

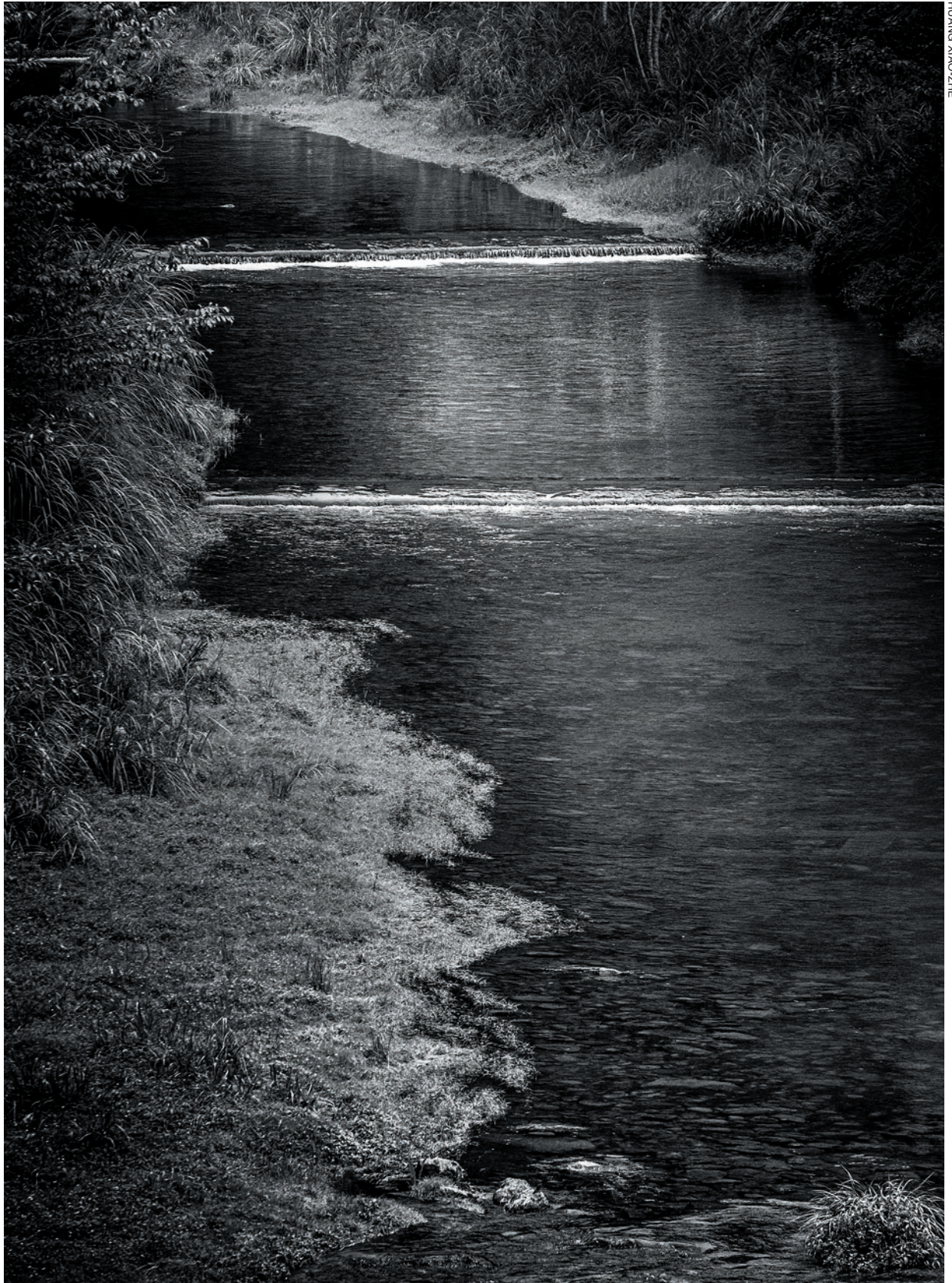
慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action



Tzu Chi's Eco-Friendly
Assistive Device Program



It All Starts With Love

Translated by Teresa Chang

Seeing Tzu Chi volunteers from around the world coming to Taiwan for our year-end blessing ceremonies or to receive their volunteer certifications fills me with gratitude and joy. Even though we are usually far apart, as long as there is a heartfelt connection, no mountains or oceans can break our enduring bond—a bond forged by shared love and compassion. This love and compassion extends from our past lives, through our present existence, and into our future lives. We are united by our collective aspiration to walk the Bodhisattva Path throughout the journey of our lives.

I've become aware of the toll that age has had on me in recent years; even speaking has become a challenge. What I most eagerly desire now is for everyone to lend me strength, to help convey the teachings of Tzu Chi, and to ensure that people in need worldwide can receive assistance. I'm reassured whenever young people come to me and express their willingness to shoulder the responsibility of serving humanity. Their sincere commitments put my heart at ease.

Tzu Chi wouldn't be what it is today without our Bamboo Bank Era. Our foundation started with 30 housewives each saving 50 NT cents (about 1 US cent) each day from their grocery money in a bamboo bank to assist the needy. As word spread, more people joined in. In India's Bodhi Gaya, volunteers and local residents are following the same spirit, using bamboo to create containers and setting aside whatever money they can to help the underprivileged. Despite limited means, they tap into love, cultivating a rich inner life.

The essence of fundraising is not about the amount of money donated; it's about inspiring hearts and cultivating love. Everyone has an equal capacity for love and compassion. Just as a drop of water in a river or a stream contributes to the vastness of the ocean, our individual compassion, when combined, forms the boundless energy of love. The collective merits thus created are immeasurable. The Bamboo Bank Era marks our beginning of nurturing loving hearts, and I hope this compassionate intention will continue to thrive and be passed on through generations.

For over 50 years, Tzu Chi has been broadening hearts and inspiring altruistic actions with Buddhist teachings. That's why I often say that Tzu Chi has truly made significant contributions to humanity.

The greatest value of Tzu Chi lies in bringing together the Great Love of many people—an unselfish love embracing all of humanity—uniting Tzu Chi volunteers worldwide in a spirit of cooperation and harmony. It's like holding hands and encircling the entire globe, weaving together our threads of love.

Tzu Chi is a Buddhist organization. We are all fortunate to have the karmic affinities to learn Buddhism. Reverence for the Buddha, respect for his teachings, and veneration of the sangha (the Buddhist monastic order) are crucial. Most importantly, it is essential to practice the Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Loving-kindness is about bringing joy and peace to those who encounter us. Some individuals naturally attract others, their words are readily accepted, and their good deeds inspire more good deeds. This is because they have nurtured positive connections with others. We should learn from their example.

According to the Buddha's teachings, we can encapsulate the principles of all things within a framework of three dimensions, each with four phases. In the physical dimension, everything in the universe undergoes the stages of formation, continuation, decay, and extinction. In the mental dimension, thoughts and feelings arise, remain, change, and disappear. In the bodily dimension, life cycles through birth, aging, illness, and death. All things are subject to change and impermanence, including the human mind. Making a pledge isn't easy, and following through with it is even more challenging given the myriad afflictions, ignorance, and obstacles in the human realm. Without unwavering faith, a moment of compassion can swiftly dissipate, and accumulating merits becomes difficult.

Receiving blessings starts with creating them, just as taking the first step is crucial for making anything possible. Progress comes from continuous effort, and each step contributes to a long journey. Time is precious and irreversible. I often say that time is running out. With this awareness in my thoughts, I consistently remind myself to diligently seize each moment, ensuring that every word I speak aligns with the Buddha's teachings and every action I take follows the right path. Let's seize every moment to diligently cultivate merits. Blessed are those who can help others. Let's be ever more mindful. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

January 2024



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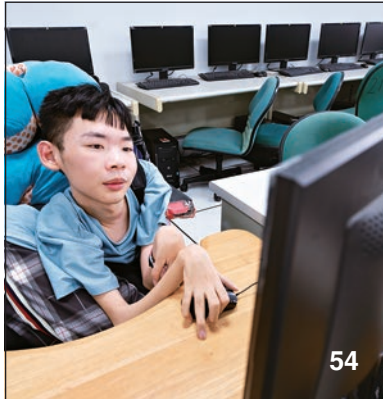
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Tzu Chi's Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program

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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Sustainable Solutions

The Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

Tzu Chi volunteers in Taiwan recycle, repair, and deliver assistive devices directly to people's homes, providing impactful solutions for the challenges of aging and disability.



Tzu Chi volunteers brave rain and navigate through narrow alleyways on Penghu's Hua Islet to deliver an electric bed, weighing over a hundred kilograms, to a household.

“With this standing wheelchair, he can manage getting up and down independently—ascending gradually when he chooses to stand and descending slowly when he prefers to sit, without the assistance of another person,” said Chen Hui-xian (陳惠仙), referring to her father.

Chen works in a long-term care facility, engaging the elderly in activities to enhance their physical and mental functions, aiming to delay disability. She plays a similar role in her personal life for her 88-year-old father. He was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease five years ago and has now reached a point where he can no longer stand or even maintain a sitting position on his own. He needs help with almost all daily tasks, including getting in and out of bed, using the bathroom, and eating. He had a foreign caregiver, but she had to move him more than ten times a day, resulting in a back injury that forced her to resign. In response, Chen and her sister, who works as a home care provider, take turns visiting their brother’s home to care for him.

To increase her father’s independence, Chen applied to the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program, which provided an electric hospital bed, a standing wheelchair, and other equipment. She secures her father every day into his standing wheelchair, fastens the chest, waist, and leg straps, hands him the remote control, and lets him control standing and sitting on his own. Mr. Chen’s physical and mental well-being has improved with the assistive devices, enhancing the overall quality of life for the entire family.

Reflecting on this experience, Chen remarked, “In the very beginning, I questioned why Tzu Chi put so much effort into assistive devices when our government already offered support. However, I’ve since come to realize the strong societal demand for such equipment, and we need all the help we can get.”

Hong Shu-ying (洪淑英) is another beneficiary of the Tzu Chi program. She applied for assistive devices from the program before her husband returned home from the hospital for his final care. Tzu Chi volunteers prepared and delivered an electric bed, wheelchair, and shower chair to her home. All Hong needed to do was open the door and let the volunteers place the items where they needed to go.

In May 2023, Hong’s husband passed away. Initially, she worried about how to return the assistive devices to Tzu Chi. Volunteers suggested that she focus on completing her husband’s final



In many remote areas of Taiwan, there is a significant outflow of young and middle-aged populations, resulting in a higher proportion of elderly residents. This demographic shift underscores the increased demand for local caregivers and assistive devices.



The Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program

Tzu Chi established the Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program in Taiwan in March 2017. By the end of October 2023, a total of 67,521 assistive devices had been distributed, benefiting 44,015 families.



Distribution Statistics

Items provided	Number
Hospital beds	14,913
Air mattresses	6,552
Oxygen concentrators	1,969
Phlegm suction machines	2,015
Nebulizers	640
Standard wheelchairs	14,396
Specialized (high-back) wheelchairs	2,601
Electric mobility scooters	322
Commode chairs	8,180
Walkers	6,046
Assorted canes	4,121
Other assistive devices	5,766

arrangements before dealing with the devices. When she finally contacted them to take back the equipment, they ensured she didn't have to exert any effort. "I just opened the door and let them take the equipment away," she said. Looking back on the support and care she received in the process, she said gratefully: "I benefited from many people's help. There's a large team behind this program. The love I witnessed was selfless—more than touching, it was truly heartfelt."

Addressing the need

According to estimates by Taiwan's National Development Council, Taiwan is expected to become a super-aged society by 2025, with individuals aged 65 and above constituting over 20 percent of the population. Challenges accompany this aging trend. Currently, the average life expectancy for Taiwanese citizens hovers around 80 years, but the average "unhealthy life expectancy" has stretched to seven to eight years. Simply put, a significant portion of seniors spends the last seven to eight years of their lives in a state of disability or being bedridden.

The Taiwanese government has created a comprehensive long-term care system to address the care needs of millions of older and disabled individuals. In conjunction, assistive device centers have been established in counties and cities across Taiwan. People eligible for long-term care, holding proof of physical or mental disabilities, or having suffered from occupational accidents can apply for government subsidies to purchase brand-new assistive devices. Meanwhile, individuals with short-term rehabilitation needs can either rent or receive second-hand assistive devices free of charge from local assistive device centers.

Director Yang Chung-yi (楊忠一) of the New Taipei City Assistive Device Center explains: "For example, if the subsidy for a wheelchair is 2,800, and you opt for one priced at 4,000, you only need to cover the remaining cost of 1,200. If you don't qualify for a subsidy or only require such devices for a short time, like during recovery from an accident, you can use second-hand ones to meet your needs."

In addition to those assistive device centers established by local governments, the Tzu Chi Foundation, an organization known for its charitable and environmental conservation efforts, established the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program in 2017 to tackle the challenges posed by an aging population. Volunteers clean,



disinfect, and refurbish recycled second-hand assistive devices, providing them at no cost to people in need of such equipment, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged.

This charitable initiative has its roots in the environmental protection endeavors that Tzu Chi began in 1990. In response to Dharma Master Cheng Yen's call for recycling, volunteers began reclaiming materials such as paper and plastic bottles. But soon much more than paper and plastic were being recycled. Many used assistive devices, including wheelchairs and walking aids, found their way to Tzu Chi's recycling stations when their users no longer needed them, either because they had passed away or recovered from an accident.

Initially, Tzu Chi volunteers treated these assistive devices like regular recyclables. Those in poor condition were disassembled and recycled, while usable ones were cleaned and placed in a designated area within a recycling station for

Volunteer Zeng Yao-shan (曾堯山) repairs a commode chair at Tzu Chi's Gangshan Campus in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. Sometimes, an assistive device can be restored to working order with just a wrench and a few screws.

ZHU LI-WEI

individuals in need. Such items were sometimes given as gifts to Tzu Chi care recipients. Later, volunteers with electrical repair skills began independently fixing and personally delivering such items to people in a community, driven by word-of-mouth.

Such efforts expanded with the widespread use of communication software after 2012. Now volunteers willing to contribute could connect and communicate much more easily, exchanging knowledge on repair methods and cleaning techniques. With such collaboration, volunteers more efficiently refurbished and delivered assistive devices to those in need.



As Taiwan's society continued to age, volunteers discovered a growing demand for assistive devices during their regular home visits to those in need. Properly disinfected and repaired second-hand assistive devices became increasingly sought after. Subsequently, the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program was formally launched, with service outlets established across Taiwan and local volunteers actively participating. The only exception is the Matsu Islands (officially Lienchiang County), which doesn't have a Tzu Chi assistive device outlet. As of October 2023, over 67,000 assistive devices have been distributed, benefiting more than 44,000 families.

Delivering best wishes

The assistive devices distributed by Tzu Chi have collectively saved the public over four hundred million Taiwanese dollars (US\$13,333,000) over the years, which doesn't include the cost of the services provided by Tzu Chi volunteers themselves. Lu Fang-chuan (呂芳川), the director of the Tzu Chi Department of Charity Mission Development, observed, "Our program protects the environment and cares for people by extend-

Volunteers deliver a commode chair to an elderly resident living alone on Penghu's Hua Islet. Since Penghu has many outlying islands accessibly only by boats, volunteers must overcome obstacles to visit households, assess needs, and deliver the required assistive devices.

ing the life of items and relieving suffering."

To ensure the timely delivery of assistive devices, volunteers have developed skills to adapt quickly on the spot and handle unforeseen challenges. For example, when confronted with narrow apartment stairs that make it difficult to move large hospital beds, they adeptly dismantle the beds into smaller, more manageable units for easier transport, reassembling the pieces upon reaching their destination. Throughout this process, ensuring safety is paramount to prevent accidents and injuries.

Tzu Chi volunteer Lin Jin-cheng (林金城) has over 40 years of experience in the construction industry and 23 years of volunteering. He initially thought assistive devices were limited to wheelchairs and commode chairs. It wasn't until he

retired in 2022 and joined the assistive device team in Tucheng, New Taipei City, that he discovered the wide variety of assistive devices available, including electric beds, walkers, and more. He realized that even wheelchairs come in different specifications.

Lin has since handled over 500 wheelchairs and can reassemble one in under two hours. He has also participated in transporting and moving hospital beds weighing over a hundred kilograms (220 pounds) on several occasions. About his work, he says, “Handling and delivering assistive devices is among the most exhausting of all the volunteer services. But once I got involved, I dedicated myself completely to the work because I saw so many people in need of such items. Providing assistive devices directly helps people, so I have no regrets.”

Lin explained that, among all the regions in Taiwan, the assistive devices from the Greater Taipei area are of the highest quantity. These devices primarily come from Tzu Chi’s recycling stations, hospitals, and nursing homes. Sometimes a medical institution will replace old equipment in bulk, then give it to Tzu Chi. Two or three large trucks are needed to pick up and transport such a large donation, which usually includes unwieldy wheelchairs and hospital beds.

“After bringing all the equipment back,” Lin explained, “we carefully evaluate each item. We disassemble items in poor condition to salvage serviceable parts for future use. Those devices that are in relatively good condition are repaired or cleaned to be provided to users.” He added that even outlying islands such as Penghu and Kinmen have received assistive devices from the program.

Based on Social Value UK’s Social Return on Investment methodology, Tzu Chi’s assistive device program creates benefits equivalent to 81.18 times the investment. (Social Value UK is the professional body for social value and impact management in the United Kingdom.) To put it simply, every effort from Tzu Chi volunteers in the program yields over 80 times the benefit for society. These positive impacts are evident in alleviating recipients’ financial burdens, enhancing their quality of life, and improving their sense of security, both physically and mentally.

Tzu Chi’s assistive device program is dedicated to recycling assistive resources and making it easier for those in need to access suitable assistive devices. These endeavors align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3,

“Good Health and Well-being.” As proof of the value it creates, of the three gold awards the Tzu Chi Foundation won in the 2023 Taiwan Sustainable Action Awards, one was in recognition of this program.

Volunteers distributing assistive devices to households perceive their work as more than just providing a practical service—they consider it an act of delivering their best wishes too. While they serve others through this endeavor, they express hope that their efforts can have a ripple effect, inspiring recipients of these devices to contribute to the well-being of others and the Earth, collectively serving the greater good. ❊

An older woman effortlessly navigates her neighborhood on a Tzu Chi-provided electric mobility scooter. To ensure her safety, her hired caregiver has attached a sign to the scooter that reads, “I am 95 years old and a novice driver.”

HSIAO YIU-HWA



Into the Mountains

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Tzu Chi started an initiative to increase the coverage rate of assistive devices in remote areas, helping rural people obtain the devices that will improve the quality of their lives.



Accessing essential medical equipment is straightforward for city dwellers but presents challenges for those in remote countryside, where obtaining medical help or assistive devices is considerably more difficult. Recognizing these difficulties, Tzu Chi's free clinic teams have for many years visited remote areas in Taiwan, bringing healthcare services directly to residents. In 2021, the foundation expanded its efforts by collaborating with rural and outlying island township offices to provide assistive devices. In this cooperative endeavor, village officials conduct surveys and register individuals in need, after which volunteers transport the devices to specific locations for distribution.

"Urban residents are generally more informed and can easily apply online or inquire with neighbors if they require assistive devices. However, those in need in remote areas, such as in the mountains, may struggle to find such equipment. Even their neighbors may live far away," said volunteer Fang Qi-hui (方奇輝), highlighting the disparity in obtaining assistive devices between those living in urban and rural areas.

Tzu Chi's initiative to enhance the coverage rate of assistive devices in remote areas operates on a township basis. Starting in Taitung, eastern Taiwan, volunteer teams reached out to five townships in the county over the past two years, later expanding to areas including Alishan Township in Chiayi County, Ren'ai Township in Nantou County, and Beigan Township in Lienchiang County (Matsu Islands). Conducting a comprehensive survey for an entire township is comparatively feasible due to the relatively small populations in these far-flung regions. The successful completion of the Jianshi Township Project in July 2023 serves as a typical example of this proactive approach in improving access to assistive devices for elderly and disabled individuals in remote areas.

Jianshi Township Project

Jianshi Township is the largest administrative district in Hsinchu County, northern Taiwan, spanning approximately 528 square kilometers (204 square miles). The township is characterized by towering mountains, with the highest peak reaching over 3,000 meters (9,840 feet), establishing it as a well-known mountainous region in northern Taiwan. The primary residents are the Atayal indigenous people and Hakka. Smangus, located in the township, was the last indigenous tribal settlement in Taiwan to be connected to the electrical power supply. The challenges of remoteness and inconvenience are apparent in Jianshi.

To make it easier for county residents to access subsidies for purchasing assistive devices or to borrow such equipment at no cost, the Hsinchu County government has established an assistive device center in Zhudong Township, centrally located in the county. The social department at the Jianshi Township office assists residents in need of assistive devices with tasks such as filling

Volunteers unload assistive devices from a truck and give them a final check to make sure they are in proper working order before distributing them in Jianshi Township, Hsinchu County.



out forms and submitting them for approval. However, there is a waiting period for the application and approval processes before residents can obtain the devices. Additionally, the township office does not have an immediate inventory of assistive devices for distribution. That's why Zhang Pei-han (張佩涵), the head of the social department, was delighted when Tzu Chi offered assistance in this area.

"I knew Tzu Chi had an assistive device program," he said. "After their proactive contact, Mayor Tseng Kuo-ta (曾國大) instructed that we fully cooperate. We immediately surveyed demand through village chiefs and health station personnel." Zhang shared that a survey in late June 2023 identified over 400 people in need of assistive devices. After a distribution was held to meet their needs, many others inquired, "Can we still apply?"

As a result, a second survey was held, with nearly 200 more people expressing their need for various assistive devices. Tzu Chi organized another distribution in July. In total, over 600 individuals received assistive devices from the foundation, including walking aids, electric mobility scooters, and hospital beds. Considering Jianshi Township's total population of over 9,000, this effort should have covered the majority of those in need.

Beneficiaries

Mr. Lin, a resident of the Shuitian indigenous community in Jianshi Township, was one of those who received assistance through the distributions. "I had a stroke at the age of 23," he shared. "It's been almost eight or nine years now." He worked in the food and beverage industry before the stroke. Despite being a non-smoker and non-drinker, he faced health issues related to obesity. Standing at a height of 165 centimeters (5'4"), he once weighed over a hundred kilograms (220 pounds). Cardiovascular disease resulting from his weight led to his stroke at a young age.

Lin experienced paralysis on his right side after the stroke and lost the ability to move independently. He persevered through rehabilitation, and began to walk again just over a year ago. Currently weighing just over 70 kilograms, he has made significant progress, but his right leg has not fully regained its function. In order to meet his mobility needs, volunteers provided him with an electric mobility scooter.

"When you release the handle, the scooter will come to a stop," explained volunteer Fang Qi-hui as he instructed Lin on how to operate the scooter.

Fang adjusted the speed control knob to the turtle symbol, starting Lin off at the slowest speed. He then taught him to move forward, backward, and brake before practicing on the road. Volunteers had carefully inspected and made necessary repairs to this second-hand electric scooter before allowing it to be given out. This vehicle would allow Lin to travel effortlessly within a few kilometers from home, making it convenient for shopping or visiting friends.

Another resident in need of an electric mobility aid was Ms. Xu from the Shilei indigenous community. Twenty-seven years ago, she suffered paralysis on the right side of her body due to a traffic accident. When she visited the Shilei Culture and Health Station in July to receive a power wheelchair from Tzu Chi, experienced volunteers immediately noticed that the crutch she was using was too high and promptly adjusted it for her.

Dr. Fan Wen-sheng (范文勝), a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association, demonstrated to Xu's parents how to assist their daughter in hand rehabilitation. He gently pressed on Xu's right palm and extended her curled fingers. Once he released, her hand returned to its original semi-clenched state. "It's crucial to exercise both fingers and toes; the earlier you start, the faster the recovery," he reminded.

"Try moving forward and backward. It's okay; take your time," said a volunteer as he guided Xu on how to navigate the wheelchair she had just received. Following the volunteer's instructions, Xu operated the joystick with her left hand, slowly steering the wheelchair backward. She smiled and raised her left hand to wipe away a tear from the corner of her eye—likely tears of joy. "Don't be afraid; you'll get used to driving the wheelchair!" the nearby volunteers encouraged.

Empathetic support

Because communities in Jianshi Township are spread out, volunteers requested that village officials and local health station teams notify registered individuals to collect the requested assistive devices at scheduled times at designated health stations. Volunteers, however, made a point of personally delivering larger items, such as hospital beds, to households, as these were more difficult to transport. Moreover, individuals in need of hospital beds often face greater difficulties with daily activities, even struggling to get in and out of bed. During delivery visits to recipients' homes, volunteers assessed their needs for additional



Volunteers patiently show Ms. Xu how to maneuver a power wheelchair, ensuring she feels comfortable and confident in using the device.

assistive devices and evaluated whether they should be included in Tzu Chi’s long-term care recipient list.

“He was initially bedridden due to a stroke and unable to walk,” said Huang Li-na (黃麗娜), a caregiver at the Yufeng Culture and Health Station, recounting Mr. Chen’s situation. “A home care worker discovered his condition and applied for long-term care on his behalf. She visited him daily and provided massages. Now he can walk and eat independently.” Recognizing the difficulties Mr. Chen faced in rising from his bed, Huang requested a hospital bed for him from Tzu Chi. Mr. Chen lived with his son and wasn’t fully paralyzed, so Tzu Chi provided a manual bed. While manual beds may lack the convenience of electric ones, they help minimize maintenance issues with electronic components, making them a more suitable choice for people like Chen who resides in a remote area.

The road to Chen’s home, lined by dense bamboo forests, was narrow and winding, with occasional steep slopes. When a Tzu Chi assistive device team delivered the bed to the house and approached the hairpin bend in front of it, they had to accelerate up the slope in their van and truck to eventually reach their destination.

“Don’t grab the height adjustment lever; it’s

made of plastic and can break. Hold onto the sturdier bed frame,” cautioned volunteer Xie Ming-zan (謝明讚), guiding Mr. Chen’s son as they maneuvered the bed into the house. Meanwhile, Dr. Fan Wen-sheng provided rehabilitation advice to Mr. Chen: “Regularly exercise your hands to help your fingers become more nimble. Soak them in warm water every day; it will make them more supple.”

Somewhere on their way back after finishing their mission at Mr. Chen’s home, the volunteer team had to pull over and let their truck cool down. The engine temperature was rising sharply. Volunteer Fang Qi-hui remarked, “The mountain roads in Jianshi are indeed pretty steep; driving here requires extra caution.”

Tzu Chi proactively reaches out to remote areas, providing much-needed assistive devices for those facing challenges due to old age, illness, or disability. Alongside this, volunteers offer relevant health education and charitable assistance, alleviating the suffering caused by the lack of medical resources in these areas. ❀

Across the Seas

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

The aging population on Taiwan's outlying islands has resulted in a significant demand for assistive devices and long-term care. Volunteers brave challenges to deliver critical resources to those in need.



In the past ten years, tourism has given a boost to the economies of Taiwan's outlying islands, such as Kinmen and Penghu. But despite this progress, such areas continue to face major challenges that must be addressed, including low birth rates, aging populations, and limited medical resources.

A visit to the towns and villages of these islands highlights an ongoing challenge: the exodus of young people from these areas. This leaves many elderly residents living alone or relying on each other. As a result, Tzu Chi's assistive device teams on these islands face substantial demand for such equipment.

"The demand for assistive devices in Kinmen has exceeded expectations," noted volunteer

Hong Song-bo (洪松柏) from Little Kinmen. In May 2022, volunteers from northern Taiwan visited his home to introduce the Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program to local Tzu Chi volunteers. The Kinmen assistive device outlet was subsequently launched on July 18, 2022. From then until October 2023, they provided assistive devices to over 300 households. That's very nearly two households every three days.

The equipment Tzu Chi offers includes oxygen concentrators. Volunteers have noticed a high demand for such machines, perhaps due to the lingering effects of lung damage in individuals diagnosed with COVID-19. There has also been a substantial need for wheelchairs, commode chairs, hospital beds, and similar items. When the assistive device team in Kinmen receives requests for help, they retrieve the needed items from the local Tzu Chi office's storage facilities. After cleaning and disinfecting, the objects are loaded onto a truck for delivery. If personnel, vehicles, and the requested items are all available, delivery can be made to the recipient's home in about half a day. Even if there are delays of one sort or another, most deliveries are completed within three to five days.

Due to the high demand, the assistive device team in Kinmen stays quite busy. According to volunteer Wang Ren-qi (王仁戚), "Sometimes we make deliveries every two or three days, but sometimes we cover several places in a single day." The team members are usually older and moving the equipment often leads to aches and pains, but they persist in their efforts. Wang himself is 76. "I have to do it!" he exclaimed. "Our services bring relief to people, so I find joy in it!"

Deliveries and community care

Kinmen boasts many traditional Southern Fujianese buildings and old Western-style houses. The county government encourages residents to restore these historical structures when possible. Thus, volunteers often find themselves having to navigate through winding alleys flanked by such buildings during their trips to deliver assistive devices. Sometimes they become lost in the maze of alleys, requiring extra time to locate the recipient's home and complete the delivery.

When a household requires assistive devices,

Volunteers from Tzu Chi's assistive device team in Penghu take a boat to deliver equipment to a household on an outlying island. Even seasickness cannot deter them from carrying out these missions.





volunteers make every effort to deliver them promptly. Conversely, when a family informs them that they no longer need the devices, volunteers retrieve them as soon as possible. Take, for example, Mr. Li from the village of Kuningtou. He recently completed the funeral arrangements for his 90-year-old father. When he felt ready, he contacted Tzu Chi volunteers to collect the hospital bed provided by the foundation.

He had previously requested three electric beds from Tzu Chi—one for his father and the others for his mother and uncle, who were also dealing with physical decline. With all three seniors unable to care for themselves. Mr. Li, despite being under 50 at the time, made the decisive choice to quit his regular job and fully devote himself to the care and companionship of his family members.

“My children have grown, and I’m doing alright financially,” said Li, explaining his ability to leave a regular job at a relatively young age. “In addition to looking after the elders these days, I spend my time watching TV, doing odd jobs, and catching some sleep.” He nonchalantly talked about his caregiver’s life, which others might find challenging. He commended the comfort that Tzu Chi’s electric beds brought to his elderly family members. “The beds arrived pretty quick after I applied—within three or four days. Taking care of my parents and uncle became much easier once we started using the electric beds,” he affirmed.

Volunteer Chen Xiang-jing (left) delivered an oxygen concentrator to Wang Qing-wu (right) and taught him how to use it.

HSIAO YIU-HWA

Wang Qing-wu (王清武), another resident of Kinmen, received an oxygen concentrator from Tzu Chi. He also happens to be the former chairman of a disabled people’s association. Sharing his experience, he said, “I contracted COVID-19, followed by the flu. After a check-up in Taipei, I was waiting to return to Kinmen for dialysis when I passed out at the airport. I was rushed to the hospital, and stayed there for 36 days.” His ordeal didn’t stop there. Back home in Kinmen, he unexpectedly ended up in the emergency room and was hospitalized for another 16 days. He emphasized the fearful impact of COVID-19, explaining that since his lungs were still recovering, he needed an oxygen concentrator at home to serve his needs. His daughter applied to Tzu Chi for one, and volunteer Chen Xiang-jing (陳翔景) delivered it to his home.

At Wang’s home, Chen walked him through how to use the oxygen concentrator. “After switching on the machine, wait for a minute or two before inhaling to allow any remaining gas to clear. I’ve set it to 2.5, but if you ever feel like you’re not getting enough air, you can raise the oxygen level.” He also reminded Wang to keep away from open flames when the machine is pro-



As the morning light gradually brightens, volunteers load an electric bed onto a boat, getting ready to deliver it to an outlying island in Penghu.

viding oxygen and to use distilled water (not mineral water) in the humidifier to avoid inhaling impurities.

“Feeling comfortable with your breathing now?” Chen inquired. “Yes!” Wang replied. The volunteer mentally breathed a sigh of relief after confirming the machine was bringing relief. “How long can we keep this?” a family member asked. Chen took a moment to consider and then replied, “Once he’s back on his feet, you can return it to us.”

Overcoming seasickness

Penghu and Kinmen both deal with significant challenges because of their aging populations, resulting in a high demand for assistive devices and long-term care. The main difference is that Kinmen and Little Kinmen are connected by the Kinmen Bridge, making it easy to transport assistive devices by truck. In contrast, transportation between the main island of Penghu and its outlying islands, like Jibei, Wang’an, and Qimei, still depends on ferry services.

“In winter, the northeast winds in Penghu can be quite strong, reaching levels eight to ten, even 12,” said volunteer Chen Pei-lin (陳沛琳), a resident of Penghu. “Despite these challenging conditions, if someone urgently needs assistive devices, we make sure to deliver them promptly.” Chen can’t help but feel a bit nervous when she speaks of taking a boat, even though she’s lived more than 30

years on the main island of Penghu. She, like many Tzu Chi volunteers in Penghu, experience seasickness during boat journeys. Nonetheless, armed with vomit bags, they bravely face the waves to fulfill their delivery missions.

One day, Chen and fellow volunteers visited Hua Islet to deliver assistive equipment to Mrs. Liu, a 90-year-old living alone. Initially requesting only a cane during the village chief’s survey, volunteers soon discovered that Mrs. Liu needed more, prompting them to bring her a commode chair on this day.

“This won’t do; it’s too hard!” exclaimed Chen upon seeing Mrs. Liu’s makeshift bed, assembled from tables and chairs. The bed hadn’t been there during the previous visit. Mrs. Liu’s house was damaged by a recent typhoon, causing rain to seep through the roof to her bedroom on the first floor, soaking her original bed. Consequently, she had to move to the living room and create a makeshift bed using tables and chairs. Unable to ignore the situation, Chen promptly persuaded Mrs. Liu to accept an electric bed from Tzu Chi.

After convincing Mrs. Liu to accept the bed, volunteers encouraged her to try the commode chair they brought. “Come, have a seat and try it

out,” said volunteer Xu Wen-hu (許文虎) as he unfolded the chair for Mrs. Liu to test. “With this commode chair, you won’t have to leave the house to relieve yourself at night.” Most old houses on Hua Islet don’t have bathrooms. Mrs. Liu had relied on public toilets and shower facilities since a young age, but given her advanced age, volunteers were concerned about potential risks of her going to public toilets in the middle of the night. Hence, the decision to provide a commode chair.

There are only two round-trip ferry services between Magong, on the main island of Penghu, and Hua Islet every day. Taking the afternoon boat on that day, the volunteers could only make a brief visit to Mrs. Liu during the less than half-hour docking period. They left to catch the return ferry after the short visit. After dinner that day, they decided to take the early morning boat the next day to deliver the electric bed to Mrs. Liu.

That night, volunteers carefully cleaned and disinfected the bed to be delivered. They blew away the dust on the bed frame with a low-pressure air gun and sprayed it with a diluted bleach solution to disinfect it. Early the next morning, after the sun rose, they loaded the bed and mattress onto a truck and transported them to the dock.

The outbound journey of about an hour was relatively calm. As soon as the volunteers arrived at Hua Islet with the bed, local residents and Coast Guard personnel assisted in unloading and delivering the bed to Mrs. Liu’s home.

Once at her home, volunteer Xu Wen-hu explained how to use the electric bed. “Come on, lie down here,” he said to Mrs. Liu. “When you want to get up, just press the raise button, so your back doesn’t have to work too hard.” He also recommended holding onto the bed frame and using her cane for support when getting on and off the bed.

Observing the volunteers helping Mrs. Liu, a neighbor remarked, “This bed is perfect for her; you’ve really helped the right person!” The woman then shared Mrs. Liu’s life challenges. After marriage, she gave birth to two sons, but the younger one had physical and mental disabilities. He now resides in a care facility. Both her husband and elder son have passed away. Her daughter-in-law lives in Magong, and her grandson works elsewhere, leaving Mrs. Liu alone on Hua Islet, relying on government subsidies. “Her back isn’t in good shape, and she often falls,” the neighbor said. “We always check on her if she sleeps in. One time we called her, but she didn’t answer. When we peeked through the window, we found her unconscious.”

The neighbor’s story reflected Mrs. Liu’s difficulties, but it also revealed the close-knit connection among neighbors. Now, with the addition of assistive devices to reduce the risk of daily activities, Mrs. Liu’s later years can be more secure.

“Life must go on, whether it’s tough or joyous,” said Mrs. Liu. Watching her lean on the cane provided by Tzu Chi, casually making visits to neighbors as usual, chatting with them, the volunteers could finally return to Magong feeling assured. “Take good care of yourself! Stay well!” the volunteers said, wishing the nonagenarian their best as they said goodbye.

Putting forth their best efforts

The Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program has expanded its services to Taiwan’s outlying islands, including Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu, Little Liuqiu, and Orchid Island. The program’s service outlets in Kinmen and Penghu have been operating for over a year. Most assistive devices in these two areas are shipped from northern Taiwan, either departing from Keelung Port or Taipei Harbor to Kinmen, or being transferred from Chiayi, southwestern Taiwan, to Penghu.

Volunteer Chen Ming-zhou (陳明周), a resident of Chiayi, explained, “The quickest route when transporting assistive devices from Taiwan to Penghu is from Chiayi’s Budai Port. Volunteers from northern Taiwan guided us on related shipping matters, enabling our services to reach more people.” Chen shared that when the Chiayi assistive device outlet was established in 2022, they took on the responsibility of supporting Penghu. He and his fellow volunteers have since become well-versed in relevant shipping affairs. However, sometimes a hitch arises. “There are instances when we’ve already loaded everything for shipping, but due to adverse weather conditions, the boat cannot depart, and we have to wait.”

Compared to their counterparts in Taiwan, the assistive device teams on outlying islands face additional challenges, due to limited manpower and resources. Even transportation is impacted by weather conditions. Nonetheless, the volunteers persevere. One reason for their dedication is the positive feedback from local residents, who appreciate their ability to promptly address urgent needs.

Volunteer Chen Pei-lin mentioned that residents of Penghu applying for assistive devices through the county government often encounter long queues, resulting in waiting times of up to three months before receiving the equipment.



Unfortunately, some severely ill patients under home hospice care cannot wait and pass away before obtaining the devices.

“In response to users’ needs, we swiftly dispatch the required equipment, enhancing their comfort in their final moments and aiding in a more peaceful departure,” Chen said. “I am grateful that they give us the opportunity to serve them.”

Speaking of the current operation of the Penghu outlet, she noted that most users or their

Mrs. Liu tries out an electric bed provided by Tzu Chi as volunteer Hsu Wen-hu guides her on how to use it.

families express deep gratitude, whether loaned devices are returned due to the user’s recovery or their passing. Some are even motivated to join as volunteers. “Even though the work can be tiring, it’s all worth it because of those moments that touch our hearts,” added Chen. ❁

Preventing Bullying Starts With Care

By Li Qiu-yue, Tzu Chi Teachers Association

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphic by Zhong Ting-jia

This article delves into the reasons behind bullying and offers solutions to combat this prevalent issue.

A teacher asked, “Bullying has become a prevalent problem in schools, with students even provoking me. How should I deal with this?”

In recent years in Taiwan, there has been a significant rise in reported cases of bullying in schools, from 562 cases in 2018 to 1,942 cases in 2022—a three-and-a-half-fold increase in just four years. How can we tackle this issue?

Non-harming and non-victimizing

Bullying fundamentally stems from issues in interpersonal interactions. Factors such as declining birth rates, challenges in social adaptation, weakened family functions, and excessive immersion in the virtual world, among others, contribute to this issue.

Research has revealed that most bullies struggle with low self-esteem, leading to a distorted sense of unfulfillment. This motivates them to engage in bullying behavior, often targeting vulnerable individuals, to boost their own self-worth. Some may join the ranks of bullies out of a fear of social isolation, while others passively observe bullying without intervening. On the other side, bullied children often exhibit traits such as timidity and social isolation.

I am a former schoolteacher. I often told my students, “Everyone is equal. You don’t have to compromise your true self to please others, and it’s not right to mistreat those you dislike. What’s more, let’s assess people based on their actions, not personal preferences.” I’d also tell them that if they couldn’t find someone in their class to

befriend or speak up for them, it was an opportunity for self-reflection on how to cultivate better interpersonal relationships and avoid becoming a target for bullying.

Supporting vulnerable children

Equipping vulnerable children with self-defense skills is a sustainable solution. Alternatively, entrusting them to a more compassionate and cohesive group can also yield positive results.

One of my students, C, had suffered from a speech impediment since childhood. As a result, he was introverted and lacked confidence. His mother revealed that he had no friends and had experienced bullying in junior high, which instilled in him a deep fear of going to school.

All the students in C’s class were friendly and got along well. However, after the first week of school, I noticed that C was being consistently left out during group activities. Delving deeper into the issue, I discovered the underlying reasons. His peers perceived him as moving too slowly and having communication difficulties, which led to concerns about how this could affect the group’s overall performance, hence the exclusion.

I had a private conversation with the class leader and a few enthusiastic students, encouraging them to proactively invite C to join their group during activities. I promised to reward this group at the end of the semester if they could provide C with proper support. Additionally, I spoke with C, letting him know that the class leader would always include him in their group and encourag-



ing him to participate wholeheartedly. Over the course of a semester, C began to smile more, gained confidence in his speech, and developed better relationships.

Building trust

School authorities have the power to administer justice by delivering rewards and punishments. The Student Affairs Office can impose disciplinary actions, and the Counseling Center can facilitate mediations. Bullying becomes an extremely challenging issue should educators turn a blind eye or adopt an ostrich mentality. Ignoring it will only worsen the problem in the long run.

Therefore, incidents of bullying must be addressed immediately. The homeroom teacher can listen to the bully's perspective, acknowledge their viewpoint, and then express their concerns. They should work toward achieving a consensus to prevent future misconduct. Extending goodwill can reduce the bully's defensiveness. In more severe cases, parents, law enforcement, and the judicial system must intervene. This is to make the bullies understand that this is a society governed by the rule of law.

Teachers must establish rapport with students. Building trust in normal times and promptly addressing issues when they arise will make bullies or the bullied feel the teacher's care, concern, and love, thus effectively curbing bullying.

Many bullies have themselves been victims of bullying in the past. They replicate this pattern of mistreatment to find a sense of security. Similarly, academically gifted students might look down on those with lower grades because their parents treat them differently based on academic performance, instilling similar values in them. Other children may have endured domestic violence at home; their experiences have taught them that using force is the only way to protect themselves. To avoid becoming targets of bullying, they often choose weaker individuals as their victims.

Children raised in nurturing families tend to have better psychological well-being, healthier mindsets, and engage in positive activities. Consequently, they are less likely to become bullies or victims of bullying. Hence, emphasizing the significance of family education and recognizing its crucial role is essential in reducing the occurrence of bullying. ❀

A photograph of a forest landscape. In the foreground, a grassy hillside is covered in patches of moss and small plants. Several trees with bare branches are scattered across the slope, their limbs heavily laden with bright green moss. The background shows a dense forest of tall, dark evergreen trees, with a misty or hazy atmosphere. The lighting is soft, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting.

Meeting a Younger Me

By Yi Yi

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Huang Xiao-zhe

Lost touch with a fellow *Tzu Ching*, a member of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association, after parting ways with her following a Tzu Chi camp over 20 years ago. Surprisingly, we recently crossed paths and reconnected at a Japanese-style tea house in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. Seated on

tatami mats, we found ourselves immersed in a nostalgic conversation, reminiscing about our shared Tzu Ching experiences.

“Although we haven’t stayed in touch,” she said with a warm smile, “there’s something about you that has left a lasting impression.” Intrigued



and slightly nervous, I wondered whether her revelation would be positive or otherwise. She went on, "During that camp years ago, we shared a dorm room with others, and you slept next to me...." Before she could finish, I hurriedly interjected, "Were you going to say I snored and kept

you from sleeping?"

Her laughter filled the air as she reassured me, "No, not at all!" Then, she began to share a touching memory that gave me goose bumps. "One night, I returned to our room very late after a meeting. The room was pitch-dark, but in the darkness, I saw a strand of light green, glow-in-the-dark prayer beads on my bed, accompanied by a small card you had written: 'I'm leaving a bit of light for you returning late at night.' Your actions felt incredibly warm and considerate!"

She continued, "The next morning, I asked you about your thoughtful gesture. Explaining, you mentioned it was inspired by an older Tzu Chi volunteer who had shown you similar warmth. You had simply learned from her kindness, replicating her heartwarming act." I was deeply moved, hearing her recount the incident. My cheeks flushed with the realization that a small gesture over 20 years ago had left a profound mark on someone's heart and had now circled back to me.

My friend's shared memory prompted deep reflection within me. Two decades ago, I was an innocent college student, a warm-hearted individual eager to share that warmth to those around me. Now, through someone else's words, that younger version of myself seemed to transcend time and space, asking me, "Do you remember me, the warm and kind version of yourself? Have you held onto that compassionate heart? Do you still remember to think of others at all times? Have you continued to spread the goodwill others have showed you?"

Like the butterfly effect, a seemingly insignificant act can have far-reaching consequences. I no longer recall the identity of the Tzu Chi volunteer who originally left me the luminous prayer beads, but she was the warm starting point, setting the stage for what unfolded thereafter.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen often emphasizes that every act of kindness you perform will eventually find its way back to you. While we give without asking for anything in return, heaven uses its own way to remind us that generosity and sincere interactions with others ultimately benefit ourselves, yielding a harvest of warm emotions and joy.

After concluding our nostalgic conversation and bidding each other farewell, I reminded myself to carry forward the important life lesson she had taught me that day: "Remember the younger you and spread warmth the best you can!"



Tzu Chi's Mission in India's Bodh Gaya

By Wei Yu-xian
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

The Buddha attained enlightenment more than 2,500 years ago in Bodh Gaya, India, now one of four major Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Since March 2023, Tzu Chi volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia have been actively engaged in charitable endeavors there, contributing to the well-being of local people.

Early on the morning of September 20, 2023, two tuk-tuks—also known as auto rickshaws—were parked outside the Tzu Chi office in Bodh Gaya, India. The roofs of the tuk-tuks were laden with blackboards, electric fans, soccer balls, tableware, and notebooks. Ten Tzu Chi volunteers sat inside the vehicles, ready to embark on a journey to two schools located about 40 to 50 minutes away. Amar Kumar, a native volunteer, was perched on a motor scooter nearby, with fellow volunteer Yaw Ah Moi (姚雅美), a

Tzu Chi's medical volunteers visited the densely populated village of Rattibigha in Bodh Gaya several times in September 2023 to conduct health check-ups for villagers.

TENG PICK CHEANG





retired vice principal from Malaysia, as his passenger.

Their first destination was Rajkiya Madhya Vidyalaya Ghato School, a school so remote that even the tuk-tuk drivers had to seek directions along the way. In May 2023, a survey conducted by Tzu Chi volunteers on water quality at several schools in Bodh Gaya revealed that this particular school faced a shortage of clean water, a common challenge in rural India. The volunteers also discovered the school lacked essential school supplies. Their findings prompted the foundation to step in to address these issues.

The school had been without access to running water for two decades, relying solely on two buckets of water brought in daily by a female teacher living nearby for the children's hand-washing needs. Tzu Chi volunteers undertook the task of tapping into the government-installed water pipeline nearby, directing water to the school's water tower, and then installing pipelines to the kitchen, washbasins, and toilets.

Despite these efforts, the school's access to water was short-lived. Farmers, discovering the pipeline to the school, intercepted it midway and redirected the water for irrigation, leaving the school once again without water. Volunteer Yaw Ah Moi had

had several discussions with the school principal, Shiv Pujan, urging him to seek government assistance in addressing the water issue.

Upon arriving at the school this day, the volunteer team visited the first-grade classroom, in which 45 students were seated on the fabric-covered floor, some with even younger children snuggling up to them, likely their siblings. They relied on a single light bulb and two windows for illumination. Like the other classrooms, this one was equipped with just one ceiling fan, despite the high temperatures so prevalent in India. The school also lacked sufficient tableware, leading to a rotating lunch schedule. Even the students' beloved football games were hindered by damaged soccer balls. The visiting volunteers were bringing much-needed items to address these material deficiencies. Principal Shiv Pujan, with a smile, conveyed gratitude, saying, "Thanks to Tzu Chi, we no longer face a shortage of those items."

Parents in the community struggled to make ends meet, lacking the money to open bank accounts. As a result, the government couldn't

Children in Bodh Gaya make the "Happy Face" gesture taught by Tzu Chi volunteers.

YE JIN-HONG



even transfer funds to them for purchasing uniforms for their children. Students were compelled to attend school in casual attire. The principal told the volunteers he was seeking a solution, and Yaw expressed hope for positive outcomes.

After that first stop, the volunteers then proceeded to Ghongariya School. Though 180 students were enrolled in the school, only 120 or so attended every day. Principal Sarmila Kumari was deeply troubled by the high student absenteeism, attributing it to the limited number of classrooms and parents keeping their children at home to assist with farming or household chores. Yaw offered to accompany teachers to make home visits to absent students during holidays or when teachers weren't required to be at school, encouraging such students to return to school. When the principal expressed concerns about the feasibility of the plan, Yaw offered words of encouragement, saying, "With determination, anything is possible." She exemplified this with the dedication of volunteers from Taiwan and Malaysia who traveled to India to enhance students' education.

Underlining her commitment, Yaw emphasized that even if some teachers were unwilling to visit students or if only one or two were willing to

join, it would still be worth trying. "Master Cheng Yen hopes to achieve zero absenteeism and zero student withdrawals," she explained.

A tour of these two schools provided a glimpse into the challenges faced in Bodh Gaya in education, public health, and livelihoods. These areas highlighted a path in which Tzu Chi could contribute. Tzu Chi became a registered non-profit organization in India in November 2022 and established an office in Bodh Gaya on September 13, 2023. The foundation is actively working to improve the well-being of underserved people in Bodh Gaya. It is also working to recruit more local volunteers and offer training to further support its mission.

The Buddha taught the path to enlightenment to his disciples, hoping to ease suffering in the world. Master Cheng Yen, as a devoted follower and proponent of Buddhism, has always aspired to repay the Buddha by contributing to the welfare of the significant locations in the Enlightened One's life journey.

Prince Siddhartha, who would later become the Buddha, renounced his royal life to embark on a spiritual quest and find the path to liberation. After enduring six years of austere practices in the forest, Siddhartha, weakened and exhausted, received nourishment from milk-rice offered by a woman named Sujata. Strengthened by this sustenance, he crossed the Niranjana River and subsequently attained enlightenment beneath a bodhi tree. Later, he taught the Dharma in the Deer Park and entered nirvana in Kushinagar. The crucial sites in the Buddha's life journey span both Nepal and India.

Tzu Chi volunteers from Malaysia and Singapore have been stationed in Lumbini, the Buddha's birthplace in Nepal, since April 2022. Drawing on a year of experience in charitable work there, especially noting the positive responses received from sharing Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si aphorisms on campuses, the volunteer team replicated their efforts in the Silaunja village of Bodh Gaya. Shortly thereafter, they identified the first long-term aid case in Bakraur village, also in Bodh Gaya. Volunteers initiated health check-ups starting in June 2023, recognizing the medical needs of residents in the area.

With the establishment of the Tzu Chi office in Bodh Gaya, volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia no longer need to stay in hotels when they visit to conduct Tzu Chi work. They now have a base from which to make a positive impact in the lives of local people in need. ❀

Tzu Chi in Bodh Gaya

Locations in Nepal and India where Tzu Chi volunteers from Malaysia and Singapore are stationed:
 Lumbini, Nepal
 Bodh Gaya, India
 Rajgir, India

Tzu Chi's initiatives in Bodh Gaya:
 Volunteers launched charitable activities in Bodh Gaya on March 11, 2023. A Tzu Chi office was established there on September 13, 2023.

Coverage Areas: Ganga Bigha, Bakraur, Silaunja, and Jagdishpur

Charitable Efforts: Assistance for those in need, vocational training (sewing classes), and work relief projects

Healthcare: Health check-ups and subsidies for medical needs

Education: Jing Si aphorism program, classes under trees, School for All campaign, and establishment of a local chapter of the Tzu Chi Teachers Association

A Sewing Machine for Godiya

By Wei Yu-xian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Ye Jin-hong

With Tzu Chi's support, a mother raising two children on her own is now navigating financial challenges with surer steps, forging a path towards a more stable and promising future.

Tzu Chi volunteers initiated their philanthropic endeavors in Bodh Gaya in March 2023. In June, the first Sunday of each month was officially designated as Charity Day, with all volunteers mobilized to visit and deliver aid to the households under the foundation's care. By early October 2023, Tzu Chi had added over 20 households from Bodh Gaya to its long-term care recipient list.

Godiya Kumari, a beneficiary of Tzu Chi's support, was referred to the foundation by a village head in April 2023. Volunteer Vivek Kumar visited Godiya to assess her situation and learned she was a 34-year-old mother raising a 15-year-old son and a 13-year-old daughter. Her husband had passed away in 2015, leading her in-laws to expel her and her children from their home. Godiya brought her children back to her maternal home, but unfortunately, they didn't receive a warm welcome from her four brothers and two sisters. Being a brave woman, she rented a house in the downtown area of Bodh Gaya and began working as a farmhand in Bakraur. She worked at that four to five days a week and picked up part-time cleaning jobs to supplement her income.

Despite facing financial challenges, Godiya was determined to ensure that her two children received a good education. In addition to regular school, her son and daughter also attended extracurricular classes. During his visit, Vivek discovered that Godiya was four months behind on her rent and owed three months' worth of tutoring fees. Vivek and other volunteers discussed Godiya's situation, and decided to offer her daily necessities and monthly financial aid to help her cover her rent.

On August 25, volunteers reached out to Godiya once more to explore opportunities for

improving her employment prospects and economic circumstances. Godiya revealed that she had previously participated in a government-sponsored entrepreneurship training seminar with the hope of obtaining a loan to pursue a career as a tailor, but unfortunately, the loan didn't materialize. To add to her challenges, her landlord intended to renovate the living space she shared with her children into a sewing room, forcing her to find a new place to live.

Because both of her children were studying in Bakraur, Godiya planned to find an affordable rental in the same village. Because she could tailor, she also hoped to work part-time from home making clothes. But there was one hitch: she would need a sewing machine first, something she didn't have.

The volunteers advised her to find a place to live first, and once everything was settled, they would apply to Tzu Chi on her behalf for a sewing machine. Godiya expressed deep gratitude to the volunteers. She also thanked them for their visits, as no family or relatives had visited them since her husband had passed away.

A brand-new sewing machine

Soon after, volunteers learned that Godiya had moved to a new place near the Niranjana River. In response, they purchased a new sewing machine and delivered it to her on the afternoon of September 14. Godiya's joy was evident when she saw the sewing machine she had longed for. She lovingly ran her hand over the brand-new equipment.

This sewing machine required assembly and the volunteers spent nearly four hours putting it together. When they were done, they discovered to their dismay that a wooden component of the sewing machine had accidentally cracked during

assembly, and the wheel axle at the foot pedal's edge was loose. As it was getting late, the volunteers had no choice but to return to the Tzu Chi office in Bodh Gaya.

Concerns about whether the sewing machine could function properly prompted the volunteers to schedule another visit for the afternoon of the 21st. During this visit, volunteer Aw Kwai Wan (胡桂雲) brought red fabric from the Tzu Chi office and two cloth bags of different sizes. Her plan was to commission Godiya to sew bags based on the provided samples. On the monthly Charity Day, when volunteers brought daily necessities to Tzu Chi's care recipients, they also collected rice and money donated by the recipients to help others in need. These bags would serve as containers for the donated rice and money. (Care recipients are encouraged to set aside a portion of rice daily

or save spare change for charitable purposes. This is in line with Master Cheng Yen's teachings to cultivate compassion and empathy for others.)

Godiya's rental was a simple room located on the first floor of a three-story apartment. The room, measuring approximately 6.7 square meters (70 square feet), had no windows. One side facing the road had an inoperable metal door. Illumination was provided solely by a light bulb. Positioned in one corner were a double-burner gas stove, cookware, and tableware. There was no private bathroom, so she and her children shared a bathroom with other tenants. The family of three slept on a double bed, while a rope on the wall

Godiya tries out a new sewing machine, delivered to her by Tzu Chi volunteers on September 14, 2023.



supported a few pieces of clothing. The sewing machine gifted by Tzu Chi stood out as the most prominent item in the compact room.

Upon entering, volunteer Lok Bee Hua's (駱美花) first action was to take out pre-prepared transparent adhesive tape and mend the unintentional cracks in the sewing machine from days ago. With her head lowered, she said, "I feel really guilty about damaging the new sewing machine. No matter what, I had to come back and check on it." After completing her repair work, Lok ran her hand over the damaged wooden board, confirming that it was now smooth and should not affect Godiya's work.

Next, Aw Kwai Wan took out the red fabric and talked with Godiya about the details of sewing the rice and money bags. Godiya set out to sew a sample, but just then a power outage occurred, plunging the room into darkness.

The volunteers quickly turned on their mobile phone flashlights so that Godiya could see well enough to thread the needle and sew. At this moment, Godiya's son, who had been silently sitting nearby, took out his phone from his pocket, activated the flashlight, and illuminated the area for his mother. Seeing this, the volunteers turned off their flashlights. With the illumination from the boy, Godiya finished threading the needle. Then the sewing machine was moved to the bedside. Godiya, sitting on the bed, started sewing by stepping on the foot pedal.

However, the sewing machine wobbled, raising concerns from Lok Bee Hua that it might be experiencing issues. She requested that Vivek Kumar bring in a professional technician for inspection, adding that Tzu Chi would cover the associated costs.

A smiling face

Despite the issues with the sewing machine, Godiya had already begun accepting orders before the volunteers' visit. She had even successfully completed a garment for a customer. Sudden power outages were common locally; the volunteers inquired about how she managed during such times, and she shared that her son or daughter helped out by illuminating the workspace with a mobile phone, just like on this particular day.

The volunteers were gratified to learn that. Their joy was heightened when they discovered that the boy took charge of laundry duties, and the girl contributed to cooking and house cleaning. They were happy that Godiya had responsible children.

When Godiya finished sewing one bag, Aw Kwai Wan offered her some suggestions about how to improve the other bags. Godiya had nine more to sew. She told the volunteers she wouldn't accept payment for her work—it was a token thank-you for Tzu Chi's assistance. The volunteers praised her for her grateful attitude. She responded with a radiant smile.

On September 29, Vivek Kumar arranged for a professional technician to reassemble the sewing machine. The technician discovered that the pedal had been installed in the wrong direction, impeding normal operation. He made the necessary adjustments and also bought and installed replacement parts for the damaged components. Following these fixes, Godiya's sewing business officially opened. The timing proved to be a fantastic opportunity for Godiya; the many festivals in India during October and November, when women wear new clothes, provided a chance for her to showcase her tailoring skills and bring in some much needed income.

When volunteers visited again in October, Godiya handed over the completed bags. She mentioned that she had sewn ten more, intended for her friends. She said she would introduce her friends to the practice of setting aside a portion of rice daily for charitable purposes and encourage their involvement. She also told the volunteers that she had received seven orders since their last visit and had already completed five upper garments, each taking about two hours to complete. She was charging 40 Indian rupees (US\$0.48) for each. Her joy was obvious despite the modest sums.

Later, Lok Bee Hua shared that when she first met Godiya, the latter's face was always marked by worry. However, as she and other volunteers started expressing care for her and her children and assisting in resolving their challenges, smiles more frequently illuminated Godiya's face. "We can tell that she now sees hope for the future," said Lok.

Given that Godiya's sewing skills were self-taught, Lok was considering inviting her to the upcoming sewing classes at the Tzu Chi office in Bodh Gaya to refine her skills, thus improving her work opportunities. Reflecting on their farewell just a short while before, Lok recalled how Godiya had taken the initiative to hug her and the other volunteers. It was evident to Lok that Godiya was deeply moved by their assistance, just as Luo herself was touched by the opportunity to help the mother and her children. ❁❁

Reshaping Her Future

By Wei Yu-xian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Chen Li-xue

Tzu Chi helped a little girl whose face was disfigured by a fire undergo reconstructive surgery. Her hardship helped a Tzu Chi volunteer, coping with sudden vision loss in his left eye, see his own challenge in a new light.



On the morning of September 26, 2023, nine Tzu Chi volunteers visited Raushni Kumari, a two-and-a-half-year-old, and her family in Bakraur, Bodh Gaya. Their home, even shabbier than the other simple dwellings around it, had walls coated with mud, bamboo poles supporting the eaves, and a makeshift protective barrier of straw, presumably serving as a windbreak. Lok Bee Hua was among the visiting volunteers. Standing less than 160 centimeters

Raushni Kumari, held by her sister, finished the first phase of reconstructive surgery with Tzu Chi's help.

(5'2") tall, even she had to stoop to enter the house.

Raushni was engrossed in play with neighbors when the volunteers arrived. She displayed minimal expression upon seeing them. But then, it was difficult to discern her emotions from her face. A year and a half earlier, she accidentally tumbled



A volunteer comforts Sampu Paswan's wife, injured in a traffic accident and confined to bed.

from a bed and landed directly on a fire used for warmth beside it. Her face and right hand suffered severe burns. Her face was severely disfigured.

Stark examples of life's impermanence

The burns had left Raushni's skin around both eyes sagging, hindering her vision. The skin around her mouth was scorched too, preventing proper closure and affecting her ability to eat and drink. Her right palm suffered a contracture due to the burns, restricting her movement to her thumb. Her parents sought medical help for her without success for a year after the incident, until Tzu Chi intervened.

Volunteers accompanied the toddler to plastic surgeon Dr. Sanjay Kumar's clinic for evaluation. He confirmed that Raushni's facial issues could be improved through reconstructive and skin graft surgeries, enhancing her field of vision and ability to eat and drink. The girl's mother revealed a long-lost smile when she heard this good news.

Raushni is the fourth of five children. Her father, supporting the family of seven, earns a liv-

ing working odd jobs. The estimated cost of 146,500 rupees (US\$1,760) for the surgery and hospitalization over 21 days was next to impossible for him. Tzu Chi decided to help.

Volunteer Lok Bee Hua took charge of the family after arriving in Bodh Gaya from Malaysia on May 12, 2023. On May 21, while returning from Dr. Sanjay's clinic to Bodh Gaya, she received a call from her husband's elder sister in Malaysia, informing her that her husband, Khoo Chin Theong (邱振忠), had suddenly lost vision in his left eye. Doctors were still investigating the cause.

Remaining calm, Lok first accompanied Raushni home after the clinic visit before contacting her hospitalized husband. During their conversation, Lok inquired about his condition and how he was feeling. She then shared with him about the recent visit to the plastic surgeon with Raushni and the upcoming treatments for the lit-

tle girl. She talked to her husband again the next day. He told her that Raushni's unfortunate story had helped him put things in perspective. He realized that the little girl had had it worse than he did—at least he still had one eye that could see, while this young girl, at such a tender age, had suffered grave burns, severely disfiguring her face. He told Lok, "The girl taught me that in this world, there are people who are suffering more than me."

He suggested that Lok do what needed to be done in India instead of rushing back to Malaysia, assuring her not to worry, as he had his sister and medical workers to take care of him. He added that from the smile and radiance on her face, he knew that she was doing the right thing by helping the needy in India. "I was quite moved when I heard that," Lok remarked.

She eventually returned to Malaysia in early June, after settling affairs in India. Her husband's first words upon seeing her were, "Seeing that little girl helped me gradually let go of the sudden blindness in my left eye." Lok shared with him that everything happens for a reason. She also said that thankfully their life is reasonably comfortable, and while the loss of vision may be challenging, if it had happened to someone with a heavier financial burden, it would have been even worse. Her husband found added comfort as he absorbed her words.

Sempu Paswan's tuk-tuk

Raushni was admitted to the hospital on May 26 for surgery. The hospital, a four-hour drive from Bodh Gaya, worried Raushni's mother, who hadn't traveled far before. Making the situation more difficult was that she had a child she was breastfeeding. Considering this, volunteers arranged for Raushni's grandmother to go as well, providing 9,000 rupees (US\$110) for two weeks of living expenses.

Tests before the surgery revealed that Raushni had insufficient hemoglobin. So, she had two bags of blood transfused into her, rested for two days, and then proceeded with the facial reconstructive surgery. Skin from her right thigh was used for her grafts. The goal of this first surgery was to allow her lips to close, making eating more convenient. Once she recovered sufficiently, surgery would be performed on her right hand to restore its functionality.

"This little girl 'saved' my husband," said Lok.

Lok, now 46, became a certified Tzu Chi volunteer in 2018. Her husband, Khoo Chin Theong,

received his certification in June 2023. During his visit to Taiwan for his volunteer certification, Dharma Master Cheng Yen encouraged him to visit India and witness the local living conditions, saying that it might further help him mentally cope with his loss of vision. Following the Master's advice, Khoo traveled to Bodh Gaya on September 1, staying for three weeks and joining his wife in charitable visits to the needy.

On the afternoon of September 16, Khoo, along with his wife and other volunteers, visited Ganga Bigha village to promote an upcoming community cleanup event. During the visit, a villager named Sempu Paswan approached him, expressing hope that Khoo might visit his home. Realizing the villager needed assistance, Khoo followed him home.

With the help of a local volunteer to translate, Khoo learned that Sempu earned a living by driving a tuk-tuk. Two days earlier, while he was driving his wife in his tuk-tuk, the vehicle collided with a truck and overturned. The roof of his tuk-tuk caved in and the seats dislodged. Sempu's wife was hospitalized, and was in great pain, even after returning home. She could barely move. In addition to his wife, Sempu had four young children and his elderly mother to support. He was in a difficult situation. Having previously seen Tzu Chi volunteers conducting health check-ups in the village, he sought their help when he saw them again, clinging to them as if he had found a lifeline.

After learning about his situation, volunteers first delivered a month's worth of food supplies to his home. They saw his wife, a bandage covering part of her face, lying on a hardboard bed in a small room. There were no windows and only one light bulb for illumination. A female volunteer gently touched her head, and she opened her eyes. Using her left hand, she pointed to her lower back, indicating pain. Her four children sat beside her or stood by the bed, gazing innocently at the volunteers.

Sempu told the volunteers that his most pressing need was to repair his tuk-tuk so that he could get back to work and earn money. With minimal savings and high medical expenses for his wife's injury, he had borrowed money from his sister. He hoped that Tzu Chi volunteers could help him through this tough time.

Lok and other volunteers accompanied Sempu to fix the tuk-tuk, with Tzu Chi sharing the costs. The repairs were finished on September 21. Witnessing Sempu able to drive his tuk-tuk and earn a living once more, volunteers felt relieved and happy for him. ❁

Journey in the Land of the Buddha's Enlightenment

By Wei Yu-xian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Chen Li-xue

A Taiwanese volunteer reflects on her visit to Bodh Gaya, where she participated in Tzu Chi's charitable missions.

On September 9, 2023, I arrived at the Tzu Chi office in Bodh Gaya, along with 11 fellow volunteers from Malaysia. We were welcomed by Brother Sio Kee Hong (蘇祈逢), the deputy CEO of Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, who had been stationed in Bodh Gaya since February 2023. He exclaimed, "Coming to Bodh Gaya, you'll attain buddhahood more quickly!"

His words hinted at the challenges that lay ahead, but having mentally prepared for the Indian heat and food, I didn't take his words to heart.

Sister Chen Li-xue (陳麗雪) and I both hail from Taichung, Taiwan. My primary responsibility during this trip was text documentation, while she focused mostly on photography. She had arrived in India eight days before me, and had arranged for my accommodations. Thanks to her, I could quickly start my volunteer duties.

Dr. Chitra

Tzu Chi's volunteer attendance system in Bodh Gaya was well-established and running smoothly by the time I arrived. The charity, medical, and education teams communicated daily through a group chat, sharing information about their upcoming work. Volunteers interested in joining any of the teams responded in the chat to arrange transportation. On the day after my arrival, Sister Chen and I decided to accompany Dr. Chitra's medical team, documenting their health checkups for villagers and profiling the doctor herself.

Dr. Chitra, born in 1963, is a native of Chennai, India. In 1988, she married a man from Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, and relocated with him to that city the following year, where she pursued a career

in medicine. Introduced to Tzu Chi by a neighbor, she became involved in the foundation's activities and officially joined the Tzu Chi International Medical Association 15 years ago. She retired as a physician in 2021. When she heard about Tzu Chi's philanthropic endeavors in Bodh Gaya, she willingly volunteered her expertise. She arrived in early September 2023 and joined Tzu Chi's medical team to provide healthcare services to impoverished villages.

We were immediately greeted with the strong odor of cow dung hanging in the air when we reached Ganga Bigha village, along with the medical team. We brushed against cows and sheep as we walked down the road and saw hens and their chicks foraging for food. The scenes were reminiscent of rural Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s.

Dr. Chitra fluently greeted the villagers in a local dialect and inquired about their well-being. Some villagers had high blood pressure; her earnest advice to them was to stop drinking. Women suffering from illness shared their discomfort with her. Dr. Chitra sat beside them, holding their hands, speaking to them like family. The kind doctor always wore a warm smile, regardless to whom she was speaking. Due to my limited proficiency in English, I had to rely on a Malaysian volunteer for translation support during my interview with her. Fortunately, she didn't mind, and it resulted in a wonderful connection between us.

The houses in the village were not numbered, so Sister Lim Kim Yan (林金燕), a retired nurse from Singapore and the medical team's coordinator, implemented a practical solution. To facilitate the medical team's work, she asked her team members to affix number tags on doors belonging to



households interested in Tzu Chi's health check-ups. Villagers needing additional medical attention after the initial examinations were reported to the community clinic.

Tzu Chi also provided free monthly support for individuals facing economic difficulties and with a body mass index below 16, indicating they were severely underweight. The support entailed the provision of chickpeas, soybeans, and other legumes, aiming to enhance their nutritional intake.

Classes under trees

At 3:30 in the afternoon on September 11, I joined the education team on a trip to Bakraur village. My mission was to document their weekly Tzu Chi class, conducted outdoors under the shade of a tree. During our journey in three tuk-tuks I observed lively scenes of children playing and frolicking outdoors and groups of women either seated in front of houses or holding small children.

When we arrived, I asked Sister Yaw Ah Moi, the education team's coordinator, "Where are the participants of our class?" Without hesitation, she replied, "We'll go find them!" The team swiftly sprang into action, going from house to house, inviting women and children to join our class. Some volunteers planned to teach the women how to sew scrunchies, while others would engage children in group activities. In just a short

Dr. Chitra visited Bakraur village on September 12, 2023, to check on three medical cases, one of which involved a six-year-old boy with burn injuries.

YE JIN-HONG

time, they had successfully gathered about 50 adults and children.

Seeing their proactive efforts to locate students left me utterly speechless. As a retired teacher, I was accustomed to children coming to class, not teachers actively seeking students. The education team's enthusiastic spirit and proactive approach immediately won me over.

A different scene unfolded when I followed the education team to Silaunja village on the afternoon of September 15 for similar activities. Just before reaching our destination, Sister Yaw shared with me that when the team first started classes in the village, the tree they had chosen for their sessions didn't provide enough shade. Consequently, the team made the decision to take the students and move deeper into the village in search of a larger, cooler tree under which to hold their classes.

However, when the team invited the children to move further into the village with them, their mothers hesitated. The mothers voiced concerns about the residents in the rear part of the village belonging to a lower social class than those in the front. As a result, the mothers were unwilling to let their children play with those in the back.



Children listen intently while volunteer Rozi Parween tells a story.

Subsequently, each time the team passed through the village to reach the rear area for a class, the children who couldn't participate could only watch eagerly as the team passed through.

When we arrived on the 15th, the children in the back of the village immediately held their chins with both hands, making the "Happy Face" gesture taught to them by Tzu Chi volunteers. The youngsters gathered under a tree and cheerfully participated in the group activities led by the education team. They obediently followed directions, jumping to the right, left, up, and down.

Our team shared an animated video recounting the tale, "The Elephant That Saved a Girl's Life," told by Master Cheng Yen. Volunteers Tan Lee Ting (陳麗婷) and Rozi Parween each held a laptop, playing the video, while Rozi explained the story in the children's dialect.

These children hailed from families with modest means, and their homes typically had only essential items, such as beds and cooking ware. Since their families likely didn't own televisions or cell phones, watching the video must have been fun for them. Every child stared intently at the small laptop screens. We weren't certain if they fully grasped the story or not, but their focused expressions touched our hearts.

Regrettably, rain started to fall midway through the activity. Both adults and children scattered, some running back home, others seeking shelter in an empty house near the tree. After the rain sub-

sided, everyone emerged from their shelters. Suddenly, Sister See Paik Lan (施依伶) slipped and fell on the slippery ground. Three more volunteers slipped in succession, getting their clothes and shoes covered in mud. The children, amused by the scene, erupted into laughter, which sparked laughter among the nearby adults as well. The four volunteers, caught up in the mirth and light-hearted atmosphere, momentarily forgot the awkwardness of their now mud-stained shoes and clothes.

As we were leaving the village, Sister See stopped me and said, "Yu-xian, this child has been holding my hand since I fell. It seems he's afraid that I might fall again." I turned around and captured this moment with my phone. I then asked Rozi to inquire on my behalf why the child was holding Sister See's hand. The boy explained that in the video he watched earlier, when the big waves came, the little elephant saved the little girl, so he wanted to "save" Sister See too. This response deeply touched everyone. Isn't this the best proof of the adage, "The mind, the Buddha, and living beings—there is no difference among these three"?

My heart remained in Bodh Gaya

The tuk-tuk is the most convenient means of transportation in Bodh Gaya. This three-wheeled

electric vehicle has two rows of seats facing each other, allowing four people to ride. There is also space next to the driver for an additional passenger. Though the local roads are predominantly paved, they are riddled with potholes, turning the tuk-tuk ride into a bumpy journey that sways to the left and right. Passengers must hold tightly to a hanging ring in the tuk-tuk to keep themselves steady.

Experienced volunteers wisely cautioned us against extending our bodies beyond the metal bars next to the seats to avoid having them hit by passing vehicles. After a few days in Bodh Gaya, I noticed soreness in my shoulders, realizing it was from gripping a hanging ring too tightly. The dull pain in both upper arms, on the other hand, stemmed from bumping into the metal bars beside the seats.

Volunteers went out almost every day for Tzu Chi activities, and immersed themselves in their work at the Tzu Chi office when they returned. Oftentimes, their only interruptions were messages announcing that “Lunch is ready” or “Dinner is ready,” drawing them up to the top floor to enjoy the meals prepared by Malaysian volunteers. Given their routine, the days of the week and specific dates faded in importance. Even if there was a power outage during computer work or a shower, there was no need for concern. The generator quickly came to life, ensuring a continuous power supply.

Before I left to return to Taiwan on September 28, I wanted to see Raushni again. I first encountered the little girl, about the same age as my granddaughter, on my third day in Bodh Gaya. She was walking with her mother, hand in hand, in a crowd of people. The visible scars on her face and her right palm turned outward were remnants of a tragic fire accident. Curious about her story, I asked volunteer Seema and learned that Tzu Chi was already helping her, which relieved my concerns.

On September 26, Sister Lok Bee Hua took us to visit Raushni. As our tuk-tuk came to a stop near her house, the girl’s 30-year-old mother emerged from the house. She greeted us with a welcoming smile. Several children surrounded her, but Raushni was nowhere to be seen.

“Where is Raushni?” volunteer Vivek Kumar asked. “She’s playing outside,” the mother replied.

We found Raushni, wearing a bright dress, playing with her brother, sister, and neighboring children under a tree. She looked at us with big eyes while other children gathered around Sister Aw Kwai Wan and began singing. Raushni’s little brother, naked and covered in mud, asked us to



During her visit to Bodh Gaya in September 2023, Wei Yu-xian (魏玉縣), the author of this article, contemplates Prince Siddhartha’s journey in pursuit of the path of liberation.

hold him. Seeing his adorable appearance, everyone happily took turns holding him.

Sister Lok suggested that the mother dress her little son. She explained that the little one was reluctant to wear clothes and always took them off. Even so, she went inside her home, fetched clothes, returned, and patiently dressed him.

During our visit, we carefully examined the area on Raushni’s right thigh where skin had been taken for her facial reconstructive surgery. Noticing some scraped skin there, we advised her mother to apply medication regularly to prevent infection.

After playing some more with the children, we left with a sense of contentment. I held onto the hope that, with Tzu Chi’s assistance, Raushni could look forward to a brighter and better future.

On my second day back in Taiwan, I strolled along a mountain path behind my home. I hadn’t traversed this trail in a month. As I gazed at Taichung City below, my thoughts wandered to Bodh Gaya. “Today, the charity team is visiting Bakraur to teach women handicrafts; the education team is organizing an athletic event at a school; the medical team is....”

Although I was physically in Taiwan, my heart remained in Bodh Gaya. ❀

More Than a School

Compiled by *Tzu Chi Monthly* editorial staff

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Mohammed Nimir Aljamal

El Menahil International School in Türkiye helps Syrian refugee children continue their education during displacement. The school also restores the dignity of Syrian education workers by providing them with employment opportunities.

Muhammed Munir Amino's life was going well in his early 30s. He was raising four beautiful children with his wife in a lovely house, and serving successfully as the principal of a secondary school. Unfortunately, his peaceful life took a tragic turn with the onset of the Syrian civil war in 2011. His hometown, the border city of Idlib, was transformed overnight into a battleground. The conflict compelled him to leave the life he had loved. Bidding farewell to his wife, children, and mother was the most heart-wrenching part.

He eventually ended up in Istanbul, Türkiye, in 2015, but all of his educational expertise was irrelevant in his host city, leaving him no choice but to work in a bakery.

In the same year, Tzu Chi, in collaboration with the government of the Sultangazi district in Istanbul, established El Menahil, a school for Syrian refugee children. Amino was able to join the school, thus re-entering the education system. He became a Tzu Chi volunteer at the same time, assisting the foundation in monthly aid distributions to thousands of Syrian refugee families. He even traveled to quake-stricken areas for disaster relief after earthquakes struck southern Türkiye in February 2023.

The term "Menahil" in the Tzu Chi school's name, translated from Arabic, means "spring of water," symbolizing a source of knowledge for children trapped in an educational desert. In 2018, the school received accreditation from an American accrediting agency and was renamed El Menahil International School. Graduates can now obtain diplomas acknowledged by the Turkish Ministry of Education and pursue further education worldwide.

By the end of 2022, El Menahil International School had nurtured 343 graduates, with 265 of

them entering universities. Among the latter, 70 pursued medical-related disciplines, 114 entered STEM fields, and 81 pursued literature and social sciences. Because the number of students enrolled in the school has been increasing, Tzu Chi has acquired land to build a new campus.

In October 2023, a team of 13, including personnel from the school and Tzu Chi volunteers from Türkiye, visited various Tzu Chi facilities in Taiwan. During the trip, Muhammed Munir Amino, in his capacity as the principal of El Menahil's high school division and the school's academic director, signed a memorandum of understanding with Tainan Tzu Chi Senior High School in southern Taiwan, aiming to expand the international perspectives of students at both schools. Before returning to Türkiye, he choked back tears, saying that history would remember the people who guided thousands of Syrian students from darkness to light with love and kindness. He promised Dharma Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi volunteers that he and the other visiting educators would take the love they had experienced in Taiwan back to Türkiye and someday return with outstanding graduates, sharing how Tzu Chi's assistance had led them to achieve excellence in life.

Educational empowerment

The Syrian civil war has dragged on for nearly 13 years, resulting in 300,000 fatalities and displacing more than 13 million people. Türkiye hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees, providing shelter for as many as 3.7 million people.

In 2014, Tzu Chi volunteers in Türkiye, including Faisal Hu (胡光中), Nadya Chou (周如意), and Yu Zi-cheng (余自成), initiated assistance to Syrian refugee families. Alongside other efforts,



they visited households, identified children not enrolled in school, and played a pivotal role in establishing El Menahil school for them. These young individuals faced the harsh realities of war and displacement during their formative years, often compelled to work to help support their families. Tzu Chi stepped in with financial aid and offered them an opportunity to pursue an education. This support not only alleviated the economic burden on their families but also became a source of empowerment, allowing these young people to envision a brighter future despite the adversities they had experienced.

“El Menahil is more than just a school,” said Dana Salem, the director of the student affairs office in the school’s elementary division. “Here, I learned about love and had the chance to become a volunteer. We share love with both teachers and students, navigating the days of overseas displacement together.”

Salem enjoyed a comfortable life before the civil war, believing it would remain that way. Who could have predicted the eruption of conflict and the subsequent upheaval of their lives? She encountered difficult challenges after arriving in Türkiye, which continued until she secured a teaching position at El Menahil.

Graduates capture their happiness at the graduation ceremony of El Menahil International School’s high school female class in 2021.

Salem emphasized that El Menahil provided Syrian children the opportunity to study Arabic, something that regular schools in Türkiye didn’t offer, helping the youngsters reconnect with their mother tongue. In fact, the school offers education in three languages: Arabic to preserve the cultural roots of Syrian students; Turkish to assist their integration into Turkish society; and English to facilitate international connections. Additionally, the school provides elective Chinese courses, as many students aspire to communicate directly with Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi.

Tzu Chi’s assistance to the students extends beyond their time at the school. If graduates are accepted into university but face financial challenges, the foundation offers monthly living stipends ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 Turkish lira (US\$34 to \$103), as well as a 30 to 50 percent subsidy on tuition fees. All this is to assist students in successfully completing their education and improving their prospects for securing stable employment after graduation.





El Menahil currently boasts over 5,000 students spanning grades one through 12, both on-site and online, with approximately 300 faculty and staff members. Elham Haddad, the school's director of distance education, explained that online learning includes some 3,000 students, including those unable to leave Syria and women who must stay home. When the new campus is completed in the future, there will be an additional private high school for underprivileged Turkish students.

An essential aspect of El Menahil is that the Syrian educators serving at the school not only teach students but have become important participants in Tzu Chi's charitable endeavors. Besides helping the foundation provide aid for their fellow compatriots and underserved Turkish people, they also take on international missions, such as traveling to Lebanon to help people affected by the Beirut explosion and to Poland to assist Ukrainian refugees. This work allows them to transition from recipients of aid to contributors, further enriching their lives.

Tokens of appreciation

The personnel from the school who visited Tzu Chi's facilities in Taiwan in October 2023 had already obtained Turkish citizenship, allowing them to travel abroad. While the primary focus of

Personnel from El Menahil International School visited Tainan Tzu Chi Senior High School in October 2023, signing a memorandum of understanding between the two schools.

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their visit centered on the exchange of educational experiences, the most eagerly anticipated part was meeting with Master Cheng Yen. During their time with the Master, they recounted the pain of being unable to return to their homeland, the emotional toll of being separated from loved ones, and the uncertainties surrounding their future. Almost every one of them became emotional, choking up or breaking into tears as they shared the pain of loss and the joy of reunions.

"I'll never forget that day," said Elham Haddad, the director of distance education. "When the school where I worked in Syria was bombed, many people died in front of me. Everything was covered in blood. Stepping over bodies, I was so afraid I would see my own child. It wasn't until I found my daughter crying in a corner that my heart eased. Holding her tightly to me, I knew that we had to leave our homeland." Haddad added that, with Tzu Chi's help, his children had gained admission to the best university in Türkiye. On one occasion, he overheard them talking to each other: "Tzu Chi helped us, how can we repay them?" "Don't worry, after graduating from dentistry, we'll join Tzu Chi's International Medical Association and help people around the world. That's how we'll repay them."

Ziad Zamzam, the director of student affairs, shared his profound bewilderment about the war.

El Menahil International School hires Syrian intellectuals (top left) to provide quality education. YU ZI-CHENG
Students take notes (bottom left) during a class at El Menahil in November 2023.



"We are a peace-loving people; we never imagined that one day, war would find us." He revealed that he had crossed into Türkiye in 2017, but it was only when he connected with El Menahil that he could finally resume his beloved teaching profession. "With a job and income, I was able to bring my wife and children to Türkiye. I am grateful to Tzu Chi and everyone for standing by us through these challenging years."

After the war erupted, Vice Principal Ahmed Aliyan's brother and uncle died after enduring cruel torture. Two years later, Aliyan received a photo of his deceased brother, with a number written on his forehead. Fearing for their lives, Aliyan and his family decided to flee their home country. "Ten of us were smuggled into Istanbul, including six children from my brother and me, along with our parents. We didn't know what to do next. I was almost 50 years old at that time, and no factory was willing to hire me. Eventually, Tzu Chi gave me an opportunity, and I became a teacher at El Menahil."

He started volunteering for Tzu Chi on his very first day at work. He visited Syrian refugee families after school every day until ten at night. After the Beirut explosion in 2020, he represented Tzu Chi in relief efforts, distributing items to those affected, including blankets. "At the distribution venue," he said, "memories flooded back from several years before when I received five blankets from Tzu Chi. Our whole family felt warm, inside and out, that night."

Currently, the most significant challenge facing the school's faculty and staff is the surge in

A representative from El Menahil International School takes a selfie with students at Tainan Tzu Chi Senior High School in October 2023.

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rent. The influx of quake survivors into Istanbul after the devastating tremors in southern Türkiye in February 2023, coupled with inflation, has led to a sharp increase in rental costs. If they can't pay the rent for their homes, they face immediate eviction. With rent nearly matching their monthly salary, they have to tighten their belts to send money to their families in Syria, making every day a financial struggle.

Muhammed Munir Amino expressed his sorrow, saying, "Going back to our home country isn't an option. Life there is very difficult." He explained that even going out to buy food was dangerous—they ran the risk of not returning.

Despite the challenges they face, they are very grateful to Tzu Chi for offering them unwavering support along the way, even increasing their pay to try to make their lives easier. As a token of their appreciation for the foundation, the school personnel brought gifts to Taiwan. These gifts included treasured wooden crafts and hand-knitted creations by mothers, along with drawings by students. Volunteer Faisal Hu, who accompanied the Syrian educators to Taiwan, highlighted Tzu Chi's significance to them: Tzu Chi helped them transition from losing everything due to the war to regaining their human dignity. In the words of Dana Salem: "We left our homeland, arrived in Türkiye, and found a new home in Tzu Chi." ❀

Always a Child in My Mom's Eyes

Narrated by Bashar Kerdi

Compiled by Wei Yu-xian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Jessica Yang

I kissed my parents' foreheads the day I left Syria, and gave another kiss to my beloved homeland. Tearfully, my mom said, "I hope you stay, but I also hope you go, because only then can you stay safe."

Back in Syria, I served as a school principal while also running a computer repair shop. My wife was also an educator, a teacher. We had two children, owned our house and car, and led a comfortable life.

In 2011, the war transformed Syria into a nightmarish place. Despite my efforts to continue living there, I had to leave in 2016. On the day of my departure, I kissed my parents' foreheads and bid farewell to my beloved homeland. Tearfully, my mother told me, "Your three sisters have already left; you are all I have left. I hope you stay, but I also hope you go because only then can you stay safe."

I left my children and pregnant wife behind because I didn't know what the future held. I went to Idlib first, near Türkiye, but couldn't find work. A month later, I fled to Antakya, Türkiye, but the cost of living was too high. Eventually, I moved to Istanbul, where I opened a computer repair store.

In 2018, I decided to give up my computer repair business and joined the staff at El Menahil school. The school provided a sense of belonging, wrapping me in a warmth reminiscent of my mother's embrace. I missed my family dearly, being away from them for so long. Fortunately, in the same year, I successfully arranged for my wife and three children to join me in Türkiye. The greatest joy was when we all acquired Turkish citizenship.

On February 6, 2023, massive earthquakes shook Türkiye. Many of my relatives lived in the heavily affected area of Antakya; over ten of them

lost their lives. Tzu Chi didn't leave us to our own devices; the next day, they took me to the disaster area on a school bus, allowing me to bring back three families.

I currently serve as the head of the enrollment department at El Menahil. Many parents wish to

Bashar Kerdi, the head of the registration department at El Menahil, is pictured with two children during a visit to Tainan Tzu Chi Senior High School in southern Taiwan. The school includes a high school, junior high, elementary division, and a kindergarten.



enroll their children in our school, yet available spots are limited. For children, the most challenging part is feeling inferior to their peers. They perceive the world through the pure lens of their souls, wondering, “Why do some children go to school every morning but I can’t?”

One day, a little girl and her mother came to El Menahil. The girl gazed at me with hopeful eyes, yearning for admission into our school. Both of them cried in front of me. The mother pleaded, “Sir, I bought her a school uniform, a backpack, and shoes. One day, she hugged them and cried herself to sleep. Please make her dream come true.”

I stood before them helplessly, facing one of the most challenging situations of my life. Many children were like this girl—El Menahil was akin

to their paradise. How I wished to fulfill all these children’s dream.

After becoming refugees, we were reduced to mere numbers. This stripped us of our dignity, but Tzu Chi has played a pivotal role in helping us regain it. The foundation also gave us an opportunity to serve the needy. On this trip to Taiwan, I brought a gift from Türkiye—a decoration hand-knitted by my mother. In crafting this work, she poured seven years of longing for me, imbuing it with her motherly concerns and love—the kind that never forsakes you under any circumstances.

In my mother’s eyes, I am still a child. How I yearn to be embraced by her once again! I want to give this cherished knitting to Master Cheng Yen, who is like a mother to us, as a heartfelt token of gratitude for all that Tzu Chi has done for us. ❀

A No-Wait System

Narrated by Basel Khalil

Compiled by Wei Yu-xian
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photo by Abdulrahman Hritani

I endured a four-hour wait under the scorching sun, standing in a queue until I finally received my supplies. Wanting to spare others from similar painful experiences, I created the No-Wait System.

Two moments in my life stand out prominently to me. The first was when I donned the Tzu Chi volunteer vest; the second was in 2019 when I visited Taiwan and met Master Cheng Yen. I presented the Master with a Family Card during that visit, the same card used during Tzu Chi’s distributions in Türkiye, affectionately named “Master.” This occurred shortly after my marriage, and in return, Master Cheng Yen gave a gift to my wife. Fast forward to October 2023, when I visited Taiwan again, this time as a proud father of a daughter.

I was in my third year of studying software engineering at a university in Damascus, Syria, when the war broke out, forcing my family and me to leave our home and move to another province. I left home at six in the morning each day, got to school by noon, and hurried back home after two

classes. Delaying meant having no place to stay for the night. I spent a significant amount of time commuting every day just to attend classes.

We relied on aid from charitable organizations for survival, queuing up for supplies, which was a painful experience. I tried to convince my brother to join me during a distribution during Ramadan, while we were fasting, but he refused. I had to go alone. I stood in a queue under the hot sun for four hours, but finally got my supplies. I informed the distribution staff I was a software engineering student and could help improve the queuing system.

Every day, I thought about designing a system that could spare people from long waiting times, as I had experienced. The organization could only serve a hundred families a day before I offered to create a No-Wait System for them, and even that took a considerable amount of time. After imple-



menting my system, they were able to assist up to 800 families a day.

I joined the charitable organization after offering to create the system for them, and I remained with them even after obtaining my university degree. Working for them was an experience unlike anything in the regular job market. However, war eventually forced me to leave my home country. I'll never forget the pain my departure caused my father. He didn't want to say goodbye; his eyes were filled with sadness, but he tried his best not to show it.

The desire to see my father again never left me in Türkiye, not for a single day. After five years of separation, he told me he could finally visit me with my mother. Tragically, the day he got his passport, he passed away. My heart was broken.

I became an employee at El Menahil school after arriving in Türkiye. A month after I joined the school, I was asked to help with a distribution event on that weekend. I was surprised and asked, "We are a school; what are we distributing?" They replied, "El Menahil was founded by a charitable organization, so we are part of the organization."

The next day at the distribution site, I saw people checking a wall for their names, just like students checking exam results. At that moment, I finally understood that the two years I spent working for the charity organization in Syria were

Basel Khalil (left) serves at a Tzu Chi distribution for victims of the February 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye, ready to step in whenever needed.

to train myself to help these people!

As I had done in Syria, I successfully developed a software system to expedite Tzu Chi's distributions. By sending distribution information to the care recipients, allowing them to register for the preferred date and time to collect our aid, and integrating this information to notify them when they could come to the distribution venue, the process became more efficient. On distribution day, after verifying their identity using the check-in system, claim slips would be printed, enabling them to receive their aid. This streamlined process provided more time for volunteers to interact with the care recipients. Additionally, the system could be monitored remotely online. It became a helpful tool during Tzu Chi's distributions for Ukrainian refugees in Poland, and we were allowed to understand the entire progress of the events from Türkiye.

A team is like a computer; it must have power, and the power source for our team is Master Cheng Yen and everyone else in Tzu Chi. With the support from Tzu Chi, our "computer" can handle everything. I sincerely thank Master Cheng Yen. Her compassion has warmed everyone's heart. ❀

A Symphony of Sustainability Elderly Eco-Heroes

By Cai Li-li

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Despite their age, elderly volunteers at Tzu Chi's Gangshan Campus create an inspiring eco-symphony as they work together to process discarded cables and electronics for recycling, minimizing waste and easing the Earth's burden.

An open metal structure stands under a mango tree near the recycling station at the Tzu Chi Gangshan Campus in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. Even from a distance, you can hear knocking and banging emanating from it. Stepping closer reveals a group of recycling volunteers, with an average age of 80, working at a relaxed pace. While age has slowed them down a bit, they skillfully disassemble electrical appliances and extract copper wires from cables, using both their hands and their feet.

Within the metal structure, seven volunteers work together in a loose production line, creating a slow-motion symphony with their hands and feet as they cut, slice, and hammer on the electrical cables. Focused on their tasks, they share a clear goal: to sell recycled resources at a good price, supporting the production of high-quality programs for Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV.

These volunteers, old enough to be grandparents, are like superheroes in the world of dismantling electrical appliances and cables for recycling. The youngest is 71, the oldest 85. Though age may not be on their side, their dedication to service remains unwavering as they enthusiastically embrace their role as the Earth's guardians.

Striving for zero waste

Du Yu-zhu (杜玉珠), 81, serves as a dedicated volunteer at the recycling station, managing tasks that include receiving and organizing second-hand clothes and cleaning up after the daily recycling activities. With seemingly effortless grace, she juggles her various responsibilities while sharing stories about the station and fellow volunteers, radiating a gentle warmth that touches the hearts of those around her.

Over four years ago, the Tzu Chi Liuqiao and Houhong Recycling Stations in Kaohsiung's Gangshan District merged with the station at the Gangshan Campus. After the merger, Du Yu-zhu repurposed a shipping container from the Liuqiao Recycling Station to store second-hand clothes. Later, when nearby factories donated discarded electrical cables, on-site volunteers began stripping them for recycling. They also recycled discarded household appliances.

Electrical devices and cables consist of various materials, such as stainless steel, copper, bronze, and plastic. Not all materials are accepted by recycling companies. The station's volunteers diligently process and separate these materials, making every effort to reduce waste and environmental pollution.



Another remarkable volunteer at the station is Yu Cai Xiu (余蔡秀), 83, who works alongside her husband, Yu Yi-xiong (余益雄), affectionately known as Big Brother among their fellow volunteers. The dedicated couple has been actively involved in recycling work for many years, consistently working from morning till afternoon every day. Interestingly, nearly everyone in Yu Yi-xiong's family volunteers for Tzu Chi, a fact that brings immense joy to Yu Cai Xiu.

Clad in recycled second-hand clothes and sporting makeshift boots crafted from plastic bags, she layers three pairs of gloves—two plastic and one cotton. Her protective ensemble is designed to guard against oil stains. Lowering herself onto a small stool, she places a basin filled with crushed gravel and sand in front of her. Into this, she adds long, hard cables coated with thick black oil. Methodically, she begins rolling the cables within the gravel and sand to remove the oil. In no time, her cotton gloves are covered with a thick layer of grease.

After Yu Cai Xiu finishes cleaning the cables, 81-year-old Yu Bang-shao (余邦紹) cuts them into small sections and works with her to peel off the insulation. Chen Mei-yu (陳美玉), 71, manages to remove further insulation before passing the cables to 76-year-old Zhu Chen Xiu-luan (朱陳秀鸞) and 84-year-old Huang Xie Min (黃謝敏) for the final steps. The entire team treats the extracted copper wires from the recycled cables with the utmost care, as if they were treasures.

Chen Mei-yu is the youngest among the volunteers and prefers to work quietly. She has battled and overcome COVID-19, but is still dealing with a lingering cough. Every cough causes discomfort in her back, but she doesn't let that stop her from volunteering at the recycling station. She dislikes being idle or at loose ends.

Once Yu Bang-shao completes his work with the cables, he returns to his small stool to continue disassembling electrical appliances. He and his wife, 75-year-old Luo Jia-zhen (羅家蓁), are regulars at the recycling station, showing up every day. Once he starts working, he easily loses track of everything else. After a quick chat with others, he swiftly immerses himself in his work once more.

Luo Jia-zhen joined Tzu Chi's recycling efforts in 2003. At the station, she often uses a hammer to take apart recycling items on the trunk of a lychee tree over ten years old. The tree trunk is now concave from years of use, speaking volumes about the effort she's put in on it. Despite dealing with back pain and soreness, applying pain relief ointment as needed, Luo persists in her work. She remains motivated by the continuous influx of items awaiting dismantling, emphasizing, "Our hands never stop; if we don't work hard, we won't keep up with our workload. We prac-



tically start early and finish late every day.”

In January 2023, Luo began cancer treatment, facing all the challenges that accompanied it. Throughout it all, she maintained an optimistic and resilient outlook, viewing life and death as predetermined and facing it with courage. While undergoing chemotherapy, with reduced energy and weakened resistance, she temporarily paused her dismantling tasks at the recycling station. However, she continued sorting recyclables at home because neighbors continued bringing them over. Her son took over that part of her work during her hospital stay.

Now, she has returned to the recycling station and resumed disassembling appliances there. She says, “I want to be a good disciple of Master Cheng Yen, so I give my best effort. Even when

Volunteers with an average age of 80 carefully disassemble discarded electrical cables and appliances before organizing the components by type or material for recycling. This labor-intensive task demands patience and hard work, showcasing the dedication of these volunteers.





unwell, I do what I can. I'm glad my actions enable me to not only support Da Ai TV but also care for the Earth."

Staying focused to avoid sorrow

Even at the age of 85, Chen Cai Yue-ying (陳蔡月英) adeptly handles a power drill, effortlessly dismantling devices. Two years ago, she experienced the heartbreaking loss of her youngest son to cancer, a pain that lingers. Her daily volunteering now serves as a haven, providing solace from sorrow and the ache of longing.

Life recently threw her another curveball—her husband was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Nevertheless, she remains steadfast, once again finding strength in her commitment to recycling amidst life's uncertainties.

Mao Chen Xiu (毛陳秀), 83, boasts a round figure. She speaks sparingly, wholly focused on the task at hand. Perched in a small plastic chair, she skillfully pounds on a steel frame with a hammer to extract a bundle of copper wires embedded within. When the wires are exposed, her face lights up with satisfaction and joy, much like a child discovering their favorite candy, smiling with pure delight.

In 2003, Mao Chen Xiu began volunteering at Tzu Chi hospitals in Hualien and Dalin, located respectively in eastern and southern Taiwan. After her husband, also a Tzu Chi volunteer, passed away, she donned a volunteer vest he once wore,

determined to fulfill both his and her share of volunteer duties. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, coupled with her advancing age, she chose to forgo traveling to Hualien and Dalin for hospital volunteering. Instead, she now takes the 8:05 a.m. bus daily to the Gangshan Campus for volunteering and returns on the 4:00 p.m. bus. During volunteer Luo Jia-zhen's cancer treatment, she took on the responsibility of opening and closing the area designated for dismantling.

Mao Chen Xiu lives by herself but doesn't feel lonely. Her two sons have brought her to stay with them on multiple occasions and even expressed their desire for her to move in, but she prefers her home in Gangshan District, which makes volunteering at the Gangshan Campus convenient. "Idleness doesn't suit me," she says. "Life is short, especially at our age. We don't know when we'll depart this world, so it's important to contribute while we can. Time and tide wait for no one."

She shared that when she married into her husband's family decades ago, she took on many responsibilities in line with the traditions of older Chinese society, given her husband's status as the eldest son. With two brothers and six sisters in the family, it wasn't until they also had married and started their own families that she finally had some free time, allowing her to pursue volunteering. As she reflects on these past experiences, her smile maintains a constant presence on her face.



Extending the lifespan of items

Whenever volunteer Sun Xiang-han (孫湘涵) joins recycling activities at the Gangshan Campus, she makes a point of visiting the dismantling area and spending time with the group of elderly volunteers. Their pure intentions and actions for the environment move her deeply. Despite their age, they dedicate their entire days to recycling work, sometimes even foregoing breaks at noon, and only heading home after four in the afternoon.

Their meticulous efforts extend beyond reclaiming and recycling copper wires; they also ensure that no second-hand clothes brought to the station go to waste. They carefully select wearable garments, then pack and store them for later use. Even clothes considered unwearable are treasures to Du Yu-zhu. She hands them over to Huang Xie Min, skilled in tailoring, who cuts them into pieces for reuse by factories. The volunteers consistently prioritize extending the lifespan of items, reducing waste, and lightening the burden on the Earth.

Eighty-four-year-old Huang Xie Min excels not only in cutting fabrics but also in stripping cables to retrieve wires. Taking a break from her task of cutting cables with a utility knife, she expresses her appreciation for being able to serve at the recycling station. Sitting idly at home triggers unwanted thoughts and worries, she says. Volunteering at the recycling station keeps her engaged, diverting her from those unwelcome

From left: Luo Jia-zhen, Chen Mei-yu, Yu Cai Xiu, Mao Chen Xiu, Chen Cai Yue-ying, Huang Xie Min, and Du Yu-zhu, smiling with joy as they strive to safeguard a beautiful environment for future generations.

thoughts. She also enjoys chatting with fellow volunteers at the station and values the mutual care they provide for each other.

Du Yu-zhu oversees the operations of the recycling station, staying busy every day and finding joy in her work. She chuckles, mentioning that if she ever has a free moment and her hands aren't occupied, she might doze off. Besides her recycling station duties, she sorts recyclables at the entrance of her home. She also attends funerals on Tzu Chi's behalf, chants the Buddha's name for the deceased, and cares for families of the departed. When asked about her boundless energy, she attributes it to the teachings of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, which give her the vitality and strength to handle various tasks and responsibilities.

In the small space beneath the mango tree, the senior volunteers move at a measured pace, diligently performing various tasks. They take the labor-intensive nature of their work in stride, remaining steadfast and unwavering. Even with their face masks on, one can perceive happiness and contentment in their eyes. ❀

Breaking Free

Jing-wei's Triumph Over Limitations

By Leong Imm Chon

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Chen Jing-wei

Despite living with a rare disease and being bound to a wheelchair, Chen Jing-wei fearlessly pursues his dreams. He earned recognition as one of Taiwan's Ten Outstanding Young Persons in 2023.



When Jing-wei (陳景維), a 23-year-old resident of Yilan in northern Taiwan, daily confronts the challenges of spinal muscular atrophy, a genetic disorder affecting nerves and muscles, weakening the muscles over time. The Tzu Chi Foundation initiated support for him in 2019, enhancing the accessibility of his home, covering wheelchair maintenance expenses, and arranging monthly volunteer visits. These visits provide care and companionship for both him and his grandmother, Li Mei-hua (李美華), now 70. (For further details on Jing-wei's story, please refer to the January 2021 issue of *Tzu Chi Bimonthly*.)

My connection with Jing-wei began in 2020, when I joined the Tzu Chi Foundation. He was a college sophomore at the time. His limbs and torso had already significantly weakened, and his spine had contorted. With his health in continual decline, life's impermanence wasn't an abstract concept, but an everyday truth.

By the end of 2020, only his right index finger retained mobility. By the end of 2021, even this sole movable finger began to stiffen and curve, compelling him to switch to an eye-controlled mouse in 2022.

Despite his physical condition, Jing-wei shared the vision of his life with me, fixing me with a crystal-clear gaze and full of anticipation for the future: "My life goals include successfully completing my university studies, publishing a book about my life's journey, and stepping onto the TED stage."

In my previous role as a school counselor in Malaysia, I provided guidance to many students, most of whom grappled with despondency in the face of illness or other challenges. Jing-wei, however, stood apart. He had learned to embrace his reality and coexist with a debilitating illness. Acutely aware of life's delicate nature, he treasured every passing moment, striving to make the most of it.

Mei-hua, Jing-wei's grandmother, assumed multiple roles when he was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy at only eight months old. In addition to her role as a loving grandmother, she also became like a father and a mother. She sold breakfast and took on cleaning jobs to make a living while tending to Jing-wei's needs the best she could. She never allowed the hardships she confronted to define her, empowering her grandson to bravely pursue his dreams.

"I hope I outlive him!" These words from Mei-hua reverberated in my mind for a long time. She

was afraid that if she passed away first, there would be no one to take good care of Jing-wei. I wonder if I'd have her courage if I were in her shoes. She has dedicated her life to safeguarding Jing-wei, and her positive attitude allows her to face difficulties with a smile. Her influence inspired Jing-wei to approach each day with a smile as well. Like the best of partners, the grandmother and grandson have grown together through thick and thin, their mutual support bringing light to each other's lives.

Achieving recognition

In April 2023, when Jing-wei expressed his desire to apply for the prestigious Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award, I couldn't help but cry. Witnessing his determination to embrace life's opportunities moved me to tears.

Addressing me as "Sister," he asked, "Do you think I'm eligible to apply for the award?"

I encouraged him to give it a try and assisted in refining his autobiography, which was necessary for the application. It felt like I was helping him realize yet another dream. For three years, volunteers in Tzu Chi and I had been helping him to turn his dreams into reality:

We supported him in publishing his first book, *The Little Me, Who Wants to Shake This World*, written in about ten months, spanning approximately 108,000 words. By writing the book, he hoped to inspire people with his life story. We also helped create an audio version of the book, allowing the visually impaired and others like Jing-wei to access the content by listening. Additionally, we organized a trip to an ocean park where Jing-wei rode a Ferris wheel for the first time. His grandmother also enjoyed the carousel, accompanied by our volunteers.

Jing-wei's original aspirations included delivering a talk on the TED stage. While this particular goal remains unfulfilled, Master De Xin (德昕) from the Jing Si Abode encouraged him with these words, "As big as your heart is, so too is your world." This statement broadened our perspectives. We came to understand that it's crucial not to fixate solely on the channels that might have the most significant impact. With that in mind, Jing-wei has since embraced every opportunity to speak, accumulating over 70 presentations to date, reaching an audience of tens of thousands.

In 2020, Jing-wei won the prestigious Presidential Education Award, which honors students who manage to thrive and shine despite tough circumstances. The recognition was fol-



lowed two years later by the Golden Eagle Award, a prize that commends outstanding citizens with disabilities. His journey of triumph continued as he was named one of Taiwan's Ten Outstanding Young Persons in September 2023. His path to these accolades wasn't without obstacles and rejections along the way. Nonetheless, he was always quick to bounce back, and he continued to advocate passionately for people with disabilities.

Jing-wei wasn't the only one in his family recognized with awards. In 2023, his grandmother was selected as one of the ten exemplary loving mothers in Taiwan. Mei-hua's phone call to me sharing the happy news filled my heart with immense warmth. I feel privileged to have played a part in helping them receive well-deserved recognition. Their inspiring stories serve as a beacon, offering hope to others.

Jing-wei's professional journey

After Tzu Chi began caring for the family in 2019, we improved the accessibility of their home and provided subsidies for Jing-wei's rehabilitation. The foundation offered additional assistance, such as for tuition and transportation fees, but

Chen Jing-wei has shared his life story with many people. During his visit to Jiaoxi Junior High School in northern Taiwan, he encouraged students to understand the challenges posed by his illness by replicating and experiencing the stiff body posture he endures.

Jing-wei graciously declined the support. To cover these expenses, he sought corporate sponsorships, actively delivered speeches, and applied for scholarships to alleviate his grandmother's financial burden. Before completing his university studies, he established a home-based studio, taking on projects in graphic design, social media editing, event planning, and more. While the initial outlook appeared promising, a series of challenges surfaced, one after another.

In addition to caring for Jing-wei, Mei-hua also cared for her husband and her mother-in-law. As Mei-hua aged, lifting Jing-wei became increasingly difficult. Consequently, Jing-wei had to hire and cover the monthly salary for a full-time home caregiver. At the same time, his studio faced irregular project flow and an unstable income. Despite

his efforts to secure a full-time remote job, his job applications seemed to vanish without a trace.

For more than a year since his graduation, securing a full-time job was the foremost thought on his mind every morning when he woke up. To assist him, I recommended his resume to Jing Si Publishing Company, highlighting his design and planning strengths alongside his current situation. Taking Jing-wei's physical condition into account, the company's human resources department carefully evaluated his suitability for the position, his support system, and the logistics of recording remote work attendance.

After several months of waiting, Jing-wei joyfully shared the good news over the phone one day: "I'm officially starting my role as a design specialist at Jing Si Publishing on October 18." He expressed gratitude towards me and others who aided him in securing the position. Not only was he relieved that his grandmother no longer had to worry about the monthly caregiver fees, but he was also elated to have secured his first job, signifying the recognition of his professional capabilities.

Limitless potential

While I couldn't directly experience the pain of Jing-wei's illness or his grandmother's struggles, our shared exploration of life's possibilities over the past few years has been a profound learning experience. Together, we have navigated the unknown, gaining insights and growing through the process, discovering hidden treasures within life's challenges.

I came to realize through this journey that the key to overcoming life's challenges lies not in the problems themselves but in our attitude towards them. Mei-hua chose to shoulder the responsibility of caring for Jing-wei, and Jing-wei chose to courageously embrace coexistence with a rare illness. Each choice revealed different landscapes. I chose to accompany and assist Jing-wei in realizing his dreams, supporting him in exploring his resources and abilities, and leveraging his strengths for positive change.

Letting go emerged as a precious gift I learned from Mei-hua and Jing-wei. It instilled strength in facing the challenges posed by a rare illness for both the grandmother and grandson. Jing-wei, by letting go of and not obsessing over his physical challenges, transformed his rare illness from an obstacle into a source of motivation, encouraging him to surpass limitations and live with vitality. Mei-hua, by letting go of questioning why her

grandson faced such challenges, embraced the reality of the rare illness, willingly assuming the responsibility of caring for her grandson.

Life doesn't adhere to a fixed formula, and that's what makes it brim with possibilities. Despite having to deal with the torment of illness, physical limitations, and economic pressures, Jing-wei strives to explore endless opportunities, enriching his life's journey to the full. As he exclaimed to me, "Sister, let's continue to do more things and make a positive impact in the world!"

Only love and acceptance can lead us to a place where we can truly be ourselves, embracing life's sorrows and navigating through pain with resilience. Let's embrace our unique journey and make the most of it! ❀

Chen Jing-wei received the Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award in September 2023. His grandmother, Li Mei-hua, joined him in accepting the honor, sharing in the joy.



Tzu Chi's Aid Efforts After Morocco's Powerful Quake

Text and photos provided by the Tzu Chi Foundation

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

On September 8, 2023, a magnitude 6.8 earthquake rocked Morocco in North Africa, marking the most powerful seismic occurrence in the region's recorded history. The temblor wreaked havoc on villages in the Atlas Mountains and claimed nearly 3,000 lives. The aftermath of the disaster included landslides, collapsed homes, and severed roads. Many people were still living in tents two months after the quake, enduring tough conditions.

Even though the Tzu Chi Foundation didn't have an office in Morocco, its personnel actively sought ways to provide relief. They decided to partner with the Jood Association, a local charity,

for aid distribution.

A series of relief distributions unfolded in various villages beginning on November 8. Tzu Chi provided aid packages containing food such as rice, noodles, chickpeas, and cooking oil, totaling 87 kilograms (190 pounds)—a weight requiring two men to manage. This supply is sufficient for families of five for three months. Hygiene products and blankets were also part of the aid packages. As of early December, over 3,000 households, comprising more than 20,000 individuals, had received assistance. Tzu Chi has also donated two mobile shower units and aims to help 12,000 households by early 2024. ❀

MOROCCO





Quake-Affected Schools Resume Classes Amid Challenges

By Goh Lam Kia
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Unish Khyaju

NEPAL



A shallow earthquake with a magnitude of 5.6 struck Jajarkot District, Karnali Province, Nepal, on November 3, 2023. This disaster resulted in over 150 fatalities, more than 300 injuries, and severe damage to 6,000 houses and other structures. Bheri Tribeni Secondary School (BTSS) in Rimna village, only 25 kilometers (16 miles) from the epicenter, lost 11 classrooms. Despite the challenges, classes resumed on November 20. Local residents set up makeshift tents using plastic sheets and bamboo, with students attending lessons on the ground.

Tzu Chi volunteers arrived following the quake from Lumbini, over 310 kilometers (193 miles) away, to assess the damage. They decided to build 40 temporary classrooms for five schools and evaluate the possibility of assisting in the reconstruction of BTSS.

Construction materials for the temporary classrooms were transported from Lumbini. Using the BTSS grounds as a demonstration site, volunteers employed local villagers for labor. They taught them to use power tools and understand construction drawings for assembling the framework and wall panels. Within two days, the

first classroom was completed. Once finished, children eagerly moved in with desks and chairs. Volunteers provided additional help by offering new textbooks and school supplies. Construction followed in the other four schools to ensure that students could receive lessons in more comfortable settings as soon as possible. ●●



ZHANG BO-LIN



Tzu Chi Chronicles

Notable Highlights From Nov. 11 to Dec. 22, 2023

<p>Nov. 11 - 12</p> <p>The Eighth Tzu Chi Forum, “Fostering a New Era of Equality,” was held in New Taipei City</p>	<p>The Eighth Tzu Chi Forum, “Fostering a New Era of Equality,” convened at the Xindian Jing Si Hall in northern Taiwan. Issues of inequality were addressed in regards to employment, housing, homeless care, energy, and food resources. Possible solutions were also proposed. Fifty scholars and experts from Taiwan and abroad delivered speeches and engaged in panel discussions, presenting a total of 35 papers. Additionally, the Tzu Chi Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Garwood Center for Corporate Innovation at the University of California, Berkeley, with plans to host an innovation forum involving businesses from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Taiwan.</p>
<p>Nov. 15</p> <p>Lin Chin-Lon, CEO of the Tzu Chi medical mission, was awarded Taiwan’s Outstanding Sustainability Achievement Award</p>	<p>Lin Chin-Lon (林俊龍), CEO of the Tzu Chi medical mission, received the Outstanding Sustainability Achievement Award at the 16th Taiwan Corporate Sustainability Awards (TCSA) on November 15. In October, CEO Lin learned of his inclusion in the 2022 Annual Scientific Influence Ranking released by Stanford University. This additional recognition at the TCSA marked a double celebration of his achievements</p>
<p>Nov. 20</p> <p>Tzu Chi Hospital Indonesia successfully performed Indonesia’s first pediatric stem cell transplant</p>	<p>The bone marrow (stem cell) transplant team at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in eastern Taiwan assisted Tzu Chi Hospital Indonesia in Jakarta in successfully performing Indonesia’s first pediatric hematopoietic stem cell transplant for patient Assyifa, diagnosed with severe thalassemia. Assyifa’s brother, Alfatih, served as the compatible donor. Since September 2020, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital has provided training in stem cell transplantation for four Indonesian doctors, 14 nurses, and two medical technologists.</p>
<p>Nov. 24</p> <p>Vice Superintendent Lin Ming-nan honored for advancing Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital as an international environmental benchmark</p>	<p>For more than a decade, Vice Superintendent Lin Ming-nan (林名男) of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital in southern Taiwan has championed environmental awareness within Taiwan’s medical community, establishing the hospital as an exemplar for environmental practices. He has also played a pivotal role in helping the hospital win the Outstanding Fulfillment of WHO Health Promoting Hospital Standards Award. In recognition of his contributions to environmental sustainability and health promotion, he was honored with the 2023 Taiwan Medical Contribution Award from the Taiwan Medical Association. Dr. Lin sees this award a testament to the collaborative efforts of the entire hospital team.</p>

<p>Nov. 30 - Dec. 13</p> <p>Tzu Chi shared practical experiences in addressing climate change at COP28</p>	<p>The 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP28, took place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The Tzu Chi delegation attended as an official observer to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and in the capacity of co-chair of the Multi-Faith Advisory Council. Through participating in forums and organizing an exhibition, the Tzu Chi delegation shared the foundation’s specific accomplishments in promoting environmental protection, reducing plastic usage, lowering medical carbon footprint, and enhancing public environmental awareness. The goal is to harness the efforts of various religious groups to together address climate issues. Vice Superintendent Lin Ming-nan of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital was also invited to elaborate on the relationship between vegetarianism, health, and the environment during side meetings.</p>
<p>Nov. 6</p> <p>Aid provided to 130,000 people affected by floods in Pakistan</p>	<p>In 2022, floods in Pakistan impacted over 33 million people, prompting collaboration between Tzu Chi and six NGOs to provide assistance. In 2023, recurring floods damaged around 45 percent of the country’s agricultural land. Coupled with inflation reaching nearly a 49-year high, the population has faced daunting financial challenges. Tzu Chi, once again partnering with the Al-Madinah Islamic Research Center and three other NGOs, renewed efforts to offer aid in the form of food, blankets, and free medical clinics. As of December 6, 2023, a total of 131,301 people had benefited from the assistance. (Repeated services are counted as separate recipients.)</p>
<p>Dec. 9</p> <p>Vision Future Incubator Results Presentation offered effective solutions to social issues</p>	<p>The Tzu Chi Foundation held the Sixth Vision Future Incubator (VFI) Results Presentation at the Huashan 1914 Creative Park in Taipei. They also announced the participants selected for the 7th VFI. VFI is a sponsorship program for people under 40 with innovative ideas to improve the world. Participants receive grants and guidance from mentors to implement their projects. The 11 teams in the 6th VFI presented solutions addressing subjects like stray animals, small farmers, the elderly, and children. The VFI program exemplifies Tzu Chi’s commitment to fostering positive change and making a meaningful impact on diverse societal challenges.</p>
<p>Dec. 10</p> <p>The Tzu Chi International Youth Sustainability Conference showcased youth achievements in sustainability</p>	<p>The Second Annual Tzu Chi International Youth Association Sustainability Conference, centered around the theme “Sustainable Vitality, I DO!”, took place at Taipei’s Plantarium. The event highlighted Tzu Chi youth’s year-long accomplishments in sustainability, encompassing contributions to the foundation’s assistive device program, outreach to inmates at Hualien Prison in eastern Taiwan, and other efforts. There were related exhibitions on-site. The conference brought together young people, demonstrating their commitment and proactive efforts in promoting sustainability.</p>
<p>Dec. 18</p> <p>Tzu Chi initiated distributions to quake victims in Gansu Province, China</p>	<p>At 11:59 p.m. on December 18, a powerful magnitude 6.2 earthquake struck Jishishan County, Gansu Province, resulting in the tragic loss of over 150 lives in Gansu and Haidong City, Qinghai Province. With temperatures below freezing in the disaster area, Tzu Chi volunteers quickly mobilized to provide essential supplies such as folding beds, blankets, cotton tents, electric blankets, coal stoves, and medical kits. Arriving in the disaster area on the evening of the 21st, volunteers initiated aid distributions to four villages in three townships the following day.</p>

The JING SIA Illustrated APHORISMS



The Buddha says:

If you personally experience the Dharma by practicing it in daily life, you will immediately get results. Only very wise people can experience the Dharma just by reflecting inwardly.



No matter how high a mountain is, there is always a spring of water at the top. Water can run as high as any mountaintop or as low as any valley.

In other words, no matter how old people may be or how much education they may have, they all possess a compassionate nature and pure wisdom.



I want to spend my whole life promoting peace in this world.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "It is all right for young people to be far-sighted. However, as you move forward, remember to pay attention to the present. You can only reach your ideals by being realistic. If you want to promote world peace, you must start by cultivating your own mind. You must love yourself before you can love others."

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

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With love, even hell can be transformed into heaven.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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