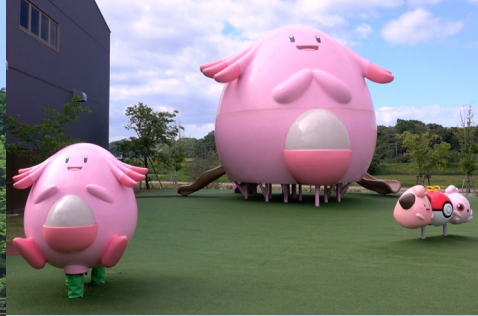




Under Pokémon Local Acts, which aims to promote local attractions, activities are being conducted in nine prefectures. In Iwate Prefecture, a train adorned with Geodude illustrations travels along the coast (left), while in Miyagi Prefecture, children enjoy riding on a snow tube shaped like Lapras (right bottom). In Fukushima Prefecture, four parks featuring the adorable Chansey have been opened (right top). RIGHT TOP PHOTO: AFLO



POKÉMON WITH TOHOKU: CONTINUING TOWARD A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

When the giant earthquake hit Tohoku, northeastern Japan, in 2011, Pokémon, one of the world's most beloved video game franchises, promptly responded to provide support, bringing smiles to the faces of children in disaster-stricken communities. In the following years, these efforts have evolved into a joint endeavor to help the Tohoku region recover from the disaster. Grassroots collaboration is further facilitating the revitalization process.

Since its debut in the form of a Japanese video game, Pokémon has become an international sensation with fans across the globe. The Pokémon Company is currently engaged in unique projects, leveraging the widespread popularity of Pokémon to make these initiatives possible. One initiative involves providing sustainable assistance to the three Tohoku prefectures—Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima—that were severely affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011.

Amidst the aftermath of the disaster, many young children, along with others, faced lives with

uncertainty. In response, The Pokémon Company deliberated on how Pokémon could contribute to the cause. SUGA Daigorotoyohide, director of The Pokémon Company's general headquarters, says, "It all started when some of our staff members volunteered to take plushies and various other toys to evacuation shelters. Eventually, Pikachu began visiting those shelters and elementary schools." His colleague, Senior Director HIROSE Chihiro smiles, "The moment Pikachu showed up, children's faces brightened up instantly. That led to the happy realization that Pokémon could

provide support by just being there."

In December 2011, Pokémon Center Tohoku, an official Pokémon retail store, opened in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, to bring cheer to children throughout the Tohoku region. On its inaugural day, many parents and children lined up outside,

Pikachu's arrival brought smiles to the children at an event in Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture.



Left: HIROSE Chihiro (left) and SUGA Daigorotoyohide from The Pokémon Company. They are thrilled to contribute to showcasing the charm of both local communities and Pokémon. Right: Under Pokémon Local Acts, "Poké Lids"—maintenance hole covers featuring unique Pokémon designs—were installed in 30 prefectures across Japan. Touring the country in search of different Poké Lids is bound to be fun.



eagerly waiting for its opening. The proceeds from the store's sales were used to fund The Pokémon Company's support program for Tohoku, dubbed "Pokémon with You," ensuring the continuation of its events and activities.

The company has also utilized Pokémon GO, a location-based smartphone app game, to assist with attracting visitors to the Tohoku area.

"We became convinced that Pokémon has the power to move people and invigorate communities," says Suga. He adds, "As time passed after the disaster, our support evolved into a form of revitalization assistance where we work together to build up communities."

Following that process, Pokémon Local Acts was launched in 2018. Under the program, Ambassadorial Pokémon have been chosen for various regions in Japan in collaboration with local governments, aiming to showcase the unique charm of each area to both domestic and international audiences. Currently, nine prefectures have chosen their Ambassadorial Pokémon, with Geodude representing Iwate,

Lapras for Miyagi, and Chansey for Fukushima in the Tohoku region. Each Pokémon was chosen based on its connection to the prefecture's name or local characteristics.

The Pokémon Company does not charge any royalties for the Ambassadorial Pokémon, and these partnerships extend to product development in collaboration with local traditional crafts and specialties, along with Pokémon-related events. In Miyagi Prefecture, visitors can enjoy a ride in a boat shaped like Lapras, while in Iwate Prefecture, a train adorned with Geodude illustrations travels along the coastline.

One recent initiative within Pokémon Local Acts is the development of parks as gathering spots for local residents. In 2021, playground equipment featuring Chansey as its primary design was

donated to Fukushima Prefecture, establishing Japan's first park to feature Pokémon. "We want to create places where people can always meet Pokémon. It's touching to think how Chansey will always hold a special place in the memories of the children who grow up playing in one of Chansey's Parks," says Hirose. When these places become integrated into the local scenery, they also attract travelers. Hirose adds, "We are on a mission to connect the world through the power of Pokémon, so we also hope to build bridges with tourists from overseas."

In the nearly 13 years that have passed since the March 2011 earthquake, and in the years to come, Pokémon will continue to stand by the people of Tohoku, bringing smiles to the faces of both residents and visitors to the region. ●

