

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

The Work Continues

Tzu Chi's Quake Relief in Myanmar

July 2025



Walking the Bodhisattva Path is not easy. Yet in a world full of suffering, Master Cheng Yen encourages us to nurture a loving heart that gives without expecting anything in return, so we can truly help those in pain.

HUANG XIAO-ZHE

When Compassion Becomes Action

Translated by Teresa Chang

I often say that walking the Bodhisattva Path in this world is no easy task. It takes courage to face situations that most people would rather avoid or turn away from. Despite the difficulty, we must press on with determination, especially in a world so full of suffering. When disasters strike, what can bring peace to troubled hearts? The answer is that familiar word: love. We need people not only willing to help, but ready to offer timely aid without hesitation—people who see all living beings as family and step forward in times of need to offer the warmth of love.

Recently, colleagues at the Tzu Chi Foundation compiled a historical account of our volunteers' response to the plane crash that occurred in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan, in 1998. On the day of the crash, which claimed the lives of all those on board, dozens of volunteers rushed to the scene to chant the Buddha's name for the deceased. They worked in shifts throughout the night to keep the chanting uninterrupted.

At first, I thought their main role would be limited to chanting and consoling grieving families. But what they did far exceeded my expectations. Some accompanied families as they identified personal belongings and searched for the remains of their loved ones. Others, with deep reverence, helped recover victims' fragmented remains—each movement carried out with care and solemnity. As they bent and rose, they softly recited "Amitabha Buddha." Their sincerity moved the personnel on-site and brought a sense of calm to the scene.

Despite their dedication, I couldn't help but worry about whether witnessing such devastation had taken an emotional toll. So, I traveled to Taoyuan to hear firsthand from the volunteers who had taken part. I asked, "Were you able to eat? Did you sleep at all during those few nights?" They replied, "We ate as usual. But on the first night, we couldn't sleep; we were busy the whole time, then went straight on to prepare breakfast for the rescue teams. On the second night, the images from the crash still haunted us. By the third night, we were so exhausted we finally managed to sleep. It wouldn't be true to say we weren't afraid, but our emotions have gradually settled. Mentally and

physically, we're doing fine now."

These living bodhisattvas, guided by love, focused wholeheartedly on tending to the deceased and comforting the bereaved. Their only wish was for the living to find comfort and the departed to rest in peace. With this single-minded focus, they gave themselves fully to the relief effort. Undaunted by the distressing conditions, they truly embodied the spirit of cultivating wisdom through courage.

More than two decades have passed since the tragic event. Though the memories remain painful, what stands out most vividly in my mind is the courage our volunteers displayed, a courage that arose from hearts free of inner hindrances. Without hindrances, there is no fear. This inner strength was rooted in compassion, born of an inability to stand by while others suffer. That compassion became a powerful force that brought comfort and solace.

Such love and courage also reflect a state of selflessness. When the ego is present—when the sense of "I" is strong—hesitation arises, and with hesitation comes fear. But in moments of crisis, the idea of self can disappear. There is no time to wonder, "Do I dare?" In those critical moments, only the bodhisattva heart remains. The only thought is to be there for the living and honor the departed.

As practitioners of Buddhism, we often ask ourselves, "How far are we from the true state of a bodhisattva?" Anyone who embodies the compassion and fearlessness of these volunteers is already a bodhisattva in spirit. Yet, even as we address one another as "bodhisattva," we must not become complacent. Those who walk this path will inevitably encounter the full range of human emotions—joy and sorrow, hope and heartbreak. What matters is that we keep striving, growing, and learning to give without expecting anything in return. In so doing, we can truly help those in pain.

The Buddha taught us to cultivate "great mercy even to strangers and great compassion for all." Even if those who suffer are strangers, we should care for them as we would our own family. This kind of pure, selfless love is like a breath of fresh, clean air. When our hearts are filled with it, we carry it wherever we go, and that goodness spreads. That way, we help bring about a better world. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

July 2025



1 WHEN COMPASSION BECOMES ACTION

Master Cheng Yen reflects on Tzu Chi volunteers who responded to tragedy with love, showing how compassion in action can bring peace in the midst of sorrow.

4 TZU CHI EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Read about recent highlights in Tzu Chi's history.

8 YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS ADVANCING THE PUBLIC GOOD

Tzu Chi empowers youth-led teams to tackle challenges like environmental protection and public health through its Vision Future Incubator,

blending purpose with practical support.

16 THE WORK CONTINUES

Tzu Chi continues its quake relief in Myanmar, now focusing on mid- to long-term recovery aid to support rebuilding efforts and further help communities restore their lives.

24 HOPE ROOTED IN ACTION

Follow the footsteps of Tzu Chi volunteers as they reconnect with communities in Sierra Leone, celebrating a decade of unwavering support, grassroots progress, and shared hope for a better tomorrow.

36 ISMAHAN GOES HOME

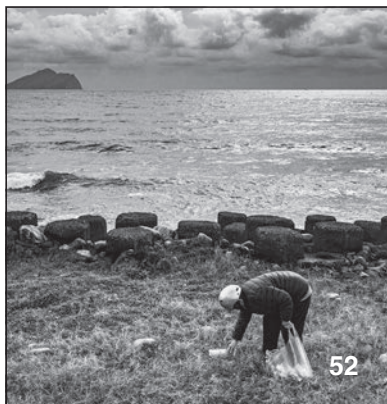
A grieving mother returns to Syria with her family, carrying with her the love and teachings of Tzu Chi, determined to bring hope and healing to others in a land scarred by war.

41 FINDING STRENGTH IN TEACHING

After fleeing war, some Ukrainians in Poland became teachers in classes supported by Tzu Chi, helping others while finding healing themselves.

46 CHIANG MAI TZU CHI SCHOOL

Three decades after arriving in northern Thailand, Tzu Chi's pres-



ence continues to echo through classrooms and communities, helping students carry forward light, gratitude, and a sense of purpose.

52 PERSEVERANCE BEYOND ILLNESS

Through the streets and along the sea, a Tzu Chi volunteer recycles with dedication. At 80 and facing late-stage cancer, she finds meaning in caring for the planet and the lives she touches along the way.

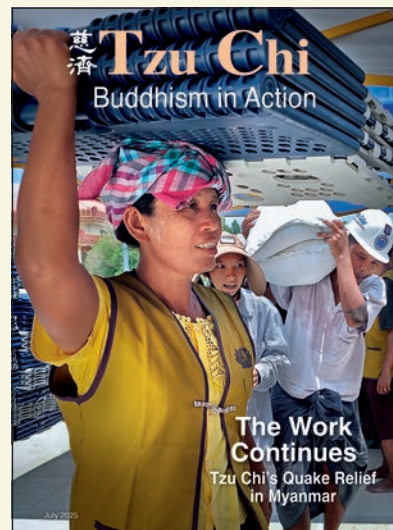
60 LENDING A HAND, LIFTING A LIFE

The hands of Tzu Chi volunteers carry more than assistive devices; they carry hope, kindness, and the belief that every life deserves comfort and care.

ON THE COVER Local residents help

Tzu Chi move folding beds and rice for a distribution held in May 2025 in Sagaing, Myanmar, for victims of the tremor that struck in March. The foundation continues working to meet the needs of affected communities. Photo by Wai Yan Htun

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

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Tzu Chi Event Highlights

Apr. 15 to Jun. 21, 2025



Myanmar

• A powerful earthquake rocked central Myanmar near Mandalay on March 28. Mobilizing quickly, Tzu Chi volunteers carried out the first phase of emergency relief from April 2 to 20, distributing food, folding beds, blankets, mosquito nets, and medical masks, among other items. On April 27, they returned to the disaster area to begin the second phase of damage assessment and aid distribution. Over the two phases, volunteers donated medicine, N95 and other medical masks, and medical gloves to 12 hospitals; they also offered cash-for-work opportunities that led to the construction of temporary shelters at 30 sites, providing refuge for 1,822 monastics and local residents. Volunteers continued distributing rice, cooking oil, folding beds, blankets, mosquito nets, and other supplies through May 25. On June 11, another distribution was held in Tada-U, benefiting 266 households with rice and cooking oil.

In preparation for schools reopening in June, volunteers from Malaysia provided international support, working with four local contractors and cash-for-work participants to construct temporary classrooms and housing for schools and monasteries affected by the disaster. On May 15, they started building units measuring approximately 43 square meters (460 square feet) each, with layouts adjustable to fit the available land. A total of 87 units were completed by June 15, across four campuses of Mandalay Kongjiao School and ten monasteries. The project includes Mandalay, Amarapura, Inwa, Tada-U, and the capital, Naypyidaw, with a total of 200 units planned.



Cambodia

• From May 30 to June 1, the Samdech Techo Voluntary Youth Doctor Association (TYDA) collaborated with Tzu Chi International Medical Association teams from Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan to provide free medical services at Prey Kabbas Referral Hospital in Takeo Province. The outreach covered five specialties—ophthalmology, dentistry, surgery, internal medicine, and traditional Chinese medicine—serving 3,686 patient visits. As part of the work prior to the clinic, Cambodian volunteers and TYDA doctors conducted pre-operative eye screenings on May 3 and 4, paving the way for operations performed by surgeons from the Tzu Chi Eye Center in Manila, the Philippines, during the event. Since 2017, Tzu Chi and TYDA have teamed up annually to host large-scale free clinics in Cambodia, with a pause in services during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Taiwan

- In May, Tzu Chi Stem Cell Center Director Yang Kuo-liang (楊國梁) and Medical Director Yang Shang-hsien (楊尚憲) traveled to Quebec, Canada, to attend a World Marrow Donor Association (WMDA) meeting, where they personally received the association's Full Standards certification. To ensure donor safety and transplant quality, WMDA sets strict international standards and conducts rigorous on-site evaluations every four years. Tzu Chi's marrow registry has achieved Full Standards status—the highest level currently awarded by WMDA—three times to date.
- In response to the January 21 Chiayi earthquake, Tzu Chi provided emergency relief and assisted with home repairs in Tainan's Nanxi and Yujing districts, which were close to the epicenter. To support residents displaced by the quake, Tzu Chi worked with the Tainan City Government to build a three-story facility that will offer survivors a safe place to stay while rebuilding their homes. Construction began on June 21. Tzu Chi is funding the main building's construction, while the city government is responsible for landscaping and other environmental improvements. The facility will include 70 units—52 studios and 18 double rooms—on the second and third floors, along with a community hall on the first floor. Once its role in resettlement is complete, the facility will be repurposed for other social welfare needs.

Malaysia

- In March, severe flooding struck the state of Johor, forcing more than 10,000 people to evacuate. Tzu Chi volunteers, braving wind and rain, rushed to provide care, distributing dry food, daily necessities, blankets, and folding beds to evacuees. For the first time, Tzu Chi's Johor Bahru office partnered with the state government to distribute cash aid in Permas Jaya, Tampoi, Gelang Patah, and Ulu Tiram, relieving financial pressure on over 1,300 affected families.



Charity



Medicine

Guatemala



- Tzu Chi volunteers in Guatemala visited Santa Bárbara, Suchitepéquez, in March to distribute school supplies. At Los Tres María School, they found students using wooden tomato crates as desks and chairs. Although the school had applied for funding for years, no support had been provided. To address the need, volunteers delivered 62 desk-and-chair units to the school on April 27. Each unit included a backrest and built-in storage. Since the school has no electricity, the mayor arranged for a generator and sound system for a donation ceremony. Local government officials attended the event to express their gratitude.

Haiti



- On May 25, Haiti's Mother's Day, Tzu Chi volunteer Johnson Chang (張永忠) led a group of local volunteers in organizing a bowing pilgrimage and Buddha Day ceremony, praying for peace and harmony in society. They also conducted two distributions of rice provided by Taiwan's Ministry of Agriculture. Since the assassination of its president in 2021, Haiti has experienced ongoing political turmoil and deteriorating public safety. Conditions have worsened further this year, with the country grappling with gang violence, a food crisis, a cholera outbreak, and a severe shortage of humanitarian assistance.

Ecuador



- Since 2023, Tzu Chi has distributed school supply kits annually in four cities and towns—Manta, Santa Ana, Portoviejo, and Canoa—helping children from underprivileged families. Nine distribution events were held this year, from May 24 to June 3, benefiting a total of 1,113 children.



Brazil

- In February, heavy rains in the state of São Paulo triggered flooding and landslides. Tzu Chi volunteers carried out disaster assessments and verified recipient lists in April. On May 25, they provided food packages to 262 households in the city of Itaquaquecetuba. Each family received 24 kilograms (53 pounds) of supplies, including rice, cooking oil, beans, flour, seasonings, and more.

Australia

- In April, Tzu Chi volunteers from Brisbane traveled nearly 400 kilometers (250 miles) to the remote town of Tara to hold a three-day free clinic. A team of 61 medical professionals and 85 support volunteers provided care during 675 patient visits, offering services in traditional Chinese medicine, Western medicine, and dentistry. The dental team supplied 46 sets of dentures, working late to complete them. Tara faces challenges such as limited public transportation, insufficient medical resources, and unreliable Internet access. The annual Tzu Chi free clinic has been a cherished tradition for 18 years, with many residents bringing coin banks filled with money to donate. This year, two sisters organized a bake sale, which attracted over a thousand supporters and raised more than 80,000 New Taiwan dollars (approximately US\$2,670) to support the clinic.



Young Entrepreneurs Advancing the Public Good

Tzu Chi and the SDGs

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Wu Meng-en

Tzu Chi's Vision Future Incubator empowers young changemakers through funding and mentorship to drive positive change.

Environmental pollution, climate change, and shifts in social dynamics have prompted many young people to reflect on how modern technology and sustainable thinking can be used to solve real-world problems. The launch of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016 gave this generation a clearer sense of direction and purpose to tackle such difficult challenges.

Recognizing the importance of socially driven, youth-led innovation, Tzu Chi introduced the Vision Future Incubator in 2017—a proposal-based competition designed to support young teams working for the public good through non-profit organizations or social enterprises. The program selects innovative, forward-thinking teams and provides funding, mentorship, and other resources to help them develop their initiatives and expand their impact.

The Vision Future Incubator is one of two key programs under Tzu Chi's Youth Innovation Promotion initiative. The other is the Compassionate Technology Innovation Competition, which encourages students and teachers from high school through graduate

school to design creative tools for use in charity and healthcare.

The driving force behind the Youth Innovation Promotion initiative was Professor Feng Yen (馮燕), a Tzu Chi board member and honorary professor of social work at National Taiwan University. After stepping down from public service in 2016, Feng joined Tzu Chi and proposed to Dharma Master Cheng Yen that the foundation share its resources with creative, socially minded youth outside the organization. "They may not fit within traditional institutional structures or conventional frameworks," Feng said, "but they have the potential to forge entirely new paths. What they need are opportunities."

As of its seventh year, the Vision Future Incubator has awarded grants to 77 teams. Yen Po-wen (顏博文), CEO of Tzu Chi's charity mission, estimates that over 200 teams apply each year on average, competing for around ten grant awards. Unlike most competitions, where the process ends with a cash prize, the real work in this program begins after the award. As Tzu Chi liaison Tian Zhi-xian (田智賢) explained, "Through this program, Tzu Chi walks alongside young



changemakers and supports them on a much longer journey to create lasting social impact.”

Building capacity

Take, for example, the 11 teams selected for the eighth Vision Future Incubator. Chosen in December 2024 through an open-call selection process, the teams began a yearlong capacity-building program in January 2025. Each team takes part in monthly workshops on topics such as business models, branding and marketing, and project management, with instructors providing guidance. They also receive eight to ten one-on-one mentoring sessions tailored to their specific fields. The program includes a midterm presentation in June and concludes with a final showcase in December.

The first monthly workshop took place the weekend before the Lunar New Year. On Saturday morning, the teams gathered at the Taipei NPO Hub on Chongqing South Road for an orientation. They then split into groups to visit three alumni teams that had previously taken part in the program: Against the Wind Theater, House of Story Wear, and the Red House Period Museum.

Team members, mentors, and Tzu Chi representatives pose together at the Vision Future Incubator’s seventh results presentation in December 2024.

Against the Wind Theater is a troupe that addresses youth social issues through performance. “Fraud has become a very serious issue lately,” said director Cheng Wei-sheng (成瑋盛) to the visitors. “Last December, we invited a youth who had once worked as a scam courier and paired him with an elderly person who had been scammed. Together, they performed an intergenerational anti-fraud play.” He explained how the group uses theater and mentorship to help at-risk youth—such as school dropouts or those requiring close supervision—get their lives back on track.

To discourage unlicensed driving among teenagers, the troupe also formed the Against the Wind United motorbike team. Members must first obtain a driver’s license before joining. Every ride serves a public cause, whether cleaning up a beach or cooking for a banquet for seniors in remote areas. “We want them to do good in a way that speaks to them,” Cheng said.



In addition to learning from alumni, the new teams also gained insights into organizational management. On Sunday, at the Xindian Jing Si Hall in New Taipei City, business consultant Chen Xiu-han (陳秀涵) led participants in reflecting on the vision and mission behind their ventures and other foundational topics.

“The greatest overlap between social enterprises and non-profit organizations lies in their shared objective of creating social impact,” Chen said. “The main difference is how they’re funded—social enterprises rely on revenue, while non-profits depend on sponsorships or donations. No matter how they are funded, both require financial discipline, team coordination, and navigation of similar challenges and needs.”

Building sustainable solutions

The 77 teams the Vision Future Incubator has supported through its yearlong capacity-building program work in areas such as environmental protection, circular economy, charitable innovation, and community development. About 60 percent of them operate as social enterprises. Their efforts directly contribute to the UN’s 17 SDGs, reflecting a shared commitment to environmental, social, and economic progress.

To support young changemakers like these,

Professor Feng Yen (second from left), a Tzu Chi board member and driving force behind the Vision Future Incubator, interacts with one of the selected teams during the seventh results presentation, encouraging the young entrepreneurs to unleash their creativity.

Tzu Chi partners with Impact Hub Taipei, a member of a global social innovation network. Olivier Chang (張士庭), co-founder of Impact Hub Taipei, pointed out that although Taiwan offers other startup support programs, most focus only on awarding prize money. “They often fall short when it comes to follow-up services and support,” he said. “Tzu Chi’s program stands out by helping teams build stronger, more stable foundations.”

Chang explained that their role involves assessing each team’s specific needs and helping them develop the skills necessary for sustainable operations. “For example, some teams struggle with donor communication. We match them with mentors who have that expertise—people who can walk them through the process, step by step, to revise their strategies.”

He also highlighted the importance of Tzu Chi’s four missions—charity, medicine, education, and culture—as practical resources for participat-



ing teams. “Sometimes, what a team lacks is simply a testing ground or collaborators,” Chang said. “If their work involves tutoring, for example, they can connect with Tzu Chi’s schools or volunteers from the Tzu Chi Teachers Association for assistance.” This network strengthens the overall impact of the program.

Chang emphasized that many young people are full of heart and ideas for making the world a better place. One inspiring example is Hearing AED, a team selected in 2023. It was founded by a public-spirited doctor who noticed that many cardiac arrest victims received no first aid before the ambulance arrived. To address this, he began training volunteers and developed a reporting system that alerts them when someone nearby collapses. These volunteers can quickly retrieve an AED—a portable device that delivers an electric shock to help restart the heart—and provide emergency care before official help arrives.

Other teams have tackled the issue of single-use tableware by designing rental systems that provide reusable dishes for events or takeout orders, offering a sustainable alternative that helps reduce waste and keep the environment cleaner.

Chang noted that if more people learn about and support such initiatives, many social issues could gradually improve. As the lead mentor for

Olivier Chang (far right) has worked with Tzu Chi for over seven years to nurture and empower social-impact startups, giving the young entrepreneurs behind them a leg up.

JI HUA-XIU

the Vision Future Incubator, he also reminds teams to cherish the funding they receive: “Some may assume that Tzu Chi’s funding comes from large corporations. But in reality, over 90 percent of donations are under a thousand New Taiwan dollars [US\$33], contributed by everyday individuals. That prize money comes from countless small acts of generosity.”

He shared plans to enhance the program: “Many teams were new ventures when they participated in the program, but now they’re in their fifth or even seventh year of operation. As such, they may face more complex operational challenges, so we’re launching an alumni program that will include subsidies for consulting services.” The goal is to help them stay steady as they grow and continue contributing to public welfare and sustainability.

CEO Yen Po-wen warmly invited young people to join the Vision Future Incubator: “You can go fast alone, but with us, you can go far. The path of social innovation is not easy, but we’ll walk it with you—and help you find your footing.” ❀



A Social Enterprise Giving Seniors a New Stage

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo courtesy of RockYeNai

The social enterprise RockYeNai trains older adults to become skilled storytellers. More than 600 seniors have taken part since it was founded in 2017, sharing their voices through over 1,200 storytelling events across Taiwan.

In 2016, a news report revealed that 25.9 percent of suicides in Taiwan involved individuals aged 65 and older. This sobering statistic made Lin Zong-xian (林宗憲) acutely aware of the mental health challenges facing the elderly. Drawing on his years of experience in picture book reading and storytelling instruction, he saw a way to help. The following year, he founded RockYeNai (meaning “rocking grandpas and grannies”), a social enterprise that trains adults over 50 to tell stories using picture books, enriching their lives through creative expression and stronger social connection.

Zhong, one of the early trainees, recalled that when RockYeNai first started, participants received a stipend of 300 New Taiwan dollars (about US\$10) for each storytelling session. Though modest, the incentive served as a significant source of encouragement for many seniors.

“This stipend had real meaning,” Lin explained. “I wanted them to see themselves as professionals. Storytelling within our group wasn’t something to be taken lightly, and the stipend wasn’t just a handout—it was a recognition of the skills they had developed, something they had truly earned.”

Lin holds his trainees to high standards, refus-

ing to lower expectations simply because they are older. Unlike many nonprofits that offer free programs to attract seniors, he charges tuition—underscoring RockYeNai’s professional approach—and actively seeks opportunities for participants to perform in various venues. Although the stipend was discontinued last year, participation has remained strong. Picture book classes continue to be held every month in northern, central, and southern Taiwan, drawing robust attendance. The appeal for many participants goes beyond learning new skills; it also offers a chance to make friends. Some have even found emotional healing through the experience.

One participant, now a popular internet personality known as Grandma Downstairs, spoke about how her storytelling evolved through her time with RockYeNai. A former preschool teacher, she had experience reading stories to children, but RockYeNai opened up a new world for her. She had once simply read aloud to preschoolers, but her storytelling was transformed after she learned from Lin and other instructors. She can now captivate adult and senior audiences as well. “Storytelling is so diverse—you can act, narrate, sing. There are so many ways to bring a story to



life,” she said enthusiastically.

Beyond technique, storytelling also became a source of healing. “Several classmates had lost their husbands, but they gradually worked through their grief by sharing picture books,” she reflected. “I, too, came to terms with my mother’s passing by connecting with the stories we told.”

After more than seven years of experimentation and development, Lin and his team have shown that their model is both feasible and sustainable. With proper training, seniors can share stories not only with children but also with university students and working professionals. Their ability to blend life experience with storytelling has also drawn attention; for example, last year a financial services company invited participants to help raise awareness about fraud prevention in local communities.

Looking back, Lin said that RockYeNai’s early success wouldn’t have been possible without a grant from the first round of Tzu Chi’s Vision Future Incubator. With more than one million New Taiwan dollars (US\$33,300) in prize money, he was able to rent venues for training sessions and offer stipends to participating seniors. This financial support allowed him to test RockYeNai’s

From initial unfamiliarity to confident performances on stage, senior storytellers from RockYeNai use picture books as a medium to connect with audiences of all ages across a variety of settings.

appeal without expending significant time and energy on market research. He acknowledged that without Tzu Chi’s backing, it would likely have taken another year or two to reach their current level of success.

Today, RockYeNai has established a solid foothold in the social enterprise sector. It has trained more than 600 middle-aged and senior storytelling experts, who perform at fairs, department stores, cafés, senior centers, and nursing homes, reaching audiences of all ages. The initiative embodies the ideal of “productive aging,” empowering older adults to contribute actively to their communities through storytelling and giving them a renewed sense of purpose.

“The Vision Future Incubator helps shorten the trial-and-error phase for young entrepreneurs,” Lin said. “It supports ESG [environmental, social, and governance principles], the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, and social enterprises. It’s a truly brilliant strategy.”



Greener Straws, Cleaner Future

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo courtesy of Wonder Greener

Since its establishment in 2020, Wonder Greener has sold 50 million eco-friendly straws globally—each offsetting around 0.6 grams of carbon emissions.

“Over two trillion drinking straws are used worldwide each year,” said Benson Chen (陳柏桑), co-founder of Wonder Greener, one of the teams selected for the fifth year of Tzu Chi’s Vision Future Incubator. “That amounts to more than 1.6 million tons of plastic. So, we developed a sustainable alternative: straws made directly from plants. After use, they can go into general waste or food scrap bins, and even if incinerated, they won’t release harmful substances.”

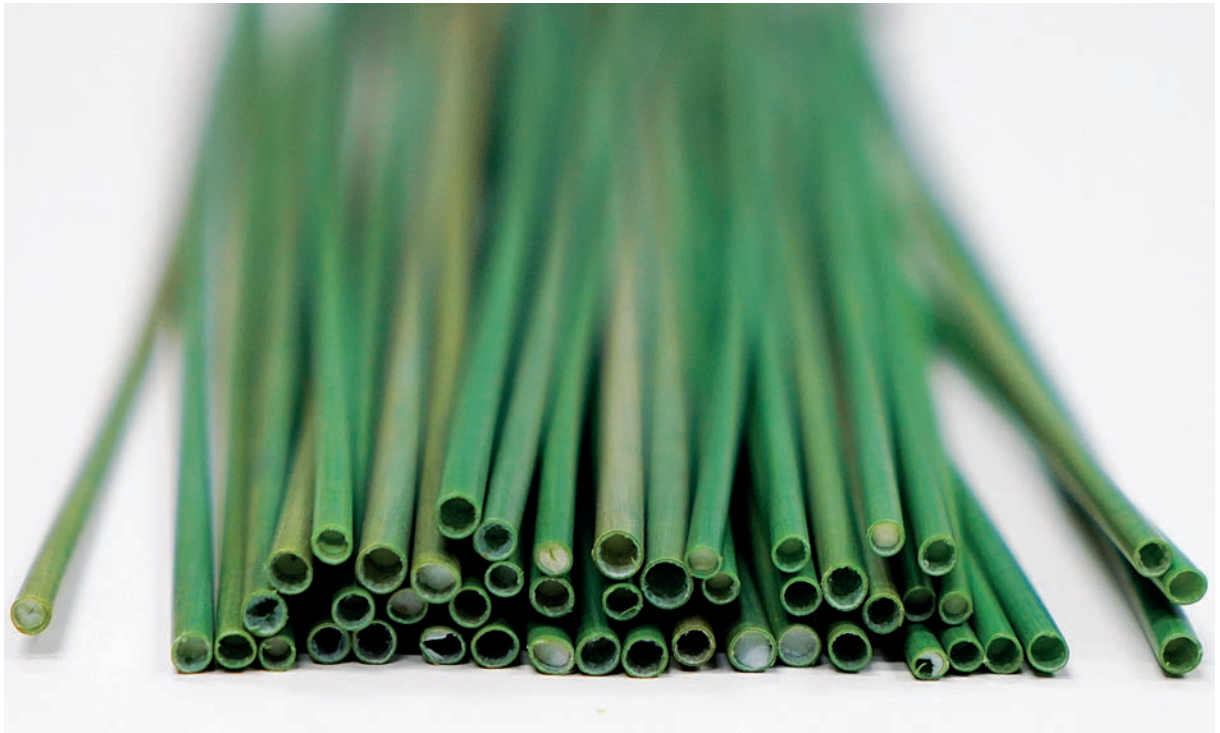
Chen’s interest in eco-friendly straws began even before Taiwan’s Environmental Protection Administration (now the Ministry of Environment) introduced restrictions on plastic straws in 2019. He was operating five or six restaurants and cafés at the time and had been searching for non-plastic alternatives to use in his stores as a way to help the environment. Stainless steel and glass straws raised hygiene concerns, while disposable paper straws softened too quickly—all of which failed to resonate with customers. Then he came across a news report from Vietnam about straws made from bulrush—a wetland plant with tall, hollow stems—and his curiosity was piqued. He shared the article with a friend knowledgeable about aquatic plants, and in 2018, the two traveled to Vietnam to learn more.

Chen had assumed bulrush straws were wide-

ly available in Vietnam. But after visiting more than 200 food and beverage establishments, he found only one that actually used them. This eventually led him to a field of bulrushes and a processing workshop along the Mekong River. There, he observed a simple production process: rural women cut harvested bulrush stems to customer-specified lengths, cleaned out the hollow centers with basic tools, then washed and packed the finished straws for delivery.

“I wanted to buy some to use in Taiwan, so I asked them to sun-dry a batch for me,” Chen recalled. “After trying them out, I realized they were really practical.” The straws resisted soaking and were compostable on land and in water, making them a truly eco-friendly alternative to plastic. And while both plastic and paper straws generate carbon emissions, each bulrush straw has a negative carbon footprint of around -0.6 grams, supporting broader climate action goals.

However, cost posed a major hurdle. Each bulrush straw cost four New Taiwan dollars (US\$0.13), compared to one NT dollar for paper straws and just 0.10 NT dollars for plastic. Chen realized he needed to scale up and mechanize production to bring prices down and make them viable for mass adoption, so he established a processing plant in Vietnam and expanded bulrush cultivation. In 2020, he and like-minded partners



officially launched Wonder Greener, setting out on a dual path of social enterprise alongside his restaurant and café business. Thanks to the team's research and development, the cost per straw has since dropped to just 0.60 NT dollars.

The benefits of bulrush extend well beyond reducing plastic waste and carbon emissions. Because Wonder Greener avoids pesticides, its fields teem with snails, shellfish, insects, and fish, creating a habitat that attracts birds and mammals and fosters a vibrant, balanced ecosystem. Economically, bulrush cultivation provides stable income and employment opportunities for rural communities.

As global awareness of sustainability grows, so does the demand for alternatives to plastic. Wonder Greener's straws are now used by Taiwan High Speed Rail and a Hong Kong coffee chain, with over 800 businesses placing regular orders. Chen's company is not only growing and processing bulrush in Vietnam for global markets but is now cultivating native bulrush in Taiwan in preparation for future mass "Made in Taiwan" production.

Despite their youthful energy and drive, Chen and his team initially lacked experience in areas like funding and business development. He candidly admitted that their main reason for applying to Tzu Chi's 2021 Vision Future Incubator was to secure operational funding.

Bulrush stems, typically 0.6 to 0.8 centimeters (0.24–0.31 inches) in diameter, are turned into natural drinking straws through simple processing and drying. These eco-friendly alternatives reduce environmental impact and have helped establish Wonder Greener as a sustainability-driven social enterprise.

"We had just started promoting our product in Taiwan at the time and didn't have much visibility," he said. "I thought Tzu Chi might be more receptive to our mission." The move proved fruitful: in addition to winning a grant, the team also gained valuable mentorship and networking opportunities.

"We were given guidance on sales and marketing strategies and received support in determining where to begin," said Chen. He appreciated the structure of the program, which required a clear plan for using funds and progress reports, a valuable training experience for the team.

Still, Chen stressed that while grants can be helpful, they're only part of the journey. "They make things a bit easier—they give you a short break from financial worries," he said. "But ultimately, you have to chart your own course and build a sustainable business model. Making it work takes relentless effort." ❀



The Work Continues

Tzu Chi's Quake Relief in Myanmar

By Chiu Chuan Peinn and Li Wei-huang

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Tzu Chi volunteers spent 18 days providing aid in the disaster area after Myanmar's March 28 earthquake, then returned a week later to offer further aid and comfort. The devastated monasteries, orphanages, and cries of grief stayed close to their hearts.



On April 11, volunteers delivered bread, milk, and rice to Pyi Lone Chan Thar Ethnic Orphanage, which was founded by a monastery and shelters 180 children. A monk is seen here guiding the volunteers as they assess the earthquake damage.

KHIN YADANAR THEIN

and deep empathy for those affected—that drove the volunteers to act swiftly and do all they could. “Though we were all afraid, we pressed on with our relief work,” Daw Thida Khin added.

The team remained in the area until April 20. Those 18 days marked only the first phase of Tzu Chi’s response. Given the scale of devastation, much more support was still needed.

Temporary classrooms and housing

After the first phase of relief work concluded, a team of volunteers from Myanmar and Malaysia who had participated in the mission traveled to the Jing Si Abode, Tzu Chi’s headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, to report on the situation. They shared their firsthand observations of the damage, as well as the living conditions of local residents and the monastic community. Their findings served as valuable references for planning the next stages of aid.

In addition to Daw Thida Khin, the team included Wen Si Lang (溫斯郎) and Aye Nandar Aung (郭寶鈺), who had each led a team during the relief mission; entrepreneur-volunteers U Kyaw Khin (林銘慶) and Lin Zhi Min (林志民), who had coordinated with the Myanmar government and facilitated customs clearance for Tzu Chi’s relief supplies; Malaysian volunteers Teoh Paik Lim (張濟玄) and Lee Chong Hoo (李濟瑯); and a group of young administrative volunteers.

Three principals from Mandalay Kongjiao School were also part of the visiting team. The school—the largest Chinese-language school in Myanmar—had suffered extensive damage in the quake. “All four campuses were affected, with the North Campus sustaining the worst damage,” said Principal Ding Tze-min (丁澤民). To help ensure that classes could resume when school reopened in early June, Tzu Chi planned to build 41 temporary classrooms, enough to accommodate the school’s 8,000 students across all campuses.

In addition to supporting Mandalay Kongjiao School, the relief team also surveyed other quake-affected schools to assess their need for temporary classrooms. Teoh Paik Lim, who has overseen the

“The hotel windows rattled, and we could hear a low rumbling,” recalled Daw Thida Khin (李金蘭), head of Tzu Chi Myanmar, matter-of-factly describing their experience in the post-quake disaster zone. “At night, we kept our emergency kits close—some even slept with the lights on. Everyone had their own way of coping.”

A major earthquake struck central Myanmar on March 28, 2025, with the epicenter near Mandalay. On April 2, Tzu Chi volunteers entered the disaster zone to assess the damage and provide assistance. They distributed emergency supplies and launched a cash-for-work program, hiring affected residents to build temporary rain shelters.

Aftershocks were frequent, sometimes reaching magnitude 5.5, violently shaking buildings from side to side. The ongoing aftershocks unsettled not only local residents but also the visiting volunteers. Yet it was this shared sense of fear—



tered. “They are genuinely humble and broad-minded,” she said. At one monastery, a well-respected monk even shared that he knew of Dharma Master Cheng Yen and deeply admired her work.

In line with Theravāda tradition, monastics typically go on daily alms rounds, symbolizing detachment from material desires. Laypeople, in turn, see giving as a way to accumulate merit and generously offer food, medicine, and monetary donations to the monastic community. However, following the earthquake, monastics in hard-hit areas suspended their rounds, mindful of the economic challenges faced by local residents.

Many monasteries also serve as educational centers. In recent years, Myanmar’s civil conflict has displaced many families, and these monasteries have welcomed children seeking refuge, regardless of ethnicity. In times of natural disaster, monasteries have also opened their doors to shelter affected residents. The earthquake this time was no exception—even though many monasteries themselves had suffered severe damage.

Tzu Chi volunteers were heartbroken to see many long-standing monasteries and pagodas left in ruins. In addition to delivering aid and constructing temporary shelters, they also hoped to support efforts to repair or rebuild these spiritual centers.

Another earthquake struck in the early hours of the volunteers’ first day back in Mandalay in late April, causing many residents to rush outside. Here, the team takes shelter at a factory, spending the night on folding beds lined with cardboard and covered by mosquito nets.

PHYO PYAE AUNG

Prayers to soothe the pain

In addition to material aid, emotional healing was needed for those left traumatized by the earthquake.

“Our master is from Taiwan; she’s very worried about everyone,” said a Tzu Chi volunteer, referring to Dharma Master Cheng Yen. The volunteer and her team were visiting injured monastics in a hospital to offer comfort and convey the Master’s concern. Many monastics had been hurt in the quake. One monk, who had lost his left arm in the disaster, saw an image of Master Cheng Yen on a volunteer’s phone and, despite his pain, tried to stand and bow in respect.

At the time of the earthquake, more than a thousand monks were at U Hla Thein Monastery in Mandalay, sitting for a senior-level Buddhist examination. One of the monastery’s buildings collapsed during the tremor, trapping about 200 monks. It was later estimated that 80 lives were lost. The monk who lost his arm had been serving



as a chief examiner during the exam.

For many years, U Hla Maw—a 76-year-old longtime resident of the monastery—had helped prepare the exam site. He took pride in witnessing the emergence of a new generation of Dharma teachers each year. But this time, the memory of monks being carried out from the rubble remained vivid, filling him with deep sorrow.

It was against this backdrop that on April 17, the first day of the Burmese New Year, Tzu Chi volunteers and a local Dharma propagation association held a large-scale prayer and blessing ceremony at the monastery. A total of 550 monks from 34 monasteries participated.

Departing from tradition, in which monks typically face the congregation in such ceremonies, a

senior monk suggested they instead face the building behind which most of the casualties had occurred. Facing this site, the monks then led the public in chanting and prayer.

During their time in the disaster zone, volunteers often heard residents say, “I keep hearing voices crying for help.” In the hardest-hit areas, such cries had echoed for days after the quake, leaving a lingering sense of fear—one that may never have fully gone away, only pushed aside by the urgency to survive and rebuild.

The ceremony on April 17 held deep meaning for those attending. Community members prayed for lost loved ones, while monks offered chants for fellow practitioners and students who had passed away. Through this solemn Buddhist ritu-



Monks and members of the public take part in a prayer ceremony at U Hla Thein Monastery on April 17, the first day of the Burmese New Year. Around 80 monks who had been sitting for a religious exam at the monastery on the day of the quake lost their lives due to the disaster.

SAW THO HAN SAW

al, they honored the dead—and found a way to face their grief together.

Second phase

On April 27, Tzu Chi volunteers returned to the disaster area to carry out the second phase of relief efforts. This time, they conducted more detailed on-site assessments. They mapped the



Volunteers respectfully place daily necessities for monastics at U Hla Thein Monastery into bags.

WAI YAN HTUN

locations of damaged schools and monasteries and identified their specific needs.

In early May, a group of volunteers also traveled to Naypyidaw, Myanmar's capital, to meet with the Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture, U Tin Oo Lwin. Their goal was to gain a clearer understanding of the damage to pagodas or other religious sites and determine which areas were most in need of assistance. This would further inform the direction of Tzu Chi's ongoing support.

Between May 1 and 6, volunteers conducted 66 distribution events in the disaster area, delivering food, folding beds, and other supplies to monasteries, orphanages, and homes for the elderly. On May 6, the foundation held two free clinics—one at Nay Min Monastery and the other at Lay Kyun Man Aung Buddhist Teaching Monastery. Nay Min Monastery houses 300 students, many of whom were displaced by the civil conflict in the north. After the quake, they were forced to crowd onto a single floor, where the heat and cramped conditions led to widespread skin infections. Some of the young novice monks developed lesions that wouldn't heal due to constant scratching. In response, volunteers invited medical professionals to provide on-site treatment.

On May 8, a team of Malaysian volunteers arrived in Mandalay to prepare and begin construction of temporary classrooms for Mandalay Kongjiao School. Shortly after, starting on May 10, Tzu Chi launched another five-day rice distribution. The second phase of relief concluded on May 15, having brought not only practical aid but also comfort to communities still reeling from the disaster.



Every bit helps

“We’ve vowed to do our best to serve as the Master’s eyes, hands, and feet,” said volunteer Aye Nandar Aung, “and to carry out the love she wishes to give to everyone affected by the quake. To say we’re not tired would be dishonest, but we find deep Dharma joy in this work. Volunteering with Tzu Chi isn’t just about completing tasks—it’s about cultivating a heart of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.”

Whether speaking on camera or reporting at the Jing Si Abode, volunteers projected strength and optimism. But after witnessing so many broken families and irreplaceable cultural landmarks left in ruins, where could they place their sorrow?

“There was so much heartbreak,” said Daw Thida Khin. “Some lost their children. In the face of such impermanence, how can we provide comfort and solace? We just hope they find even a little peace in what we offer.” Perhaps this was where they placed it: by transforming sorrow into compassionate action.

According to the latest statistics, 200,000 people lost their homes in the earthquake. The road to recovery will be long. Of the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, commonly known as ASEAN, Myanmar ranks as the poorest, with average monthly incomes remaining low. Even the cost of demolishing a collapsed

Daw Thida Khin (second from left) and other volunteers discuss assistance for the reconstruction of religious sites with Myanmar’s Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture, U Tin Oo Lwin (second from right), on May 5. Many such structures were severely damaged in the earthquake.

SAW THO HAN SAW

building can be overwhelming, making the challenges of reconstruction all the more daunting.

And yet, they are not alone.

Donations have come in from around the world. Patients receiving free eye care at the Tzu Chi Eye Center in Manila, the Philippines, have contributed, as have children at the Tzu Chi school in the Dominican Republic and Syrian students long supported by Tzu Chi in Türkiye. Even volunteers in Zambia—where nearly 60 percent of the population lives below the absolute poverty line—have given what they could. No matter where the money comes from, it carries love and compassion, everyone giving with the hope to help Myanmar recover.

Each contribution, no matter how small, adds strength to the path of recovery. In the face of profound loss, the combined efforts of local communities and compassionate supporters worldwide can better help a devastated region move forward. ❀

2025 Myanmar Earthquake: Tzu Chi Emergency Relief

At 12:50 p.m. local time on March 28, a powerful earthquake struck near Mandalay, central Myanmar.

- Moment Magnitude: 7.7
- Depth: 10 kilometers
- Impact: 3,757 confirmed dead, 116 missing, 5,107 injured
- Displacement: 206,977 people lost their homes

Phase One of the Aid Effort: April 2–April 20

- Rice and cooking oil were provided to 11,818 households as food aid.
- A cash-for-work program created 1,342 work shifts to support the construction of temporary rain shelters.
- Emergency financial assistance reached 504 households.
- Medical supplies—including medicine, masks, and gloves—were delivered to four hospitals.
- Additional relief items included mosquito nets, tents, straw mats, folding beds, lighting kits, bottled water, bread, instant noodles, and more.

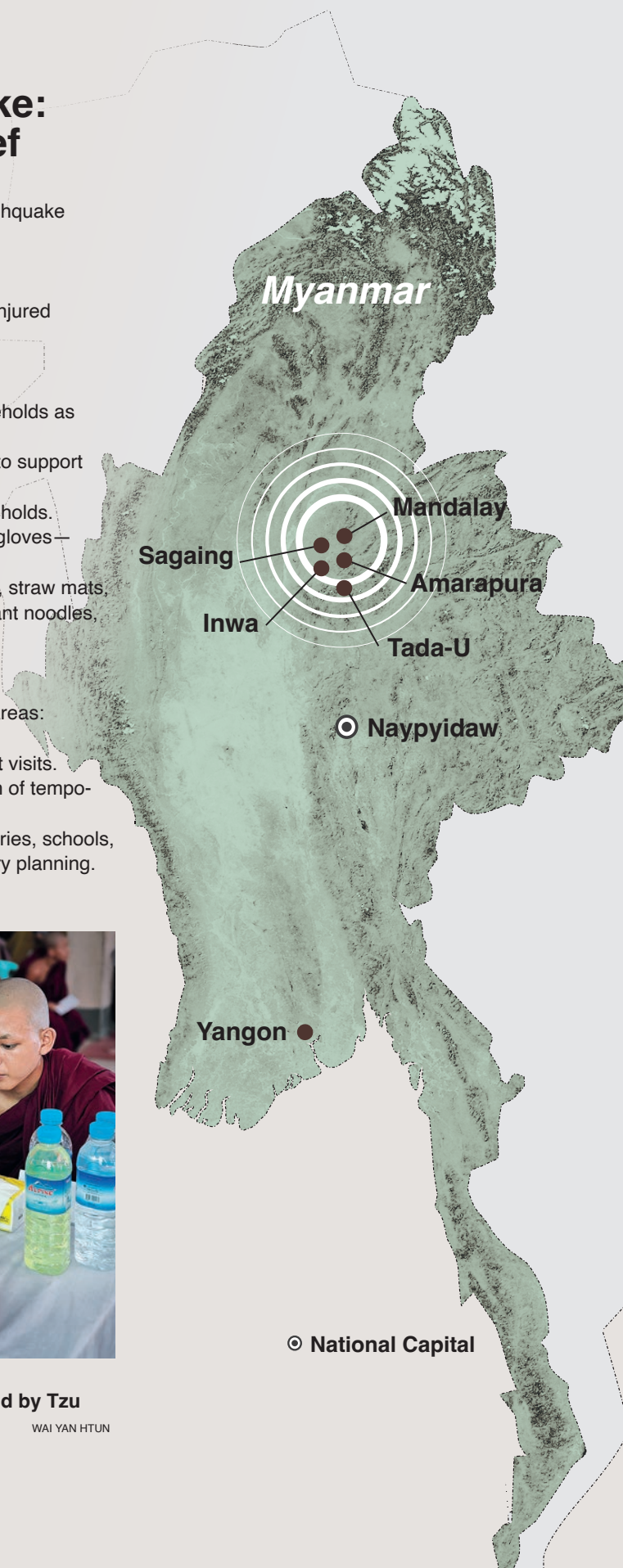
Phase Two of the Aid Effort: April 27–May 15

- Aid distributions focused on four severely affected areas: Sagaing, Amarapura, Tada-U, and Inwa.
- Free medical services were provided for 495 patient visits.
- A cash-for-work program supported the construction of temporary classrooms and housing.
- Damage assessments were conducted for monasteries, schools, and communities to guide mid- to long-term recovery planning.



A young monk seeks treatment at a free clinic held by Tzu Chi at Nay Min Monastery on May 6.

WAI YAN HTUN





Hope Rooted in Action

Ten Years in Sierra Leone

Compiled by *Tzu Chi Monthly* editorial staff

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi USA

Sierra Leone, one of the world's poorest nations, has seen a decade of collaboration between Tzu Chi and three nonprofit partners to aid the poor and vulnerable. Now, the focus is shifting toward self-sufficiency.

Volunteers from Tzu Chi's partner organizations in Sierra Leone lay stones over a muddy road to make it passable. In 2024, while delivering rice to the southeastern region, they encountered impassable roads due to heavy rain and had to find ways to continue their journey.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HUALIEN HEADQUARTERS





Passengers made their way to immigration after their plane touched down at Freetown International Airport in Sierra Leone. Among them was Tzu Chi USA volunteer Debra Boudreaux (曾慈慧), who noted the airport's fully computerized systems, electric baggage carousels, and jet bridges. Such features are standard at most modern airports but a clear sign of progress compared to what she had seen on earlier visits.

She recalled that during her first trip in 2016, the airport had no jet bridges and luggage was handled manually. Conditions beyond the airport also appeared underdeveloped. What struck her most on this visit, in February 2025, six years after her last in 2019, were the visible signs of development. "Many new buildings were going up," she said. "Nights were no longer pitch black but lit

Freetown faces the Atlantic Ocean and is bordered by mountains to the north and east. With an estimated population of over one million, the city faces housing shortages and inadequate infrastructure.

with lights, and local markets bustled with diverse activity. There has been progress in every aspect of daily life—food, clothing, housing, transportation, agriculture, and commerce. It may be slow, but it is real and visible."

Tzu Chi began its work in Sierra Leone in March 2015, responding to the Ebola outbreak by providing support to orphans, women, and people with disabilities. That effort sparked a decade-long partnership with local charitable organizations and sustained aid to various institutions.

Today, Tzu Chi maintains an office in the country, with staff representing the foundation in government meetings and emergency relief efforts.

In February 2025, Johan Alwall (歐友涵) and Chu Yu-jia (褚于嘉) from Tzu Chi's headquarters in Taiwan traveled over 14,000 kilometers (8,700 miles) to join Debra Boudreaux for a 15-day visit. Together, they met with local organizations and partners to reflect on the past ten years' work and plan for future collaboration.

Koindu

Tzu Chi's connection to Sierra Leone can be traced back to Koindu, an agricultural town in the eastern part of the country, near the Liberian and Guinean borders. Koindu was one of the first areas in the nation affected by the 2013 Ebola outbreak, which ultimately claimed more than 10,000 lives across the three countries.

The virus spread rapidly in Sierra Leone, exacerbated by a weak public health system, the practice of family members caring for the sick, and traditional customs such as washing the deceased. The country recorded the highest number of infections among the three nations. Thousands of children lost their parents, and fear of the highly lethal disease led to the stigmatization and rejection of survivors and victims' families by their own communities.

In 2015, Tzu Chi began working with Caritas Freetown and the Healey International Relief Foundation to distribute food, tableware, beds, blankets, and other supplies. The Lanyi Foundation joined in 2016. Each year, Tzu Chi applies to Taiwan's Ministry of Agriculture (formerly the Council of Agriculture) for humanitarian rice aid. Some of the rice is shipped to Sierra Leone for distribution, along with multigrain powder provided by the monastics at the Jing Si Abode, the Buddhist convent founded by Master Cheng Yen that also serves as the headquarters of Tzu Chi.

Koindu is about a five-hour drive from Freetown, including 52 kilometers (32 miles) of rough dirt roads that are difficult to navigate, even with a four-wheel-drive vehicle, and especially during the rainy season. In September 2024, when a Caritas team delivered aid there, their truck became stuck, stranding them there for three days. They ended up relying on motorcycles from nearby villages to transport the supplies.

During their drive to Koindu on this trip, the visiting Tzu Chi team noted clear signs of change. Infrastructure improvements tied to China's Belt and Road Initiative were helping connect villages

with better roads. Roadside vendors remained a familiar sight as they reached the outskirts of Koindu, but new additions included a police station and a mosque. Solar panels of various sizes dotted the landscape, providing electricity.

It was a Saturday, so children were not in school. Some played outside their thatched homes, while others helped their parents with chores. Goats roamed freely along dirt paths. Women gathered to weave crafts or mix sand and soil to make bricks, preparing to expand their homes. Nearby, a group of mechanics repaired motorcycles—the community's primary mode of transport. These scenes reflected signs of economic recovery in the impoverished village.

Although Koindu has nine public schools, many children orphaned by Ebola still face discrimination and are denied access to education. "What moved me most was Auntie Mary [Mary Sesay]," said Debra Boudreaux. "She founded an orphanage and a primary school to help these children rejoin society. Tzu Chi has supported the school since 2016 with rice and multigrain powder. The children are much healthier now."

Johan Alwall added that many orphans had been abandoned on the streets. Auntie Mary took it upon herself to find and care for them, ensuring they were fed and clothed, and placing them with foster families. Later, she even provided land for the construction of a school, which was named Smile With Us Primary School. During the team's visit, lessons written on the blackboard showed the students were receiving a solid education. One or two students were even pursuing university admission.

Victoria, a teacher at the school, is an Ebola survivor. Though she recovered physically, the trauma remains. Grateful for Tzu Chi's years of support, she became a volunteer. In 2018, she traveled to Taiwan and met Master Cheng Yen in person. She continues to carry the Master's words in her heart and does her best to serve her community. She hopes the villagers will cherish and make good use of the support they've received from Taiwan.

Helping slums

Another stop on the team's visit was Kroo Bay, an informal coastal settlement in Freetown. Although Kroo Bay is part of the capital, the team felt the air shift from comfortable to stifling upon entering the community, with a heat index well above 26°C (78.8°F). As they walked through tightly packed alleys, a mix of odors filled the air. The ground beneath their feet was not solid earth



but reclaimed land made from compacted waste, discarded clothing, and other debris—an area that continues to expand into the sea.

Over the past several years, Tzu Chi has provided assistance to three underserved communities in Freetown: Kroo Bay, Susan's Bay, and Dwarzark. Hot meals have been served after floods and fires, and cleanup efforts have helped remove garbage. Today, children can play and kick balls in open spaces once cluttered with trash. But challenges remain. Drainage ditches are still clogged with refuse, leading to flooding during the rainy season. Ongoing community involvement is needed to change habits, like littering.

When the team arrived at a football field in Kroo Bay, they were greeted with singing and dancing. In the community meeting hall, nearly 50 representatives from the three communities had gathered to express their gratitude for the long-standing support of Tzu Chi and Caritas. They highlighted the positive impact of flood-prevention cleanups, recycling programs, disaster relief, and firefighting training—efforts that have improved safety and hygiene in their communi-

Mobilized by Tzu Chi, Caritas, the Healey Foundation, and the Lanyi Foundation, residents in Kroo Bay clean up their community following flooding in August 2023.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HUALIEN HEADQUARTERS

ties. One notable result has been a significant reduction in diseases such as malaria and cholera. Community representatives voiced their hope to obtain machinery to compress recyclables into bales, creating at least one source of income. "Please don't give up on us," a representative said. "Give us a chance. One day, even a slum can become paradise."

The challenges faced by the three communities are much the same. Kroo Bay has a population of between 20,000 and 30,000 people, but there are no proper sanitation facilities—not even a single water tap. Susan's Bay is equally overcrowded, with most homes built from zinc sheets, mud, or concrete. It also lacks a drainage system. Although an organization once built public toilets and showers, they have largely fallen into disuse due to a lack of user knowledge and maintenance.



Fires also remain a serious hazard. In 2024, a devastating blaze in Susan's Bay left up to 300 households homeless. Dwarzark, built on a hillside, similarly faces persistent fire risk.

The Tzu Chi team met with Freetown Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr following the visit. They discussed potential strategies for improving these communities in line with the city's broader urban development plans.

Buying rice locally

To help reduce Sierra Leone's dependence on food imports, Tzu Chi began purchasing locally grown rice in 2022 to supplement its relief distributions. In 2024, for example, 600 tons of rice were donated from Taiwan, but an additional 230 tons were sourced locally.

This local procurement effort led Tzu Chi to become the first major buyer from the Takakleneh Women Farmers' Association in Kambia, a district in North West Province bordering Guinea. The association, led by Isata Feika Sessy, includes 300 women and 150 men engaged in farming. The farmers expressed gratitude to the visiting Tzu

Fire victims gather for a hot meal distribution organized by Tzu Chi USA and Caritas Freetown after a March 2023 blaze in Susan's Bay left 7,000 people homeless.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI HUALIEN HEADQUARTERS

Chi team for the foundation's support, which has not only provided a stable source of income but also contributed to broader community development. Thatch roofs have been replaced with durable zinc sheets, and traditional farming practices have given way to mechanization. With greater income stability, the farmers now manage their earnings more strategically, saving some in banks for future investments and using the rest for daily expenses, education, and medical care. The government even plans to install solar-powered irrigation systems to further boost agricultural productivity. Together, these improvements have strengthened the farmers' confidence in their ability to become self-reliant.

The Tzu Chi team also paid a visit to the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs. Minister Dr. Isata Mahoi affirmed that Tzu Chi's



food aid has supported orphanages, temporary care centers, and schools for children with special needs. She also highlighted the foundation's assistance to survivors of sexual violence, ensuring they receive essential care and support.

In another meeting, this time with officials from the national school feeding program under the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, officials shared updates on an initiative carried out in cooperation with Tzu Chi. Since 2018, Tzu Chi has partnered with the government to provide free lunches to students. To date, the program has benefited approximately 20,000 underprivileged students at 70 schools across 15 districts outside Freetown, including 500 children with special education needs.

Father Peter Konteh, executive director of Caritas Freetown, observed that hunger severely affects a child's ability to learn. He commended the lunch program as reflecting the compassionate philosophy of Master Cheng Yen, who encourages volunteers to serve hot meals after major disasters—to warm hearts and restore strength. Father Peter also praised the multigrain powder

Tzu Chi and its partners have long provided supplies—such as multigrain powder, rice, eco-friendly blankets, and shoes—to institutions like the St. George's Foundation Orphanage in Freetown, helping orphans and individuals with disabilities.

provided by Tzu Chi, pointing out its popularity among orphans, elderly residents in nursing homes, and youths in juvenile rehabilitation centers. Most notably, the powder is lovingly prepared by nuns at the Jing Si Abode, making it a gift imbued with unmatched compassion.

Each is vital

Tzu Chi has worked hand in hand with Caritas, the Lanyi Foundation, and the Healey Foundation for about a decade, with each partner organization contributing to different areas of need.

Caritas has long been active in Freetown, offering a wide range of services, including case management, charitable visits, crop cultivation, and disaster preparedness education in underserved



communities. It also assists with customs clearance for rice shipped from Taiwan and compiles recipient lists for distributions.

The Healey Foundation focuses primarily on medical support. In partnership with Tzu Chi, it provides midwife training that requires participants to pass certification exams. Ninety-four individuals took part in the training in 2024 alone. With support from Sierra Leone's Ministry of Health and Sanitation, the program has helped reduce infant mortality caused by inadequate postnatal care. Plans are underway to expand the training to more remote areas.

The Lanyi Foundation leads vocational training for women and promotes local agriculture. In Bo, Southern Province, it has partnered with Tzu Chi for years to support women with disabilities through initiatives such as sewing classes. With this training, participants have learned to use manual and treadle sewing machines to make everyday clothing and now mass-produce reusable sanitary pads in various sizes, demonstrating remarkable progress toward self-sufficiency.

Together with its local partners, Tzu Chi pro-

The Tzu Chi and the Lanyi Foundations have for years supported women with disabilities in Bo, Southern Province. Through sewing classes, participants have learned to make everyday clothing and now produce reusable sanitary pads at scale.

vided over 240,000 instances of aid in 2024 alone. Boudreaux described the partnership as "a chair with four legs, each one indispensable." They ensure that the love and care of Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi volunteers reach those in need, following the principles of timeliness, prioritization, directness, respect, and practicality.

As the partnership enters its 11th year, how can this spirit of care be sustained? "The most essential thing is to inspire goodness in more people," Boudreaux said. "That way, everyone becomes a part of caring for their community."

Building local capacity

Despite many areas of progress, the country still faces significant challenges. For example, an estimated 12,000 orphans, 7,000 widows, and

5,000 impoverished Ebola survivors remain in need. Tzu Chi continues to provide food aid and has helped more than 700 orphans pursue education or join foster families.

During its first decade in Sierra Leone, Tzu Chi focused primarily on providing aid after disasters, including the Ebola outbreak and devastating floods and landslides. Now entering its second decade, the foundation is shifting toward cultivating local capacity and fostering long-term resilience. More than 30 local volunteers have already joined the foundation to support its work.

Looking ahead, Boudreaux shared that Tzu Chi will continue organizing community cleanups to remove litter and prevent clogged drainage ditches, helping to reduce flooding during the

rainy season. “We’ll also continue empowering women farmers, supporting people with disabilities through craftmaking, and purchasing rice locally—these are all part of our ongoing and future efforts,” she said.

Johan Alwall noted during their visit that everyone they met who had received Tzu Chi’s assistance shared a common aspiration: to become self-reliant and give back by helping others. From Ebola survivors and women farmers to government officials, people are working hard to build a better future. “Tzu Chi and its partners are helping to bring about meaningful change,” he said. “My heartfelt thanks go to all Tzu Chi volunteers and members of the public for their continued love and support for Sierra Leone.”



Tzu Chi’s Humanitarian Efforts in Sierra Leone

A Glimpse into Sierra Leone

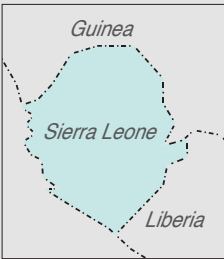
As of 2024, Sierra Leone has an estimated population of 8.6 million. A significant portion of the population continues to live below the poverty line. Infrastructure remains inadequate, and the country relies heavily on imported food to meet basic needs.

How Tzu Chi Began Its Aid

In December 2013, the deadliest Ebola outbreak in history began in Guinea and quickly spread to neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone. The epidemic, which lasted until 2016, overwhelmed the public health systems of all three countries. In response, the Tzu Chi Foundation launched humanitarian operations in Sierra Leone in 2015, providing aid to survivors and children orphaned by the disease—many of whom were stigmatized and ostracized by their communities.

Tzu Chi’s Work in Sierra Leone

Since then, Tzu Chi has worked closely with three NGOs. Their efforts have included distributing food and essential supplies, providing emergency relief after major disasters, organizing community cleanups to reduce flood risk, constructing water and sanitation facilities, and offering vocational training such as sewing programs to help people build sustainable livelihoods.



⦿ National Capital ⦿ Major City

Nursing at the Edge of Life

Narrated by Wang Yi-qin, deputy head nurse at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital

Compiled by Cai Jia-qi

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Painting by Wen Mu

The intensive care unit (ICU) is a truly unique place, where each day reveals both the strength and fragility of human life. Here, some patients lie unconscious. Others awaken as if by a miracle. Some have their loved ones holding their hands as they take their final breaths, deeply cherished and destined to be dearly missed. In this space, death isn't a headline—it's part of a daily reality.

For us ICU nurses, becoming familiar with death doesn't mean growing numb. On the contrary, it teaches us to treasure every breath, every moment we can open our eyes and speak. I remember caring for a man in his 80s. He was intubated and unable to speak, yet his eyes conveyed a powerful desire to live. I also looked after a young father in his 30s who, despite multiple organ failures, fought on for nearly three weeks before passing. As we help our patients walk the fine line between life and death, we come to feel the weight of each life we encounter. We are reminded that the goal is not to fear dying, but to live more fully and sincerely.

After nearly a decade in this field, I've come to deeply understand just how vital and interconnected the ICU is. A well-functioning ICU depends on close collaboration across departments. Doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, social workers, and dietitians all play essential, interconnected roles. We rely on mutual trust and timely communication to provide the best possible care.

Nurses serve as the team's messengers. Because we're closest to the patients, we can



detect even subtle changes and quickly relay urgent information. We're not only a bridge between the medical team and the patient—we're also an emotional anchor for patients and their families. In the ICU, we accompany families through countless nights, staying by their side as they move from denial to grief, and eventually to peace and acceptance.

Since becoming a nursing supervisor, I've gained an even deeper appreciation for what makes a strong nursing team. It's not just about expertise and experience—it's about the ability to respect and support one another under pressure. I've seen colleagues who, even in the midst of chaos and demanding situations, find the gentleness to soothe patients with soft, reassuring words, and the steadiness to stand firm in their duty to care. I take great pride in them.

To all the nurses serving on the front lines: I want to express my heartfelt gratitude and deep respect. You carry the weight of life in your hands and protect each fragile hope with love and devotion. What you do may not always be seen by the public, but I believe it is held with lasting gratitude in the hearts of those you care for. May we all continue on this path of nursing with strength, compassion, and courage. ❀

Handrails of Love

By Zhang Yu-fen

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Yang Shun-bin

Going from home to home, Tzu Chi volunteers do more than install safety equipment—they bring care and connection.

I received a message from my Tzu Chi team leader, Sister Huang Feng-zhu (黃鳳珠), which read: “Master Cheng Yen, the monastics at the Jing Si Abode, and our local Changhua chapter are all concerned about the safety of senior volunteers in their homes. To help prevent accidents, handrails can be installed free of charge for those aged 65 and older. This will also help bring peace of mind to children living and working away from home.”

After discussing it with my husband, we politely declined the offer, as we felt we didn’t need the installation just yet.

But a week later, Sister Feng-zhu enthusiastically followed up and asked me to send her our address so volunteers could come and install the handrails. I told my husband that the team was planning to come. He asked, “Do we have to pay for it?” I said, “No, it’s free.” He murmured, “Really? They’re offering that for free?” I replied, “I wouldn’t mind if we had to pay. But since it doesn’t cost us anything, we can always donate the same amount instead.”

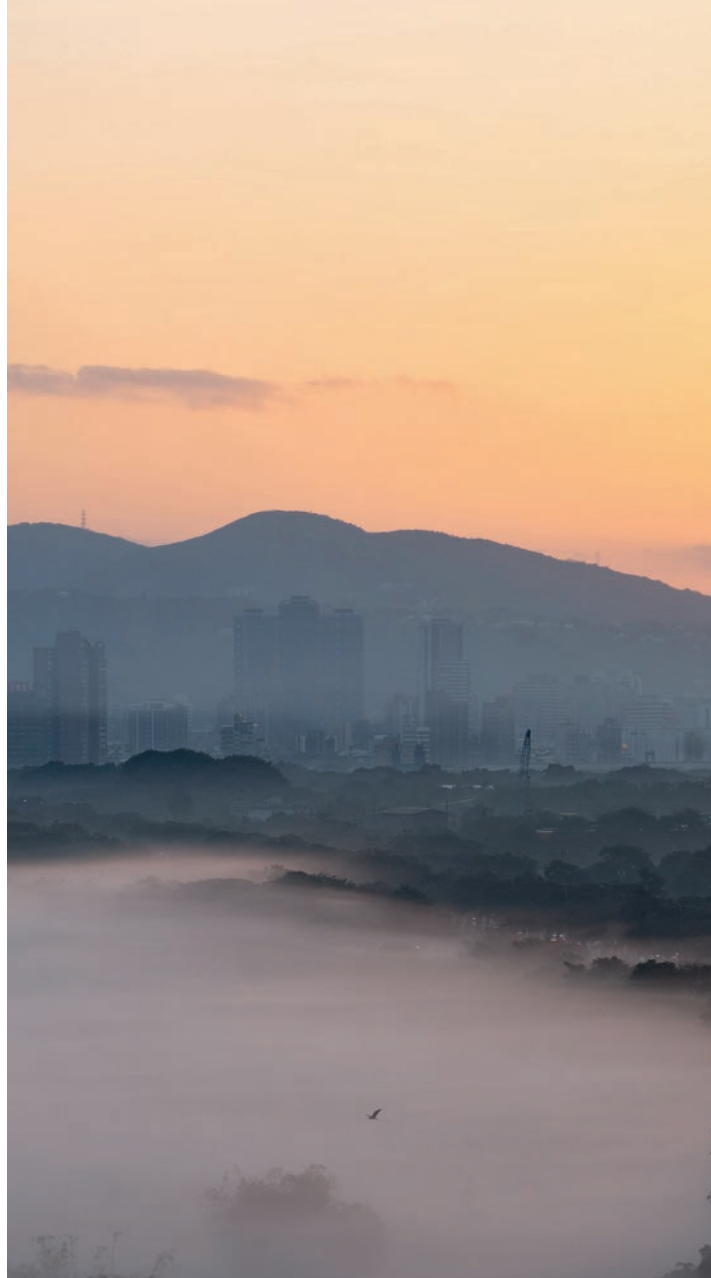
Not long after, three Tzu Chi brothers—Chen Guo-zheng (陳國政), Shi Yi-liang (施宜良), and Zheng Kun-yang (鄭坤楊)—arrived at our home to assess the site. As they measured, they also took photos. We learned later that, after leaving our place, they still had to visit 15 more volunteers’ homes that day. Their dedication and enthusiasm deeply impressed my husband.

I’m sincerely grateful to team leaders Sister Zheng Jia-zi (鄭佳子) and Sister Feng-zhu for staying in close contact with everyone during this

time. They patiently coordinated and adjusted the installation schedule according to each person’s needs. It took a lot of effort to make everything come together!

On the day of the installation, Brother Guo-zheng arrived in an SUV packed with tools and materials. We helped him move the heavy equipment into the living room. He got right to work, installing handrails in three locations and adding anti-slip strips to the stairs, while I assisted him.

He worked skillfully with a range of tools. He said with a smile, “In Tzu Chi, you learn so many things along the way—even if you didn’t know anything about them at first.” He had started out helping others install handrails, buying his own tools just in case he needed them. Over time, he





became a main installer, not only serving fellow volunteers, but also helping people in need. He has completed over 700 installations to date.

Brother Guo-zheng shared that many volunteers were curious about why Master Cheng Yen initiated this handrail project. She has always cared deeply about the well-being of volunteers and is mindful that many are growing older and need safer living environments. Even though some can no longer serve actively, she remembers their past contributions. This thoughtful gesture has deeply moved many senior volunteers.

On a typical installation day, Brother Guo-zheng heads out at 7:30 a.m. and works until around 6 p.m., completing as many as 30 installations in a single day. After he finished the work at

our home and left, my husband shared his thoughts with me: “Brother Guo-zheng is truly admirable. He runs his own business, yet still dedicates so much time and energy to Tzu Chi—and does it with such joy.” I replied, “Yes! And he’s formed so many good affinities through the work he does. His days are full and fulfilling.”

Our volunteers truly embody this aphorism from the Master: “The value of life lies in every moment—in seizing each one to move in the right direction and do what is right.”

To me, Tzu Chi is a truly beautiful group. Learning goodness, cultivating kindness, and practicing love—these are the principles that guide us daily. I feel so fortunate to walk this path with Tzu Chi. How about you? ❀

Ismahan Goes Home

From Jordan to Syria

Text and photo by Lamiya Lin

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Though Ar-Ramtha, in northern Jordan, is just a 30-minute drive from Daraa, Syria, Ismahan Al Masri had waited over a decade to return. She kept the grief of losing her son buried deep within, carried the beauty she had found in a foreign land, and returned to Syria with a mission.

“We packed all the beautiful things given to us during our time in exile—gifts from friends, from our dear family, and from the compassionate Master Cheng Yen herself,” said 62-year-old Ismahan Al Masri, gazing at the belongings that filled a truck. Though the future of her war-scarred homeland remained uncertain, she looked forward to going back to Syria without fear, bringing all the love she had received in a foreign land with her.

The 13-year Syrian civil war ended on December 8, 2024, bringing a long-awaited glimmer of hope to more than ten million people displaced by the conflict. On April 19, 2025, Ismahan’s family joined the growing number of returnees. Eight family members spanning four generations departed from Ar-Ramtha, a northern border city in Jordan, and headed for Daraa in southern Syria. The group included Ismahan, her husband, Mousa, her elderly parents, her daughter-in-law, and her grandchildren.

Tzu Chi volunteers in Jordan, holding back their emotions, accompanied the family to the Jaber border crossing. “The first thing I want to do when I get home is visit my son’s grave,” said Ismahan. “I want to see my son.”

A better next chapter

The war started on March 18, 2011. Ismahan and her husband fled to Ar-Ramtha with their family in late 2012. Their eldest son, Ali, later returned to Syria to take up arms. Sadly, he was killed in battle on September 28, 2013. “That day, my heart was buried with him,” Ismahan said. Her grief was immeasurable.

As waves of displaced Syrian families poured into Jordan after the war erupted, Tzu Chi launched relief efforts to support the refugees, providing essentials, education assistance, medical aid, and winter fuel subsidies. In 2016, Chen Chiou Hwa (陳秋華), head of Tzu Chi Jordan, and other volunteers knocked on Ismahan’s door, bringing love with them. They offered not only long-term material support but also a path toward healing.

A gifted writer like her father, Musa Al Masri, Ismahan channeled her gratitude for Master Cheng Yen and the volunteers into poetry and prose. Her writing became not only a way for her

Ismahan and her family are welcomed home by their extended family upon returning to Syria.

COURTESY OF ISMAHAN AL MASRI





Tzu Chi volunteers gather with Ismahan and her family on the day of their return to Syria.

to heal, but also a source of comfort and inspiration for other refugee mothers coping with grief.

Then came another trial: a severe bout of COVID-19. Tzu Chi provided her with an oxygen concentrator and medication, helping her recover. Her gratitude for the foundation only deepened.

Together with fellow Syrian Elham Aljawabra, Ismahan trained as a Tzu Chi volunteer and assisted with free clinics and winter aid distributions for refugees in Ar-Ramtha. But through it all, her heart remained in Syria, with her son Ali. When the war finally ended, her thoughts turned homeward.

Early on the morning of the day the family was set to depart, Elham, Jordanian Tzu Chi volunteers Khader Khalifeh and Lamiya Lin (林綠卿), and Syrian volunteer Mohamed Khir Alriz rushed from Amman to Ar-Ramtha to see them off, cherishing this final moment together before the family's long-awaited return.

"Thank Allah, today we're going home," said

Ismahan. "I know we might be surprised or even shocked when we arrive, but I believe we'll also find joy." She was apprehensive yet hopeful. Much had been lost, but she still held on to hope for the future: "We've already endured so much. I'm looking forward to a better next chapter."

Following the Master's teachings

As they prepared to return home, everyone busied themselves loading furniture and daily essentials onto a large truck, which now held more than ten years' worth of belongings and memories. Before long, Ismahan's once warm and cozy home stood empty. She felt a swirl of emotions—sadness, gratitude, anticipation—but she knew the time had come. No matter where life took her, she would continue to follow Master

Cheng Yen's teachings, letting love guide her way. "Dear Compassionate Master," said Ismahan, "we will bring your teachings back to our country. We will be your hands to help suffering people in Syria, just as you have helped us."

Volunteer Khader struck up a conversation with the truck driver and learned that he had traveled between Ar-Ramtha and Daraa many times since the war had ended, helping Syrians return home. Ar-Ramtha is only a 30-minute drive from Daraa, but for the returning families, the journey marked the fulfillment of years of longing.

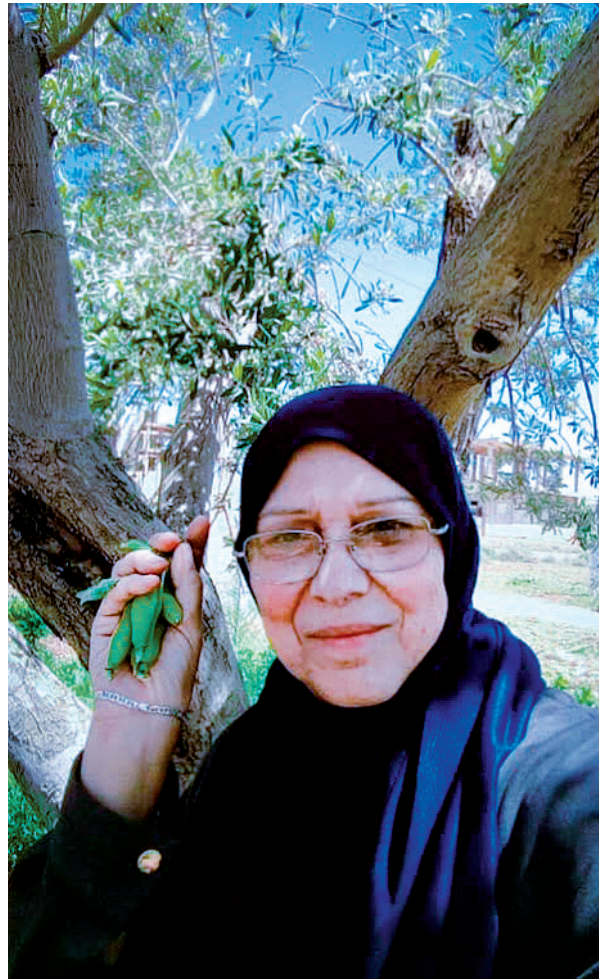
When everything was ready, the truck slowly pulled away, followed closely by the volunteers in their cars. Supplies were limited in post-war Syria, and the economic situation was dire. One Jordanian dinar, for instance, was worth about 15,000 Syrian lira. Given this reality, the family brought as much as they could: drinking water, bread, sugar, and other essentials. Even a refrigerator and gas stove were strapped to the roof of the truck. Ismahan's younger son, 33-year-old Mohammad, planned to stay behind in Jordan for another month to work and pay off debts. He packed a large bag of bread for his mother to take home.

The group made a quick stop at Ismahan's parents' house to pick them up. Ismahan's 87-year-old father, Musa, was blind. She gently whispered to him, "Tzu Chi volunteers are here to see us off." At these words, Musa burst into tears. Over the years in Jordan, Tzu Chi had helped cover their rent and medical bills, and monthly visits from volunteers had eased their loneliness. The bond that had formed between them was like that of a family. Out of gratitude, Musa said again and again to the volunteers, "May Allah bless you all with good luck and keep you healthy and safe." His words moved everyone to tears.

In Tzu Chi's name

As Jordan's National Day on May 25 approached, the streets were decked with fluttering Jordanian flags. Ismahan's heart was full of gratitude for the country that had given her family—and so many other Syrians—sanctuary and humanitarian aid.

Elham was happy to see the family off, but she couldn't help voicing her concerns: "My brother and his family returned to Syria ten days ago. Life there isn't easy. He already regrets leaving Jordan. The situation is still unstable; there was even an explosion on the very day they arrived."



Ismahan holds plump bean pods in her hand at her brother's home, wearing a gentle smile that reflects her hope for the future.

COURTESY OF ISMAHAN AL MASRI

She explained that their hometown had no reliable electricity or running water—just an hour and a half of electricity each day. The war's destruction was visible everywhere, and jobs were scarce. With no basic infrastructure and no essential systems in place, Elham had decided to stay in Jordan a while longer.

When the group reached the Jaber border crossing, Mohammad stepped out to present his family's refugee documents and process their exit paperwork. Volunteer Mohamed, himself a Syrian refugee, stood nearby, overcome with conflicting emotions. "Today is both joyful and sorrowful," he said. "Joyful, because they're finally returning home. Sorrowful, because we don't know when we'll meet again." Still, he gave thanks to Allah,

and also to Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi for helping and protecting the family. “May Allah bless Tzu Chi and the Master,” he said. “Now that Ismahan and her family are crossing the border, I pray that everything goes smoothly and safely.”

Hugs and kisses followed. Ismahan made a heartfelt pledge through her tears: “No matter where we are, we will follow in Tzu Chi’s footsteps. I’ve saved every envelope that held Tzu Chi’s monthly relief funds. I’ll keep using them—to give in Tzu Chi’s name and help others.”

She had packed those envelopes in her luggage, along with her Tzu Chi trainee volunteer uniform. Eyes glistening, she told the volunteers, “I’ll wear my uniform in Syria when I go out to do good deeds. What Allah gives me, I’ll share with

the poor, in the name of our beloved Master. I’m so grateful to be part of the Tzu Chi family. In our most difficult time, we found kinship with you.” No words could fully capture her love for Tzu Chi and Master Cheng Yen.

The family finally crossed into Syria. Everyone in Jordan waited anxiously for news. An hour later, Ismahan sent a message. They had arrived safely in Daraa. Surrounded by relatives, they had shared lunch together.

For now, they were staying at her brother’s home. The broad bean plants on his property were already in season. Ismahan sent a photo back of herself, standing outside holding plump bean pods in her hand. With the sky blue and clear, she wore a gentle smile, radiating hope for the future. ❀

Tzu Chi’s Support for Syrian Refugees in Jordan

Up to one million Syrian refugees sought shelter in Jordan after the Syrian civil war broke out in March 2011. Tzu Chi has remained a steady source of support for refugees throughout the humanitarian crisis.

- Winter 2011: Tzu Chi volunteers in Amman carried out their first aid distribution in Mafraq, northern Jordan.
- 2012: The Aid for Syrian Refugees project was officially launched, providing essential supplies—including blankets, food, formula, and clothing—in Ar-Ramtha, just five kilometers (3.1 miles) from the Syrian border.
- 2014: Free clinics and surgical subsidies were introduced, expanding the scope of assistance.

Although the civil war in Syria ended in late 2024, Tzu Chi has continued to offer charitable, medical, and educational support to refugee families, demonstrating a lasting commitment to their well-being.



Finding Strength in Teaching

By Monica Chang

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Monica Chang

*Displaced by war, they found refuge in Poland, where they share their expertise
to light the way for fellow Ukrainians.*



Adam Mickiewicz University and Tzu Chi organized the inaugural session of the medical Polish language course in Poznań in 2023. Among the Ukrainian medical professionals who took part, 11 passed the final exam and received certificates jointly issued by the university and the foundation. With recommendations from Poland's employment services department, they became eligible to practice legally in the country.

“These classes aren’t just about learning. They’re a reminder that you’re not alone,” said Łukasz Baranowski, a Tzu Chi volunteer in Poland. His words capture a deeper meaning behind the vocational courses offered to Ukrainian refugees.

Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced across Europe since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Poland, one of the main host countries, has sheltered many refugees. In Poznań, a major city in western Poland, Tzu Chi has supported more than 20 courses for Ukrainian refugees for over two years, providing classrooms, equipment, and materials to help them rebuild their lives.

The courses include Polish, English, digital skills, entrepreneurship, art therapy, and counseling. They are taught free of charge by Ukrainian volunteers. Formerly teachers, lawyers, musi-

cians, or artists, these volunteers use their knowledge and experience to guide and uplift fellow refugees, helping them find their footing in a foreign land. Weekly attendance across all classes totals over a thousand.

Aid starts with respect

The Russia-Ukraine war triggered a humanitarian crisis affecting much of Europe. Dharma Master Cheng Yen attentively tracked developments after the war started, while Tzu Chi’s char-

The Tzu Chi office in Poznań offers a range of classes for Ukrainian refugees. Here, retired Ukrainian university associate professor Olena Mladzievska leads a children’s choir class, using music as a form of healing.



ity mission quickly began to organize a response. Just four days after the invasion, Monica Chang (張淑兒) and her husband, Łukasz Baranowski, contacted Tzu Chi. Chang is originally from Taiwan and a former employee of Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV. The couple, residents of Poznań, wanted to help the rising number of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland. On March 5, they launched the foundation's first local distribution.

Within three months, Tzu Chi had carried out dozens of distributions, providing over 30,000 aid packages to newly arrived Ukrainian families. "At first, we distributed goods we had purchased," Baranowski recalled. "But we soon ran into problems. People would ask for items like underwear, socks, or other personal necessities that we hadn't included. That's when we realized that no matter how well we prepared, we couldn't meet every-

one's individual needs."

"Respect is the starting point of Tzu Chi's relief work," Chang added. She explained that Master Cheng Yen has long emphasized a compassionate approach—one that not only provides material aid but also maintains respect and human dignity.

To better serve displaced Ukrainians, Tzu Chi adopted a method used in previous relief efforts in the U.S., Mexico, and other countries: distributing gift cards. These allowed recipients to purchase what they needed most from designated retailers. Between May and July, Tzu Chi volunteers from more than a dozen countries helped distribute over 23,000 gift cards—each worth about 2,000 Polish zlotys (US\$450)—across five Polish cities: Warsaw, Poznań, Opole, Lublin, and Szczecin. This approach, which offered families both flexibility and dignity, was warmly wel-

Ongoing Tzu Chi Relief for Ukrainians at Home and Abroad

Tzu Chi launched humanitarian relief efforts following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The foundation continued its support for refugee families across several Polish cities in 2023 and 2024, providing over 30,000 instances of aid annually.

Within Ukraine, Tzu Chi began working with the Lithuanian charitable organization Food for Ukraine on April 1, 2023, to distribute food packages. During the first two years of the partnership, the focus was on orphans, children with disabilities, the elderly, and families displaced by the war in areas around Kyiv—reaching more than 100,000 instances of aid. In 2025, the initiative expanded to include additional affected regions such as Sumy, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Odesa.

Under this partnership, Food for Ukraine is responsible for coordination, procurement, and transportation. The supermarket chain Novus provides warehouse storage, while the Red Cross delivers the food packages to those in need. (Source: Tzu Chi Foundation)



comed by local communities.

Six months into the war, Tzu Chi shifted from emergency relief to long-term support. Starting in August 2022, Tzu Chi Poznań expanded its assistance to Ukrainian families, including free dental care in partnership with Professor Karolina Anna Garreth at a hospital affiliated with the Poznań University of Medical Sciences; medical Polish language courses in collaboration with Adam Mickiewicz University to help Ukrainian doctors seek employment in local hospitals; vocational training for adults to improve job prospects; and art therapy and preschool education for children. These efforts have helped many Ukrainian families begin rebuilding stable lives in Poland. In 2024, alongside ongoing gift card distributions, Tzu Chi introduced medical allowance cards to help low-income Polish and Ukrainian families afford essential medications.

Olena Viktorova, a secondary school English teacher from Lviv in western Ukraine, arrived in Poznań with her two children and just two suitcases. “I thought I would never again stand in front of a class,” she said. “So when a volunteer asked me, ‘Would you be willing to help other mothers learn English?’ I burst into tears and said yes.”

Today, she teaches adult English classes twice a week at the Tzu Chi Poznań office. Some of her students are in their 40s or 50s and have never studied a foreign language before. “This isn’t just an English class; it’s a space for them to rediscover their courage,” she said with a smile. Her students learn how to write résumés in English, prepare for job interviews, and express their aspirations.

Art teacher Yulia Tkachuk helps children process trauma through acrylic paint and imagination. A former lecturer at an art institute in eastern Ukraine, she specialized in industrial design and contemporary aesthetics. Now in Poznań, she guides children as they paint flowers that grow in their homeland, memories and scenes of the war, and visions of the homes they long for. “These children don’t speak,” she said, “but through their art, they’re telling us: they’re still here.”

The most popular course

Olena Mladzievska is a retired associate professor from the Faculty of Culture and Arts at Kherson State University in Ukraine. Her husband was a shipbuilder. In April 2022, Russian forces occupied their city, Kherson. Although it was retaken nine months later, the city was left in ruins. The couple drove 18 kilometers (11 miles) through a perilous area, navigating streets in utter

darkness and dodging shellfire, before finally boarding a refugee bus to Poland. Once they had arrived, there was little relief—only silent exhaustion and deep anxiety about the future. Displacement, financial hardship, and uncertainty turned each day into a new struggle.

In Poznań, Mladzievska began teaching vocal performance, piano, and musical theater at the Tzu Chi office. The children in her classes had endured war-related trauma similar to her own; some had stopped speaking, while others were terrified of sound, haunted by the relentless explosions etched into their young minds. “The sadness in their eyes is unmistakable,” Mladzievska said, choking up. “But when they begin to sing, something stirs inside them. They remember what joy feels like.”

She prepares all her teaching materials on her own time and never asks for anything in return. “I once had everything and lost it all,” she said. “But at Tzu Chi, I feel like a teacher again. I feel useful.”

While helping others, many volunteer teachers also learn to rebuild their own lives. Math teacher Tetyana Fedartsova teaches Ukrainian children how to solve equations while learning Polish herself. Computer skills instructor Iryna Grechana writes lesson plans after her children go to sleep, helping middle-aged and older mothers learn to create résumés and send emails. These practical skills have become tools not just for helping others, but also for creating stability in their own lives.

“I teach my students how to find work,” said one volunteer teacher. “But in truth, I’m also learning how to live again.” Reflecting on this, Monica Chang noted, “This isn’t just one-way charity—it’s mutual support. By teaching others, they’re also rebuilding their own strength.”

Oksana, a single mother of four, enrolled in Tzu Chi’s Google Digital Tools course, where she learned office software and remote work skills to prepare for freelancing from home. “Tzu Chi didn’t just teach me skills,” she said. “They helped me believe in myself again.” Now, she volunteers with Tzu Chi to give back and has become a role model for other Ukrainian mothers.

Among the various offerings, the Entrepreneurship course has proven especially popular. It’s taught by Kateryna Volotkovych, a Ukrainian lawyer who had already been practicing law in Poland before the war and founded her own law firm in Poznań. Well-versed in both the Ukrainian and Polish legal systems, Volotkovych offers free



classes at Tzu Chi Poznań every week. She teaches students how to write business plans, analyze market risks, understand Polish startup regulations, and apply for subsidies. She also provides one-on-one legal consultations.

"Many people think they have nothing," she said. "But what they really need is just a starting point."

Assisting in flood relief

Having fled the devastation of war, Tzu Chi's Ukrainian volunteers, like the teachers mentioned above, have gradually rebuilt their confidence and regained a sense of purpose by helping others. In doing so, they have not only helped fellow refugees find a path to a new life, but also brought their spirit of sincere humanity to Polish society.

In April this year, Tzu Chi distributed gift cards to 700 households affected by flooding in Głucholazy and Lewin Brzeski, two towns in southwestern Poland. Notably, around 80 percent of the volunteers helping on-site were Ukrainians.

Ukrainian volunteers currently living in Warsaw assist at a Tzu Chi distribution for flood victims in southwestern Poland in April, giving back in gratitude for the kindness they received from the Polish people.

MONICA CHANG

They had traveled from Warsaw, Poznań, and Lublin to take part. Ukrainian volunteers have become an essential force in Tzu Chi's charitable work in Poland.

To this day, relentless bombings continue to bring death and destruction to Ukraine, while displaced families abroad carry deep psychological wounds. Yet within Tzu Chi, there is a source of healing—people are offered not only food, shelter, and medical care, but most importantly, love.

As Olena Mladzievska described, "This is a place where pain and sorrow are transformed into care and warmth. Every act of kindness helps mend a broken spirit. I lost my home, but here, I found a family."

Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School

Be the Wind That Lifts Others

By Wei Yu-xian and Jiang Yu-ping

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Jiang Yu-ping

Over the past two decades, 3,000 students have graduated from Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School in northern Thailand. The school's aim is not merely to help its students fly high, but to help them fly far, fly steadily—and become the wind that lifts others.

It was a tragic chapter in history, born out of the upheaval of a turbulent era. In 1949, after the Nationalist government retreated from China to Taiwan following its defeat by the Chinese Communists, a unit of the Nationalist army—composed primarily of soldiers from Yunnan, southwestern China—moved to the northern border of Myanmar and continued their fight. They eventually retreated into the mountains of northern Thailand and settled there.

Scattered across the hills, these soldiers and their families built villages made up of thatched huts and stilt houses. Inside, a few hardwood benches and basic cooking utensils comprised the entirety of their possessions. Without Thai citizenship, they lived as stateless refugees, unable to seek legal employment. Their survival depended on small-scale farming on poor soil, which yielded little. The villages lacked even the most basic services—no electricity, running water, or medical care.

In early 1994, John Chiang (蔣孝嚴), then

Minister of Taiwan's Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (now the Overseas Community Affairs Council), visited Dharma Master Cheng Yen at the Jing Si Abode in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. He explained that the Taiwanese government's aid program for the refugees in northern Thailand would end later that year and appealed to Tzu Chi to take over the support efforts. In response, Tzu Chi dispatched assessment teams on two separate occasions to conduct on-site evaluations. The following year, the foundation launched a three-year assistance program that included building homes, offering agricultural guidance, and providing care for the veterans.

Through this work, the foundation came to recognize the vital role of education in improving long-term prospects for local children. Consequently, at the end of the three-year program—and while continuing support for the veterans—Tzu Chi embarked on a project to build a school in Fang District, Chiang Mai.



Construction of the elementary division of Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School began on April 27, 2002, on land provided by the local government. The school officially opened on May 16, 2005, becoming Tzu Chi's first overseas school. By 2013, it had expanded to offer a full curriculum from first grade through high school. Although located in a remote mountain area, the school offers trilingual instruction in Thai, Chinese, and English, equipping students with the skills needed to engage with the international community. The school now has over 80 teachers and more than 1,100 students. Over 3,000 students have graduated from the school in its 20 years of operation.

From student to entrepreneur

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Tzu Chi's work in northern Thailand, as well as the 20th anniversary of Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School. In March, I, an employee of Da Ai TV, joined a Tzu Chi team from Taiwan on a visit to northern

Teachers tie white cotton strings around graduating students' wrists as a blessing during this year's Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School junior and senior high graduation.

LIN YING-QIN

Thailand. One part of our itinerary was to attend the school's junior and senior high school commencement ceremony. I was also tasked with interviewing several alumni for a feature segment.

Before the interviews, I wondered: Can education truly change a person's future? The school has been nurturing students for 20 years. Have the children who once studied there found their place in the world?

Our first stop was Samut Prakan Province, south of Bangkok, a region known for its many factories and industrial zones. There, we met Jing Wen-liang (景文亮), one of the earliest graduates of Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School. Now 30, he is in



Jing Wen-liang instructs a worker on operating machinery at his bottled water factory. As a descendant of northern Thailand's Chinese community, he is mindful of protecting migrant workers' rights.

his fourth year as an entrepreneur, the founder of a bottled water company.

My first impression of Jing was from an old video clip, before I had met him in person. He was in 11th grade at Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School at the time, speaking during a Chinese class. When the teacher asked the students to use the word "future" in a sentence, Jing stood up and declared with confidence, "In the future, I want to be a boss!" His declaration stayed with me.

When we finally met, he spoke with our team as if we were longtime friends—relaxed, self-assured, and warm. That same ease, I thought, might be what helped him navigate the challenges of building a business from the ground up.

His factory spans about 20,000 square meters (4.9 acres) and consists of three buildings that operate around the clock. He employs 83 people,

90 percent of whom are migrant workers from Myanmar. Many of these migrant workers don't speak Thai and lack legal status, leaving them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. To protect them, Jing helped each one obtain a legal work permit and provides low-cost dormitory housing. "I'm a Chinese descendant from the mountains in northern Thailand," he said. "I know what it's like to live without choices."

Bottled water production demands precision; any misstep in the process can result in major losses. Although language differences can be a challenge, Jing remains calm. Smiling, he explained, "Each line supervisor can speak a bit of Thai. We divide the work among small teams, so I only need to communicate with a few key people." That confidence and easy command of things harken back to his school days. "Our teachers used to take us out for volunteer work," he said. "We ran into all kinds of unexpected problems, and we learned to figure them out on our own."

Back at our hotel, I noticed that the bottled water in our fridge came from Jing's factory. I reflected on the journey behind his business: he had begun with only one machine and had slept on the factory floor in those early days, gradually expanding his operations through sheer hard work. "The sound of the machines was like my lullaby," he said. "Whenever they stopped, I'd wake up." His success is built on persistence, long nights, and learning from trial and error. One can't help but admire this young man—not just for what he's built, but for the spirit that has carried him through.

Lifting others as they rise

Weng Jian-ting (翁建廷) was also among the first graduates of Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School. Today, he works as a creative director in the computer animation industry, leading a team of 30. He has a boyish charm but his glasses give him a bookish air.

Weng's first encounter with the school came when he accompanied a friend to enroll. The moment he set foot on campus, he was captivated by the large trees in front of the school buildings and the mountain winds rustling through their leaves. But what ultimately led him to enroll was more personal. Raised by a single mother, he was deeply moved by how hard she worked to support the family alone. Choosing to study and live in a remote area was his way of easing her burden. Life in northern Thailand meant lower living expenses and less pressure. "I wanted to make



things a little easier for my mom—and also become a little more independent,” he said.

Visual storytelling had always been his passion. When he was a student at Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School, he took on nearly every filming and editing task, from documenting events to producing graduation videos. His teachers supported his interests and provided the resources he needed to explore them. Over time, that passion became his profession. He even created Thailand’s first free online animation learning website, giving children with limited resources a way to step into the world of digital animation.

Looking back on his school days, he said, “Volunteering taught me more than any class ever did. We visited nursing homes and remote villages. Those real-life experiences taught me how to understand people.” Like Jing Wen-liang, he credited volunteer experiences with shaping who he is today.

We also interviewed 26-year-old Chen Ji-chang (陳吉昌), an alumnus who now serves as a firefighter in Fang District. He recently passed the national teacher qualification exam and is awaiting a placement.

Weng Jian-ting, a creative director in computer animation, once launched a free website to help children with limited resources explore the world of digital animation.

On the day we met him, he was preparing for a wildfire prevention mission in a national forest reserve. He moved with a steady, purposeful stride in his uniform, but spoke in a tone that was humble and gentle. Asked why he chose to become a firefighter, he recalled a moment from his school days. Back in high school, Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School had invited firefighters to speak. “After listening to them, I just knew I wanted to do something like that, something that helps people,” he said.

As for his interest in teaching, he credits his own teachers: “I hope to eventually return to a remote area to teach. I want to carry forward and pass on the spirit of the people who once helped me—the teachers who encouraged me to keep going.”

These alumni share something in common: they don’t run from their roots. Instead, they look

back with gratitude—and they give back. They're not only focused on their own success. They also want to be part of the wind that helps lift others.

Deep bonds

Before visiting Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School, I never imagined I would shed so many tears at a graduation ceremony in a foreign country.

A gentle breeze wafted across the campus that evening, as all the graduating junior and senior high school students gathered in front of one of the school buildings. They sang and danced, their movements a little awkward, but their smiles bright and unrestrained. It was the spirit of youth, blooming freely in the twilight. Guests from both Thailand and abroad, including monastics from the Jing Si Abode, couldn't resist pulling out their phones to capture the moment. Some even turned on their flashlights, waving them in time with the music.

As the ceremony drew to a close, a special ritual took place: teachers tied white "blessing strings" around the graduates' wrists. This Thai

Buddhist ritual symbolizes purity and blessings. Each student received five cotton threads and invited five teachers who had deeply influenced them to tie them on.

The cheerful atmosphere gave way to a deeper emotional current. More than a hundred graduates knelt quietly in lines, waiting their turn. The teachers, seated in low chairs, busily tied the threads, softly uttering each student's name and offering words of encouragement. The students expressed their gratitude and love—and even apologies, asking for forgiveness for their youthful rebellion or defiance.

I still remember a boy, nearly 170 centimeters (5'7") tall, sobbing in the arms of a male teacher. The teacher's eyes were red too. As he tied the thread, he gently whispered something. I didn't know their names, but the boy's tears spoke of a genuine trust, a silent but powerful testament to their bond.

In that moment, a thought came to me: if every child could have a teacher like this—someone who truly understands and loves them—then regardless of where life took them, they would always carry the knowledge that they are worthy of love and care.

Not alone

In one corner of the graduation ceremony, teacher Huang Ya-chun (黃雅純) knelt beside a petite girl and gently asked, "Are you happy?" The girl, ninth-grade graduate Bao Shu-san (包書叁), nodded.

"You weren't happy during your first two years at the school, were you?" the teacher continued. "Life doesn't have to be so complicated. If you keep worrying about things before they even happen, you'll only make yourself unhappy." Her voice was calm and steady, as if she could see straight into the girl's heart. "At your age, it's okay to take things a little more lightly," she added. "Try to practice that in high school, okay?"

The teacher's advice moved me. She must have been paying close attention to Bao—caring for her, watching over her—otherwise, how would she have known just what to say to reach her inner world?

Bao was once a stateless refugee student and obtained legal residency only last year. With the help of Tzu Chi scholarships, she and her younger brother were able to enroll in the school. When she first arrived, she was malnourished and frail, but her health gradually improved after she moved into the school dormitory. She excelled



Now a firefighter, Chen Ji-chang was inspired by teachers at Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School to earn a teaching certification. He hopes to teach in remote areas, passing on the support he once received.

academically and maintained a disciplined routine. Her teachers described her as a highly promising student.

The director and camera assistant with me had filmed Bao last year as part of their coverage of the school. I asked them, “Do you think she’s changed from when you saw her last?” They both nodded without hesitation. “She smiles more now, and looks more confident,” one of them said.

When I asked Bao about her dreams, she told me she wanted to become a doctor. As a child, she had needed surgery, but her family couldn’t afford it. A charity stepped in and helped her through that difficult time. She’s never forgotten their kindness and hopes to pay it forward.

Her parents couldn’t attend the graduation ceremony. Though she tried not to show it, her sense of loss was unmistakable. Back at the dormitory, I took out a folder I had bought before the trip. It had a cute design, and though it was simple and inexpensive, I gave it to her as a graduation gift—a small gesture to let her know she’s not alone. I want her to know that wherever life takes her, there are people who care about her and are quietly cheering her on.

Passing on the light

Just when we thought the event was over and had wandered to another corner of campus, we were met by a breathtaking sight: the entire central atrium glowing softly with candlelight. Curious, I asked a nearby teacher what was happening. He smiled and shook his head, saying, “I don’t know either—I’m just here to enjoy the show.”

As I soon learned, the event is a tradition at the school. Every year, the 11th-grade students secretly plan a surprise for the graduating seniors. The entire surprise is planned, organized, and executed by the students themselves, without any help from the teachers.

Soon, the graduating seniors, blindfolded, were guided into the atrium, each placing a hand on the shoulder of the person in front. When their blindfolds were removed, they were met with a sea of candlelight and a projection screen showing clips their younger schoolmates had secretly recorded—moments of them reading in the classroom, daydreaming in the hallway, or laughing on the sports field. Each scene captured the radiance of youth.

That night in the atrium, there were no empty slogans—only genuine blessings, heartfelt gratitude, and the quiet sorrow of parting. This surprise wasn’t meant to impress; it was a lesson in passing on the light.



Bao Shu-san, who graduated from junior high this year, received surgery as a child with help from a charity. She aspires to become a doctor to help others.

More than 3,000 students have graduated from Chiang Mai Tzu Chi School over the years, each taking their own path in life. They work in various professions and earn different incomes. But the important thing isn’t how much they earn or what they do, it’s what they carry within themselves: a heart that cares for others. That’s something to be truly proud of.

A school’s true achievement isn’t measured by rankings or college admissions. It’s whether students leave knowing how to love, take responsibility, and see the needs of others.

This, I believe, is the essence of Tzu Chi’s humanistic education: it’s less about teaching children how high to fly, and more about teaching them how to fly far, fly steadily, and light the way for others.

(Translator’s note: the English names of the people mentioned in this article are transliterations of their Chinese names.)



Perseverance Beyond Illness

By Huang Xiao-zhe and Cai Yu-xuan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

The bitter, cold wind whipped against my face. Waves crashed relentlessly against the gray breakwater, sending sprays of seawater into the air. Under an ashen, overcast sky, Turtle Island rose clearly in the distance. Amid this stark winter scene, an elderly woman scanned the area with sharp, focused eyes, carefully searching for any recyclable waste. To her, every bottle and piece of plastic was a burden on the environment—and she was there to collect them and ensure they were properly recycled.

Though she appeared small and alone, she carried an inspiring story.

Her name was Chen Xiu-yun (陳秀雲), an 80-year-old Tzu Chi recycling volunteer residing in Toucheng, a coastal town in Yilan County, northeastern Taiwan. I was photographing her on a chilly February day.

I had made an appointment with her by phone before heading out to interview her for *Tzu Chi Monthly*. She spoke with remarkable eloquence, her voice over the line loud, vibrant, and full of energy. But when she began to share her story, I was stunned. Diagnosed with three different types of cancer after middle age, she was undergoing targeted therapy for late-stage lung cancer. Yet nothing in her voice hinted at illness.

Even more astonishingly, despite the seriousness of her condition, she continued her recycling work with unwavering diligence. I couldn't help but wonder: Wasn't she affected by the side effects of treatment? Didn't she suffer from pain? Most people in her situation would feel overwhelmed, their spirits sinking into despair. So how did she remain so optimistic, so full of positivity? What gave her the strength to face the time she had left with such calm and vitality?

An unshakable spirit

Grandma Xiu-yun rises at 3 a.m. every day. (“Grandma” is a respectful term commonly used in Taiwan to address older women.) She begins each morning by reciting the *Great Compassion Mantra* and the *Heart Sutra* 200 times each, then offering a prayer of dedication—a Buddhist practice of transferring merit to others. By the time dawn breaks, she’s dressed and ready to go out for her recycling work.

If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn’t have believed it: the elderly woman bent over picking up recyclables along the coast was actually a late-stage cancer patient.

A native of Toucheng, Grandma Xiu-yun feels a deep connection to the land and sea. In 2014, after hearing Dharma Master Cheng Yen encourage people to take up recycling, she became acutely aware of the importance of environmental protection and committed herself fully to the cause. She not only leads by example but has also inspired her family and friends to incorporate recycling into their daily lives.

Though she has endured years of illness and physical pain, she never thinks of herself as a patient. With steady strength, she embraces life’s uncertainties and continues to give of herself, day after day. Her spirit is as enduring as Turtle Island in the distance—calm, resolute, and unshaken.









Scenes along the way

I followed Grandma Xiu-yun that day through the streets of town, watching as she rode her motor scooter—specially outfitted to carry recyclables—from one stop to the next. She made her rounds to homes, hotels, and guesthouses, picking up items people had gathered. The scooter could only carry so much at a time, so she would drop off her load at a nearby recycling point, then return to her route for more. Back and forth she went, repeating the process until everything had been collected.

She also stopped by Wushi Harbor and the nearby coastline, scanning the ground for discarded bottles or cans. Only when the area looked clean would she feel at ease enough to move on.

We came across many stray dogs along the way. To my surprise, Grandma called each one by name—and every dog seemed to recognize her. The moment her scooter came to a stop, they would trot up to her, eager for a scratch or a pat, making her laugh with joy.

As it turns out, every time she goes out for recycling work, she brings food for the stray dogs she meets, worried they might go hungry. Over time, they've become like old friends, greeting her with warmth and affection whenever they see her.

Her pure-hearted compassion shines not only in how she cares for the environment, but also in the way she cherishes all life. Thanks to her selfless giving, I had the privilege of witnessing a genuine and precious kind of beauty.





A wish for the remainder of her life

Grandma Xiu-yun prepares all her own meals and keeps her home neat and tidy. In the mornings, she collects recyclables; in the afternoons, she takes care of housework. Never one to sit idle, she believes that as long as she's able, she should keep moving.

I asked, "Can your body handle it?"

She replied, "It is hard during treatment. Sometimes I feel really sick—I can't eat, or I throw up. But you can't keep dwelling on being sick. Once I'm up, I can keep going. If I can still do something, I should."

As she spoke, she casually pulled out a notebook. Inside were tally marks tracking how many times she recited her daily scriptures. She also recorded the number of PET bottles she recycled each year. By 2024, the total had reached an astounding 765,000 bottles.

That's when I learned she had a personal goal: to recycle one million bottles in her lifetime.

These numbers are more than statistics. They reflect her deep commitment to her faith and convictions.

Illness has never broken her spirit; if anything, it has deepened her understanding of life and death, allowing her to see the impermanent nature of all things and to live with wisdom and grace.

Page after page of her notebook carries a vow that transcends personal suffering. She doesn't pray for her own health. Instead, she devotes her life to caring for the Earth. Her story is a powerful reminder of what one person's determination can achieve. With heartfelt sincerity, I hope her wish comes true.





Lending a Hand, Lifting a Life

By Shi Jin-xiu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Chen Jun-lang

With each assistive device they deliver, Tzu Chi volunteers offer not only relief but also a reminder that no one is alone.

On a weekend morning, a white truck prepared to set out from Tzu Chi's Neihu campus in Taipei. It was loaded with electric hospital beds, wheelchairs, commode chairs, and other assistive devices for delivery to applicants' homes. Before the truck departed, volunteer Jiang Li-qiang (姜禮強) carefully checked each item. "If we don't take a thorough inventory, we might forget something and have to make another trip," he explained. At the same time, other volunteers secured the equipment to prevent it from shifting during transit.

Nearby, Wu Dun-rong (吳敦榮), the contact person for the Neihu outlet of the Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program, was busy finalizing the next day's delivery schedule with applicants. Several years earlier, Wu's mother had suffered a fall due to high blood sugar, fracturing her hip and requiring a wheelchair. A wheelchair from the Tzu Chi Neihu Recycling Station had helped her move around more easily. Grateful for the support his family had received, Wu decided to pay it forward. He began volunteering for the assistive device program.

Volunteer Lai Zheng-qiao (賴正喬) had a similar experience. His mother had fallen in a nursing home and fractured her pelvis, making movement difficult. One day, while on duty at the Neihu campus, he learned from fellow volunteers about Tzu Chi's assistive device program, which provided free equipment along with delivery and handling. After applying for devices and experiencing the program's benefits firsthand, he came to appreciate its importance. When he learned that the program needed more delivery volunteers, he joined and has since often assisted with weekend deliveries. "The more I give, the more joy I gain and the deeper my sense of fulfillment," he said with a smile.

Compared to Wu and Lai, Jiang is a veteran in this work. He began delivering assistive devices more than 20 years ago—long before the program was officially established in 2017. He had once run a meat floss factory, where his daily routine included transporting 70 to 80 freshly slaughtered pigs each morning for production. After joining Tzu Chi, he switched to a vegetarian food business and dedicated himself to recycling work. This gave him more opportunities than most to

encounter used hospital beds and wheelchairs. At first, he dismantled them for recycling. But when he saw that many were still in good condition, he began delivering them to those who needed such equipment instead.

Since its founding in 2022, the Neihu outlet of Tzu Chi's assistive device program has grown significantly. Applications increased from 83 in 2022 to 560 in 2024, while total deliveries and collections rose from 161 to 1,652 items—an average of 4.5 per day. As demand has increased, so have volunteers' responsibilities. The cleaning and disinfection team works even on the coldest days to ensure each device is sanitized and as good as new before reaching an applicant's home. The repair team stays busy in their workspace, quietly fixing broken equipment. The administrative and transport teams are just as dedicated, diligently attending to their respective duties.

Over a hundred items a day

There are now more than 130 Tzu Chi assistive device outlets across Taiwan, located in every county and city, including the offshore islands of Kinmen and Matsu. In 2024, volunteers nationwide delivered an average of 110 assistive devices per day. Their efforts not only extend the lifespan of secondhand equipment but also significantly benefit those in need. For example, air mattresses help bedridden patients reduce the risk of pressure sores, while high-back wheelchairs provide extra support and comfort for those with spinal issues. Volunteers use their hands-on experience and training to teach caregivers how to use the equipment safely.

Deliveries often present unexpected challenges, turning each trip into a journey of overcoming obstacles. Volunteers often have to navigate winding or narrow alleys and obstacles such as illegally parked cars or piles of clutter to ensure the equipment reaches applicants' homes.

Some recipients live in congested areas where parking is difficult. In such cases, volunteers park farther away and carry the equipment on foot. Along the way, they often experience kindness from strangers. "When shop owners see us delivering assistive devices, they not only let us park temporarily but also keep an eye on our vehicle," Wu shared with a smile.

Transporting the equipment, especially electric hospital beds, is physically demanding. Volunteers must be familiar with proper lifting techniques to prevent injuries. In older buildings without elevators, they carry the equipment up

Volunteers carefully carry a heavy bed frame up the stairs of a walk-up apartment building, mindful to avoid injury.



narrow staircases, working closely as a team to navigate tight turns. According to Lai, hospital beds vary in weight and size. To conserve energy, they prioritize delivering lighter beds to higher floors, while heavier beds are reserved for lower floors or buildings with elevators. “We bring a tool kit to disassemble beds when necessary, which makes transportation easier,” he added.

Their smiles say it all

That day, as volunteers in the white truck made their way to deliver assistive equipment, they reminisced about a visit to a home on Ankang Road. As soon as they entered, they were greeted by a strong odor. The recipient was a bedridden man living alone, cared for by his former wife. Even though they had divorced, she continued to visit regularly and ensured he attended his medical appointments. She also cared for their daughter, who had an intellectual disability. The former wife did all this in addition to managing her own job.

The home was cluttered. The former wife cautioned the volunteers to be careful, as her ex-husband sometimes exhibited violent behavior. She politely asked them to leave the bed in the living room rather than move it into his room. Volunteer Wu asked, “The bed is heavy—how will you move it?” To save her the trouble, the volunteers

After the transport team retrieves assistive devices, they are passed to the cleaning and disinfection team for processing. Some require repairs or part replacements before being stored for future use.

cleared space and moved the bed inside. While doing so, they expressed their admiration for her resilience and sense of responsibility.

As the volunteers recalled the divorced couple, they arrived at one of their first stops. “This place looks so familiar,” a volunteer remarked. A fellow volunteer responded, “This is the very home we were just talking about!” As it turned out, they were returning to the bedridden man’s home to retrieve the assistive equipment. He had passed away, and his residence had been cleared out, leaving only a dim light and the equipment awaiting removal.

In the dimly lit space, the volunteers quietly dismantled the hospital bed. They were comforted by the thought that they had helped provide the husband with a comfortable bed in his final days. It reminded them of life’s impermanence and the importance of cherishing every chance to give.

The team made another stop on Donghu Road to deliver an air mattress to Ms. Chen’s elderly mother-in-law. The volunteers arrived just in time,

delivering the mattress before her discharge from the hospital. They patiently explained how to use it. Grateful, Ms. Chen insisted on accompanying them downstairs to see them off, thanking them wholeheartedly.

A similarly heartwarming moment unfolded at their stop on Xinming Road, where Ms. Lin had requested a hospital bed for her 95-year-old mother. The volunteers cheerfully greeted the nonagenarian, who, despite her age, had sharp hearing and a quick mind, easily responding to small talk. Her good condition reflected the attentive care of her family, warming the volunteers’ hearts. Her radiant smile filled the volunteers with the joy of giving.

Vehicles carrying blessings

Seventy-year-old volunteer Zhan Fei-xiong (詹飛雄) repeatedly pounded his back, trying to ease the discomfort as he carried assistive devices during this trip. He had strained it on a previous delivery, and the injury still hadn’t healed. Even so, he showed up for duty. “It’s no big deal—I can still manage!” he said. Concerned, his fellow volunteers

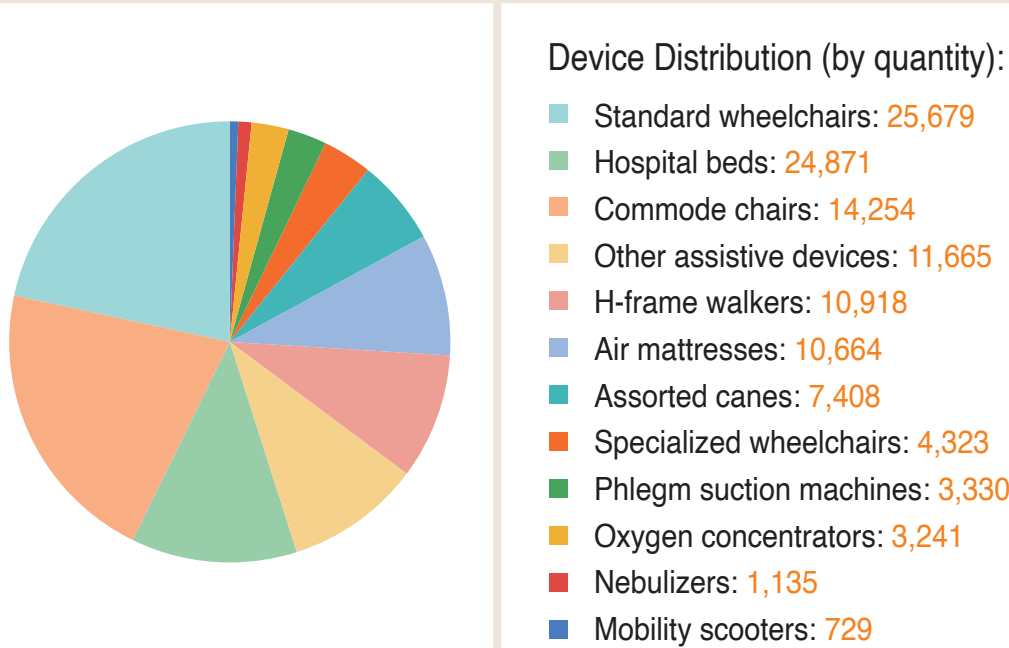
urged him to stay by the truck and leave the heavy lifting to them, but he insisted on joining them.

Working alongside him that day was volunteer Zhang Yi-ming (張逸銘). After the COVID-19 pandemic, Zhang left his career in China and returned to Taiwan for good, dedicating himself fully to volunteer work. Now a regular in the assistive device program, he serves on the transport team for the Neihu outlet.

Despite their varied professional backgrounds, once these volunteers put on their Tzu Chi uniforms, they become a united team, serving without complaint. They acknowledged the physical demands of the work but affirmed their commitment: “It’s exhausting, but we’ll keep going!” Each delivery provides not just practical assistance but heartfelt blessings as well. Volunteer Wu explained that some recipients struggle financially and can’t afford essential equipment. “Seeing their smiles when they receive our devices makes all our efforts worthwhile,” he said. “We can’t solve all their problems, but we can at least ease the burden of caring for their loved ones.”

Tzu Chi Eco-Friendly Assistive Device Program

Established in March 2017, the program had, by the end of 2024, distributed **118,217** assistive devices to **77,602** households across Taiwan.



The JING SIAPHORISMS Illustrated

The Buddha says:

"Right Mindfulness" means to:
carefully observe ourselves,
carefully examine our feelings,
carefully reflect on our thoughts,
and carefully study questions concerning "existence."
We must do all this with diligence, enthusiasm, caution, and reason,
and we must get rid of earthly greed and worries.
My fellow monks, this is "Right Mindfulness."



This is why
we must constantly stay
alert to whether or not our
thoughts are correct. If they are,
then we will not go astray.

"Right" means
free from deviation or false
views. The Eight Noble Paths repeatedly
emphasize the word "right." If our
direction is even slightly incorrect, we
will end up moving further and further
away from our goal.



If I do good deeds with full sincerity and devotion, what will happen?

Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "Whatever we take from our community, we should give back to our community. So long as you sincerely do good deeds without asking for anything in return, good results will follow."

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

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A moment of disaster does not constitute a lifetime of hardship. With faith, one can manifest one's innate abilities and determination.

—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY HSIAO YIU-HWA