

## “Those with Wings of Self-expression”

20 years ago, when Katayama Studio was established, there was no place in Japan where people with disabilities could express themselves like today.

Most of them would go to places called “Community Workplace” operated by the local government, after graduating from a special-needs school at the age of 18. Those community workplaces were established as places for disabled individuals to work and spend their days. Parents with disabled children also hoped their children would work as a part of society.

The predecessor of Katayama Studio was a community workplace and had started out as a place to complete small tasks. However, although it was called a workplace, in reality, disabled individuals were simply assigned a task that didn’t match with what they could do or what they wanted to do. Those who cannot complete those tasks due to their disabilities would just sit at the workplace all day, waiting for the time to pass, while the staff would complete the tasks for them.

I started to question the way these workplaces operated. As the first step of transformation, I stopped assigning tasks to disabled individuals, which they were unable to carry out. We stopped all tasks and started to carefully listen to their stories. We decided to focus on what each of those individuals can do. By doing so, we started to hear their real voices, expressing: “I want to do this”, “I want to write my name”, “I want to draw”, etc.

Takashi Sawada was only able to move his right leg due to severe cerebral palsy. Initially, he tried to write letters using his leg but he was unable to do so. After some trial and error, he kicked a paper cup filled with paint with his right leg and was able to create a drawing. Seeing this, I was unconsciously asking him, “What would you like to do tomorrow?” At that moment, I could see a future for all of these individuals.

From that day, we decided to support art activities as a method for them to live their own unique lives. We believed that, instead of making them do a task they can’t complete, continuous success on things they can actually do would encourage them to live with enthusiasm in the coming days. I wanted to make a place where they can feel that they are “living” their lives. Working does not mean

you're living a life. And so, we decided to rename the place Katayama Studio and started to provide a place for self-expression.

By presenting these free and lively art pieces to the society, I hope it would encourage the audience to "live" their lives as well.

With the philosophy "People Are the Axes", we, Katayama Studio, are continuing our activities to live closely with people.

Syuhei Shinkawa  
Director of Katayama Studio

## History

April 1993	Started as a Center for Independent Living (Community Workplace)
June 2003	Renamed as "Katayama Studio"; started to support art by disabled individuals
April 2004	Started "Katayama Art Club" to support disability art for those not eligible for the system
June 2010	Established "100 Years Social Welfare Non-Profit Organization"
October 2011	Started a welfare service business for persons with disabilities, under the name "Katayama Studio" (life nursing care business)
June 2013	10th anniversary
December 2013	Hosted a 10th-anniversary symposium
June 2023	20th anniversary