

Researchers Also Contribute to SHIEN's Support Activities



TATSUMI Makiko, SHIEN

The two SHIEN staff members provide support for some 60 foreign researchers. Although we are busy every day, we also try to collect additional information that might be useful for researchers. There is one powerful source of assistance to us in gathering this information...the researchers themselves!

Do you have a personal physician? If you were living in the community where you were born and raised, you might have a family doctor who has known you and your siblings since you were small. If not, you would have to choose a hospital from the ones in your area when the need arose. There would be many ways to make that selection. You could ask your friends, check a telephone directory, or simply go to the nearest one. But, imagine how you would select a hospital if you were living in a country where you don't understand the language.

When researchers at ATR need our support, they usually come to our office and talk with us until they are satisfied with the information and advice they obtain. However, when they need immediate medical attention, they don't have the time to see us personally. In this case, they most likely call us on the phone. Their voices often sound weak and fragile due to illness, or full of anxiety when their child has a fever. No matter what the reason may be, these calls are urgent. We respond quickly, providing hospital information, and, if necessary, accompanying them to the hospital for examination.

Since people's lifestyles and interests vary widely, the inquiries that we receive are so diverse that sometimes we have to take time to search out the information to provide the proper advice to each question. However, since assistance related to medical care is essential and vital, SHIEN's website provides necessary medical and hospital information for immediate viewing. This page contains not only information gathered by us but also information supplied by other researchers. For example, one researcher submitted the following comment about the dental service he received: "The dentist suggested by SHIEN had a very good attitude and spoke enough English to make it clear what he wanted. He explained what he was

doing, which was very reassuring. I had to fill out a registration card at my first visit, so it may be worth taking a Japanese speaker/reader with you the first time. The dental fee was... (omitted)." Fortunately, the SHIEN staff members are very healthy and rarely have to go to a hospital for treatment. Therefore, information from researchers is very valuable!

We also receive very useful information from researchers regarding other aspects of everyday life. For instance, in our support for children's school entrance formalities, we check admission eligibility and the language support systems offered by schools, and also serve as interpreters in interviews with the school staff. However, we have no way of knowing how children are being treated by the teachers after they begin to attend the school and whether they are enjoying their school life unless we hear from the researchers who send the children there. Researchers' feedback greatly helps us to provide a better information service.

We have many other situations in which researchers help us by telling us about their actual experiences, such as recommending babysitters, stores for shopping, and the English telephone service of a railway company. In fact, it was a researcher who told us the town office had a branch near our company housing!

Researchers seek support, and the SHIEN staff respond to their needs. However, there is more to this than this simple, two-step communication. We also receive feedback from researchers, and relay the information they discover on their own to other researchers. This bi-directional communication makes SHIEN's support more extensive than it could be otherwise. Therefore, we try to obtain feedback from the researchers we provide support to, even though we are sometimes a little disappointed when they say something like, "Thank you for your help the other day, but...well...I didn't go to the place you recommended...!"