

## Scripture

Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?

Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old

NIV, Lamentations 5:20-21

## “ What kind of place is HELP Women's Shelter ? ”

The Act on Support for Women Facing Difficult Problems came into force this April. It provides clear perspectives on women's welfare, respect and protection of human rights, and gender equality. It also stipulates the responsibilities of the national and local governments to implement measures to support women facing difficulties, as seen in Article 13, which states that “municipalities shall collaborate with private organizations engaged in activities to support women facing difficult problems to respect their autonomy...”

We hope and will endeavor to do whatever we can so the new law will be used for genuine support of women facing difficulties and not simply represent superficial changes in names only, such as from “Women's Consultation Offices” to “Women's Consultation and Support Centers” and from “women's consultants” to “women's consultation and support staff.”

Since its founding in 1986, HELP Asian Women's Shelter has played a crucial role as an emergency temporary shelter for women facing difficulties living their lives on their own terms. In cases of emergency, women fleeing from domestic violence or who have lost their homes may come to HELP and receive three meals a day prepared onsite and secure, private rooms.

The staff considers it most important to embrace everyone for who they are. Despite their different backgrounds, all members have a shared commitment to accept the women and children who come to HELP with open arms and respect them as individuals capable of helping themselves to live their lives, as they have thus far amidst their difficult circumstances.

Residents at HELP have the freedom to make their own choices in various situations.

“This is perhaps the only shelter that offers snacks daily at 3 o'clock!” says a support staff. Residents enjoy snacking on donated cookies and Japanese sweets on some days. On other days, they are treated to strawberry dumplings, French toast, or other sweets prepared by the chef. Beverages include green tea, barley tea, black tea, and coffee, to cater to everyone's preferences. There is no formal announcement for snack time; residents trickle into the dining room as 3 p.m. approaches and enjoy their snacks as they wish. Some like to chat, while others prefer to enjoy their snacks sitting quietly alone by the wall.

Therapy programs also provide peaceful, relaxing moments to the residents. Participation in any session is optional, and the residents' spontaneous choices are respected. Music sessions invite residents to sing together to the accompaniment of a variety of instruments. Sometimes, someone observing a session from a distance might gradually become interested and join in the singing. Flower arranging allows residents to demonstrate their personalities, as each arrangement is uniquely beautiful, even using the same materials. These arrangements adorn the residents' rooms during their two-week stay at HELP. In animal therapy, held a few times a year due to budget constraints, trained therapy dogs bring joy to adults and children alike. Some residents enjoy playing fetch, while others are content to stroke a dog in their laps or share stories about a pet they had in the past.

“Feel free to join us.” “Please participate if you'd like to.” With such words, the staff at HELP calls out to the residents with the foremost wish to provide moments of comfort where they have the freedom to make their own choices.

Hiroko Matsui (HELP Asian Women's Shelter Director)





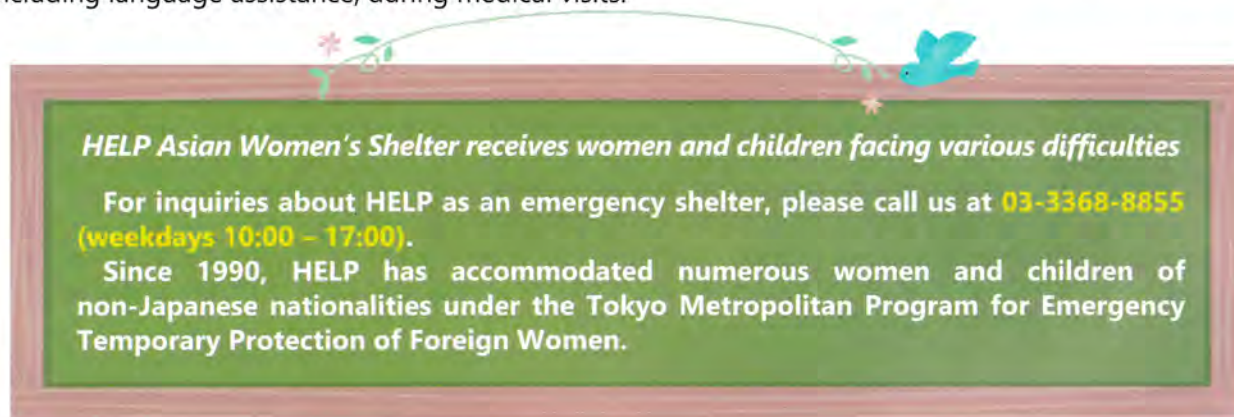
# Overview of HELP Beneficiaries in 2023

## Women Striving to Escape from Violence or Poverty and Make a Fresh Start in a Society That Has Begun to Move Forward Again

In 2023, HELP provided shelter to 89 people, including 6 women of non-Japanese nationalities, 77 women of Japanese nationality, and 6 accompanying children. This was an increase of 17 people compared to 2022 and a cumulative total of 1,913 overnight stays at HELP (100.9% compared to last year), which, while not reaching pre-pandemic levels, was roughly the same as last year.

A variety of therapy programs was offered again throughout the year as last year. In addition to music therapy (four times a month) and flower arranging, art and yoga sessions were also offered, among others. A new animal therapy program (three times a year) was also introduced (see p. 6).

To protect the safety of residents who are victims of domestic violence, HELP staff accompanied 12.6% (4.3% last year) of all residents to medical facilities, including 73.4% (1.3% last year) of all non-Japanese residents. Regardless of nationality, the overall rate of accompaniment increased compared to last year due to the reclassification of COVID-19 to Category 5 in May 2023. Notably, the accompaniment of non-Japanese residents increased significantly, once again highlighting the need to provide support, including language assistance, during medical visits.



### <Non-Japanese Women>

Among the 6 women of non-Japanese nationalities who stayed at HELP, 4 were accompanied by children. There were 5 children in all, including school-aged children. Domestic violence accounted for 100% of their reasons for coming to HELP. In 2023, there were no victims of violence by a family member, homelessness, or human trafficking who sought shelter at HELP. Non-Japanese residents stayed at HELP for an average of 30.73 days. This was 10 days shorter than last year's 41.95 days, primarily due to the higher rate of residents being transferred to medium to long-term facilities relatively quickly.

- DV victims: In 2023, many of the women who sought shelter at HELP were accompanied by children. School-aged children received educational support, and infants and toddlers were given childcare and play activities to support their emotional well-being and ease the burden on their mothers when there were delays in transitioning to the next facility. Among these women, one woman diligently attended every Japanese language class offered by the facility. Another struggled with the lack of access to health insurance despite her high medical needs while working on changing her residency status. Yet another woman who came to HELP alone returned home with a profound sense of loss after learning that her elderly abuser passed away during her stay.

There was also a woman who faced significant distress as her child's chronic illness worsened due to their abrupt change in environment. In this case, relevant local governments and the embassy of their country of nationality made coordinated efforts to facilitate their move to the next stage.

- Care for current and former residents: In 2023, a Christmas party was held on two separate occasions, bringing together both current and former residents, and various programs offered at HELP were opened to spontaneous visits by everyone. In addition, support was provided to several families to help solve their problems, such as by offering telephone consultations with former residents and assigned support staff or making regular visits to their new facilities.



## <Japanese Women>

Among the 77 women of Japanese nationality, 1 woman was accompanied by her child. The primary reason for Japanese women seeking shelter at HELP was homelessness, accounting for 69.2%, or nearly 70% of all reasons. Following this were domestic violence (violence from their husband or intimate partner) at 15.4%, violence from a family member at 11.5%, and other reasons at 3.8%, which were roughly the same levels as last year. The average length of stay was 21.0 days, also generally consistent with last year (19.90 days) and the year before that (21.54 days).

In 2023, more than 50 women sought shelter at HELP due to homelessness. Among them were women who arrived from the hospital immediately after having a baby or recovering from self-harm, those who had spent the previous night at the airport or a bus terminal, and an elderly woman who had fallen victim to fraud. Those who stayed at HELP for extended periods included a senior woman awaiting the completion of her pension procedure so she could stabilize her income and accordingly select her next facility and a woman waiting for a suitable facility within walking distance from her regular physician because she is unable to use trains or buses. These residents made the most of their time at HELP by participating in various programs and enjoying nutritious meals. Conversely, several young women, feeling confined by shelter life, opted to return to their previous circumstances after a brief stay.

Among the women who had escaped from domestic violence (violence from their husband or intimate partner) or violence from a family member, there were women with disabilities who had fled from a rural area to Tokyo while supporting each other along the way. There was also a woman who suddenly and unexpectedly requested to leave HELP in the middle of the night.



## <Telephone Consultation>

In 2023, HELP received inquiries over the phone from people representing 23 countries (19 countries last year), including Japan, on 1,133 matters (109.7% compared to last year). The total number of calls and the time spent on each consultation both increased from last year.

Calls from people of non-Japanese nationalities were mainly about issues related to the expiration of residency status and financial difficulties exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic, in addition to calls for help from domestic violence and inquiries from former residents about their present living circumstances. There were also calls from neighboring local governments (consultation desks), foreign support organizations, and church acquaintances inquiring about interpreter services, information on native language counseling, and initial consultation procedures. While not all cases required referral to

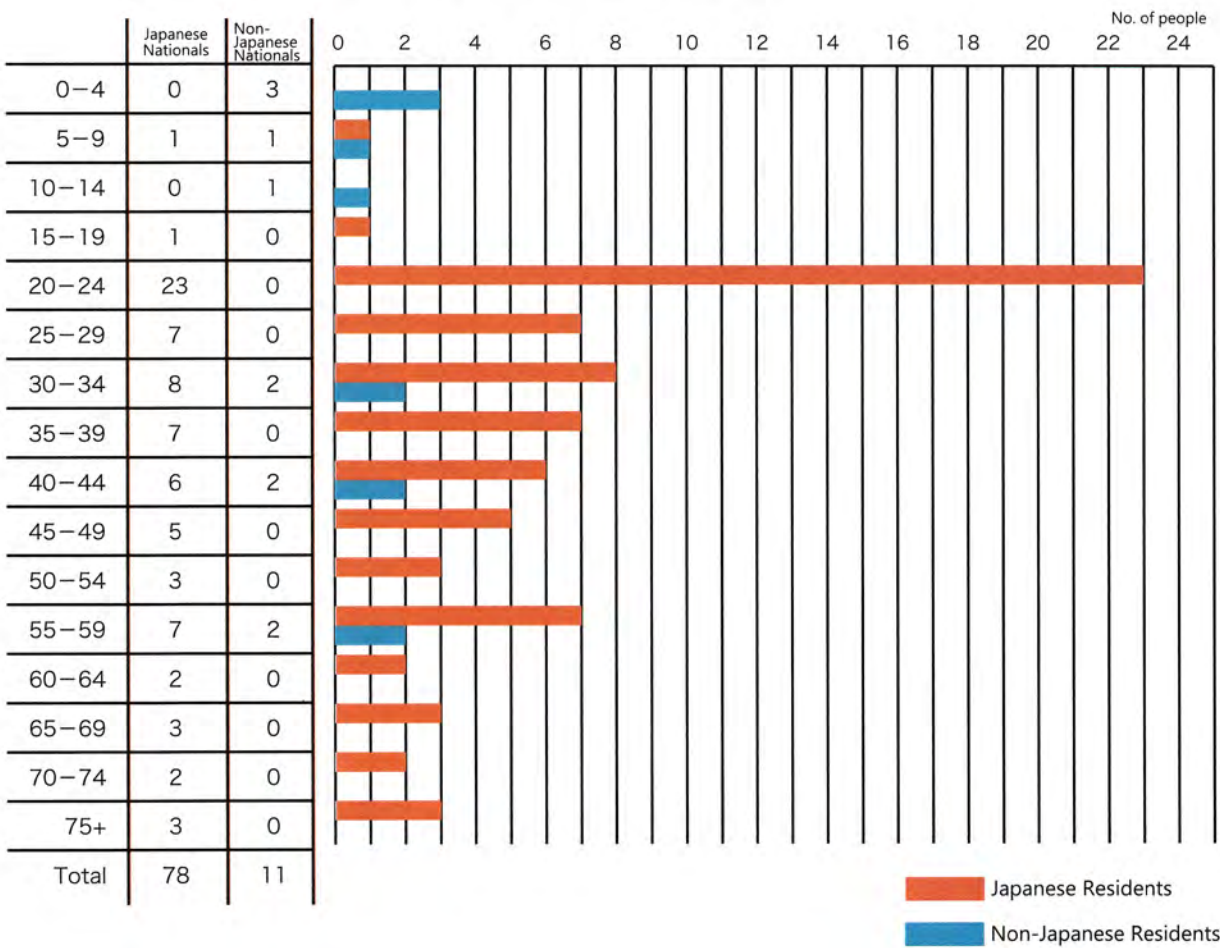
HELP for temporary protection, they provided a glimpse of a situation where perinatal women and mothers with residency status not covered by public assistance were experiencing various difficulties and seeking help at consultation desks. Besides telephone consultation, there were cases where onsite consultation was requested at public agencies to connect individuals to the necessary experts.

Meanwhile, calls from people of Japanese nationality continued to focus on their ongoing pains of living with the memories of domestic violence or sexual abuse. Given the gradual reawakening of social activities, there were numerous inquiries about situations that verged on requiring temporary protection, as with many of the inquiries from non-Japanese nationals.

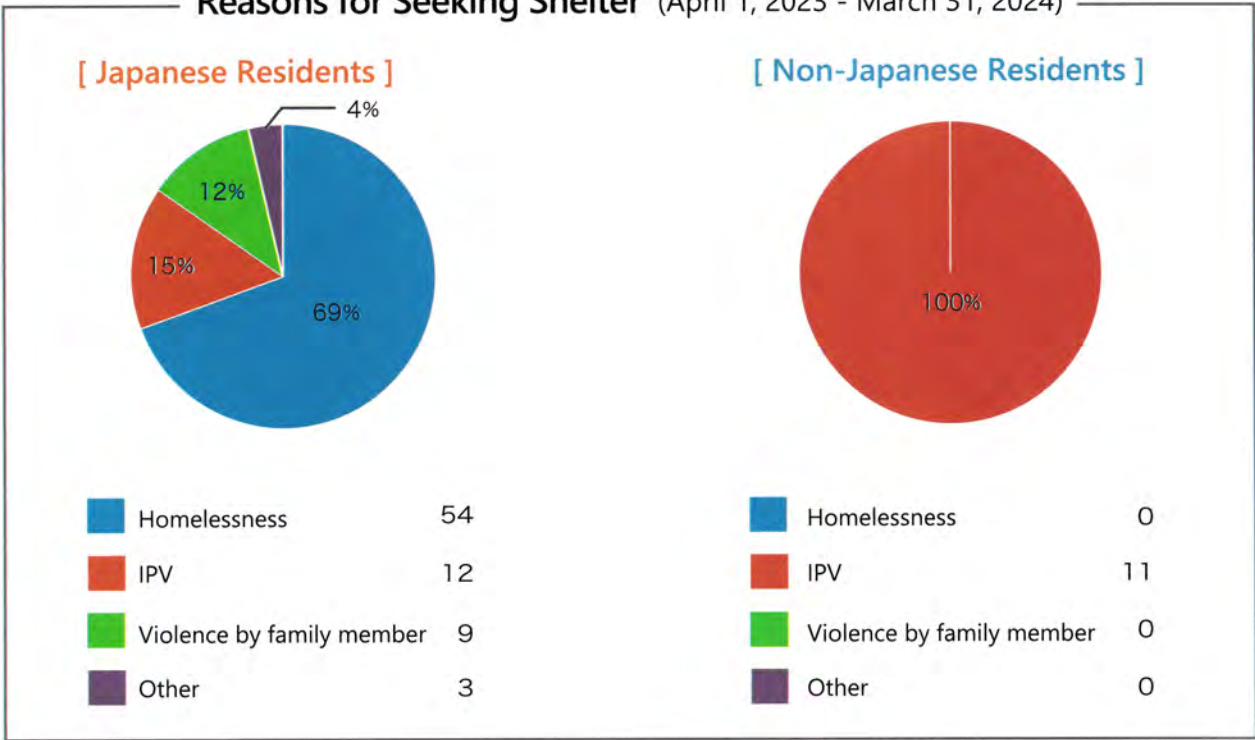


# Statistical tables for 2023

## Age Distribution of Residents



## Reasons for Seeking Shelter (April 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024)





## Number of Residents at HELP by Nationality (April 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024)

※ Including residents whose stay extended into the following year

Number of Residents at HELP by Nationality

Nationality	Women	Accompanying Children
Philippines	1	0
Myanmar	1	1
China	1	2
South Korea	1	0
Spain	1	1
Ghana	1	1
Subtotal	6	5
Japan	77	1
Total	83	6

Destination of Residents after Leaving HELP

Destination	Japanese Residents	Non-Japanese Residents
Welfare home	47	8
Apartment	1	0
Women's center	3	0
Home country	0	0
Home	3	1
Home of friend or acquaintance	2	0
Streets	0	0
Hospital	1	0
Live-in employment	2	0
Unknown	8	0
Undecided	4	0
Other	6	2
Total	77	11

Number of Non-Japanese Residents by Region

Region	No. of residents
Tokyo	5
Saitama	1

Avg. Length of Stay by Non-Japanese Residents

Year	Avg. Length of Stay (days)
2019	46.46 days
2020	76.75 days
2021	17.92 days
2022	41.95 days
2023	30.73 days

Number of Women with Accompanying Children

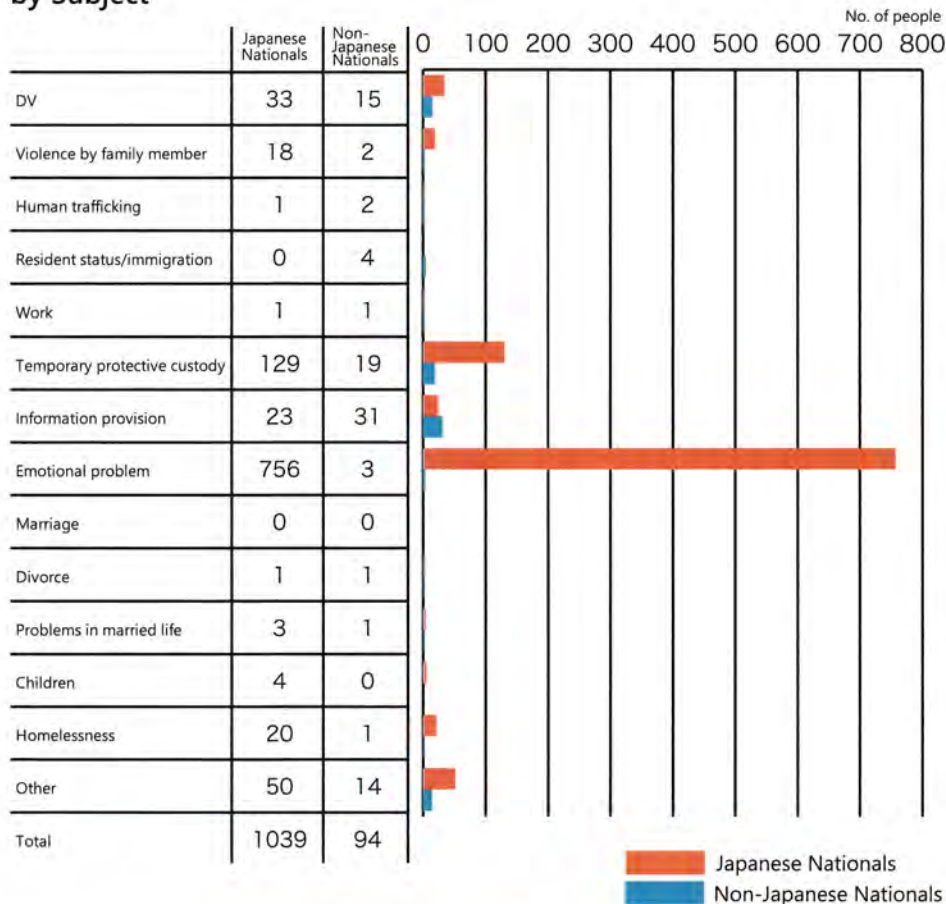
Japanese Residents	1 among 77
Non-Japanese Residents	4 among 6

Total Length of Stay by Nationality

Japanese Residents	1576
Non-Japanese Residents	338
Total	1914

## Number of Telephone Consultations

by Subject



by Nationality

Nationality	No. of consultations
Japan	1039
Philippines	12
China	9
Myanmar	7
Thailand	7
Congo	7
USA	7
Senegal	5
India	3
Pakistan	3
Canada	2
Bangladesh	2
Taiwan	2
Russia	2
Brazil	2
Nigeria	2
Guinea	2
South Korea	1
Japan (living overseas)	1
Nepal	1
Vietnam	1
Peru	1
Romania	1
Unknown (Africa)	1
Unknown	13
Total	1133



## Programs for Current and Former Residents



### Christmas Party

Last December, we held a Christmas party with the participation of many current and former residents of HELP. Until last year, we had been hosting small gatherings on separate occasions as an infection control measure. However, with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, we were finally allowed to return to our full-scale Christmas party for the first time in four years.

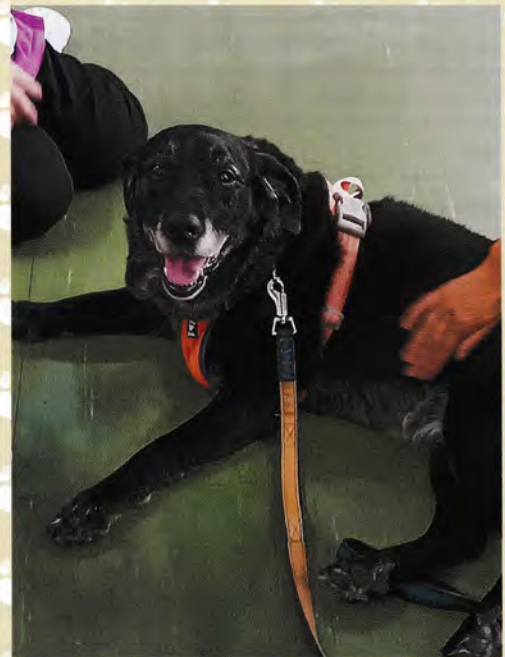
It was a long-awaited opportunity for everyone, and we staff were deeply moved by the sight of everyone gathering and chatting with each other, enjoying the party as they wished. The homemade dishes and Christmas cake, definite highlights of the party, were met with cheers and quickly devoured. Afterward, everyone enjoyed the thrills of a lively bingo game, sang Christmas songs, and danced to the music. It was a joy to celebrate such a fun-filled Christmas together.



### Animal Therapy

The animal therapy program that began last year was held for the third time as part of the Girls' Day event in March, welcoming four therapy dogs. It provided a precious opportunity to see expressions we usually do not notice on the faces of residents. We discovered new sides to many residents, including a usually mischievous boy who claimed one of the dogs as his, gently petting it and taking it for a walk. We also witnessed the power of healing that dogs possess in the peaceful expression that spread over the face of a resident who rubbed her cheek against a dog and let fond memories warm her heart. We are grateful to the trainers who came from afar for us and maintained a watchful eye during the program.

Since we began offering animal therapy, new residents have often inquired about it. We hope to continue the program, with a strong desire to provide this wonderful experience to many people again this year.







## HELP Asian Women's Shelter Workshop Was Held for the Second Time

The second HELP Asian Women's Shelter Workshop was held on Wednesday, November 1, 2023, to deepen understanding of support for foreign women. It was themed "What to Keep in Mind when Supporting Foreign Women Living in Japan: Regarding Religious Considerations, Cultural Practices, and Food," and focused on Muslim women, whom we now increasingly receive in our shelter, and Halal food. Two staff members from HELP served as lecturers, including a foreign staff member who spoke about the worldview of Islamic practices such as prayer, fasting, and the importance of respecting human rights, and a kitchen staff member who introduced seasonings suitable for preparing Halal food and provided specific examples of how to identify Halal ingredients.

The workshop was attended by 22 people from three women's support centers having connections with HELP based on temporary custody contracts and five welfare offices in Tokyo. They asked numerous questions during the workshop, and afterward, those interested took a tour of HELP's facility.



## Mobile Phone Usage Environment from 2024

In April 2022, the rules for using mobile phones at HELP had changed. Where previously, mobile phones were basically required to be kept in safekeeping and could only be used during outings or in the first-floor meeting room, the new rules allow residents to keep their mobile phones with them and freely use them in their rooms (with some restrictions on noise and social media usage). However, while they were allowed free use of their phones, Internet connection continued to be a problem, and it was not unusual to see residents fall behind with their mobile phone bills due to various circumstances. To address this problem, free Wi-Fi was temporarily installed in December 2023, allowing residents to use their phones more freely without worrying about data limits. After a trial period of several months, the connection was provided on a full scale in April 2024.

For most young people who come to HELP, the Internet has been a part of their lives since they were born, so to them, obtaining information and knowledge online is as natural as breathing. During initial interviews, we saw the tension on their faces immediately loosen when informed that we provide free Wi-Fi in our facility.

Although there are various challenges, such as protecting the safety of those who have fled from violence, we believe this service is necessary so that people for whom the Internet is a vital part of their lives would feel comfortable seeking shelter at HELP.



# HELP Asian Women's Shelter Needs Your Support!



## Maintenance Donations

We hope this newsletter finds everyone safe and well, as various social activities are resuming following the COVID-19 pandemic. We are deeply grateful that we have been able to continue our activities to lend a helping hand to women and children in need during this whole time, owing to the support of all of you who have helped sustain HELP.

Last year, HELP provided shelter to 89 women and children from Japan, Myanmar, South Korea, China, the Philippines, Spain, and Ghana and received calls for telephone consultations regarding women from 23 countries worldwide. There are many women and children suffering hardships and difficulties, such as the experience of abuse and violence from parents or family members, a painful past, or the difficulty of living their own lives. HELP will continue to reach out to these women and children and support them through the dedicated efforts of our entire staff.

Under our challenging financial circumstances, we ask for your support through maintenance donations that will allow us to fulfill the mission entrusted to HELP. Thank you for your understanding and generous consideration.

July 2024

KYOFUKAI Japan Christian Women's Organization

Mizuho Iida, Chair of the Board of Trustees

Hiroko Matsui, Executive Director and HELP Asian Women's Shelter Director

**Please send your donation to:**

**Post office account : 00110 – 5 – 188775**

**Account name : 女性の家HELP (Josei no ie HELP)**



## Goods Donations

At HELP, we provide items of daily necessity to women and children who have come to our shelter deprived of their familiar surroundings, personal relationships, and much of their precious belongings. We hope the items provide a measure of stability so they may nurture hope and the will to begin a new life. With your generous support, we will make ongoing efforts to respond to the diverse needs of each of our residents based on their age, nationality, culture, etc. We deeply appreciate your understanding and cooperation.

***We are currently accepting only new, unused items. Thank you for your cooperation.***

- <Foods>** Condiments (sugar, salt, soy sauce, vegetable oil), jam, snacks, drinks (coffee, tea, cocoa, green tea, juice, creamer) ***\*Items that have not passed their expiry dates***
- <Sundry goods>** Shampoo, laundry detergent, kitchen detergent, tissue paper, skin lotion, milky lotion, cosmetics, hand cream
- <Clothing>** For adults: Pajamas, sweat suits, socks, jackets, hooded sweatshirts, undershirts (short and long sleeved), underwear (L, LL, XL)  
***\*We are not accepting children's clothes at present***
- <Other>** Folding umbrellas, shoes, notebooks, cotton blankets, bath towels and face towels, Quo Cards (prepaid cards), gift certificates, etc.

**Please send goods donations to: KYOFUKAI**

**2-23-5 Hyakunincho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 169-0073**

***\*Please specify your delivery to be made between Monday and Friday***