

慈濟 Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action



**Free Dental Service for People
With Special Needs**

July 2023



Sacred writings of any religion that promote kind words, virtuous actions, and benevolent intentions have the power to create blessings and peace for humanity.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

Create a Better World

Translated by Teresa Chang

I always keep my mentor Dharma Master Yin Shun in my heart and on my mind. When he accepted me as his disciple six decades ago, he instructed me to “work for Buddhism and for all living beings.” Those instructions have guided my life. I have taken care to ensure my life adheres to his teachings and the right principles.

The Buddha is also my mentor. Hundreds of years after the Enlightened One entered nirvana, wise and accomplished monks compiled his oral teachings into sutras. All sutras are rare and precious, containing profound wisdom and providing guidance for future generations on the path to overcoming worldly attachments and desires. I have expounded on several important Buddhist scriptures in my life, including the *Sutra of Forty-Two Chapters*, the *Sutra on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teachings*, the *Sutra of the Bodhisattvas' Eight Realizations*, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Medicine Buddha Sutra*, and the *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings*. Among these, the *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings*, which is the essence of the *Lotus Sutra*, holds a special place with me. I've recited, transcribed, and expounded on the *Lotus Sutra* all my life. It contains the guiding principles I have steadfastly lived by.

Before I entered the monastic life, I overheard a devotee telling Dharma Master Xiu Dao at the Ci Yun Temple in Taichung about how a neighbor was renovating their house and had discovered a copy of the *Lotus Sutra*, consisting of seven volumes. No one knew how many generations it had survived. When I heard the name *Lotus Sutra*, my heart was filled with joy. The neighbor was planning to take it to an antique dealer, but I quickly asked if I could purchase it. That was 70 years ago. I kept that copy until its pages became loose when I flipped through it.

In 2020, I was given a hand-copied edition of the Koran by Faisal Hu (胡光中), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Türkiye. It was 500 years old, although its pages had suffered damage over time. The value of this precious scripture prompted me to take great care in its preservation, so I entrusted it to the National Taiwan Library for restoration. In June this year, they returned the sacred book to me, meticulously restored. I am grateful for modern technology, which has ensured its preservation for many more centuries to come.

The National Taiwan Library's restoration work

with the Koran showed exquisite craftsmanship and left me in awe. It filled me with great confidence in their skills. Therefore, I entrusted my old copy of the *Lotus Sutra* to them as well. I hope that it will be restored to good shape and can continue to be passed down through generations.

Living in an impure and troubled world, it feels as though we are traversing through a dark tunnel. Sacred religious texts serve as a guiding light, illuminating the path towards the radiance at the tunnel's end. While religions bear different names, their underlying principles remain the same. Teachings that possess wisdom and can be shared with individuals of varying capacities are all worth propagating. No matter the religion, the promotion of virtuous actions that benefit humanity is of utmost importance.

Good teachings, kind words, virtuous actions, and benevolent intentions have the power to create blessings for humanity. Conversely, speaking ill words and sowing discord among people can disrupt society and even lead to conflicts between nations. If people's minds are not peaceful and balanced, disharmony and unrest follow.

Unwholesome thoughts can turn friendly nations into warring foes, resulting in tragic death and the large-scale displacement of people. While achieving a world without illness or suffering may be impossible, attaining a state of peace without warfare is within our reach. It is impossible that humanity, all eight billion individuals, can share one mind and heart. However, we can still make a difference by starting with ourselves. I urge all Tzu Chi volunteers to inspire those with whom they have formed positive connections. By sharing kind words and stories of Tzu Chi with as many people as possible, we can encourage them to make noble aspirations and contribute to the welfare of humankind, working towards alleviating suffering in the world.

The biggest concern in my heart is witnessing people in need yet being unable to reach out and help them. They may have survived disasters, but still need assistance to get by. Reflecting upon their suffering and contemplating the multitude of individuals enduring hardships and hunger reinforces the importance of encouraging more people to go out into the world and make a positive impact. Let us be ever more mindful. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

July 2023



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On the Cover:

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa



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

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Special Patients, Special Dentists

By Hong Jing-jing

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Volunteers from all over Taiwan visit three nursing institutions in Taitung twice a year to provide dental care to people with special needs, addressing the difficulties these individuals face in seeking medical treatment.



Dentists at a Tzu Chi free clinic for special needs patients carefully provide treatment, using flashlights and headlamps for illumination.

“Mom is here. The doctors will be done soon; don’t exert yourself. You’re going to become a handsome guy!” reassured Mrs. Chen, to her son Tai-you. Mrs. Chen and her husband make a weekly visit to a care facility run by the Genesis Social Welfare Foundation (GSWF) to see their son. This day’s visit, however, was a special one.

Seven years ago, Tai-you was in a motorcycle accident that left him in a vegetative state. Afterwards, his parents sought help from several dental clinics to help care for his teeth. Unfortunately, doctors always politely declined to treat him, due to his inability to respond and his dependence on a ventilator connected through a tracheostomy tube. But that changed in 2022 when he was transferred to the GSWF facility. Regular dental care there is provided by the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA). It wasn’t long before Tai-you’s dark and yellow teeth were clean and white again.

“Tai-you, blink your eyes twice to express your gratitude to the doctors,” Mr. Chen said to his son. November of last year marked the first time Tai-you had had a dental cleaning since the accident, and Mr. Chen had been eagerly looking forward to meeting the Tzu Chi team. Finally, on this day, his wish was fulfilled. “Seeing so many people serving Tai-you today is truly unexpected. I’m immensely grateful to have such an exceptional team care for my son!”

Dental calculus

On May 20 and 21, 2023, a total of 213 TIMA healthcare professionals and support volunteers from all over Taiwan provided dental care, as well as ENT and surgical treatment, to elderly people in need, patients in vegetative states, and individuals with physical and mental disabilities. The services were conducted at three institutions in Taitung, southeastern Taiwan: the Taitung Ren’ai Senior Citizens’ Home, the Genesis Social Welfare Foundation’s Taitung branch, and the Shenxiu Nursing Center (affiliated with the Malan Veterans Home). The free medical events over the two days served approximately 300 patient visits.

Dental patients with special needs require specialized clinical care. As an example, the entry of water into the airway during the dental cleaning procedure can cause respiratory obstruction and reduce blood oxygen levels, so extra attention and monitoring is required by a whole team. During

TIMA’s free clinics, each patient is typically attended by two dentists who provide mutual support. They are assisted by two or three nurses or specially trained dental assistants, who are responsible for suctioning water from the patient’s mouth and passing instruments. At the foot of the bed, a nurse or doctor monitors the patient’s blood oxygen level using an oximeter. A volunteer with expertise in plumbing and electricity is also on standby to ensure the proper functioning of equipment. Furthermore, a doctor conducts regular rounds to promptly respond to emergencies. Everyone works together and implements multiple safeguards to ensure that treatments are carried out with the utmost safety.

TIMA’s dental services for people with special needs started in 2008. Dr. Li Yi-bang (李彝邦), the director of Special Needs Dentistry at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, eastern Taiwan, went to a dental university in Japan in 2007 to study home-based oral care. The following year, the Genesis Social Welfare Foundation’s Taichung branch in central Taiwan reached out to TIMA. They expressed concerns about the lack of dental care available to their residents in vegetative states. In response, TIMA members in central Taiwan organized the first-ever dental care event for such individuals. Dr. Li Yi-bang, along with over ten volunteers, provided dental cleaning and treatment for 30 patients in vegetative states.

“The first time I volunteered at a dental clinic for people in vegetative states was an emotional experience. It brought tears to my eyes,” Dr. Li recalled. “Witnessing the profound suffering these individuals endured, it felt as if their souls were confined within a prison.” He added that although these patients can’t express their dental pain, he recognizes the importance of TIMA’s assistance and the potential difference they could make.

Dr. Li continued, “It took more than an hour to thoroughly clean each person’s teeth. Their dental calculus was quite severe; sometimes it required multiple sessions to completely remove it. There were also many cases of tooth decay and periodontal disease.” He emphasized that tooth decay and periodontal disease can in turn pose risks for other diseases, such as aspiration pneumonia. The periodontal bacteria can enter the bloodstream, affecting the heart or causing brain infections or abscesses. It can also contribute to vascular inflammation and blockage, increasing the likelihood of stroke. It’s vital not to overlook the importance of proper oral care.



Mr. and Mrs. Chen (standing in the rear) observe as TIMA volunteers prepare to clean their son's teeth.

TIMA Taiwan's Special Needs Free Clinics

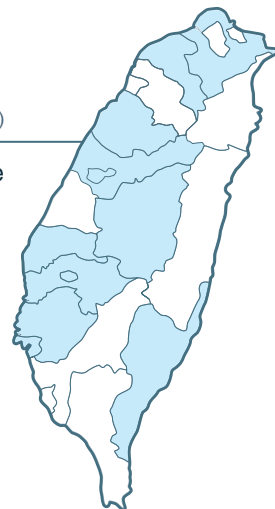
(2022 statistics)

Target groups: Individuals with disabilities, patients in vegetative states, special education classes, and care institutions

Coverage areas (highlighted in blue on the map):
New Taipei, Taoyuan, Miaoli, Taichung, Nantou, Yunlin, Chiayi, Tainan, and Taitung

Number of events: 30 **Patient visits:** 2,155

Mobilization: Medical professionals contributed 465 shifts, while support volunteers dedicated 767 shifts.



Before performing any procedure on an individual in a vegetative state, Dr. Li takes the time to explain what he is going to do. He also adds, "Dental cleaning may cause some discomfort. I apologize for any pain. Please bear with it for a moment." He stressed the importance of experience when it comes to providing dental care to such patients. One important aspect is quickly suctioning dental calculus and cleaning water to prevent overflow from the oral cavity. Dr. Li typically pauses the cleaning process after silently counting to around ten or 20 while he cleans to ensure proper control. Another crucial consideration is the positioning of the bed, which should be inclined at an angle of about 40 to 60 degrees. Additionally, an extra pillow is placed behind the neck to create a bend in the airway. This ensures that the patient's head is in the optimal position for treatment. If the head is in the wrong position, water can easily pass through the airway and enter the lungs.

When caring for patients in such conditions, dentists must adapt their posture, often bending and sometimes even stooping over the bed to accommodate them. The positions can eventually result in discomfort and stiffness in the neck and waist, requiring the use of back support during treatments. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, every dentist approaches their work with joy and enthusiasm. They volunteer for the free clinics repeatedly, even though it's on their own time and at their own expense.

TIMA members have been visiting the Taichung branch of the Genesis Social Welfare Foundation every three months for 15 years, since 2008. Their services have expanded to include GSWF branches in Miaoli, Nantou, Hsinchu, Taipei, Keelung, New Taipei, and Taitung. When individuals in vegetative states experience toothaches or gum inflammation, they may drool constantly. After receiving a dental cleaning, their mouths are less likely to suffer from inflammation or unpleasant odors. The air inside the care facilities actually becomes fresher, without lingering smells. Furthermore, there is a reduction in oral bacteria, resulting in fewer hospitalizations for pneumonia among the residents, thereby alleviating the workload of healthcare workers.

Dedicated volunteers

"It really hurts when my patients bite, but I understand that they don't do it on purpose," said dentist Huang Wen-guo (黃文國). "If I were in the

same situation, I'd hope that healthcare professionals would make allowances for me." One elderly lady at the Shenxiu Nursing Center, one of the three locations where TIMA offered free clinics in May in Taitung, kept shouting and refusing to receive treatment, firmly biting into Dr. Huang's hand, unwilling to let go.

Huang works in the Department of Dentistry at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, northern Taiwan. He has devoted more than 20 years to delivering dental care to individuals with special needs. Half of his patients suffer from mental illnesses, followed by those with physical disabilities. Some individuals with special needs present particular challenges for dentists, even with the assistance of security personnel to restrain them, making it difficult to provide smooth dental treatment.

Dr. Huang shared an anecdote about a patient with bipolar disorder who spent over an hour rambling in his consultation room. An assistant gestured for him to stop, but the patient angrily brushed her hand away. Huang patiently listened and provided advice at appropriate moments. In the end, the patient expressed gratitude, saying, "Thank you for listening to me for such a long time. I no longer have the desire to kill that person."

Another patient came to bid farewell, revealing that he had refrained from eating for seven days. He thanked Dr. Huang for the years of care that had relieved him of toothaches. Huang quickly informed a social worker of the patient's situation while offering solace to the patient and presenting him with a gift given to him by Tzu Chi volunteers. To everyone's surprise, the patient knelt down and repeatedly thanked Huang. Four days later, during a follow-up visit, the patient said to Huang, "My mood has improved."

When he was growing up, Huang's father had consistently advised him to take care of his family and extend help to others when he had the ability. He kept his father's words firmly in mind and committed himself to assisting others with his medical expertise. But Huang acknowledged, "I'm no longer young. Before I reach a point where I can no longer work, I hope to see more younger individuals join this field to carry on the torch." This was his greatest concern.

Patients with special needs pose challenges in providing treatment. Dentists who specialize in treating them often face lower incomes and higher medical risks. Consequently, new dentists in this area of expertise often become discouraged and quit within three months. Huang doesn't mind

the hard work but hopes for a continuous influx of young professionals in the field, whether in regular clinics or free clinics.

Li Zi-ying (李姿瑩) was a member of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association (TCA) when she studied at Kaohsiung Medical University in southern Taiwan. When she graduated and entered dental training, she faced a dilemma in choosing which dental specialty to pursue. But then, a vivid scene suddenly flashed in her mind: during her fifth-year internship, she witnessed Dr. Huang Chun-de (黃純德), a pioneer in special needs dentistry in Taiwan, holding the hand of a disabled patient and singing to him. This scene reminded her of her own experiences accompanying patients as a volunteer for TCA. "I aspired to live a purposeful life, so I made the decision to choose pediatric and special needs dentistry," she explained.

Li began participating in TIMA free clinics in

2017. The following year, she invited Huang Zi-min (黃子旻), a third-year dental student at her alma mater, to join as a dental assistant in TIMA's free clinics in Taitung. Huang later graduated and became a dentist herself. She participated as a full dentist for the first time in TIMA's free clinics in Taitung last year.

Li remembered the words of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, who had once told her, "Inviting young people to participate in our free clinics is not as difficult as it may seem." Motivated by these words, Li gathered her courage and, togeth-

At a TIMA free clinic on May 20 at the Shenxiu Nursing Center, dental assistants stand or kneel, offering comforting words to patients or even holding their hands in an attempt to alleviate any fear they might have.

LIN JIA-RU



er with Liao Guan-xuan (廖官瑄), a fellow dental alumnus, organized a training event for youth medical volunteers at their alma mater earlier this year. In addition to teaching courses on clinical skills and the delivery of oral health education, they invited the participants to serve at TIMA free clinics. Five attendees volunteered at the free clinics held in Taitung this time.

Li said that young people are pure and passionate, echoing the sentiments of renowned primatologist Dr. Jane Goodall, who stated that when a group of young people come together, they have the power to change the world. Li aspired to be a strong pillar of support for this transformative power.

Dr. Chen Qing-jia (陳清家), a resident of Taitung, had experience providing dental care to special needs patients in a nursing home for about four years before participating in a TIMA free clinic for the first time in November 2020. He was aware of the presence of HIV/AIDS patients in the facility where they were offering dental services, but remained fearless, stating, "As long as I take proper precautions, there is no need to fear. Everyone else [in our team] is doing it, and I should, too."

Due to the pandemic, TIMA was forced to suspend its free medical services for two years. When Dr. Chen rejoined TIMA's free clinics in November 2022, one of their target groups for services were individuals in vegetative states at the Taitung branch of GSWF. It was Chen's first time offering services to such people, which naturally made him a bit nervous. Fortunately, Dr. Li Yi-bang shared many valuable clinical techniques with him. Being part of a dedicated medical team working together to care for those in need also brought Chen a sense of peace of mind.

While Chen was cleaning the teeth of a patient at the Taitung branch during the May free clinics this time, the individual suddenly started shedding tears, which startled him. He wasn't sure if the patient was experiencing pain or if he was moved by the care and love demonstrated by the team. Everyone comforted the patient in a gentle manner, saying, "We are all here to help you."

Chen's wife, Wu Yan-chan (吳彥蟬), and their son, Chen Dao-yi (陳道宜), volunteered alongside him, serving as assistants. Wu expressed profound gratitude for the opportunity to volunteer together with her family. Their son is currently interning at a hospital. Chen hoped that Dao-yi would go beyond merely observing techniques

and acquiring experience as an assistant at such events. He wished for him to embrace the spirit of Great Love and integrate it into his lifelong medical career.

We'll come back again

Wang Yu-feng (王玉鳳), the director of GSWF's Taitung branch, recalled the initial visit of TIMA volunteers to her institution in 2016 for a free clinic. More than 40 medical workers and support volunteers came together for the event. Wang was so deeply moved that tears welled up in her eyes. "It was like witnessing a glimmer of hope."

She explained that when the Taitung GSWF branch was established in 2014, she had struggled to find oral healthcare resources in the area for her residents. To her surprise, a team from all over Taiwan gathered to provide services to the residents of her institution, despite it being located in the remote area of Taitung. As that first event drew to a close, she grew concerned and asked, "Will there be another visit?" Several doctors, including Xie Jin-long (謝金龍) and Li Yi-bang, reassured her with determination, saying, "We will definitely return next time!"

TIMA holds special needs dental clinics in Taitung every May and November. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the clinics had to be temporarily suspended. Nevertheless, the medical team continued to demonstrate care and concern to the institution through messaging apps. On one occasion, after an earthquake struck Taitung, volunteers reached out to the institution and asked, "Was everyone okay after the severe earthquake in Taitung last night?" On other occasions they expressed sentiments such as, "We miss the director and the patients greatly and are also concerned about the patients' oral health." They eagerly awaited the resumption of the free clinics.

The free clinics resumed in November of last year as the pandemic eased. Director Wang said, "When I saw the volunteers returning, I couldn't help but cry. They never forgot about us!"

Dr. Li Yi-bang enjoys singing to patients to help them find emotional relief. He remarked, "Simply singing to individuals in vegetative states can sometimes improve their blood oxygen levels!" Xiao-mai, a young man, suffered a brain injury from a car accident and had been bedridden at GSWF's Taitung branch for six months before he miraculously regained consciousness. Dr. Li knew that Xiao-mai enjoyed listening to

songs by Jay Chou (周杰倫), a renowned Taiwanese singer, so he dedicated time to practicing the song "Rainbow." As Xiao-mai listened and smiled, Li encouraged him to work hard at rehabilitation, saying, "Once you can walk with crutches, I will take you to Taichung for some fun!"

"We had just a dozen people [volunteering] at the beginning, and now we have over 200 people! It truly feels like a miracle!" exclaimed Li Yi-bang. He further expressed that it is because he is in Tzu Chi that he has been able to connect with so many

medical professionals and volunteers who share the same values and aspirations. He emphasized the immense satisfaction he derives from working with everyone else to deliver oral healthcare to a large number of individuals simultaneously. "I consider myself incredibly fortunate to be a part of the Tzu Chi family!" he concluded. ●●

Volunteers set up pipelines before the start of a free clinic.





Safer Homes, Secure Old Age

By Wen Bao-qin

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Tzu Chi launched the “Safe Homes, Caring Communities” project in Taiwan in March 2020. One of the initiatives involves collaborating with neighborhood chiefs to enhance home safety for elderly individuals living alone, disabled people, and vulnerable families. By the end of 2022, 3,750 households had benefited from this initiative.

A volunteer drills into a wall to install a grab bar in a household with older residents.







On a pleasant day in March 2021, 43 Tzu Chi volunteers and five social workers from the Tzu Chi Tainan office set out for the neighborhood of Gaoyuan in the Dongshan District of Tainan City, southern Taiwan. They were visiting 50 households consisting of seniors living alone or individuals with disabilities based on a list provided by the neighborhood chief. Seven local residents, also Tzu Chi volunteers, were guiding them on those visits.

As soon as the visiting team entered the rural Dongshan District, they were greeted by picturesque rice fields and slopes adorned with orchards. This district is devoid of factories, creating challenges for young people to find employment and build stable lives. As a result, many of them have left to seek opportunities in other places, leaving behind elderly parents who rely on each other for support. Some elderly individuals have lost a spouse, leading to a life of solitude. Others have assumed the responsibilities of raising and caring for their grandchildren. This happens when the children's parents have been unable to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities due to work commitments, health issues, or other circumstances.

The neighborhood of Gaoyuan, signifying "highland," truly lives up to its name with its elevated, steep terrain. Luo Xian-long (羅獻龍), the neighborhood chief, explained to the visiting volunteers that the community had around 270 households, and that despite having over 800 registered residents, the actual population was less than half of that. He further elaborated on the scattered distribution of the households across the hills. "While we are all neighbors in a sense, the actual distance between us is often over a hundred meters or more," he said. "We have approximately 50 households with elderly individuals living alone, elderly couples relying on each other, or elderly people raising their grandchildren. The distance between households presents a genuine concern for the safety of our older population."

Tzu Chi volunteer Zheng Zong-zhi (鄭宗智) lives in Gaoyuan. He has expertise in plumbing and electricity, and is a member of a home safety

Even though they have to climb uphill with heavy tools, members of a Tzu Chi home safety improvement team maintain a brisk pace, thinking of the older people waiting for them to install safety features in their homes.

improvement team under the Tzu Chi project of "Safe Homes, Caring Communities." Understanding the life-saving importance of even a single grab bar, he took the initiative to contact neighborhood chief Luo, who is about his age, to propose the idea of improving the living environments for the elderly in Gaoyuan by installing non-slip or fall-prevention features to reduce the occurrence of accidents.

"Inconveniences such as squat toilets, inadequate lighting, deteriorating doors, uneven hallways, and loose or damaged steps can significantly affect the daily lives of older people," said Zheng. "These concerns are the driving force behind Tzu Chi's community safety initiative." His words deeply resonated with Luo, who had dedicated his younger years to a career outside Gaoyuan but returned to his community a few years before to serve his fellow villagers. In fact, Luo had been mentally noting the repairs needed by local elderly and vulnerable residents even before Zheng contacted him, his care for the well-being of his community members obvious.

After Zheng reached out to him, Luo conducted a household survey, assessing which families met the criteria for Tzu Chi's home safety improvement program. He went from house to house over the course of two to three days. If someone wasn't home, he returned on another day to ensure no one was left out. In some instances, community residents alerted him to households in need of assistance. Until the morning of the volunteers' planned visits, the numbers reported by Luo continued to fluctuate. Ultimately, he recommended 50 households for the volunteers to make their first visits.

Makeshift grab bars

On that March day, the Tzu Chi team broke into seven groups and fanned out to visit the 50 households.

Mr. and Mrs. Zhang lived with the former's unmarried brother. All three of them were in their 70s. Mr. Zhang faced mobility challenges and relied on crutches to move around their home, located on a slope.

The group of volunteers visiting this household conducted a careful examination of their bathroom and the layout of their rooms. Inside the bathroom, they noticed several knotted ropes hanging from the towel rack. These turned out to be makeshift aids for Mr. Zhang to help himself stand up after washing himself. Social worker

Weng Xiu-ya (翁綉雅), who had extensive experience in home visits, immediately discussed this with volunteer Zheng Zong-zhi. Together, they decided to install handrails and provide a shower chair for Mr. Zhang's convenience.

Zheng thoughtfully reminded the senior to be cautious when pulling on the ropes hanging from the towel rack, as they had limited weight-bearing capacity. Then he retrieved a measuring tape and adeptly determined the height for installing the handrails, taking into account Mr. Zhang's seated position. Continuing their assessment, the volunteers made their way through the hallway connecting the rooms in the house, where they discovered uneven and loose sections of the cement floor. Without delay, they scheduled another visit with the Zhang family to address these repairs and install the handrails in the bathroom.

Zheng, whose own father was advanced in age, was delighted to serve his fellow villagers. "I'm acquainted with many local residents," he said, "but it is through home visits like this that we truly get to understand the specific conditions and needs of each household. The safety of the elderly is of utmost importance. Since I live here in this community, I will begin by taking care of the repairs or modifications I can handle independently to ensure faster progress."

The Tzu Chi team also visited Mrs. Hu at her home. She lived alone. To reach her house, one had to climb over a dozen steps covered in moss. Despite being 86 years old, Mrs. Hu still moved with relative agility. The visiting volunteers praised her for appearing younger than her age and were amazed to discover that she already had 28 great-grandchildren.

The octogenarian lived in a traditional Chinese-style house designed in a linear layout. Over a decade earlier, her husband had built a step to facilitate movement between the house and the yard. When volunteer Xu Mao-zhong (許茂忠) stepped onto the solitary step, he noticed an unsettling instability beneath his feet, sensing the potential danger.

Arriving at the bathroom, Xu opened the door and was quick to notice a slippery plastic mat placed on the floor. Mrs. Hu smiled and candidly shared, "Yes, I slipped on it not long ago!" After just a brief inspection, Xu and the other volunteers had identified three concerning safety issues: the moss-covered stone steps, the unsteady step leading from the yard to the main hall, and the slippery plastic mat in the bathroom.

The volunteers recorded the issues requiring attention on a form, while also asking for the contact information of Mrs. Hu's child who lived closest to her. They assured Mrs. Hu that they would inform her through the community leader before they proceeded on their work during their next visit.

Home repairs and improvements may appear straightforward, but in reality, there are many things to consider. Sometimes, the work involves drilling into walls to secure grab bars, removing existing bathtubs, or replacing squat toilets with seated ones. Before the volunteers do anything, they must first ascertain whether the property is owned or rented. If it is a rental, the landlord's consent is required; if someone is staying in a house on loan without any rental charges, the owner's permission is required too. After conducting a home

visit to assess the required work, it is essential to obtain signatures from the beneficiary, the neighborhood leader, and representative volunteers to confirm the project's initiation. Additionally, on the day of completion, it is vital to have the beneficiary or family members test the repairs or modifications and sign off on the project.

A former care recipient

Mrs. Ye, a petite woman in her 80s, lived in a remote area of Gaoyuan. The volunteers who were visiting her found on their way to her home

Volunteer Xu Mao-zhong meticulously marks the installation positions of a handrail with a pen, to ensure that the handrail will be conveniently accessible for the older individuals to use.



that their vehicles sometimes skidded on the muddy slopes, so for safety' sake, they decided to take a detour. When the group finally arrived at her home, they promptly began checking the brightness of the lights in her house, locating suitable spots for grab bars in the bathroom, and ascertaining whether there was enough space to place a shower chair. Later in their visit, they discovered that Mrs. Ye had previously received care and support from Tzu Chi.

Mrs. Ye's husband had passed away many years earlier, and both of her daughters were married. Her only son had married and started a family nearly 20 years before, but his foreign-born spouse couldn't bear the quiet and isolated life in the mountains and had left. Years later, he fell ill, rendering him unable to work and burdened with significant medical expenses. With the collapse of the family's financial support, both the elderly and the young in the family became vulnerable. Consequently, their relatives had referred them to Tzu Chi for assistance.

Mrs. Ye's son had since passed away, and the two grandchildren she had helped raise had graduated from high school. They were now capable of taking care of themselves, juggling their studies with part-time jobs. They often visited her on the weekends or during holidays.

Having toiled for the majority of her life, the older woman had been shaped by her environment into a remarkably capable individual. Despite her petite stature, she possessed a pair of rough and strong hands. Her front and back yards were filled with coffee trees, yielding highly valuable coffee beans, known as the "green gold" of the Dongshan District. They served as a source of financial support for her and her grandchildren. Mrs. Ye maintained an optimistic outlook and told the volunteers, "That's just how life is. When faced with challenges, we accept them. Having grandchildren gives me hope!"

In addition to visiting the Gaoyuan neighborhood and carrying out home safety improvement work there, volunteers in Tainan have done the same in the districts of Xinying, Yanshui, Baihe, Liuying, Houbi, and others. After completing their work, they make a point of revisiting each household to verify that the installed safety features are functioning properly and to extend care to the family members. The volunteers find peace of mind when they know that they've helped ensure the safety of the elderly people they help.

Over the past couple of years, 29 neighbor-

hood chiefs in the Greater Xinying Area in Tainan have reported over 500 households for visits by Tzu Chi volunteers. Home improvement efforts have been completed in 370 households.

Wishing the elderly well

In February of this year, social workers Zhang Yu-ci (張育慈) and Xu Ya-ling (徐雅鈴) from the Tzu Chi Tainan office joined a home safety improvement team as they visited the Shuiyun community in Dongshan District. They installed grab bars or handrails for five elderly residents there before proceeding to the Gaoyuan neighborhood. As their vehicles wound their way around the verdant mountain roads, amidst the delightful scenery and boundless spring beauty, the group found it difficult to imagine how local residents, especially the older people, navigate the area's steep slopes.

They first went to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Zhang, the couple who shared a house with Mr. Zhang's brother. As the visitors neared their home, they saw Mr. Zhang, sitting in a wheelchair, and his brother waving their hands to greet them.

The volunteers hadn't seen the family in nearly two years. They went to the bathroom to check the handrails they had installed there two years before. Mrs. Zhang told them her husband had started to show signs of dementia.

She explained that due to his limited mobility, her husband rarely went out and relied on visits from family and friends to socialize. However, opportunities for interacting with relatives and friends had become scarce with the outbreak of COVID-19. Though their children returned home during holidays to visit, the reduced social interactions exerted a detrimental effect on his physical and mental well-being, further deteriorating his overall condition.

The volunteers felt for the family when they learned about Mr. Zhang's decline. At the same time, they found solace in the knowledge that the home safety improvements they had implemented had made their lives more manageable.

After leaving the Zhangs' home, the team took a few turns before arriving at Mrs. Hu's residence. They called out from the spacious yard in front of the house, "Mrs. Hu, are you home?" Responding to the call, the senior emerged from around a corner of the house, warmly greeting the visitors. She gripped the handrail that volunteers had installed for her, and descended into the yard using the new metal step that had replaced the unstable one



built by her late husband. The volunteers noted that her movements were noticeably slower.

Looking at the festive decorations of cloth fire-crackers and different-sized red lanterns hanging under Mrs. Hu's eaves for the Chinese New Year, the volunteers asked, "Did all your children come back for the New Year?" Mrs. Hu replied joyfully, "Yes, they did! I have two sons and five daughters. This New Year, two more great-grandchildren returned home for the celebration. I now have a total of 30 great-grandchildren!"

The volunteers asked, "Is the handrail helpful?" With one hand still gripping the handrail, Mrs. Hu answered, "Yes, it is—look, it is very handy. I am truly grateful to you for installing this for me!" After the volunteers confirmed the safety of the previously installed equipment, they said their goodbyes with a touch of reluctance.

According to a 2021 survey conducted by Taiwan's Ministry of Health and Welfare, unex-



Volunteers show concern for the daily needs and health conditions of Mr. Zhang, a resident of Dongshan District, Tainan City, southern Taiwan. Zhang had previously used ropes to help himself up after washing himself, but with the installation of handrails by Tzu Chi volunteers, he no longer needs to exert as much effort.

pected falls are second only to traffic accidents as the leading cause of accident-related fatalities among individuals aged 65 and above. The survey revealed that the primary reason for falls is “slipping or tripping,” highlighting the importance of fall prevention. Failure to prevent falls can result in functional decline or bedridden conditions among the elderly, placing additional burdens on families, society, long-term care resources, and the national healthcare insurance system.

Although the installation of handrails, non-slip features, or the improvement of accessibility ramps does not entail significant expenses, elderly people, even if they are not experiencing financial difficulties, often become accustomed to their living conditions and may be hesitant to embrace change or seek assistance. Tzu Chi took the initiative to address this issue, striving to create safer homes and contribute to the development of a stronger society as Taiwan approaches the era of a super-aged population. ❁



In addition to installing handrails or grab bars, constructing accessibility ramps, and implementing anti-slip measures based on the specific needs of each household, volunteers also provide shower chairs to enhance bathing safety.

Volunteers installed a handrail and step for Mrs. Hu to make it easier for her to negotiate the height difference between her yard and house.



No Project Is Too Small

By Hong Jing-jing

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

The volunteer team in Tainan, Taiwan, consistently leads in evaluations across all categories in Tzu Chi's home safety initiative. Over 200 households in the southern city are even slated to receive long-term support following repairs or modifications.

Tzu Chi's home improvement program was initiated in 2020. Over the span of nearly three years, from the project's inception until the end of 2022, Tzu Chi volunteers in Tainan City, southern Taiwan, have visited 133 neighborhoods. They've received 1,204 requests for assistance, conducted 1,149 home assessments, and completed repairs or modifications for 759 households. Among all the volunteers working in the cities and counties participating in the program, those in Tainan City have consistently excelled in every category, demonstrating a strong commitment to service.

Xu Ya-ling (徐雅鈴), a staff member at the Southern Social Welfare Office, in the Tzu Chi Department of Charity Mission Development, shared her experience in organizing this program. She recalled the large-scale briefings conducted to address volunteers' concerns when the program was first launched. One of the questions that was addressed was why this charity service did not exclude wealthier people.

According to statistics from Taiwan's Ministry of Health and Welfare, one out of every five to six older individuals have experienced a fall within the past year. For every ten falls, one to three result in injuries, a third of which require hospitalization. The average cost of hospitalization for each of these types of falls ranges between 90,000 to 130,000 New Taiwan dollars (US\$3,000-4,330).

Falls can have serious consequences for the elderly, resulting in injuries and potentially confining them to bed. Moreover, the risk of experiencing subsequent falls is heightened, which often leads to a reduced willingness to walk and engage in social activities. This in turn can result in an increased demand for caregiving support in terms

of both manpower and financial resources within households. On a larger scale, the cost of health-care and social welfare escalate in response to these challenges.

Xu Ya-ling explained that Tzu Chi's home safety initiative is a form of "preventative charity." She emphasized that certain elderly individuals may lead financially stable lives, but because they live alone in remote mountainous areas and their needs often involve small-scale projects, professionals may be reluctant to undertake the necessary home improvement work for them. Additionally, some seniors lack awareness of home safety, while others, despite desiring to enhance their living environment, hesitate to seek assistance from their children, especially if they live far away. "So, why not extend a helping hand to ensure the home safety of elderly people in our society?" Xu asked.

Support from communities

In fact, Taiwan's city and county governments provide subsidies for housing repairs and home accessibility improvements, primarily targeting low-income households, older individuals from low- to moderate-income households, people with disabilities, and those who are unable to function independently. The amount of subsidy varies depending on the specific circumstances. But Xu explained that Tzu Chi takes a different approach. After conducting visits and assessing the actual needs of individuals, the foundation provides repair or modification assistance without any specific eligibility criteria or financial limitations for a project. An example is elderly individuals involved in farming. They are ineligible to apply for government subsidies because they

receive farmers insurance benefits and do not qualify as low- to moderate-income households. But Tzu Chi will help these individuals if the home visit indicates they could benefit from it.

Xu provided an example of a 78-year-old woman living in Dongshan District, Tainan City. She lives with her two sons and a daughter-in-law. The senior uses a urinary catheter and relies on a wheelchair to get around. Her daughter-in-law suffers from cerebral palsy and experiences muscle atrophy in both legs, requiring her to crawl on the ground using her hands. Because the older woman receives farmers insurance benefits, owns a house and land, and lives with her two sons, they are classified as a regular household and cannot receive assistance from the government. Even though they may be eligible for the government's home accessibility improvement services covered under its long-term care program, elderly individuals in rural areas often have limited awareness of such available resources and don't know how to apply for such help. In response, Tzu Chi stepped in to assist this family by installing handrails to ensure the safety of both the older woman and her daughter-in-law in their daily activities. Cases involving similar regular households make up around 70 to 80 percent of the total in the foundation's home improvement initiative, indicating a significantly high proportion.

Zhang Yu-ci, a colleague of Xu who is also involved in the home safety program, added, "No matter how small a project is, [as long as it addresses the needs of the elderly and improves their safety,] we will readily undertake it!"

Grandma Gui-hong, 70, experiences limited mobility as a result of polio. She relies on her electric scooter to travel to a community care center every weekday to collect meals. Worried about a hole in her ceiling and the potential danger of something falling through it, she sought help for the repair. Unfortunately, finding someone willing to take on such a small repair job proved challenging. After Tzu Chi volunteers fixed the hole for her, she repeatedly expressed her gratitude, saying that she could finally enjoy peaceful sleep.

A major characteristic of Tzu Chi's home safety initiative is the integration of neighborly assistance. The foundation's social workers and volunteers visit district chiefs, neighborhood leaders, and organizations that cater to the needs of the elderly within a community, with the aim of identifying those requiring assistance. As a result of

this effort, over 80 percent of home improvement cases in Tainan City are reported by neighborhood leaders. For instance, Su Ming-tian (蘇明田), the chief of the Dongzheng neighborhood, and Wang Yuan-zheng (王元正), the chief of the Keli neighborhood, both in Dongshan District, spared no effort in compiling comprehensive lists of elderly individuals in need, enabling Tzu Chi volunteers to broaden their reach.

Chief Wang Yuan-zheng provided lists of over 70 households for Tzu Chi volunteers to visit. Among them was Mrs. Li, a senior who lives alone. Her son had been imprisoned for drug use, and she suffers from glaucoma, which caused her to lose sight in both eyes. As a result, she was unable to accompany her two grandchildren, whom she single-handedly raised, to school, and had no choice but to send them to foster care. Mrs. Li is accustomed to moving around her home by touching the walls as she walks. Volunteers installed handrails in her bathroom to ensure that she has the necessary support and stability while navigating the space. They also adjusted the height of a shower chair for her convenience. She gratefully expressed her appreciation, saying, "Tzu Chi is such a great organization, willing to help us underprivileged people." Her greatest wish now is for her grandchildren to return to her side one day.

There are no Tzu Chi volunteers in the neighborhood of Guanshan, Nanhua District. But thanks to the help of the neighborhood chief, the foundation has been able to provide assistance there. One of the residents benefiting from Tzu Chi's program was 79-year-old Mrs. Xu. She did not have access to an indoor bathroom, and had to wash herself outdoors by manually scooping up water. The large water tank she used for water storage was extremely dirty. Volunteers set up a simple shower room and provided a shower chair so that she could comfortably bathe herself.

Community members have assisted in the program, too. During home visits, local residents have readily volunteered as guides, offering their help to the Tzu Chi teams in locating the residences of the elderly on their lists.

In the Shengxian neighborhood, Dongshan District, Lin Zhuang-zhi (林莊智), a young man, made the decision to resign from his teaching job a few years ago and return home to take care of his parents, who had been injured in a traffic accident. He also started cultivating their family's farmland, which had been neglected and left

uncultivated. When he discovered that Lin Chun-xu (林春旭), a fellow villager, was a member of a Tzu Chi home improvement team, he proactively reported households in need of help and even accompanied Tzu Chi volunteers on their home visits, along with his mother.

Mrs. Huang was another enthusiastic resident in the Shengxian community. Despite the intense summer heat, she tirelessly rode her bicycle, wearing a bamboo hat, to guide volunteers during their home visits. The basket of her bicycle was always stocked with a variety of beverages, such as tea, coffee, and vegetable and fruit juices, offering the volunteers a refreshing source of hydration.

Selfless service

Tzu Chi volunteers in Tainan City actively support the foundation's home safety program through concrete actions. The number of repair

and modification cases in the city has increased each year. Some have been assigned to professional workers while others are handled by volunteers. Social worker Zhang Yu-ci highlighted the work of the repair and modification team in Dongshan District. This dedicated team is made up of volunteers Lin Chun-xu, Zheng Zong-zhi, Xu Mao-zhong, Chen Ming-de (陳明德), Qiu Jun-lang (邱俊郎), and Shen Xin-fu (沈新富). They are known as the "Six Musketeers of Home Safety." Each member brings his expertise to the team. Over the past three years, they have developed excellent teamwork and honed their skills with each project. In an effort to minimize expenses, the team procures and cuts all materials them-

From home visits to the installation of safety features, Tzu Chi social workers provide timely assistance based on professional assessments.



selves instead of relying on external vendors. Zheng Zong-zhi personally sketches the dimensions of accessibility ramps or platforms to ensure enhanced precision and accuracy in their construction. They are incredibly dedicated. Even during the mourning period following his father's passing, Xu Mao-zhong continued volunteering for the program without interruption.

Annan District has the highest number of neighborhoods among all the administrative districts in Tainan City. Chen Qiu-lai (陳秋來), a 65-year-old volunteer, has undergone knee surgery and needs support when getting up. She once slipped and fell at home due to a wet and slippery floor. "I myself need handrails, let alone older people in their 80s and 90s," she said. "I have already visited over a dozen neighborhoods for the program, and am determined to visit all 51 neighborhoods in Annan District."

Xu Ya-ling pointed out that promoting the home improvement initiative in urban areas presents a greater challenge because "neighborhood leaders in urban areas are less familiar with residents living in high-rise buildings." As for rural areas, older houses often have bathrooms and toilets situated outside, posing safety risks, especially when navigating rough terrain. Moreover, elderly individuals in mountainous regions often worked as farmers when they were younger, resulting in hunchbacks and weakened joints in their old age, making them in greater need of handrails and other assistive devices.

Grandma A-ruan, a 93-year-old resident of Dongshan District, lives in a traditional three-sec-

tion compound house. She receives assistance from a home care worker who visits her five days a week to cook for her. Her only companion is her 95-year-old sister-in-law, who resides in the same compound and is physically stronger. Grandma A-ruan has a delicate and slender frame, and her stooped posture makes it challenging for her to stand up straight. She relies on a bamboo stick for support while walking. Due to her unstable center of gravity, she is prone to falling. To improve her mobility, volunteers installed handrails in her home. Recognizing her difficulty in reaching the floor with her feet when getting out of bed, they also installed a bedside support for her.

Shen Xin-fu, one of the Six Musketeers, said, "Using our expertise to help elderly people in need is a wonderful way to form good affinities with them." Warm-hearted people like Shen are more than happy to contribute to the home improvement program.

Long-term care

"The completion of a home safety case doesn't mark the end [of Tzu Chi's involvement with an aid recipient]; rather, it signifies the beginning of a lasting commitment to care," said Xu Ya-ling. Out of the 759 beneficiary households in Tainan City, 230 have been included in a long-term care list, through which volunteers provide continuous support and companionship.

The lives of the elderly undergo an instant transformation when a dimly lit corridor is suddenly illuminated by brighter lights, when a bathroom is equipped with sturdy handrails for support, or when a quiet living space resonates with the voices of visitors. Grandma Qing-hua, in her 80s, struggled with weakened eyesight due to glaucoma. Upon hearing that the volunteers visiting her wanted to capture beautiful photos of her, she promptly fetched her sunglasses from a room



The designs of many old-fashioned bathrooms present underlying safety concerns. Tzu Chi's home improvement initiative offers help within the constraints of existing living conditions, safeguarding the elderly.

By using their skills to serve the elderly, volunteers participating in the home improvement program have also received an abundance of blessings and a sense of fulfillment.





and put them on, continuously expressing how happy she was and how she had never dreamed that there would be such wonderful handrails available for her to use. Zhang Yu-ci emphasized that radiant smiles, such as those of Grandma Qing-hua's, serve as the greatest source of encouragement for Tzu Chi's home improvement program.

"Many elderly people dedicate their entire lives to society and their families yet hesitate to invest in their own safety by installing safety features in their homes," Zhang said. "Launching the home safety program is our way of giving back to the older population in our society." She stressed that there are still many seniors in need of care and expressed hope for more people to come together and create safer living environments within communities. This would help enable older people to age in peace and safety in the comfort of their own homes. ☘

Volunteers revisited an older woman for whom they had installed safety features. They are pictured above singing a song to wish the woman well before leaving. The picture below shows the woman holding a gift from the volunteers. The Chinese characters on the package mean "love" and "thank you and best wishes."



Fare Evader

By Xie Shu-ya

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphic by Su Fang-pei

I recently gave a drug prevention talk at the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. On my train ride back home, I noticed a young man who exhibited an intriguing behavior. Each time our train pulled into a station, he would leave his seat, only to return to the carriage when the train resumed its journey, in search of an empty seat to occupy. I also saw him twice on my way to the restroom, squatting in the space between carriages and using his smartphone.

As it grew later, the number of passengers on board dwindled. Eventually, he moved closer to my seat. His behavior was extremely peculiar, and I began to wonder if he was attempting to avoid paying for his ticket. Soon after, I noticed the ticket inspector approaching from a distance. I unexpectedly began to feel anxious for the young man. Even if he tried to leave at that moment, it would be too late to avoid a confrontation.

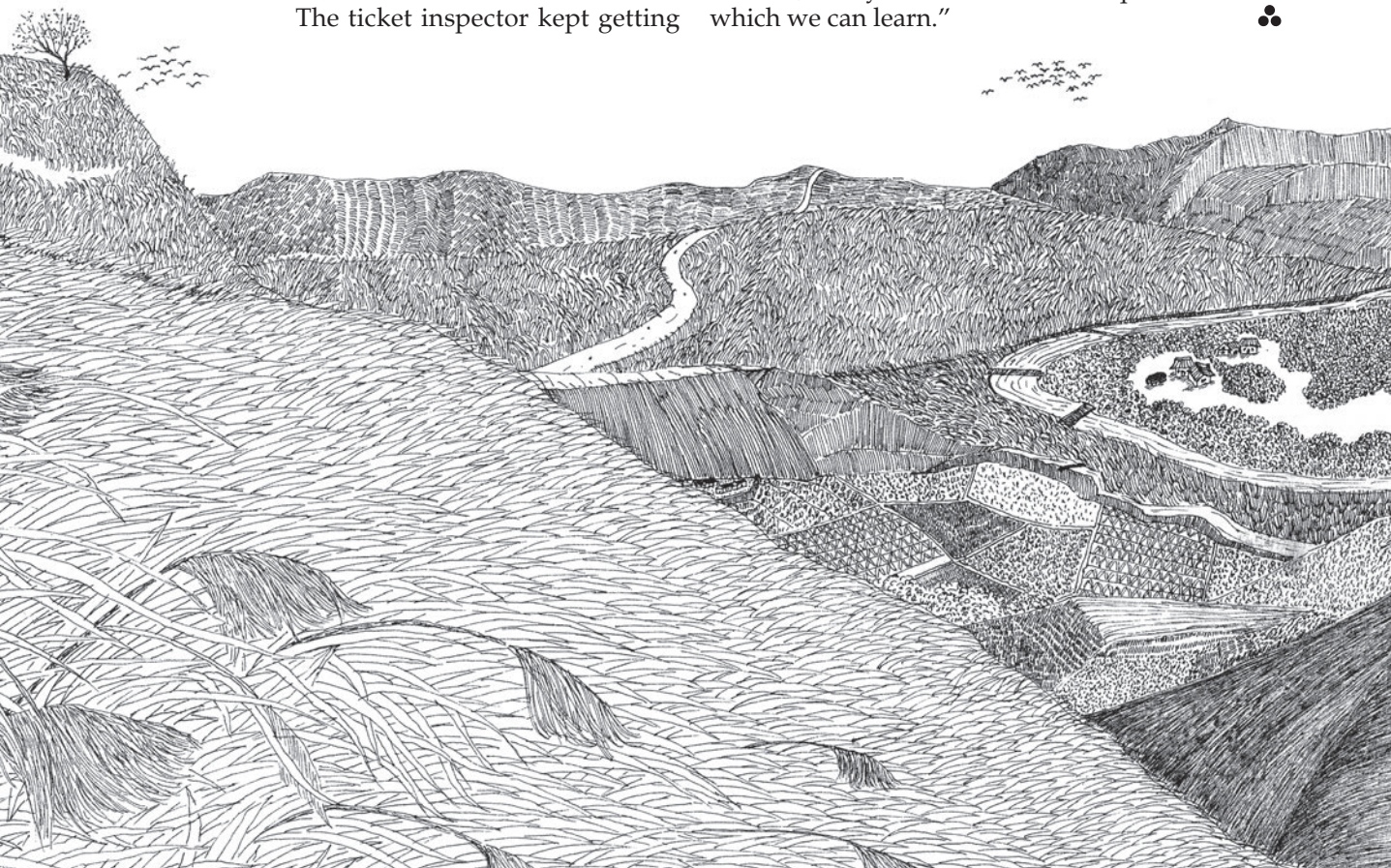
The ticket inspector kept getting

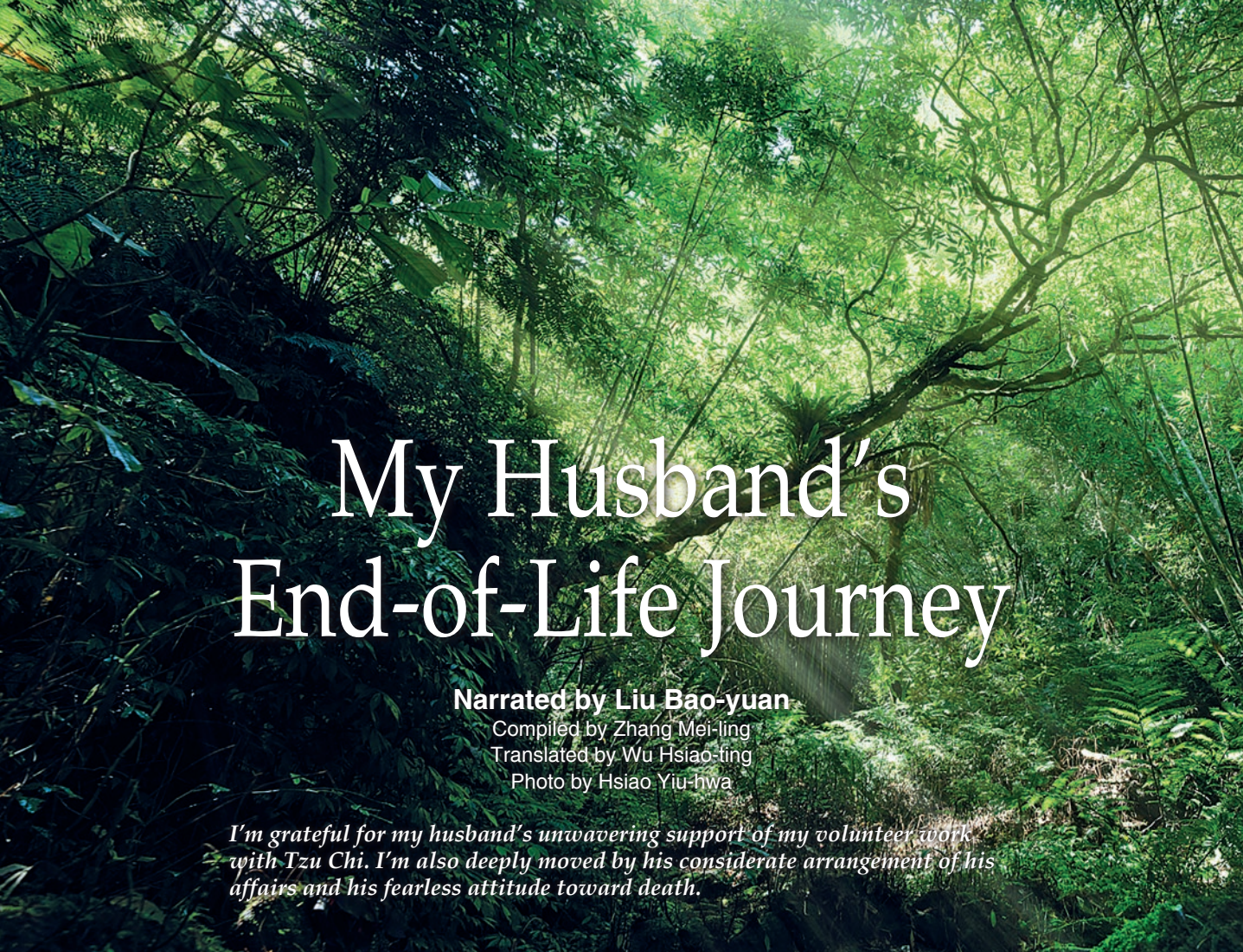
closer, but he continued to calmly stare at his phone. Did he not notice?

When the inspector finally reached him, I saw him lift his head and fumble around, taking out a ticket from his pocket and handing it over. The inspector examined the ticket and said, "Carriage Four? This is Carriage 11." In response, the young man pointed towards the front and explained, "My father is seated right there."

Looking in the direction he pointed, I saw an elderly man. The ticket inspector nodded and left. That's when my inner turmoil began. I felt truly remorseful. How could I have so easily suspected him of fare evasion? All he wanted was to be readily available should his father need him.

After this incident, I reminded myself to integrate the lesson learned into my daily life and to avoid hastily judging others. As Dharma Master Cheng Yen taught us: "Do not hold preconceived notions; everyone has admirable qualities from which we can learn." ❀





My Husband's End-of-Life Journey

Narrated by Liu Bao-yuan

Compiled by Zhang Mei-ling

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

I'm grateful for my husband's unwavering support of my volunteer work with Tzu Chi. I'm also deeply moved by his considerate arrangement of his affairs and his fearless attitude toward death.

Every time I go to a hospital, my mind is transported back to four years ago, when my husband, Wang Zhen-ming (王振銘), and I were in and out of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, in Chiayi, southern Taiwan, for his treatment.

My husband was a police officer. After retiring in 2004, he joined me in volunteering for Tzu Chi. He did recycling work and served as a hospital volunteer at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. He also contributed his time at various Tzu Chi camps. He really enjoyed volunteering with the foundation. When asked why he hadn't undertaken formal training to receive his volunteer certification, he answered, "I dedicated 39 years to my service as a police officer, never doing anything to compromise the reputation of the police force. However, when it came to becoming a certified Tzu Chi volunteer, I realized that adherence to the Ten Precepts was required. Because I couldn't fully comply with all of them, I hesitated to join, fearing that I might unintentionally tarnish Tzu Chi's honorable name. Hence, I am content with being

someone who supports Tzu Chi."

One day four years ago, he told me that he wanted to go see a gastroenterology specialist at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. "While lying on the couch watching TV this afternoon," he explained, "I felt a lump in my stomach, and it seemed to be moving." I was deeply concerned at what he had said, so I decided immediately to accompany him to the hospital to seek medical advice. Dr. Tseng Kuo-chi (曾國枝) performed a gastroscopy, followed by an MRI scan, which confirmed the presence of liver cancer. The tumor had grown quite large, so much so that only one-fifth of his liver remained healthy. Surgery and radiation therapy were not viable treatment options, leaving targeted therapy as the only feasible choice.

After leaving the consultation room, my husband comforted me, urging me not to be saddened by the news. "I've already lived to the age of 77, and that's enough!" he said. "Don't worry about me, just accept the treatment!" On our way to Dalin Station, he instructed me, "Don't tell any-



one about my condition. When the time comes, you and our children can take care of everything." I expressed my concern in response: "Is that okay? Won't those who are unaware blame me?" He reassured me to have peace of mind.

After returning home, he remained calm. A few days later, he invited a fellow Tzu Chi volunteer, Zhou Yi-ming (周義明), to our home. They shared a close bond and often carried out volunteer duties together. My husband sought Brother Zhou's assistance in handling matters after his passing. He emphasized that a funeral and placing a memorial tablet in a columbarium were unnecessary. Instead, he expressed his desire for a tree burial. He had originally signed up to donate his body, but was unable to fulfill that wish due to having hepatitis C. I listened to their conversation nearby. When they conversed, it was as if they were discussing someone else's affairs.

Our daughter lived in the United States. When she heard about her father's illness, she was deeply saddened and returned to Taiwan to be by his

side. When she learned that he had instructed me not to let anyone know about his condition, she pleaded, "Dad, we can't do that. We have to tell Auntie and Uncle! Otherwise, they might be upset with us for keeping this from them."

He took her words to heart. During the Tomb-Sweeping Festival, we returned to his hometown together. Everyone was astonished to see how much he had slimmed down from his original weight of 93 kilograms (205 pounds). They asked in surprise, "What happened?" He gently replied, "I have liver cancer. The doctor has given me a prognosis of six months, and I've already passed the halfway mark. I came back today to tell you all that when I pass, none of you should come to my home. You're all getting on in years; don't make the trip to Tainan. It would be too exhausting. My family won't inform you, and my wife and children will take care of everything. I came back today to bid farewell to everyone."

After we returned home, our daughter urged him, "Dad, you should let your good friends know, too! You can't just leave quietly like this." Listening to her again, he asked me to take him on a motor scooter to a friend's house, where he shared his condition over a cup of tea. We visited other friends in the days that followed. One by one, he said goodbye to them.

When he moved into the palliative care ward at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, our fellow volunteers visited him continuously, offering support and encouragement. He was profoundly touched and grateful for their care. He said, "This is what Tzu Chi volunteers are like." Several of the volunteers we were particularly close to continued to visit me even after he passed away. They were afraid that I would feel lonely on my own. Whenever there was a gathering, they invited me to join, too.

I joined Tzu Chi over 30 years ago. My husband always showed strong support for my volunteer work when he was still with us. He wholeheartedly embraced Dharma Master Cheng Yen's teachings and internalized them more deeply than I have. He arranged his own affairs in such a simple and organized manner, ensuring that he didn't burden others and that our family wouldn't be overwhelmed by his matters. Witnessing his peaceful passing deeply moved me.

A nun at the Jing Si Abode, the Buddhist convent founded by Master Cheng Yen, said that we should wish him the best and allow him to go in peace. She expressed gratitude for his contributions as a volunteer, recognizing him as a Tzu Chi bodhisattva. ❀

Light in the Midst of War

Narrated by Faisal Hu

Compiled by Wang Hui-ping and Huang Hsiu-hua

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

*Tzu Chi recently published a Chinese book titled **Light in the Midst of War**, which chronicles the experiences of volunteers who have helped the foundation provide aid to Ukrainian refugees in Poland, as well as the stories of Ukrainians affected by the Russia-Ukraine war. Below is a translated excerpt from the book.*



The book cover of *Light in the Midst of War*

Our plane took off from Istanbul, Türkiye, and arrived in Warsaw, the capital of Poland, around six o'clock in the evening of November 23, 2022. The sky was dark by the time we left the airport, the temperature a frigid 1°C (33.8°F). Even with a coat on, I could feel the biting cold.

My wife, Nadya Chou (周如意), and I, both Tzu Chi volunteers, had been away from Poland for four months, and the season had transitioned into winter. This marked our third visit in seven months. We were accompanied by Basil Khalil and Hani Aldib, two IT engineers and Syrian refugees.

We had come to Poland again out of concern for the welfare of our Ukrainian friends, displaced as they were in a foreign land. The Russia-Ukraine war had just reached a new peak, and the weather was growing colder. The European Union had estimated that it would ignite a fresh wave of refugees. Our objective on this journey was twofold: to distribute aid to vulnerable Ukrainian families stranded here in order to help them endure the winter, and to formulate long-term assistance plans to provide ongoing support.

Beauty lies in the state of mind

The temperature continued to drop throughout the night. I awoke a little after 3 a.m. Peering

out of the window, I discovered that it was already snowing.

Later that morning, still before dawn, my wife, myself, and three other representatives from the Tzu Chi Foundation stepped out into the snow under a twinkling starry sky. My wife was wearing a padded jacket embroidered with the Tzu Chi logo. It was the very uniform she wore during our initial participation in Tzu Chi's disaster relief efforts following the powerful earthquake in Türkiye in 1999. It had been 23 years since we embarked on the path of volunteer service, and the jacket had accompanied us through numerous disaster relief missions in many countries.

At the early hour of 4:20 a.m., Warsaw Central Station appeared both familiar and unfamiliar. Just over half a year earlier, the place was filled with flags of various charitable organizations from around the world. Booths were set up one after another, providing all kinds of assistance to incoming refugees, including accommodation, transportation, phone cards, medical aid, and various daily necessities. The station, filled with people, overflowed with an overwhelming outpouring of love, permeating every corner. But now, the once crowded and tense hall had been transformed into a bright and spacious space, adorned with imaginatively crafted art installations, creat-



After the Russian invasion in February 2022, the Ukrainian government forbade men aged 10 to 60 from leaving the country. As a result, the majority of those who fled the country were women, children, and older people.

ALBERTO BUZZOLA

An illustration featured in the book *Light in the Midst of War*

GRAPHIC BY LING A-BAN

ing a relaxing and leisurely atmosphere for travelers passing through.

Bathed in the gentle glow of dawn, the first train from Warsaw to Poznań departed punctually at 5:09 a.m. Poznań, located 310 kilometers (193 miles) west of Warsaw, is an important historical, economic, academic, cultural, and technological center in central-western Poland. We were heading there to visit Monica Chang (張淑兒), originally from Taiwan, and her Polish husband, Łukasz Baranowski.



Łukasz is the vice president of a mobile gaming company; Monica is a senior data analyst in the IT industry. Both of them are busy executives, and yet they still find time to care for their three young children. Despite their demanding lives, they accepted the responsibility entrusted to them by Tzu Chi to help Ukrainian refugees after an influx began in early March 2022. They conducted four distributions in Poznań during that month alone. During the first distribution in particular, they had to personally handle everything, from procurement to logistics. Later on, Łukasz's sister and brother-in-law lent a hand, and even Łukasz's Russian-speaking mother participated as an interpreter during distributions. The entire family is kind-hearted and happy to give of themselves to those in need.

After the war began, Poland provided accommodations for millions of older people, women, and children from Ukraine, with both the government and the private sectors showing great generosity and support. However, no one expected the war to last this long and have such a significant impact on energy and the economy, resulting in serious inflation for Poland and many other European countries. The prices of water, electricity, goods, and even rent had multiplied several times over in the few months before our current visit. Due to financial constraints, the government had to discontinue providing subsidies to families who were hosting refugees. Therefore, individuals like Monica and Łukasz, who continued to contribute their own money and efforts to assist refugees, were truly commendable and deserving of our admiration.

My wife and I stayed a total of 67 days during our previous two visits to Poland, primarily in Warsaw. Although we traveled to other areas for distributions and other activities, we were often confined within institutions or shelters, leaving little opportunity to appreciate the local scenery. Now, sitting in the cozy carriage arranged by Monica and Łukasz, we could see the beautiful vistas of central Poland through large glass windows. Even so, the sense of relaxation and leisure that typically accompanies travel eluded us. I could imagine that the most breathtaking scenery for the displaced Ukrainian people lay not in front of their eyes but in their homeland, visited through midnight dreams. Sadly, the ravages of war had stripped away the vivid hues of their once-vibrant hometowns, leaving behind a monochromatic palette of grays and blacks amidst the ruins. Numerous challenges awaited them,



including the struggle to sustain their livelihoods, pursue education, and secure employment.

Though beautiful, the scenery passing by our window made me sad and wistful, serving as a poignant reminder to us. Only in a state of peace can we truly take the time to appreciate the beauty of landscapes, and it is through the presence of peace that the scenery comes alive with vibrant colors.

Monica and Łukasz were already waiting for us when we arrived at the station in Poznań, warmly welcoming us with smiles on the platform. Monica introduced us to three Ukrainian women by her side. In their home country, they had been a lawyer, an architect, and a high-level



To alleviate the isolation experienced by elderly Ukrainians in Poland, Tzu Chi established a Dumpling Club in its office in Warsaw, inviting older Ukrainians to come together every week to make dumplings.

COURTESY OF UKRAINIAN TZU CHI VOLUNTEERS

Faisal Hu (胡光中, right) and Nadya Chou, two Tzu Chi volunteers from Türkiye, visited the Dumpling Club last December, where they served everyone Taiwanese-style dumplings.

COURTESY OF NADYA CHOU



executive, but now they were employed by Tzu Chi to help carry out the foundation's philanthropic work in Poznań.

Monica and the others were providing care for over 200 Ukrainian families in Poznań. The young mothers of these families had been forced to frequently relocate due to their inability to afford rent, resulting in disruptions to their children's education. In response, Monica and her husband had been conducting visits to identify potential locations to settle them. They had requested our assistance in evaluating these options.

Have faith that things will get better

After staying in Poznań for three days and two nights, we returned to the familiar city of Warsaw. Even though Tzu Chi's large-scale distributions for Ukrainian refugees in Poland had concluded by the end of July 2022, the foundation's services in Warsaw had not come to an end. They established an office in the city and hired seven Ukrainian women as staff to continue providing care for their fellow compatriots.

The seven Ukrainian staffers had been diligently conducting home visits over the past months, identifying Ukrainian families in need of assistance. Following assessments by the Tzu Chi Foundation, they started providing economic aid and emotional support to the families in need. In collaboration with the Camillians, a Roman Catholic missionary order based in Italy, they used their expertise to provide character education to children. They also established a "Dumpling Club" to help lead older Ukrainian individuals out of their isolated lives in Poland. They even planned and organized Tzu Chi's first winter distribution in Warsaw, which took place on November 28. What brought us even more joy, aside from witnessing their wholehearted service to their fellow countryfolk, was their ability to stand on their own.

The creation of the Dumpling Club is a good example of the dedicated efforts of these Ukrainian staff members. During their home visits, they encountered elderly individuals from their home country who rarely ventured out due to language barriers or various physical and emotional factors. The volunteers deeply empathized with their situations, so they devised a solution by organizing gatherings at the Tzu Chi office where the seniors could come together and make dumplings—a traditional delicacy often enjoyed during family gatherings in Ukraine and which almost every older Ukrainian knows how to make. Once

the dumplings are made, our staff sells them online, with 80 percent of the proceeds going to the elderly participants and the remaining 20 percent allocated to support those in need. This initiative perfectly encapsulates the teachings of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, who encourages us to eat until we are 80 percent full and use the remaining 20 percent to assist the less fortunate. When we visited the Dumpling Club during our stay in Warsaw, we witnessed the smiles on the faces of the elderly. We were truly delighted to see them rediscover a sense of purpose and value in a foreign land, knowing that they were able to contribute to those in need.

"No matter how great the difficulties we face, we must believe that one day the situation will improve. Never give up hope, and always persevere towards your goals. This is the encouragement we give ourselves every day in Türkiye," said Basil and Hani, the two Syrian IT engineers who had come with my wife and me to Poland. They were drawing from their own experiences of displacement to inspire the Ukrainians they encountered in Poland, assuring them that persistence would lead to a turning point.

I was immensely grateful to Basil and Hani for visiting Poland again to encourage the refugees. My gratitude was especially great for Basil, who revealed to me only upon landing that he was actually afraid of flying. Throughout the two-and-a-half-hour flight from Türkiye to Poland, he had been restless and endured great anguish. Despite having gone through similar experiences the last time he visited Poland with us, he was still willing to join us once again. I was greatly touched.

Waiting for that day

I recall that on the tenth day of the Russia-Ukraine war, Monica and Łukasz initiated Tzu Chi's first aid distribution to refugees. Soon after, Tzu Chi volunteers from 12 countries and regions arrived in Poland to help with the foundation's relief efforts. The support began with the distribution of gift cards, which could be redeemed at a retail chain in Poland, along with other aid items. Later on, we transitioned to cash cards, universally accepted across Europe. Tzu Chi provided assistance to over 80,000 people through these efforts. In fact, since the war began, our commitment has gone beyond providing practical aid. We have also offered unwavering companionship to those in need.

To help displaced Ukrainian families get through the winter, we conducted eight winter



relief distributions in Warsaw. We personally handed out 631 cash cards to 277 vulnerable households, consisting of 841 individuals. Although we expected nothing in return, we deeply understood that all our efforts were worth it when we witnessed the recipients' tearful eyes and felt their tight embraces. We had successfully conveyed love and blessings from around the world to them.

The seven Ukrainian staffers at Tzu Chi's Warsaw office are incredibly courageous and resilient women. They set aside their own pain and dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to caring for their fellow displaced compatriots. Instead of waiting for instructions from the foundation, they proactively take the initiative to identify and solve problems, demonstrating a deep understanding of Tzu Chi's charitable spirit. Following the success of the Dumpling Club, they recently observed that mothers bringing their children to classes could also utilize their waiting time to learn. Therefore, they proposed the idea of offering yoga and ballroom dance classes.

Every time a Ukrainian starts singing the Ukrainian patriotic song "Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow," their eyes light up, and they raise their hands in a resolute gesture, singing out loudly:

Tzu Chi's Ukrainian helpers in Poland use their expertise to serve their fellow compatriots. Here, Hanna Mankus (left), an English teacher, uses a parrot as her teaching assistant, teaching children how to show kindness towards animals.

COURTESY OF UKRAINIAN TZU CHI VOLUNTEERS

Oh, in the meadow a red viburnum has bent down low.

For some reason, our glorious Ukraine is in sorrow.

And we'll take that red viburnum and we will raise it up,

And we shall cheer up our glorious Ukraine, hey, hey!

Despite the challenges they face, we have faith in the dedicated Ukrainian staff members at our Warsaw office. We believe that they will demonstrate the spirit described in the song, that they will go above and beyond to care for their fellow Ukrainians stranded in Warsaw, that they will encourage them to support and uplift one another as they patiently await the day to return home together.

In my 80 days in Poland, I witnessed that love can make even the coldest environments warm, that when people can love and support each other, even strangers become family. ☘

Snip and Smile

Tzu Chi Zimbabwe's Free Haircutting Services

By Zhu Xiu-lian, Tino Chu,
Hlengisile Jiyane, and Lin Jing-ni

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hlengisile Jiyane

Without money for haircuts or water for washing their hair, rural children in Zimbabwe are commonly infected with scalp ringworm. Tzu Chi volunteers tackle this problem by offering free haircuts and treatments.

Can you imagine the magnitude of a number that starts with "1," followed by 14 zeros? The number is one hundred trillion. Zimbabwe, a landlocked African nation, once actually issued such a banknote in that denomination. Astonishingly, even that astronomical amount was enough to buy only half a loaf of bread.

Zimbabwe achieved independence in 1980. Despite being endowed with an abundance of natural resources, including gold, silver, and nickel, the country has been plagued by prolonged political and fiscal instability. Over a decade ago, it experienced severe hyperinflation, leading to a rapid devaluation of the Zimbabwean currency. It got so bad that a one-hundred-trillion-dollar note could only be exchanged for three eggs. The country's currency situation has shown some stability in recent years, following efforts by the government to address this issue. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a resurgence of inflation, creating financial challenges even for those with employment.

The country also lacks basic infrastructure when it comes to water. During the dry season, when rainfall is scarce for an extended period,



people are left with no alternative but to settle for a simple wipe-down. Under the circumstances, washing one's hair is regarded as a luxury. Moreover, haircuts, which can range from one to five U.S. dollars, carry a price tag comparable to a meal. If impoverished families have this amount of money, their priority lies in filling their stomachs, not taking care of their hair.

With no money for haircuts and no water for washing their hair, many children suffer from scalp ringworm, a highly contagious fungal infection of the scalp. To make matters worse, many parents are unable to afford the required medication, leaving their children with no chance of a cure. Taiwanese businessman Tino Chu (朱金財) became aware of this problem when he visited schools to provide food for free. He pondered how to help solve it.



Before the haircut
I'm a little nervous, but...
it's finally my turn.

After the haircut
It's now easier to keep my
scalp cleaner and
healthier.



**Tzu Chi volunteers provide
free haircuts for children
and community residents in
Domboshava, Mashonaland
East Province, Zimbabwe.**

COURTESY OF TINO CHU

Punished for wearing his hair too long

Originally from Taiwan, Chu relocated from South Africa to Zimbabwe in 1995, where he established a garment factory and 12 stores offering clothing and miscellaneous goods. Things went relatively well until his businesses were robbed four times by mobs, resulting in substantial losses that pushed him to the brink of desperation. However, his life took a transformative turn when something he read in a Buddhist scripture inspired him to do good and give to the needy. This marked the beginning of his charitable endeavors in Zimbabwe, reshaping his path and purpose in life.

Facing the prevalence of scalp ringworm in the country, he contemplated: "Why not offer free haircuts to shave their hair and reduce the chance of dirt and grime accumulating on the scalp?" Putting his idea into action, he recruited a team of volunteer barbers to assist him in his mission. After procuring electric hair clippers, a power generator, and even crafting barber capes himself, he and the volunteer barbers ventured into schools and villages, providing haircuts and administering medicated solutions to treat the condition.

Chu returned to Taiwan in 2011 to receive his Tzu Chi volunteer certification. After that, he continued to offer free haircuts in Zimbabwe. Over the course of more than a decade, he and his team have visited numerous schools, gaining consent from principals one by one, and cutting the hair of hundreds of students on each occasion. This project was going strong until 2020, when the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent enforcement of lockdown measures forced them to temporarily suspend their services.

"I returned to Taiwan in August 2022," Chu recalled. "During my stay, Master Cheng Yen once again mentioned our haircut services in Zimbabwe." He was moved by the fact that the Master had such a clear recollection of their work. After his return to Zimbabwe, he came across a piece of news that said that in Mhondoro, Mashonaland West Province, a ten-year-old boy named Tanya had been subjected to corporal punishment by his teacher for wearing his hair too long. The teacher struck each of the boy's palms ten times as a form of punishment. Unfortunately, the boy was particularly weak that day due to going to school on an empty stomach, causing him to faint after the punishment. He had to be sent to the hospital to recover.

Chu's heart went out to the boy. The pandemic

situation had significantly improved by then, so he and other volunteers wasted no time in resuming their haircutting and food supply services. From the capital city of Harare to nearby provinces, they provided a total of 10,900 haircuts within just six months, commencing in October 2022.

At Nyamande Primary School in Domboshava, Mashonaland East Province, a group of children lined up and walked across the sandy ground, gathering under a cluster of trees while awaiting their turn to receive haircuts. A row of chairs had been set up, while a power generator hummed loudly in the background. Volunteers quickly set to work under the meager shade provided by the trees, using electric hair clippers to provide haircuts to the students. There were a lot of children waiting, keeping the volunteers on their feet for hours without rest. November to April is the summer season in Zimbabwe, with occasional rainfall, so volunteers kept an eye out for deteriorating weather conditions as they worked. Chu oversaw every aspect to ensure everything was in order.

When Chu and his fellow volunteers visited the Mhondoro area to offer haircuts, he made a special visit to the boy Tanya and his mother. Taking the boy's small hand, he expressed his heartfelt empathy, saying, "I can imagine the pain the child endured from the strokes on his palms." The volunteers who accompanied Chu presented the mother and son with some daily supplies. Tanya's face brightened with a smile.

The mother said, "Our family is struggling to afford even meals, so how could we possibly have money to spare for our child's haircuts?" She thanked Tzu Chi for solving two problems for them at the same time. "Our boy's hair was cut, and he won't go hungry [with the food you provided]. He'll be better able to focus in school now."

Hair clippers buzzing

In Zimbabwe, government regulations restrict gatherings, so each haircutting session requires permission from the relevant authorities. Volunteers arrive at each session fully equipped, even bringing chairs along in their vehicles. Prior to the haircuts, they engage the children in games using empty rice bags. For the participating children, who typically spend their days with their grandparents, this time together brings them treasured moments of happiness.

On March 9, volunteers arrived at Miriro Children Care Network Primary School in Harare to provide free haircuts. However, they encoun-



Children in Mhondoro, Mashonaland West Province, participate in a game arranged by Tzu Chi volunteers before a haircutting event.

tered a problem with the power generator that day—it couldn't supply enough power for all ten hair clippers simultaneously. The haircutting process slowed down with only a few clippers in operation. Students from a nearby secondary school noticed the large number of children waiting for haircuts and came forward to offer their assistance.

Volunteers shaved away the children's tangled curls, one student after another. Over 90 percent of the children were infected with scalp ringworm. "Before the haircut, they looked fine. But we noticed the problem after the haircut," explained Chu. Children with scalp ringworm feel self-conscious, he added. However, after the medicated solution was sprayed on, their scalp improved within half an hour, and their previously furrowed brow transformed into a smile.

The volunteers' haircutting services made a significant impact. In less than a month, they were receiving invitations from village chiefs and community members to return and provide more haircuts. At Nyamande Elementary School, so many students received haircuts that volunteers had to occasionally pause their work to prevent the generator from overheating. Despite the delays, they worked with focus, without any complaints. The volunteers were happy, witnessing

the children's dignified appearance and happier demeanor after their haircuts. At the end of the day, everyone worked together to clean up. A sense of joy permeated the air.

Chu was once diagnosed with COVID-19. His condition was so severe he needed to be put on a ventilator. Knowing how much he cared for the needy in Zimbabwe, his wife wisely encouraged him to strive for recovery for the sake of those who needed his help. Driven by the hardships faced by the people in the country, Chu fought hard to overcome the illness and succeeded. Following his recovery and discharge from the hospital, he continued to lead local volunteers in distributing aid, drilling wells, providing haircuts, and other work. Reflecting on his experience with COVID, he said, "Having gone through this ordeal, I expect myself to make the most of every second to help those in need."

He remains steadfast in his mission, unwaveringly dedicated to making a difference in the lives of local impoverished people and bringing smiles to more and more children. ❁

Tzu Chi Indonesia

Free Clinic Restores Sight

Text and photo by Metta Wulandari

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Maswah refused cataract surgery, not wanting to burden her children with medical expenses. But then she regained her vision thanks to Tzu Chi's free clinic and was able to witness her granddaughter's wedding.

"Thank you, Allah. Thank you, Tzu Chi volunteers. I can see clearly now," said Maswah, 65, as she tightly embraced Eva Wiyogo, a Tzu Chi volunteer living in Jakarta, Indonesia.

A post-operative examination confirmed that Maswah was recovering well from her cataract surgery. She was deeply moved, and tears welled up in her eyes. Wiyogo understood her emotions but said immediately, "Please don't cry. It's best to keep water away from your eyes for now." "I am overjoyed!" Maswah replied, "I can see how everyone looks so beautiful, handsome, and courteous."

Maswah hails from Indramayu Regency, West Java, but made a special trip to Jakarta, staying for three weeks, to participate in a Tzu Chi free clinic. Afflicted with cataracts in both eyes, her vision was reduced to discerning only light and darkness. She could no longer see objects, causing great worry for her children.

She worked as a laborer in Saudi Arabia during her younger years to help provide for her family and renovate their house. But now her husband has passed away and her children live in different locations, leading independent lives. She lives next to her son, who had suffered a stroke. Her daughter-in-law and grandchildren help care for her.

Despite her vision problem, Maswah tried to be as independent as possible. Aware of her advancing age and limited time, she declined her family's offer to pay for her surgery. She did not want her children to incur debt for her medical

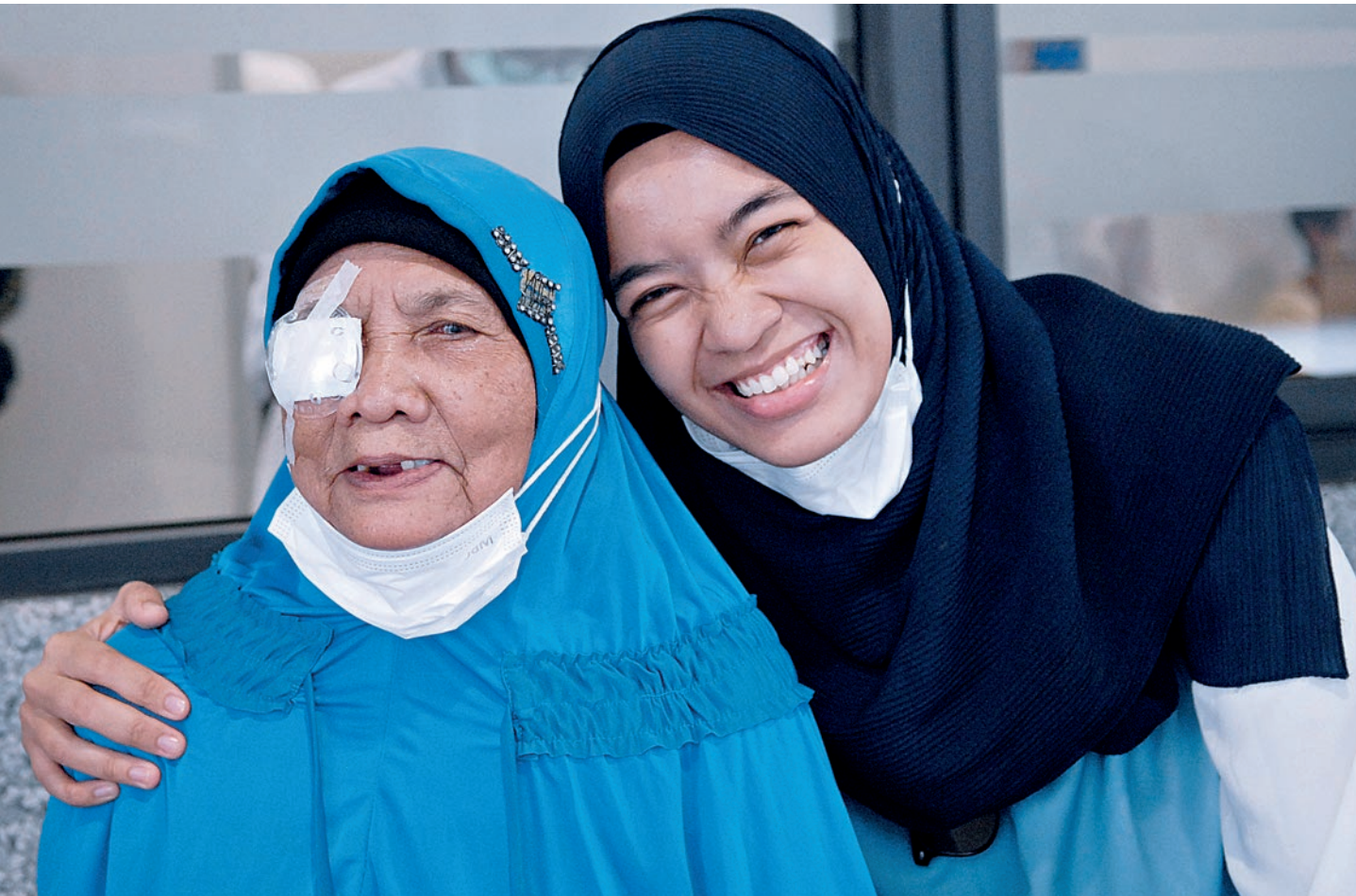
expenses, so she bravely accepted the pain of losing her vision. Her granddaughter Imroatun Khasanah, who was about to walk down the aisle, pleaded earnestly, "Don't you want to see me get married? By participating in the Tzu Chi free clinic, you can see my wedding." When Maswah learned that the surgery would be provided free of charge and wouldn't impose any financial strain on her children and grandchildren, she finally nodded in agreement.

Imroatun, an elementary school teacher, shared her concerns and profound emotions as she witnessed her grandmother undergo surgery. She expressed gratitude to the medical workers and support volunteers for bringing blessings to the patients and transforming their lives. "I wish all of you good fortune, longevity, and smooth journeys in all aspects of life."

Free clinic transforming life

On May 27 and 28 of this year, Tzu Chi Indonesia held its first free clinic at Tzu Chi Hospital Indonesia, which opened in 2021 in Jakarta. This event marked the 138th large-scale free clinic organized by the Tzu Chi chapter. Eighty-three medical professionals and 124 support volunteers aided 95 patients undergoing cataract or hernia surgeries.

A week earlier, on May 20, a medical team had performed examinations for the individuals who had registered for the free clinic. Taleb, a 61-year-old, tearfully repeated, "Thank God for allowing me to pass the screening." Volunteers reminded



him to take good care of himself to help ensure a smooth cataract surgery.

Taleb lives in Cikarang, Bekasi Regency, West Java. He used to work at an auto repair shop and had been experiencing a gradual deterioration in his vision. In 2019, he personally financed the treatment for his almost blind left eye, which amounted to around 15 million Indonesian rupiah (US\$1,000). However, when he intended to seek treatment for his right eye, he faced financial difficulties due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The auto repair shop later closed down, but he found employment as a janitor in a clinic operated by a church. A dentist at the clinic informed him about Tzu Chi's free clinic and even generously covered his transportation expenses. "The examination went smoothly, and the volunteers were very kind, providing me with heartwarming companionship!" Taleb was immensely grateful for all the support and assistance he received.

Heru Suwardi, an 81-year-old man, also

Imroatun Khasanah was filled with joy when her grandmother Maswah had successful cataract surgery. A Tzu Chi free clinic conducted in Indonesia in May this year provided cataract and hernia surgeries to 95 patients.

regained his eyesight with the help of the Tzu Chi free clinic. He can finally read Prophet Muhammad's biography with ease. Karsan, a 63-year-old street vendor, had an accident due to his impaired vision while taking his wife to the market. This accident made him fearful of riding a motor scooter again. After a successful surgery at the free clinic, his greatest joy was being able to return to his work, no longer burdening his wife and children with overwhelming responsibilities to support their family. The volunteers and medical professionals involved felt a shared sense of joy with the beneficiaries, as they were able to help relieve the suffering of underserved individuals. ❀

Used, But Not Useless

By Shi Jin-yu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Ye Jin-hong

A volunteer team refurbishes and provides recycled computers to those in need. Helping others gives them fulfillment while also extending the lifespan of the devices.

“Access to computers and the Internet enhances children’s motivation to learn and expands their horizons by connecting them with the wider world,” said Secretary-General Xu Hao (徐皓) of the Chunyang Community Development Association in Ren’ai Township, Nantou County, central Taiwan. His statement followed Tzu Chi’s donation of computers to the association this past April for use in its tutoring classes for elementary and junior high school students from the local tribal village. Xu expressed gratitude to Tzu Chi for providing such excellent educational resources, enabling the children to access videos and online materials while working on their homework at the association.

All the donated computers were sourced from Tzu Chi’s recycling stations. Despite being recycled, they performed just as efficiently as regular desktop computers, thanks to the volunteers who assembled and refurbished them, replacing any necessary components. “I strongly support the concept of resource recycling,” Xu stated. “It greatly benefits environmental conservation and imparts valuable lessons to our children about environmental protection.”

In mid-March of this year, the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program donated assistive devices to Ren’ai Township. The Chunyang Community Development Association’s activity center served as a central location for distributing the donated devices to 15 villages in the township. Tzu Chi volunteers, while interacting with Secretary-General Xu there, learned about the association’s need for computer equipment to support their tutoring classes. In response, the foundation’s Recycled Computer Program in

Hsinchu, northern Taiwan, decided to donate eight refurbished computers.

On April 10, five Tzu Chi volunteers gathered at the Ren’ai Township office and held a donation ceremony for the eight computers. Mayor Jiang Zi-xin (江子信) was in attendance to receive the contribution on behalf of the township.

Three of the five volunteers, Wu Xiong-lin (吳雄麟), Zhang De-sheng (張德盛), and Liu Qian-de (劉千德), were from the Recycled Computer Program. The day before the donation ceremony, they had traveled from northern Taiwan to the Chunyang Community Development Association, located at an altitude of 1,200 meters (3,937 feet), to deliver the eight computers. It took them over two hours to install and successfully test the computers. Aware of the higher humidity in the mountainous area, they advised the Secretary-General to take precautions with the computers to avoid damage caused by excessive moisture. They suggested not placing the computer towers directly on the ground and emphasized the importance of keeping the power cords connected. Shutting down the computers while leaving them on standby power would prevent excessive moisture on the motherboards from building up. They also said that they could be contacted for remote assistance should any software issues arise in the future.

The birth of the program

Wu Xiong-lin, Zhang De-sheng, and Liu Qian-de are full of gratitude for the opportunity to donate to the association. As repair and maintenance volunteers for the Recycled Computer Program, they wholeheartedly embrace their roles



Children from a tutoring class in Daren Township, Taitung County, southeastern Taiwan, eagerly watch as a volunteer from the Hsinchu Recycled Computer team unboxes speakers and other equipment, excitedly anticipating the availability of computers.

WU XIONG-LIN

Liu Qian-de (pictured here) and fellow volunteers from the Hsinchu Recycled Computer Program make a meaningful impact by repairing discarded computers and donating them to disadvantaged families and organizations. Their efforts conserve valuable resources and extend a helping hand to those in need.





as active participants in the deeply meaningful initiative.

Liu Qian-de, an information technology professional, was instrumental in the establishment of the Recycled Computer Program. As part of a Tzu Chi sound control team, he was responsible for maintaining computer equipment at the Hsinchu Jing Si Hall and various recycling stations. Whenever equipment was damaged, additional purchases were required. To reduce costs, he started paying attention to discarded computers that ended up at Tzu Chi's recycling stations. In testing these, he discovered that some of them could be salvaged. In some instances, this required assembling components from multiple machines to restore a computer's functionality. By revitalizing discarded computers, he achieved significant savings in procurement costs.

Because of his efforts in reclaiming and refurbishing desktop computers and laptops obtained from Tzu Chi recycling stations or volunteers' homes, almost every recycling station in Hsinchu is now equipped with sound control computers available for volunteers to use during gatherings.

Liu also provided refurbished computers to ensure uninterrupted learning for his daughter's classmates during Taiwan's level three alert period of the COVID-19 pandemic, when students had to attend online classes. Inspired by this experience, he thought of other children in families receiving Tzu Chi's care, motivating him to extend his support to more families in need.

His dedication to helping the underprivileged

Members of the Hsinchu Recycled Computer team install and test computers at the Chunyang Community Development Association in Ren'ai Township, Nantou County, central Taiwan.

inspired fellow volunteers to contribute donations to purchase computer peripherals. His work also prompted Tzu Chi volunteer Wu Mei-yun (吳美雲), who specializes in computer peripherals, to generously provide keyboards, mice, speakers, and other accessories. With the addition of wireless network cards and web cameras, complete and fully functional computer sets could be assembled.

The initiative gradually expanded its reach from Tzu Chi care recipients in Wufeng and Jianshi Townships, Hsinchu, to encompass disadvantaged families, people in need, and community organizations in Penghu, Kaohsiung, Tainan, and other areas. One example involved 24 Ukrainian students attending Tzu Chi University in eastern Taiwan, some of whom required desktop computers for their online classes. The Hsinchu Recycled Computer team stepped forward and donated two sets of computer equipment to assist them. Another example included students from the Social Work Department of Shih Chien University in northern Taiwan. These students recently embarked on a philanthropic mission to northern Thailand, accompanied by five recycled laptops provided by the program. The laptops were brought to the country to be donated to those in need.

By mid-May 2023, the program had donated 343 refurbished computers. “We hope to recruit more like-minded people to join our ranks and revitalize more discarded computers,” said Liu Qian-de. He envisions the establishment of recycled computer teams in other regions, enabling local communities to reap the benefits.

From trash to treasure

Wu Xiong-lin, 72, another member of the program, began using a computer when he became a Tzu Chi documenting volunteer, which involved tasks such as videotaping and editing. He didn’t get off to a good start on his computer journey though. His lack of knowledge in proper computer usage led to the malfunction of his first computer within a year and a half. Determined not to be discouraged, he decided to learn computer assembly to become more familiar with the technology. The second computer he used lasted a lot longer and gave him a sense of accomplishment in overcoming challenges associated with computers.

In 2022, Liu Qian-de invited Wu to join the Hsinchu Recycled Computer team. Wu strongly supports the initiative, saying, “Through computer recycling and reuse, we can transform trash into treasure and minimize environmental damage.”

Repairing and rejuvenating computers can be a highly challenging task, but Wu derives great joy from identifying and fixing their faults. What may appear to others as an obsolete machine is for Wu an opportunity for accomplishment. Engaging in computer repairs has helped him to not only hone his skills but also cultivate his patience, transforming him into a gentler and more composed person. His wife, Peng Yu-qin (彭玉琴), happily attested to this positive change: “He has undergone a complete and remarkable transformation.”

Wu’s role as a documenting volunteer requires him to assist in recording the operations of the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program. This entails accompanying fellow volunteers on visits to various locations to deliver assistive devices while capturing their work. Initially, he had concerns about managing the delivery of assistive devices as well as the delivery of computers, but he soon discovered that the two could be combined. “I’m like a traveling salesman, going all around Taiwan,” he said, “but I approach it with a sightseeing mindset. I’m very happy!” With his vibrant nature, he finds rejuvenation

through these activities, and he feels youthful and full of energy. He is also open to future learning and opportunity. “I want to venture onto new paths. Since I am here in this world, I want to continue embracing new experiences and learning. I want to avoid a monotonous life confined to simply sitting and enjoying tea or coffee!”

Wu recognizes the value of his work. He said, “Even though the computers we provide are recycled, there is still a considerable demand for them. It is vital for us to expedite the repair process to meet this need.” He sincerely hopes that students will appreciate the value of these carefully restored devices and make good use of them. He also emphasizes that their mission extends beyond mere distribution, as they follow up with new owners to learn how the computers are working and offer additional support.

Busy retiree

Zhang De-sheng joined the program after retiring from the furniture industry in March last year. He started by connecting and testing recycled screens for malfunctions. Under the guidance of his team members, he has now become proficient in assisting with repairs. “I find it engaging,” he said. “When I sit down to work, time flies by, and I never feel a moment of boredom.”

Zhang’s weekly routine is packed with volunteer activities. He spends three days repairing computers, one day doing recycling work, and another day serving at a long-term care center. He sets aside the weekends for his family. “I’ve been really busy since retirement, but it’s fueled by my own passions. I derive so much enjoyment from my volunteer work that I often feel that time slips away too quickly,” he exclaimed.

Regarding his involvement in the Recycled Computer Program, Zhang dedicates most of his time to computer repairs, rarely going out for computer deliveries. Despite the sedentary nature of his role, “I find a profound sense of fulfillment in being able to prolong the lifespan of devices and help others,” he said. He takes joy in his contributions and is deeply moved by the teamwork and mutual support among the members. “That’s what touches me the most,” he adds.

The mission to cherish resources and help people in need drives the unwavering commitment of the Hsinchu Recycled Computer team. They tirelessly work towards bridging the digital learning gap for children from underprivileged families and in remote areas, uniting efforts for the betterment of society and the environment. ❁

Looking for Loving Stores

Text and photo by Li Ming-mu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Volunteers have launched a Loving Store campaign, striking a chord with people's natural inclination to help others.

In June 2022, Tzu Chi volunteers in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, launched the Loving Store campaign, actively reaching out to shops and businesses and encouraging them to place coin banks in their establishments. These coin banks serve as a platform for store owners or customers to contribute spare change to be used for charitable purposes. Once the coin banks are filled, volunteers are notified to collect the donations. Close to 300 stores participated in the first month alone. Over the past year, the number of participating stores has grown to more than 1,100.

I am a volunteer in Taoyuan and help promote the campaign. I distinctly remember that before we started, I heard Dharma Master Cheng Yen speak about the prevalence of negative actions in the world. Her comments left me feeling unsettled and disheartened. I couldn't help but wonder: "If what the Master said is true, then it seems like we're running out of time...." But her words were also a call to action and reinforced the urgency for us to intensify our efforts to propagate kindness and positivity in the world.

One day, I arrived at a store for the campaign. Before going in, I caught sight of an employee sweeping the floor. She wore a very solemn expression. Immediately, doubts started to cloud my mind. "If I go in now, she will surely refuse." I hesitated, unsure of what to do next.

In the next moment, I urged myself not to let any self-imposed limitations hinder my actions. With determination, I entered the store and confidently spoke the first phrase that I always used whenever I approached a business to invite them to join the campaign: "Hello, I'm a Tzu Chi volunteer, and we're promoting our Loving Store campaign. Would it be possible to have a coin bank placed here? It presents an opportunity for everyone to contribute their love to those in need by simply donating their spare change."

The woman, in her 50s, instantly displayed a friendly demeanor. "Oh, alright," she said. She graciously allowed me to position the coin bank in a prominent spot near the cash register. As our conversation unfolded, I discovered that she had been a donating member of Tzu Chi in her younger years. My eyes widened in surprise. Seizing the opportunity, I invited her to rejoin Tzu Chi. "Sure, why not?" she promptly agreed. And just like that, we welcomed back a member from 30 years before, adding another force of goodness to Tzu Chi.

There was also a steamed bun shop whose owner had temporarily halted donations to Tzu Chi after relocating his shop. However, upon joining the Loving Store campaign this time, he re-enrolled his wife and son as Tzu Chi donating members.

A breakfast shop owner initially had concerns about the campaign, fearing the possibility of being deceived. After depositing ten Taiwanese dollars (US\$0.33) in a coin bank, she told volunteer Zheng Wen-zhang (鄭文章), who had visited her shop to encourage her to join, that she no longer wished to participate. A few days later, Zheng revisited the shop to deliver the receipt for the ten-dollar donation. The owner's delight upon seeing the receipt sparked a change of heart, and she decided to join the campaign after all. Zheng said, "In reality, everyone has a kind heart." He further elucidated the campaign's essence: "Although individual contributions may be small, what truly matters is the accumulation of everyone's good intentions."

At the start of the Loving Store recruitment, volunteer Chen Shu-hua (陳淑華) was recovering from surgery and was unable to drive. However, she could still walk, so she enlisted three other volunteers to accompany her in approaching shops for the campaign. They started with a breakfast shop located at an alley entrance. Upon



In November last year, Zheng Wen-zhang (right) made his third visit to the coffee shop owned by his daughter and son-in-law to collect a coin bank filled with spare change. The couple were the first shop owners to join the Loving Store campaign.

reaching the shop, she said to the owner, “Please consider placing the coin bank in your store, allowing customers to contribute spare change to support the underserved. This act will enable them to cultivate blessings, as doing good deeds for others is a way to bless oneself as well as others.” The shop owner was delighted by the proposition and agreed to join. Six or seven out of every ten shops they visited decided to join.

Zhang Yue-li (張月里), another volunteer for the campaign, rode her motor scooter to seek out shop owners she was acquainted with for recruitment. As time went on, she extended her efforts to unfamiliar ones as well. Witnessing the warm reception she received from everyone, she felt joyful, saying, “Performing acts of kindness is not solely my aspiration; it turns out that many others share the same desire.” Clothing store owner You Yu-min (游玉閔) echoed this sentiment, remarking, “Although depositing spare change in a coin bank may seem a simple action, it has the power to ignite a sense of warmth in those who receive help. When customers express their willingness to donate, I always respond with a smile.”

Volunteer Zheng Wen-zhang said that many young people who run their own businesses gladly embraced the idea of doing good together and joined the campaign. “As long as we are willing to reach out and extend invitations,” he remarked, “it is not as difficult as we might have initially thought.”

Chen Jing (陳靜), a young volunteer responsible for the graphic design of this campaign, often sees shops on the street with Loving Store stickers on display or that have coin banks placed on their counters. “I deeply appreciate the dedication of our volunteers,” she said. “It’s all thanks to their efforts that over a thousand stores have come together in this endeavor.”

On December 19, 2022, when the Taoyuan Loving Store team met with Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the Master mentioned that when shop owners allow us to place coin banks, it creates good affinities and gives us an opportunity to highlight the inherent goodness in people. It also allows us to share the humble origins of our foundation, about how Tzu Chi started with 30 housewives each saving a little of their grocery money in bamboo coin banks every day to help the needy. By understanding the profound impact of small acts of kindness when combined, others might also be inspired to become a force for good.

The volunteers who have visited stores to recruit participants for the campaign have experienced both moments of joy and setbacks. However, they quickly tell themselves not to be discouraged and that there are still many compassionate people waiting for them to extend an invitation. They recruit wherever they go, aiming to spread love and goodwill as extensively as possible. They envision that every Loving Store will become a gathering place for goodness. ❀

Resolving a Bug Crisis

By Zhuang Ya-weng

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Zhang Qiu-ju

Volunteers visited the home of a care recipient to eliminate bedbugs. They were not without fear, but their compassion was greater.

“How does one endure a life like this?” This question reveals the compassion and concern felt by Tzu Chi volunteer Cai Mei-yu (蔡美玉) towards Mr. Lin, a Tzu Chi care recipient.

On May 19, volunteers from Yancheng, Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, gathered to clean the home of Mr. Lin, a 90-year-old who lives alone. The four volunteers arrived early in the morning outside his building, fully equipped with protective suits, alcohol, diatomaceous earth, gloves, and other related items for their mission. This particular effort would go far beyond the usual household cleaning. The focus this time was to address the persistent bedbug bites that had been troubling Mr. Lin for quite a while.

Volunteer Lin Yi-zi (林怡孜) explained that during a previous visit to Mr. Lin’s home, they had initially mistaken the problem for small cockroaches. However, upon seeing the many blood-stained bite marks across his body, they realized that the true culprits were rapidly multiplying bedbugs. Apart from the impact on Mr. Lin’s daily life, the potential consequences would be unimaginable if anyone unintentionally carried the bugs back to their own homes. Therefore, she and other volunteers decided to do something to tackle the infestation.

After reaching the sweltering, humid, and stuffy high floor where Mr. Lin resides, the volunteers helped each other put on protective suits and gloves. Despite not yet having begun their work, they immediately began to perspire inside their protective gear. They understood firsthand the challenges faced by healthcare workers who must wear protective clothing to shield themselves from infectious diseases.

Once fortified against the bedbugs, the volunteers entered Lin’s home, helped him into his wheelchair, and pushed him outside. They asked him to wait for a while in the hallway. Then they said to Lin’s grandson, “A-you, please move that deity statue to the window. Also, please take off the deity’s clothes to be disinfected and washed.”

The volunteers respectfully paid their respects to the statue before A-you moved it to the window. Without delay, they commenced their work, disinfecting each item that was infested with bedbugs. After obtaining A-you’s consent, they sealed the treated items in plastic bags and disposed of them.

A crucial moment arrived as the volunteers joined forces to move the spring bed. The bed was crawling with bedbugs—on the bed itself, the bedsheets, and underneath the bed. They immediately removed the bedsheets and placed it in a garbage bag. Then, using a spray bottle filled with alcohol, they meticulously sprayed the spring bed, ensuring a thorough disinfection. To prevent any bedbugs from escaping, they carefully encased the mattress in a transparent plastic bag while adding an extra layer of comprehensive disinfection.

After removing the spring bed, the volunteers swept up a small mountain of bedbugs. A-you said, “The living environment at my grandfather’s place is very poor. I’m genuinely grateful to have all of you here to assist with the cleanup.”

After two hours, the volunteers had successfully completed their mission. Shortly thereafter, volunteers from the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program arrived, delivering an electric hospital bed to Lin’s home. To prevent future bedbug infestation, the four visiting volun-



teers sprinkled diatomaceous earth around the walls of Lin's home and on all four corners of the hospital bed and inside the mattress. They wanted to ensure that Mr. Lin's home remained bug-free.

Volunteer Zhang Su-xia (張素霞), her voice choked with emotion, said, "Seeing his living environment, how could you not help him? When I was cleaning the bathroom, I got goose bumps. But when I thought of Mr. Lin lying in bed, unable to sleep due to the bug bites, I realized that the little discomfort I felt was nothing compared to his suffering. We wholeheartedly wanted to provide him with a comfortable environment."

Lin didn't show much excitement when he saw the new bed being brought in. However, he actively participated by giving instructions on the positioning of the bed and how high it should be adjusted. Slowly, he maneuvered his body onto the bed, listening attentively as a volunteer taught him how to operate it. He also picked up the remote control and tried it himself. Volunteer Lin Yi-zi asked him, "Are you happy today?" Mr. Lin, lying on the bed, replied, "Yes, I am!"

Lin had not been able to take a proper bath in a long time due to his limited mobility. The volun-

Clad in protective clothing, volunteers work to eradicate the bedbugs in Mr. Lin's home.

teers requested assistance from his grandson, and together they bathed him.

Lin's children are scattered in different locations. Only his eldest daughter and grandson occasionally visit him. The volunteers treat him as if he were their own father, taking care of household chores on his behalf. When he neglected to take good care of himself, the volunteers playfully remarked that they wouldn't come to see him or bring delicious food anymore. In response, Lin promptly corrected his behavior and expressed sincere gratitude to the volunteers for their help.

Despite the sweltering heat, the volunteers persevered in their protective clothing and finally accomplished their mission. It was hard work—the relentless heat caused them to feel faint on multiple occasions, but they pushed through. Mr. Lin's residence is located across from a large, verdant park. As they stood there, the volunteers sincerely hoped that the senior would enjoy a tranquil and comfortable old age from then on. ❀



Embracing Resilience in a Fragile Life

By Huang Xiao-zhe and Cai Yu-xuan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

She was hard not to notice. Standing up, her height was a mere 1.3 meters (4'3"). She relied on two crutches to slowly move forward, and her face and hands showed multiple deformities and contortions. However, she appeared completely unconcerned about her appearance or movements as she worked with undivided attention at the Tzu Chi Chang'an Recycling Station in Taichung, central Taiwan.

Her name is Wu Zhen-ye (吳貞葉). She suffers from a congenital condition called osteogenesis imperfecta, also known as "brittle bone disease." She wasn't always like this. In fact, she vividly recalls a time from her childhood when she was a healthy and energetic nine-year-old, with all her limbs functioning perfectly. In those days, she would play joyfully in the field. One day, however, she fell and fractured her left thigh bone. Seeking medical assistance, she was taken to a martial arts center so the broken bone could be set. To everyone's surprise, after a month, it was discovered that the bone had not healed properly. As a result, she had to undergo another painful procedure at the martial arts center: the same bone had to be forcibly broken and reset. This traumatic experience remains deeply etched in her memory.

We were astonished as we listened to her story. We found it hard to believe that such bizarre treatment had been inflicted on a child. During our conversation with her, we discovered that while her genes may have carried a congenital defect, they also endowed her with an extraordinary quality of being optimistic and cheerful. She exudes confidence and warmth in her interactions with others, always wearing a smile. Although her bones are as fragile as glass, her heart is like glass too: transparent and pure, reflecting a resilient light.





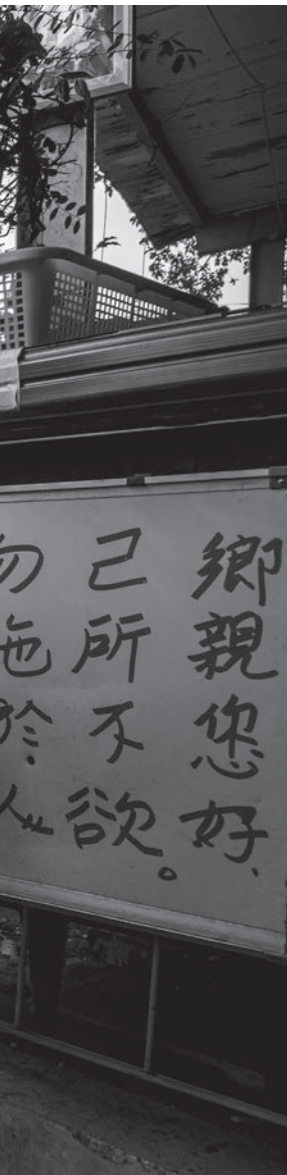
Willing to bear, happy to contribute

Wu Zhen-ye approaches recycling in the same way as most other Tzu Chi recycling volunteers. With a deep care for the Earth, she wholeheartedly dedicates herself to contributing to a more sustainable world. When she was younger, she would ride her three-wheeled motor scooter to nearby shops, collecting recyclables and making every effort to fill the vehicle to its capacity. As her physical strength declined with age, she eventually transitioned to resource sorting at a recycling station.

While some may perceive a recycling station as a potentially hazardous environment for someone with brittle bone disease, demanding constant caution to avoid injury, Wu sees it differently. A recycling station in her eyes is a treasure trove that allows her to forget about her own limitations and dedicate herself to serving. At times, you can see her sorting different types of plastic bags, and other times, removing rings from the necks of PET bottles. She also takes on the task of cleaning and organizing the environment.

Wu firmly believes in the law of karma, that our actions in past lives determine our present circumstances and that our current actions will shape our future lives. This belief empowers her to rise above the trials and challenges posed by her physical condition. Guided by her unwavering faith, she willingly accepts whatever life presents to her and does her best to give.





Her loving mother

Wu volunteers at the Chang'an Recycling Station twice a week. Whenever possible, she takes her 84-year-old mother along too. Despite her small stature and physical limitations, Wu rides her three-wheeled motor scooter to pick up her mother and drive her home afterward. Even though it may require some extra time and effort to assist her mother in getting on and off the vehicle, she does it patiently and happily. Throughout the journey, she remains cautious and careful to ensure their safety.

Due to her condition, Wu experienced innumerable days seeking medical treatment or resting at home during her school days. Although her mother only completed elementary school, she used newspapers and television to teach Wu literacy. She even personally guided her in writing and reviewing lessons to make up for the missed learning opportunities. Wu said gratefully, "My mother has never given up on me; she is the best teacher in my life!" Instead of complaining about her flawed physique, Wu cherishes the body bestowed upon her by her parents and maximizes its potential by contributing to the betterment of society. The mother provides loving care and companionship, and the daughter reciprocates by caring for her mother and performing acts of kindness. The intimate interaction between mother and daughter not only shows the flow and circulation of love but also a heartwarming touch of wisdom.



A normal life

At home, Wu's daily life is not much different from that of an average person. Instead of using her crutches at home, she sits on a rolling stool, effortlessly gliding it with a gentle push from her hand or foot. Tasks like cleaning the floor, wiping furniture, doing laundry, and cooking do not pose a challenge for her. In her younger years, she acquired sewing skills at a vocational training center and worked as a seamstress in another city for several years. After getting married, she continued to alter clothes for others, supplementing her household income.

Entering her sewing space, one can see a frame displaying a sweet wedding photo hanging on the wall. Behind that blissful image lies another story of hardships and setbacks for her. At the age of 27, just as she had met her future husband, she was diagnosed with breast cancer, dealing her yet another cruel blow. Fortunately, she triumphed over the illness after undergoing treatment. Wu and her husband eventually exchanged vows and welcomed a daughter into the world when she was 29. She is profoundly grateful for having encountered a husband who never looked down on her. He has stood by her side, offering support and care from their pre-marriage days to their married life. Together, they have built a family and lead a life no different from that of an average couple. This, to her, is the ultimate satisfaction.





Resilience

"This is me when I was young, before any deformities started," Wu said, pointing at herself in a group photo taken during her childhood. "I used to play fearlessly, without any worries."

At the age of 57, she has endured numerous deformities and fractures in her head and limbs, along with the growth of tumors. But these challenging trials and painful experiences have not defeated her. Instead, her complete acceptance of life's challenges, her optimism, courage, and kindness have transformed her into an exemplary bodhisattva, guiding others along their own paths.

Wu once provided support for a person who was feeling hopeless. Little did she expect that after a few hours of conversation, she exerted enough force lifting herself up that she accidentally fractured a bone. As the saying goes, "A broken arm three times makes a good doctor." Drawing from her extensive experiences of injury, Wu immediately used her jacket as an impromptu sling to stabilize her arm. On another occasion, she met with a woman who was unable to overcome the grief of losing a child. Upon seeing what Wu looked like, the woman burst into tears and couldn't stop crying. Witnessing how Wu had courageously confronted life's challenges, the woman was inspired to gather her strength and find the resilience to carry on.

Wu's personal story has had a profound impact on many individuals, including her own family. Motivated by her example, her daughter has taken the initiative to help at the recycling station, continuing the lineage of goodness. Wu feels that her life journey, though arduous, is deeply rewarding. It is impossible not to admire and applaud her, as she truly embodies the indomitable spirit that shines brightly amidst life's adversities. ❁



After Leaving Home at 18

By Hong Jing-jing

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Yang Jing-shun, fleeing the Chinese Civil War as a student, endured an arduous journey of over a thousand kilometers. Knowing what it is like to be displaced, he reached out when he had the means to support underprivileged children in the pursuit of their education.

Inside a weathered house that has stood for more than 60 years, Yang Jing-shun (楊景順), 96, sits serenely at a square table in the living room. Unperturbed by the cacophony of car noises outside, he holds an ink brush, diligently transcribing a chapter from the *Book of Rites*, one of the Five Classics of the Confucian canon.

Yang's life journey mirrors a captivating and turbulent historical biography. In 1949, amidst the relentless gunfire and upheaval of the Chinese Civil War, he managed to survive against all odds and made it to Penghu, an archipelago off the west coast of Taiwan. As a student in exile, he was forced to join the military and later served as a police officer. He eventually embarked on a business venture with his friends and attained a life of stability and prosperity.

Tzu Chi volunteers made their first visit to Yang 14 years ago as part of a collaborative effort with a government social welfare agency aimed at providing care for elderly people living alone. Volunteers Zhu Bao-chun (朱寶春) and Huang Xian-de (黃獻德), a married couple, have been visiting Yang since 2016. One year, Zhu specially arranged for a volunteer with a beautiful singing voice to perform old songs during Yang's birthday celebration. Yang listened with joy, softly singing along and rhythmically tapping his hands to the melodies.

Zhu shared that Yang became emotional while they were singing the song, "Little Lamb Wants to Go Home." Did the song trigger memories of his cherished hometown, evoking strong sentiments? Or was it because he had witnessed too many separations and farewells in his life?

War-ravaged early years

Yang, originally from Yantai, Shandong Province, eastern China, fondly treasures one of his happy childhood memories—riding a small donkey to visit his grandparents' house. Sadly, those simple but blissful moments abruptly came to an end when he turned ten. In 1937, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred, marking the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War. "The young and strong sought refuge in the mountains," he recalled, "while the elderly and children unable to flee remained at home." The nonagenarian vividly remembers when Japanese soldiers invaded their home, then sat on their heatable brick bed. The brutal scenes of war left a deep sense of fear and terror in young Yang. Even today, his voice resonates with anger as he recounts the events that happened so many decades ago during the war. "Life became perilous, and I could no longer attend school."

The Sino-Japanese War lasted eight years, only to be followed by a civil war. That was when teachers and students from eight secondary schools in Shandong Province, under the leadership of their principals, embarked on a long journey of exile. Eighteen-year-old Yang hastily left home, carrying meager belongings—a thin blanket, a few clothes, and some books. Whenever they arrived at a place free from war, they stopped,

Yang Jing-shun, 96, taught himself calligraphy to compensate for the regret of being unable to complete his education due to the turmoil of war.

COURTESY OF YANG JING-SHUN



put down their belongings, and began their classes. The students laid some grass on the ground, gathered around their teachers, and took out their slate boards. They wrote on the slates using stones.

They starved every day, often going without a meal, hunger driving them to the brink of fainting. Kind-hearted villagers, despite their own impoverishment and struggles, offered food to alleviate their hunger along their journey. Some villagers went a step further, inviting them into their homes to eat.

They trudged over ten kilometers a day on the crowded path of escape, their feet swollen, blistered, and even bleeding. They became utterly exhausted. Yang recalled, "I never shed a tear throughout the journey. Even the younger children didn't cry." Why didn't they cry? Was it because they were consumed by sheer panic and terror? Or was it because the agonies of war had forced them to mature beyond their years? The answer eludes those who haven't experienced the horrors of war.

Yang repeatedly exclaimed, "It was such an ordeal!" as he recounted his war-time experiences, conveying the unimaginable sorrow and anguish of their uprooted lives amidst the chaos and tumult. The hardships he endured were not visibly etched upon his face, but they were engraved in his heart. It was a profound ordeal that left an indelible mark on his soul.

After the turmoil

After journeying over a thousand kilometers, Yang and his fellow displaced students finally arrived in Penghu, Taiwan. Unexpectedly, he was pressed into military service there, which would last two years. Afterwards, he ended up in Zuoying, a district located in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. Struggling without support and dressed in tattered clothes, he sought shelter on covered sidewalks. Uncertain about his future, he looked on with envy at the impeccably dressed police officers in their khaki uniforms parading the streets. Coincidentally, Taiwan Police College happened to be recruiting at that time, prompting him to apply. He successfully gained admission.

Working as a police officer, his life finally acquired a sense of stability. It was during this time he made a vow to himself: "When I have the ability, I'll definitely help others."

After he retired from the police force, Yang teamed up with friends to embark on a restaurant business venture, which flourished. Despite his

accomplishments and success, he would occasionally experience pangs of homesickness, leaving him feeling powerless and longing for solace. When that happened, he would cast his eyes upon the portrait of his late mother hanging on a wall of his living room. The photograph had been taken when he had visited his mother after the Taiwanese government allowed people from Taiwan to visit their relatives in China.

The vow he made to himself over 70 years ago was finally realized in 2021. He generously donated his life savings—30 million New Taiwan dollars (US\$1,000,000)—to the Tzu Chi Foundation, aiming to help underprivileged students pursue their education without worries. Why did he give away almost all of his savings to help others? He explained, "Because when I was a displaced student, I received help from others."

Volunteer Zhu was surprised by Yang's substantial donation. The old man had always lived a frugal life. He had been using the tables and chairs in his home for over 50 years, and his house showed signs of age. Despite having the means to buy new furniture or renovate his place, he never considered doing so. Instead, he dedicated his resources to aiding others.

Another example of his frugality occurred two years ago, when he was hospitalized for acute cholecystitis. Because all the rooms covered by the National Health Insurance program were already occupied, the hospital arranged for him to stay in a private room that required self-payment. This decision deeply upset him. He exclaimed, "Money shouldn't be spent like this!" As soon as a public healthcare room became available, the hospital promptly transferred him into it.

Over the course of their seven-year acquaintance, Zhu has come to regard Yang as her own elder. "After my mother and father-in-law passed away, whenever there was something delicious at home, the first person I thought of to share the food with was Uncle Yang," she said. Before the Chinese New Year this year, Yang had a fall in his home bathroom and fractured some ribs. When Zhu found out about it, she quickly sought the assistance of a fellow volunteer with the required expertise to install handrails, ensuring enhanced safety for Yang within his own home.

Zhu frequently shares her experiences as a volunteer with Yang. He never fails to express his admiration, remarking, "The compassionate spirit of you Tzu Chi volunteers is truly remarkable!"

There is a family under Tzu Chi's care who lives near Yang's home. This financially strug-



gling couple slept on the floor with cardboard as bedding in a rented place that was dirty and disorganized. Yang witnessed Tzu Chi volunteers assisting them by cleaning their surroundings, purchasing a bed, providing food, and even accompanying them for medical treatment when they were ill. “Tzu Chi supports those who genuinely need help,” he said. “I believe they will use my donations where they are truly needed.”

The classic text Yang was copying at the beginning of this article contains the following: “One should not exclusively prioritize their own kin, nor should they solely cherish their own children.” These lines emphasize the importance of extending love and care beyond oneself and one’s immediate family circle, tending thoughtfully to the well-being and needs of others. Yang exemplified these principles through his selfless actions. Having survived the hardships of war, he showcased through his deeds what truly matters in life.

Yang Jing-shun (second from right) donated a significant portion of his savings to Tzu Chi to help underprivileged children pursue their studies with peace of mind. Volunteers Zhu Bao-chun (first from left) and Huang Xian-de (first from right) delivered the donation receipt and a certificate of appreciation to him.

COURTESY OF WANG ZHU-MING

The depth of suffering etched within his heart did not harden him; instead, it gave rise to an abundance of love. Unable to pursue education in a peaceful environment when he was young, he decided to reach out to support underprivileged children when he had the means. A life of luxury has never been his aspiration. “A simple and ordinary life is enough,” he said. “If you are able, do something good. When a person leaves this world, the only legacy they leave behind is their acts of kindness.”



The JING SI A Illustrated APHORISMS



The Buddha says:

Great doctors excel in four things:
The first is diagnosing illness,
the second is identifying the causes of illness,
the third is controlling illness,
and the fourth is curing illness.



Human life is full of illness. Physical imbalances cause illness. Family quarrels and social chaos are also illnesses.

The Dharma is like a river which washes clean the polluted minds of all living beings. The Dharma is also like medicine. There are no better or worse medicines. Any remedy that can heal an illness is a good one. One example of an excellent remedy is a joyful heart.

Quite often people suffer from spiritual maladies rather than physical illnesses. Many people cannot be cured by conventional medicine. Some need "great doctors" such as the buddhas and the bodhisattvas to untangle their psychological knots.

Whenever a war arises, many innocent people suffer.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "Human disasters are created by human minds. When human minds are filled with greed, anger, and delusion, catastrophes such as war will go on and on. If everyone can rediscover their innate light and wisdom, and if they can deal with each other with Great Love instead of arguing with each other from their own viewpoints, then the world will be harmonious and peaceful."

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

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Have faith in our selfless nature, and have faith that everyone has a loving heart.

—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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