

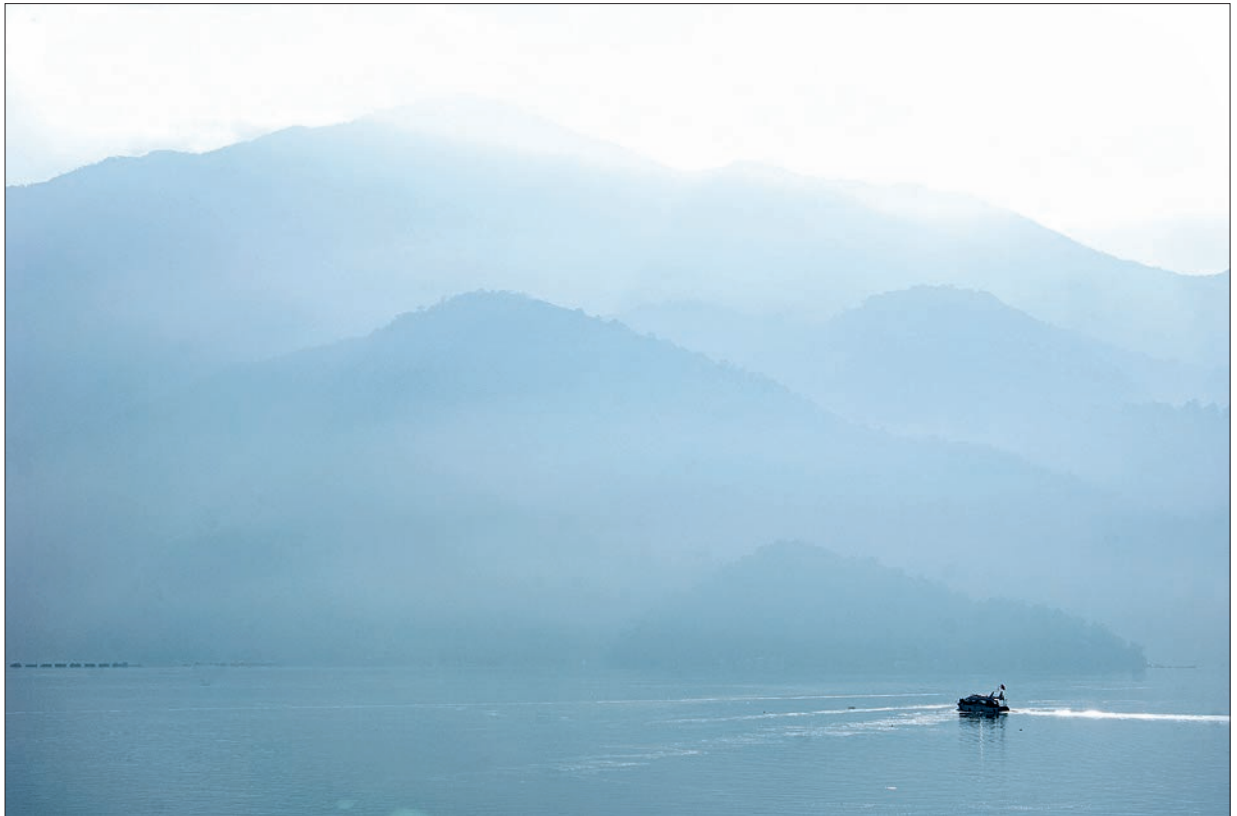
慈濟 Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

A New Home
for Tzu Chi's Media



January 2023



Our beautiful world needs action to save it before it is too late. We can all do our part by leading an eco-friendly lifestyle.

HSIAO YIU-HWA

Saving the Earth Starts With You

Translated by Teresa Chang

Our Earth was sparsely populated a few million years ago. People back then lived a simple lifestyle. But now, though the planet has remained the same size, the population on it has grown exponentially. In fact, the world's population topped eight billion on November 15, 2022. Our average lifespan has also greatly increased. I am concerned with how much we are overtaxing our planet.

I have been keeping a daily tab on the Climate Clock in New York for a while now. The clock is a countdown of the time we have left to take action to prevent the effects of climate change from becoming irreversible. There are now less than seven years until the clock reaches zero. How is humanity to save the Earth within such a short time? This desperate need calls for change in our lifestyles.

Carbon emissions are a huge factor contributing to the crisis facing the Earth. Such emissions can't be reduced if we don't curb our consumption. Our unchecked desires fuel the production of all kinds of merchandise, which in turn leads to the release of carbon dioxide. On the other hand, if we lead simpler lives and take good care to prolong the lifespan of what we have, we can greatly help the environment. We can conserve energy and reduce our carbon footprint without necessarily compromising our quality of life. For example, we can buy what we need and refrain from throwing away things after just one use, and we can carpool instead of taking separate cars. As long as we really want to help, we can find ways to contribute to the Earth's sustainability, which, in a way, is creating blessings for ourselves.

Evaluating our eating habits is another way to help our planet. A lot of food is wasted when we prepare too much for a meal or order too much when eating out. An even greater impact on the environment is eating meat. Raising animals for food requires a lot of land and feed, and the livestock's breathing and excrement pollute the air and the land. Considering the vast amount of livestock raised for human consumption, it is easy to imagine the harm being done to the environment.

Aside from harming the environment, meat-eating entails the taking of animal life. It has been

estimated that it takes 38 chickens or a 120-kilogram (265-pound) pig to make just 500 non-vegetarian boxed meals. If we were to look at the animals being slaughtered for human consumption in the eye, they might be saying to us: "It's you! I'm being killed because you want to eat me!" Though we may not kill the animals directly, their lives are sacrificed because of us. This is indirect killing. Think about it: every day, hundreds of people eat here at the Jing Si Abode. If meat was served, how much bad karma would we be accumulating for causing all those animals to lose their lives for us? Life is precious, be it a human's or an animal's. Let us bravely say "No" to meat eating. The more people that reject meat, the more animal lives that will be saved.

Sometimes, children demonstrate greater compassion than adults. I know of a little girl who once said to her mother: "I often play with animals. They are like friends to me. How can I eat my friends?" Like this child, we can all choose not to eat meat. In fact, we can obtain sufficient nutrition by eating grains, vegetables, and other vegetarian food alone. As seasons change, we are able to eat different kinds of produce. Every kind of vegetable has a different taste. Whether it is cilantro, celery, water spinach, or amaranth, they can all bring satisfaction to our palates if we eat mindfully.

Living on this planet, sustained by this planet, we have many things for which to be thankful. With different seasons come different natural scenery for us to enjoy. All kinds of creatures coexist on the planet while doing their part to contribute to a thriving ecosystem. Look at the ants and earthworms. Tiny though they are, they aerate and enrich the soil and help the planet as a whole. They offer many benefits to humanity, too. Such an amazing coexistence of species in the world is truly beautiful, isn't it?

If we want to live in safety and peace, we need a healthy planet. Protecting and loving the Earth and all its creatures brings humanity only benefits. It is not hard to do. By eating vegetarian, inspiring others to do so, and living simply, we can reduce the burden on the Earth. All it takes is a willingness to start. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

January 2023



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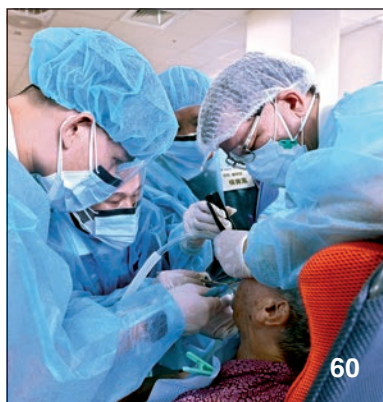
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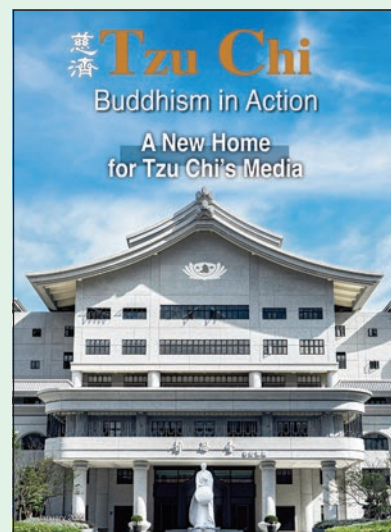
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Tzu Chi brings aid and love to the underserved around the world.

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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right to edit the letters for purposes of space, time, or clarity. Letters should include the writer's name, address, and telephone number.

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A photograph of a baby sitting in a stroller with a camouflage pattern. The stroller is on a black and white checkered floor. The baby is looking to the right. The background is dark and out of focus.

A Tough Winter for Refugees

By the end of 2021, the number of people displaced due to conflict and persecution around the world had topped 89 million. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further exacerbated the refugee situation. Energy shortages, inflation, and food price spikes as a result of the war have made this winter an especially tough one for refugees around the world.



A Ukrainian participating in a Tzu Chi work relief program helps look after a baby for an aid recipient family at a distribution the foundation held in Warsaw, Poland, in May 2022. Women and children comprise 90 percent of the Ukrainians that have fled the war.

ALBERTO BUZZOLA

Ukrainians in Poland

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Alberto Buzzola

For every hundred Ukrainian refugees currently staying in Poland, two to three have received help from Tzu Chi. As the Russia-Ukraine war drags on, the foundation has launched mid- and long-term aid to further assist people displaced by the war.



As the Russia-Ukraine war enters its first winter, the two sides that have been embroiled in fierce battles for more than nine months now face a new challenge—the severe coldness of winter. Once winter sets in, the East European Plain, on which European Russia and Ukraine are located, will be assailed by ruthless winds and snow.

“We generally use electricity or natural gas for heating; some also burn wood,” said Denys Dubin, a student from Ukraine currently studying at Tzu Chi University, in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. He pointed out that the war had exposed those relying on electricity or gas for heating to high

risks. “You never know when a missile might fly over. If the electricity or heating facilities you depend on are bombed, you’ll have to bear the brunt of cold weather.”

Dubin’s concerns were not unfounded. Russia launched fierce attacks on electricity facilities in Ukraine in October, cutting off power or necessitating power rationing in the capital Kyiv and other areas. Heating systems were crippled without electricity or gas. Even if people have wood to burn, it will be difficult to get through the winter, given the damage to other infrastructure facilities and civilian houses.

The dangers of Russian attacks and the impending cold has caused the number of Ukrainians leaving their country to surge. Łukasz Baranowski, a Polish Tzu Chi volunteer, indicates that an estimated 500,000 Ukrainians will cross the border into Poland before winter arrives.

However, Ukrainian refugees will continue to face many challenges and are not guaranteed an easy time, even if they can safely make it into Poland. The Russia-Ukraine war has dealt a hard blow to food and energy supplies, driving up prices. Polish citizens themselves are feeling the sharply increased pressure to get by, which is reducing the ability of Polish society as a whole to support the Ukrainian refugees in their country.

“The energy shortage problem has affected all of Europe,” said Monica Chang (張淑兒), the wife of Łukasz Baranowski and also a Tzu Chi volunteer. “Many private natural gas companies in Poland have responded by raising their prices, some as much as 500 percent. Some people have had no choice but to burn wood, which is also making air pollution worse.” Baranowski added: “Because of the war, Poland and other European countries can’t get enough natural gas. We predict that this winter will be a hard one, not just for the Ukrainian refugees, but for other Europeans as well.”

Aid on two fronts

Anticipating the challenges posed by winter, Tzu Chi sent out blankets and winter clothing to be delivered to internally displaced people in Ukraine. For this, the foundation partnered with Airlink, which transported the blankets and winter clothing to Poland free of charge. Then the

Ukrainians remaining in their home country after the Russian invasion in February 2022 strive to get on with their lives under the threat of warfare.



items were given to Ukrainians returning to their home country, to bring into Ukraine. According to Debra Boudreaux (曾慈慧), CEO of Tzu Chi USA, Tzu Chi has also provided medications, entrusting them to IsraAID, a humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Israel, for delivery via their logistics hubs in Moldova and Romania into Ukraine.

Tzu Chi has also continued to focus its aid for displaced Ukrainians within Poland, the country that has taken in the most Ukrainian refugees. According to statistics from the United Nations, there were still more than 1.4 million registered Ukrainian refugees in Poland in early November 2022. With the prospect of returning home still uncertain, the top issue facing them is how to support themselves in Poland.

Simon Shyong (熊士民), deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission, explained that Tzu Chi had given out enough aid by mid-November 2022 to help more than 80,000 Ukrainian refugees. The foundation's next step will follow the example of how Tzu Chi Jordan and Tzu Chi Turkey have

aided the Syrian refugees in their countries. Working with its partner organizations, the foundation will offer Polish language courses and vocational training courses to Ukrainian refugees in Polish cities such as Warsaw and Poznań. Such strategies will help the refugees find jobs in Poland and better assimilate into local society.

In fact, Tzu Chi has already achieved some results in helping Ukrainian refugees obtain work to support themselves. For example, Tzu Chi has implemented a work relief program, in conjunction with the Polish Women Can Foundation. One part of the program pays Ukrainian physicians who have escaped to Poland to provide their fel-

Tzu Chi volunteer Stephen Huang (黃思賢) thanks Father Sławomir Szczodrowski from a Salesian church in Warsaw for working with the foundation to distribute aid to Ukrainian refugees. Tzu Chi has implemented relief work for displaced Ukrainians in Poland in cooperation with several religious and non-governmental organizations.



low compatriots with medical services, especially in the fields of family medicine and OB/GYN.

Tzu Chi has also been training and paying Ukrainian refugees to help the foundation conduct home visits and extend care to other displaced Ukrainians. During such home visits, the Ukrainian Tzu Chi helpers try to locate people who need assistance and then arrange for help accordingly. Gao Wei-li (高薇玗), of the Tzu Chi Department of Religious Affairs at the foundation's headquarters in eastern Taiwan, explained: "In Warsaw, Tzu Chi and the Polish Women Can Foundation have together established an office. When our Ukrainian helpers find families who need our assistance during their home visits, they put them on a list to receive our care. Should any of these families require help with medical care or legal or psychological counseling, they are referred to the Polish Women Can Foundation for assistance."

There are similar Tzu Chi helpers in Poznań conducting home visits for the foundation. They have found Ukrainian soldiers during their visits who have been sent to Poland after being maimed in the war. If need be, they list them as Tzu Chi care recipients too and give them aid, such as gift cards, to help them get by. "Such injured soldiers have been sent to Poland one way or another," Debra Boudreaux said. "Some arrived as early as between March and May. Our Ukrainian helpers found them during their home visits, and we have since been doing what we can to help them."

Besides finding people in need of aid via their home visits, Tzu Chi's Ukrainian helpers also receive referrals from their fellow Ukrainians. Boudreaux observed that many Ukrainian refugees in Poland have formed group chats to keep in touch and help each other. When they learn about families that are having difficulty getting by, families whose children are looking for schools to attend, or that have members injured in the war and are looking for a hospital for treatment, they work together to find help or resources for the families. Tzu Chi's Ukrainian helpers have become one of the sources the refugees turn to to seek help.

"We are hoping eventually to establish permanent Tzu Chi branch offices in Poland, with the help of our local helpers and volunteers as well as local ethnic Chinese people," said Simon Shyong.

Most Ukrainian refugees are women, children, or older people, so Tzu Chi is placing emphasis on helping Ukrainian women settle in Poland and helping children obtain schooling and psychologi-

Tzu Chi's Help for Ukrainian Refugees

- ▶ Participating volunteers: from **12** countries and areas
- ▶ Areas that Tzu Chi's aid is mainly focused on: Lublin, Warsaw, Poznań, Szczecin, and Opole in Poland
- ▶ Number of distributions held: **363**
- ▶ Number of gift cards distributed: **24,995**
- ▶ Number of cash cards distributed: **13,982**
- ▶ Number of blankets distributed: **40,137**
- ▶ Packages of multigrain biscuits distributed: **11,703**
- ▶ Packages of food and other necessities distributed: **17,800**
- ▶ People who have benefited: **81,006**
- ▶ Cooperation with other organizations:
Tzu Chi is working with 11 NGOs to carry out humanitarian aid work in five countries in response to the Russia-Ukraine war. The help provided includes healthcare, medications, psychological counseling for children, legal counseling, and financial subsidies.
- ▶ Each gift card is loaded with **2,000** Polish zlotys (**US\$450**), redeemable at a major supermarket chain in Poland.



Last updated: November 17, 2022

cal counseling. In Taiwan, on the other hand, in addition to soliciting donations to help Ukrainian refugees, the foundation has spared no efforts in helping Ukrainian students attend Tzu Chi schools of higher learning.

Ukrainian students at Tzu Chi University

Hsinyi Hsiao (蕭心怡), Ph.D., Dean of International Affairs at Tzu Chi University, explained that in early March 2022, soon after the Ukrainian war broke out, Tzu Chi University announced that students from Ukraine were welcome to come study at the school. After the announcement was made, the Department of



International Affairs at Academia Sinica, the foremost academic institution in Taiwan, forwarded nearly 200 letters of application to the university.

After intensive online interviews, Tzu Chi University decided to enroll 24 applicants. By early November, 23 of those students had begun studying at the school, ten studying for a degree and 13 that had come to learn the Chinese language. The university also invited six Ukrainian scholars to the school.

“The students study at our university, but they also take online Ukrainian courses at the same time,” said Dr. Hsiao. “They came to our school mainly for safety—they wanted to study in a secure environment where they would not have to worry about missile attacks.”

Speaking of these Ukrainian students, the dean sympathizes with them for what they’ve had to

Tzu Chi volunteers perform the Tzu Chi song “One Family” at a distribution held for Ukrainian refugees in Warsaw.

go through. She said that one student told her that after the war broke out, she had ridden in a train with fellow Ukrainians to escape from an area controlled by the Russian army. To prevent the Russians from discovering that the train was carrying people, the train windows were covered with adhesive tape to prevent light from spilling out. The entire trainload of people was transported this way out of the Russian-controlled area, with their hearts in their mouths, totally unaware of what was happening outside.

“There was also a Ukrainian student who, during her stay in a quarantine hotel when she first

arrived in Taiwan, was scared whenever she heard an airplane flying overhead,” said Hsiao. “She was so scared she asked me online one time, ‘Is another war breaking out?’ I said to her, ‘No. Don’t worry. It’s just military planes on a drill.’”

Several of the Ukrainian students studying at Tzu Chi University have exhibited varying degrees of post-traumatic stress disorder. School administrators have arranged for psychological counseling, and even asked Tzu Chi volunteers who can speak English and who have counseling experience under their belts to serve as the students’ Tzu Chi moms and dads. (Tzu Chi moms and dads are Tzu Chi volunteers who “adopt” students of Tzu Chi schools and care for them as if they were their own children.)

Anna Mariia Chechina, one of the Ukrainian students at Tzu Chi University, said that the peaceful campus life at the university was exactly what she needed most after having fled from the war. She also expressed her appreciation for being able to visit Dharma Master Cheng Yen with other fellow Ukrainians before they started their lessons at the university. “The Master is an outstanding figure with the power to change lives. Her kindness and generosity moved me to tears.”

Cycle of love

Since the war started, the international community, regardless of religion or ethnic background, has never stopped extending aid to Ukrainian refugees. Tzu Chi, as part of the international community, has been doing its part too. Whether it be via distributing relief supplies, providing language learning and vocational training courses, or offering work relief programs, Tzu Chi is hoping to soothe the wounds caused by the war and plant seeds of kindness in this difficult time.

When they are distributing relief goods and gift cards, volunteers make a point of sharing the origin of Tzu Chi with the aid recipients. They explain to the refugees how the foundation started with 30 housewives each saving a little money in a coin bank every day to aid the needy. They hope to convey to the refugees how small amounts of money pooled together can be used to do great good. The money on the gift cards distributed by Tzu Chi, for example, comes mostly from small donations of kind-hearted people around the world. No one should underestimate their power to make a difference.

“Tzu Chi is different from other NGOs,” said Chen Hui-ru (陳惠如), who lives in Opole, Poland, but is originally from Taiwan. “What impresses



Ukrainian refugees participate in a group activity during a Tzu Chi distribution in Lublin.

SUSAN CHEN

people the most during the foundation’s distributions is the sharing of Tzu Chi ideals and the use of coin banks to inspire people’s love.” Chen and her husband, Radosław Atlas, had contacted Tzu Chi on their own initiative after the foundation started holding distributions in Poland for Ukrainian refugees, and asked to work with the foundation to help the refugees in their city. This led Tzu Chi to launch distributions in Opole in June 2022. Because of this experience, Chen got to witness the impact of the “Tzu Chi coin bank spirit”: some Ukrainian refugees were so touched after hearing Tzu Chi volunteers share the story behind the coin banks that they volunteered to hold a coin bank during the distributions to solicit donations from their fellow compatriots.

“I didn’t get it originally,” said Chen. “I thought, ‘Aren’t the refugees here to receive help? Why are they being invited to deposit money into a coin bank?’ But when I saw how they smiled or were moved to tears because they had been able to contribute their bit to help other needy people, I got it.”

“Two to three out of every hundred Ukrainian refugees currently in Poland have received gift cards from Tzu Chi,” said Simon Shyong. He added that the gift cards or other material supplies that Tzu Chi volunteers have distributed will last the refugees for only so long, but the love and kindness inspired in their hearts will last forever. He hopes that with love inspiring love, those who Tzu Chi has aided will help the foundation provide further help in Ukraine in the future. ♣

A Home Away From Home

Narrated by Hanna Mankus

Compiled by Tu Jun-ye and Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

We cry together, laugh together, and discuss how to help our fellow Ukrainians. Though we are not from Poland, we've found a home here.

My name is Hanna. I come from Zaporizhzhia, a city in a Russian-speaking area in southeastern Ukraine—a city that has now become known the world over.

I was an English teacher before the war broke out. I lived in the tallest building in an urban area. I have two sons and an adopted daughter. My

career and life apart from work were perfect for me. But I'll never forget my birthday in 2022.

That morning, I noticed a lot of calls I had missed on my phone. I thought my friends had tried calling to wish me a happy birthday. But when my phone rang again and I answered, I heard this urgent message: "Run for your life! The war has started!" I looked out the window and saw military planes flying toward us, followed by the sounds of explosions. I immediately took my children and escaped to a friend's small basement, where we hid for nine days.

We didn't want to leave our hometown, but when the Russian army surrounded the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the biggest in Europe, I knew we had to leave. We had only an hour to pack before we rushed to the train station to take a train—any train—that could take us away. The station was crammed with people. As soon as one pulled in, everyone scrambled to get on it.

I was separated from my youngest son for a few minutes in the shoving crowd. Those were the longest and most scary minutes in my life. We eventually found each other and boarded the train. It was packed. We didn't even know where it was headed. We could only trust the driver to take us to somewhere safer. It became pitch-dark when night fell. Our train was stopped when we passed through a battle zone; we were told to sit on the floor and wrap our hands around our heads. When I looked out the train window, I saw the night sky in the distance illuminated by shellfire. The only thing I could do was hold my children tightly in my arms.

The most heartrending scene during our journey unfolded as our train was decelerating and pulling into a station. Before we could even stop, air sirens began blaring, prompting our train to



Hanna Mankus, originally an English teacher in Ukraine, has joined Tzu Chi in helping her fellow compatriots in Warsaw, Poland.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

accelerate again and speed away from the station. I saw people waiting on the platform drop their luggage and start to run after our train. Some children on the train didn't realize what was happening and waved to the desperate people through the window.

Our train eventually arrived at Lviv, a thousand kilometers (620 miles) away. From there we trekked an additional 400 kilometers (250 miles) to Warsaw, the capital of Poland. All along the way I asked myself, "Is leaving Ukraine the best decision?" But my mind was finally put at ease on the first night we arrived in Poland. When I saw my children going to sleep wearing their pajamas instead of their heavy coats, when I saw them ready to go to sleep instead of ready at any instant to run for our lives, I knew I had made the right decision.

We all thought the war would end in a couple of months. When it didn't, we had to accept the possibility of a prolonged stay in Poland. That was when I started looking for work on social media platforms and found that Tzu Chi was enlisting English-speaking Ukrainians to participate in their work relief programs. I called to apply. That turned out to be a life-changing phone call for me.

I have been with Tzu Chi since then. There are at present seven Ukrainians serving at the Tzu Chi office in Warsaw. We all come from different backgrounds and had different jobs: a nurse, a tour guide, a physician, a preschool teacher, or a reporter. But no matter where we've come from, we now see ourselves as a part of Tzu Chi's big family. At the office, we laugh together, cry together, and hold meetings together to discuss the charity cases we are handling. We work together to help needy Ukrainian families. We also design character education curricula for Ukrainian children to help them cultivate positive qualities and virtues.

This past July, the Camillian Mission for Social Assistance referred a family from western Ukraine to us for help. The family consisted of an Orthodox Christian pastor, his wife, and their five children. With so many kids, they were experiencing difficulty getting by. One of their children, two-year-old Daniil, suffers from a congenital disease.

During our first home visit to the family, we discovered that Daniil couldn't sit up without the help of assistive devices. He couldn't hold things or talk. His mother told us he needed physical therapy, but they hadn't found a place in Poland yet where they could take him, nor did they have the money for it. In response, Tzu Chi decided to help the family by financing the youngster's physiotherapy.



Tzu Chi's Ukrainian helpers organize dumpling-making gatherings for older Ukrainians in Poland to help lead them out of their isolated lives in a foreign land.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI VOLUNTEERS IN POLAND

Whenever we visited their home after that first visit, we'd see from a distance the family's children already waiting on the balcony for our arrival. Physiotherapy is a painful process, and Daniil used to cry during it. But with our company, he has grown more cheerful. With the help of the therapy program, his hands have grown stronger, and he can now sit up on his own. He can speak vocabulary words and is learning to walk. I'm very grateful; it's thanks to Tzu Chi we can provide support for this hard-working family.

During our home visits we often met elderly people who were helpless and at a loss in a foreign land. They led isolated lives in Poland. When we saw them like that, we asked ourselves, "How can we help lead them out of their isolated lives?" It then occurred to us we could hold gatherings for them in which we could make Ukrainian dumplings. We could promote vegetarianism through such events and allow the older people to get together and interact with each other. So we started doing that. We donate 20 percent of the dumplings made in the gatherings to needy families, and sell the others so that the older people can have a little income and get a sense of achievement.

I used to feel I was without a home in Poland. But that changed after I started helping Tzu Chi distribute relief supplies and gift cards to other displaced Ukrainians. I'd notice the smiles on my fellow compatriots' faces during such distributions and be so touched. Poland might not be our original home, but we have found a home here. ♣

Together We Stand

By Nataliia Starovoitova

Compiled by Wu Hsiao-ting

We decided to flee the war in Ukraine when it was no longer safe to stay there. We never ever imagined that one day we'd need to start a new life in Poland, nor did we ever expect that we'd become part of a big family here.

My name is Nataliia Starovoitova. I am 35 years old. I arrived in Poland from Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, on March 9, 2022.

When the war began on February 24, 2022, I immediately left home with my 11-year-old daughter, Alexandra. In despair and fear, we left without anything—no clothes, nor any other belongings. Having left everything behind, we spent the first ten days with relatives in Zhytomyr, 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Kyiv, close to the Belarusian border. Just a few days after we arrived, that city became unsafe as well. We had to spend almost all our time in a frosty basement. Endless air alarms and explosions haunted us. It was almost impossible to sleep. We lived in constant fear.

After a rocket hit the school right next to our relatives' place, we decided to seek a safer place. That was on March 4. The journey to Poland took us 49 hours. Sleep-deprived and exhausted, we arrived in Poznań, in western Poland, on March 9.

When I was back in Kyiv, I worked as a top manager in a company that helped outfit hotels, restaurants, and other businesses in the hospitality industry with professional equipment and other products. I was in that job for more than 12 years. My daughter was a fourth grader when we left Ukraine. She was fond of rhythmic gymnastics and learning English. We loved to spend time together: going to the cinema, taking walks, traveling, playing sports. We lived a happy life, without the faintest idea that February 2022 would bring such drastic changes to our lives.

In April, already here in Poland, I found out that the Tzu Chi Foundation was enlisting help for their aid mission for my fellow compatriots. I gladly joined them to help. That's how I met

Łukasz and Monica, two Tzu Chi volunteers who live in Poznań. I was impressed by their sincerity and kind hearts.

I have been with the Tzu Chi team in Poznań since then. Together we've carried out distributions of gift cards and blankets, and conducted home visits to our fellow Ukrainians. There are more than 60 Ukrainians helping Tzu Chi carry out its work now. Participating in the foundation's work has become a major part of my new life. Every time after a distribution, I returned home exhausted, but was glad that we were doing a great job helping to support our compatriots, who, like me, were forced to seek security in Poland.

Though some Ukrainians who fled the war to Poznań have since returned to our home country, many still remain in the city. We visit them at the hotels, churches, shelters, or private homes where they are staying to find out how they are getting on and whether the gift cards or cash cards distributed by Tzu Chi have helped improve their lives.

One family we visited left a deep impression on me. Nataliia and her husband were raising 14 children when they were in Ukraine. Ten of those children were adopted; only four were their own biological children. When the war first broke out, Nataliia and her children hid in a basement for more than three weeks, during which time they had no running water, electricity, or heating. In March, Nataliia decided they had to leave or else their lives would be in grave danger—they had heard sounds of Russian military planes firing machine guns into their neighborhood.

According to Ukrainian law, her three grown-up sons were required to stay in Ukraine to



defend their home country. Sad but having no other choice, Nataliia left Ukraine with her other children. After a journey of three days and nights, they finally arrived in Poland. Nataliia thought she could finally breathe a little easier, but then the tragic news came that her second son had been killed in battle.

Now Nataliia and her family live with more than 20 other Ukrainians in a place provided by a church. The gift cards distributed by Tzu Chi have helped them have an easier time financially. However, they know that they can't rely on aid forever; they'll have to find some way to sustain themselves if they are to continue staying in Poland. That is easier said than done though. The language barrier is one of the problems facing them.

Nataliia and her family are not the only Ukrainians in Poland in that predicament. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian families in the country have lost their homes to the war. They have nowhere to go, no jobs, and don't know what tomorrow will bring. There is, for example, a Ukrainian family in Poland with five members who are practicing lawyers. Despite their qualifications, they can't make good use of their abilities

In early June 2022, a Tzu Chi team in Poznań conducted training for the Ukrainians taking part in a Tzu Chi work relief program to prepare for the upcoming large-scale distributions for displaced Ukrainians.

COURTESY OF MONICA CHANG

in Poland due to the linguistic and legal differences between the two countries. Seeing the predicament these people are in, Tzu Chi is providing Polish language courses in Poznań to help Ukrainians who want to learn the language.

We will continue to make home visits, record our visits, and do what we can to help our fellow Ukrainians. I am very grateful to Tzu Chi for providing support to my compatriots in this difficult time. I've found real friends in Tzu Chi. Łukasz, Monica, and all my fellow Ukrainians who are helping Tzu Chi carry out its work in Poznań are now like a big family. We have one thing in common: we want to help others. I am very happy my daughter, Alexandra, has also become a member of our team. Each of us might have limited strength, but together we can make a marked difference. ❀

The Short Time We Had Together

By Chen Yi-wei

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

I knew they would return to a life of harsh reality after they left the distribution venue. I gave each of them a tight hug, hoping to bring them at least a moment of peace.

Facing the Ukrainian refugees, I couldn't tell them everything would become better. They had been deprived of the basic rights of a human being: having their own homes, eating well, and sleeping well. Fleeing their homes panic-stricken and empty-handed to take shelter in a foreign land, lining up under the hot sun to receive relief supplies, wearing donated clothes that didn't fit them.... I asked myself, if I had been in their shoes, could I have faced and survived such challenges?

For these reasons, I wanted to give all my love and warmth to them. I hoped to make every child laugh and be a haven to them, albeit just a temporary one. The time we had together was short—just 20 minutes. After they walked out of this room, the reality facing them would still be harsh; they'd still have to live with the cruel fact that a war had turned their lives upside down. When they were leaving, I gave each of them a tight hug. Even though tears were rolling down their cheeks, I didn't understand what they were saying to me. All I could do was hug them tighter.

In Szczecin, Poland, Tzu Chi worked with the Oktan-Us Foundation to distribute food and other daily necessities to Ukrainian refugees. The venue, provided by Oktan-Us, was only large enough to accommodate 25 people at a time, so we could serve only 350 to 450 people a day. The venue was some distance from the city center, but the refugees usually arrived before eight in the morning. Then they waited in groups in the shade for their turn to enter the venue. Among them were older people and children. With the sun beating down

on them, they were hungry and thirsty. We served food and tea to them. The tea was hot, but they were so thirsty they didn't mind and quickly drank it without waiting for it to cool off.

The food we brought out went quickly. In fact, we began setting aside some food first and then quietly bringing it to some older people sitting in a corner. We were worried that they didn't have the strength or the speed to get the food themselves.

It seemed that no matter how much food we prepared, it wasn't enough to meet the need. A volunteer took out her ATM card, gave it to our partners, and asked them to use the money on the card to buy more food. We couldn't bear to see the looks of disappointment on people's faces when they saw the last biscuit taken before they even had a chance to get one. We eventually decided to skip our lunch so that our food could be given to the refugees.

Children politely thanked us when they received food from us. Just a few months ago, they were living a well-provided-for life, with an endless supply of biscuits and drinks waiting for them to consume. But now things were so different. Even so, they were quick to express gratitude for the help people gave them. Looking at the displaced Ukrainians at our distributions, I imagined the pain they must be going through. I imagined how they were feeling after witnessing a war break out in front of them and losing almost everything overnight. How were their relatives, friends, and neighbors? Had they all made it out safely?

When we were being introduced to the refugees during each distribution, they looked at us



cheerfully, nodded their heads, or waved to us—though we spoke different languages, they tried to convey their thanks to us in whatever way they could. When we were singing the Tzu Chi song “One Family,” we’d hold the refugees’ hands and form a circle. During those moments, we felt so close to each other, as if we were really family. An older woman left a deep impression on me. She hugged me tightly, and, with tears coursing down her face, said that she felt like a well-respected guest at our distribution.

I had participated in Tzu Chi’s distributions at refugee camps in Serbia. I had also met economic refugees in England, where I live. What marked the Ukrainian refugees as different was that they didn’t look upon themselves as refugees; they didn’t just wait around to receive our aid at a distribution. Whenever they saw a truck arrive that was carrying goods for distribution, they’d form a chain to relay the goods to where they would be placed temporarily. When they saw volunteers moving tables to set up the venue, they pitched in to help too. They used their action to pay us back for our help. In addition, they didn’t just leave after they received our aid. They stayed to interact with us, and to play with children on-site. They tried their best to remain upbeat. They often said they were so grateful to the Polish people who had put them up, and they thanked us for coming

Chen Yi-wei (陳翊暉), right, the author of this article, interacts with two Ukrainian refugees who broke into tears after hearing the Ukrainian version of the Tzu Chi song “One Family,” which made them think of their family members still in Ukraine. COURTESY OF CHEN YI-WEI

from places as far as Taiwan to help them.

Though Tzu Chi’s distributions in Szczecin have come to an end, I try my best to remember every Ukrainian I met. I have saved a place in my heart for them. Since I returned to England from Poland, every time I talk to others about what the refugees have had to go through because of the war, I choke up with emotion. Whenever I shop in a supermarket, I think of them too. I think to myself: “Why is it that I can live such a good life, but they can’t? What else can I do for them?”

That’s why I decided to share with everyone around me the photos and videos I took while I was in Poland participating in Tzu Chi’s work for displaced Ukrainians, so that more people would pay attention to Ukraine, so that more people would know that in Szczecin there too lived a group of Ukrainian refugees, a group uncertain about their future. It’s my way of continuing the affinities I formed with the refugees I met. It’s just like the lyrics from “One Family” say: “Let’s share each other’s lives and burdens.”



Stepping Up to the Plate

Narrated by Zheng Qiu-di

Compiled by Zhu Xiu-lian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

With no volunteers in Poland, it was a real challenge for Tzu Chi to carry out humanitarian work for displaced Ukrainians. Thankfully, volunteers from other European countries stepped up to the plate to help.

I am a Tzu Chi volunteer living in the Netherlands. I first participated in our foundation's international relief work in 2012. We reached out to help earthquake survivors in Italy that year. It marked the first time Tzu Chi had carried out disaster relief work in that country. I'm from Taiwan but have lived in Europe for 38 years. I am not afraid to do pioneer work for Tzu Chi in any new country. No matter how difficult something is, we must be brave enough to rise to the challenge. My fellow volunteers in Europe embrace the same conviction. Whenever we learn that a disaster has occurred in Europe or that there are refugees here needing our help, we join hands to deliver aid.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, many Ukrainians fled to Poland. Tzu Chi decided to launch distributions in Poland to help the refugees there through this tough time. But, because there were no Tzu Chi volunteers or offices in Poland, it was difficult to conduct aid work there. To help out, Susan Chen (陳樹微), a volunteer from Germany, arrived in Lublin, eastern Poland, at the end of March. I arrived on April 1, and by July I had made five trips there.

I remember most clearly the distributions we held in May, in conjunction with Caritas Internationalis. I operated the sound system during those events. My work required my full attention. I had to make sure nothing went wrong with the music or videos I played, from the time the refugees entered the venue, to the prayers halfway through, to the very end. In addition to being very familiar with the equipment I was operating, I needed to respond quickly to any unexpected situation. During similar events in the past, I had usually worked alone in a dedicated space off-

stage. But this time, I had to work onstage due to the limitations of the venue provided by Caritas. My vantage point allowed me to clearly see the facial expressions of everyone in attendance. I was deeply stunned by what I saw from the stage, so much so that I'd get goose bumps.

Almost all the Ukrainians who came to our events were older people, women, and kids. Most common were young mothers with children in tow. When they entered the venue, their eyes were vacuous. They looked like their hearts couldn't have been heavier. My heart really went out to them when I saw them like that. I'm a mother myself; the sight of the young refugee mothers in particular reminded me of my own daughter. Looking at them, I thought of how hard it would be for my daughter and how my heart would break if she was the one who had to flee from a war with young kids in tow.

To an outsider, we seemed to carry off every distribution with ease. But what wasn't as visible was all the work that went into the events behind the scenes. A casual observer couldn't know the difficulties that volunteer Susan Chen and Joey Chen, a Taiwanese student who helped us organize the distributions, had to overcome to make the distributions possible. Knowing how much pressure they were under, other volunteers and I did our best to help them and fill in wherever we were needed. Though we couldn't communicate directly with the refugees due to the language barrier, with the help of Caritas Internationalis, the Ukrainians who took part in our work relief program, and some Taiwanese students studying in Poland, we successfully pulled off one distribution after another. When we saw the smiles on the refugees' faces after they had received our aid or



Zheng Qiu-di (鄭秋嬋), right, a Tzu Chi volunteer from the Netherlands, hands over a gift card to a Ukrainian refugee in a distribution in Opole, Poland.

LU PEI-LING

when they hugged us, we forgot all the hard work we had put in.

Since I joined Tzu Chi, I've participated in our disaster relief work in Italy, Germany, and Bosnia. I have also worked with other volunteers to help refugees in Serbia, mostly from the Middle East. From those experiences and the experience of helping displaced Ukrainians in Poland, I've come to deeply realize how the first step is often the hardest. Even though Tzu Chi has provided aid to over a hundred countries and regions, most people in Europe don't know us. Since we are a Buddhist organization, we hold a different religion from those of most of the people we are trying to help, so it is easy for them to suspect that we are offering them help with the ulterior motive of converting them to Buddhism. That's why when we first express our desire to help, we often have doors shut in our faces. However, if we can successfully take the first step and make a breakthrough, the other things fall into place more easily.

Things are often easier if we can establish channels for communication with local governments or with agencies in charge of refugee affairs and win their trust. If our work necessitates the purchase of relief goods, it's also better to establish partnership with local businesses.

When we encounter challenges, I take out my wallet, look at a photo of Master Cheng Yen I keep there, and ponder: "What would the Master do if she were in our situation?" I also use her

words to encourage myself: "In the face of ever-changing circumstances, we must bring forth wisdom. In the face of difficulties, we must develop resilience. In the face of tedious processes, we must learn patience...." I've found that whether something is difficult or not often depends on how we look at it.

In carrying out international relief work, we must be quick to adapt to the circumstances facing us and provide help that's really needed. Take for example the work we did after Germany was hit by severe flooding in 2021. The floods damaged electricity and natural gas facilities in the disaster area, making cooking inconvenient for local residents. When we saw survivors left with nothing but cold bread, we decided to rent a food truck to launch a hot meal service. When we saw how happy local residents were when they received our food, we knew we had made the right decision to launch the service.

We need to mobilize many people for every relief mission. We typically work in a relay fashion, trying to accomplish as much as possible with the limited manpower we have. Master Cheng Yen says: "We must overcome difficulties, not be overcome by them." I'm grateful to my fellow volunteers from 12 countries and areas for working together to help the Master serve Ukrainian refugees this time. Relieving suffering and giving joy is our mission. Nothing is difficult if you have the will to do it. ❀

Accompanying Them Along the Long Road

Tzu Chi carries out charity work for refugees in Canada, the United States, Great Britain, France, Serbia, Turkey, Jordan, Thailand, Malaysia, and Australia, providing displaced people with financial aid, daily necessities, or medical care. There are even schools or free clinic centers run by the foundation for refugees in three of these countries: Turkey, Thailand, and Malaysia.

→ **A Syrian refugee receives dental treatment at a Tzu Chi free clinic in Huweyja, Mafrqa, Jordan. Most of the Syrian refugees who came to the free clinic were from the Zaatari refugee camp. Tzu Chi Jordan has been caring for Syrian refugees for over ten years. Volunteers started conducting free clinics for this group of people eight years ago.**

CHEN CHIOW HWA

↓ **Tzu Chi volunteers in Europe have long provided help to the Krnjača refugee camp in Belgrade, Serbia, a camp made up mostly of refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Tzu Chi is the only organization still providing ongoing aid to the camp. Volunteers visited the camp again in September 2022. During the trip they also distributed school supplies and book bags to refugee students at Branko Pešić School, also in Belgrade.**

ŽARKO AKSENTJEVIĆ



جمعية مؤسسة
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Foundation Society

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A New Home for Tzu Chi's Media

By Li Wei-huang

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The Tzu Chi Humanitarian Center, the headquarters of Tzu Chi's cultural mission, is moving into a new home in 2023. By working with its neighbors, it hopes to imbue new energy into the local community.





Tzu Chi's media, including Da Ai TV and Chinese and foreign language publications, are moving from their original building (right) to a newly completed building right next to it in 2023. XU JUN-JI

The Tzu Chi Guandu Jing Si Hall in Guandu, New Taipei City, inaugurated on January 1, 2023, is going to become the new home of the Tzu Chi Humanitarian Center (TCHC) in early 2023. The TCHC opened in 2005 and is the headquarters of Tzu Chi's cultural mission. It brought together all of Tzu Chi's media divisions in one building, including Da Ai TV, Da Ai e-Radio, Chinese and foreign language publications, *Rhythms Monthly*, and Jing Si Publications. Its new home, the brand-new Guandu Jing Si Hall, is located on the Guandu Plain. It sits close to large swathes of paddy fields, with views of Mount Guanyin and Tamsui River in the distance. In its vicinity are world-class companies, including ASUSTek Computer Inc. and Pegatron Corporation, as well as the Koo Foundation Sun Yat-Sen Cancer Center and the Taipei Blood Center. After moving to its new home in the Jing Si Hall, which is adjacent to its original building, the Humanitarian Center hopes to work with its neighbors and imbue new energy into the local community. It aims to become a gathering place for local residents and office workers, as well as a location for continuing education. Courses on a rich variety of subjects will be offered beginning in April 2023.

A sense of beauty

To mark this new chapter in its life, the TCHC joined hands with its neighbors to launch the Guandu Cultural and Artistic Week at the end of 2022. Renowned performance troupes such as the Cloud Gate Dance Theater and the Ju Percussion Group were invited to perform. There were also a vegetarian fair and other activities to bring neighbors together.

Eric Yao (姚仁祿), who manages Tzu Chi's media, said that the TCHC hopes to be not only the headquarters of Tzu Chi's media, but also a promoter of beauty, goodness, and lifestyle aesthetics in the community. He expressed hope that the Guandu Cultural and Artistic Week would become a yearly event and that there would be activities such as vegetarian fairs and documentary festivals every season.

Besides being a manager of Tzu Chi's media, Yao is a renowned interior designer in Taiwan and is known for his creative ideas. He admits to a hope he has embraced for years: "Taiwan needs a sense of beauty." His concept of a sense of beauty is not limited to the ability to appreciate beautiful things in life, but more of a lifestyle.

For example, a sense of beauty in life can mani-

fest itself as a compassionate heart, one that pushes you to change your dietary habits through the love you have for all living creatures and a concern for the environment. It will also show in how you wisely use food and other resources, cherish flowers and other plants you see in your daily life, or care for and love other people. All of this arises from a heart of gratitude towards everything you see, encounter, or use in life.

To promote such a lifestyle, a vegetarian convenience store has already opened at the Guandu Jing Si Hall, and a vegetarian restaurant is slated to open soon. There is also a Jing Si Books and Café, run more like a library, in which people can access materials to nourish their hearts and souls.

As soon as you enter the grounds of the Guandu Jing Si Hall, you will see a herbal garden. Herbs may be small and look delicate but they have potent therapeutic powers when made into medicine. Similarly, Tzu Chi's media have therapeutic powers too. They can bring solace to audiences and readers around the world when they feel sad or lost, or they can inspire vitality or joy when people need encouragement to keep going.

A statue of the Buddha stands in front of the Jing Si Hall. Installed in December 2022, the 5.5-meter-tall statue is in plain sight for everyone who passes by the hall to see. The sculpture possesses aesthetic beauty and embodies the spirit of Buddhism.

As an exponent of humanized Buddhism, Tzu Chi has always emphasized the importance of practicing the Buddha's teachings in daily life and of living out the spirit of the bodhisattvas. Dharma Master Cheng Yen's preferred version of a statue of the Buddha is one that will endear people, is easily accessible, and is not removed from a sense of reality. She emphasizes that such a statue is not for people to worship. It should be a representation of the inner state of the Buddha, a concrete





manifestation of his love for the world and his mission to relieve suffering, an image that can inspire people to put their compassion into action.

Based on this line of thinking, the statue of the Buddha that stands in the square in front of the Guandu Jing Si Hall holds in his left hand a bowl that symbolically contains pure water, which represents wisdom; his right hand gently touches the Earth, signifying his compassion and love for all living creatures. The Buddha's teachings came from his awakening to the truths and universal laws that govern life. Everyone is capable of the same awakening as the Buddha. The Master hopes that in practicing Buddhism, one should seek to cultivate wisdom and compassion like the Buddha's, instead of focusing on praying to the Enlightened One for blessings.

The Tzu Chi Guandu Jing Si Hall, the new home of Tzu Chi's various forms of media

HSIAO YIU-HWA

The aim of Tzu Chi's cultural mission is to promote wholesome values in society. The various forms of media it encompasses are dedicated to spreading the ideals of goodness, truth, and beauty. The cultural mission also includes local events and activities which seek to nurture a healthier, better, and more cohesive community. After moving into its new home, the Tzu Chi Humanitarian Center will continue to uphold its mission to celebrate all that is good and positive and help effect positive change in people's lives. ❀

From Suffering to Freedom

By Luo Yonghua

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

He had lived with a debilitating illness for 18 years when Tzu Chi helped him obtain treatment. After all those years of suffering, he finally could see light shining into his life.



Xiamen, in southeastern China, is a dream city for many people, myself included. I once hoped that I could make it in that big, bustling city in Fujian Province and return to my rural hometown in style and glory. Sadly, life is full of curveballs and often doesn't turn out the way we plan or hope. In my case, an illness threw my life off track and made it difficult for me to continue working in Xiamen. I used up my paltry wages paying for my medical bills, but my illness, instead of taking a turn for the better, just grew worse. It was then that I knew my time trying to carve a path for myself in the city had come to an end.

Boarding the bus back to my hometown, I felt as if I were duckweed, drifting with the current, unable to control my own fate. Instead of being

adorned with the trappings of success, I was returning home with nothing to show for myself, back to that poor, far-flung village in the mountains in Liancheng County, Fujian Province, back to live with parents who had toiled and moiled their entire lives but still lived in poverty.

My condition continued to worsen after I had returned home. Even walking became difficult. Lying in my bed, I watched one season give way to another. More than that, I watched as life passed me by. When I occasionally browsed through old photos, the hopeful, younger versions of me felt so far away—as far away and unreachable as the promising city of Xiamen.

The first time Tzu Chi volunteers came to my home, I thought they were government workers visiting impoverished households. Some of them



were wearing yellow vests, others were dressed in neat, tidy uniforms of blue shirts and white trousers (for certified volunteers). I learned later through our conversation that they were from Xiamen.

I felt very awkward when they arrived, with my terrifying-looking skin in plain view. Then one of the volunteers, a female, went to sit next to my father at a table. Her expression was soft and gentle. Her manner of speaking seemed to possess a magical power, capable of dissolving any unease in the air. I learned later this was Sister Lin Xiufang (林秀芳).

She asked Dad for some details about our family and the typical yield of our farm. Then, rising from her seat next to my father's, she came to sit by me. She lightly touched my hand, covered in

Luo Yonghua (羅永華), middle, the author of this article, traveled to Xiamen again in May 2022 to receive follow-up treatment for his psoriasis. He can happily wear short sleeves now, showing to the public the arms he used to hide to conceal his skin condition.

WU DEHUA

reddish, scaly plaques, taking me aback. But in the same comforting manner with which she had talked with my father, she inquired about my condition and what treatments I had tried for it.

When the cars in which they had arrived took them away again, my life fell back into its usual, simple routine. My brother was out of town working, my parents were usually busy tending to our crops in the field, and my sister-in-law,

being mentally disabled, wasn't much of a help around the house. Thus, it fell to me to care for my young niece and nephew. When they cried, I held them in my arms to soothe them; when they wet their pants, I stripped off their trousers and changed them for dry ones. When they finally had a quiet moment, I'd wearily head back to my bed and lay down for a while to give my heavy, aching legs a rest.

A month after the volunteers' visit, I heard from my brother that some people would be visiting us in our home in a couple of days. This time, I prepared before they arrived, putting on long-sleeved clothes so that less of my skin would be exposed. When the day came, a few cars pulled into our village. When they disembarked, I noticed that they were wearing the same outfits as the volunteers before: yellow vests, or blue and white uniforms. The ones in blue and white, I had come to learn, were from Xiamen, while those in yellow vests were from closer to home: Liancheng County. I was surprised they were visiting again.

A closed heart opens

Sister Chen Yanzhen (陳豔珍) was among the volunteers who visited this time. Bespectacled and smiling, she walked towards me, addressed me by name, then held my wrist for a moment. As



An autoimmune condition resulted in Luo's discolored, scaly skin and deformed joints. This photo shows a Tzu Chi volunteer checking his hand during their first visit to his home in August 2019. WANG YANLING



before, I was taken aback by her physical touch. Just as I was wondering how she came to know me, she said she had seen me in the video taken when Sister Xiufang and the other volunteers visited us last time.

Having been ill for so many years, I had become inured to people's apathy and indifference, and had long shunned physical contact with others. But these Tzu Chi volunteers touched me



so naturally, without any fear or hesitation. Their quiet compassion carried the weight of a thunder-clap, cracking open my closed heart.

Xiamen Tzu Chi volunteers visited us every month after that, and continued to visit me after I had moved alone into government housing. Knowing that washing clothes by hand was an inconvenience with my condition, they even bought me a washing machine.

Volunteers from Xiamen have a good time with Luo and his niece and nephew at Luo's home in the countryside of Liancheng County.

HUANG DEXIN

How I wished my skin would return to normal so I could face these volunteers with a healthy look. However, there was no known cure for psoriasis, the disease afflicting me. I was destined to live with it throughout my life unless there was a medical breakthrough. That being the case, I thought it'd be better for the volunteers not to waste Tzu Chi's precious resources on me, but to use them instead on worthier purposes—such as helping poor children who couldn't afford schooling. With these thoughts in mind, I asked the volunteers to stop visiting. I coldly told them their visits were bothering me. To further deter them, I even told them I was moving to a place where none of them could find me.



Dr. Li Yihan diagnoses Luo at the Xiamen Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine in November 2021.

JIANG CAIYE

In response, Sister Qiu Lianna (邱蓮娜) sent me a message saying that she was sorry their visits were troubling me. She said that they'd stop visiting me for a month but expressed hope that I would allow them to visit my family instead that month.

Her words made me realize that they wouldn't be easily deterred—now that they had started helping me, they would never easily give up on me.

In fact, it was not easy for them to travel again and again all the way from Xiamen to visit needy people like me. I could feel how precious their love was—a love more special than that from family, because it was not bonded by blood.

Nothing short of a miracle

In a blink of an eye, Tzu Chi volunteers had been visiting me for two years. They did more than visit, actually—they had also been finding ways to help me regain my health and live a normal life. That's easier said than done though, especially for a stubborn disease like psoriasis, a disease I had lived with for 18 years.

But easy or not, they kept at it, continuing to seek a miracle. Then, finally, Sister Lianna learned at her workplace, the Xiamen Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine, about a biological therapy that might help me effectively manage my illness. I should have been happy when I heard the good news, but years of repeated failures at finding relief for my condition had caused me to lose faith in any so-called "miracle" cures. I didn't think anything would work, so when the volunteers talked to me about seeking treatment at the hospital, I turned them down.

But, like my attempts to turn them away before, they didn't give up so easily. They kept working to get me to agree. Sister Lianna even told me that they had applied to Tzu Chi for funding for my treatment, and that it would be a great pity if I didn't even give it a try. Seeing how hard they were trying to help me, I eventually gave in and agreed to give the therapy a go.

On November 18, 2021, my brother accompanied me to Xiamen to start my treatment. Early that morning, Brother Luo Shoulin (羅壽林) picked us up at my place and drove us to the train station. When the train bound for Xiamen started moving, I was overwhelmed with emotion, my youthful dream of making it in that big city fresh and vivid in my mind.

We arrived in Xiamen at 9:30 that morning, after a ride of less than two hours. As I entered



the Xiamen Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine, I looked around at the other people seeking medical attention there. Sad memories of seeking treatment for my illness to no avail surfaced unbidden in my mind. Sister Lianna took care of my check-in procedure, then took us to the 13th floor. Yin Chunlian (殷春蓮), another Tzu Chi volunteer working at the hospital, dropped by to check on me as soon I was settled in my room. She said she wouldn't leave me alone at the hospital and would visit me whenever she had a free moment.

While I was still talking with Sister Chunlian, Dr. Li Yihan (李依寒), my attending physician, arrived. She asked about my medical history while carefully examining my red and scaly hands. I was very surprised to see that neither she nor the nurse wore gloves during their time with me. This was quite a contrast to my previous visits to the doctor. During those visits, medical workers would don several layers of gloves

Lin Jinxiong, a Tzu Chi volunteer and hairdresser, gives Luo a haircut when the latter finished his first treatment session in early December 2021. The volunteer encouraged Luo by saying: "Have faith in others, have faith in yourself, have faith that you'll get better and better."

JIANG CAIYE

before daring to touch my skin—they had acted as if I was suffering from some highly contagious disease. But Dr. Li was different, and I immediately admired her expertise. She knew that my condition was an immune system problem, and though my skin looked horrifying, it was anything but infectious.

The next day, Dr. Qiu Mingshan (邱明山), from the department of rheumatology and immunology, led a team of physicians to my room when they were making rounds in the ward. Sister Lianna had once arranged during a visit to my home for Dr. Qiu to meet with me online. Half a



year had passed since then, and I was surprised that Dr. Qiu still remembered me. Their plan for me was to give me a thorough physical checkup before starting the biological therapy. While waiting for the results to come out, they would do some routine auxiliary treatment, combining traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine.

Feeling reborn

My first week at the hospital was spent almost entirely on all kinds of tests. The care the hospital gave to patients was comprehensive. Because I had no family with me and because I couldn't get around easily by myself, there were people to push me around in a wheelchair during the testing. Even so, Tzu Chi volunteers still made time to visit me and keep me company.

Years of suffering from the illness had made my legs as heavy and painful as if they were shackled to some tremendously heavy stones.

Luo (right) volunteers for Tzu Chi by collecting recyclables on Gulang Island during the one-week hiatus between his two treatment sessions. WANG HUINA

Every step I took was laborious. However, after I started my treatment, I began to notice an increase in my urine output. Following that was a feeling that a huge load had been taken off my legs. The newly gained lightness of my legs greatly increased my desire to move around. Every day, I'd go down to take a walk around the hospital. My joints had deformed due to my chronic illness, restraining my movement, but it was nothing compared to the extreme difficulty walking I had experienced before I began my treatment. My skin condition also started to greatly improve.

I finished my first treatment session at the end of my two-week hospitalization, and was already feeling great. After a hiatus of one week, I would

return to the hospital to begin my second treatment session. After I was discharged from the hospital, I rode in a car driven by Sister Jiang Caiye (江采曄). I looked out the window at everything in the outside world with a fresh eye. I felt reborn. Brother Huang Dexin (黃德欣) had arranged for me to have my hair cut by another Tzu Chi volunteer, Lin Jinxiong (林錦雄), a senior hairdresser, so Sister Caiye took me to his hair salon first. There were still a lot of skin scales in my hair, but Brother Jinxiong didn't seem to mind. My journey back to a normal life started with this haircut.

I stayed at Sister Chunlian's place while waiting for the second treatment session to start. She and her husband, Wu Luqiang (吳鶯強), also a Tzu Chi volunteer, took very good care of me. They even prepared great food for me three times a day.

Sister Chunlian was in the habit of collecting recyclables such as bottles and cans; when she had accumulated a certain amount she'd ask her husband to deliver them to a Tzu Chi recycling station. Brother Luqiang was quite a neatnik, and averse to using his beloved car to transport the garbage, but he did it anyway. One day, when he got into his car, he found a cockroach in it. Turning to his wife, riding shotgun, he exclaimed, "My car has become a garbage truck!" Sister Chunlian replied, unperturbed, "It's okay. I still

like the car—and cockroaches as well." Brother Luqiang could say nothing to that, and just started his car. As I saw it, he had been using his car to transport more than recyclable garbage—it also carried his kindness and mercy, and his love for Sister Chunlian.

During the week between my two treatment sessions, accompanied by Tzu Chi volunteers, I did recycling work, attended Tzu Chi study group sessions, took walks in the park, and made dumplings. I met a senior named Xue when I was sorting recyclables on Gulang Island, off the coast of Xiamen. Xue had lost his eyesight after a failed cataract surgery several years earlier. Devastated, he shut himself up at home; for more than a year he never once stepped out of his house. It was Tzu Chi volunteers' repeated visits to him that helped him untangle his emotional knots and emerge from that difficult time. He was a changed man when I met him, actively engaged in Tzu Chi's recycling work. Despite being sightless, he sorted recyclables with a great proficiency. A constant smile on his face revealed an inner sense of fulfillment and contentment.

I also met several elderly women, disassembling things with screwdrivers when I met them. When they got up from their seats, I noticed they all had some difficulty moving around. Despite their diminished mobility, they got out of their homes and took up volunteer work, contributing to a charitable cause.

On the morning I returned to the hospital to start my second treatment session, Brother Luqiang hoisted my heavy luggage onto his strong shoulder to carry it for me. That image is engraved in my mind.

Whenever I think back on those 37 days of treatment in Xiamen, memories of the time I spent with Tzu Chi volunteers come rushing back to me, creating waves of deep emotion in my heart. It is so hard to put those feelings into words. As Master Cheng Yen says, human nature is inherently good. But whenever I think of how Tzu Chi has been able to finance my treatment due to the contributions of countless ordinary people, tears well up in my eyes. Where would I be, if I hadn't met Tzu Chi, if it weren't for the love of so many people?

The first time I arrived home from the big city of Xiamen, I came back defeated, feeling sorry for myself that my plans for a successful life had come to nothing. But this time, thanks to Tzu Chi, I returned with a smile, with hope in my heart for better days ahead.



Luo on the train home on December 25, 2021, after a 37-day stay in Xiamen for treatment. Though his condition had greatly improved, he still needs to return to the Xiamen Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine every month for regular treatment.

HUANG DEXIN

Old, Not Obsolete

By Wen Bao-qin

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Octogenarian Yu Jin-rong believes that taking good care of herself frees her children from having to worry about her, allowing them to concentrate on what they need to do in their lives. "When I'm good, everyone is good," she says.

Donning a bamboo hat, an apron, and rain boots, Yu Jin-rong (余錦絨), 87, gets on her bicycle and leaves for the Tzu Chi Yanshui Recycling Station in Tainan, southern Taiwan. It takes her about eight minutes to get there from her home. Unless it is raining, she bikes to the station every day to volunteer.

Yu never turns down any task, but instead does whatever needs to be done at the recycling station. She pitches in wherever help is needed and does whatever work Su Xiu-xiang (蘇秀香), the head of the station, assigns her. "I try to learn everything," Yu says. "If I don't know how to do something, I ask others to show me how to do it, or watch how others do it, to learn the ropes. In this way, I interact with others, make friends, pick up new skills, and keep my brain active. It's pretty nice." Learning new things and making friends—these are among the things that make her happy to volunteer.

Her siblings suggested she volunteer for Tzu Chi's recycling work more than 20 years ago, and she's been doing it ever since. For the past ten years, she's also been serving twice a week as a cleaning volunteer at the Mazu Temple near her home. Despite her advanced age, she lives a full life of service.

A good end of life

Yu was born in 1935, the second child in a family of eight. Her father was a civil servant and put a premium on his children's education. However, when Yu finished her elementary education, she decided to stop going to school. She sacrificed her chance to study and stayed at home to help her mother with farming so that her siblings could go to school. Her sacrifice paid off: her siblings ended up successful in life. Her older brother, for exam-

ple, obtained a PhD degree abroad and had a good career. He is now 90 and lives in Canada.

Yu married Li Rong-kun (李榮坤), a native of Yanshui, when she was 24. They had four sons together. Sadly, Li passed away at 48 due to illness, just after their eldest son had completed his compulsory military service and was beginning to teach at a junior high school in Yanshui. Yu brought up her younger children with the help of her parents, who assisted her with farming. Her siblings also gave her a lot of encouragement and support.

After her children had become independent and started their own families, Yu began following her sister-in-law to the Kaiyuan Temple in Xuejia, about 25 minutes by car from Yanshui, to listen to Dharma talks and chant sutras. "I'm thankful to my sister-in-law for leading me to the path of Buddhism and allowing me to learn that everything in life is due to karmic affinities," Yu said.

Yu is very devout. Every day for more than 30 years, she has diligently performed her morning and evening Buddhist rituals. "I typically recite the *Surangama Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Medicine Buddha Sutra*, and the *Amitabha Sutra* during my daily morning ritual. It takes over an hour to recite the scriptures." She isn't praying for anything by chanting the sutras; she doesn't even want longevity, which many people long for. Knowing that life is full of suffering, she just hopes for a good end of life, one in which she doesn't suffer too much before passing on.

"We come into this world with the karma we have accumulated," she says. "Any Buddhist knows that once we have paid off our karmic debts, we have completed our lessons for this life. We are not here in this world for pleasures, but to cultivate ourselves. I hope that when I finish my



spiritual cultivation in this life, I can move on to the Western Pure Land so that I need not continue to suffer."

Living out old age in a positive spirit

Yu's three children live in Taipei, northern Taiwan. They are all near retirement age, and often visit her on the weekends. Her third son died early, but his wife, who also lives in Taipei, visits her often too. "She is a very good daughter-in-law," Yu says of her third son's wife. "She is an after-school childcare teacher. She became a widow at 35. Thanks to her parents, who gave her a lot of help, my grandson got a very good upbringing. He graduated from medical school and is now working as a physician."

Unlike many elderly people in Taiwan, Yu lives alone instead of with her children. She is very independent and doesn't like to rely on others. "I take good care of myself so that I won't become a burden to others, and so that my children can concentrate on what they need to do in their lives and don't have to worry about me. When I'm good, everyone is good."

Yu's siblings are scattered across Taiwan and abroad. They are all getting on in years, but keep in close touch. They talk to each other on the phone every month, expressing care for each other and maintaining their close ties. In a way, even though Yu lives alone, she is never alone in this world.

Besides volunteering at the recycling station and the temple near her home, she attends Tzu Chi study group sessions every Monday morning. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, she joined other Tzu Chi volunteers every Wednesday for *taiko* drumming. That weekly drum event was changed to once a month due to COVID.

When asked why she takes part in so many things, she said, "Older people are people too; we can learn anything and try out everything. Our brains are more likely to stay in good shape that way." She often encourages other older people to step out of their homes and interact with other people: "Don't shut yourself up at home. When you shun contact with others, you'll grow isolated, and your body and mind will deteriorate more easily."

That's why she didn't suspend her recycling work during the pandemic. "I take precautions, such as wearing a mask, and when the government notified us to get our COVID vaccination, I did. I've already had my fourth shot. Since I'm well protected, I'm not afraid. Besides, being afraid doesn't do me—or anyone—any good."

She said that her eldest son suggested she stop going to the recycling station for a while, but she promised him she'd take good care of herself. "I believe I must go out to serve. Staying active helps me stay nimble. My children remind me not to get too tired volunteering. I won't."

People might envy Yu for being able to lead such an active life at the advanced age of 87, but she's not without health issues. About seven years ago, she started to experience occasional dizziness and chest tightness. The doctor told her that her blood pressure was a little on the high side, so Yu started taking medicine for it. "Illness is inevitable in life. We shouldn't dwell on it and let it bother us too much."

Two years ago, she started to experience weakness and pain in her knees. The doctor diagnosed her with degenerative knees. Now she receives hyaluronic acid injections periodically for treatment. Talking about her knees, she said with her usual philosophical attitude: "I'm old. Just like a machine wearing out due to wear and tear, we humans do too. But we shouldn't allow our aches and pains to confine us and prevent us from moving around and giving of ourselves." She believes that the pain she has had to endure is part of her karmic debt to repay, so she accepts it willingly and continues to do her best to serve. She does as Dharma Master Cheng Yen teaches and seizes every chance to do good.

Yu's volunteer work for Tzu Chi has led her to lead a regular working life, like that of an office worker's. She reports to the Yanshui Recycling Station every morning at eight. At eleven, she returns home on her bicycle with a boxed lunch, courtesy of the station. "It's really wonderful the recycling station allows me to volunteer," she said. "I'm very grateful."

The smile that crinkles her eyes indicates a grateful, contented heart. She is optimistic and takes everything that comes her way in a positive spirit. She volunteers at the Mazu Temple as a way to show her appreciation to the sea goddess of Mazu and Guan Yin Bodhisattva for blessing her community. She is thankful she can serve as a recycling volunteer because it allows her to stay active and be around people. She uses her time in a fulfilling way, so it never hangs heavy on her hands. She's a perfect example of how we can live out our old age in peace and at ease. ❧

Yu volunteers at a Tzu Chi recycling station every day. It helps her stay active and socially connected.



Out to Deliver

By Ji Shu-zhen

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

He was a conscientious postman who worked hard to ensure that every piece of mail reached its intended destination. He treats his volunteer work with just as much commitment and dedication.



“Registered mail!” Cai Zong-qin (蔡宗欽) hollered out as he arrived at a house, delivery in hand. In response, two large, strong dogs barked fiercely back at him. They bared their teeth and looked ready to charge him at any moment.

“Fortunately, the owner of the house was home that time,” Cai recalled. “Otherwise I might have ended up at a hospital.”

The former postman continued: “To be chased by or even bitten by dogs is something every postman goes through from time to time. The only difference is whether you are chased by a large or a small dog.”

The bicycle Cai rode to deliver mail was green, with a basket in front. The saddlebags at the rear of the bike were typically bursting at the seams with mail. He biked close to 30 kilometers (20 miles) a day, weaving through streets and lanes, rain or shine. As he knew well, a postman has no right to complain about the weather. He attended to his rounds no matter if the weather was hot and sweltering, or with violent winds blowing, or was raining cats and dogs. And it was always him, not the mail he was delivering, that got wet on a rainy day, because he did everything he could to protect the mail from water damage.

Cai said that when people put something in the mail, they expect it to be delivered. “It’s our duty to ensure that every piece of mail is delivered to its intended destination,” he said with a serious expression. A sense of responsibility pushed him to do his best at his job. But he holds the same attitude for everything else in life, including his volunteer work for Tzu Chi.

No problem. I’ll do it

“Brother Zong-qin, we are short on hospital volunteers this month,” said a fellow volunteer to Cao. “Brother Zong-qin, I can’t go cut the grass tomorrow!” said another volunteer. “No problem. I’ll go.” Cai is quick to fill in for others in such types of situations, and is very understanding whenever someone who has volunteered to do something is unable to do so. “I know our volunteers are committed to their work for Tzu Chi,” he said. “They don’t easily let go of any chance to serve. When they have to pull out of something, there must be a good reason for it. So, I’m more than happy to fill in when there is a vacancy.”

Cai Zong-qin was a dedicated postal worker, and is just as dedicated to his volunteer work for Tzu Chi.

YIN CHENG-CANG

Cai, known for his modesty, regards every chance to volunteer as a privilege, and he goes all out to carry out his assignments. He has exhibited this quality since he was young.

Cai was born in 1954 in Dacheng Township, located in the most southwestern corner of Changhua County, on the west-central coast of Taiwan. Strong winds blew all year round in that region, unfavorable conditions for farming, but that’s how Cai’s family made a living. He is the oldest child in his family. When he was still very young, he had to take his two younger brothers and a younger sister to the fields after school every day to cut fodder, harvest crops, or do other chores. During busy times of the farming year, he also had to feed the cattle, move rice seedlings, and plant them. Farming was hard work, but he never complained. He felt he was just doing what he should do.

Most children in his impoverished hometown stopped going to school after graduating from junior high school. They either stayed home to help out on their family farm or left town to work to help support their family. Cai’s grandfather, however, decided to let him continue going to school. Cai was therefore one of a small number of children from among the local farming families who made it to high school. But he still worked during his free time in high school. Via a relative’s introduction, he was hired on as a part-time cleaner at the local post office.

While he was working there, he began to realize it might be a good place to work full-time after he graduated from high school, either as a postman or a window clerk. It would offer a steady income, and it certainly beat toiling away on a farm. After he finished high school, he approached the postmaster to inquire about the possibility of his working there. The postmaster was a kind man with a head of white hair and a constant smile on his face. After he listened to Cai’s inquiry, he said apologetically that there was no vacancy. Cai felt like a deflated balloon, his hopes dashed.

The postmaster continued, “The need for postal employees in a rural area is usually small, and there is a slower turnover rate. Why don’t you try to get hired on in Taipei?” The postmaster’s suggestion reignited hope in him, and he soon started sending application letters to various post offices in Taipei.

Banqiao, in Taipei County (now New Taipei City), had at that time just been upgraded from a town to a county-level city. Tall buildings were popping up on the streets one after another, like



mushrooms after a rain. To meet the rising demand for mail delivery, the city's postal system was hiring a large number of people. After passing an examination, Cai succeeded in landing a job as a postman at Banqiao Post Office in 1974.

In 1990, he applied to be transferred to Changhua Post Office so he could work closer to his home. His application was granted. He was promoted to the position of mail sorter at the same time. Changhua is located at the intersection of the Taiwan Railways Administration's Mountain Line and Sea Line. Mail to be delivered to different places in Taiwan converged there before being sorted and sent to post offices across the island for delivery. Cai worked the graveyard shift. Though his new position as a mail sorter saved him from having to work outside in all kinds of weather, he had to readjust to a new schedule that required him to work through the night. He took it in stride though. He reported to work every night at nine and clocked out past six in the morning. He lived a life like this for 27 years.

Cai's wife, Hong Shu-qing (洪淑卿), became a Tzu Chi donating member in 1983. She also began

Cai never turns down a task in Tzu Chi and is happy to fill in for others. This picture shows him helping with the foundation's relief work for flood victims in Chiayi, southern Taiwan, in 2018.

WU BI-FENG

participating in volunteer activities. Gradually, she got her husband involved as well. Cai said, "I tagged along when my wife went volunteering. I literally followed in her footsteps."

Some time later, Cai began collecting recyclables by truck for a Tzu Chi recycling station. Often, when he had just arrived home after a night's work at the post office, his wife would ask him, "Do you want to go collect recyclables now, or catch up on your sleep first?" "Let's go now," Cai would reply. Then off they went, stopping at the collection points on their round, picking up the recycling, and transporting it to the recycling station.

Helping hands, dedicated heart

When the disastrous 9/21 earthquake hit central Taiwan in 1999, Cai happened to be at a mountain lodge taking part in an employee train-

ing course for postal workers. The day after the tremor, they began to venture down the mountain. They saw bumps or cracks created by the tremor everywhere on the surface of the road on their way down.

As he was making his way down, Cai heard someone calling for help from a collapsed temple at the side of the road. "Help! Is anyone around?" He quickly stopped his car and dashed toward the temple. "Quick, take this!" someone said to him. Before he even had time to respond, someone handed a child to him. The child had been trapped under a pillar earlier. Cai took the child in his arms and walked to a safer place.

Though it felt nice to help save people, Cai's heart grew heavier and heavier the more he continued down the mountain. More broken road and collapsed or tilted buildings met his eyes. "The more I saw, the more frightened I became," he recalled. "It was the first time in my life I had sensed how insignificant and vulnerable human beings were in the face of nature's powerful forces."

Early the next morning, he hurried to a large collapsed building in Yuanlin, Changhua, to prepare hot food for rescue workers and waiting family members. He also chanted the Buddha's name with other volunteers to pray for peace for the departed. Despite recurrent aftershocks, first responders pressed on with their rescue efforts. He wanted to do more to help. Feeling deeply for the

deceased and their family members, he continued chanting the Buddha's name in devout sincerity.

For nearly a month afterwards, he traveled early every morning to Puli, Nantou County, where the epicenter was, to build temporary housing for people who had lost their homes to the earthquake. He moved building materials, laid interlocking paving bricks, and did whatever else he could. He worked hard with the others who had pitched in to help, hoping to finish the temporary housing as soon as possible so that quake survivors could have a roof over their heads.

After participating in Tzu Chi's relief work for victims of the 9/21 earthquake, Cai identified even more deeply with the foundation's mission to help the needy. He started training the year after the tremor to become a certified volunteer.

Cai has always been known for his dedication to his volunteer work. One time, he went to Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital to volunteer for a week. His duties consisted of delivering case histories to the various consulting rooms where doctors saw patients, and retrieving the case histories when medical workers were done with them. His work required so much walking that by the third day, his big toe began swelling and hurting badly. His old ailment—gout—had flared up.

"It hurt so badly," he recollected. "Even a whiff of wind would make the pain worse. I could hardly sleep that night." When he woke up the next morning, he sat on the edge of his bed, gently stroking his swollen foot while putting on his socks. Never one to quit easily, he decided to bite the bullet and finish his week-long volunteer session at the hospital. Standing up with the help of his hands, he walked out of his room. Over the next four days, he continued doing what he had been doing on the first three days: delivering case histories and taking them back. He volunteered at the hospital for a full week—just as he had committed himself to.

Cai retired from his postal work in 2017 and became a full-time volunteer. He does all kinds of work in Tzu Chi: cleaning the Changhua branch office, cooking for Tzu Chi events, doing dishes, and more. "I'm lucky to be able to volunteer after I retired," he said with a smile. "Otherwise I might be sitting in a massage chair now, dozing off."

Volunteering for Tzu Chi takes him out of his home, keeping him socially active and healthier. His four daughters and six grandchildren all fully support his volunteer work. After a long career helping get mail to people, he now helps Tzu Chi deliver its mission to all.



Cai sharpens a kitchen knife while serving as a culinary volunteer. He tries to make himself useful in whatever way he can in Tzu Chi.

YAN XIU-YING



Fixing Homes in Eastern Taiwan

By Zhang Li-yun and Shi Jin-yu

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Tzu Chi launched its first-ever large-scale repair project to fix damaged homes after the strong 9/18 earthquake in eastern Taiwan, helping affected families face the winter in peace.



A volunteer uses a power tool to remove cracked granite tiles on the wall of a home damaged in the 9/18 earthquake in Taiwan.

LI HONG-WEN

Vacationing tourists flock to the East Rift Valley, in eastern Taiwan, to soak up its natural beauty, the sea, and the boundless Pacific blue skies. In particular, the popular Chike Mountain Orange Daylily Festival in Yuli, Hualien, attracts large throngs of tourists in August and September, inviting them to slow down and enjoy the beautiful scenery in this rural town.

But that leisurely country lifestyle was disrupted in 2022, when a 6.8 magnitude earthquake hit eastern Taiwan on September 18. Aftershocks continued to rock the region, leaving residents in fear. Though there were no major casualties, some houses in Yuli and Fuli Townships were severely damaged. Fuli is right next to Chishang, the epicenter; Yuli is about 40 kilometers (25 miles) away.

In the aftermath of the quake, many neighborhood chiefs received complaints from local residents about how the tremor had left their homes with cracks, collapsed perimeter walls, blocked gutters, leaks, and fallen water tanks. According to statistics from the Hualien County government, 660 households in the county reported damage to their homes. After inspection, 81 of those households were determined to be seriously damaged, 105 were moderately damaged, and 486 were slightly damaged.

A building was determined to be seriously damaged if its main structures, such as columns, beams, outer walls, floors, or foundation, suffered damage, or if the building was tilted to a certain extent. Such buildings were marked on the outside with a red notice. A building received a yellow notice if it was moderately damaged, that is, if its ceilings, indoor partition walls, or other components apart from the main structures were damaged, or if adjacent buildings were tilted to a certain extent. A slightly damaged building was one that showed minor damage, such as cracks in the walls or floors. Tzu Chi volunteers also visited affected homes after the quake and learned that many damaged houses were quite old.

In Yuli Township alone, more than 300 families reported damage to their homes. This created a sudden and rapid uptick in demand for repairmen. Li Jia-liang (李家樑), chief of the Taichang neighborhood, visited every household in his neighborhood and learned that some older people hadn't the slightest idea about where to find a repairman. Even people with the ways and means to get a repairman faced competition for their now-scarce services. Many people waited days for appointments with repairmen to no avail.

Yuli has a population of more than 20,000, so the number of skilled construction workers, plasterers, plumbers, and electricians is limited. A shortage of building materials also ensued after the earthquake. With cracks and leaky water pipes in the house—and the possibility of a typhoon in late autumn—the residents were understandably worried. Seeing the need, Tzu Chi called on volunteers from all over Taiwan, particularly those with professional expertise, to help repair damaged homes in the disaster area. The project started on October 1.

"We're really thankful we have Tzu Chi and the TSMC Charity Foundation to help us!" said neighborhood chief Li Jia-liang. "Many Tzu Chi volunteers who pitched in to help are themselves professionals in construction or related fields. We knew we were in good hands when we saw them. What's more, Tzu Chi even supplied the materials. They added nothing to our burdens at all."

Putting residents at ease

Tzu Chi started the repair project by first attending to homes with minor or moderate damage, then moved to those that were more seriously damaged. In late October, a repair team of volunteers from central Taiwan visited Hualien again to work on those homes needing more extensive repair. Zhang Fu-jin (張富進) reminded the whole team that though their target homes this time would be those posted with red notices, they would be responsible for fixes that didn't involve major structural damage, such as repairing cracks in the walls or floors. (Work that involved major structural damage would be taken care of later by Tzu Chi's construction department.) Even so, Zhang said with emphasis, "You must wear a hard hat, pay attention to safety, and see clearly before acting."

"The sight of so many helpers coming today makes me teary," said Ms. Zhang, 70, who lives alone in a hillside house in Yuli. She choked up and continued, "I was so frightened when the earthquake hit. I wanted to rush out the door when it started. After a few shakes, I finally decided to hurry out." The earthquake left her house tilting to one side, seriously damaged her front porch, and created cracks in the walls and floor. Her house was so severely damaged it had received a red notice. When a typhoon brought abundant rain in mid-October, she ended up with a pool of water in her house.

Right next to her house was a storage shed that stood beside a stream. A perimeter wall next to the

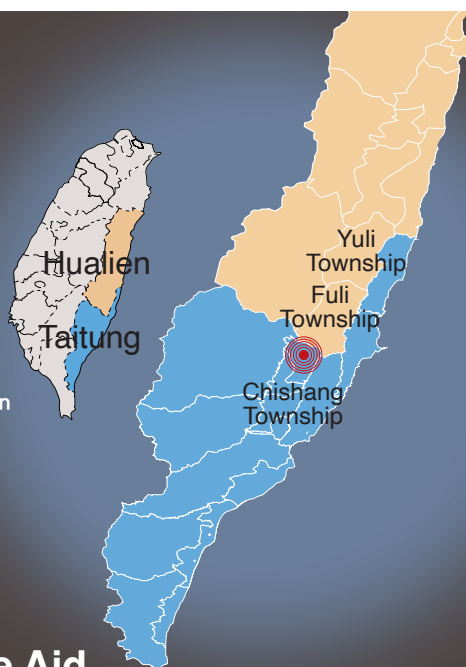
About the 9/18 Earthquake

Time: 14:44 on September 18, 2022

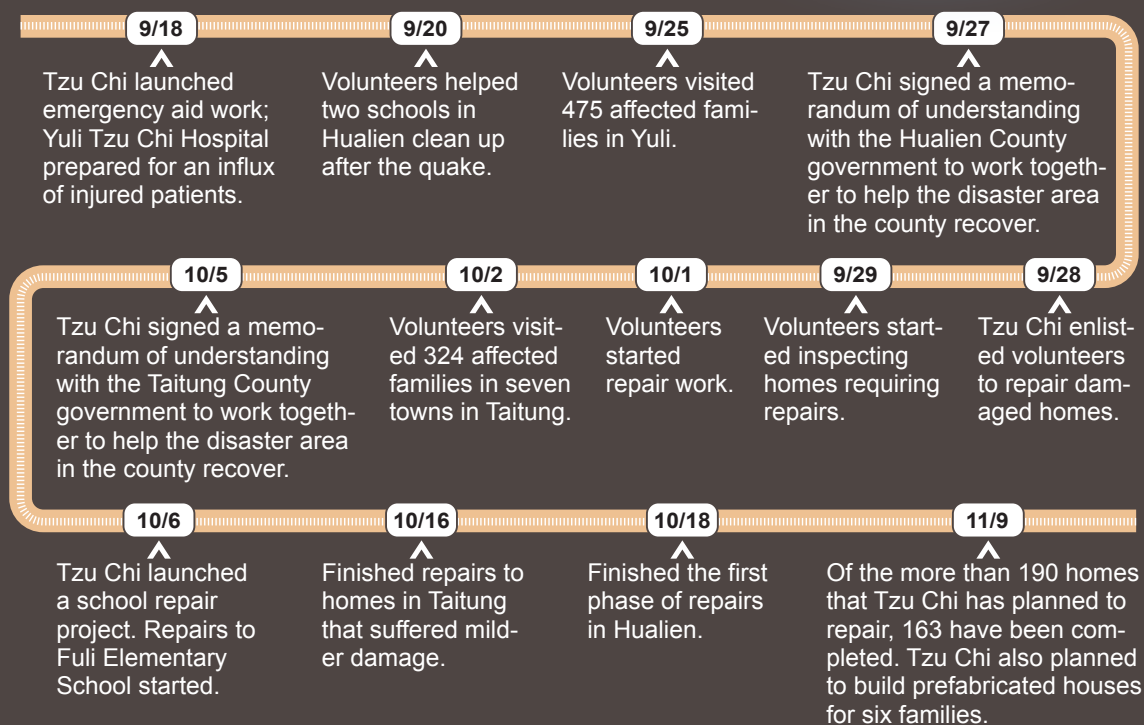
Magnitude: 6.8

Epicenter: Chishang Township, Taitung County, eastern Taiwan

Damage: One person was killed; 549 schools across Taiwan sustained damage; more than 900 homes in Hualien and Taitung were damaged.



A Timeline of Tzu Chi's Post-Quake Aid



storage shed had been split up during the quake. Some concrete pieces had fallen off into the stream below and a large cement block was hanging precariously off the wall, making beholders tremble with fear. Volunteer Gan Qing-wen (甘清文) worried that the concrete pieces that had fallen into the

stream might block the water flow, so he took a ladder and went down into the stream to tie the pieces with rope, one at a time, so other volunteers could pull them up and out of the stream.

Other volunteers removed the hanging cement block, then went on to repair the perimeter wall.



Still others filled cracks in the walls in the house, or loosened and removed cracked and bulging floor tiles. They also worked on the damaged front porch, including repaving the ground with cement.

When the volunteers were done with their repairs, they would hand the house over to the professional team from Tzu Chi's construction department to repair major structural damage.

Not to be outdone by the male volunteers, Lin Wen-xiu (林文秀) and Yang Li-hua (楊麗華) loaded the concrete and brick pieces from the damaged perimeter wall onto a wheelbarrow and pushed them to the front door for disposal. They also moved some wood pieces out of the storage shed and piled them up neatly for the homeowner to use for cooking. Lin Wen-xiu said, "I grew up in the countryside. When I saw a big traditional stove in the house, I knew she used wood as fuel."

Ms. Zhang's children are all married and live out of town. Yu Yu-hua (俞玉華), acting chief of the Dongfeng neighborhood, where Zhang's home is, thanked the Tzu Chi volunteers for extending a warm helping hand to Zhang when

Lin Jin-zan (林金讚), 75, a seasoned plasterer, repaves the front porch of a damaged house in Yuli, eastern Taiwan, with cement.

ZHANG LI-YUN

she needed it the most. Yu said, "I'm really touched to see the volunteers rolling up their sleeves, doing the masonry work, and even cleaning up the surroundings. They got all sweaty. I'm happy and grateful for our residents that they can have Tzu Chi volunteers' help."

It took the volunteers just two days to finish the repairs to Ms. Zhang's home, a project originally estimated to require four days. Zhang was moved beyond words when she saw how the damaged floor and ground were now level and smooth, the perimeter wall next to the storage shed was completely fixed, the weeds in the front yard had been eradicated, and even a stone bench that had once been covered by vines reappeared in front of her eyes. She could hardly hold back her tears. "I was worried that I would not be able to continue living here. I am very grateful to the Tzu Chi brothers and sisters for



making it possible for me to continue to live here!” she exclaimed.

Boss volunteers working overtime

On the afternoon of October 25, another group of volunteers went to Ms. Zeng’s home, in the Guowu neighborhood in Yuli. “The earthquake gave you a big scare, didn’t it?” the volunteers asked Zeng. She responded to their concern with the comment that though earthquakes were commonplace in Hualien, and that she had long been accustomed to them, the tremor that hit on September 18 had really shaken her up. The shaking was so severe, she couldn’t remain standing. But even more terrifying was the noise that accompanied the shaking—she said it sounded like the house was being torn apart. Furniture was knocked down, glass was broken, and ornaments fell to the floor. She was so frightened that she had burst out crying.

Zeng’s children had just left Hualien on a train, returning to work in Taipei, when the earthquake struck. They immediately called home to check on their mother. When they learned how bad things

Female volunteers clear away masonry waste while male volunteers use power tools to remove damaged tiles, do masonry work, or restore plumbing and electricity.

LI HONG-WEN

were, they turned right around to go back. When they arrived at home, they were shocked to see the havoc created by the quake. They picked up the furniture, put fallen objects back to where they had been, and swept up the broken glass. The next day, Zeng’s son had to return to work in Taipei, but her daughter stayed. One of Zeng’s older sisters also went to her home to keep her company. Although her daughter and sister were with her, Zeng was worried and restless because of the severe cracks in the house and, because so many homes in Yuli were damaged by the earthquake, she couldn’t find any repairmen to fix her home.

“Thanks to you Tzu Chi volunteers for coming to help me,” Zeng said, choked with emotion. “I can finally feel more at peace now.”

Some of the tiles on Zeng’s walls were cracked or broken. Several volunteers took turns to



remove them, while others held a light for them so they could see better. Volunteer Qiu Ming-wen (邱銘文), who was quite burly, wore goggles and firmly held a power tool to loosen some granite tiles on a wall. His work created clouds of dust that covered him from head to toe like flour.

This was Qiu's second trip to Yuli to help with Tzu Chi's repair project. The owner of a molding business, he said, "I came because there was a need for more workers. At 65, I no longer need to work hard for my business. I work hard for Tzu Chi now." He had also invited more than ten fellow volunteers to come with him. These volunteers had previously participated in the foundation's relief work for survivors of Typhoon Haiyan that hit the Philippines in 2013.

This was also a second trip to Yuli for master plasterer Wu Jin-ding (吳金定). He had put business on hold and brought his son, Wu Bo-hao (吳博皓), to volunteer for the repair project for the second time. With 46 years of professional experience under his belt, Wu Jin-ding was the go-to man when major tile-laying work was being done. No wonder he was always sweaty.

Watching Wu Jin-ding work, Ms. Zeng's sister

Volunteers rebuild a perimeter wall for a household in Yuli.

LIN JIA-RU

said with admiration, "I can tell that he is an experienced professional just by looking at how he works. He shows such a proficiency in his work and is so meticulous. Even if we hired someone to do it, they may not have been able to fit the tiles so closely and neatly together. He's really awesome." Chatting with volunteers on-site, she was surprised to learn that several of the volunteers working on her sister's home were themselves owners of companies or factories. "They are all bosses, and that makes it so much more precious that they are willing to volunteer for Tzu Chi and do whatever work the foundation needs help with," she said.

With each person doing their part, the volunteers completed the repairs in three days. Personnel from the foundation's construction department would take over and repair the longer, deeper cracks and other more serious damage. Zeng cried when she saw that many of the damaged places had been restored to their origi-



nal state. She hugged the volunteers in tears and thanked them. Knowing that she had been a Tzu Chi donating member for many years, the volunteers said, "You're welcome to join Tzu Chi as a volunteer. We'll be waiting for you!"

More than a month after the earthquake, many buildings in Yuli were still undergoing repairs. Tzu Chi had negotiated and joined forces with local stores selling construction materials in Yuli. They came to an agreement by which Tzu Chi volunteers could pick up at a participating store the materials they needed for the repair project.

Many volunteers drove halfway around Taiwan to arrive in the disaster area to help. "Taichung and Hualien are very close as the crow flies, but the actual driving distance is very long," said volunteer Hong Wu-zheng (洪武正). He pointed out that almost 200 volunteers from the Taichung area had taken part in the repair project, collectively driving more than 37,000 kilometers (23,000 miles) for the undertaking.

Participating volunteers hoped they could complete all the repairs before Chinese New Year so that quake survivors could celebrate the New Year in their duly repaired homes. This hope

Volunteers from Taichung visited Yuli again in late October to help repair homes that had sustained more serious damage in the quake.

ZHANG LI-YUN

pushed everyone to work hard to speed up the project. Professionals from all over Taiwan took turns to serve in the disaster area. They set out from the Yuli Jing Si Hall early in the morning each day to get to work, and kept at it until after five in the evening. If they didn't finish their work according to schedule, they worked overtime so that they could move on to other work the following day.

Mr. Li, whose home was damaged in the quake, went to the Jing Si Hall to help prepare meals for repair volunteers. When he heard that many of them had driven six or seven hours to Yuli to work for the repair project for free, he said gratefully, "Only Tzu Chi volunteers would do something like this!"

By mid-November 2022, Tzu Chi had finished repairing more than 160 homes. The outpouring of love after the quake is helping survivors emerge from the dark shadows of the disaster and is bringing peace to their hearts. ❀

Unwavering Love

By Zeng Qian-yu, Yuan Shu-zhen, and Wu Xiu-ling

Translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi Sri Lanka

Despite political and economic turmoil, Tzu Chi volunteers continue to work for the needy in Sri Lanka. They are sustained by their unwavering love.

“I’m sorry, but I’m afraid that we are unable to include you in the recipient roster for our distribution this time,” said Tzu Chi volunteer Victoria Paranthavithana to Etin Signo. She had determined that Etin, 88 and living alone, didn’t meet the application criteria. He was receiving a monthly stipend for the elderly and earning income from working odd jobs, which also provided lunch.

Instead of being upset, the senior took some money out of his pocket and said, “I want to

donate it to Tzu Chi.” Though he had lost the coin bank that volunteers had given him before, the idea of saving to make a donation to help the needy was not lost on him. Volunteers were reluctant to accept his money, but he insisted.

After he left, they decided to pay him a visit in

With gasoline in scarce supply, volunteers rode bicycles to visit needy families. In one instance, a group of volunteers rode as much as 48 kilometers (30 miles) in a day to visit five families.



his home. The volunteers hoped they might find a way to really help this man of nearly 90 years of age live a little more comfortably.

Struggling to get by

In early 2022, signs of economic problems began to emerge in Sri Lanka. In May, the government defaulted on its foreign debt for the first time. In July, the government declared bankruptcy. With its foreign exchange reserves exhausted, the country was unable to import fuel and food. Petroleum, gasoline, pharmaceuticals, and food were in extremely short supply. Sri Lankans saw the price of their daily necessities double within six months. The Tzu Chi Colombo office began to receive five to eight phone calls a day for help. The volunteers receiving such requests were affected by the economic crisis too, and could empathize with those in need on the other end of the line.

People spent a lot of time waiting in lines for gasoline, sometimes for days on end. Udeni Kumara, a Tzu Chi volunteer in Hambantota, said that many people waited in gas queues through the night, sleeping either in their cars or on the ground. Volunteers once took turns waiting in a gas queue to obtain enough fuel to transport 22 needy patients to a hospital to receive cataract surgery, but after four days of waiting they only managed to purchase 15 liters (4 gallons). It was only enough to transport nine of the 22 patients to the hospital and back; the remaining 13 patients who lived closer to the hospital had to make it there on their own.

The political and economic chaos began to stabilize in October, but life remained tough for most people. Rosalie Chen (陳尚薇), a staffer at Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, pointed out that food and gasoline prices in Sri Lanka rose about 43 percent for the year. Power was out 13 hours per day in April and May before going down to three hours of outage, only to increase to ten hours in October. Fortunately, the two Tzu Chi offices in the country, in Colombo and Hambantota, are equipped with solar panels, so their power supply was only minimally affected.

Sri Lanka has a population of 22 million, of whom about a quarter live below the poverty line. The government provides about US\$0.75-1.50 to each needy family per month, hardly enough to support a household. Starting in April, Tzu Chi held distributions of necessities in Colombo, Central Province, Eastern Province, Hambantota Great Love Village and nearby villages, and at Tzu Chi National School. They had completed seven distributions by October, benefiting 31,172



Etin Signo, 88, who lives alone, is poor, but he insisted on donating money to Tzu Chi.

people in 7,793 households. Some families in that number received help more than once.

Rosalie Chen said that Tzu Chi purchased rice, lentils, flour, cooking oil, and spice for the distributions. "We gave out shopping vouchers in the past," she said. "But given the current food shortage, needy families may not be able to buy what they need if we give them shopping vouchers or money."

With the gasoline shortage, people came to distribution venues on foot or riding bicycles. When the government started setting weekly gasoline quotas for vehicle owners, Tzu Chi volunteers began donating their own fuel passes so that they and their fellow volunteers could have enough gasoline to reach distribution sites. The managers of two gas stations near the Tzu Chi Hambantota office knew that Tzu Chi is an organization that helps the needy, so when they had extra gasoline, they gave Tzu Chi priority to purchase it.

At the same time large demonstrations broke out in the nation on July 9, volunteers in Hambantota were holding their scheduled distribution of necessities for the needy. Volunteers in Colombo, on the other hand, cleared an open tract next to a recycling station so they could plant vegetables and fruit trees in the hope of lessening the pain of food shortages.

You helped me, now I help him

"My food has come from the kindness of others. I'm truly grateful for Tzu Chi's help over the

last three years,” said Suman, 67. “The aid I receive each time sustains me for two months and relieves me of worries.” Suman shared his thoughts as he visited the Tzu Chi Colombo office to apply to receive aid in an upcoming distribution that the office was holding for needy families in Kesbewa, the district in which the office is located. It was the first distribution for September for the office. Unable to work because of a disability, Suman had been a long-term recipient of Tzu Chi’s care.

Suman gets around on his hand-propelled tricycle, which goes about as fast as walking. It took him 90 minutes to reach the office on this day. “May I apply here without going inside?” he politely asked a volunteer when he had arrived. “It’s a big hassle for me to get off my tricycle.” The volunteer immediately stepped towards him to check his personal information.

Suman was one of the 1,413 low-income families who received goods from Tzu Chi Colombo in its first distribution for September. The people sent by the rice supplier for the event not only helped unload the rice but even carried heavy bags of rice for recipients who needed extra assistance. Some children from a Jing Si aphorism class zigzagged throughout the venue, offering drinking water to the recipients. (Jing Si aphorisms are short sayings by Dharma Master Cheng Yen). The children also put the distribution goods in order so that people could more easily grab them.

Each family received 30 kilograms (66 pounds) of rice and about ten kilograms (22 pounds) of other food items, enough to last an average family

for a month. Getting such a weighty load of gifts home was no easy task. Some women together hired a driver to take them and their goods home. When the driver learned that the women were returning home from a distribution for needy people, he waived his fees.

Though many people came to take goods home, many gave back to Tzu Chi as well. They had previously received coin banks from Tzu Chi, so they brought the banks, now filled with money, to the distribution to donate to the foundation. Love was contagious. Their donations touched first-time aid recipients and prompted them to donate as well. In the end, Tzu Chi received nearly US\$300 in donations from the aid recipients.

In 2021, the Sri Lankan government had stepped up its efforts to push farmers to farm organically. Many farmers were caught unprepared and suffered poor harvests as a result. With the help of Venerable Mahawela Rathanapala of the Buddhist Gem Fellowship, Tzu Chi volunteers went to Central Province and Eastern Province in late September to distribute aid to 300 disadvantaged farming families there.

The first day of distribution took them to the Doluwa district. At the event, Venerable Mahawela Rathanapala listened intently as Tzu Chi volunteer Arossha Paranavithana introduced the foundation to the farmers in attendance. What the Venerable heard touched him deeply, so after the distribution he searched the Internet to learn more about Tzu Chi. The following day, when another distribution was held in the Dehiattakandiya district, the Venerable couldn’t wait to share with the crowd what he had learned about Tzu Chi. He finished all that Arossha had to say to the beneficiary families. Though surprised, the Tzu Chi volunteers on-site were amused at his enthusiasm.

Many women brought their children with them to the distribution because



After delivering rice to a Tzu Chi distribution venue, a man who works for the rice supplier carries goods for an aid recipient.



their husbands were at work and there would be nobody at home to care for their children. Priyanthika Kumari held her baby, just five weeks old, during the distribution. Little did she expect to receive such a heavy gift, for which she was overjoyed. Unable to carry both her baby and the goods, she called her husband who was working an odd job to come and help get the goods home.

Aruna, the supplier of goods for Tzu Chi's distribution in Dehiattakandiya, said, "The government offered ten kilograms [22 pounds] of rice and a kilogram [2.2 pounds] of milk as aid, but that was sorely inadequate for some families." Referring to the Tzu Chi distribution, he said, "This is the first time that outsiders have been here to give out aid." Once he learned how Tzu

Children from a Jing Si aphorism class served drinking water to aid recipients at a distribution in September 2022.

Chi raised funds to help poor families, he provided vegetarian lunch for the volunteers. Volunteers were truly appreciative that so many people were willing to give.

Each individual may have limited strength, but they, like fireflies, could all give out their flashes of light. The volunteers in Sri Lanka were determined to inspire more people to join hands together to serve the needy. In so doing, they hoped to be able to bring light to the darkest corners in society and relieve as much suffering as possible. ❦

Care and Warmth for the Homeless

By Julia Chang

Translated by Syharn Shen

I am a Canadian immigrant enjoying the abundance of living in this wealthy country. However, I can't ignore the homeless hidden in the dark and marginalized corners of society.

The season when maple trees turn bright red has arrived again. Canadian geese play in the water on the lake, seizing the final moments of warmth to bask in the golden sunlight. The birds will be reluctant to leave this beautiful land, but soon they will set off on their long journey, migrating south towards warmer lands.

It was this same time of year, back in 2015, when Tzu Chi volunteers in Toronto first served hot meals to homeless people in Newmarket, York Region. There were very few Asians among those we served, and we were initially worried whether they would like the Chinese food we had prepared. Thankfully, with our culinary volunteers' careful planning and cooking skills, the community meal was a hit. We've been serving hot meals to the homeless at least three times a year ever since. The homeless look forward to our meal events, often asking us when the next one will take place.

In affluent Canada, apart from certain downtown areas, it's rare to see homeless people on the streets. Over 80 percent of people who are homeless in Canada are hidden, living in the woods or in their cars. While some suffer from mental illness, others are plagued by drug addiction. Those who became homeless due to financial challenges are relatively few.

While there are various causes that lead to homelessness, the COVID pandemic worsened the situation, as it brought mental and financial stress to many people's lives. It also changed the demographics of the homeless. Statistics show

that in 2020, over 20 percent of homeless people in Canada lost their homes because unemployment made it impossible for them to keep up on their mortgages. Compared to previous years, the number of the homeless living chronically on the streets has risen to 80 percent. While the government tries to offer more housing options, it simply can't keep up with the rising number of people in need; the waitlist is too long. Because the shelters in downtown York can no longer accommodate the increased number of the homeless, they've started moving north to the suburbs.

As Tzu Chi volunteers, we reach out to the homeless, regardless of why they are on the streets. In poor countries, it is not unusual for Tzu Chi to provide aid to over a thousand people during a single distribution; volunteers in those countries also come into direct contact with those in need. But in affluent Canada, where people value their privacy, it's difficult to know who needs help. That's why Tzu Chi Canada's North Toronto branch chose to partner with local charities—Inn From the Cold and LOFT's Crosslinks Street Outreach Van in Newmarket—to give help. These groups have been serving locally for decades and know where to find the homeless. Most people donate what they want to give, but the supplies may not be what the charities or the homeless really need, so Tzu Chi stepped up to fill in gaps of needed supplies.

We have been offering three to four community meals for the homeless each year, through our partnership with Inn From the Cold, and hold



large-scale distributions of supplies during summer and winter. We also provide supplies to LOFT's Street Outreach Van, which serves different areas every day. From the list of needed supplies our partners give us every month, we've learned that the needs of the homeless vary according to the season. They need blankets in winter, and mosquito repellent and umbrellas during summer. Deodorant is needed throughout the year.

Providing constant support

Tzu Chi's North Toronto office was just two years old when we first started to reach out to the homeless. We had only a few people in the beginning, but now have a much larger team of community volunteers that can be mobilized anytime.

Many Canadians give their time to volunteering, and they donate regularly when their financial conditions allow. We live in a country rich in love, and Tzu Chi is but one of many charity organizations. Each year, we need to register early for our community meals in order to book the dates

Since 2015, Tzu Chi Canada's North Toronto branch has been partnering with Inn From the Cold in Newmarket, providing vegetarian meals three times a year for the homeless.

FRANCIS LEUNG

that we want. In a place with so many groups reaching out to those in need, what is it that makes Tzu Chi different? We serve with gratitude, respect, and love, as taught by Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi.

Because Canadian nights are chilly in the summer and bitter cold in the winter, Tzu Chi volunteers in North Toronto have been collecting milk bags and weaving them into floor mats since 2019 to give to the homeless every month. Soft to the touch and able to insulate the cold from the icy ground or floor, the mats are useful for those who live in tents. Together with Tzu Chi's signature blankets, made from recycled PET bottles, the mats can help the homeless get by for three out of four seasons a year—it's only during the winter that the homeless seek accommodation in shel-



ters. Even though the government has been trying its best to provide options, there is still a lack of beds. In addition, isolation and social distancing measures due to the pandemic have greatly reduced the number of beds. When the homeless have no choice but to stay out on the streets in the biting cold, the mats and blankets can make a crucial difference.

Mary Ann Proulx, coordinator for LOFT's Crosslinks Street Outreach Van program, is grateful for Tzu Chi's support over the years. Martha Berry, coordinator at Inn From the Cold, also thanked Tzu Chi for preparing healthy and delicious vegetarian meals. In the early days of the pandemic in 2020, when charities temporarily suspended their services, only Tzu Chi kept operating as usual and continued to support the homeless. Due to social distancing measures, we couldn't enter the central kitchen to cook and prepare the meals, so we ordered boxed meals from vegetarian restaurants and gave them out to the homeless. It was also during this time that we had the opportunity to share with our partner groups the story of Tzu Chi's coin banks—how saving a little every day in a coin bank can help people in need.

According to I Count: York Region's Homeless Count in 2021, there were 235,000 homeless people in Canada. The social problem of homelessness in modern countries has become a given. Having immigrated to Canada, a country generally regarded as a paradise for immigrants, I've been very lucky and privileged to enjoy the benefits and abundance of living here. But I cannot ignore the homeless living in the dark and marginalized corners of society. As a Tzu Chi volun-

Working with LOFT's Crosslinks Street Outreach Van, Tzu Chi volunteers in North Toronto regularly provide supplies for the homeless.

VINCENT CHIOU

teer, I'm grateful for the opportunity to reach out to these corners, see the needs of people who are less fortunate than me, and give what I can.

Giving back to society

Master Cheng Yen often reminds Tzu Chi volunteers around the world to repay the society that nurtures them. Compared to the work Tzu Chi offices in other countries have been carrying out, the scale of our work in Canada is small. Yet, I've come to understand that different approaches of operation are needed to accommodate cultural and social differences across regions. I appreciate the efforts of Tzu Chi volunteers in North Toronto, and I hope we can further connect to the local culture and provide better care for the homeless.

Having immigrated to Canada over 25 years ago, I've long been writing "Canadian" in the citizenship box when I fill out forms and documents. Like a drifting dandelion seed that has fallen to the ground, I've put my roots down in this country and raised my children here. My family leads a stable life in this land. Canada is my home now, and Taiwan has become the place where I came from. As I've built my life and my family here in Canada, it's my responsibility to give back to this country.

As a Tzu Chi volunteer in Eastern Canada, what better way to look after my home than caring for my community, including the homeless in need? ♣♣

The Illustrated JING SIAPHORISMS



The Buddha says:

For one who loves truth, the mind is clear and calm because it is totally pure.

A sage regulates his mind like a carpenter cutting a straight piece of lumber, a bowyer straightening the shaft of an arrow, or a builder cutting a new canal.



I tend to lose my temper easily. I know I shouldn't, but I just can't control myself.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "It is often easy to know what to do, but hard to go do it. Try to make yourself smaller so that you won't get in other people's way, but expand your heart so that you can embrace the whole world. If you can do this, there will be nothing worth getting angry over."

Translated by E. E. Ho and W. L. Rathje; drawings by Tsai Chih-chung; coloring by May E. Gu

Upcycle Your Old Jeans

By Julie Yen Yu Chu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by and courtesy of Julie Yen Yu Chu and Goo Yee

The textile and fashion industry is the second largest polluter on the planet, after the oil industry. A Tzu Chi volunteer is transforming old jeans and other used clothing into bags to reduce waste and help the environment.

A few years ago, a friend brought Goo Yee (吳玉), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Melaka, Malaysia, a pair of jeans she couldn't find the heart to discard. She explained to Goo her idea of making them into something new. Bringing her own creativity into play, Goo came up with a design and refashioned the jeans into a tote bag. Her friend loved what she had conjured up out of something that could have ended up as garbage. This experience launched Goo on a path of trans-

forming used clothing and other kinds of items into fashionable bags.

Where does Goo, age 74, get the jeans and other materials to refashion? She is a dedicated recycling volunteer—so dedicated that she even set up a recycling station at her home eight years ago. She often pushes a wheelbarrow around her community, collecting reusable garbage from local residents. Because of her recycling work for Tzu Chi, she often has access to discarded clothes and other



items, including jeans or all kinds of bags. When she sees items that still look good and are reusable, she takes them and remakes them into “new” bags of various sizes and purposes: totes, handbags, clutches, shoulder bags, change purses, you name it. She even removes buttons, zippers, straps, and so on from old clothes or other items and puts them to use in her creations. Thus, her one-of-a-kind bags are made completely from recycled materials.

She is happy every time she finishes a new bag. Even though she is no longer young and sewing is hard on her eyes and demands a lot of energy, she greatly enjoys the creative work. Denim fabrics, often used to make jeans and with which she often works, are usually thick and tough. A run-of-the-mill sewing machine cannot handle such tough fabrics. To facilitate her work, she purchased a second-hand specialty sewing machine to work on such fabrics more easily. She is now on her second specialty sewing machine.

Before she repurposes a pair of jeans, she gives them a good wash. Then she works out a design based on the original design of the jeans before cutting them up, sewing the cut pieces, and decorating. The entire process can be complicated and involve a lot of work, but everything pays off when she sees her bags snatched up by others and

sell out in no time. This greatly motivates her to continue doing her creative, eco-friendly work. She donates the money she earns from selling her bags to Tzu Chi. So her work not only enables her to extend the life of older garments and other articles but also allows her to help the needy.

“I came from a poor family,” she said. “Such a background helped me cultivate a habit of cherishing everything I had. If a used piece of fabric or zipper was still serviceable, I saved them to be reused.” Growing up with such a mindset, it’s no wonder she embarked on this path of making new things out of old. It has been more than three years since she began, but she’s as passionate about her creative work as when she first began.

Everyone or every family has jeans or other clothes they no longer wear. It might be because the garments no longer fit or are out of fashion, but they still hold on to such items because they feel it’s a waste to throw them away. Maybe we can learn from Goo, use some creativity, and try to transform the clothing into bags or other useful items. You might be surprised by your creativity and come up with something that comes in handy and is stylish at the same time. It might be a good chance to help the environment and produce a one-of-a-kind piece. ❀



Goo Yee creates eye-catching bags from old jeans and other used items.



Like

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



Indonesia

On November 21, 2022, a shallow 5.6-magnitude earthquake rocked Cianjur in West Java, Indonesia. At least 334 people died and more than 7,700 were injured. It was the deadliest tremor to hit Indonesia since the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake.

Tzu Chi volunteers in Jakarta, Bandung, and Cianjur quickly got in touch with each other and coordinated their efforts for the quake. By November 22, they had prepared 1,080 aid packages and other necessities, had them delivered to the disaster area, and launched distributions.

On November 23, the second batch of goods, including 700 aid packages, 1,000 sleep mats, 200 mosquito nets, seven generators, 200 tarpaulins, and 30 boxes of bottled water were sent to the disaster area. On that same day, volunteers from Jakarta set out to Cianjur to help conduct more distributions and other relief work.

A distribution was subsequently held on November 24 in Talaga, Cugenang, Cianjur. Many quake survivors were taking temporary shelter in tents. The quake had turned their lives upside

Volunteers delivered daily necessities to a shelter for quake survivors in Ciherang, Pacet, Cianjur, on November 22, 2022.

MUHAMMAD DAYER

down. As soon as the relief goods provided by the foundation were unloaded, volunteers quickly distributed them to the needy, hoping to ease their suffering a little. Volunteers continued to hold more distributions in the disaster area on November 25 and 26.

On November 24, 74 medical professionals from the Tzu Chi International Medical Association and 57 support volunteers held a free clinic at Prawatasari Park in Cianjur. They were aided by a medical team from Indonesia's Ministry of Defense. A total of 877 people benefited from the free clinic. Some patients had sustained injuries during the quake, while others were seeking relief from coughs or colds.

Endang was one of the people seeking help at the free clinic. When the quake hit, he was buried under the debris of a building. He eventually man-

aged to get himself out, but because he was covered all over with blood, everyone was scared at the sight of him. Fortunately, a man was brave enough to take him to a local health center for treatment. Due to his serious injuries, he was transferred to a hospital, where he had his injuries cleaned and dressed.

When Endang came to the November 24 free clinic, a doctor checked and dressed his lesions, instructed him to protect them from water, and gave him some vitamins. He also received a five-kilogram (11-pound) bag of rice and ten face masks from Tzu Chi. He was one of 782 quake survivors who benefited from the distribution of rice and face masks. “Thank Allah,” said Endang.

“I have nothing now. I badly needed the help you gave me.”

In addition to distributing aid and providing free medical services, Tzu Chi volunteers also launched a hot meal service in the disaster area. By November 25, 980 hot meals had been provided.

Due to an unrelenting series of aftershocks, many survivors were still living in temporary shelters or tents the second week after the earthquake. The wide differences between daytime and nighttime temperatures caused many to contract colds or other diseases. Tzu Chi’s medical volunteers responded by holding more free clinics in the disaster area. On December 3 alone, they served 146 patients in Ciherang, Pacet, Cianjur.

Indonesia

In September 2022, Tzu Chi Indonesia drilled a well for a junior high school in Telawang, East Kotawaringin Regency, Central Kalimantan, solving a water shortage problem that had lasted for nearly 30 years.

SMPN 3 Kota Besi is a junior high school with 19 teachers and more than 200 students. The school had suffered from a lack of clean water due to its location on a plateau since its foundation in 1993.

“To meet our needs for water,” said school principal Alpen Yasko, “we collected rainwater for use during the rainy season. When the dry season arrived, we had no choice but to buy water, which, at 70,000 rupiah [US\$4.50] per tank, wasn’t cheap.

Even with those measures, we still ran short of water.” Water was in such short supply that students who lived near the school often had to go home when they needed to use the restroom.

Tzu Chi volunteers in Central Kalimantan visited the school when the problem was brought to their attention. After the visit, they decided to drill a well for the school. It turned out to be a difficult operation, because the school was located on an area with rocky soil, and also because it took some time to locate a water source. “We tried three spots before finally succeeding in finding a water source,” said volunteer Erwin Sitepu. “We hit it at a depth of 110 meters, and the water was very clean.”

An inauguration ceremony for the new well was held on September 27, 2022. Rusdianae, an official from the East Kotawaringin Regency education office, thanked Tzu Chi for helping the school solve a long-standing problem. “We’re deeply touched by the foundation’s assistance,” she said. “Drilling wells is very expensive. The water from the well will benefit not just the school but also local residents. Once again, we thank you.”

Meysia Safhanie, a student at the school, recited a poem entitled “Water,” which she had written to thank Tzu Chi: “Water, the mother of life, has finally descended on our school. We no longer have to worry about a lack of clean water.” Volunteers hope that the well will provide an endless supply of water for the school and local residents. “Thanks to the school for giving us this chance to give,” said volunteer Erwin Sitepu.



A volunteer cuts the ribbon during a ceremony to mark the inauguration of a water well drilled by Tzu Chi for SMPN 3 Kota Besi, a junior high school in Telawang, East Kotawaringin Regency, Indonesia.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI INDONESIA

Mozambique

After Hurricane Idai pummeled Mozambique in March 2019, Tzu Chi launched emergency relief work and followed up with mid- and long-term aid plans. The plans included building four villages with more than 3,000 housing units. Construction for the Ndeja Tzu Chi Great Love Village, in Tica, Nhamatanda District, Sofala Province, started in April 2022. Four hundred eighty houses were planned for the village, with 50 of them scheduled to be completed by the end of 2022. However, progress on the construction moved slower than expected. Mozambique had entered the rainy season by the time the first 12 houses were completed, so the foundation decided to let beneficiary families move into those houses first.

A handover ceremony for the 12 houses was held on December 7. To celebrate the happy occasion, volunteers prepared housewarming gifts for each family, which included two Tzu Chi blankets, two Tzu Chi folding beds, a folding table with attached seats, and cleaning utensils.

The houses built by Tzu Chi come in two sizes: 460 and 320 square feet, for larger and smaller families. Built of bricks and cement, each home is equipped with an outdoor toilet building and a 1,500-liter rainwater collection tank to save residents trips to fetch water.

Adamo Abdula Osumane, administrator of Nhamatanda District, and Dr. Joshua Pedro Mangué, chief of Tica village, attended the hand-

over ceremony to give their best wishes to the families. Osumane said that the selfless giving of Dharma Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi volunteers has taught everyone that love isn't just a word—it's something to put into action. He thanked the foundation for their humanitarian aid and encouraged the residents to cherish the blessings from Tzu Chi.

Upon entering her new house, Madofa Canivete said: "I'm very grateful. I'm asking God for at least ten more years of life so that I can enjoy the blessing I have received. I never imagined that I would live in such a beautiful house!"

Tzu Chi volunteer Dino Foi explained that those who received the new houses were people who were particularly hard pressed to get by. "We will try to finish the other houses as soon as we can so that everyone can move into their new homes as soon as possible."

Separately, another handover ceremony—for 17 houses in the Kura Tzu Chi Great Love Village in the village of Nhamatanda, Nhamatanda District—was held on December 12, enabling an additional 17 families to greet the new year in the comfort of their new homes.

A handover ceremony for 12 houses Tzu Chi built for victims of Hurricane Idai in Mozambique was held on December 7, 2022. The picture shows volunteers moving housewarming gifts from Tzu Chi into one of the new homes.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI MOZAMBIQUE





Pakistan

Pakistan was hit by severe flooding in 2022, from June to October. Over a thousand people were killed and millions of others left homeless. The nation declared a state of emergency and appealed for international help in late August.

Tzu Chi has no branch offices in Pakistan. After learning about this catastrophic disaster, the foundation contacted other organizations with which they could cooperate to allow aid from Tzu Chi to reach people affected by the floods. Tzu Chi worked with six organizations to deliver their aid: Camillian Disaster Service International, Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World), the We Care Foundation, Islamic Relief, Shirkat Gah-Women's Resource Centre, and the Al-Madinah Islamic Research Center. Tzu Chi provided dozens of kinds of mediations, more than 30,000 blankets made from recycled plastic bottles, a variety of food, and hygiene items to be distributed to flood victims or used in medical events.

The We Care Foundation had worked with Tzu Chi when Pakistan was devastated by another flood disaster in 2010. After receiving Tzu Chi's aid items for the 2022 flooding, We Care completed 12 distributions in two weeks. "We haven't received

The We Care Foundation helped distribute relief supplies from Tzu Chi to flood victims in Thatta, Sindh, Pakistan, in late October 2022.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI FOUNDATION

any aid from the government or other sources yet," said a flood victim in the province of Sindh. "You are the first organizations to reach out to us." He thanked Tzu Chi and We Care for their timely help.

Another partner organization, Shirkat Gah, is a women's rights organization in Pakistan. Volunteers from Shirkat Gah visited many villages in the province of Balochistan and other areas to assess damage and distribute aid. Many women were touched by the help given by the organization and Tzu Chi. They said that people from other organizations had visited their areas, but that they hadn't received any assistance from them yet. Tzu Chi and Shirkat Gah were the very first to help them.

Tzu Chi's aid packages contained food, such as flour, rice, chickpeas, and sugar, as well as water purification pills, mosquito repellent, and other items. The foundation planned to aid about 30,000 affected families.

Taiwan

On November 19 and 20, 2022, members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) held free dental clinics at three institutions in Taitung, serving needy seniors, patients in vegetative states, and people with physical or mental disabilities. The three venues were the Taitung Ren'ai Senior Citizens' Home, the Shenxiu Nursing Center (affiliated with the Malan Veterans Home), and a care facility run by the Genesis Social Welfare Foundation (GSWF).

TIMA volunteers had been providing free dental treatment at the three institutions twice a year, but those services were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The events in November marked the first time in more than two years that TIMA had been able to help residents at the institutions with their teeth.

Early on the morning of November 19, 160 medical professionals and support volunteers set out from across Taiwan. They converged at the Taitung Tzu Chi office later in the day, then broke into two teams, one going to the Taitung Ren'ai Senior Citizens' Home and the other to the GSWF nursing facility.

The Taitung Ren'ai Senior Citizens' Home is a facility for low-income or disabled elderly people. A group of social workers was already waiting at its entrance for the visitors when the vehicles carrying one of the medical teams arrived. Before

welcoming the team into the institution, the social workers took the volunteers' temperatures and sanitized their hands with disinfectant alcohol as precautions against COVID.

Wu Shu-ping (吳叔平), who leads the team of social workers at the senior citizens' home, first thanked Tzu Chi for providing personal protective equipment and Jing Si Herbal Tea to their facility during the pandemic to help the staff and residents there fight COVID. (Jing Si Herbal Tea is a health drink developed in response to the coronavirus and contains an effective mixture of herbal medicines.) He also thanked TIMA for reinstating the dental service as soon as the pandemic situation allowed.

This was the first time dentist Li Jin-xun (李勁勳) had participated in the twice-a-year dental event at the senior citizens' home. He said he realized how much their service was needed there: "I cleaned eight people's teeth today, and each of them had very bad plaque buildup. I'm thankful to Tzu Chi for this opportunity to serve. It allowed us to understand that many people really need our help."

Dentist Zhou Yan (周研) was also a first timer. His back began to ache during the event because the equipment being used wasn't as adequate as that typically used in a hospital or a regular clinic. "Despite my physical fatigue," he said, "I felt an inner joy for being able to help."

The team that went to the GSWF nursing facility was likewise happy to help the residents there. The GSWF is mainly dedicated to the care of people in persistent vegetative states. Its operation relies mostly on donations from the public. TIMA volunteer Dr. Xie Jin-long (謝金龍) said: "When the head of the nursing facility saw us, she said in tears, 'Thank you for still remembering us after all this time.'" The dentist was touched to be able to help the facility care for their residents.

Another free clinic was held at the Shenxiu Nursing Center the next day. The events over the two days benefited more than 300 people.



TIMA dentist Su Guo-you (蘇國祐) treats a patient at a free clinic at the Taitung Ren'ai Senior Citizens' Home in Taitung, southeastern Taiwan.

LIN JIA-RU

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*When we experience friction with others, we should
thank them for tempering our spirit and allowing it to
shine.*

—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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