

Profile: Mr. Hiroyasu Itoh

- CEO, Abilities Care-net, Inc.
- Chairperson, Japan Abilities Association (NPO)
- Former Vice Chairperson, Subcommittee on Anti-discrimination, in Policy Committee for People with Disabilities (under the National Cabinet Office)
- Chairperson, National Network of Japanese with Disabilities Act (JDA)
- Vice Chairperson, Healthcare Forum Japan (NPO)
- Guest Professor, Wenjing College of Yantai University, China (2015–)
- Guest Professor, Faculty of Human Sciences of Waseda University (2004–2012);
Subjects taught: Social Security and Social services.

Honors and Awards

Prime Minister's Award (Japan), 1987

Prince Henrik's Medal of Honor (Denmark), 2001

Bachelor of Commerce (Business, Management, Marketing, Related Support Service,
Waseda University Commercial Department, 1966

In March 1966, after graduating from Waseda University, Mr. Itoh started the Abilities Movement, establishing Japan Abilities Association. One month later, in this statement, he declared the principle of this movement: "We seek opportunity, not security."

Two months later, he established a commercial printing company, targeted at employing persons with disabilities. The first 5 employees, who happened to be persons with severe disabilities, assumed leading roles in the company. Today, this company has evolved into Abilities Care-net, Inc., a company in which Mr. Itoh is CEO.

For over 50 years, Mr. Itoh has successfully and aggressively employed qualified individuals with physical, learning and developmental disabilities. The company is dedicated to demonstrating that disabled persons can work as effectively and productively as any other person in the workforce.

In 1971, Mr. Itoh submitted a proposal to Mr. Kenzaburo Hara, Japanese Minister of Labor, requesting a reform of the employment law for people with disabilities. This single action created the platform for an official review of the Handicapped/Disabled Persons' Employment Promotion Act by the national government. In October 1975, the revised Act passed in the Diet; it became effective in April 1976.

After extensive preparation begun in 1972, Mr. Itoh's Abilities company expanded to development, sales, and import business of assistive devices and rehabilitation equipment on July 15, 1974. In November of that year, the Ministry of Health requested that Mr. Itoh develop the Home Care & Rehab International Exhibition. The first exhibition was an overwhelming success. (October 2016 is the exhibition's 43rd year.) Abilities continues to develop a variety of assistive devices, supporting independent living for people with disabilities, and expanding the worldwide network for distribution of its products.

In 1999, Mr. Itoh initiated the management of healthcare and medical facilities. This included daycare services for the elderly, assisted living homes for the elderly and disabled, and a rehabilitation center and clinic.

The United Nations challenged the Japanese government to establish anti-discrimination laws for people with disabilities in September 2001. However, the Japanese government ignored the challenge and did not act.

Mr. Itoh's dedication and enthusiasm for bettering the opportunities for people with disabilities entered a new phase in 2001 with a movement to realize the Japanese with Disabilities Act (JDA), securing basic human rights for all Japanese with disabilities. He established "National Network of JDA" in cooperation with 12 major organizations for people with disabilities. As executive director, he worked actively and tirelessly to energize the movement, hosting many lectures, a symposium, and open forum. Mr. Itoh invited noted authorities from the United States, to share information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the relationship between government and services for the elderly.

In January 2002, he promoted one of his employees, Mr. Takahiro Kuroiwa, who, in the national election, won a seat in the National Diet. Mr. Kuroiwa has worked to inform and promote understanding of the needs for a JDA, among his colleagues in Parliament.

Finally, in November 2009, Mr. Yukio Hatoyama, Prime Minister at the time, recommended the reform of programs for people with disabilities, in three arenas. In only two weeks, the Cabinet approved the establishment of the core group to spearhead the reform, with the Prime Minister as its principal Director. This was the beginning of the work to reform the basic law, to establish the law for comprehensive support, and to establish the anti-discrimination law, all for people with disabilities.

One year later, Mr. Itoh was appointed Vice Chairman of the Subcommittee on Anti-Discrimination at Prime Minister's Department. And in September 2012, his Subcommittee presented its 90-page report to the Minister of State. In June of the following year, the Anti-Discrimination Law for People with Disabilities unanimously passed in both the House of Representatives and House of Councilors. It became law in April 2016.

The Abilities movement celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in April 2016.

Abilities Care-net opened a local affiliate office in Taiwan, "Abilities Healthcare Taiwan" in November 2013.

Today, Abilities Care-net, Inc. has over 35 sales offices and rental centers for the distribution of rehabilitation and assistive equipment all over Japan. And, it operates 30 rehabilitation and care facilities in Japan. Among its staff of 1,000, individuals with different disabilities work equally, alongside those without disabilities.

As the driving force behind the Abilities movement for over 50 years, Mr. Itoh's passion and enthusiasm were motivated by his own personal experience at the outset his career. His affected lower limb, a result of contracting polio at the age of one year, has little to do with HIS abilities as a businessman, as a visionary, and as an inspiration to so many.