



A Disability of the Soul: An Ethnography of Schizophrenia and Mental Illness in Contemporary Japan

Karen Nakamura

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Bethel House, located in a small fishing village in northern Japan, was founded in 1984 as an intentional community for people with schizophrenia and other psychiatric disorders. Using a unique, community approach to psychosocial recovery, Bethel House focuses as much on social integration as on therapeutic work. As a centerpiece of this approach, Bethel House started its own businesses in order to create employment and socialization opportunities for its residents and to change public attitudes toward the mentally ill, but also quite unintentionally provided a significant boost to the distressed local economy. Through its work programs, communal living, and close relationship between hospital and town, Bethel has been remarkably successful in carefully reintegrating its members into Japanese society. It has become known as a model alternative to long-term institutionalization.

In *A Disability of the Soul*, Karen Nakamura explores how the members of this unique community struggle with their lives, their illnesses, and the meaning of community. Told through engaging historical narrative, insightful ethnographic vignettes, and compelling life stories, her account of Bethel House depicts its achievements and setbacks, its promises and limitations. The book is accompanied by a DVD containing two fascinating documentaries about Bethel made by the author: *Bethel: Community and Schizophrenia in Northern Japan* and *A Japanese Funeral* (winner of the Society for Visual Anthropology Short Film Award and the Society for East Asian Anthropology David Plath Media Award). *A Disability of the Soul* is a sensitive and multidimensional portrait of what it means to live with mental illness in contemporary Japan.

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