



Nishikawa "Charles" Chiharu poses proudly outside the National Stadium.

Managing a major sporting event like the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 is no easy feat. An important part of this process were the volunteers—a group of people often overlooked, whose friendly faces and congenial presence gave proceedings a human dimension.

For the Tokyo 2020 Games, volunteers were managed in two groups: Field Cast, who directly supported the operation of the Games in ways such as running the competitions and providing information to concerned parties at the venues and the Olympic and Paralympic Village, and City Cast, tasked with being guides around the Olympic flame and assisting at Tokyo Sports Square, which was an information center set up to promote the city during the Tokyo 2020 Games.

"People who were able to work well in teams, with a sense of consideration and compassion, came together in great numbers—regardless of age, gender, or impairment—to support the competition," explained one training manager. A cumulative total of over 76,000 people worked as Field Cast and more than 20,000 as City Cast.

as well as how to balance health and safety concerns while pleasing those attending and participating.

Field Cast member Awada Shuhei, a wheelchair user, had attended three previous Games, and been struck by the level of support he received there, so for him, his stint as a volunteer was about giving back. Reflecting on his experience at the Tokyo 2020 Games, he said he learned how to utilize his knowledge and experience to add value to the event. He described how volunteers in his team went the extra mile to make the experience enjoyable. For example, they decorated their workstations with origami cranes and also distributed handwritten messages to visitors as *omotenashi*—an expression of wholehearted Japanese hospitality.

City Cast member Sugisaka Tsutomu acted as a guide for international media at the Tokyo Media Center set up by the TMG. He applied because people who came from overseas for the Tokyo 2020 Games might be less familiar with Japan compared to usual tourists, and they might need more help. "I was glad to play a small role in international relations by showing that Japanese people are



Gika Akiko giving directions with a radiant smile at the entrance of Tokyo Sports Square.

## Sharing the Experience

Field and City Cast members talk about their participation in the Tokyo 2020 Games.  
by **Anne Lucas**

The lengthy and extensive training of the volunteers began well before the Games, with the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee handling the Field Cast and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) managing the City Cast. All volunteers were educated in the history and significance of the Games and given an outline of the upcoming Tokyo 2020 Games. They were instructed in the quality of tone and manner expected of them, as well as methods of support for people with impairments. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated training to be moved online, and thorough infection prevention measures were added to the curriculum.

Being a volunteer is a significant role, but unremunerated. So, what inspires a person to sign up for the role?

One Field Cast leader, Nishikawa "Charles" Chiharu, was extremely grateful to have witnessed the gold medal being won, a number of times. A seasoned volunteer and provider of language support who had worked at the past three Games interpreting in events such as table tennis, Nishikawa believes the pandemic has been instructive in how to handle large international events going forward,

friendly, positive, and helpful." Another valuable lesson he learned during training was how to engage with people with impairments. "It is more important to ask them what specific help they need rather than simply learning how to assist with wheelchairs and so on."

Gika Akiko, another one of the City Cast, said that as soon as the Tokyo 2020 Games were announced, she knew immediately she wanted to be involved, seeing it, amongst other things, as a chance to promote Shibuya Ward in Tokyo, where she lives. In preparation for the Games, she volunteered for a wide range of other events. "I find volunteering as enjoyable as someone might find playing tennis or golf. I love how it allows me to come into contact with people I wouldn't necessarily have a chance to meet in my daily life."

The contribution of the volunteers was one of the factors that led to the success of the Tokyo 2020 Games. While the scope of their activities may have been reduced from what had originally been planned, the sense of satisfaction they gained was far from inconsequential. As Nishikawa put it: "Working as a volunteer changes you as a person in a positive way. It becomes a true vocation."



Sugisaka Tsutomu was a beacon of helpfulness at Tokyo Media Center.

Awada Shuhei volunteered at Ariake Arena, which hosted the wheelchair basketball events.

