

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

The Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes
Tzu Chi Rushes in Love and Aid





Tzu Chi volunteers and members of the public in Taiwan sort and pack donated items for quake victims in Türkiye at the Tzu Chi Neihu office in Taipei, northern Taiwan.

HSIAO YIU-HWA

Create More Blessings Every Day

Translated by Teresa Chang

Life is truly impermanent. Joy can turn to sorrow in an instant when loved ones are separated forever. Early on the morning of February 6, a devastating earthquake hit southern Türkiye and neighboring Syria, killing more than 40,000 people and toppling or severely damaging over 340,000 buildings. In a matter of seconds, everything changed. People might have been sleeping soundly or having sweet dreams before the quake. They might have had great plans for the future and were looking forward to waking to another new day. But all that was not meant to be. Their dreams and hopes evaporated when the tremor struck; everything they had was gone with them. Many of those who survived had to face the heartrending reality of losing their loved ones to the disaster, their hearts broken to pieces as they realized their loved ones had been snatched from this life so suddenly.

The weather in the disaster area was freezing. Our foundation quickly responded by donating Tzu Chi eco-blankets to help. Climate change has made some cold places in the world even colder. That's why I started asking last year to have our blankets made thicker. More than 8,000 such extra-thick blankets have already been flown from Taiwan to Türkiye since the quake. I'm very grateful to our volunteers for their help. Our eco-blankets couldn't have been produced without the combined efforts of many people. First, our volunteers have to collect and properly sort PET bottles to be made into fabric. After the fabric is produced, volunteers cut it to size, hem the edges, and pack the final products. With everyone's help, we can quickly prepare shipments to help out whenever a disaster or other occasions arise in which our blankets are needed.

The Turkish Trade Office in Taipei appealed to people in Taiwan for in-kind donations for quake survivors after the tremor. At the request of the trade office, we provided our Neihu office in Taipei to be used as a center to receive the donations. Donated items flooded in as soon as the donation appeal was made—there was such an outpouring of love. Our volunteers worked with members of the public to sort and pack the goods. Culinary volunteers in northern Taiwan were also mobilized to prepare boxed meals every day for the thousands of people

participating in the sorting and packing work.

A Tzu Chi relief delegation from Taiwan has arrived in Türkiye. The team is carrying out emergency relief and assessing how Tzu Chi can help in the mid- and long-term reconstruction efforts. Our local volunteers in Türkiye are also working to help survivors. I implore everyone to put their support behind our relief work in Türkiye. Let us all contribute what we can and pave the path to recovery with Great Love.

Not a day goes by that I am not concerned about the world. I am concerned about people living in poverty, about our world being plagued by disasters, about the impurities afflicting people's minds. I ponder every day how to bring peace to the world. Just as we can create bad karma with unwholesome actions, we can sow blessings with positive actions too. Instead of negatively impacting the world, let us create blessings for the world by doing our best to do good. Allow your love to grow every day. Tell yourself: "I did something good today. I will do more tomorrow." We can, for example, save our spare change every day to help the needy. It will not be much money on a daily basis, so it will not affect our livelihoods, but as it accumulates over time, it will grow to be significant enough to help tide people over in an emergency. When more people in this world are willing to give, we'll be able to create more blessings. All the blessings combined will bring peace to the world.

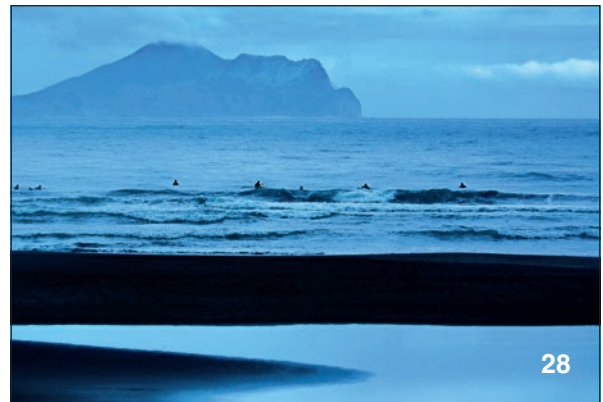
I often suggest that people take stock of their lives to see how much good they have done to the world. I also encourage everyone to reflect on themselves to see if they are giving rise to more unwholesome thoughts than wholesome ones every day. A negative thought is like a drop of ink that can blacken a dish of clean water in no time. In the tug-of-war between good and evil, we must stay watchful and let good triumph.

The land is fragile and the world is impermanent. A disaster can strike at any time. Let us stay vigilant at all times, seize every chance to do good, and never hesitate to respond to people's cries for help. I also encourage you to invite more people to come together to benefit the world. We can only do so much when we work alone but can bring relief to many more suffering minds and lives when we work together. ❁

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

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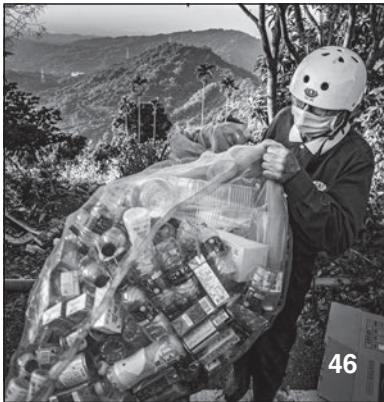
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Taiwan, just in time for Chinese New Year. Recipients were overjoyed to start the new year with new homes.

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

ON THE COVER Tzu Chi purchased 10,000 blankets in Istanbul after the Türkiye-Syria quakes for distribution to quake victims. When one of the shipments arrived at El Menahil International School, all the male teaching and administrative staff turned out to unload the goods.
Photo by Mohammed Nimr AlJamal

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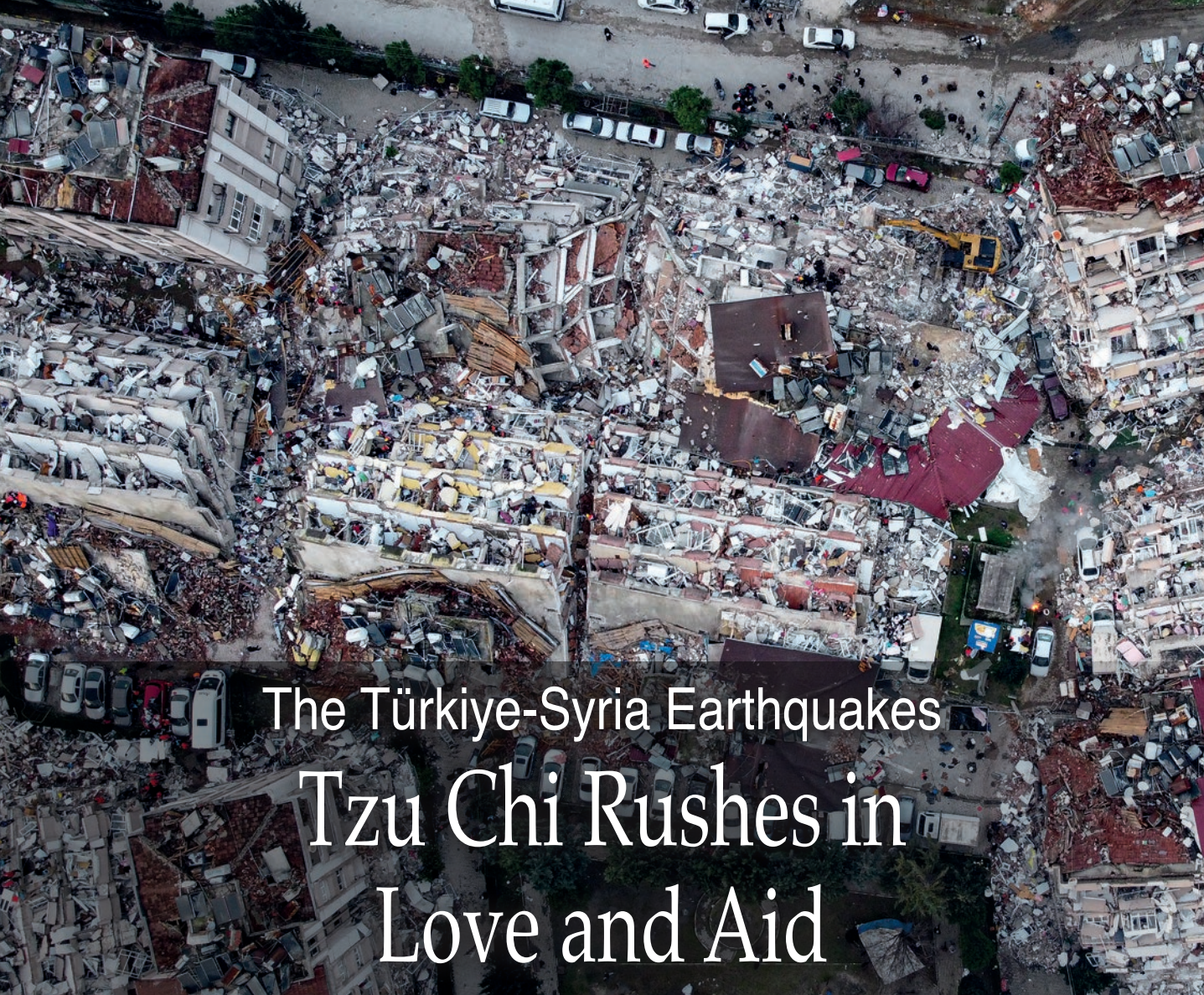
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The Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes Tzu Chi Rushes in Love and Aid

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Information provided by Ning Rong

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The recent Türkiye-Syria earthquakes resulted in staggering destruction and loss of life, shocking the world. Tzu Chi is bringing warmth and love to survivors to help them through the harshest winter of their lives.

People in Türkiye (formerly Turkey) are no strangers to earthquakes, but the scale of the one that occurred on February 6 was worse than anyone could have anticipated.

On that fateful day, a few foreshocks shook southern Türkiye sometime before daybreak. Kurdi, a resident of Hatay, the southernmost

province of the nation, didn't think much of them at first. But then he heard a loud rumbling sound from the earth, followed by violent shaking and then a blackout. "My children were all screaming," said Kurdi. "My youngest son fell on me and became completely silent."

Using all his strength, Kurdi pulled his four-



A bird's eye view of a central area in Hatay Province, southern Türkiye, after the quakes. Almost all the local buildings have collapsed. COURTESY OF TPG IMAGES

year-old son out from under a collapsed closet. Then they and the rest of their family hurried downstairs in the darkness. When they had escaped to safety outside, they turned and saw the six-story building in which they had lived collapse in front of their eyes, one floor after another. “The violence of the shaking this time blew my mind,” Kurdi recalled. “You had only a few short minutes to respond.”

Outside, it was very cold and raining. Kurdi waited until it was light, then began quickly working with his neighbors to rescue survivors from under the rubble. “Over the next three days, there were people calling for help from under top-

pled buildings on every street. But I had only a hammer. When I had managed to get one person out, more asked for help from me. Some refused to be saved because their family members had been killed.”

Some time later, Kurdi and his family went to Istanbul to live temporarily with relatives. During the 1,100-kilometer (685-mile) journey there, they didn't eat or drink anything. The meal they had at El Menahil International School, where Kurdi's brother worked, was their first meal in three days.

Kurdi's face had been injured, having been hit hard by a falling object during the quake. His clothes were covered in dust, and his hands, soiled and swollen, trembled every now and then. He was agitated and emotional whenever he recalled rescuing people in the aftermath of the quake.

A perfect storm

The magnitude 7.8 earthquake rocked Gaziantep Province, in south-central Türkiye, at 4:17 a.m. local time on February 6. A large number of residential buildings were reduced to rubble while people slept soundly. Nine hours later, another strong quake, this one with a magnitude of 7.5, hit Kahramanmaraş Province, to the north of Gaziantep. The result was more damage, death, and injury.

The severity of the devastation was caused by a perfect storm of factors: the large magnitude of the quakes, buildings not built to withstand severe earthquakes, and a bitter cold front that dropped the temperatures to lower than -10°C (14°F) the day after the quakes. The combination of these resulted in more than 40,000 people killed, 100,000 injured, and over ten million affected in Türkiye alone.

Türkiye, which encompasses the junction of three tectonic plates, is prone to earthquakes. In 1999, for example, the country was struck by two earthquakes with a magnitude greater than seven. But the strong tremors that had hit the nation had for decades been concentrated in the east and northwest; the south hadn't been hit by a major quake in over a century. The capability of local buildings, both old and new, to resist a quake had never been tested.

The two powerful earthquakes and a series of aftershocks wrecked a huge area in 11 southern provinces in Türkiye. The disaster zone was three times as large as Taiwan. Some regions in northern Syria, located to the south of Türkiye, also suffered severe damage.



Northern Syria has long been under the control of resistance forces; armed conflicts have been going on there since the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011. Almost all of the buildings that had not been destroyed in the war had sustained some sort of damage from artillery and mortar shelling, which made them even less capable of withstanding a major earthquake. It's sad to think of the Syrian people, who have already suffered a lot from the war, to be hit by even more tragedy.

Rushing in blankets

The devastation caused by the earthquakes shocked the world. More than 60 countries sent in rescue teams to help save lives. Taiwan's National Fire Agency, for example, dispatched 130 rescuers in two groups to Türkiye. The first group arrived in Adiyaman Province, a hard-hit area, on February 8. Volunteers from the International Headquarters S.A.R., Taiwan, a non-governmental organization, also flew to Türkiye to aid in the search and rescue efforts.

The Tzu Chi Foundation, based in Taiwan, responded quickly too. While preparing to dispatch a delegation to Türkiye to assess damage

Tzu Chi volunteers assessing damage in Hatay Province greet quake survivors who had returned to their collapsed homes to salvage belongings.

YU ZI-CHENG

and carry out relief work, the foundation launched a fundraiser and initiated other aid work in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

"The disaster area is huge," said Yen Po-wen (顏博文), CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission. "But wherever we want to go [within the disaster area], we are required to work with the Turkish government or the organizations they have authorized to coordinate the relief work." The CEO said that the Turkish government allowed only rescue workers and media personnel to enter the disaster areas immediately after the quake; all donations of relief supplies, on the other hand, were required to be referred to Türkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency for management and distribution. In other words, all aid from abroad, once it was transported into Türkiye, was to be handed over to the Turkish government for further allocation. Any distribution events would have to be supervised by government agencies as well.



- At 4:17 a.m. on February 6, a 7.8-magnitude shallow earthquake hit southern Türkiye, followed by another powerful earthquake—magnitude 7.5—at 1:24 that afternoon.
- More than 46,000 people were killed in Türkiye and Syria, and more than 100,000 people were injured. Over 345,000 buildings collapsed or were severely damaged.
- The disaster area was three times as large as Taiwan. The death toll was two times larger than that of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

Last updated: February 20, 2023

After the tremors, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of Türkiye, declared a state of emergency for the earthquake zone. The government tightly controlled everything, including the coming and going of people and goods related to disaster relief work. It was a real challenge to obtain tax-exemption on imported relief goods or get permission to collect, transport, and distribute relief goods on one's own. Even so, Tzu Chi personnel worked hard to negotiate with the Turkish government on these matters.

On February 8, Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, instructed the foundation's Neihu office in Taipei, northern Taiwan, to quickly prepare and pack more than 8,000 extra-thick Tzu Chi blankets (made from recycled plastic bottles) to be transported to Türkiye by air. Tzu Chi volunteers in northern Taiwan worked overnight and had all the blankets ready for shipping the very next day. The first batch of blankets were flown to Türkiye that very night.

"Standard-size Tzu Chi blankets are packed five to a bag and two bags to a box," explained volunteer Wu Yue-ying (吳月鶯). "The extra-thick blankets, on the other hand, are packed three to a

bag and two bags to a box." Wu added that the 8,000-plus extra-thick blankets weighed about the same as more than 13,000 standard-size blankets. Since the weather was cold in the disaster areas, the blankets would be very useful to survivors.

"Thanks to all Taiwanese people," said Muhammed Berdibek, Türkiye's representative to Taiwan. "Thanks for your generous support for Türkiye after the quake." Berdibek said those words in the donation ceremony for the 8,000-plus blankets, held at the Turkish Trade Office in Taipei. The representative also thanked Tzu Chi for their help. He said that when their trade office called for in-kind donations from Taiwanese people after the tremors and needed a place to receive and sort the donated goods, Tzu Chi donated blankets to them and provided its facility (the Tzu Chi Neihu office) to serve as a center to receive the goods donated by Taiwanese people. His gratitude for the foundation was obvious.

"The quakes wreaked such havoc that almost all houses in the disaster areas collapsed," said Ayse Ucar (耿慶芝), a staffer at the Turkish Trade Office in Taipei. "Survivors are sleeping outdoors and have no access to running water or electricity.

The Turkish government can't tend to the needs of so many people at the same time, so they appealed for aid from the outside world." Ucar added that Türkiye's diplomatic posts all over the world had started raising needed relief items for the quake victims in their country.

The Turkish Trade Office in Taipei solicited the donation of 17 kinds of necessities from Taiwanese people, including new or unused winter clothes, blankets, and sleeping bags. Donated items began flooding into Tzu Chi's Neihu office as soon as their donation request was sent out. Tzu Chi volunteers and many members of the public pitched in to sort and pack the goods. Working together, they sorted and packed more than 400 tons of goods.

Relief efforts in Türkiye

A Tzu Chi delegation from Taiwan arrived in Istanbul, in northwestern Türkiye, on the first Saturday after the quakes, February 11. After meeting with local volunteers, they started working to organize relief work for quake survivors.

The Tzu Chi team flew to Ankara, Türkiye's capital, on February 12 to meet with the nation's vice president, Fuat Oktay. This was via the introduction of Ali Uslanmaz, a former deputy governor of Kayseri Province. Tzu Chi finally obtained permission to enter areas hit hard by the quakes. Early on the morning of February 15, an advance Tzu Chi team set off from Istanbul, and after traveling for more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles), arrived in the hard-hit Hatay Province, which borders Syria.

The volunteers set up a disaster response center at a hotel owned by a friend of former deputy governor Ali Uslanmaz, then began visiting shelters for survivors. They also conferred with personnel from other relief organizations to explore possible partnerships.

"We also assessed damage in provinces near Hatay Province to evaluate whether to hold distributions there," said Simon Shyong (熊士民), deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission and a member of the Tzu Chi delegation from Taiwan. He said that their team's mission was to assess who should receive Tzu Chi's aid, how to get relief items into the disaster zone, and where to temporarily store those items. He explained that they would follow Tzu Chi's guiding principles for relief work and find locations in which Tzu Chi could personally distribute aid to survivors. "We'll also explore possibilities to help with the reconstruction work in the future."

Many survivors flooded into Istanbul after the quakes to seek help from or live temporarily with their relatives. Tzu Chi Türkiye mobilized volunteers to visit this group of people and compile recipient rosters for distributions. Aid was subsequently distributed from February 17 to 19 to 1,044 families. The items given out included blankets, scarves, and gift cards.

"Their houses had collapsed in the earthquakes," said Faisal Hu (胡光中), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Türkiye, referring to the aid recipients. "Left with nothing, they had no choice but to come to Istanbul to seek help from their friends or relatives. Our aid can help tide them over a difficult time." Hu said that Tzu Chi Türkiye mobilized nearly 300 Syrian refugee volunteers to make home visits. From the visits, the volunteers learned that what was most needed by the survivors was items that could protect them from the cold. Volunteers therefore quickly set to work purchasing blankets for distribution.

Twenty-four years ago, in 1999, a strong earthquake hit Türkiye on August 17. Tzu Chi had at the time purchased blankets at a discounted price from a local manufacturer for distribution to quake survivors. Volunteers were happy to learn that the manufacturer was still in business after all these years. Even better, the manufacturer agreed to sell blankets to Tzu Chi for a reduced price again. They also agreed to rush to get the order out.

On the eve of the distributions, the first shipment of blankets—more than 2,600—arrived at El Menahil International School by truck. All the male teaching and administrative staff at the school turned out to unload the goods. They finished unloading and moving all the blankets into a storage space in just half an hour. The first man to climb onto the truck for the unloading had been Cuma Serya, the principal of the school. "Every one of us feels that those who can help others are the happiest," the principal said. "We had a great time unloading the blankets. We hope to share with everyone the joy we feel."

Whether it is extending care to quake survivors who are staying in Istanbul or providing emergency aid in the disaster zone, a lot of relief supplies and manpower are needed. Fortunately, because Tzu Chi established El Menahil International School for Syrian refugee children and has also for years been helping refugee families, the foundation has developed a strong team which can be tapped when help is needed to carry out work in response to a disaster or other emergency events. In addition, many graduates of the



A Syrian refugee volunteering in a Tzu Chi distribution for quake survivors hugs an aid recipient (above). Students at El Menahil International School created pictures to convey their best wishes for survivors. They also donated money to help with Tzu Chi's relief efforts.

TOP PHOTO BY MOHAMMED NIMR ALJAMAL; BOTTOM PHOTO BY MUSTAFA HAMWIEH



school, now in college, are willing and capable of assisting Tzu Chi with its disaster relief work.

“The volunteers we need will have to be able to speak Turkish, Arabic, and English,” said volunteer Hu. He explained that the Syrian young people from whom they are planning to enlist as volunteers are 11th and 12th graders at the school and graduates that are attending college. They will provide help, such as interpreting for Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan visiting Türkiye for the quake relief work. “I’ve asked the school to collect information on the following: what students have special talents; their majors in which university; what languages they can speak; the dates on which they will be free to volunteer, etc. We’ll build a database with this information to facilitate our future work.”

Hu added that the school’s staffers he had talked to had told him that whether Tzu Chi needed a hundred people or even 300, there would be no problems. They said they could quickly organize a big enough team of volunteers for Tzu Chi. “I believe they can,” Hu said with confidence.

Aside from the disaster areas in southern

Tzu Chi purchased 10,000 blankets in Istanbul for distribution to quake victims. When one of the shipments arrived at El Menahil International School, male teaching and administrative staff gathered to unload the blankets.

MOHAMMED NIMR ALJAMAL

Türkiye, Tzu Chi has also launched work to help survivors in northern Syria. Chen Chiou Hwa (陳秋華), a volunteer in Jordan, said that Tzu Chi Jordan had prepared over 10,000 jackets, pairs of shoes, hats, and gloves for affected Syrians. There were, additionally, Taiwanese businesspeople who had said they’d donate winter clothing to help. If things went as expected, the United Nations would help transport Tzu Chi’s aid supplies from northern Jordan into southern Syria and deliver them across areas controlled by the Syrian government into the disaster zone in the north, controlled by resistance forces.

For the quake survivors, the path to recovery won’t be easy, but hopefully, love from across the globe will help them get back on their feet. ☪

Tzu Chi in Action for the Türkiye-Syria Quakes

Feb. 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two powerful quakes shook southern Türkiye and northern Syria. Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, quickly initiated humanitarian aid operations and set up a response center.
Feb. 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tzu Chi started a global fundraiser to help with quake relief work. By mid-February, Tzu Chi volunteers in 45 countries and areas had joined in the effort.
Feb. 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tzu Chi donated 8,148 extra-thick blankets to the Turkish Trade Office in Taipei. The blankets were subsequently flown to Türkiye in three shipments, with the last shipment arriving on Feb. 12.
Feb. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the request of the Turkish Trade Office, Tzu Chi opened its Neihu office as a center to receive Taiwanese people's in-kind donations for quake victims. Tzu Chi volunteers and members of the public pitched in to sort and pack the donated goods. The work was finished on Feb. 20. Volunteers had worked 11,196 shifts. Over 34,000 boxes were prepared, containing 401,545 kg of relief goods.
Feb. 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Tzu Chi relief delegation set off from Taiwan to Türkiye. Tzu Chi volunteers in Istanbul purchased 133 blankets for delivery to Adiyaman Province for Taiwan's rescue team to use in the disaster zone.
Feb. 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tzu Chi representatives met with Türkiye's vice president, Fuat Oktay, in Ankara.
Feb. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Türkiye's presidential office agreed to Tzu Chi's proposals to import blankets and hold distributions. Foundation volunteers were also allowed to enter the disaster zone to carry out relief work.
Feb. 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An advance Tzu Chi team arrived in Hatay Province and set up a response center.
Feb. 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team assessed damage in the provinces of Osmaniye and Gaziantep.
Feb. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tzu Chi held the first distribution after the quakes. For three consecutive days, volunteers distributed gift cards, blankets, and scarves to survivors who had arrived in Istanbul to seek help from their relatives. Seven distributions were held over the three days, benefiting 1,044 families. The Tzu Chi advance team continued to assess damage in Hatay Province, and visited the Taiwan-Reyhanli Center for World Citizens in Reyhanli. The center was serving as a shelter for quake victims after the tremors.
Feb. 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The advance team met with Gaziantep's deputy governor to discuss the foundation's relief plans.
Feb. 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Indonesian government flew relief goods to the disaster areas in Türkiye and Syria. The goods included 30 power generators and 4,800 blankets donated by Tzu Chi Indonesia.

Information provided by Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien



Wiping Away Their Tears

Medical Aid for Syrian Refugee Children

By Su Fang-pei

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos edited by Yan Lin-zhao

Adeebah Adnan Hilal, a Syrian refugee child who drew the picture on the right, said that the red tears are shed for Syria, and the red hearts stand for the love of Tzu Chi Jordan. Over the last 11 years, the Tzu Chi branch has helped over a thousand Syrian children in Jordan receive medical treatment.



أديبة عن نيات هلال

من يشعر بالهم ليس كما يشعر
بالسعادة ولدت اليوم أنا سعيبة
وأشكر كل من يريد أن يجلب السعادة
لنا

I Love you

Laiwand

سوريا



Jordan, officially the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is located in the Middle East. Covering an area of 89,342 square kilometers (34,495 square miles), it is just a little larger than Austria. Bound by Syria to the north, the country is currently hosting 870,000 registered Syrian refugees. If unregistered refugees are also taken into account, the actual number is estimated to surpass 1.3 million. Some of the refugees live in camps established jointly by the United Nations and the Jordanian government; others are scattered in tented settlements in the deserts or in dark corners across urban areas.

These Syrians crossed their southern border into Jordan to escape from the civil war in their country. Entire families were uprooted, seeking a chance to survive. Sadly, many were killed before they could make it to safety. Some of those who were lucky enough to cross into Jordan are now living with the heartrending memories of seeing their own family members cruelly killed. Even without such trauma, life as a refugee in a foreign land is rarely easy. One of the issues is medical care. In the Arabian world, large families are favored. While many Syrians chose to flee their home country for the sake of their children, they are often helpless when their young ones fall ill in a country not their own.


Most of Jordan is desert. The country relies heavily on imported goods. Living expenses, including food, clothing, housing, and transporta-

tion, are relatively high. This is so for a regular Jordanian citizen, let alone for a refugee for whom landing a job that pays enough is a challenge—even if he or she is well equipped with marketable skills. Thus, if refugees or their family members become sick, and if the treatment involves major surgery, paying the medical bill can become a serious burden.

The Syrian civil war erupted in the spring of 2011. In the winter of the same year, Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan started reaching out to Syrians who had fled to their country. “In 2013, after overcoming a lot of difficulties, we began helping Syrian refugees obtain medical treatment,” said Chen Chiou Hwa (陳秋華), the head of Tzu Chi Jordan, as he recalled the branch’s first medical cases involving Syrian refugees. “We helped a refugee undergo cataract surgery, and another to be operated on for a corneal condition.”

In November 2014, the United Nations stopped assisting refugee camp residents with their surgical needs, forcing those with such needs to find help themselves—from charitable organizations or other sources. Many people have turned to Tzu Chi for help.

With the help of Dr. Mohanad Salahi, a Syrian physician, Tzu Chi Jordan joined hands with Arabian Medical Relief Hospital in the Zaatari refugee camp to provide medical aid to refugee children. Since they started, they have helped over a thousand children with conditions ranging



To this day, 80,000 Syrian refugees still live in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. There are doctors in the camp for residents, but no surgical services. There is also no financial aid for refugees who need medical treatment.

LAMIYA LIN

from imperforate anuses (a birth defect in which there is no opening where the anus should be) and tonsillitis to hernia and other conditions.

Chen Chiou Hwa vividly remembers the helplessness of some parents whose children had imperforate anuses. Unable to defecate, the little ones' abdomens were swollen. Their parents took them, extremely weakened, to the doctor for treatment, but they were either turned away due to the seriousness of their children's conditions, or had no choice but to give up treatment midway because they couldn't pay the medical bill. Dr. Salahi helped Tzu Chi evaluate the conditions of the young patients, then sent them to hospitals outside a refugee camp for surgery.

"Other international NGOs pick up only part of the tab when it comes to helping refugees obtain treatment," Chen explained, "and the refugees need to go to the organizations themselves to receive the financial aid. Tzu Chi, on the other hand, pays in full, and our volunteers personally deliver the financial aid to the refugees." The head of Tzu Chi Jordan said that at first some refugees were wary of the foundation and suspected that they might have ulterior motives in helping them, but after 11 years of consistent, unconditional giving, Tzu Chi now has the full trust of refugees.

In addition to financing medical treatments, Tzu Chi conducts free clinics and provides daily necessities for refugees, whether they are living in a camp or not. There are now 287 families receiv-

ing long-term care. The foundation even continued their services for people with medical needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the last two years, they have facilitated more than 400 surgeries and helped more than 2,000 people be checked by the doctor or obtain medications.

Tzu Chi also addresses the educational needs of refugee children. For example, volunteers initiated a work relief program in a tented settlement in the village of Huweyja, near the Zaatari refugee camp, in which some refugees live. Tzu Chi's program pays refugee teachers to give lessons to children in the settlement. Tzu Xin House, a shelter for refugee mothers and children, is another place Tzu Chi has reached out to help. For over seven years now, Tzu Chi has provided tuition aid for the children there, in addition to helping the shelter pay its rent. The care volunteers have extended to the shelter—they tried every means even during lockdowns to deliver necessities to the shelter—moved refugee mothers there so much that they began volunteering for Tzu Chi.

The sadness that comes from being forced from their homes and enduring a lack of medical resources have persisted for the refugees. As long as their sorrow and difficult situations persist, Tzu Chi will be there for them. May all dark corners in the world be illuminated by light. May all the tears that refugees shed in their helpless situations turn into blessings and help refugee children in the deserts grow up in peace and safety. ❁



Preventing a Lost Generation

By Su Fang-pei

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

A group of Syrian doctors has been working with Tzu Chi Jordan to tend to the health of their fellow Syrians, especially that of the younger generation.

Near the end of 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stopped helping refugee camp residents in Jordan with their surgical needs. As a result, many refugees turned to Tzu Chi for assistance. In 2015, a group of Syrian physicians was invited by Tzu Chi to attend a meeting in Akilah Hospital in Amman, the capital of Jordan.

During the meeting, Dr. Abdul Hakim Khader, a Syrian otolaryngologist, looked with mistrust at Chen Chiou Hwa, the head of Tzu Chi Jordan. The physician had come to the meeting at Chen's invitation, but he couldn't believe that a charity organization based as far away as Taiwan was interested in reaching out to his fellow Syrians. His experience escaping from Syria to Jordan more than a year before only added to his wariness: even though he had managed to find a job at a hospital in Jordan, he was cheated out of a month's pay. Given such experiences, working in a country not his own and having to fend for his family, it is understandable that he was guarded and vigilant.

Chen shared with the doctors at the meeting how he had been carrying out charitable and humanitarian aid in Jordan on behalf of the Tzu Chi Foundation for many years. He had witnessed the plight of Syrian refugees in the country, some of whom were plagued by both poverty and illness. He invited the physicians in attendance to work with Tzu Chi Jordan to help their fellow compatriots.

Though they still harbored some suspicion, the goodwill and kindness demonstrated by Chen touched the Syrian doctors. Still a bit skeptical, Dr. Ahmad Majid, a cardiac surgeon in attendance at the meeting, started taking part in free medical clinics organized by Tzu Chi. He also joined Tzu

Chi volunteers in their monthly visits to Tzu Xin House, a shelter for refugee mothers and children. Once he got to know Chen and observe him, he found himself completely won over. To help Tzu Chi help his countrymen, he even negotiated with Al Bayader Hospital, which was working with Tzu Chi to provide treatment to Syrian refugees, to get preferential prices for the foundation.

Syrian refugees in Jordan need to pay for their doctor visits and have no choice but to pay whatever fees a hospital or clinic charges. One time, a Syrian refugee required a stent in his heart to deal with a heart problem, so Tzu Chi sought out Dr. Majid to perform the procedure. After the surgery, Dr. Majid told Chen that instead of a stent implantation, he had found that a balloon angioplasty procedure would work just as well for the patient, so that's what he had done for him. A stent would have cost 2,500 Jordanian dinar (US\$3,525), but the balloon angioplasty procedure ran only 400 Jordanian dinar (US\$565). Chen was very surprised when he heard what Dr. Majid had done. Originally from Taiwan, Chen had lived in Jordan for more than 40 years. In that time he had met many doctors, and he knew how some of them wouldn't miss a single chance to make money. "I was impressed and deeply touched by Dr. Majid's compassion," said Chen.

In his capacity as a physician, Majid does what he can to save money for his fellow Syrians. When they go to him for treatment, he charges them less to reduce their financial burdens. He charges less from Tzu Chi, too, so the foundation can help more people.

Tzu Chi Jordan has paid for the medical treatment for refugees from all sorts of backgrounds and circumstances. They included those who had sought help at a Tzu Chi free clinic and were



found to be requiring further medical care, and ranged from children suffering from hernias to older people needing dentures. In the early days, Tzu Chi would refer its medical cases to the hospitals in partnership with the foundation. But in recent years, it has shifted to entrusting patients to Syrian doctors working on a long-term basis with the foundation. When a patient needs surgery, the Syrian doctor Tzu Chi has turned to rents an operating room from the hospital he works at to operate on the patient. Tzu Chi then pays the doctor for his service. This helps ensure that these Syrian physicians have better incomes.

Tzu Chi Jordan now has a strong team of Syrian doctors working with them, their specialties covering a wide spectrum of medical fields. Dr. Khader, who had doubts about Chen seven years ago, is now a regular at Tzu Chi free clinics and distributions. He has been moved by how

Tzu Chi volunteers give with sincerity, integrity, faith, and honesty. He knows that no matter how hard they work, it is impossible for them to reach every Syrian refugee, but the aid Tzu Chi has provided to his fellow compatriots—whether it be via subsidizing educational fees, distributing daily necessities, or conducting free clinics—has changed the future of many families. “What Syrian children in Jordan need help with the most is education, food, and medical care,” said Dr. Khader. “We must work to prevent a lost generation for Syria.”

Dr. Abdul Hakim Khader, a Syrian physician, sees a child patient at a free clinic held by Tzu Chi Jordan in the village of Huweyja, Mafraq. The child was from the Zaatari refugee camp.

LAI HUA-XIU



Preventing a Lost Generation

Saving My Left Forearm

In November 2021, Tzu Chi Jordan held a routine free clinic in the village of Huweyja, Mafraq. During the event, Dr. Hamzawi, an orthopedist and volunteer physician for UNHCR, examined Yousef Samara, a Syrian teenager. The muscles in Yousef's left forearm were seriously atrophied. He couldn't even move his fingers.

Yousef was from the Zaatari refugee camp. He had suffered a fall in 2020, fracturing the ulna bone in his left forearm. Medical resources at the camp were inadequate, suitable only for treating minor ailments, such as a cold. Yousef needed much more extensive medical treatment, for which he needed to leave the camp. To do so, he had to line up to get a spot in the daily quota of 500 people. It wasn't until January 2021 that Yousef was able to leave the camp for an X-ray, which showed that he would need surgery to fix his bone fracture.

Residents at the camp couldn't work, relying instead on food stamps distributed by UNHCR—at a value of 20 dinar (US\$28) per person per month—to get by. Though worried for her son, Yousef's mother was helpless. How could they afford the surgery?

By the time Dr. Hamzawi met him at the Tzu Chi free clinic, more than a year had passed since Yousef's injury. He had by that time almost completely lost the ability to move his left forearm and hand. When the doctor discovered how stiff and atrophied his forearm and hand were, he asked Dr. Feras Ibrahim, a pediatric orthopedist, to check on him. Ibrahim ascertained that Yousef's left ulna had suffered a break near his wrist, and determined that a bone transplant operation was in order.

Tzu Chi helped Yousef pay for the required

medical treatment. Dr. Ibrahim performed the surgery for him. The physician took a small segment of bone from Yousef's pelvis, some tendon from his calf, and a small patch of skin from his abdomen to fix the injury. The doctor hoped to help the youngster regain at least 70 percent of the function of his forearm, wrist, and hand. The surgery took six hours to complete. Yousef was discharged from the hospital in March 2022. He returned from Amman to his refugee camp with bountiful blessings from Tzu Chi volunteers.

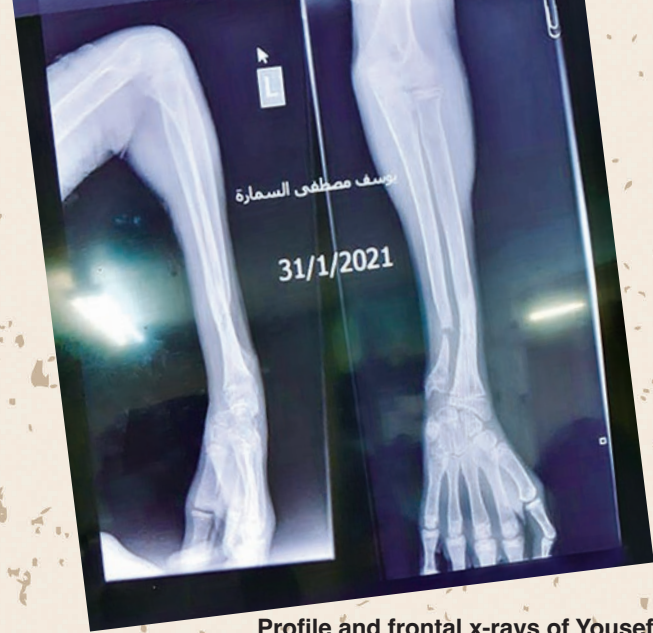
Two weeks after the operation, Yousef went back to the hospital in Amman for a follow-up checkup. Dr. Ibrahim removed the cast from Yousef's arm and took another X-ray. He was very pleased to see that the bone was healing well. Yousef exclaimed in disbelief, "I can move my fingers now!"

Dr. Ibrahim couldn't be happier. He said to Yousef, "You're recovering far better than expected. Your arm and hand might regain 90 percent of their function." The doctor put Yousef's arm back in a cast and, like a loving father, demonstrated to him how to do rehabilitation exercises to help his arm, wrist, and hand get back in shape. He asked Yousef's mother to bring him back a month later for another checkup.

"I've disliked going to school for two years now," said Yousef, "because my classmates would laugh at me for my arm. I always kept it hidden in my clothes. Now I no longer have to hide it. Thank you, Tzu Chi!"

Yousef will always remember that the freedom that comes from being able to freely use his left hand again is a result of Dr. Ibrahim and Tzu Chi. He will forever be grateful for their dedication and compassionate work. ❦

قرامس لا فسوي



Profile and frontal x-rays of Yousef's left arm. The fracture in his ulna bone can be seen in the frontal view.

LAMIYA LIN



Yousef's left arm and hand are stiff and atrophied due to delayed treatment for his broken ulna.

LAMIYA LIN



Dr. Ferās Ibrahim examines Yousef during a post-surgery checkup.

ASMAA AKHRAS

Yousef Samara

Age: 16

Condition: fracture in left ulna

Treatment: bone and tendon reconstruction

Result: 90 percent of the original function regained

Preventing a Lost Generation

I Want to Grow Tall

Tzu Chi Jordan logs thousands of instances of medical aid every year, helping people receive medical examinations, obtain medications, or undergo surgery. The Tzu Chi branch provides as much aid as they can using local medical resources, but occasionally seeks assistance from outside of Jordan to help patients continue their treatment.

Lujin Omar Shshadeh is a girl who escaped from Syria to Jordan with her siblings and her mother, Manar Mariri. They moved in with relatives in Jordan. By the age of six, she was only a hundred centimeters (3'3") tall, much shorter than other children her age. To determine the reason why, her mother took her to the hospital for an examination. Lujin was diagnosed with a growth hormone deficiency.

Manar was deeply worried following the diagnosis. The hormone injections used to treat a condition like her daughter's were costly—so costly she couldn't possibly afford them. Adding insult to injury, her husband had died that year in Syria. She was grief-stricken, having lost her loved one, but couldn't return to Syria. Nor could she return to her home country, Kuwait. She was trapped in Jordan.

Though Lujin was already six, her epiphyseal plates, also known as the growth plates (zones of cartilage in children at each end of their long bones), were about the same as a two-year-old's. She was severely lacking in growth hormone. It was essential to take advantage of the time window when she was still growing to have her condition treated.

"A dentist told me that a 'Mr. Chen' from Taiwan wanted to learn more about Lujin's condition," Manar recalled. "Later, he came to visit us. After looking at the doctor's report, he decided to help us."

The man Manar was referring to was Chen Chiou Hwa. He visited Lujin for the first time in 2017, after she had been referred to Tzu Chi for help. It so happened that in December of the same year, a Tzu Chi team from Taiwan arrived in Jordan to offer free medical clinics. Wang Zhi-min (王智民), a pharmacist from Tainan, southern Taiwan, and a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA), was on that team. He first helped Tzu Chi Jordan purchase locally some hormone injections for Lujin. After returning to Taiwan, he found a supplier that sold the same medicine for a lower price, and began buying it in Taiwan out-of-pocket for Lujin.

Chen Chiou Hwa took advantage of the trips he made to Taiwan to bring the injections Wang had purchased back to Jordan. Because the medicine needed to be stored in a freezer, he could only bring back a year's worth of injections with each trip. After Chen had done that for three years, the Jordan TIMA chapter found a supplier in Türkiye that sold the injections for the same price as in Taiwan. As a result, the chapter began buying the medicine to be administered to Lujin in Türkiye.

At the suggestion of Tzu Chi volunteers, Lujin had started learning taekwondo to help boost her muscle growth. Her height began increasing quickly until 2022, when her growth spurt began slowing. Her doctor adjusted her medicine accordingly, and she's now grown to 143 centimeters (4'7") tall.

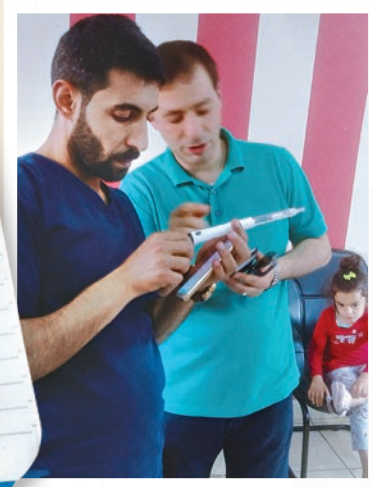
When Lujin drew pictures at home in the past, she always made the legs of the children she drew very long. When her mother asked her why, she answered, "Because I want to grow tall." Tzu Chi has been helping to make her dream come true. May the girl grow as tall as she wishes and have long legs like the figures in her drawings. ❁

قداهشلا رمع ني جل



A drawing created by Lujin features children with long legs.

CHEN CHIOU HWA



A doctor prepares to inject Lujin with growth hormone.

CHEN CHIOU HWA



Lujin (middle), her mother, Manar (left), and pharmacist Wang Zhi-min pose for a photo when the three met in 2019.

CHEN CHIOU HWA

Lujin Omar Shhadeh

Age: 14

Condition: growth hormone deficiency

Treatment: growth hormone injections

Result: grew from 104 centimeters when Tzu Chi volunteers first visited her at age eight to 143 centimeters in December 2022



PHOTO BY CHEN CHIOU HWA

Preventing a Lost Generation

A Boy With Crohn's Disease

It was in 2019 when the team of Syrian doctors helping Tzu Chi provide medical treatment to their fellow Syrians learned about teenager Osama Sofrajy's condition.

"Someone told me about the kid's illness," Dr. Abdul Hakim Khader recalled, "and asked us to save him." The physician said he had felt deeply for the impoverished boy when he learned about his story from a nurse.

Osama was born in Homs, western Syria. He was diagnosed at five with Crohn's disease, an autoimmune bowel disorder characterized by persistent inflammation of the lining or wall of the gastrointestinal tract. If the inflammation is left unchecked, ulcers can form anywhere within a patient's digestive tract, including the mouth and anus. Sometimes such ulcers may extend through the intestinal wall, resulting in a fistula—an abnormal connection between different body parts.

The eruption of the Syrian civil war interrupted Osama's treatment. In 2013, the boy fled with his family to Jordan. Despite being in a foreign land, Osama's father sought medical attention everywhere for his son. Osama's aunt and a kind pharmacist also helped to find medical resources for the boy. Osama was able to receive treatment, though intermittent, with the help of some NGOs, but he didn't get better, and in the end was dependent on steroids provided by a charity-run clinic to get by.

Dr. Mohanad Salahi, a member of the team of Syrian doctors, referred Osama to Tzu Chi for help. Afterwards, volunteer Lai Hua-xiu (賴花秀) visited the boy at Al Bayader Hospital. She found him emaciated and too weak to walk. Though he was already 14, he weighed a mere 17 kilograms (37 pounds). A fistula had developed in his bottom due to Crohn's disease. When a doctor lightly

pressed his bottom, dark green feces seeped out. The boy cried out in pain.

Chen Chiou Hwa was at an airport in Thailand waiting for a connecting flight to Taiwan when he received a video taken by Lai at the hospital. He saw how sick Osama looked, and how his mother covered her face with her hands in sadness. Osama's father, facing the camera, talked about the hardships they had endured over the years seeking medical help for his son. After seeing it all, Chen asked Dr. Salahi to quickly arrange for surgery for the boy. "Please do everything possible to save his life," he said.

The surgery took place at Al Bayader Hospital. A doctor removed the affected part of Osama's intestine and performed a colostomy to help him defecate. Antibiotics were injected to prevent infection. Tzu Chi paid the cost in full.

But Crohn's disease wasn't the boy's only problem. Long-term steroid use had led to osteoporosis, badly affecting his teeth. Tzu Chi asked a dentist to fix the boy's teeth to help him chew normally. The foundation also continued to help with his other medical needs. For example, as part of his treatment regimen, Osama required immunoglobulin injections. Chen once again enlisted the help of pharmacist Wang Zhi-min, who responded by generously underwriting the cost of more than ten injections.

Osama is now much healthier. He can run around and play soccer with his friends. He is unable to attend school due to his health, but Tzu Chi has hired a tutor for him. His smile has become very bright.

"He's very strong now," said Dr. Salahi. "I feel an urge to cry whenever I see him. Thank you." The physician's eyes were moist as he talked about the boy whose life had been saved thanks to the efforts of many people. ❦

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After part of his intestine was removed, Osama received a colostomy to help him defecate.

LAI HUA-XIU



Osama experienced difficulty walking and eating due to a severe case of Crohn's disease.

LAI HUA-XIU



Osama's teeth went bad because of long-term steroid use. Tzu Chi arranged for a dentist to treat him and help him chew normally again.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI JORDAN

Osama Sofrajy

Age: 18

Condition: Crohn's disease

Treatment: surgery, immunoglobulin injections, dental care

Result: health greatly improved; regaining the ability to move around freely; can now play soccer and attend taekwondo classes

War-Torn Childhoods

By Su Fang-pei

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

What kind of marks will the Syrian civil war leave on the children that fled from their country? A pharmacist and member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association shares in this article her own experiences with some Syrian refugee children, and also about the work that Tzu Chi Jordan is doing on their behalf.

My heart ached as I was writing about Tzu Chi Jordan's medical aid for Syrian refugee children; I couldn't stop my tears from flowing. The Syrian people that have fled their country have been deprived of their roots and so much more. I could feel their sadness pulling at my heartstrings.

I live in Taiwan, more than 8,200 kilometers (5,095 miles) from Jordan. Though it takes nearly 24 hours to fly from my home to Jordan, I feel so close to the Syrian refugees there. What has caused the cataclysmic upheaval in their lives?

What happens in childhood has a deep, enduring impact on one's life. That's why it's essential for parents to give their children enough love and a strong sense of security and trust. Sometimes I wonder if Syrian children, after enduring all the hardships caused by the war, will grow to have more psychological scars. I wonder what kind of marks the war will leave on the minds of the children who have been forced to grow up prematurely.

I'm a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA). In 2017, Brother Chen Chiou Hwa in Jordan learned how I combined drawing and cello music in my art therapy activities at my pharmacy on Saturday afternoons. He hoped I could bring similar activities to refugee children in Jordan. That led me to take a trip to Jordan in May of the same year.

Before I set off, students at the elementary division of Tzu Chi Senior High School in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, created many pictures for me to take to Jordan. While I was in Jordan, Syrian refugee children there reciprocated by drawing many

pictures too. The one that impressed me the most was by Adeebah Adnan Hilal—she drew an eye shedding red tears. When I asked her the meaning of her drawing, she said, "Crying for Syria. The tears are red because they are blood tears." Then she hugged me and burst into tears.

I held my art therapy activities at Tzu Xin House, a shelter for Syrian refugee mothers and children, located in suburban Amman. Tzu Chi Jordan helps the House pay its rent, subsidizes residents' medical treatments, and provides tuition aid for the children there. They also help the mothers there learn marketable skills by arranging for cooking, sewing, and nursing classes.

When I first visited the shelter to conduct art therapy activities for the mothers and children, my attention was drawn to a little boy named Abdul Alaziz. He never talked or interacted with the other children. When everyone was drawing, he just sat there, his eyes bleak and lost.

I knew that he was that way because his heart had been hurt, that it ached so much that he didn't want to say or express anything for fear that his tears would come as soon as he spoke. I thought of the boy often after that day.

At one point during my third visit to Tzu Xin House, I felt someone tugging at my sleeve from behind. When I turned around, I saw that it was him. He pointed to some pens and paper. I realized he was finally willing to open up his heart, so I immediately asked Chen Chiou Hwa to take him to another room to draw. A short while later, Chen returned and asked me to go look at what Abdul had drawn. I did and saw that he had



drawn a large blue boat with some Arabic writing above it. A teacher translated the Arabic into English: "A life-saving boat."

As it turned out, he was expressing his longing for his father through the picture. He hadn't seen his father since he had left Syria with his twin brother, Munir, and his mother, Nimar. His father had escorted them to a boat to leave Syria that day. Abdul had missed him dearly since.

After I interacted with Abdul that day, his appetite improved. He grew tall and strong. Once he turned 13 years of age, he was no longer eligible to stay at Tzu Xin House, according to the House's regulations. As a result, his mother actively sought refuge in another country and eventually obtained approval for them to go to Norway.

In turbulent times, a mother will do everything she can to fend for and protect her children. Nimar was no different. Though she had heart disease, for the sake of her children, she flew with them to Norway. Sadly, she had a heart attack on the flight and passed away after leaving the plane.

When I wrote about Osama, Lujin, Yousef, and other children with medical conditions, I couldn't

help but think: how many more Syrian children are needing company to help them better move forward on their life journeys?

An immigrant helping refugees

I kept in touch with Brother Chen after my trip to Jordan had ended and I returned to Taiwan. I tried to stay updated with how the refugee mothers and children were doing.

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Jordan declared a state of emergency to limit the spread of the infection. Syrian refugees in Jordan were originally allowed to work or receive subsidies from the United Nations, but the lockdown made things difficult for them. Roads were closed by the military and vehicles weren't allowed to travel freely. Worried that some refugee families would have difficulty getting by, Chen walked to obtain subsidies for them.

Su Fang-pei (蘇芳霽, middle), the author of this article, interacts with Syrian refugee children at Tzu Xin House in Amman, Jordan.

YOU XI-ZHANG



The pandemic eased in 2022, and Tzu Chi Jordan was finally able to resume their regular aid distributions and free clinics. But the Tzu Chi branch hadn't stopped helping people with their medical needs, not even during the pandemic.

Chen told me that Tzu Chi has worked with medical institutions, such as Al Bayader Hospital and Akilah Hospital, since 2013 to provide surgeries for refugees. This cooperation has continued for more than nine years now. Osama Atari, superintendent of Al Bayader Hospital, is even planning to use the second floor of the hospital as a dedicated ward for patients whose treatments are being financed by Tzu Chi. The King Hussein Medical Center, on the other hand, is helping Tzu Chi take care of some cancer patients.

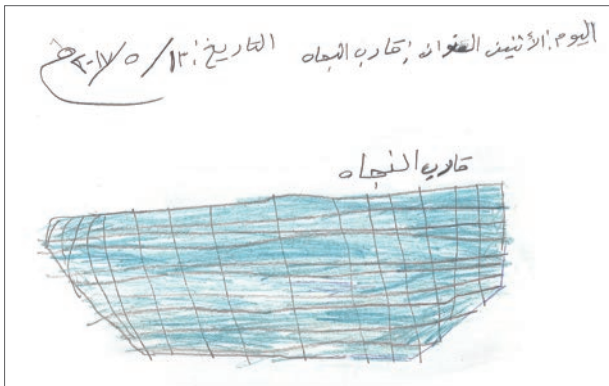
The incidence of cancer among Syrian refugees is relatively high. It might be connected with the trauma from having to flee a war, or with living in unsanitary conditions. It might be due to a lack of health knowledge, stress, or persistent negative emotions. Among the refugees Tzu Chi has helped

obtain treatment, many were widowed mothers and children. Though there are other international NGOs in Jordan that offer financial aid to refugees who need medical attention, there is often a limit on the aid they can provide. Surgery is expensive locally, and sometimes the aid they provide to a patient is only enough to cover a small part of their medical expenses. Refugees can be left in the lurch if they are unable to get help.

"Sometimes we also find ourselves in a dilemma because we have many people to help and yet only so much money to help them," Chen said. "Besides, will they receive the best care after we decide to help them?" It takes wisdom to make the best decisions. Chen often tosses and turns in bed trying to decide what's best to do.

Because they often feel insecure, refugees tend to be on their guard. Syrian doctors who have been able to find a job in Jordan because of their expertise are no exception. It often takes Tzu Chi volunteers a lot of time to win their trust when they are reaching out to help them.

Jordan and Syria are both Arab countries, and the same language—Arabic—is used in both nations. In the past, Syrians went to school and received healthcare in their country for free. The country's social welfare system was comprehensive, and people were well provided for. Jordanians loved to go to Syria. In the early years, when Jordanians went to Syria to attend school, they were not only exempted from tuition fees, but they could also receive stipends for their living expenses. For example, Abeer Aglan M. Madanat, a Jordanian pharmacist and a TIMA member, had attended school in Syria before



A drawing by Abdul Alaziz features a blue boat covered in fetter-like grid lines. The background is a blank, conveying a feeling of desolation. Abdul is expressing via this picture his pain of separation from a loved one. It took him some time to eventually be willing to communicate his feelings.

The Koran, the holy book of the Islamic religion, is the subject matter of this drawing, created by Nour Aldin Ameer. In a foreign country, one's traditional culture and religion serve as the best reminders of one's roots.





returning to Jordan to work. Sometimes it cost but half as much driving from Amman to Damascus, two hours away, to have a meal or to shop. But that's all in the past. The two countries have long since switched places. It is easy to imagine what Syrians feel about this.

Brother Chen cares a lot about refugees. He also cares a lot about the team of Syrian doctors who have been working with Tzu Chi to provide medical treatment to their fellow Syrians. "I once asked these physicians why they didn't take their families and flee to Europe," Chen said. "They told me they didn't want their children to forget their roots. They said that it would be as good as abandoning their roots if they forget their traditional culture and religious beliefs."

It has been 48 years since Chen himself first set foot in Jordan. Highly skilled in taekwondo, he was sent in 1974 by Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense to Jordan to serve as the head martial arts coach for the Royal Guards. He has come a long way since then, from an expatriate who had difficulty communicating with local people due to the language barrier to the head of Tzu Chi Jordan. For many years now, he has helped Tzu Chi carry out charity work in Jordan, doing everything he can to help refugees and destitute families in the Middle Eastern country.

He recalled his early days in Jordan. He once walked for more than an hour to a market to buy a cleaning brush, only to find after he arrived that he couldn't say the name for it. Chewing Jordanian

Volunteer Chen Chiou Hwa greets a Syrian child who had received cleft lip surgery with the aid of Tzu Chi. Chen has helped Tzu Chi carry out charity work in Jordan for many years.

WANG JIN

flatbread with effort, he missed food back in Taiwan. It was said that Jordan had the best yogurt, but even after two weeks he couldn't get used to its taste, not even with his nose pinched. When a friend came from Taiwan to visit him and made some fried rice for him, tears came to his eyes as he ate it. He eventually came to realize that nothing was easy in life.

Chen is a Buddhist and Tzu Chi a Buddhist organization. Because of this, it is not easy to get people in Jordan, a Muslim country, to join Tzu Chi as volunteers and work with him to help local needy people. Limited manpower has made his work in Jordan more of a challenge. He and other local volunteers have encountered so many difficulties providing help to refugees in Jordan that he once thought of scaling back their work for this group of people. "Fortunately, I have Master Cheng Yen's teachings to rely on," Chen said. "They have guided, supported, and kept me going through the difficult times when I've felt helpless."

It has not been easy, but Chen has managed to carve a path for Tzu Chi's charity work in Jordan, bringing light to people in need, including Syrian refugees in the country. ❀



Talking to a Scammer

By Jian Yu-xian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

My 80-year-old mother-in-law, who lives alone, phoned me the other day. She told me in an anxious voice, “I just received a call. The caller said I didn’t pay my electricity bill and that they were cutting off my electricity. But I did pay my bill!”

“Mom, don’t worry,” I said to her. “That was without a doubt a phone scam. Just ignore it.” She was very relieved after hearing what I said.

Having had my share of run-ins with telephone-based fraudsters, I knew a phone scam when I heard one. That’s why I could assure my mother-in-law with such certainty. I was glad to put her mind at ease, but at the same time I was

angry at those fraudsters for causing people like my mother-in-law such anxiety and fear.

Some time after this conversation, I received another phone call at my home with this recorded message: “This is XXX Telecom. Your phone line is about to be suspended. Please dial nine to reach a representative.” “Another scam!” I grumbled to myself. Just as I was about to hang up, an idea flashed into my mind. Instead of disconnecting the call, I dialed nine. I was met with some tacky electronic music, indicating that the call was being transferred. A few seconds later, the voice of a young man—about 17 or 18 years old—came on the line: “Hello, good afternoon.” I could tell he



was trying to make his voice deeper to make himself sound older.

I cut to the chase. "This is a phone scam, isn't it?" I said into the phone.

Much to my surprise, the man didn't hang up or deny my accusation. Instead, he said after a short pause, "Yes."

His honesty threw me for a loop. It aroused my curiosity, too. I began to wonder why he didn't hang up, why instead he was being so honest. What led him to participate in a fraud scheme like this?

"Why did you become a scammer?" I asked.

"I didn't have much of a choice. I had to make a living," he answered.

Sympathy rose in my heart when I heard his frank reply. I thought: "Maybe his family was so poor he became an imposter out of desperation." But almost immediately, I thought of my mother-in-law and of how that fraudulent phone call had sent her into a panic.

"There must be other ways to make a living," I said. "Put yourself in the shoes of those you dupe. What are they to do if they have difficulty getting by after falling victim to your scams?" I tried to keep my tone even and talk as slowly as possible to avoid infuriating him into hanging up on me.

The man responded to my question with silence.

"Your voice told me you are still very young," I continued. "You might have a great future ahead of you. Our world needs one more good person, and it can certainly do away with one more bad one. Make the world better by being a good person. Don't make it worse by being a bad one."

When I said those words to him, I was thinking of the following aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "If you are doing good deeds, count me in; if you are doing evil, count me out." That aphorism once instilled sense into a man, stopping him from robbing a bank. I was taking heart from that encouraging example and hoping to help prevent this young man from continuing going down the wrong path.

The young man's positive response took me by surprise. "Okay. I'll give it a try."

Tears came unbidden to my eyes. Slightly emotional, I sincerely said to him, "Good for you. Give what I said some serious thought. You have my best wishes."

When I finally hung up the phone, my child said to me, "Why did you say so much to a fraudster?"

I explained why I did what I did. I said I was moved by the young man's honesty into believing that he was not really a bad guy. Not wanting him to continue going astray, the mother in me sympathized with him and snapped into action. I hoped I could awaken his conscience by sharing those words with him.

Master Cheng Yen says that our lives are brighter when we embrace positive thoughts and take action for the good of others. I believe that when we constantly harbor kind thoughts and show care for people around us, we make a difference in the lives of others. My best wishes go to all the kids that have gone astray—I hope they all meet people who can ignite a light in their lives and give them a helping hand. ❁



To Supplement or Not?

By Ng Hooi Lin

Translated by Syharn Shen

Photo by Huang Shi-ze

Taking supplements for nutrients that our bodies don't lack will not make us healthier. On the contrary, they may even harm our health. A nutritionist weighs in on this with her professional advice.

At a gathering, a friend noticed that while I smiled and laughed, I yawned a lot too. After asking how I was doing lately, she told me, "Since you don't eat meat, I'll buy you iron supplements."

I couldn't help but chuckle in response. I pointed out to her that nutritional supplements can only help those who don't eat adequately or who can't absorb enough nutrients from their diet. "For example, vegans don't eat eggs, drink milk, or consume dairy products, so they may not have a reliable source of Vitamin B12 from their plant-based diet. In this case, supplements can be taken."

Many people, like my warmhearted friend, are eager to buy supplements for their family or friends to boost their nutritional intake. The common idea that taking supplements will only help you is deeply ingrained in many people's minds, especially among the older generation.

For example, I accidentally overheard one elderly woman saying to another at a shopping center: "I recommend you try the iron supplement I'm taking. People our age need to protect our brains, or we'll likely get dementia. If that happens, no amount of money in our bank accounts will help."

But the idea that taking supplements automatically must be good for you is actually a misconception. Taking too many supplements for nutrients that you don't need doesn't promote your health at all.

Supplementing for deficiencies

When some people experience constant fatigue or skin paleness, they proceed to take iron supplements without doing a blood test first. I find this concerning. When I hear of this or similar situations, I advise people not to try to be a doctor themselves. In fact, the first thing you should do when you experience symptoms of anemia is visit a doctor and get your blood tested to confirm if you really have the condition.

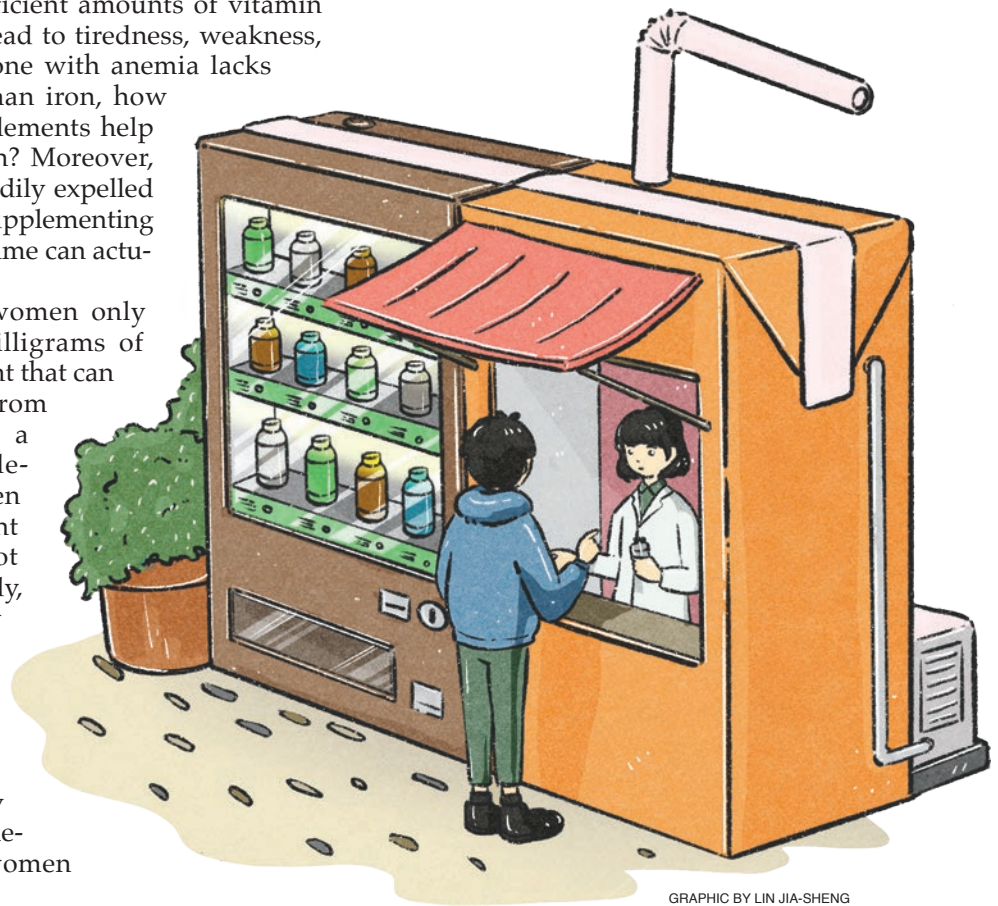
Even if you do suffer from anemia, iron supplements aren't the be-all and end-all. Not all cases of anemia result from iron deficiency; that's why taking iron supplements doesn't necessarily help with the condition. Yet, whenever I tell others about this, most people just stare in disbelief.

If someone on a vegan diet, for example, doesn't carefully plan their day-to-day meals, they may not get sufficient amounts of vitamin B12, which can also lead to tiredness, weakness, and anemia. If someone with anemia lacks vitamin B12 rather than iron, how will taking iron supplements help improve the condition? Moreover, because iron is not readily expelled from the body, over-supplementing over a long period of time can actually harm one's health.

Postmenopausal women only need eight to ten milligrams of iron per day, an amount that can be easily absorbed from their daily diet. As a result, taking supplements for iron is often not necessary. Pregnant women need iron not only for their own body, but also for the baby they carry, so they need about 15 to 45 milligrams of iron, depending on the stage of pregnancy. Obstetricians usually recommend iron supplements to pregnant women for this reason.

For those with a true iron deficiency, it's important that they get their iron supplements prescribed by their doctor. For maximum absorption, it's best to take iron supplements on an empty stomach, with water rather than milk, as the calcium in milk hinders the body's absorption of iron. For similar reasons, avoid taking iron supplements with coffee and tea. Some people suggest taking iron supplements with fruit juices as they are rich in vitamin C, which enhances iron absorption. While it's true that vitamin C does help the body absorb the nonheme iron found in whole grains and legumes, studies have shown that the iron contained in supplements is easily absorbed by the body anyway. Thus, iron supplements can be taken and well absorbed, taken with fruit juices or not.

As long as we follow a varied and balanced diet, we can basically get all the nutrients our bodies need. There is no benefit to taking iron supplements when our body doesn't lack iron, and doing so may even end up harming us. We only have one body. Let us take good care of it by treating it right!



GRAPHIC BY LIN JIA-SHENG

Use It or Lose It

The Anti-Aging Fitness Center at Chiayi Tzu Chi Clinic

By Hong Jing-jing

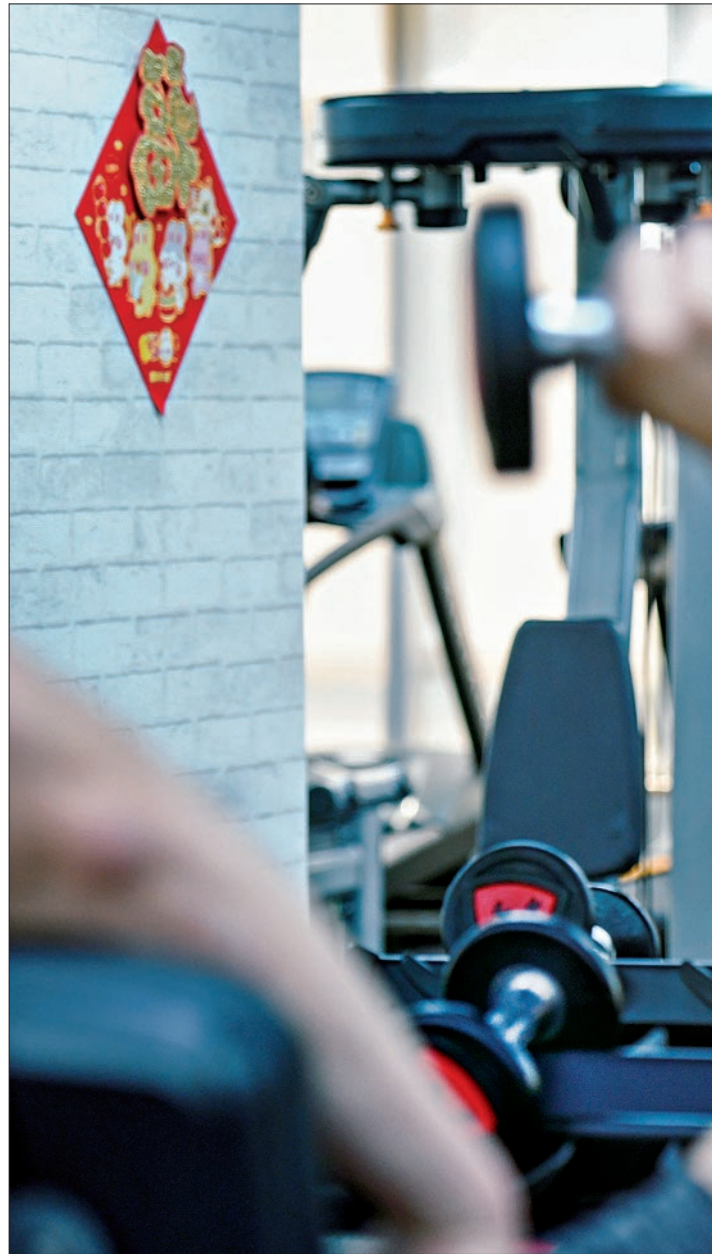
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

The Anti-Aging Fitness Center at Chiayi Tzu Chi Clinic combines healthcare and fitness in their strength training regimens, designed to prevent functional impairments, delay aging, and help people live with quality and confidence.

What type of people do you expect to see in a fitness center? Younger persons, exercising vigorously to slim down or stay fit, their faces and bodies covered in sweat? If that's what you imagine, the Anti-Aging Fitness Center at Chiayi Tzu Chi Clinic in southern Taiwan will surely upend your stereotypes.

Here's a couple of examples of the type of person you will see at this fitness center: an 80-year-old woman suffering from osteoporosis and an 82-year-old retired doctor. After the elderly woman started strength training at the fitness center, a body composition analysis showed an increase in her muscle mass as well as a reduction in her body fat. And the man, who had never been exposed to weight training before, can now do a barbell back squat and other free weight training. He enjoyed strength training so much he said, "Strength training has improved my quality of life after retirement. I wish I had started earlier!"



A man does strength exercises under the guidance of a trainer at the Anti-Aging Fitness Center at Chiayi Tzu Chi Clinic, southern Taiwan. The center is devoted to the prevention of sarcopenia and functional disabilities.

The Anti-Aging Fitness Center, opened in April 2022, is a joint effort of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital and Chiayi Tzu Chi Clinic. Merging healthcare and fitness, the center offers one-on-one strength training services, mainly to patients at the clinic.



Taiwan is projected to become a super-aged society by 2025, with people 65 or older making up at least 20 percent of the population. Dr. Chou Yi-chun (周宜群), director of the Anti-Aging Fitness Center, pointed out that old age is often accompanied by sarcopenia—the gradual loss of muscle mass and strength—as well as degenerative bone and nervous system conditions. Once the degeneration starts, functional impairments follow, negatively affecting one’s quality of life.

Cardiovascular exercises, such as brisk walking, running, or bicycling, can only do so much

when it comes to building muscle strength. “You need stimulation from weight training if you want your muscle strength to grow,” said Director Chou. Only when your training is providing enough stimuli to your muscles, bones, and nervous system will you achieve muscle growth. Since the main goal of the fitness center is to promote strength training to prevent or reverse functional disabilities, exercise prescriptions are tailored to the clinical context of each patient. This helps them recover or improve their quality of life.



The more you work them

“Everyone should treat their body well,” said Director Chou. “You can’t rely on intravenous injections, medications, or health supplements [to achieve wellness]. The key to that is actually good dietary and exercise habits.” In addition to being at the helm of the fitness center, Chou, 40, also works at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital as a gastroenterologist and a liver cancer expert. Growing up, he was overweight and suffered from asthma and allergies. He was often on medication. He started exercising regularly by jogging and playing basketball to improve his health when he was in junior high school. Later, as a resident doctor, he wanted to get in even better physical shape. He surfed the web for tutorial videos on weight training and began training on his own.

Five years ago, he enrolled in a gym and started working out under the instruction of a professional trainer. He was encouraged by his improved body shape after training at the gym, and began to wonder if weight training could improve one’s health in other ways. He had once suffered from gout himself, which prompted him to begin studying in earnest the benefits of weight

Polio caused the muscles in Lin Xiu-yue’s right leg to atrophy, making her unable to stand steady and liable to fall. After training at the Anti-Aging Fitness Center (right), her limbs became stronger and she can now easily toss bags of recycling onto a truck (above).

training. He even sat for and passed the American Council on Exercise Personal Trainer Exam and obtained his certification as a trainer. “My body is now in the best shape ever,” he said.

Strength or resistance training can improve an older person’s posture and balance. Practicing standing on one foot alone can’t improve one’s balance. Chou said that there is a built-in balance system in our muscles. When a person strength trains, they use every muscle in their body, including their core muscles. Core strength is especially important for balance “because you need good stability at your core to have safe and effective movement at the hip, knee, and ankle,” says Kailin Collins, a physical therapist at Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital.

Some seniors tend to fall on unstable surfaces or uneven ground. “Strength training can help ensure



that one has enough muscle strength or quick enough nervous reflexes to regain one's balance and prevent oneself from falling," Chou explained.

Lin Xiu-yue (林秀月), 68, has been a Tzu Chi recycling volunteer for 30 years. One time when she was transporting a full load of recyclables on her scooter, she lost her balance and fell with the scooter. Her weak right leg was partly to blame for the accident. The muscles in her right leg had atrophied due to polio, and her right knee had degenerated to such a point that she couldn't even have a knee replacement. She couldn't sit for long and had difficulty remaining steady when she stood up from a sitting position. At the recommendation of Director Chou, she started visiting the fitness center to build her muscles.

Lin's personal trainer at the fitness center put an emphasis on helping her right leg become stronger. For example, the trainer would have her sit on a chair, with pads under her right buttock to keep it higher. This was to prevent her from getting injured, because the atrophied muscles in her right side had resulted in one of her hips being higher than the other. Then Lin would straighten her right leg, have a resistance band wrapped round her ankle, and, with her trainer serving as the resistance, try to kick her leg upwards. She would do ten such kicks in a row. Lin used to depend on medicine and injections for treatment to her right leg, and it never occurred to her that her right leg could become stronger. But after training at the center, she felt an obvious increase of strength in both her arms and legs. "I'm proud of myself," she said. "Now when I ride out in a truck to collect recyclables, I can easily toss bag after bag of recycling onto the truck. Despite my age, I'm stronger than before. I'll keep training so that I can do more recycling work."

Getting fit

Chiayi Tzu Chi Clinic is located in Chiayi County, which, along with neighboring Yulin County, is home to a large population of older people. The clinic focuses their services mostly on seniors in these areas. However, since prevention is better than cure, everyone is welcome to visit the clinic to have their physical fitness assessed before they decide whether or not to train at the center. "Anyone who feels they have the need to train and who can still walk into the clinic is welcome," said Director Chou. "In my opinion, everyone should train."

After a patient's condition is assessed at the clinic, the doctor will discuss with the instructor

how to tailor the training prescription. Some patients have chronic illness or have had their knee joints replaced—all such circumstances need to be taken into consideration when writing the prescription. The instructor will also make adjustments to his curriculum in accordance with the patient's performance during a training session.

Chou said that some people who have had hip or knee joint replacement surgery believe that they should avoid pressure on their joints, but what they don't know is that only when the muscles surrounding the joints are strong enough will they offer good protection to their joints. He explained that for these patients, he generally asks the coach to pay special attention to training their lower limbs, by way of exercises such as squats—deeper squats than usual.

That being said, there are people who may be unfit for strength training. They include those who have recently experienced chest pain or tightness or have even passed out. They should have their hearts checked first if they want to try strength training. People who easily get short of breath are advised to find out if they have any heart problems too. Those who have swollen ankles should also take extra caution, because it could be a sign of kidney or liver disease.

Dai Yi-fang (戴一芳), 65, woke early one morning more than ten years ago to a sudden stiffness in his right shoulder, which was followed by soreness, pain, and numbness. It was so bad that he couldn't even button up his clothes, but he didn't think much of it at the time. Later, he had a traffic accident and was diagnosed with a severe case of osteoporosis. When his condition was at its worst, he lost a lot of strength in his legs, became winded just from walking for five or six minutes, and when he sat, his tailbone hurt awfully. His weight plummeted from 40 kilograms (88 pounds) to 30. He began coming to the fitness center at Chiayi Tzu Chi Clinic half a year ago, at his daughter's encouragement, to strength train with an instructor.

"Sit on the chair," Wang Hao-yu (王皓譽), an instructor at the center, said to Dai during a training session. "Now stand up, and slowly crouch down to the height of the chair. Put your weight on your thighs; use the strength of your thighs to support your body." The instructor explained that because Dai's bones offer poor support, excessive load-bearing should be avoided. He should also avoid twisting his spine right or left or bending forward or backward. "Get the feel of your muscles first," he said. "Learn how to use them to control your body."



Dr. Chou Yi-chun, director of the Anti-Aging Fitness Center, hopes to use fitness training to help improve people's quality of life.

Wang said that he often comes across people in the fitness center suffering from sarcopenia or backaches. Nearly nine out of ten such people don't exercise regularly. Most of them find that walking or other normal daily activities are more strenuous than they used to be. Some patients come to the center because they've had surgery and are taking their doctors' advice to train to increase their strength and endurance. He explained that instructors at the center design courses according to each individual's physical condition, so people who have never taken fitness courses need not worry that they can't handle the training regimen. "We'll start with the basics," he said.

Dai Yi-fang, the man who began training at



Dr. Chou has made himself healthier by maintaining his exercise habits. He recommends that people build up their muscles via strength training to prevent the loss of muscle mass and strength.



Xiao Kao-xiang (right) was paralyzed from the bottom of his chest down due to a traffic accident. He undergoes regular physiotherapy sessions at a hospital, and trains at the Anti-Aging Fitness Center to further strengthen his upper limbs.

the center at his daughter's encouragement, said that whenever he saw other people coming to the center in wheelchairs or with the aid of crutches, he felt blessed because he could still walk on his own. "My legs have become much stronger now," he said. "I can walk for two hours straight now without problems, or rise from a sitting position without having to use my hands for support. I'll keep training. I want to go mountain climbing one day."

A sense of accomplishment

Xiao Kai-xiang (蕭愷翔) is 28 years old this year. He was in a traffic accident eight years ago, injuring his thoracic spine, leaving him paralyzed from the bottom of his chest on down. He relies on a wheelchair to get around. After his injury, he started undergoing physiotherapy at a hospital. He also did dumbbell and barbell workouts at home. When he felt that he was up to more rigorous exercises, his mother started taking him to the Anti-Aging Fitness Center.

"Lie down flat," said instructor Wang to Xiao. "Chest out. Brace your core. Hold up the dumbbells with your arms straight. Lower the dumbbells until they are at a 45-degree angle." Xiao's upper limbs were the only body parts he could still move, so Wang focused on training and

strengthening his chest, back, arms, and the stability of his body.

Wang explained that a fitness trainer is different from a physical therapist. A trainer mainly focuses on providing fitness training with an eye to preventing injury. They instruct people on how to maintain correct postures when exercising and other related know-how. A trainer can't treat an injury or engage in any medical services. A physical therapist, on the other hand, is primarily dedicated to treatment and physiotherapy following an injury. He suggested that people who have just sustained an injury or are suffering from acute pains go to the doctor for a check-up or treatment first before coming to the fitness center.

Xiao Kai-xiang, the paraplegic, said that his coach always gives him very detailed instructions and takes a lot of care to protect him from injury whenever he trains at the center. His physiotherapy sessions at the hospital can prevent a decline in his physical functions, but the strength training at the fitness center can enhance the effects of the physiotherapy. "The nerve injury I sustained in the traffic accident caused me to lose feelings in my back muscles," said Xiao. "But now I can feel my back muscles working again when they are engaged. I used to need to sit in chairs with backs, but now I can sit on backless chairs too."

"I'm so happy every time someone training at our center tells me his or her physical condition has greatly improved," said Wang. Wang used to work in a commercial gym, where most of his clients were young, energetic, and relatively fit. Now, at the fitness center, the majority of people he works with are older, weaker, and sometimes even sick. The level of challenge he faces at work has therefore greatly increased. Despite that, he likes the sense of accomplishment he gets at his current job. "People might walk into the center with difficulty when they first come," he said, "but I hope that with our help they will one day regain their physical functions and live happier, more carefree lives."

Wang mentioned someone he coaches at the center who is in his 40s. He has dwarfism and has been diagnosed with early-onset Parkinson's disease. Despite that, his spirits and physical condition improved after he started training at the center. He said that he feels happiest when he is at the center, where someone is beside him when he works out and with whom he can chat. "Any positive feedback from a student is motivating and helps keep me going," said the trainer.

From nine to 99 years of age

Director Chou said that many people mistakenly believe that weight training can easily cause injuries. But according to statistics from the United States, the chance of weight training resulting in severe injuries is about the same as playing badminton or tennis. A higher likelihood of serious injuries comes from team sports, such as basketball, rugby, and soccer. Most of the severe injuries that do occur during strength or weight training arise from one accidentally dropping a dumbbell on oneself instead of from other causes. Weight training is very safe if you maintain correct movements and postures and avoid overstraining yourself, and, even better, work out with supervision from a professional trainer.

Chou pointed out that young people nowadays spend a lot of time in front of their computers or on their handheld devices, and thus lead a relatively sedentary lifestyle. Even though they might not be victims of sarcopenia yet—which is more common among older people—some of them might already be suffering from muscle weakness. He suggested that they start strength training in moderation. "I have a vision, a vision where everyone from nine to 99 years old does strength training," said Chou.

Chou added that even though strength training is good for all ages, the elderly can especially benefit from it. Functional impairments are something they might have to face sooner than later, and strength training can help them maintain independence and delay the need for care. Many older people might look healthy, have no difficulty walking, taking care of themselves, or gardening. But once they come down with a severe illness, they might become bedridden for the rest of their lives. This might be because they haven't worked to build their muscles. On the other hand, if they strength train regularly and build a strong body, their good physical condition might come in handy on a rainy day. Even if they can't return to what they were like before they fell ill, there is a good chance for them to have some sort of independence.

"We don't want to just live, but live with quality," said Director Chou. "We want to live the kind of life we want to lead. The best answer to that is strength training." It takes time to build up our muscles, he added. "You need to give yourself at least half a year. But as long as you are willing to stick to it under the guidance of your trainer, you are sure to see the results of your efforts." ❀

Rebuilding After the Quake

A New Home by Chinese New Year

By Wei Yu-xian, Li Hui-ling, and Lin Chun-xia

Translated by Syharn Shen

Photos by Yang Kai-cheng

A strong earthquake rocked eastern Taiwan on September 18, 2022. After repairing nearly 200 damaged homes, Tzu Chi built seven prefabricated steel houses for those whose homes were deemed unsafe for habitation.



I'd been three months since a strong earthquake had struck eastern Taiwan, in September 2022. Walking with a cane and accompanied by his septuagenarian son, 104-year-old Grandpa Lin arrived at the site where his quake-damaged home had been demolished and was being rebuilt. He saw the steel frames of his new house, being built in an inverted U-shape to look like a traditional three-section compound. The elderly man was overwhelmed with emotion, anticipating the day it would be completed, when he'd finally get to sit out on his covered patio and enjoy the sun.

After the earthquake, Lin and his son were forced to move out of their home and to rent a place to stay. "My son told me yesterday that he was taking me back 'home' to see the construction of our new house," said Lin. "I was so overjoyed I couldn't sleep!" Seeing the progress of construction at the site, it seemed too good to be true that he'd soon have a new house to live in. "It's been a journey from sadness and despair to hope. Tzu Chi has showered me with so much love that I have nothing more to ask for in this life!"

Volunteer Hong Wu-zheng (洪武正), who had been traveling back and forth between central and eastern Taiwan after the quake to help with Tzu Chi's repair and construction projects, was filled with joy after seeing the smile on Grandpa Lin's face. "What's most important is to provide our fellow men with safe places to live so they can settle down in peace," he said.

Quick but sturdy

The earthquake that rattled eastern Taiwan on the afternoon of September 18, 2022, was a big one, a 6.8 magnitude temblor. Its epicenter was located in the town of Chishang, Taitung County. At least 900 homes were damaged in Taitung County and its neighbor, Hualien County. The Tzu Chi Foundation surveyed over 350 of them before proceeding to repair nearly 200. Tzu Chi also helped demolish seven severely damaged homes and replaced them with prefabricated steel houses.

Despite the bitter cold of winter, construction workers and Tzu Chi's volunteer team worked hard to complete the seven prefabricated houses

The Tzu Chi Foundation initiated a construction project to build prefabricated steel houses for seven families whose homes had been severely damaged in the earthquake that rocked eastern Taiwan on September 18, 2022.

LIN XUE-FENG

as soon as possible. Six were constructed in Yuli Township and one in Fuli Township, all within Hualien County. Because the building materials were prefabricated, the construction of the houses went quickly.

"The materials used for these prefabricated houses, including the steel frames, the exterior walls, and even the iron roofing sheets, are very different from what we used in the past," said Lin Min-chao (林敏朝), director of the Tzu Chi Foundation's Construction Department. Lin contrasted the materials used in these prefab structures with those of the temporary houses Tzu Chi built after the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan as an example. He said that the materials used to build those temporary houses were about the same as those used to build construction site offices. Though those structures were good enough for people to live in for three to five years, the prefabricated steel houses built after this quake are semi-permanent.

Because earthquakes are common in Yuli, quake-resistance and safety are the top priorities in building houses there. When evaluating the various options for the construction of the new houses this time, Lin and his team thought of the 25 COVID-19 screening stations that Tzu Chi had helped build in 11 counties and cities in Taiwan during the pandemic, and of how fast those structures had been put up. As a result, they decided to work with the same construction company.

Each of the seven prefabricated houses came with its own architectural drawing. A temporary building license was also obtained from the Hualien County government for each structure. The houses' exterior walls are made of non-combustible materials to meet Taiwan's construction regulations. The walls and roofs, supported by strong steel frames, are resistant to severe earthquakes. Natural lighting and ventilation were also taken into account, so the ceilings in the interior are at least 2.5 meters (8.2 feet) tall. The residents inside won't feel closed in.

In addition to being sturdy, the new homes were designed with pitched roofs for better rain drainage. Cotton insulation was placed under steel beams of the roof to reduce heat. "Even if it's pouring, residents inside the house won't hear the rain," said Lin Min-chao. "Nor will the heat be transmitted indoors, even when it is scorching hot outside." Comparing the outdoor and indoor temperatures from the previous day, Lin said that while the iron sheets of a house on the outside were as hot as 40°C (104°F), they were just 20°C

(68°F) on the inside. He added, “The county government will issue usage permits, so the houses will be officially registered.”

After the earthquake, Tzu Chi volunteers traveled from all over Taiwan in shifts to the island’s eastern region to help repair houses with minor or moderate damage. The construction of the prefabricated steel houses began in December 2022. They were for families whose homes were too seriously damaged during the quake for them to reoccupy. By mid-December, Tzu Chi’s Construction Department team had finished laying the foundation for each house, after which Tzu Chi volunteers from central Taiwan started arriving to help build the houses. Once the building materials arrived, the basic structure of the houses took shape quickly. For example, the steel framework of two houses located on Xinyi Road in Yuli took but half a day to erect, install, and weld together.

Volunteer Hong is the owner of a company that manufactures mechanical parts. When he saw the quality of the building materials for the prefab homes, he said to Director Lin, “These materials

are tip-top!” Hong led the volunteer team that had come from central Taiwan to help. Though the team consisted of senior experts in construction, plumbing, and electricity, Hong asked everyone to regard themselves as “assistants” to the construction company staff on-site and respect their expertise.

Despite working as “assistants,” the volunteers gave their very best. While male volunteers helped to build the houses, female volunteers offered their support to the residents and helped with chores at the construction sites. To speed up the building process, everyone worked together to move the sandwich panels that were being used to build the exterior walls. The panels had two external metal layers and insulation in the middle, making them heavy, each weighing nearly 20 kilograms (44 pounds).

The seven prefabricated steel houses were built on the same sites where severely damaged houses had been demolished. Each new home has a different design and layout.



Catering to the needs of the residents

“Dharma Master Cheng Yen said that a job is well done if the end results meet the needs and expectations of the user,” Director Lin quoted. He pointed out that the seven prefabricated houses were individually tailored to meet the needs of each household. “In addition to considering the needs of the residents when we designed the houses, we also took into account the shape and other conditions of each piece of land. Thus, though each housing unit is 18 square meters [196 square feet], every single house is different.”

Grandpa Lin’s house is a great example. Since he lives with his son, his house was planned with three units from the beginning. After discussions with the father and son, it was decided that their new home would be built in an inverted U-shape to resemble a traditional three-section compound. A covered patio in front was added to allow Grandpa Lin to sit, enjoy the sun and fresh air, and chat with others, just like he used to.

Ms. Huang is another beneficiary of Tzu Chi’s construction project. Her house, located diagonally opposite Grandpa Lin’s house, was also severely

ly damaged in the earthquake and received a red notice issued by the government. The new house that Tzu Chi planned for Ms. Huang and her family was three units arranged into a square, complete with two rooms, two bathrooms, a dining room, and a kitchen.

Ms. Huang took a day off from work to visit the site where her old house used to stand and where Tzu Chi was now building a new home for her. A volunteer explained to her in detail the layout and other aspects of her new house as they watched the construction company staff and Tzu Chi volunteers hard at work. Huang was very moved. “We had to rent a place to live after the quake,” she said. “We felt so helpless, seeing how badly damaged our home was. We had no idea how we were going to rebuild it.”

Huang lived with her three siblings before the disaster. Each was getting on in years and had their own health issues, so it was beyond their

Construction workers install ceilings, made of lightweight, non-combustible materials.



Panels with wooden veneer were added to the houses' exterior walls. They make the houses look charming and can help insulate the dwellings from heat. Grandpa Lin's prefabricated steel house (right) is made up of three units arranged into an inverted U-shape to resemble a traditional three-section compound. Each of the seven prefabricated houses is individually tailored to meet the needs of residents and to accommodate the number of people that will live there (below).

YE YI-JIA



means to rebuild their own home. Huang was therefore very grateful for Tzu Chi's help. Since she and her siblings had to move out of their rented place before Chinese New Year, she hoped that the house Tzu Chi was building for them could be completed by that time. "Seeing so many people coming here to build our home, I'm deeply touched and feel hopeful now," she said. "I've seen on TV the efficiency of Tzu Chi volunteers as they carry out disaster relief work, but now I've been able to witness it with my very own eyes."

Because the weather had turned cold, Huang brought hot tea to the construction site the next morning before heading for work. She wanted to do something to help warm the bodies of the volunteers.

Mr. Jiang received a new home from Tzu Chi, too. He used to be a volunteer firefighter in Yuli Township, but he no longer worked on the front lines due to health conditions. His house collapsed during the earthquake, forcing him and his wife to stay temporarily in their undamaged barn. Needless to say, the living conditions there were primitive. There was no bathroom or kitchen, and the lighting was poor. Evenings grew dark early

in the mountain area during winter, so Jiang took from his collapsed house light bulbs that were still serviceable to use for more lighting in the barn, as well as a search and rescue light he had obtained.

More than ten Tzu Chi volunteers arrived at Mr. Jiang's home a little after four on the afternoon of December 21. The steel frames and exterior walls had already been erected by that time, so the volunteers had come to take care of carpentry work and put up partitions in the bathroom. They worked into the night, and even though Mr. Jiang provided some illumination, visibility wasn't very good. The team decided to saw the calcium silicate boards they were installing by hand, as cutting the boards with electric saws would raise large clouds of dust, making it even more difficult for them to see clearly. Feng Shi-xiu (馮詩秀), an 80-year-old professional carpenter, was determined to finish the work they had set for themselves that day so that paint could be applied the next day. He wanted to complete the house as soon as possible so Mr. Jiang's mind could be at ease.

Building houses like their own

Huang Li-yun (黃麗雲), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Yuli, had been doing what she could to give her fellow locals support since the earthquake had struck three months earlier. Now, in late December, seeing people in her town slowly settling down again, she finally felt more at peace, the worry lines between her eyebrows easing. "In the beginning, my fellow townspeople didn't know where to turn for help and find resources," she said. "As a Tzu Chi volunteer from Yuli, I've truly felt the solid support Tzu Chi has given to people here."

Huang recalled an incident one rainy day after the earthquake. An elderly man arrived at the

local Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall on a four-wheeled motor scooter. "I've come from Fuli Township," the man said. "My house was damaged in the quake. People told me to come to Tzu Chi in Yuli for help, so that's why I'm here. I really don't know who else to ask for help."

"The man looked like he was in his 80s," Huang said as she choked up. "He had tears in his eyes. He was so eager to find help that he didn't even take off his raincoat. His desperate look broke my heart. I remember it vividly to this day."

Mr. Li was another earthquake victim. He left his temporary dwelling provided by the government on October 8, 2022, about three weeks after the tremor, and returned to his quake-damaged home. A red notice from the government had been affixed on the outside. It'd been raining for several days in Yuli, and when he pushed the door to his house open, he was greeted with muddy rainwater that had seeped into his house via the cracks that had been created by the earthquake. He remembered what Tzu Chi volunteers had told him during a home visit after the quake: "If there is anything you can't handle and need help with, come to see us at the Jing Si Hall."

Later, he arrived at the Jing Si Hall in Yuli. He sat in his car for a while, mulling over whether he should go in or not. He finally decided to ask for help. The volunteers that received him comforted him and reassured him that Tzu Chi would help him. They also told him that if he didn't want to stay home alone, he could join them to help other locals. Li started by helping Tzu Chi prepare meals for volunteers who were in town to repair homes damaged in the quake. Then he began taking part in the repair project. One time, while helping rebuild a perimeter wall for a household, he was impressed to see four elderly volunteers, soaked to the bone, working hard in the rain. "That's the most amazing thing I've seen!" he exclaimed at the time.

The prefabricated house Tzu Chi built for Li has an indoor area of 18 square meters (one unit), enough for one person. It is also equipped with a bathroom. In the house, one doesn't feel the chilly wind blowing from the Lehe River down the hill. Li recalled he once chatted with some Tzu Chi volunteers, and told them that time, "Yuli is my home." "This is our home!" replied the volunteers, referring to Li's house. "Their reply went straight to my heart," Li said, pounding his chest. "In the volunteers' eyes, we are one and the same. I'm deeply moved!" In place of his 70-year-old house, the small prefabricated house standing on

the hillside was built with collective efforts, with love and care, by people who had built it as if they were building their own homes. Such care was what had moved Li the most.

After the construction company erected the steel frames and partitions of the prefabricated houses, professional experts and a team of Tzu Chi volunteers specializing in carpentry, painting, plumbing, and electricity took over and completed the other parts of the houses. All seven houses were finished by Chinese New Year, complete with outdoor drainage and other facilities. A donation ceremony was held on January 17, 2023, to formally turn the houses over to their new residents, just in time for them to celebrate the New Year in their new homes. ❁

Grandpa Lin and his son check on the building progress of their new home at the construction site. Their minds are finally at peace, knowing they'll be moving into their new home soon.



Small Station, Big Hearts

Dongyuan Recycling Station

Text and photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

October 6, 2022, marked the first time I visited the Tzu Chi Dongyuan Recycling Station in Dongshan District, Tainan, southern Taiwan. This recycling station is situated in such an atypical location I couldn't have found it if someone hadn't shown me the way to it. Nestled in the mountains, it doesn't have an address, nor are there any signs that point the way. The only "landmark" you can rely on to locate it is three shipping containers sitting alongside a mountain path leading to the recycling station. After passing the containers at a bend in the mountain path, you are there.

The recycling station is small and simply laid out: a single sorting area and two or three places for storing recyclables. Beyond that, it's just trees and natural unpaved land covered by grass. I asked the volunteers there when they usually gather together to sort recycling. The station is located in the mountains, and the volunteers are scattered across nearby villages, but they said they make a point of taking half a day out of their weekly schedule on Thursday afternoons to come to the station and sort recycling.

My first visit there happened to fall on a Thursday afternoon. Since everyone was around, I decided to take advantage of my visit to record the people and their work at the station. When I gathered everyone for a group picture, I was surprised to discover there were fewer than ten volunteers at the station. Though they are a small "family," they have kept the station going for 16 years.



Volunteers at the Dongyuan Recycling Station pose for a group photo. From left: Liu Xiu-qin (劉秀琴), Wu Mei-yun (吳美雲), Zheng Qiu-yuan, Li Shu-zhu (李淑珠), Luo You-hui, Zheng Zong-zhi, Li Li-qin (李麗琴), and You Ye Min.

Recycling
Family
Album



The Dongyuan Recycling Station doesn't have an address, nor are there any signs leading to it. You arrive after passing the shipping containers pictured here at a bend in a mountain path.



Upon entering the recycling station, you see several bags of plastic bottles under a tree, with a backdrop of mountains in the distance.



No Need for Words

Though the volunteers have only half a day per week to sort the recycling brought to the station, I saw that a lot of recycling was already there for them to work on. The amount of recyclables collected by volunteers from various collection points every week is enough to fill several 3.5-ton trucks. Since there is so much work to do with so few people to do it, the volunteers have worked out a system for their time together. One week they might focus on removing rings from the necks of PET bottles, the next they sort recyclables of miscellaneous kinds, and so on. Each week has its particular focus for the team.

Volunteers usually arrive right after noon on a typical weekly recycling day. Then the female volunteers take their seats amidst piles of unsorted recycling and get to work, while male volunteers load sorted recyclables onto trucks. The sound of sorted items tossed on their respective piles rises and falls throughout the afternoon. The volunteers have great chemistry. An unspoken understanding, forged over years of working together, has allowed them to work seamlessly. I learned later that they all have experience working on farms. As I watched them work, I was reminded of seasoned farmers sorting harvested crops together, each working briskly but in great tandem as a whole. No words are needed to coordinate their efforts.

No matter the amount of recyclables, volunteers make sure they finish sorting everything before dusk. The limited space at the recycling station makes it impossible to store large quantities of recyclables there. So volunteers can't call it a day until they have transported the sorted recyclables down the mountain to recycling merchants.



Despite Age and Physical Limitations

If you don't look closely, it is easy to miss her.

Wearing a bamboo hat, with a back bent 90 degrees as a result of osteoporosis and age-related degeneration, Luo Youhui (羅尤惠) can appear invisible as she quietly works amidst the small mountains of recyclables at the station. It's difficult even to see her face. To do that, you have to bend lower than she does.

Luo, 90, is the oldest and most senior volunteer at the station. She started serving there as soon as it was set up 16 years ago. She is rarely absent on the weekly recycling day, even though she has to endure the aches and pains caused by the degeneration of her bones. With her badly curved spine, it is quite a challenge for her to stay seated for long stretches of time. She has to stand up from her stool every few minutes to give her aching back some relief before sitting back down and continuing her work. Despite her physical limitations and discomfort, the thought of quitting never crosses her mind. Her commitment comes from wanting to leave a better environment behind for future generations.







A Covenant

Six volunteers, working in pairs, are responsible for collecting recyclables from the collection points spread across various local villages and bringing them to the recycling station. The three pairs are Zheng Zong-zhi (鄭宗智) and Zheng Qiu-yuan (鄭秋源), You Jing-hui (尤景輝) and You Ye Min (尤葉敏), and Wang Chao-yong (王超永) and Chen Su-juan (陳素娟). Each team attends to different districts and routes.

On the afternoon of November 30, 2022, I tagged along while Zheng Zong-zhi and Zheng Qiu-yuan were making one of their rounds together. Only then did I realize the uneasy task they had taken upon themselves. It's no piece of cake driving around winding, sinuous mountain roads making those collection trips, especially as the collection points are widely dispersed across a large area. They range from local residents' homes, fruit processing factories, to vehicle maintenance shops, and more. We even visited a temple—the highest-elevation temple locally—to pick up their recycling.

Dongshan District, where the recycling station is, is a major producer of fruit. For convenience's sake, many orchard farmers buy shop-sold beverages and bring them with them to drink when they go up into the mountains to work. Because of this practice, plastic bottles and Tetra Pak cartons account for the largest categories of recyclables among the items that volunteers collect. It is difficult to convince all the farmers to prepare their own drinking water instead of buying bottled beverages, so volunteers encourage them to recycle their bottles and cartons. This is at least better than throwing the containers away as garbage. Volunteers even provide large mesh bags into which the farmers can toss their bottles and cartons when they are empty. This helps prevent littering and serves to help the farmers make recycling a habit. In a way, the mesh bags are like a covenant between the volunteers and local residents to keep their homes cleaner.





Zheng Zong-zhi and Zheng Qiu-yuan are relatives, and they work as a team to collect recyclables by truck.




Husband and wife You Jing-hui and You Ye Min are usually busy with farm work, but they still make time to collect recyclables for the recycling station.

An Unwavering Course

It was near dusk. Volunteers picked up their pace to finish their work for the day before it became dark. There remained only a small amount of recycling to be sorted.

All of a sudden, I noticed that Luo was gone, no longer at her seat in the sorting area. I looked around for her and saw her slowly making her way to her mobility scooter, nicknamed “Mercedes-Benz.” When she reached the scooter, she held on to one of the armrests, then slowly straightened her badly curved spine until she stood tall. It was the first time I had seen her stand tall like that since we met. I was suddenly so moved. Noticing me looking at her, she smiled and said, “No worries. I’m just aching a little. I’ll be fine after a little rest.” Even though she said she was fine, everyone knew she had said that because she didn’t want others to worry about her. She was good at enduring pain.

As she stood beside her scooter, I caught her looking back at the recycling station, at everyone still working there. Her expression told me that despite her aches and pains, what she was most concerned about was still the recycling work at the station.

For 16 long years, Luo and her fellow volunteers have kept at their work, charting an unwavering course on their environmental mission. Limited manpower never holds them back, as they resolutely step up to the plate to help recycling be woven into the fabric of daily life. Standing side by side, they are working for a better future. 



Luo You-hui straightens her badly curved spine and stands tall beside her mobility scooter.

The Hand That Gives the Rose

By Jian Yu-xian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphic by Su Fang-pei



I'd known, I'd have taken another bus." One negative thought after another arose in my mind. I couldn't wait for my stop to come up.

Counting backwards the number of stops I still had to pass, I finally arrived at my destination. Just when I was about to disembark, however, I noticed a shift in my emotions. I suddenly felt sympathy for the driver.

Instead of choosing to disembark via the back door, which was closer to me, I walked towards the front door, turned to look at the driver, and said to him in a cheerful voice before I got off, "Happy New Year!" His head hung low and his eyes were fixed on the steering wheel. He didn't say anything back to me, but I clearly saw a look of embarrassment flicker across his sullen face.

I thought back to 30 years before that, when I was a student studying abroad. At the time, I was a hormonal teenager easily held hostage by the vagaries of mood. One day, I was walking angrily down the street, having been riled by a trivial matter, when a kind-looking, middle-aged, white lady said to me with a smile, "Why don't you give me a smile?"

All of a sudden, my bad mood dissipated like smoke in the wind. I turned to the lady and flashed her a bright smile. She smiled back at me. I remember this beautiful moment so many years later—it has been burned into my memory.

People say that the fragrance always stays in the hand that gives the rose. I am happy I extended my goodwill to the driver and wished him "Happy New Year." I hope it lifted his mood a bit, which would no doubt in turn have benefited the passengers still on the bus when I got off. ❀

Early on the first day of 2023, I arrived in Taipei for a visit from Hsinchu, about 90 minutes away by car. As soon as I boarded a bus in Taipei, the driver closed the doors and pulled into traffic. I quickly held onto something for support, then carefully walked to an empty seat and sat down.

I soon began to feel an atmosphere of tension and agitation among the handful of other passengers on board the bus. The source of that tense atmosphere was the driver. He was honking the horn ever so often, complaining about other people's driving, and sometimes even cursing in a low voice. "What a bummer," I thought to myself. "If

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



New Zealand

Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand, was pounded by severe flooding triggered by days of downpours in January 2023. An entire summer's worth of rain fell within one day, on January 27. Floodwaters swept through streets and down highways, causing havoc in the city and killing four people. The devastating flood was described as "the biggest climate event" in New Zealand's history.

After visiting shelters and assessing conditions in the disaster area, Tzu Chi volunteers decided to prepare boxed meals for affected families. The floods had left many households without running water and electricity, making it difficult for them to cook their meals. Volunteers decided to provide a meal a day from January 31 to February 5, while many people would be busy cleaning up their homes. They focused their meal service on families living in low-lying sections on Chilcott Road and Clover Drive in Hendersen, an especially hard-hit area.

Volunteers pose with flood victims in Hendersen, Auckland, after delivering meals to them.

ZHANG LI-ZHEN

Food prepared by culinary volunteers was distributed door-to-door late every afternoon during the six days. Flood victim Mr. Zhou was from China. He told the volunteers delivering meals to him that he and his wife had had difficulty falling asleep at night since the deluge because they were afraid that rushing waters would come and sweep them away when they were sound asleep. He expressed his gratitude to the volunteers for their care during this difficult time. He said that it was troublesome for them to cook right now because their car and cooking equipment had been ruined in the floods. There were so many things to take care of every day they didn't have the mood to even think about eating. Tzu Chi's meal service had therefore come at a good time. "You've been coming every day," he said to the volunteers. "I can really feel your care for us."

“Thank you!” said Napoleone, another flood victim, to the volunteers delivering meals to him. He was busy cleaning his home but was very happy to see the volunteers again. A volunteer gave him a Tzu Chi coin bank and encouraged him to save money in it to be used for charitable purposes, sharing with him how small sums of money, when put together, can do great good. Napoleone said he’d give the coin bank to his daughter and save money in it with her. “The coin bank will remind me of you and your kindness,” he said.

Volunteers were happy whenever they saw how much the recipients loved the meals they received. When a little girl learned that the food they had received that day was chow mein, her and her family’s favorite, she dove into her share of the noodles before the volunteers had even left her home. A woman, Bernadette, was a vegetarian. She exclaimed, “Perfect!” when she learned that the food Tzu Chi was serving was meatless.

Volunteers delivered nearly 400 boxed meals during the six days. On February 5, when they made their delivery to a woman and told her it’d be the last day of their meal service, the woman’s eyes brimmed with tears. She hugged the volunteers and said, “Thank you. I’ll miss you.”



Volunteers prepare meals to be distributed to flood victims in Hendersen, West Auckland, New Zealand.

ZHANG LI-ZHEN



Indonesia

Tzu Chi Indonesia, the Sinar Mas Group, and local governments in the province of Central Java combined forces to launch a program aimed at reducing extreme poverty in five regencies in the province. Part of the program is to build 3,500 toilets for private homes. More than 1,900 of these toilets had been completed by the end of 2022. The rest are scheduled to be finished by mid-2023.



↑ Karyono (first from left) and his family pose in front of their new toilet.

ARIMAMI SURYO ASMORO

← A fishpond used by a family to relieve themselves

ARIMAMI SURYO ASMORO

Many families in the rural areas of Banjarnegara Regency, Central Java, are too poor to build bathrooms for themselves. They either dug holes near their homes to use as pit latrines, relieved themselves directly into fishponds, or employed other means to answer nature's call. As a result, there were frequent incidents of people getting bitten by insects or snakes when they relieved themselves outdoors. It was also extremely inconvenient for them when they needed to go at night or on rainy days.

Karyono, a miner, and his wife, Jasiem, a farmhand, are among the beneficiaries of the building project. After a long wait of 40 years, they no longer had to endure the inconveniences of answering nature's call out in nature. They can now go to the bathroom in the safety and comfort of their own toilet.

Thailand

Tzu Chi Thailand held two distributions in Bangkok for refugees on December 21 and 22, 2022, helping 1,667 families.

Volunteers gathered before the distributions to pack the food and other daily necessities to be given out. Lan Yu-huei (藍玉惠) was among those participating in the packing event. "Life isn't easy for refugees in the country," she said. "Unable to obtain legal identification, they aren't allowed to work. I always volunteer to help whenever I hear that Tzu Chi is distributing aid to this group of people."

Arooj Ayaz, from Pakistan, was one of those who benefited from the distributions. She and her husband had arrived in Thailand five months before. She had helped a person in her home country who was suffering from violence, and as a result, became a target of violence herself. Fearful for her own life, she decided to flee to Thailand with her husband. "Though getting by here isn't easy, at least my life isn't in danger," she said. "This has been the first time I've



A volunteer helps an aid recipient with limited mobility carry goods he received at a distribution held by Tzu Chi Thailand for refugees on December 22, 2022.

DATCHANEE SURATEP



A refugee signs to receive cash aid from Tzu Chi Thailand after a volunteer checked her identity at a distribution on December 21, 2022. PINTICHA JANSUKSRI

received help from Tzu Chi. I'm happy to encounter an organization like Tzu Chi, which helps people regardless of their ethnicity or religion."

Daraz, also from Pakistan, is 58 and lives alone. With the supplies and cash aid from Tzu Chi in hand, he was full of gratitude for the foundation. He said he would use the cash to pay his rent. Tzu Chi has helped him in other ways too. He suffers from several chronic illnesses and has to take a lot of medicine every month, which, if he has to pay for himself, would cost him a lot of money. Fortunately, Tzu Chi's free clinic center has been able to help him in that area. In addition, via a referral service from the free clinic center, he underwent surgery at a hospital a while ago to have the small toe on his left foot removed. His doctor told him that his life would have been in grave danger if he hadn't had the amputation done in time. He thanked Tzu Chi for the help that time too at the distribution venue.

Suwannaree arrived at the venue after taking three buses. She and her four children had escaped from Cambodia to Thailand 18 years before. Her family now includes her four children, a daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren. "I'm at ease now, having received the supplies and cash from Tzu Chi," she said, her voice catching with emotion. "I'll use the money to buy baby formula for my grandchildren. Thank you to Master Cheng Yen and all Tzu Chi volunteers around the world for their care for refugees."

Poland

Millions of people have fled from Ukraine since Russia invaded the country in February 2022. They weren't able to bring many things with them when they left, and it's been difficult for them to get by in a foreign country. Older people, persons with disabilities, and women with children are especially in need of help.

Tzu Chi has continued to aid Ukrainian refugees in Poland. For example, in Poznań, west-central Poland, volunteers hold distributions regularly to help needy Ukrainian families cope. Volunteers also deliver aid to those families who can't come to the distributions.

On December 17, 2022, Tzu Chi conducted another distribution in Poznań, giving out cash cards to 53 families, benefiting 106 people. Those who qualified for the aid included single mothers with two or more children, seniors older than 65, families with one or more disabled members, and/or households with two or fewer people who can work.

Volunteers respectfully handed over the aid to representatives from the participating families during the distribution, then wished them the best and gave them hugs. Ksenia Mazur, a Ukrainian volunteer, encouraged her fellow compatriots by saying, "Though a tragedy is going on in Ukraine, we must still live our lives the best we can and never lose hope for the future." To thank Tzu Chi volunteers for their help, some refugees brought gifts for them, including embroidered work, knitted socks, and home-baked cake. The volunteers were deeply moved.

As the war drags on into its second year, it is everyone's sincerest hope that peace will soon descend on Ukraine and allow the nation's citizens to freely live under the blue sky in their own country.



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*Meet obstacles in life with equanimity and they will
pass quickly.*
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY HUANG XIAO-ZHE