

“KIZUNA” (Bonding) System: A New IT Project to Support Older Persons and Promote ‘Age-friendly’ Communities

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As people get older, they require family, community, or professional support with certain tasks such as shopping, visiting a health center, access to transport services and participation in social activities. For many who require such support but cannot afford paid services, life becomes unbearable. In the community, this group of persons feels isolated and unable to make contributions in their community. With a growing ageing population, Akita City has taken some rigorous steps responsive to the aspirations and needs of older people. For instance, to support senior citizens and promote ‘age-friendly’ communities, Akita City has introduced a new IT program called “KIZUNA” (Bonding) System.

The “KIZUNA” System is an ongoing project coordinated by Friends of IFA (FOIFA), KDDI Corporation, Caregiver Support Association and other organizations to compliment the city’s efforts in achieving its ‘age-friendly’ goal. For the project, a tablet (IPad) with special functions can be used by an older person to contact the ‘concierge’ or call center that has been set up to provide 24 hour support services. Also with one touch of a button, the IPad can be used to contact emergency services, a consultant or access information from the city office. The IPad is being distributed free of charge to older persons in need of support services.

The presentation will introduce and describe “KIZUNA” System, highlighting its significant contributions in providing support to older persons, promoting their social participation and inclusion in the community. With over 200 senior citizens benefiting from this project, this paper will show how “KIZUNA” System has helped promote independent living, healthy and active ageing as indicators to the ‘age-friendly cities’ initiative. The paper will conclude by outlining some of the challenges with the project and future plans for better outcomes.