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**VVI 50th Anniversary committee, VVI committee, Education**

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**Title: “*Life is Climbing*” – a joyful, successful celebration for VVI’s 50th anniversary**

The *Life is Climbing* documentary film viewing and Q&A with Koichiro ‘Koba’ Kobayashi and Naoya Suzuki held on April 19th was a great success. The large room at Arcadia Ichigaya was filled to capacity with attendance of a diverse group of 130 people - CWAJ members, non-members, people with a visual impairment, students, and media. Hearing the audience’s reaction during the thrilling, humorous, and heartwarming scenes of the film made it clear they enjoyed the film. There were many questions during the Q&A which gave us even more insights into the experiences and friendship of Koba and Naoya.

This was the tribute we had hoped and planned for to highlight 50 years of VVI and CWAJ providing programs for the visually impaired and it successfully raised awareness to many who had never heard of CWAJ and our programs.

Before the film, participants enjoyed seeing the displays about Hands-on Art, VVI, and CWAJ, and watching the powerpoint slides about VVI. It was also a chance to chat with old friends and make new acquaintances. 50 years ago, CWAJ members formed a group to provide English language support to university students with a visual impairment. We were honored to have one of those students at the event! Chuji Sashida is currently the Executive Director, National Committee of Welfare for the Blind in Japan. Formerly, as President of the World Blind Union Asia Pacific, he laid the groundwork to promote international exchange of visually impaired. We were also pleased to introduce Haruka Tamaoki, one of the 2024 recipients of the Scholarship for the Visually Impaired.

Another very special aspect of this event was the collaboration with students from International School of the Sacred Heart High School who volunteered as guides for high school students from the Special Needs Education School for the Visually Impaired, University of Tsukuba, and also other attendees with a visual impairment.

Thank you to the committee and volunteers on the day for all their help in making this event a success. A special thank you to new member Tamami Kodemura for being emcee and excellent moderator for the Q&A.

Here are just a few of the comments received:

From a Tsukuba High School student:

What was particularly memorable was when Naoya-san said, "I like Koba-san not as a physically challenged person, but as an equal human being, and I am his friend.” I myself am blind, but I often feel sorry for my friends and colleagues because they often support me, and I sometimes worry that it is difficult to establish an "equal relationship" with them. However, I would like to keep in mind what Naoya said, "I believe in Koba even though he is totally blind. I can entrust my life to him.” And I would like to spend days with sincerity so that people will think, "She is totally blind, but she is trustworthy and can be trusted” in my personal and professional life.

From International School of the Sacred Heart high school student:

Thank you so much for providing such an incredible opportunity. The event was a great success, and we have never had such a meaningful experience before. All of our club members kept saying how much they genuinely enjoyed the entire day. We are truly blessed to have been given this chance and to be part of such an amazing event.

Masako Fujita, of the National Audio Translation Volunteer Network

From her blog "Fujita Goes", No.579 "Life is Climbing" (translated from Japanese)

The audience screamed, laughed, and sometimes felt nervous and anxious. "Calm down! It's okay! It's absolutely okay!" Koba says of his guide, "Naoya's voice has a lot of power." I was moved. I was worried about small things, but now I feel a surge of courage.

The event was organized by CWAJ. I arrived early at the reception and was greeted by a lively mix of English and Japanese. This was no surprise, as the association is made up of women from dozens of countries around the world who aim to make international contributions in the fields of education and culture. I had never heard of this wonderful organization before, hosting a screening to commemorate 50 years of strong ties with the visually impaired. I was inspired and encouraged by the people who carry out such meaningful activities.