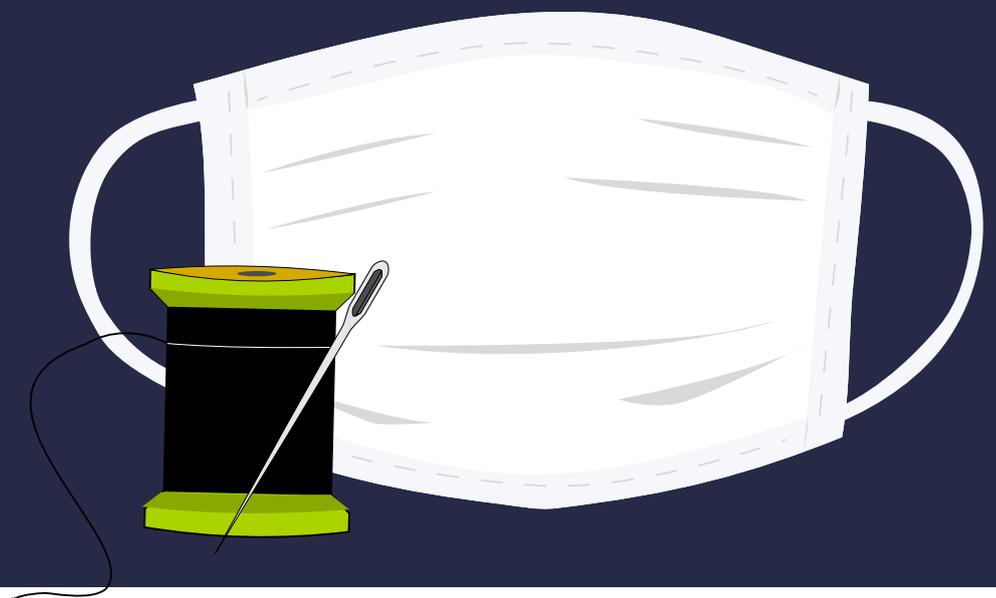




July 13, 2020

NATIONAL **AJET MASK** **SEW-A-THON** **REPORT**



Introduction

Prompted by the many JET Program participants interested in offering their help during the global Coronavirus pandemic, and the many global initiatives such as the #millionmaskchallenge occurring around the world, the National Association of Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) conducted a Mask Sew-A-Thon initiative with the hopes that volunteers all across Japan could virtually come together to support the many caregivers, hospitals workers and essential personnel who were, and still are, risking their lives every day to help and save others.

Executive Summary

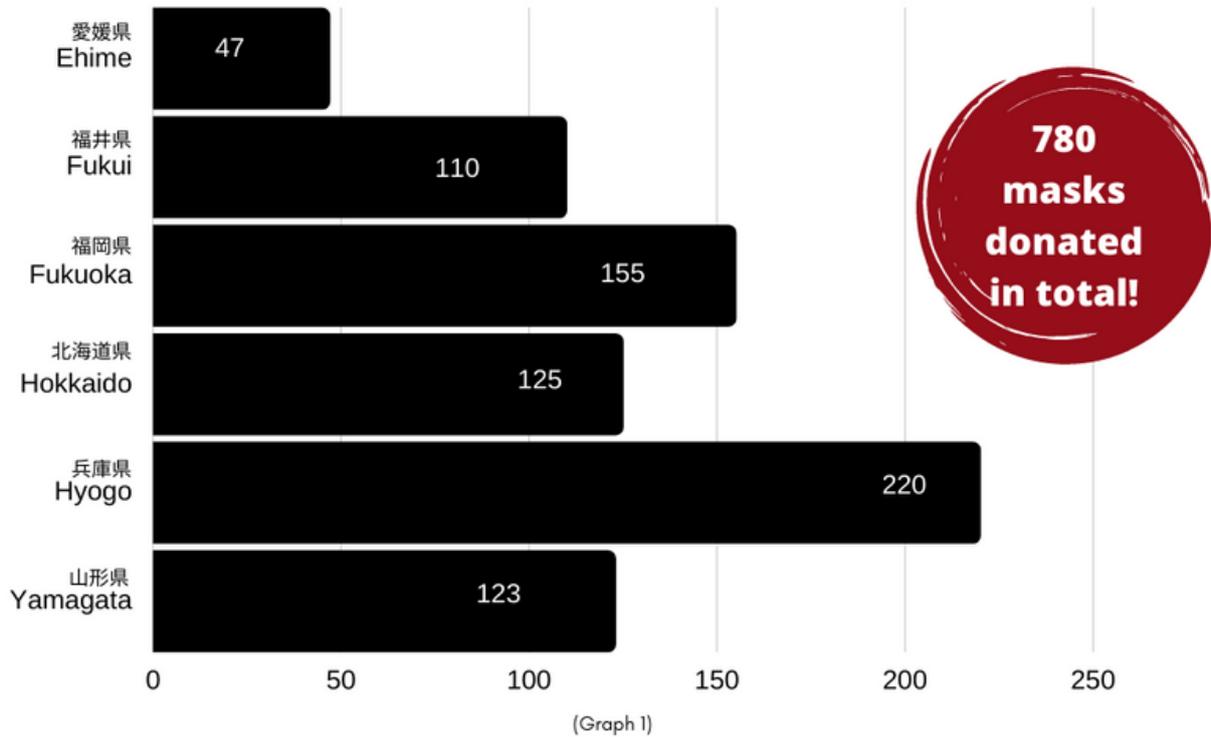
The AJET 2020 Mask Sew-A-Thon was a community mask creation and donation project to support Japanese communities in prefectures across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. From April 22, 2020 until June 25, 2020, thirty-six (36) volunteers in six prefectures in Japan made and donated a total of 780 masks. Although the initial pledge from those prefectures at the start of the project was a staggering 535 masks, the final number of mask donations exceeded initial pledge numbers by about 35%!

Results

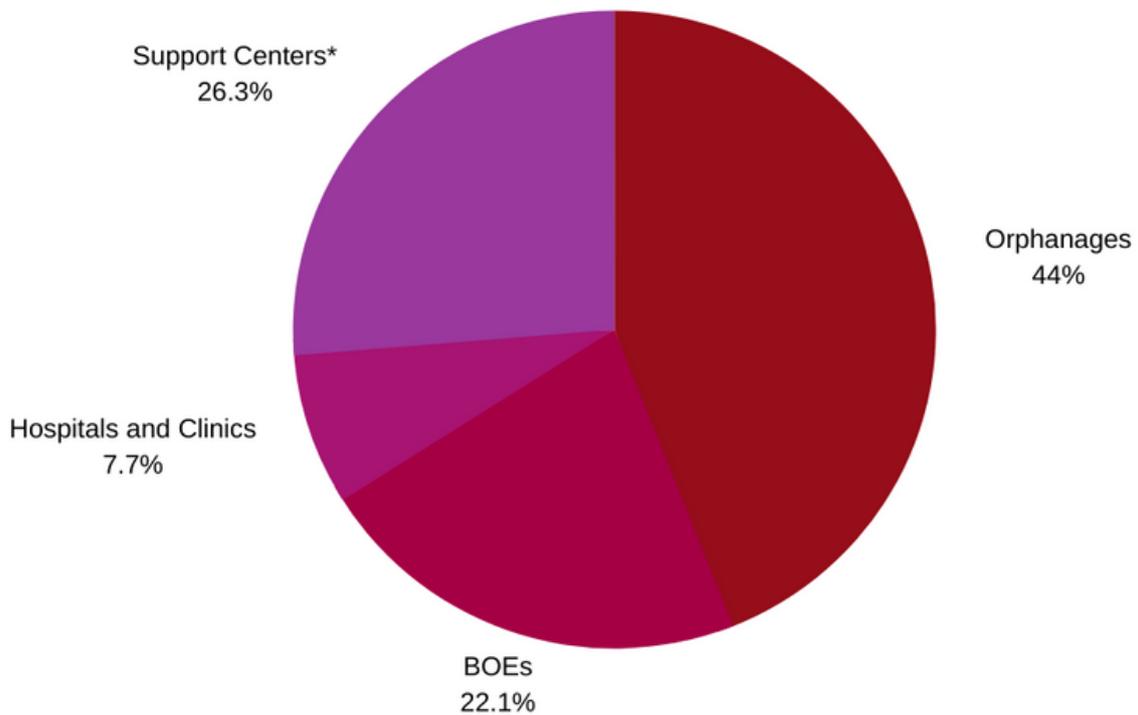
Between April 22 and June 25, 2020, thirty-six volunteers in six prefectures worked to provide over 700 masks (graph 1) to organizations and facilities such as orphanages, women and children support centers, medical clinics, hospitals, and boards of education (graph 2). In those two months, masks were made tirelessly to provide some protection to at-risk or underprivileged populations across Japan. Not only did volunteers exceed the initial total pledge, but they went on to start prefecture-based drives in their local communities.

2020 Mask Sew-A-Thon

Final Donations



Where the Masks Were Donated



**Support Centers* indicate organizations and other facilities that support specific groups of people facing economic and domestic or sexual violence-based difficulties in Japan.

Words from Volunteers

Volunteers who participated in the Mask Sew-A-Thon worked tirelessly to sew masks for their local communities during the height of the Coronavirus. Overall, volunteers expressed fulfillment in being able to help out in some way during the challenging and uncertain time.

▼ **Victoria Woodards, Fukuoka Prefecture**

"I was really happy to hear about the AJET sewathon, as it gave me a clear opportunity on how I could help during such a challenging time! I'd been sewing masks for myself and local friends for a while, so I was really happy to be able to contribute more widely and work towards helping even more people!"

▼ **Alyssa Songco, Yamagata Prefecture**

"It has been very uplifting and fulfilling to be a part of this amazing charity event. Yamagata AJET was able to create 123 masks which were donated to 3 local orphanages and to the prefecture's Mask for Love campaign. I am very proud of the AJET team and the amazing volunteers who wanted to help during this difficult time. I feel like Yam AJET has definitely gotten closer to the community through this event and will continue to make efforts in strengthening the bonds we have built. Thank you so much to National AJET for sponsoring this event and encouraging us to make a great contribution to the Yamagata community. We hope to be a part of more events like this in the future."

▼ **Olivia Novotny, Yamagata Prefecture**

"Thank you National AJET for encouraging the JET Programme community in making masks to donate. We are very lucky, here in Yamagata, to have great relationships with our local childrens' homes; where we chose to send the 123(!!!) masks we were able to create with the help of our amazing volunteers. It is always so heartwarming to see humans of different groups, languages and skill sets come together to help our fellow humans. It puts a smile on my face knowing the children without families to make them personalized, hand made masks of their own, were able to receive something made with love and their safety in mind. Looking forward to the next opportunity to connect with our community and spread the legacy of good work that AJET is known for. Stay safe y'all!"

▼ ***Bridgitte Kayasith, Yamagata Prefecture***

"The mask sew-a-thon was a good experience to connect with the community outside of JETs. Being able to donate masks to give to people who needed them was a really good cause. Making it an AJET event made it mean a lot more and involved more JETs to participate. I enjoyed teaching people how to make masks and how to use sewing machines. It made a difference to the cause and to people who joined. I hope to take part in this kind of event again."

▼ ***Katie Yockey, Yamagata Prefecture***

"Making masks for donation was really fun and a great way to spend time when staying home during the current crisis. It was also good to see masks we made go to good use in local places."

▼ ***Kimberly Buchanan, Yamagata Prefecture***

"I really enjoyed participating in the Yamagata AJET sewing event. It was an opportunity not only to give back to the community but also to interact with its members, both those from the area and people from overseas. Even though my sewing skills are subpar at best, the AJET members assisted me (and everyone else) and made us all feel very welcome. I really look forward to more community events. It really was a fun and rewarding experience in these trying times."

▼ ***Joy Sung, Hyogo Prefecture***

"So many people coming together to share skills and ideas, make new friends, and contribute to their communities in Japan is what the JET Program is truly all about. I hope the people who received the masks we made enjoy wearing them!"

▼ ***Rebecca Ruth, Hyogo Prefecture***

"I was so happy to see this project go from a conversation between myself and last year's Chair, Rachel, into such a broad project spanning Japan and collecting so many more masks than I could have imagined. It was fantastic to see so many community members step up and either use their skills or learn new skills for their community. Natasha took the idea and made it viable, exciting, and a community building exercise for JETs as well as a way to contribute to our communities in Japan. I had a great time participating and I learned a lot from the group discussions online and the conversation during the online sewathon I participated in. I hope that the masks I made help someone."

Snapshots of Mask Donations

Following the guidelines set out by the Director of Volunteering at the start of the project, volunteers made pleated and duckbill-style, double-sided masks with cotton or cotton-polyester blend fabric. In addition, many volunteers made masks that enabled filter placement within the masks and donated a variety of sizes to better fit those in need in the community.

Ehime



Fukui



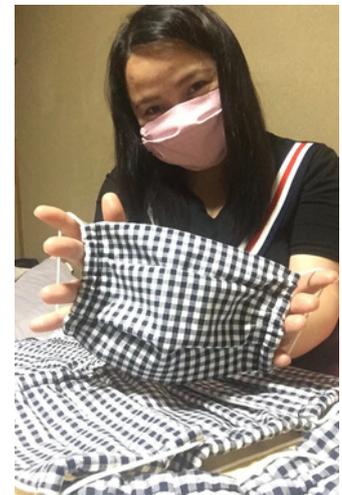
Fukuoka



Hokkaido



Hyogo



Yamagata



Afterword

The Coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic is a global disaster that has brought many communities together through volunteering and outreach. Through a seemingly small task such as sewing masks, millions of people around the world have joined global efforts to protect and support others, especially those risking their lives every day. In Japan, the small number of volunteers for this project have gone above and beyond not only to donate so many handmade masks in their spare time, but also to reach out to their Japanese communities and offer a helping hand. The Mask Sew-A-Thon project has been a great way to connect communities together during this crisis, and I'm very glad that in collaboration with those volunteers, I was able to both contribute to and facilitate that happening.

Natasha Taliferro, Fukui Prefecture

AJET Director of Volunteering, 2019-2020

The national Association of Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) would like to thank all who contributed to the Sew-A-Thon project.