

Children's Smiles are Everyone's Smiles

1. Motivation behind Research Paper

Have you ever heard of Kodomo Shokudo, a children's cafeteria? I'm exploring how children's smiles are everyone's smiles. If you have heard of it, do you know what kind of place it is? I have always loved little children and still have an interest in social welfare. When I was looking for a place to interact with children in Tenri, a small city in Nara Prefecture where I have lived for 18 years, I found a children's cafeteria called "Niko-Niko-Shokudo " I will write about children and the children's parents, community relations and activities conducted with the SDGs in mind. I thought about the volunteer activity that I saw, I experienced, and my opinions. Finally, I will also describe what I can do to make the children's cafeteria a warm place where children and local residents can continue to love more than ever.

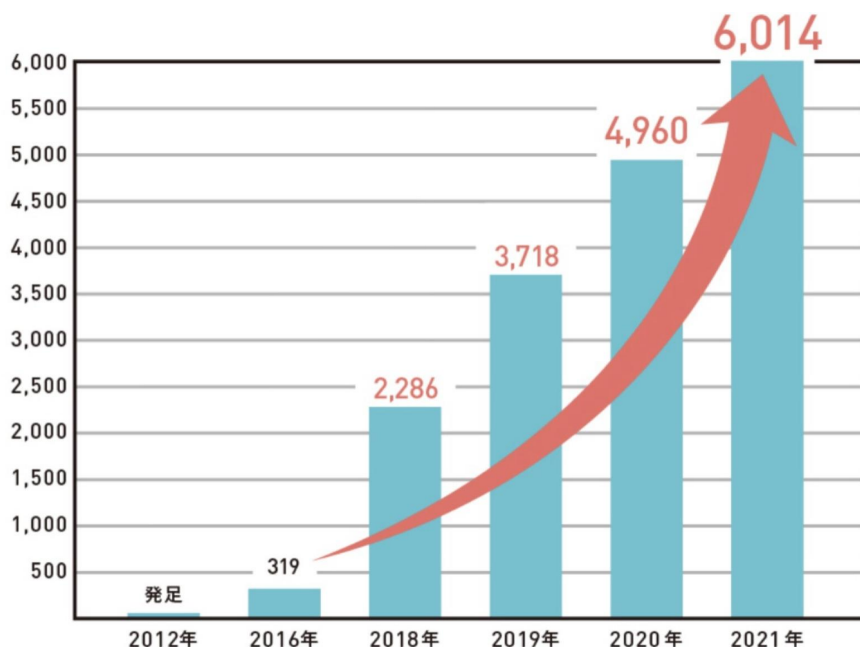
Niko - Niko - Shokudo

~May everyone be filled with smiles and kindness~



2. Introduction

The definition of a children's cafeteria is a free or low-cost cafeteria where children can go alone. The two pillars of the cafeteria are "measures against child poverty" and "a base for community interaction". However, the public has a negative image of children's cafeterias, seeing them as "embarrassing," "money-challenged," "pitiful, ". The reason for this is the negative image created by local and mass media. This is due to the fact that the media has been saying negative things on TV. However, despite this negative image, the number of children's cafeterias is increasing every year. There are two reasons for the rapid expansion of children's cafeterias. First, in 2009, the government announced the relative poverty rate, for the first time. The second reason is that the number of children in poverty in Japan is increasing. The data collected for this study will include the experience I gained from Niko-Niko Shokudo. I have volunteered in the children's cafeteria Niko-Niko Shokudo since February of 2022.



This graph is Authorized NPO National Support Center for Children's Cafeteria, Musubue

3. Results and Analysis

I volunteered at "Niko-Niko-Shokudo " children's cafeteria from February 2022 until August of the same year. This "Niko-Niko-Shokudo" was launched in October 2018. The reason for starting it up was to create a place where older kids could play with the children at the daycare centre. Now, it is held 20 times a month. Last year, staff members cooked about 1,300 meals every month. I think that many volunteer organisations can hold events only once a month or once a week. However, this Niko-Niko-Shokudo is very active. We formed one big community through food. For example, some people get stressed cooking meals or are not good at cooking. Children's cafeteria is a heartwarming place for such people to use easily. Because of the pandemic, the form of the cafeteria has been changed from dining-in style to take out style. It also lets people communicate with each other when they go to the cafeteria to get take out lunch boxes. The children's cafeteria also places emphasis on food education. For example, we plant rice and harvest fruits and vegetables, so that children can learn to appreciate food. The children said, "When we harvest the vegetables ourselves, we can eat them, even though we don't like them!" They think the vegetables are delicious because they picked them themselves. This is a very popular event that allows children to create wonderful memories. These harvested vegetables are cooked and made into lunch boxes. Niko-Niko-Shokudo conducts not only a children's cafeteria but also a children's association. In the past, the children's association ate disaster-proof rice. Disaster-proof rice is made by placing rice in water for one hour. Using this finished rice, we all ate curry and rice together. This disaster-proof rice came from a place called Nara Food Bank. A food bank is an activity in which food that is safe to eat but cannot be put into circulation due to damaged packaging, overstocking, and misprinting, is given to people in need. The

food is donated by companies, and provided free of charge to facilities, organisations, and needy households. Children's cafeterias have some challenges such as food, staff, and budget issues. As for food, we cannot always have enough food. In this case, we can get food from the food bank or neighbourhood grocery store. As for the issue of staff, at first they worked with friends of the representative, but then some mothers who use the Niko-Niko-Shokuo started asking me if they could do something to help them. Now, they cooperate to help the cafeteria. As for money, the representative said the shortage of money is a serious problem.



Harvest experience (food education)



4. Conclusion and Future Problems

A children's cafeteria is an environment that cannot be created by one person alone, it is necessary to remove the stereotypical notion of a supporter and a supported person. For this reason, we need to create a place where people can ask for "Help!" without any fear or shame, and create a community that warmly accepts anyone who wants to receive assistance. Through these activities, I have come to realise that a mother's emotional balance is directly related to the smiles on her children's faces. I myself was able to smile naturally when I saw small children smile up close.

5. Reflection

Through these activities, I have come to realise that a mother's motivation and emotions are powered by the smiles of her children's faces. However, I think that if a mother's children were not feeling well, a mother would still feel motivated to put a smile on her children's faces. Regardless of a child's emotional state, a mother or parent will work hard to give her children the best. Working with children made me so happy too. So, why don't you help each other to build a community that is filled with smiles and happiness.

6. Work Cited

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