

Station-based Nursery Schools Assist Working Women

JR East opened nursery schools at 10 stations between 1996 and 2003. In April 2004, we opened three new facilities near stations on the *Saikyo Line* in an effort to develop communities in the vicinity of our railway lines that assist childrearing. New developments are taking place in the station childcare facility business.



Emiko Taguchi

Manager, New Business Development Group, Business Promotion Division, Life-style Business Development Headquarters

"It is natural that a railway company would make progress 'from a point to a line' and come up with the idea of developing communities in the vicinity of its railway lines that support childrearing. I hope to continue expanding nursery schools at stations to meet the needs of communities."

Development of station-based nursery schools expands childcare support from a "point" to a "line"

"Station-based nursery schools are intended to be a part of 'station renaissance' (i.e., an enhancement of station amenities) that responds to societal needs, including the higher demand for childcare services and declining birthrate," says Manager Emiko Taguchi of the Life-style Business Development Headquarters in explaining why the *Saikyo Line* was chosen. "We are not adopting the small-scale, single-site development of the past. Rather, we hope that this project series serves as a model for future development along the 'line'." The vision of *Saikyo Line* station-based nursery schools – creating a

▶ The Ohisama Nursery School places great emphasis on warmth from the heart. The childcare system is supported by 12 experienced childcare providers, nurses and nutritionists.



railway line that supports community childrearing – was born when demand for childcare services of the community met JR East owning unused land on a railroad.

This project has following prehistory; when the *Shinkansen* was constructed, former Japan National Railways purchased strips of land about 20 meters wide on both sides of the viaduct from Arakawa to the vicinity of Omiya to serve as a buffer zone against noise and vibration caused by the trains. "In 1999, we exchanged documents with the local community that enabled JR East to use this land. This was the beginning of the development of station-based nursery schools along the *Saikyo Line*," says Satoshi Tsunoda, Deputy Manager of the Omiya Branch.

He continued: "The biggest hurdle was obtaining the understanding of the local government bodies." Apart from Musashiurawa Station where there is a high demand for nursery schools, most of the local government bodies were hesitant to accept JR's proposal. "We went to explain the significance of station-based nursery schools many times, and finally they recognized our point." The project team was determined to obtain the understanding of the local government bodies and to receive approvals for the nursery schools because tuition can be lowered and users would place greater trust in the service. "In Saitama Prefecture, tuition must be set at a higher level if the facility is not licensed, and thus it would not 'support' the community's childrearing," explains Tsunoda. Now that three facilities have opened with the users pleased with the service, the local government bodies are requesting more be opened.



Tailored services offer more than just a convenient location

Taguchi notes that “Commuters can farm out and pick up their children on the way to and back from work, and can also go shopping in the area while their children are at the childcare facility.” The convenience of the station-based nursery schools is not limited to their location. Director Isao Takamura of the Ohisama Nursery School explains, “We want to help working mothers as much as possible. We hope to offer opportunities for meaningful time that parents and children can spend together by lightening the burden on mothers.”

What users like most about the facilities is their extended hours. The Ohisama Nursery School is open from seven in the morning until eight in the evening. Most nursery schools have an initial period during which children's stays are limited to a half day so they can become accustomed to going to the facility, but Ohisama Nursery School did not adopt this system. This is because “mothers' jobs don't allow them a period for getting accustomed to.” Futons (padded mattresses) for naps can be leased and the facilities provide dinner to children whose parents pick them up late. The locations are certainly convenient, but the true secret to their popularity is that the facility provides services that pay close attention to the parents' needs.

Nursery schools that are open to all community members

One of the foundations of the nursery schools is the interaction with the local community. The Ohisama Nursery School began offering childcare support programs in July of 2004. The school has a broad array of activities planned that are centered on communication with the children including toy making, cooking classes taught by a nutritionist, reading books to the children, first-aid training, inviting local senior citizens to spend time with the children, and so on. These activities are intended to involve not just the facility users, but also all local residents. The school



Satoshi Tsunoda

Deputy Manager, Development Section, Enterprises Division
Shinkansen Land Development Project (currently JR Utsunomiya Planning & Development Co., Ltd.) Omiya Branch Office

“The *Saikyo* Line station nursery schools will enhance its image as a railway line that facilitates parenting and will ultimately contribute to an invigoration of the Line.”

Isao Takamura

Director, Ohisama Nursery School
Toda Ekimae Childcare Center
Tetsudou Kousaikai (Railway Welfare Association)

“The Ohisama Nursery School has 60 children, from those who are one year of age or less to five-year-olds. It is a great environment that exists as a small community.”



also offers short-term childcare services for full-time housewives. “I am grateful to all of the childcare providers for their many ideas for making this a childcare facility that is truly open to the community,” says Tsunoda.

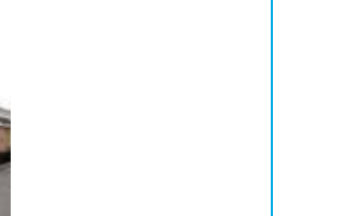
“This is a business that truly contributes to the community made possible through the collaborative efforts of local government bodies, childcare providers, and the JR East Group. There is definitely value in pursuing a business that brings happiness to all the parties involved as well as customers,” says Taguchi. Tsunoda notes that “on April 1, 2005, an authorized nursery school and senior day service center will open at the Yono-Honmachi Station. Plans also call for two schools to be opened on the New Shuttle Line. Eventually, we hope to have facilities at every station on the *Saikyo* Line.” Based on local needs and the cooperation of childcare providers, they will open station-based nursery schools at additional stations and continue to expand this business to further develop communities that support childrearing.



▶ The Ohisama Nursery School is located just a 5-minute walk from the Toda Station on the *Saikyo* Line. Because it is located close to an elevated railway line, the building was constructed with particular attention to natural illumination and noise-reduction.



▶ Musashiurawa J Kids Station (Musashiurawa Station)



▶ Toda Koen Ekimae Sakurasou Nursery School (Toda Koen Station)

