



慈濟 **Tzu Chi**

**Buddhism
in Action**

**Comfort and Care
in Action**

Tzu Chi Responds to Taiwan's Train Crash

May 2021



Jing Si Abode nuns prepare boxed meals for people working on the front lines of the *Taroko Express* train crash in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. Hsiao Yiu-Hwa

Massive Disasters Call for Great Love

Translated by Teresa Chang

I talk frequently about the fleeting nature of time, yet time seemed to slow to a crawl on April 2. On that day, the first day of a long weekend, a *Taroko Express* train packed with passengers returning home for the Tomb-Sweeping Festival or going on vacation derailed after hitting a construction truck near the north entrance of Qingshui Tunnel, northern Hualien. The truck had rolled down a slope into the path of the train. By the time the train driver spotted the vehicle, there was not enough distance to emergency brake. The disaster resulted in heavy casualties. My heart was weighed down with an ineffable sadness when I watched the news reports and listened to Tzu Chi volunteers who had been on the train recount the tragic event.

Several carriages of the train were stuck in Qingshui Tunnel, making rescue work very difficult. Our medical team in Hualien immediately swung into action to help. An example of our health professionals' quick response was that of Dr. Wu Kun-chi (吳坤信), an orthopedist at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. He is also the head of the Hualien County fire department's volunteer emergency rescue team. He was seeing outpatients at the hospital when news of the accident broke. As soon as he learned about the gravity of the disaster, he rushed to join the rescue effort. He gave the clothes off his back in his service to others: while helping at the scene, he took off his rescue uniform to cover one deceased victim whose face was in bad shape, and he used his doctor's white coat to warm a man who was feeling very cold due to the loss of blood. Although Dr. Wu has participated in several international emergency relief missions before, he could not hold back his tears when telling of his experience helping at the crash site.

Tzu Chi volunteers worked tirelessly on-site during the rescue effort to provide comfort and assistance to survivors, families of the injured and deceased, and first responders. They offered drinks, food, and other supplies throughout the operation. Realizing that the first responders engaged in the rescue mission might experience post-traumatic stress disorder after witnessing the heartrending death and destruction, our Jing Si Abode nuns gave bracelets of Buddhist prayer beads

and Buddha pendant necklaces to the rescue workers, hoping to soothe them with the power of religion.

Our volunteers were fully aware of the support that families of the injured and deceased needed. So aside from presenting them with consolation cash as a token of care, our volunteers kept the families company and provided them with whatever help they needed. I hope our volunteers' sincere love helped the family members deal with their grief and the excruciating pain in their hearts.

When the bereaved families returned to the crash site for a traditional ritual to call the spirits of their loved ones home, our nuns and volunteers were there to accompany them and offer support. They served at the Hualien Funeral Home too, chanting sutras for the deceased and taking care of the needs of the families. And it wasn't just in Hualien that our volunteers stepped up to help. The bodies of some of the deceased were sent back to their home cities or counties, such as Taipei and Taitung. Our volunteers in those areas mobilized to offer care and help to the grieving families there too.

I understand the pain the bereaved are experiencing. I know they have a long road of healing ahead of them. I pray that time will heal their wounds. At the same time, I hope our volunteers share with the grieving families that their loved ones have gone to where their karmic affinities took them, and that instead of getting caught up in sadness, it's best to turn their sorrow into best wishes for their loved ones to help them go in peace.

This tragic accident once again brought home life's impermanence. Dozens of lives were lost in just an instant, leaving families to endure unbearable pain. In times like these, compassion and love are needed more than ever. Let's offer up our most heartfelt prayers for all those impacted by the accident and give the grieving families our sincerest support and care. May the deceased rest in peace; may their families find peace of mind; and may the injured passengers recover as soon as possible. Let's also take to heart the lessons of life's impermanence and strive always to form good affinities with everyone around us and cherish what we have. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

May 2021



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PHOTO BY HSIAO YIU-HWA

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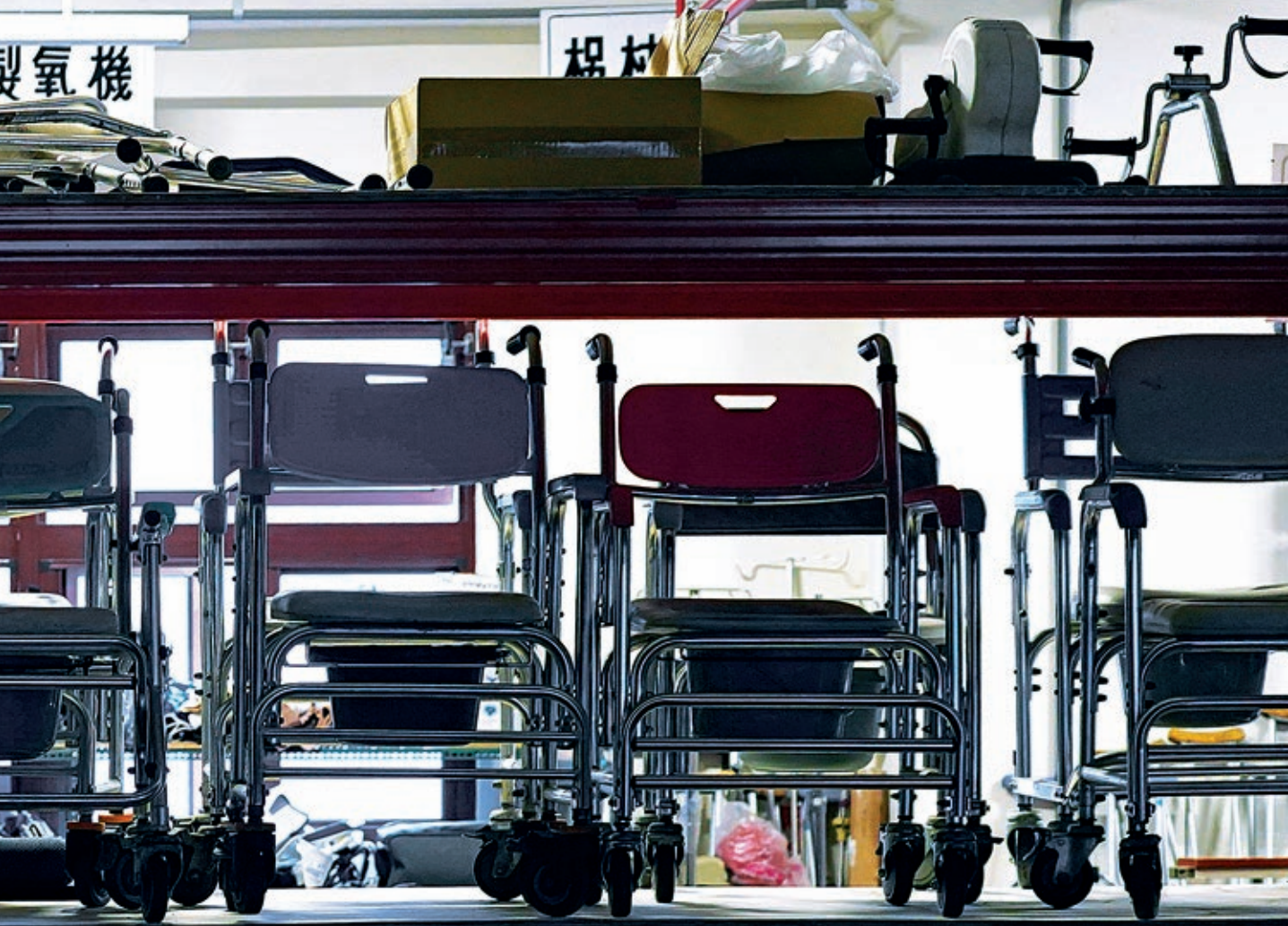
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耗材區

Recycled, well-cleaned assistive equipment waiting to serve functionally impaired people. This equipment is stored in a warehouse on floor B1 of the Bade Jing Si Hall in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan.



The Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program

Support for Functionally Impaired People

By Chen Li-an

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Tzu Chi provides recycled assistive equipment in Taiwan for people with physical limitations. The recycled devices receive a new lease on life and improve the lives of people struggling with everyday activities.

Peng Zhen-wei (彭振維) has worked for eight years in a hospital as an emergency room security guard. He often sees the children of patients fighting outside the ER when he's on duty. During one such clash, he couldn't help but approach the children angrily arguing with each other and ask, "Your parent is still lying there on the sickbed, and yet you can't wait to jump into such a fierce argument. What are you fighting for that simply can't wait?" One of the children responded, "For money." The other said, "Our dad has fallen ill, but we all have to work. Who's going to take care of him?"

These sorts of responses are common in this situation. When a loved one experiences a debilitating illness, money can often become an issue. If no one in the family can care for the patient, a care provider may have to be hired to provide essential services. The expenses that follow can be daunting for families of modest means. Another source of financial stress can be the assistive devices required once the patient is discharged from the hospital. For example, a patient might need a combination of assistive devices such as an electric hospital bed, a wheelchair, and a portable toilet chair. They may also require a ventilator or an oxygen concentrator to use at home. Whatever the need is, the resulting cost of such equipment adds to the financial stress of the family.

Chen Mei-hui (陳美慧) is the head nurse in the Stroke Center at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, in northern Taiwan. She knows better than most people about the financial impact that long-term care needs can have on a family. "The number of patients aged 55 to 60 that we are admitting has been increasing in recent years," Chen said. "People in that age group are usually still in the workforce and may even be the breadwinners of their families. When a stroke knocks them down, their families' finances are bound to be affected." With their economic situations compromised, such families must budget their expenditures with care. Saving money on things such as assistive devices is a great help in making their ends meet.

Fortunately, the Taiwanese government offers help for such needs. People with mental or physical disabilities can apply for subsidies when they need to purchase assistive devices. Those eligible for long-term care can do the same. However, some families fail to meet the criteria for government aid, even though they are not doing well financially, because they own real estate or can't qualify as low-income households. Even if they do qualify for aid, "the application process can



sometimes take two to three weeks or even longer," said head nurse Chen. "The wait is simply too long for those patients who are about to be discharged from the hospital and urgently need assistive devices to use at home."

The government has also, in partnership with private organizations, set up assistive device centers in cities and counties across Taiwan to loan equipment to people needing help. Some of the centers charge rental fees for the equipment; others loan it for free. People can access the services if they have the need.

Peng Zhen-wei, the security guard mentioned at the beginning of this article, pointed out a chal-



challenge with getting assistive devices through such centers. “Some families are getting by on as little as 2,000 or 3,000 NT dollars [US\$67-100] a month. It’s a challenge for them to even pay the transportation fees for the assistive devices on loan from a center.”

Peng, a Tzu Chi volunteer himself, is therefore happy that the Tzu Chi Foundation has launched an assistive device program, which provides second-hand assistive devices and medical equipment for those who need them. Not only is the equipment provided for free—the delivery is free of charge too. Peng admires the program so much that he has even joined the service.

A volunteer unloads an electric bed and a wheelchair to deliver to a family that has applied to the Tzu Chi assistive device program for the equipment.

How the program came to be

Tzu Chi volunteers discovered a need to offer assistive devices while providing long-term care for disadvantaged families in Hualien and Taitung, eastern Taiwan. These areas cover an expansive, mountainous area, making a visit to an assistive device center difficult for some people. The cost of assistive devices was also an issue. They could range from several thousand to tens of



thousands of NT dollars (one U.S. dollar is approximately 30 Taiwanese dollars). Depending on their medical conditions, people might need such equipment for days, weeks, or indefinitely. However long they needed the equipment, it was usually more money than these folks could afford.

It occurred to Tzu Chi volunteers that there were many recycled assistive devices at Tzu Chi recycling stations. People occasionally donated such equipment to the foundation too. Why couldn't Tzu Chi provide the equipment to those who needed it?

At first, volunteers worked on their own to deliver assistive devices to needy families, but in March 2017 the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program was established in Hualien. Its warehouse is in the basement of the local Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall. The program enables the foundation to integrate resources and services and bring help to more people.

"The launch of such a program was in line with Tzu Chi's care for the disadvantaged in society," said Lu Fang-chuan (呂芳川), the director of the Tzu Chi Department of Charity Mission Development. Lu recalled that as soon as the program was set up, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital submitted many applications. The hospital had many

A family in which two elderly parents are taking care of a bedridden son has benefited from assistive devices provided by Tzu Chi.

patients about to be discharged who needed wheelchairs, electric beds, or walking aids to make their lives more convenient at home. "When more volunteers discovered how many people needed such a service, they joined on their own initiative to help. This force for good has thus grown more and more powerful."

Why does the name of Tzu Chi's assistive device program include the word "eco-friendly"? It's simple: most of the second-hand assistive devices that have ended up with Tzu Chi are in good condition, and extending their use can help conserve resources and is beneficial for the Earth. Lu explained that before a piece of equipment is sent out, volunteers make sure it has been thoroughly cleaned, sanitized, and is safe to use. As a result, many volunteers have become experts at cleaning, fixing, and maintaining such gear.

The biggest difference between the Tzu Chi program and other assistive device rental centers is that Tzu Chi does not charge any fees, regardless of how many devices a family applies for or

how expensive a piece of equipment is. Volunteers process applications as quickly as they can, and even make free deliveries.

Since the program was launched, more and more service outlets have been set up in other areas on the island. Now the program boasts 13 locations in northern, central, and eastern Taiwan with warehouses where assistive devices can be stored, cleaned, and maintained. People who need such equipment can complete application forms online or call one of the program's dedicated hot-lines. Besides delivering equipment to the applicants, volunteers also pick it up when its use is no longer required. As of January 2021, the program had sent out 11,800 pieces of equipment. Electric beds, wheelchairs, and portable toilet chairs are the top three requested items. Other equipment circulating via the program includes walking aids, phlegm suction machines, oxygen concentrators, air mattresses, and other similar items.

The day the electric bed arrives

"Mrs. Chen, we are here to see you!" called out Ho Yue-peng (何月澎), a Tzu Chi volunteer from Xizhi, northern Taiwan. Mrs. Chen is a Tzu Chi care recipient. Ho and her fellow volunteers visit Mrs. Chen every month.

Ho handed over to Mrs. Chen a huge pack of "gifts." "I've brought some diapers for A-xin," she said, "and these incontinence pads, smaller than the diapers, are for you." Ho had picked up the items for Mrs. Chen from a warehouse used by the Tzu Chi assistive device program. The diapers and pads had been generously donated.

Chen uses incontinence pads sparingly to reduce expenses, cutting them in half to double the number of pads. She and her husband live as frugally as they can. Even their three meals consist almost entirely of steamed, stuffed buns given to them by their friends.

Chen, 82, receives only 3,000 NT dollars (US\$100) a month from Taiwan's national pension program. The bulk of their income comes from her 86-year-old husband, who retired from the Taiwan Railways Administration and receives a

It can be a challenge for a financially stressed family to purchase needed assistive equipment. Even if they can find free equipment to use, transporting it to their home can sometimes be a problem. Tzu Chi's assistive device program reduces the financial burdens of needy families, arranges for the equipment to be delivered and set up, and extends its useful life.

monthly pension of 25,000 NT dollars (US\$835). The couple would have been leading a relatively comfortable retired life if A-xin, their older, single son, had not fallen ill with a brain tumor five years ago. Now bedridden, A-xin can no longer work or even take care of his own daily needs. His in-home care and other needs depleted his savings, and his parents' pensions fall short of covering the family's expenses, which include a monthly mortgage payment of 30,000 NT dollars (US\$1,000) for their home. Though the couple has another son, he is sitting for an exam and hasn't started working yet. The family has no choice but to pinch pennies to get by.

Because the Chens own a residential property, they are ineligible for government subsidies for low-income households. With no extra money to spare, the couple can't afford assistive devices





such as an electric bed for A-xin. Before Tzu Chi helped them out, Mrs. Chen would have to prop her son up with several pillows to feed him. When their younger son was home, he'd help them bathe his brother, turn him over in bed, and change his diapers. But when he wasn't home, the couple had no choice but to manage on their own. Taking care of A-xin, who is taller than either of them, was a real challenge. Even so, Mrs. Chen kept her son very clean, and she did a fine job of running the household.

Still, she was getting old. The older she got, the weaker she became. Her memory also began to show signs of failing. The pressure she was under from having to tend to her son's needs day in and day out was hard to imagine.

A-xin's condition took a turn for the worse in 2020. He used to be able to respond to questions in simple sentences, but now he wouldn't say anything at all. This weighed Mrs. Chen even further down. Seeing her struggle and feeling for her, a friend of 30 years referred the family to Tzu Chi for help.

Volunteers visited the Chens after learning of their situation. They provided the family with emergency financial aid, and applied to the Tzu Chi assistive device program for a wheelchair, toi-

Volunteers maneuver an electric bed that weighs over a hundred kilograms (220 pounds) up an old walkup apartment. By the time they reach the applicant's home on the fourth floor, everyone is covered in sweat. LAI HUI-JUAN

let chair, and an electric bed for A-xin. They also taught Mrs. Chen some simple massage skills so that she could help relieve A-xin's discomfort and slow the speed at which his body atrophies.

"I'm really thankful to the volunteers for getting the handy assistive devices for us," said Mrs. Chen. Even though more than half a year had passed, she still vividly remembered the day the assistive equipment arrived at their home. Volunteers not only moved the devices into A-xin's room but gave detailed demonstrations of how to use them. They also taught the elderly couple some care techniques that could reduce their chance of injuries while taking care of their son.

Now, with the wheeled toilet chair, the couple finds it easier and safer to transport their son into and out of the bathroom to wash him. The electric bed has also saved Mrs. Chen a lot of hassle. "I no longer have to work so hard to prop him up with pillows to feed him," she explained. The bed has even seemed to improve A-xin's mood. Although

he is still unable to speak, he looks happier in the bed than before. "He ate a lot for dinner the day the bed was delivered to us!" said Mrs. Chen.

A more confident caregiver

Another day, volunteers from Keelung, northern Taiwan, delivered a toilet chair and an electric bed to a household located on a hillside in the city. This family's surname was also Chen. When the volunteers arrived, they broke into two teams: one team helped tidy up the room into which the bed would be placed; the other team cut Mr. Chen's hair and washed him.

He had been bedridden for six months. His son was his caregiver and the breadwinner of the family. With no prior caregiving experience, the son was overwhelmed by the responsibility of having to care for his severely disabled dad. Tzu Chi volunteers stepped in to help after the family's plight was brought to their attention.

Mr. Chen hadn't left his bed in a long time, and his room was disorderly. Volunteers worked with his son to tidy it up, and they fixed a broken light while they were at it. Volunteer Wu Wen-zan (吳文讚) helped set up the electric bed. "We hope Mr. Chen sleeps better on this bed," he said.

After Mr. Chen had been washed, the volunteers taught the son how to move a bedridden patient. Then they moved Mr. Chen onto the electric bed. Volunteer Wang Xu Mei-li (王許美麗) fixed some rice porridge for the father, who said cheerfully that he hadn't had this food in a long time.

"I was so flustered when Dad fell ill, I didn't think I'd be up to the job of caring for him," the son said. "I'm so grateful to you for stepping in to help." Learning from the volunteers how to better care for his father rekindled a sense of hope in him. The assistive devices will undoubtedly make his job easier too. "I'll tend to my dad the best I can when I return home from work, no matter how tired I am. Thank you for giving me the confidence to be a better caregiver."

A rising need

Before Tzu Chi's assistive device program was even established, volunteer Xie Guo-rong (謝國榮), of New Taipei City, northern Taiwan, had delivered recycled patient beds and other equipment to underserved families for years. He is now a volunteer for the program. During all those years of service, he saw firsthand the benefits that assistive devices could bring caregivers of functionally impaired patients. Without the devices, caregivers could easily injure themselves while

caring for someone with special needs. This was especially true if the caregivers themselves were advanced in years or didn't know the proper techniques for moving or turning an impaired patient. "I often heard from caregivers how, after we had delivered assistive equipment to them, the aches they were experiencing as a result of caregiving had been greatly reduced," he said.

Xie sighed, adding that older people taking care of older people is now the trend, given Taiwan's aging population and low birthrates. "Most families that are applying now for our assistive device service consist of people in the 40- to 60-year age group, caring for people in their 70s or 80s," he explained. He has also come across quite a few instances of older people caring for younger ones.

Xie and other volunteers working for the program often receive urgent delivery requests. For example, one time a mother contacted the program inquiring whether they had a specialty wheelchair for her son. She said that her young son had been afflicted with a rare disease, and that she had used up the financial aid from the government and therefore needed to seek assistance from other sectors. Another instance was a terminally ill elderly man who wished to spend the last days of his life's journey at home and so urgently needed assistive devices.

Sometimes volunteers deliver assistive equipment to a family only to have to take it back just a few days later because the patient has passed away. They have even delivered equipment to households only to discover that the patients had already died. Despite instances such as these, volunteers serve willingly, without any complaint, glad to be of service to anyone in need.

The original intent of the program was to put recycled assistive equipment to good use by providing it to needy families, but in the course of carrying out their work, volunteers have discovered quite a few families in need of further aid from Tzu Chi. The program has therefore become another channel for foundation volunteers to expand their care to more underprivileged households.

Taiwan is projected to become a super-aged society by the year 2025. (A super-aged society is defined as one in which at least 20 percent of the population is 65 or older.) As the number of functionally impaired people is expected to rise, so will the need for assistive devices. Volunteers will do their best to help address the need, whether by providing care directly or the assistive equipment that families need, so that a better society can be brought into being. ❁

Behind the Scenes of the Tzu Chi Assistive Device Program

By Chen Li-an

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

How do recycled assistive devices end up as treasures instead of junk? Volunteers disinfect, clean, repair, and sometimes spray-paint the reclaimed equipment so that the items look new and attractive again. Then they deliver the refurbished devices to the homes of people who need them and will treasure them anew.



The discarded appliances and other kinds of equipment that end up at Tzu Chi recycling stations may be junk to most people, but they're treasures to Tzu Chi recycling volunteers. Some items can be restored to good working order with just a little tweaking, others need more serious attention, but if an item can be refurbished, volunteers are eager to do their best to extend its life. Some volunteers have developed a special interest in restoring assistive devices. They work to lengthen the useful life of such equipment so it can once again provide valuable service to people with physical limitations.

Meet master artisans

My photographer and I were greeted by the sweet fragrance of osmanthus flowers as soon as we stepped into an old house in Caotun, Nantou, in central Taiwan. We saw wheelchairs, walking aids, mobility scooters, and electric patient beds neatly lined up in the courtyard under the sun. The assistive devices were waiting to be disinfected, cleaned, and repaired to be put in service again. Equipment that had already been cleaned and repaired was arranged by category on the left side of the courtyard, protected by a sheet-metal roof.



Tools and screws of all sizes lay on a long table at one end of the covered area. According to Hong Xi-cai (洪錫財), a Tzu Chi recycling volunteer, this was the worktable for testing electronic parts. Repairs were done in a separate area.

Hong is a retired machine repairman. He has seen his share of discarded electric fans, hair dryers, and other appliances since he started volunteering at the local Tzu Chi recycling station. He has also seen quite a few assistive devices such as wheelchairs and walkers among the deserted items. Whenever he saw items that still looked fine on the outside, he couldn't resist the urge to fix them up.

Volunteer Hong Xi-cai, of Nantou, central Taiwan, dexterously changes a tire on a wheelchair. Around him are used assistive devices provided by community residents or salvaged from recycling stations.

“Professional habits die hard,” he said of his fondness for repairing things. He initially did the repairs just to challenge himself. “I was doing what Master Cheng Yen often urges people to do about cherishing things,” Hong said. He knew the time and effort it took to fix up and reclaim equipment was worth it if it extended its serviceable



life. Items that he “brought back to life” were made available free of charge for anyone to take home.

If an item couldn’t be repaired, he’d dismantle the whole thing and separate the parts into appropriate piles so that they could be recycled more easily. Though he knew the scrap parts wouldn’t fetch much money when sold, he did it anyway to help conserve resources and do the Earth a good turn.

When people in the neighborhood learned that Hong was good at repairing stuff, they began

bringing him things that were broken or no longer needed—such as assistive devices. “Many wheelchairs or walkers that were donated were in good shape. Sometimes we even receive brand-new items,” Hong said, pointing at two airbeds in unopened boxes on a shelf.

Thus, Hong was repairing and distributing used wheelchairs and walkers to people in the local community even before he joined the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program. At first, he provided only the most basic models of wheelchairs, which were easier for him to obtain.



A volunteer washes wheelchairs with a pressure washer in an open space in front of the Yilan Jing Si Hall in Yilan, northeastern Taiwan.

After that, Hong transformed the courtyard at the recycling center, which had been used for repairing wheelchairs and walking aids only, into a warehouse for repairing and storing more types of assistive devices. He was joined by one volunteer after another. Now they refurbish and provide various types of wheelchairs with various capabilities, hospital beds, mobility scooters, as well as other assistive equipment.

How about parts?

Hong and his volunteering partners receive a wide variety of assistive devices, diverse in their type, mechanism, and functionality. How do the volunteers obtain the necessary parts when such a range of devices need to be repaired?

Hong led us into a small room in the old house to show us where he stores his supply of parts. He picked up a perfectly fine footplate he had removed from an unwanted wheelchair and explained, "Stripping still serviceable parts from beat-up assistive devices gives us enough parts to support our repair needs."

The consumable parts of used devices, such as tires, must be replaced with brand-new components, but just about everything else—wheelchair footplates, toilet chair armrests, or even wheels, for example—can be replaced with reclaimed parts. Therefore, it's not that difficult to obtain needed parts.

Huang Yu-ren (黃裕仁), one of Hong's fellow volunteers, pointed out that a simple fix can save a lot of money. For example, a brand-new, adjustable bed costs at least 15,000 NT dollars (US\$500), but a used, "broken" one at their repair shop may require nothing more than just tightening a loose screw. "Once repaired, it works fine, just like a new one," he said.

"All of us in the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program are required to follow the law," Huang added. "Most devices may be repaired, but it is against the law to modify them."

Huang recalled his first impression of Hong when he first started working with him. "This man is so obsessive!" he remembers thinking to himself. This was because after each repair was completed, Hong would test the device over and over again to ensure that nothing was amiss. But that was just Hong's way of making sure that the

Such models featured fixed armrests, hand brakes, footplates, and a simple folding frame. He didn't provide specially designed electric or high-back wheelchairs out of concern for users' safety.

In 2019, he happened to see a news report on Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV about the Tzu Chi assistive device program. He learned that other volunteers were doing the same work he was, and he was impressed that they were repairing a greater variety of devices and serving wider geographic areas. After contacting program volunteers and learning how their program worked, he readily joined up.

next user received a high-quality, functional device.

In fact, Huang is just as “obsessive” as Hong when it comes to refurbishing an assistive device. For example, a repaired item sometimes has blemishes or other imperfections in its appearance, such as chipped paint. Though such imperfections do not lessen the functionality of the device, Huang can’t help feeling that the blemishes detract from its appeal. He therefore takes the time to repaint an item when necessary. “True, they’re used, but when they are thoroughly scrubbed and refurbished inside and out, their outward newness will please their new owners. Our attentiveness will warm the recipients’ hearts,” Huang said. In addition to beautifying recycled devices and helping with administrative work for the program, Huang also disinfects, cleans, repairs, and collects or delivers equipment.

Some volunteers don’t know how to fix things when they join Hong’s repair group, but Hong teaches them, starting from simple tasks. This is how he passes down his experience. “I initially didn’t know that there were so many types of wheelchairs,” he said, “that there were fixed and four-wheeled walkers, and that some electric beds had two motors and some had three.” The experience and knowledge he has accumulated benefits more people the more he shares it with others.

He pointed out that he and his fellow volunteers have accumulated so much experience because they’ve collected, repaired, and delivered device after device, worked with one recipient family after another, and exchanged their knowledge with that of repair volunteers in other places.

Some areas in southern Taiwan, such as Tainan and Kaohsiung, have yet to join the program and establish their own service outlets. Therefore, when people in those regions need Tzu Chi’s assistive device service, Huang and his fellow volunteers, based in Nantou, central Taiwan, step up to provide it.

The devil is in the details

Volunteers in Yilan, northeastern Taiwan, have also joined the assistive device program and set up a service outlet there. Their outlet was launched in August 2020, not such a long time ago, but they’ve done enough work to leave local residents with a good impression of their service. It’s not just Tzu Chi donating members or care recipients that request their service, but the general public too.

Volunteer Liao Qi-cheng (廖啟丞), of the Yilan outlet, explained that they have been able to get up and running in such a short time mainly because volunteers in other areas have selflessly provided support and training.

The reclamation of used assistive devices involves four essential steps: initial disinfection, cleaning, repair, and a second disinfection. Only after a piece of equipment has gone through these steps will it go into inventory before being delivered to an applicant.

These four steps may seem easy at first glance, but there is more to them than meets the eye. This is because the equipment comes in different types, models, and sizes. How do you properly disassemble and clean a piece? How do you disinfect it thoroughly? How do you make sure all parts are safe to use and the device is working properly? There are many details to pay attention to, each one different for each type and model and size of device.

Volunteers in the Yilan service outlet gather every Tuesday afternoon to clean equipment. It rains just about every day in Yilan in winter, so volunteers have set up two canopies in an open space in front of the local Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall under which to work. The canopies sit right next to the outlet’s warehouse for recycled assistive devices.

On a typical Tuesday afternoon, volunteers were bustling about underneath and around the canopies as they carefully navigated the portable toilet chairs, wheelchairs, electric beds, and other items lying on the ground. The equipment had either been salvaged from Tzu Chi recycling stations or was donated by the public or nursing care centers. Most of the items were in good shape; only a few were a little stained or had a few rusty spots.

“We didn’t know the first thing about how to handle these things at first,” said volunteer Yang Mi (楊蜜). Members of the cleaning team are mostly recycling volunteers. Before the Yilan outlet was established, used assistive devices brought to local recycling stations by community residents were simply put aside in corners, unprocessed, waiting for people who needed them to take them away. But now things are different.

Thanks to the training provided by their counterparts in northern Taiwan, volunteers in Yilan have now gotten quite good at cleaning up assistive equipment. “A used toilet chair becomes like new after we’ve thoroughly scrubbed it down,” another volunteer piped up. They have even learned how to grind rust off a hospital bed and apply new layers of paint.



Assistive devices that have been disinfected with alcohol are sun-dried in a courtyard in an old house in Caotun, central Taiwan (above). Volunteers scrub dismantled parts of toilet chairs (right). Every reclaimed piece of equipment under Tzu Chi's assistive device program goes through four essential steps before it is put to use again: initial disinfection, cleaning, repair, and a second disinfection.





On this afternoon, as volunteers worked together to clean the equipment, some carefully sanitized and cleaned the devices lying on the ground with diluted bleach and pressure washers while others checked the gear for missing or defective parts. If a device was working fine after all surface blemishes were removed, it was put in storage. If not, it was routed to the repair team.

Volunteer Liao Qi-cheng coordinates the repair team, which consists of volunteers with expertise in machinery. They work in their spare time to fix things like electric beds or powered wheelchairs. Volunteers without such expertise can do some simple repairs, too. Under the tutelage of volunteers from other areas, for example, Yang Mi and her fellow cleaning volunteers have learned how to work in pairs to change a tire on a wheelchair.

Safety first

Two pickup trucks were parked at the Bade Jing Si Hall in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, while volunteers examined an air mattress and a wheelchair that were about to be shipped out. “We double-check one final time before sending anything out,” one of the volunteers said.

Volunteer Xie Guo-rong, from New Taipei City, northern Taiwan, teaches volunteers in Yilan how to repair and clean assistive devices. Such sharing of experiences allows volunteers to get up to speed sooner.

The Jing Si Hall, inaugurated just a few months before in November 2020, is home to the storage space for the Bade assistive device outlet. An indoor and an outdoor space respectively house equipment that is either “customer ready” or “to be worked on.”

Volunteer Zeng Qing-an (曾慶安), of the Bade outlet, explained that the Bade Jing Si Hall is equipped with a rainwater recycling system. Taking advantage of this system, volunteers first clean assistive devices with rainwater before rinsing them with clean water and sanitizing them. They want to prepare the devices to help others, but they strive to accomplish that objective without wasting any resources. Eco-friendliness, in line with the program’s spirit, is honored every step of the way.

Volunteer Peng Zhen-wei pointed out why every assistive device outlet attaches so much



importance to cleaning and disinfecting: it's tightly linked to the prevention of infections.

Scabies mites, for example, are one of the toughest pests that can be found in reclaimed assistive devices. After leaving the human body, a scabies mite can survive for three to four days at room temperature. Assistive equipment that is in intimate contact with the human body could be a medium through which the pests could spread.

Regardless of the outward appearance of a recycled assistive device, it must therefore be thoroughly and completely cleaned and sanitized to kill the germs or pests that may be present to make the gear safe for the next recipient. For the same hygienic reasons, every time volunteers take back a piece of equipment which is no longer needed, they make sure to spray it with disinfectant alcohol before loading it onto their truck.

The Tzu Chi Foundation has provided high-pressure water sprayers to all service outlets and begun purchasing ultraviolet disinfection equipment to help program volunteers clean and sanitize the assistive devices. Although the assistive devices provided by the program are not brand-new, the equipment looks as good as new after

Volunteers for the Hsinchu assistive device outlet load an electric hospital bed and an air mattress onto a truck for delivery to a recipient.

LI SHU-ZHEN

volunteers' mindful cleaning and revamping work. The care with which they go about their work is heartwarming.

More than a dozen assistive device outlets have been established across Taiwan over the past four years. Volunteer Ye Yi-ben (葉義本), of the Xizhi outlet, said that before the program was launched, he often saw unwanted assistive devices showing up at Tzu Chi recycling stations. He had no way of knowing what he could do with those devices. Now with the program in place, he has finally been able to learn from other volunteers how to repair such items to extend their useful lives and at the same time help improve the environment. "It's a truly wonderful thing," he said.

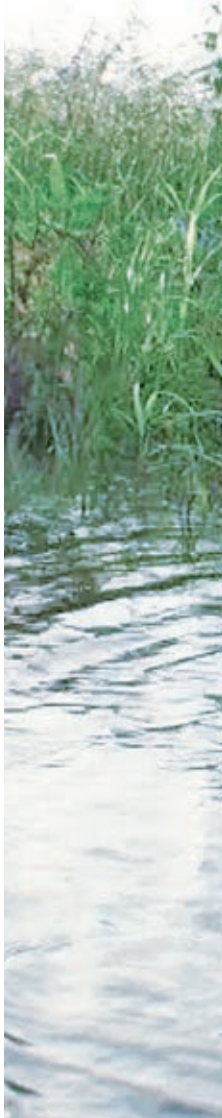
Through their hard work, volunteers give each recycled device new life. Each piece of equipment they send out includes their best wishes for its new owner. ❀

Aid Team Doubles Down After Twin Cyclones in Mozambique

By Karmen Long, Tzu Chi International Medical Association

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

President Filipe Nyusi of Mozambique urged the public through the media to be on high alert for a tropical cyclone that would soon make landfall. Knowing that impoverished people did not have the radios, mobile phones, or televisions that would allow them to receive and act on the President's warning, Tzu Chi volunteers immediately rushed to spread the message. Without missing a beat, they also mobilized in the aftermath of the cyclone to deliver aid. Their adept and orderly handling of the situation was a result of what they had learned from Cyclone Idai two years before.



Powerful Cyclones Idai and Kenneth hit Africa one after another in 2019, causing serious floods and devastating Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and other countries. The magnitude of Cyclone Idai alone was such that United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres labeled it as “one of the worst weather-related catastrophes in the history of Africa.”

Of all the countries affected, Mozambique was hit the worst. In fact, it was ranked as the country most affected in 2019 on the Global Climate Risk Index. Published by the environmental think tank Germanwatch, the index analyzes to what extent countries and regions have been affected by impacts of weather-related events. Mozambique's vulnerability to the damaging consequences of climate change is magnified even more due to its geographic position and widespread poverty.

Sadly, less than two years after Cyclone Idai devastated Mozambique, Cyclones Chalane and Eloise hit the nation again in the space of about three weeks in December 2020 and January 2021. Mozambique's central Sofala Province, where families were still trying to put their lives together after Cyclone Idai, suffered from severe flooding. The COVID-19 pandemic had already dealt the people there a heavy blow—now the double natural disasters just made things more difficult for them.

Disaster preparedness

On December 28, 2020, President Filipe Nyusi of Mozambique warned citizens through the media that Cyclone Chalane would soon make landfall in the central part of the country. He urged the public to be vigilant and prepared. After their painful experiences in the aftermath of



Cyclone Idai in 2019, native Tzu Chi volunteers in central Mozambique knew that impoverished people who did not have radios, mobile phones, or televisions would not receive the government's warnings. They immediately mobilized to spread the news in person so that people would not be caught short by the impending storm.

Volunteers walked to local villages to warn residents about the approaching cyclone, then stayed to help them secure their roofs. Whenever a storm is approaching, people living in shabby huts are most concerned about strong winds blowing off their roofs. When they heard of the coming storm, their first course of action was to look for ways to safeguard their roofs. Younger Tzu Chi volunteers helped by looking for heavy objects for older villagers and putting the objects on their roofs to hold them down. Resources were

Tzu Chi volunteers waded through floodwaters to assess damage wrought by Cyclone Eloise. The cyclone caused severe flooding in low-lying areas, including in Tica, Nhamatanda District.

SOARES JOAQUIM SANTOS

in short supply, but the scarcity spurred creativity. For example, in Metuchira, Nhamatanda District, Sofala Province, volunteers gave each family five empty, recycled rice sacks with which residents could make sandbags for disaster prevention. The yarn unraveled from the sacks could also be used as rope to tie down roofs.

Cyclone Chalane came and went very quickly, but not without devastating impact. Within just 24 hours, the wind and rain that had come with it had killed seven people and affected 130,000 in the central region. Dino Foi, Denise Tsai (蔡岱霖),

and other Tzu Chi volunteers from the national capital of Maputo rushed 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) to the disaster-stricken area to organize and carry out relief work. Within three weeks, they had, with the help of local volunteers, distributed food and building materials to more than 3,000 evacuated families. These families could start rebuilding their lives with the distributed goods as soon as they returned home.

But just a few days later, on January 23, 2021, Cyclone Eloise made landfall in the central region. It brought powerful winds and torrential rains. More than 250 millimeters of rain fell in a single day, flooding the area again. Over 210,000 people were impacted this time.

Volunteers once again jumped into action. Native volunteers in the Nhamatanda District, undaunted by poor sanitary conditions in the disaster areas, waded through sewage-polluted floodwaters to assess damage. These young helpers had themselves been victims of Cyclone Idai two years before.

Soares Joaquim Santos, 23, was one of the volunteers. His parents had died young, so he had been brought up by his grandmother. Poverty had

forced him to drop out of school to work and help support his family. He had made a living by carrying and selling water, earning 200 Mozambican meticaís (US\$3.14) a day by carrying 400 liters (105 gallons) of water. He and his grandmother managed to eke out a living on such a small amount.

Two years ago, their home collapsed during Cyclone Idai. Feeling helpless and at his lowest point, Santos met the Tzu Chi volunteers who had come to his area to help victims of Cyclone Idai. The same storm that had destroyed his home also led him to join Tzu Chi and changed his destiny.

“Before joining Tzu Chi, I was a selfish young man who knew nothing about gratitude,” said Santos. “But Master Cheng Yen’s Great Love has inspired me to step out of my own little world and

Volunteers launched a hot food program in the aftermath of Cyclone Eloise for shelter residents in Tica, Nhamatanda District, and Guara-Guara, Buzi District. The shelter pictured here is located in Guara-Guara.

DARIO NHACALE





Tzu Chi had provided the following aid in Sofala Province, as of March 19, 2021:

Following Cyclone Chalane:

Food and building materials for 3,440 families

Following Cyclone Eloise:

- Hot food: 148,177 servings Tableware: 11,935 sets
- Building materials, tools, seeds, and food: 3,380 packages

The building materials and tools include rope, nails, hammers, machetes, and hoes.

The seeds include those for corn, soybean, pumpkin, cabbage, and sesame.

The food (per household) includes 25 kilograms (55 pounds) of cornmeal, five kilograms (11 pounds) of soybeans, two kilograms (4.4 pounds) of salt, two kilograms of sugar, and two liters (0.5 gallon) of cooking oil.

care for people who are worse off than I. I'm also very grateful to Tzu Chi for helping me return to school. I've even learned photography."

Santos has made home visits to the needy for the past two years, accompanied by volunteers from Maputo. In the process, he has learned to record interviews and use computers. After Cyclone Eloise seriously impacted the central region of Mozambique this year, he hoped to use his photographs to show the world the impact of the disaster from the front lines.

Santos' dedication to putting the plight of his fellow countrymen on display for the world to see came at a personal cost. Standing water as a result of the cyclone had led to an abundance of mosquitoes, and Santos and another volunteer contracted malaria while they were assessing damage and recording the impact of the storm. But he took medicine and rested for only a day before going out to work again. "I told myself I must quickly win the fight against malaria, or else the world wouldn't be able to see what Mozambique was like in the aftermath of the cyclone," he said.

The pictures that Santos had worked hard to capture were powerful. By doing his best in his volunteer work, Santos hoped to show Master Cheng Yen that he and other volunteers in the nation were working very hard to transform lives in Africa.

Hot food for young and old

Tica, in the Nhamatanda District, and Guara-Guara, in the Buzi District, were among the hardest hit areas in the central part of the country. Emergency shelters were set up there, accommodating about 2,000 people in Tica and 10,000 people in Guara-Guara. However, there were not enough tents to go around, forcing many people to sleep in the open air. The government, lacking funds to supply enough food, offered folks in the shelters only one meal a day.

The hot weather and stretched resources made life difficult for the people living in the shelters. Because they had fled the floods in a hurry, they had few, if any, personal belongings with them. They relied on the shelters to feed them, but that meant they were hungry most of the time. A family of seven might receive only a plateful of cornmeal, or folks might line up for food only to find that, when it was their turn to receive their meals, there was no more food for them. When that happened, parents could only turn to their children and say, "We'll have to starve again today." Tzu Chi volunteers were able to capture scenes like those on video. These vivid, real, unadulterated records saddened their viewers.

The food shortage problems at the shelters prompted Tzu Chi Mozambique to launch a hot meal program for residents.



On January 28, five days after Cyclone Eloise, people gathered under a big tree at a shelter at Mutamurega Primary School in Tica. They were there for the hot food Tzu Chi volunteers had prepared for them. Volunteers had been busy for days purchasing food ingredients, and the food did not disappoint. The main dish was made with cornmeal, the side dish from soybeans.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen, who was in Hualien, Taiwan, had been kept informed of their situation in the aftermath of Cyclone Eloise. She had instructed that a set of reusable tableware be given to each participant of the meal service. So, in addition to hot food, each resident also received a cloth mask and a set of reusable tableware: a stainless steel plate, a plastic cup, and a spoon.

A recipient thanked Tzu Chi in an interview for giving them the tableware. "We used to have just

Shelter residents in Tica line up for food, carrying tableware distributed by Tzu Chi.

LUISA SHEILA DOS SANTOS CHAMBALA

one food container for our entire family," the recipient said, "so one of us would stand in line to pick up the meal, and our whole family would eat from that container. When we finished the food and went back to the line for a second helping, we would often find that all the food had been given out." Now, everyone had their own mask to wear, their own tableware to use, and enough food. They lined up in an orderly manner when it was time to eat, no longer worried about food running out before their turn had come.

January was the rainy season. It rained nonstop for days, making it that much harder for standing water in low-lying areas to drain. Obtaining



enough tableware and food for more than 10,000 people in the aftermath of such a massive disaster and during a pandemic was a great challenge for volunteers. Even so, they managed to overcome the difficulties in their way, making Tzu Chi the first NGO to initiate aid distributions after the disaster. The hot food Tzu Chi volunteers provided made life easier for the 12,000 shelter residents in Tica and Guara-Guara in the difficult time after the cyclone.

Supplies for rebuilding life

When a truck loaded with aid goods slowly pulled into the shelter at Mutamurega Primary School on February 16, people of all ages clapped, sang, and danced under the trees to welcome the arrival of the Tzu Chi volunteers.

Tzu Chi had provided hot food at the shelter since January 28. In the meantime, they had also

purchased building materials and tools, crop seeds, and food to distribute to residents to help them rebuild their homes and their lives. When volunteers learned in mid-February that the government would be closing the shelter at the school and sending the residents home, they were all set to distribute the goods for residents to take with them. The relief items were trucked to the shelter early in the morning of February 16.

Four hundred and seventy-nine families benefited from the distribution. A volunteer explained that each household would receive a month's worth of food, including cornmeal, soybeans, salt, sugar, and cooking oil, as well as materials and tools to help rebuild their homes. Since the floods had destroyed many crops, pumpkin, cabbage, sesame, and other crop seeds were also distributed, giving recipients hope that they would be able

to slowly put their lives back together. Having been away from home for weeks now, recipient Rosa was looking forward to going home to farm. "Once we start bringing in money from our new crops, we can buy daily necessities. Thank you for your help!" she said.

Nhamatanda District Administrator Tomé José pointed out that local residents were mostly farmers, and the things they needed most to recover from the disasters were shelter, food, and seeds. "We were clobbered by Cyclones Chalane and Eloise in three short weeks," he said. "Tzu Chi's supplies will help our people a lot, especially the seeds distributed today, which will enable them to support themselves and make their lives more secure."

Just as the distribution ceremony was about to begin, a pregnant woman approached a volunteer and asked whether she could get her goods first because she was about to give birth. The volunteer hurriedly handed her supplies to her. After the distribution had concluded, volunteers went to a clinic nearby to check on the woman. They learned that she had given birth to her third child.

The mother, Filismina, was so grateful to Tzu Chi for the timely distribution of supplies that she named her child "Mariano-TzuChi-José." Locally, a middle name is selected to show respect and is often used to honor an important person.

The volunteers accompanied Filismina back to her home, located in the wilderness on the outskirts of Tica. Filismina, her husband, and their three children lived in a shack built of reeds and mud bricks. Days of rain had led to standing water in their home. Their small house was bare and had no beds, so the family could only sleep sitting up and wait for the floor to dry. Volunteers' hearts went out to the family when they saw their deprived living conditions. They helped clean up the house and later delivered a Tzu Chi folding bed, blankets, and baby supplies to the family so that they could live more comfortably.

But the story didn't end there. Two employees at the Tzu Chi office in Maputo felt so much compassion for the family that they put up the money to help them rent a house. The story of Filismina's family continued to spread. Even the owner of a hotel in Nhamatanda contacted Tzu Chi to say that they were offering Filismina a job to help her provide for her family.

As of mid-March, more than 10,000 people were still living in shelters waiting to return home. Tzu Chi volunteers plan to follow up with more aid to help these people and other survivors get back on their feet. ❁

Cross-Religious Cooperation Allows Love to Spread Farther

By Ye Zi-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The sum benefit is greater than the parts when organizations of different religions work together to bring relief to the underserved. More people benefit from joint efforts than can be served by the organizations working independently.



“Master, the Tzu Chi spirit is very good, but Turkey is a Muslim-majority country, and I’m a Muslim. How do I take the Tzu Chi spirit there?” Faisal Hu (胡光中), then a 33-year-old Turkey-based Taiwanese businessman, posed this question to Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Taiwan in October 1999.

Tzu Chi at the time was deeply engaged in emergency aid operations following a massive earthquake that had devastated central Taiwan on September 21 that year. Though the Master was presiding over the operations in Taichung, central Taiwan, she took time out of her busy schedule to talk to Hu. Instead of directly answering his question, the Master talked about her younger days, back when she was carrying out her spiritual practice in Taitung, eastern Taiwan. She said that every day when she went out, she’d pass a church. “I wasn’t a Christian,” the Master said, “but every time I passed the church, I’d stop and take a deep

In March 2021, a fire ravaged a shanty town in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, affecting more than 7,000 people. Tzu Chi worked with its partners in the nation to provide aid to victims.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI USA

bow [to show my respect] before proceeding to take care of the business that had taken me out.”

She then pointed out that differences between races, languages, religions, and nationalities had created barriers between people. “But if we can let go of those differences and allow only love to stay, we’ll be able to break down the barriers.”

The Master’s answer convinced Hu that his decision to join Tzu Chi was a wise one. He subsequently threw himself into his volunteer work for the foundation and has remained steadfast to his commitment to this day. The Great Love spirit of Tzu Chi, transcending religions and cultures, has inspired many people to join the foundation. It has also led many organizations of different religious faiths to work with the foundation to help the needy.

Debra Boudreaux (曾慈慧), the convener of the Tzu Chi United Nations task force, cited Tzu Chi’s partners in Sierra Leone, Africa, as an example of the foundation’s cross-religious cooperation with other organizations. In 2015, Tzu Chi had no branch offices or volunteers in Sierra Leone, so it began working with Caritas Freetown and the Healey International Relief Foundation to help underprivileged people there. The collaboration has provided significant aid for people in that country over the last five years. Tzu Chi has been able to provide folding beds, blankets, instant rice, multi-grain powder, and other aid to local medical clinics, orphanages, and welfare institutions. Deep ties have since developed between Tzu Chi and its partners in Sierra Leone.

“We’ve kept in close contact with the Catholic priests of Caritas Freetown,” explained Boudreaux. “We’ve been able to help children orphaned by Ebola via the organization, and have distributed aid to flood victims in the aftermath of several floods.”

On March 24 of this year, a fire burned down a shanty town in Freetown, Sierra Leone’s capital, displacing more than 7,000 people. Caritas Freetown launched aid work on the front lines, setting up relief stations and providing hot meals for victims. Six college students who receive financial aid from Tzu Chi helped cook for the survivors. Tzu Chi USA lent support for the relief operations by providing needed supplies.

When COVID-19 led to lockdowns around the world, Tzu Chi’s cooperation with Catholic and other religious organizations enabled the foundation’s aid to reach more people. Thanks to the help of their clergy and lay volunteers, Tzu Chi-supplied face masks, medical gloves, isolation



Debra Boudreaux (second from left) of Tzu Chi poses with Sister Emma Lee (far right) of Caritas Taiwan and other attendees of the General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis in 2019 in the Vatican. Tzu Chi’s cooperation with Caritas had led to Tzu Chi volunteers being invited to the event. HUANG JING EN

gowns, and other PPE have been able to reach many people badly in need of such supplies. Their collaboration has also allowed Tzu Chi to help a lot of people financially hurt by the coronavirus pandemic. The partnering organizations even complied with the foundation’s request to compile recipient rosters. Debra Boudreaux thanked the religious organizations that have worked with Tzu Chi, allowing the love of Tzu Chi to reach areas Tzu Chi volunteers would not have otherwise been able to reach.

A shared mission

In April 1966, before Tzu Chi was established, three Roman Catholic nuns visited Master Cheng Yen, and they had a discussion on the teachings of their respective religions. When the Master explained that Buddhism taught compassion and love for all living beings, the nuns commented that the Catholic Church had schools, nursing homes, orphanages, and hospitals, and that priests and sisters were even helping the poor in remote mountain areas. They asked the Master, “Why haven’t we seen Buddhists engaged in similar good works for society?”

The question from the nuns struck such a deep



chord with the Master that it even helped lead to the establishment of Tzu Chi.

This episode is well-known by almost all Tzu Chi volunteers. Talking about it, Sister Emma Lee (李玲玲) of Caritas Taiwan lauded the three spiritual sisters that had visited the Master in 1966: “They helped the Master see farther, and inadvertently helped bring Tzu Chi into being. That being said, Tzu Chi couldn’t have happened if the Master wasn’t a sage herself.”

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council published the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), a rethinking of the Church’s attitude toward other religions. The document opened up relations between Roman Catholicism and non-Christian religions. Encouraged by the declaration, Taiwan’s Catholic Church began strengthening exchanges, especially in the social services, with non-Christian religious organizations in Taiwan.

This led the Church to invite Tzu Chi in October 1993 to co-host workshops on interreli-

Sisters of the Vincentian Family in India prepare Tzu Chi-provided goods for distribution to the needy in India affected by COVID-19.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HUALIEN HEADQUARTERS

gious dialogue and cooperation. The person that recommended Tzu Chi to the Church was Sister Emma Lee. She explained the reason why they decided to work with Tzu Chi: “We believe in God’s love and grace for wise non-Christian religious leaders. Since they have God’s love and grace, the organizations they have established must embrace the truth, and that makes interreligious dialogue possible.”

In January 1994, a social work workshop was co-hosted by the Catholic Church and Tzu Chi at the Tzu Chi College of Nursing (now the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology) in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. The event centered on discussions and exchanges of experiences on whole person care, hospice, crime prevention,



social participation, and other issues. Ritual ceremonies were split between Buddhist and Christian traditions. “If we held a Christian morning prayer in the morning, then we arranged a Buddhist evening service in the evening. The next day, we switched the order—a Buddhist morning service and then a Christian evening prayer. The whole experience was very beautiful,” Sister Lee fondly recalled.

The interactive exchanges and ties between the two religious groups have persisted to this day. The latest instance of cooperation occurred at the end of 2020, when Tzu Chi donated winter clothing, blankets, socks, and wool hats to Caritas Taiwan for distribution to foreign fishermen working on Taiwanese boats. Lee personally attended the donation event. She uses the term “the Good Samaritans” from the Bible to describe the Tzu Chi volunteers she knows, and she stresses the importance of putting the teachings of one’s own religion into practice. “The love of Christ urges us to help others. This is what we

With the help of Fr. Giuseppe Didone, an Italian priest of the Camillian Order who has served in Taiwan for over half a century, Tzu Chi donated 20,000 medical masks to Fondazione Opera San Camillo in Italy in April 2020 for the use of medical workers.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HUALIEN HEADQUARTERS

must learn.”

Tzu Chi’s cross-religious cooperation with other organizations allows the combined manpower and resources from both sides to benefit more people, exemplifying the truth that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Such cooperation is also part of the reason why Tzu Chi’s footprints of charity have reached 122 countries and regions around the world. Like Master Cheng Yen says, Tzu Chi and its partner organizations share a mission that is backed by selfless Great Love. Let’s hope that such selfless cooperation continues to ripple out and benefit more and more people. ❁

Being There for Her for 17 Years

By Chum Yin Yin

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Liew Cheong Yen

*Families are there for you, through thick and thin, in life and in death.
That's what a woman of Hindu descent living in Malaysia experienced.
For 17 years, Tzu Chi volunteers were Minachi's only family. They took
care of her in life and were there for her to the very end.*

Tzu Chi volunteers still vividly remember the first time they met Minachi A/P Velaithan, a 55-year-old woman of Hindu descent who lived in Kluang, Johor, Malaysia.

In 2004, Minachi and her brother were referred to Tzu Chi for assistance. A group of volunteers subsequently visited the siblings in their home to learn what they could do to help. While the volunteers talked with Minachi's brother, she sat quietly aside listening to their conversation, like a shy little girl. They learned during that visit that Minachi had had little contact with people from outside her home. Her life revolved around her family. Her family affectionately called her "Amu," which was soon picked up by the volunteers as well.

The siblings became Tzu Chi long-term care recipients, but sadly her brother passed away just two months later. Minachi was at a loss for what to do; her brother had been her last and only family. It was the family-like love of Tzu Chi volunteers that helped her through that difficult time. Her appreciation for the volunteers' love was forever obvious after that. Every time they visited her, she'd lovingly kiss their cheeks and touch their faces. She looked forward to seeing them like a mother looks forward to visits from her children.

Minachi was the youngest child at home when she was growing up. Her parents and her brother

doted on her. She never married, and lived with her parents until they passed away. After that, she lived alone with her divorced, childless brother. He had a steady income, so she didn't have to work outside their home. Instead, she ran the household. Without work to take her outside, she gradually became cut off from society.

In 2002, a stroke incapacitated her brother. He could no longer work, but by then it was all but impossible for her, then in her 50s, to step out of her home and find employment. The siblings had no choice but to scrape by on government subsidies and the brother's small pension. They lived frugally, but it was a challenge to make do with what they had. A friend who knew their plight referred them to Tzu Chi. That's how volunteers entered Minachi's life.

Despite her difficult financial situation, Minachi felt that she should give to others and do good to give back to society. The first thing she did when volunteers visited her every month was to take out five ringgits (US\$1.21) from her wallet and give it to the volunteers to donate to Tzu Chi. She did recycling work with volunteers, and helped at Tzu Chi charity bazaars and other events too.

In early October 2020, when volunteers visited Minachi as usual, a neighbor told them Minachi had not seemed her normal self lately. The volunteers immediately rushed her to the hospital for a



Minachi poses with Tzu Chi volunteers while attending a year-end distribution conducted by Tzu Chi Kluang.

checkup. The doctor diagnosed her with a stroke, which had affected her ability to speak and feed herself. She was hospitalized for a week. When volunteers visited her at home after she was discharged, she still knew them to be Tzu Chi volunteers and were willing to allow them into her home, but she had difficulty recalling their names.

Volunteers helped her find a nursing home where she could receive care. On January 4, 2021, just a couple of months after she moved in, volunteer Chum Yin Yin (覃盈瑩) received a phone call from the manager of the nursing home informing her that Minachi had slipped into unconsciousness. Chum immediately asked the manager to call for an ambulance and had her rushed to the hospital. About an hour later, Chum was informed that Minachi had stopped breathing on her way to the hospital and had passed away.

The sudden sad news of her death broke Chum's heart. As she hurried to the hospital, scene after scene of her interactions and conversations with Minachi played out in her mind. Chum recalled that it had been just a little more than a year before, on the eve of Diwali, a major Hindu holiday, that she and other volunteers had accompanied Minachi to her mother's and brother's tombs. And more recently, they had taken traditional Diwali foods with them when they visited Minachi at the nursing home, to celebrate the festival with her.

When volunteers were sorting through the things Minachi had left behind, they discovered that she had kept her Tzu Chi-related photos well protected in a cabinet. The care with which she treated those photos indicated how much she cherished her ties with the foundation.

Minachi, age 72 when she passed away, had no living relatives, so volunteers applied for permission at a police station to handle her funeral arrangements. When their application was granted three weeks later, they collected her body from the hospital and sent it to a crematory. Army Raja, the owner of the funeral home, waived his fees when he saw how the volunteers, despite being completely unrelated to Minachi, even of a different ethnicity, took care of her funeral arrangements as if she were their own family. He was very touched.

In the late afternoon of January 31, 2021, volunteers, following Hindu customs, took Minachi's ashes to a river. There, they added milk and flowers to the ashes before scattering them in the river. As the volunteers watched the river water carry Minachi's ashes away, they put their palms together and wished her the best. ❀

Comfort and Care in Action

Tzu Chi Responds to Taiwan's Train Crash

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

In April 2021, a train derailment in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, brought 49 lives to an abrupt end and broke the hearts of people across the island. The tragedy was Taiwan's deadliest rail accident in decades. Tzu Chi volunteers mobilized to provide help, support, and warmth to hurting people.





On April 3, the day after the rail disaster, the Taiwan Railways Administration used large cranes to put the derailed train back on the tracks to be towed away from the site of the crash.

At 9:28 a.m. on April 2, 2021, an eight-car *Taroko Express* train operated by the Taiwan Railways Administration slammed into a construction truck that had slipped down a slope into the path of the train. The accident occurred in Xiulin Township, Hualien, eastern Taiwan. The train, traveling at more than 120 kilometers per hour (75 mph) at the time of the accident, derailed just as it was entering Qingshui Tunnel. Of the 498 people on board, 49 were killed and 218 were injured. The tragedy was the deadliest train crash and second-deadliest rail accident ever in Taiwan.

The accident occurred at the start of a four-day-long holiday weekend because of the Tomb-Sweeping Festival. This is a traditional time when families come together to visit and clean the tombs of their deceased family members. Many residents in eastern Taiwan were thus waiting for their family members working or living elsewhere to return home that weekend. Sadly, instead of being reunited with their family, some received the tragic news they would never see their loved ones again.

“As soon as news of the accident broke, I posted a message in our group chat asking everyone to get ready and stand by for further notification,” said Tzu Chi volunteer Fan Lei (范壘), who lives in Hualien. At around 11 a.m., volunteers broke into two teams—one went to the disaster scene to learn more about the situation and to comfort those who had been evacuated from the train wreckage; the other went to the local Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall and began transporting tents, folding beds, partitions, and other items to the crash site and to Chongde and Xincheng Train Stations. Injured and deceased people were being taken to the two train stations pending transfer to other places.

At the same time, nuns at the Jing Si Abode, the Buddhist convent founded by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Hualien, began preparing boxed lunches for rescue personnel working on the front lines. “We set up a command center for the train accident a little after 11,” said Lu Hsueh-cheng (呂學正), who leads the Disaster Reduction and Prevention Section at Tzu Chi’s Department of Charity Mission Development. “Around noon, we sent out more than 500 packed lunches.”

It wasn’t just the nuns at the Jing Si Abode and Tzu Chi volunteers and staffers who quickly swung into action in response to the disaster that morning. A medical team led by Dr. Lin Chin-lon (林俊龍), CEO of the Tzu Chi medical mission, rushed to the disaster scene via ambulance to pro-

vide first aid services. Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, anticipating a huge influx of patients from the accident, issued Red Alert No. 9 at 11:26 a.m., prompting medical and administrative staffers to stand at the ready to receive injured passengers.

Chen Mei-hui (陳美慧), a head nurse from Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, happened to be a passenger on the unfortunate train. She was in the last car, which was in much better condition after the crash than the cars at the front end. Still, for a time she and the other passengers in the car were trapped inside. “All the people in our car were safe and sound,” Chen explained, “but we couldn’t open the doors to get out. The electricity was out, so we were stuck in the car.”

After Nurse Chen and her fellow passengers had been evacuated from the train by rescue workers, she immediately joined the medical team led by Dr. Lin to help the injured and perform triage. “Passengers with minor injuries were sent directly to a hospital,” Dr. Lin said, “while those more seriously injured were given first aid on-site to stabilize their heart rate and blood pressure.”

Dr. Lin added that though Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital had mobilized to receive a lot of patients with severe injuries, the number of patients that arrived at the hospital was smaller than expected. This was a sad result of many people being killed on the spot.

Ambulances sped between the disaster scene and the city center of Hualien, transporting both the injured and the deceased. The Taiwan Railways Administration also sent additional trains to help with the transportation due to the large number of casualties. Both injured and deceased passengers were delivered to Chongde and Xincheng Train Stations, the transfer points. From there, the injured were rushed to the hospital, while the deceased were examined by authorities before being transported to the Hualien Funeral Home for families to identify and claim.

At about three in the afternoon, the rescue team declared that there were no more survivors on the train, and that people still within the wreckage were deceased. Volunteer Fan Lei’s heart sank when he heard the announcement. He had been giving assistance to a couple on-site. That couple had fortunately been rescued, but their child was still stuck inside. They had insisted on waiting at the scene until their child was also rescued before they would leave. “I didn’t have the heart to dash their hope,” Fan said. “How could I tell them that all those still inside the train were dead?”



The most difficult mission

Most of the people who died in the accident had been killed on the spot. With so many lives gone so suddenly, how to comfort and soothe the bereaved became another major and difficult task. In fact, it was the most difficult mission of all.

Tzu Chi volunteers arrived at the funeral home at five that afternoon to provide help and support to families. In response to a request from the Hualien County government, volunteers kept the grieving families company and provided them with transportation. They worked in two-hour shifts to serve the families day and night. Volunteer Lu Feng-ying (呂鳳瑛) worked a shift from 11 p.m. April 2 to 1:00 a.m. the next morning. "We're using two vehicles to take the grieving families back to their hotels," she explained. "Tomorrow we're taking them to buy clothes for their deceased loved ones."

Although it was very late, Lu checked the

A nun from the Jing Si Abode and Tzu Chi volunteers comfort a bereaved family member at the Hualien Funeral Home.

supplies at the service station set up by Tzu Chi at the funeral home. There were bread and bottled water, bananas for a quick replenishment of energy, and face masks for families to wear as they rushed between the accident site and the morgue.

Around midnight, two volunteers who had taken some family members to their hotel returned to the funeral home. They were Li Si-bei (李思蓓), an administrative worker at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, and her husband, Feng Qing-rong (馮清榮), who also works at the hospital. From the time the hospital had issued Red Alert No. 9, Li had thrown herself into caring for survivors and families. It was very late at night when she returned to the funeral home, and even

though she would have to go to the hospital the next day to provide more care and help to the injured, she wasn't ready to call it a day. She wanted to spend more time with the bereaved still at the funeral home and help them in whatever way she could.

No matter the depth of their pain and loss, the bereaved had no choice but to accept the cruel fact that their loved ones were no longer with them. On April 3, the day after the accident, the grieving families returned to the disaster scene in six tour buses for a traditional ritual to call the spirits of their loved ones home. Each family was accompanied by two Tzu Chi volunteers.

With their eyes red from crying, the families called out the names of their loved ones and said with trembling voices, "Let's go home." The Tzu Chi volunteers accompanying the families had a difficult time holding back their tears, but they stayed close to them, offering their staunchest support.

"Someone has fainted!" a person on-site cried out. One woman, overwhelmed by grief, had collapsed. Volunteers Liu Li-qing (劉麗卿), Zhang Qi-fu (張其富), and David Liu (劉濟雨) escorted her away from the scene. Carrying her with a plastic chair, the three stumbled along a slope covered in dust, all the while gripping the chair tightly and using their upper bodies to protect the woman from falling off the chair.

Empathizing with their pain

"I was in the sixth car, in seat No. 30," said Lin Qiu Xiu-rong (林邱秀絨), a passenger on the train. "I took a nap as soon as I boarded the train, and I used the restroom when I woke up. When I returned to my seat, I started reading. Before long, I felt the train lurch to a sudden stop, followed by people screaming and crying out." Lin, who lived in New Taipei City, northern Taiwan, was one of the seven Tzu Chi volunteers on board the train. Already 83 and a great-grandmother, she displayed a remarkable calm, without a trace of anxiety, as she recalled the accident.

Lin had taken the train to go to Hualien to volunteer at the Jing Si Abode. Who was to know that life's impermanence would strike her during the trip? After the crash, the carriage she was in was a mess. The electricity had been cut, causing the lights and air conditioning to stop functioning. Dozens of passengers, some crying, were stuck in the dark, stuffy space. Lin soon began to experience difficulty breathing. Thankfully, a man, braving injury to himself, used all his force to break

two windows to allow air in. The difficult situation in the car was thus relieved a little.

The rescue team arrived not long after. They used demolishing equipment to create an escape route, then guided the passengers out of the train via a partially opened door. Because that portion of the train was stuck in Qingshui Tunnel, there were no platforms outside for the passengers to land on when they stepped out of the train. The gap between the bottom of the door and the ground was quite big. To make it easier for passengers to disembark from the train, rescue workers found a large piece of luggage and put it beneath the door to serve as a temporary step. Lin, supported by rescue personnel, gingerly stepped onto the luggage, and from there to the ground. Once she was out of the carriage, she followed other passengers to the tunnel exit.

"I didn't feel I was injured in any way at first," said Lin. "It wasn't until I was sent to the hospital that I began to feel a bad pain at the bottom right of my ribcage." She was later transferred to Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital for a CT scan, which revealed a broken rib. She received a combination of Western medicine and traditional Chinese medicine treatment afterwards, and then had to recuperate for a week.

Lin donated all the consolation money she had received from Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), the New Taipei City government, the Taiwan Railways Administration, Lions Clubs, Tzu Chi, and other organizations to Tzu Chi. She also pledged to do more good after the close brush with death. "As long as my body allows me, I'll work harder as a volunteer," Lin said. "I'm over 80, and so physically onerous tasks are beyond me. But I can still do work such as serving as a cooking volunteer. I have no problems washing and cutting vegetables and taking care of other kitchen duties."

Lin was one of the luckier ones among the passengers on that ill-fated train. Some never made it out alive. Families experienced excruciating pain when they realized they would never again see their loved ones. Tzu Chi volunteers accompanying grieving family members deeply empathized with them.

"My heart twisted into a knot when I saw the

Early in the morning of April 3, Tzu Chi volunteers deliver breakfasts prepared by nuns at the Jing Si Abode to the disaster site for rescue workers, other helpers, and reporters to eat.





six tour buses carrying the bereaved arriving at the accident site for the soul-summoning ritual,” said volunteer Zhong Su-zhen (鐘素真). “When they called out their family’s names in tears, my heart felt torn to pieces.”

Zhong had lost both of her parents just last year, and the experience this time once again engulfed her in sadness. But she tried her best to emerge from the sorrow. She advised everyone after this experience: Don’t wait until it’s too late to say, “I love you.” Don’t wait until it’s too late to regret.

“I felt very comforted when I saw them finally able to eat a little,” said another volunteer, Lin

Hui-mei (林慧美), who had had more than 40 years of experience in conducting home visits to the needy. She provided emotional support to the bereaved, and urged family members who had lost their appetite due to sadness to at least eat some food to keep up their strength. She was surprised at how much witnessing the families’ grief distressed her afterwards.

“I returned home from the soul-summoning ritual so upset I couldn’t fall asleep that night,” Lin said. “I kept thinking to myself, ‘Life is so full of suffering.’” She was so distressed she almost lost the courage to go to the funeral home again the next day to volunteer. But as she watched a



televised Dharma talk given by Master Cheng Yen the following day, she thought of how hard the Master had been working to help needy and hurting people. This helped her muster the courage to show up at the funeral home. Despite feeling tired from inadequate sleep, she helped out at the funeral home, serving grieving families and keeping them company. When it was time to eat, even though she had no appetite, she forced herself to finish the boxed meal prepared by nuns at the Jing Si Abode so that she could have enough energy to serve others. "The food was so delicious," Lin said. "Eating it, I was instantly rejuvenated. I was so grateful to the nuns, so moved."

Jing Si Abode nuns and Tzu Chi volunteers wait near the crash site to accompany and offer support to families coming back to the disaster scene for a soul-summoning ritual.

This just goes to show that when life is difficult, it's the love and care from others that sustain us and keep us going.

Accompanying them out of the tunnel

When devastating disasters happen and result in heavy casualties, the impact of death can be so huge that even frontline rescue workers



Volunteers set up a service station at the funeral home, providing drinking water and refreshments and taking care of other needs of the bereaved families and workers on-site.

bers, Tzu Chi volunteers, and other helpers on-site relieve their stress.

"The psychological trauma people sustain during or as a result of a disaster could remain with them for a long time," said Dr. Li Zhuo (李卓), a Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital psychiatrist who served at the funeral home. "Aside from the people directly impacted in the disaster, their families, first responders, and other helpers can be similarly traumatized." He therefore reminded all Tzu Chi volunteers to take good care of themselves physically and emotionally, so that they could help more people.

Psychological counseling aside, this rail disaster has prompted Tzu Chi to speed up its efforts to provide first aid training to its volunteers. The Tzu Chi volunteers on board the train who were not hurt in the crash said that they regretted not having learned how to apply CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), bind wounds, or provide other first aid skills. Had they had those skills before the accident, they might have been able to better help injured people at the disaster scene.

Lu Hsueh-cheng, of Tzu Chi's Disaster Reduction and Prevention Section, said that the foundation provides disaster prevention training to staffers and volunteers. "Essential first aid skills are taught in the training courses. If a volunteer has received such training, he or she will know a lot better what to do in an emergency situation or have more confidence about giving aid in such a situation."

The train crash shocked and saddened everyone in Taiwan. In the aftermath of this massive tragedy, nuns at the Jing Si Abode, as well as doctors and nurses, teachers and students, and staffers and volunteers from the four missions of Tzu Chi, all mobilized to help. Though Tzu Chi's emergency aid for the disaster has now come to an end, volunteers have continued to care for families who lost their loved ones. Fully aware of what lay ahead of them, Yen Po-wen (顏博文), CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission, promised those impacted by the accident on behalf of Master Cheng Yen and all Tzu Chi volunteers: "Tzu Chi will be there for you through your long journey toward the healing of your physical and mental wounds." ❀

and support volunteers are traumatized in the process. Tzu Chi volunteers are no exception. Some volunteers, for example, broke down and burst into tears when they went before Master Cheng Yen and shared their experiences of helping survivors and families of those killed in the train accident.

Realizing how important psychological counseling and other similar forms of help are in the aftermath of a tragedy, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital sent out doctors from the departments of psychiatry and traditional Chinese medicine to the Hualien Funeral Home after the accident to provide services. The healthcare professionals offered counseling, acupuncture, cupping therapy, and other treatments to help bereaved family mem-



Volunteers assisted the bereaved in whatever way they could. They hoped that with their presence, the grieving families could at least have shoulders to lean on.

A Synopsis of Tzu Chi's Aid in Response to the Hualien Train Accident

Compiled by Yan Wan-ting

▶ About the Accident

- At 9:28 a.m. on April 2, 2021, a southbound *Taroko Express* train numbered 408 departing from Shulin, northern Taiwan, and bound for Taitung, eastern Taiwan, derailed as it was entering Qingshui Tunnel, between Heren and Chongde, Hualien, eastern Taiwan. The derailment was caused when the train hit a construction vehicle that had slid down a slope onto the tracks. After derailment, the train rammed into the walls of Qingshui Tunnel. It came to rest with the front cars inside the tunnel and the rear cars outside.
- At the time of the accident, the train was carrying 498 people, including crew and passengers. Forty-nine people were killed and 218 others injured as a result of the crash. The injured people were sent to hospitals in Hualien and Luodong, northeastern Taiwan.

▶ Aid Provided by Tzu Chi, April 2-13, 2021

Hot boxed meals: 3,112
Bread and steamed buns: 500 servings
Cold and hot drinks: 58 tea urns
Canned multigrain porridge: 90 boxes
Scarves: 749
Blankets: 100
Folding beds: 48
Partitions: 37
Consolation cash: 90 people
Shifts put in by volunteers: 3,458
Service locations: Renshui, Qingshui, Chongde, Xincheng, Hualien Funeral Home, Jing Si Abode, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, etc.

Renshui Tunnel
Qingshui Tunnel

Chongde
Train Station

Xincheng
Train Station

Jing Si
Abode

Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital

Hualien Funeral Home

After I Entered the Train

Narrated by Wu Kun-chi

Compiled by Liao Zhe-min

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

An orthopedist from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, eastern Taiwan, recounts his experience helping with the rescue work at the scene of the train wreck.

I'm a medical doctor, but also the head of the Hualien County fire department's volunteer emergency rescue team. Our duty is to provide first aid at disaster scenes or in other emergency situations. On the morning of April 2, I was seeing outpatients in the orthopedics department of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. Some time after nine o'clock, I received a phone call informing me that a *Taroko Express* train had derailed. I received another phone call after ten with the news that a large number of passengers were stuck in the distorted train wreckage and that the rescue workers were having difficulty freeing them. I immediately realized the magnitude and severity of the disaster and knew I had to join the rescue operation. I walked to where my patients were waiting for me, explained the emergency situation, and apologized to them for having to miss their appointments. "I really need to rush to the crash site," I told them. Thankfully, my patients all graciously understood, so I left right away to render what help I could.

Pressing forward

It was 11 o'clock when I arrived at the scene of the accident and jumped into the rescue efforts. I didn't even have the time to change out of my doctor's white coat. As soon as I arrived, I donned my rescue uniform and gear on top of my white coat, then followed fire department personnel into the train. Guided by the firefighters, I first climbed onto the roof of the train before getting down to the

ground and clambering through Car No. 6 into Car No. 7, one of the carriages with the worst casualties. Once inside, we began identifying passengers who were still alive, then broke into teams to free or move the injured from the twisted carriage. We placed the injured beside the tracks as they waited to be sent to a hospital.

Most people have taken a train before and know what the inside looks like. They may even have walked through many train carriages before. I'm one of those people. But this train was like no other. Its front portion, so badly battered by the impact of the crash, was twisted and torn almost beyond recognition. Even negotiating our way through it was a challenge. The train tracks were in pieces too. With the train and tracks in such terrible shape, it was easy to imagine the condition of the passengers killed or badly injured. The scene was so grim and depressing it was hard not to be affected or shaken up. I encouraged my fellow rescue workers to not lose heart in the face of such

Dr. Wu Kun-chi (吳坤信, in white coat) participates in the rescue work in the aftermath of the train accident.

CAI ZHE-WEN



death and destruction, telling them that the dead would thank them for bravely helping them out.

A deceased female passenger had been thrown out of the carriage she had been in. Her face was in bad shape. I covered her with my rescue uniform. What followed was a series of rescue efforts.

A father had two young daughters with him. The older daughter had sustained a laceration to her head, but the younger one, whom the father was holding in his arms, was in more critical condition. I felt the younger one's carotid artery and detected a weak pulse. We moved her to the front so that she could be the first to be transferred to a hospital. Her older sister and father were the next in line.

Next we tended to a young woman with an injured back. After that, we found a man, Mr. Chen, stuck in the door between Cars 7 and 6. I climbed down to pull him out. As he was waiting to be sent away for medical attention, he kept saying that he was very cold. He had lost a lot of blood due to his broken legs, which was why he was feeling so cold. I took off my white coat and put it on him, saying, "Hang in there. Help will soon be here."

A sad scene

Everyone worked heroically to free those that had been injured. The survivors were sent one after another to the hospital. One person I helped, a young toddler, made an especially deep impression on me. The accident had obviously given the young one a bad scare. In his anxious, frightened state, he was holding on tightly to his injured mother. I asked the mother to let me hold her child so that we could move her and get her to the hospital. The child struggled when I reached out to him, unwilling to let me hold him. Realizing that the doctor's coat I was wearing must be scaring him, I soothed the toddler by saying that his mom was injured and needed care and that I wasn't giving him any shots that day. I told him not to worry. The child settled down soon after and began to lean docilely against me. He was a brave little one. I assured the mother her child would follow her to the hospital and asked her not to worry. Once the child had settled down, it got quieter on-site, and everyone around seemed better able to focus on their task.

The front cars of the train had crashed into a tunnel. It was dark and stuffy where we were working. Many rescue workers at the scene were equipped with oxygen tanks, but some weren't. I wasn't either. The smell of blood was so strong I



eventually had to rush outside for some fresh air. I gulped in the air and had a drink of water before going back to the tunnel to finish my task.

The first responders and rescue workers bent over backwards to carry out their difficult rescue mission. They repeatedly made their way into and out of the badly distorted wreckage to evacuate the deceased and injured. They put aside their feelings and focused on the task at hand, helping to get the deceased and injured away from that sad, sad place.

Emerging from the bad dream

At first, the more seriously injured passengers—along with the first three bodies—were delivered to Chongde Train Station, which had been designated as the transfer point in the aftermath of the accident. But soon it was determined that the facilities at the small station were inadequate to make it a good transfer point, so the transfer point was changed to the bigger Xincheng Train Station.



First responders overcame seemingly insurmountable difficulties to rescue survivors from the battered train. Near the end of the rescue mission, Dr. Wu holds a child in his arms for an injured mother pending her delivery to the hospital.

LEFT PHOTO BY WU KUN-CHI; RIGHT PHOTO BY CAI ZHE-WEN

The second batch of passengers evacuated from the crash site were mostly deceased. I arrived at Xincheng Train Station to assist authorities in examining the deceased before they were sent away to the funeral home. As soon as I arrived, I saw that Tzu Chi volunteers had used blue partitions to create a private passageway and a temporary morgue for the deceased. The efforts everyone was making to preserve the dignity of the deceased were what moved me the most during the whole incident.

A few days have passed since the train crash. I've been doing my best to forget what I witnessed in the tunnel so that I can return as soon as possi-

ble to a normal life. I tell myself that despite the tragedy, there are still many good things and good people out there in the world. I sincerely hope that everyone who endured this excruciating experience bravely carries on despite the pain in their hearts. It will be easier for them that way, instead of dwelling in the sorrow. After all, life has to go on. The man I rescued from being stuck in the doorway between cars, Mr. Chen, is a good example. His condition stabilized after treatment at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. I believe he will be one of the first ones to emerge from this nightmare, because he has already started showing care for others. For example, he has shown his care for his wife by voicing his concern that she might be too tired from looking after him. He has also tried to help others.

The death and destruction I faced at the accident site were difficult to take. But I'm not a hero—I'm a doctor. In times of need, it's our inescapable duty to help others. Any doctor in Taiwan would have done the same thing in my shoes. ♣





Recycling Family Album

They are not biologically a family, but may be more so than one related by blood. Coming from many separate households, they develop family-like bonds with one another when they gather at a Tzu Chi recycling station in the name of environmental protection. Huang Xiao-zhe (黄筱哲), a photojournalist for the Chinese Tzu Chi Monthly, features these "families" at different recycling stations in his new column "Recycling Family Album." Through his photos and words, he invites you to meet these inspiring families taking action to demonstrate their love for the Earth.

Starting Out from My Hometown

The An'nan Recycling Station

Text and photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

I was honored last year to have a book published. *Cherish* is a collection of my articles and photos previously printed in the *Tzu Chi Monthly* magazine under a column named "The Guardians of the Earth," which featured individual Tzu Chi recycling volunteers. It occurred to me after that book was published that just as every recycling volunteer has their own moving life story, every recycling station, like a big family, has their own stories worth recording too. That's how this new column, "Recycling Family Album," came into being.

On the eve of the Chinese New Year in 2021, I visited the An'nan Recycling Station in Tainan, southern Taiwan. I'm quite familiar with the An'nan station, but more on that later. As soon as I entered, my attention was drawn to two little children, a brother and sister. The boy was older but both were still in kindergarten. It was winter break for them, so they had come to the station with their grandma, Chen Pei-ying (陳佩瑩), a volunteer at the station. Sometimes the two youngsters helped sort recyclables; sometimes they were left to play on their own. Seeing the fun time they were having brought to mind the times my younger brother and I would come to the station with our mother to volunteer. My brother and I were just like this young pair of siblings at the time, more than 20 years ago. Though we only half understood the meaning of environmental protection, we had a blast taking things apart at the station. Now I'm in my late 30s and a stranger to the children in front of me, but we are connected through this station. Though separated by decades in time, we will share the same childhood memory of this special place.







Volunteer Chen Xiao Xiu-jiao sorting plastic bags in 2013

Her Spirit Lives On

I hadn't visited the recycling station in several years, and I found that the few Madagascar almond trees around the plastic bag sorting area had grown quite tall, tall enough to provide pleasant shade for the volunteers working in that area.

The An'nan station takes in a considerable amount of plastic bags, so volunteers there have long been proficient in sorting them. They can identify the types of plastic bags by touch and therefore demonstrate amazing alacrity as they work. They can organize mountains of bags in a single morning.

The sight of everyone working hard and with enthusiasm reminded me of volunteer Chen Xiao Xiu-jiao (陳蕭繡蕉), who is no longer with us. On September 30, 2013, I captured a shot of her working in the plastic bag sorting area. There weren't very many volunteers adept at sorting bags back then, so her workload was heavy. Undaunted, she willingly threw herself into her work. She was already past 80 at the time, but she'd pack a lunch every morning and ride a tricycle from her home to the recycling station to work. Her dedication to her work never wavered.

The plastic bag sorting area in which she used to work is still there. Though she has passed on, many more volunteers have emerged in her place. They are carrying on her spirit of service. Her spirit lives on.

Meeting a Real-Life Bodhisattva

It was much quieter in the area for processing PET bottles. Every volunteer there sat in their own corner, absorbed in removing caps and rings from bottles, much like students quietly doing their assignments in class. Suddenly someone called out to me, "Xiao-zhe, long time no see! Are you back here to photograph us?" I looked in the direction of the voice and saw that it was Ms. Huang Hui-que (黃惠雀) talking to me. Sporting a head of white hair, she was sitting in the farthest corner of the area. I marveled at her keen eyes, especially given her advanced age. She hadn't seen me in years and yet was able to recognize me in an instant.

In a short while everyone was packing up to go home. Huang warmly said to me as she gestured towards some water jugs she had tied to the rear end of her motor scooter: "I'm taking these jugs home to water my vegetables. I've grown a lot of big, beautiful jicamas. When I've harvested them, I'll send them to the Jing Si Abode [the Buddhist convent founded by Dharma Master Cheng Yen] for everyone to eat." Hearing her offer her vegetables so graciously warmed my heart. Besides being a devoted recycling volunteer, she grows vegetables not for herself but to generously share with others. It is no wonder Master Cheng Yen holds volunteers like her dear in her heart.





A Team That Works Great Together

Since the Chinese New Year was near and many households were doing their traditional year-end cleaning, a lot of recyclables were arriving at the station. Recyclable garbage that hasn't yet been separated by generic type is placed in the general sorting area in the back of the station. If volunteers stopped working for even a day, the impressive mountain of garbage there would quickly spill outwards and take up the space in which the volunteers worked. Therefore, volunteers needed to work even harder during this time to process the incoming recyclables.

This is the place where collected materials are first processed before being diverted to other areas. There is so much to do here that two shifts of volunteers typically work just in the morning alone—the earliest volunteers arrive shortly past five; the second shift arrives at around eight. The number of people showing up every day differs, depending on whether they need to work, baby-sit, farm in the fields, or take part in other volunteer activities on that particular day.

Looking at the one-story-high mountain of mixed recyclables, I began to worry that the volunteers wouldn't be able to finish processing it all before another truckload of garbage arrived. But much to my surprise, the volunteers said to me with confidence, "Don't underestimate us, we are quick. We can process a third of that mountain of recycling in a single morning."

Just then, I saw a volunteer dump recyclables out of a large bag onto a worktable. The others standing around quickly reached out and began to pick out piece after piece of garbage and sort each one into its appropriate container. This group of volunteers had worked together for some time and had built up great chemistry. Agile and quick, they went about their work with admirable speed. Others might not have been able to achieve the same level of efficiency as they did.





Recycling
Family
Album



Volunteers in the PET bottle sorting area. Back row from left: Zhuo Mei-zhu (卓美珠), Ou Fang-zhi (歐芳枝), Cai Ming-da (蔡明達), Yan Xiu-yu (顏秀玉), and Wang Hui-mei (王惠美). Front row from left: Shi Chen Li-zhen (史陳麗珍), Wu Jin-chou (吳錦綱), and Guo Bi-lian (郭碧蓮)



Volunteers in the plastic bag sorting area. Back row from left: Liu Mei-zhen (劉美珍), Zhong Jin-zhi (鍾金枝), Shi Yue-qing (史月卿), Chen Xiu-qing (陳秀卿), Shi Yu-yin (施玉鈺), Chen Ying-zi (陳英紫), Xie Mei-yun (謝美雲), and Chen Wang-shi (陳岡市). Front row from left: Lin A-bi (林阿筆), Xie Miao-rong (謝妙榮), and Wu Xiu-li (吳秀麗)

Unmasked

For days I'd made frequent visits to the An'nan station. Every time I visited, I saw how volunteers would be done sorting massive heaps of recyclables one day only to have to start all over again the next day—the garbage never stopped flooding in. Still, they kept at it indefatigably. On and on they worked, motivated by a shared sense of mission. It wasn't until evening when everyone would straighten their backs, remove their face masks, and call it a day. That was the only time I was able to see their faces.

On February 22, 2021, I took group pictures of volunteers in each area. When I was sorting through the photos later, I saw once again the confident look of every volunteer. I couldn't help but want to praise them: "You all look great and beautiful!" Though I wasn't able to photograph all the volunteers, and some photos I took didn't make it into the magazine due to space constraints, I was happy about the shots I had taken. I had captured many of the dedicated volunteers at the station. Thanks to them, my "Recycling Family Album" had its first collection of photos. ♣



Volunteers in the general sorting area. From left: Weng Jin-luan (翁金鑾), Zhou Shu-ru (周淑茹), Ma Qiu-ye (馬秋葉), Huang Xiu-jian (黃秀兼), Xie Li-xiu (謝麗秀), and Zhou Qiu Xue (周邱雪)

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



Guatemala

Like those of many others around the globe, the livelihoods of many people in Guatemala were impacted when COVID-19 took the world by storm. Aníbal Beltrán Carrillo Motta, the mayor of San Antonio Palopó, Sololá, southwestern Guatemala, appealed to Tzu Chi Guatemala to help the needy in his town get through the difficult time. Due to the raging pandemic, however, it wasn't until March of this year that volunteers were able to launch a distribution in the town.

On March 28, volunteers traveled for three hours from the national capital of Guatemala City before arriving at the event venue in San Antonio Palopó. Large crowds had already gathered there by the time the volunteers arrived. The woman aid recipients were all wearing traditional clothing to show their gratitude and respect for Tzu Chi. The items to be distributed had already been transported from the capital to the town a few days before and were laid out neatly at the venue. Thanks to the careful plan-

On March 28, 2021, Tzu Chi volunteers in Guatemala conducted a distribution for underserved people in San Antonio Palopó, Sololá. This was to help the recipients weather the financial challenge posed by COVID-19.

YE WU LI-ZHU

ning of the mayor, the event soon began unfolding in an orderly manner.

During a small ceremony before the distribution, the mayor thanked the volunteers for coming all the way from the capital to San Antonio Palopó to help his people. He said that his gratitude for them was immeasurable, especially given that this was a time when most activities had been suspended due to the pandemic.

The mayor, his wife, Janíra, and 75 employees from the town government participated in the event from the beginning to the end, helping in whatever way they could. Volunteers respectfully handed over aid items to the recipients and helped them carry their goods, making sure that the Tzu Chi spirit of "gratitude, respect, and

love” was evident in the way they conducted themselves. All told, 566 families received goods including rice, multi-grain powder, macaroni, cooking oil, masks, and blankets.

Volunteers then went on to distribute school supplies to children from a local public elementary school. Nearly 300 students received biscuits and school supplies, including pencil cases, notebooks, pens, glue, scissors, and pencil sharpeners. Volunteers felt richly rewarded to have helped ease the financial burden of the recipient families during this difficult time.

Argentina

Wildfires occurred in the provinces of Río Negro and Chubut, southern Argentina, in March 2021, devastating forests and burning down hundreds of houses. Tzu Chi volunteers from Buenos Aires, the national capital, and Tucumán, northwestern Argentina, arrived in El Bolsón, Río Negro, in late March to assess damage in affected regions. Their mission was to determine what aid Tzu Chi could provide. The volunteers discovered during their fact-finding trips that fire victims needed construction materials, food, and blankets. With the help of local people and organizations, they immediately set about compiling recipient rosters and preparing aid items.

A distribution was held on April 6 and 7 for

Wildfires occurred in Río Negro and Chubut, southern Argentina, in March 2021, destroying hundreds of houses. Tzu Chi volunteers held a distribution in El Bolsón, Río Negro, in early April to help survivors get back on their feet.

ZHONG GUH-MAN



nearly 140 affected families. The aid included blankets, medical masks, and vouchers for construction materials and daily necessities. The voucher for construction materials was worth 50,000 Argentine pesos (US\$535); the voucher for daily necessities was 30,000 pesos for families with fewer than five people and 60,000 pesos for larger households.

When one recipient received his vouchers, he said, visibly emotional: “I can’t believe this! Is this real?” Volunteers told him about Tzu Chi and its founder, Dharma Master Cheng Yen. After listening, the recipient burst into tears, saying, “Please convey our deepest gratitude to the Master.” Another recipient, Paula, said to volunteers, “God gave me the best gift at the lowest point in my life—meeting all of you.”

Volunteers had traveled a long way to the disaster areas to help victims, but when they saw how grateful the recipients were, they forgot all the hard work they had put in to make this mission possible.

The United States

The United States started its COVID-19 vaccination program in December 2020. The Tzu Chi Medical Foundation (TCMF) in the U.S. immediately applied for the vaccines issued by the government to take part in the vaccination program and help speed up the efforts to protect people in the U.S. from the coronavirus. TCMF had just received its certification as a Federally Qualified Health Center Look-Alike at the end of October 2020.

The Tzu Chi Medical Center in Alhambra started vaccinating those who were eligible in January this year. The Tzu Chi branches in Fresno, Las Vegas, Houston, and New York followed soon afterwards. By the end of March, Tzu Chi had administered more than 6,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses in the U.S.

Tzu Chi’s vaccination services are greatly welcomed, especially among Chinese-speaking residents. In the U.S. people are encouraged to sign up online for a vaccination appointment. This is a hurdle for those who can’t speak English or who don’t know how to use the Internet. TCMF opened a vaccination appointment hotline for people to register after it joined the inoculation campaign. The phones are staffed by a group of bilingual Tzu Chi volunteers. The hotline and volunteers make it a lot easier for those who can’t speak English to receive a vaccination shot. “It’s as simple as making a phone call and our volunteers on our end



Tzu Chi USA is taking part in the nation's COVID-19 vaccination program to help speed up the efforts to protect people from the coronavirus.

LUO SHU-LI

will do everything else for them," explained Dr. Stephen Deng (鄧博仁), CEO of TCMF.

Xu Jing-weng (許境翁) served as an assistant doctor at a Tzu Chi vaccination event held at the Tzu Chi clinic in South El Monte, California, in March. He had driven over 400 miles from Sacramento to take part in the event. "I don't feel tired at all," he said. "In fact, I feel very blessed to be able to give of myself."

Tzu Chi volunteers are happy to help with the vaccination campaign. As Dr. Deng said, "Every dose given is more relief because that means one extra person is protected."

Jordan

A snowstorm hit Jordan on February 17, 2021. Roads were blocked, schools were cancelled, and COVID-19 vaccinations were suspended. That very night, the Tzu Chi office in Amman, the nation's capital, received a request for help from some Syrian refugees. The Syrians, 20 families in all, lived in tents in Mafraq, 80 kilometers (50

miles) from Amman. The storm had damaged about half of their tents, leaving the families unable to shelter from the elements. Tzu Chi volunteers quickly set about making preparations to help the families. They purchased canvas to repair the tents, and got drinking water, dry food, cheese, blankets, and firewood ready to deliver to the refugees.

Heavy snow had disrupted traffic between Amman and Mafraq. It was February 22 by the time the road conditions allowed volunteers to travel to Mafraq. Once the roads were passable, volunteers wasted no time setting off to Mafraq with the aid they had prepared.

The ongoing civil war in Syria had forced those 20 families to flee their home country and temporarily settle in Jordan. They lived in tents and made their living by working as hired farm hands. In the off-season, they relied on charitable aid and loans to get by. After the snowstorm had damaged their tents, 108 of the refugees took shelter in a nearby mosque. One refugee described what it was like after their tents had been damaged: "Rain and snow kept falling on us in our tents. When it rained outside, it rained inside too."

Volunteers distributed the goods they had prepared to the families and helped them mend their

tents. When a tent was beyond repair, volunteers helped set up a new one. Though the tents were not spacious, they were the refugees' homes and protected them from the elements. When the Syrians saw that their tents had become livable again, they broke into smiles. They built fires with wood given to them by the volunteers, their hearts warming along with their bodies.

Myanmar

A fire broke out on Zaya Thuka Street in Thingangyun Township, Yangon, on February 8. Seventeen houses were destroyed and more than 60 people were displaced. Afterwards, they took shelter at a local school that had been rebuilt by Tzu Chi after Cyclone Nargis.

Most residents in the affected region made a living by doing odd jobs. The pandemic had already made it difficult for them to sustain a livelihood, and the fire just made their situation even worse. After learning of the devastating blaze, Tzu Chi volunteers visited the disaster area to assess damage. Based on their findings, they decided to hold a relief distribution to help the survivors rebuild their lives.

The conflagration happened during a time of political turmoil in Myanmar, with protests and

strikes occurring across the country following a coup. Most stores were closed as a result, adding to the difficulty of purchasing supplies for the distribution. Volunteers looked for stores that were still open and eventually managed to obtain the needed goods.

The distribution was held at the temporary shelter at the school on February 16. Twenty-two items were given out to each of the 17 families who had lost their homes, including consolation cash, blankets, tableware, mosquito nets, and rice. Among the volunteers present was Aung Ye Htet, a member of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association. He and his mother lived in Thingangyun, the town in which the fire took place. When the fire on February 8 spread to his neighbors' homes, the first thing he salvaged before fleeing was his Tzu Chi uniform. "It's my most prized possession," the young man said. After the conflagration, he worked with other volunteers to help the victims. He and his fellow volunteers sincerely hoped to ease the victims' suffering with their aid and care.

A fire broke out in Thingangyun Township, Yangon, Myanmar, in February 2021, displacing more than 60 people.

THAE ZAR NI AUNG





Thailand

Thailand saw a second wave of coronavirus outbreaks beginning in December 2020. In response, the government declared 28 provinces, including Bangkok, as high-risk zones. The public was instructed to avoid gatherings and restrict their outings. Tzu Chi volunteers were concerned that many day laborers would have difficulty putting food on their tables with the new movement restrictions, so they contacted local governments to offer help to needy households. Their efforts led to the launch of Tzu Chi Thailand's first four COVID-19 aid distributions this year. The events took place on February 3 and 4 in Thepharak, Samut Prakan Province.

Each distribution was limited to a maximum of 50 people to prevent the spread of the virus. Volunteers packed the aid items beforehand, which included rice, flour, cooking oil, sugar, and other daily necessities. This sped up the distribution and further helped protect participants from the virus.

In addition to giving out supplies at the distributions, volunteers made home visits to people who couldn't come to the venue to bring them their share of the aid. Yuak was a 90-year-old recipient who relied on her grandson to provide for her. Her grandson worked at construction

An aid distribution in Thailand held for families impacted by the coronavirus pandemic on February 3, 2021

CHEN KUN-AN

sites, but his income was unsteady, so she was overjoyed to receive the aid from Tzu Chi. Puang, another recipient, was 80 years old. Despite her advanced age, she had to take care of her paralyzed son. Like 700 other families in her village, she was qualified for three monthly installments of aid goods from Tzu Chi.

To help more people more quickly, volunteers asked local government officials after the four distributions on February 3 and 4 if they could increase the number of recipients for upcoming distributions. The officials had seen the care with which organizers had duly implemented preventive measures during the events—including mask-wearing, social distancing, temperature taking, and hand sanitizing. Reassured, they agreed to raise the number of attendees per distribution to a hundred.

Tzu Chi Thailand distributed COVID aid to more than 54,800 households in 2020. This year, they have planned to reach 25,000 households in regions including Ratchaburi Province, Nonthaburi Province, and the Greater Bangkok area. ❀

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*A life filled with desire and expectation is a
life filled with pain and affliction.*
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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