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Pink bus offers shelter to vulnerable girls in Tokyo nightspots



KYODO NEWS - Oct 27, 2018 - 09:30 | Feature, All



TOKYO – A bus in a standout pink has been serving as a shelter for teenage girls

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The camper-like bus, dubbed Tsubomi (Bud) Cafe, with flowers painted on its exterior, offers free meals and drinks as well as a space to chat exclusively for teenage girls in the Shinjuku and Shibuya districts. Many of the girls have been neglected by their parents due to poverty or are the victims of abuse.

Members of civic group Colabo are on hand to offer advice to the girls.

The bus made its first appearance on Oct. 17 in the Kabukicho red-light district in Shinjuku Ward. A smiling Colabo staff member asked two girls looking curiously at the bus to come in, saying, "You can eat inside."

By 10 p.m. that night, 15 girls had visited the bus to eat, talk, and confess their worries to the staff.

"We'd like to establish relationships" with such young girls rather than offer living assistance as such, said Colabo representative Yumeno Nito, 28, who also had a problem with her family and wandered around red-light districts at night when she was a teenager.

"I hope (the bus) will be a place where girls can relax, feel at ease and hang out as they are," said Nito.

The concept of the nighttime bus for vulnerable young girls originally came from Seoul. When Nito visited the South Korean capital and saw girls similarly in trouble chatting and eating Korean pancakes in a bus she decided to introduce the idea in Tokyo.

The bus will park once a week either in Shinjuku or Shibuya. The project has been chosen as a model for supporting vulnerable young women by the central government and the Tokyo metropolitan government.

Seiko Kitazawa, head of Shinjuku Ward's gender equality promotion division, said she has seen girls come to Shinjuku after no longer feeling secure in their homes due to poverty or abuse.

Kitazawa stressed the importance of peer support. "If we say 'We are from the ward office and we'll help you,' I'm sure no one would accept the assistance. People close to their age need to approach them and create a chance to give support," she said.

Nito echoed that view. "Some girls seem to feel uncomfortable receiving public aid as they distrust adults, so we are the ones who should try to go out to see and talk to them," she said.

Yukiko Sakamoto, head of a local group supporting the rehabilitation of offenders, joined Colabo's bus project on the first day.

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reasons for not being able to go back home," said Sakamoto. "Some of them suffer from sexual violence committed by fathers or stepbrothers and others are shut out by their mothers' boyfriends."

Sakamoto said she was surprised when she heard the color of the bus would be pink. "But it's important to stand out to attract passengers. Yumeno really wants to save those girls," she said.

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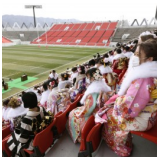
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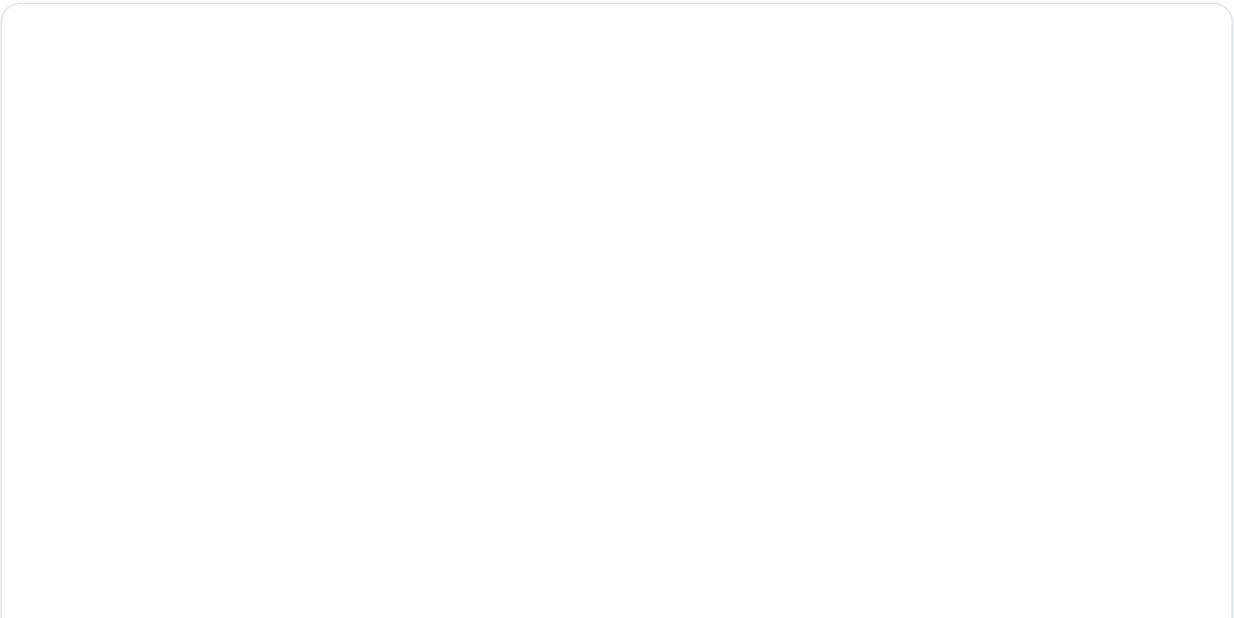
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Gifu	Gunma	Hiroshima	Hokkaido	Hyogo	Ibaraki	Ishikawa	
Iwate	Kagawa	Kagoshima	Kanagawa	Kochi	Kumamoto	Kyoto	
Mie	Miyagi	Miyazaki	Nagano	Nagasaki	Nara	Niigata	Oita
Okayama	Okinawa	Osaka	Saga	Saitama	Shiga	Shimane	
Shizuoka	Tochigi	Tokushima	Tokyo	Tottori	Toyama	Wakayama	
Yamagata	Yamaguchi	Yamanashi					
0	5000	10,000					

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