

## Encouraging Advocacy for Babies Overseas: A Journey to Japan

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I began my professional work with very young children as a speech-language pathologist. Although clinical work was very enjoyable, I sought to expand my reach and effect change for communities. It was in policy work that I found the vehicle I needed to impact larger communities and system change. I knew I had found my heart's work when I added an infant mental health lens to my policy work. I began a body of work focused on ensuring a stronger more secure future for very young children in Washington State. These efforts met with some success at the local and state level. However, until recently, international policy work held little interest for me.

However in January of 2007, I had the fortunate opportunity of meeting with a Japanese nursing colleague spear-heading infant mental health work in Tokyo with a focus on infants and toddlers who are at-risk due to young maternal age or maltreatment. Our meeting was her first encounter with someone whose professional focus was on infant mental health oriented policy and advocacy. As a result, I was invited to present on infant mental health and advocacy at the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the Japanese Association of Infant Health. It rapidly became apparent that while there "was no one like [me]" in Japan, they were hungry for an advocacy message and eager to learn how one could become a voice for babies. Out of that opportunity, an ongoing effort has emerged encouraging advocacy and system change in Japan, particularly around meeting the needs of very young children who have been maltreated.

This poster provides a window into this incredible opportunity to nurture and encourage advocacy despite being in a country not my own where I did not know the language. It looks at the unique opportunities and challenges presented by cross-cultural advocacy work. And, highlights what messages and techniques maintained their power through translation, versus those that were lost.

As we become an increasingly inter-connected global society, it is imperative we share the lessons we learn about advocating for change not only in our own personal communities but in the global community. By supporting advocacy at home and abroad, we will build a powerful chorus of voices for babies that will be heard.

For an electronic copy of this poster please email: [hill@earlychildhoodpolicy.com](mailto:hill@earlychildhoodpolicy.com)

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