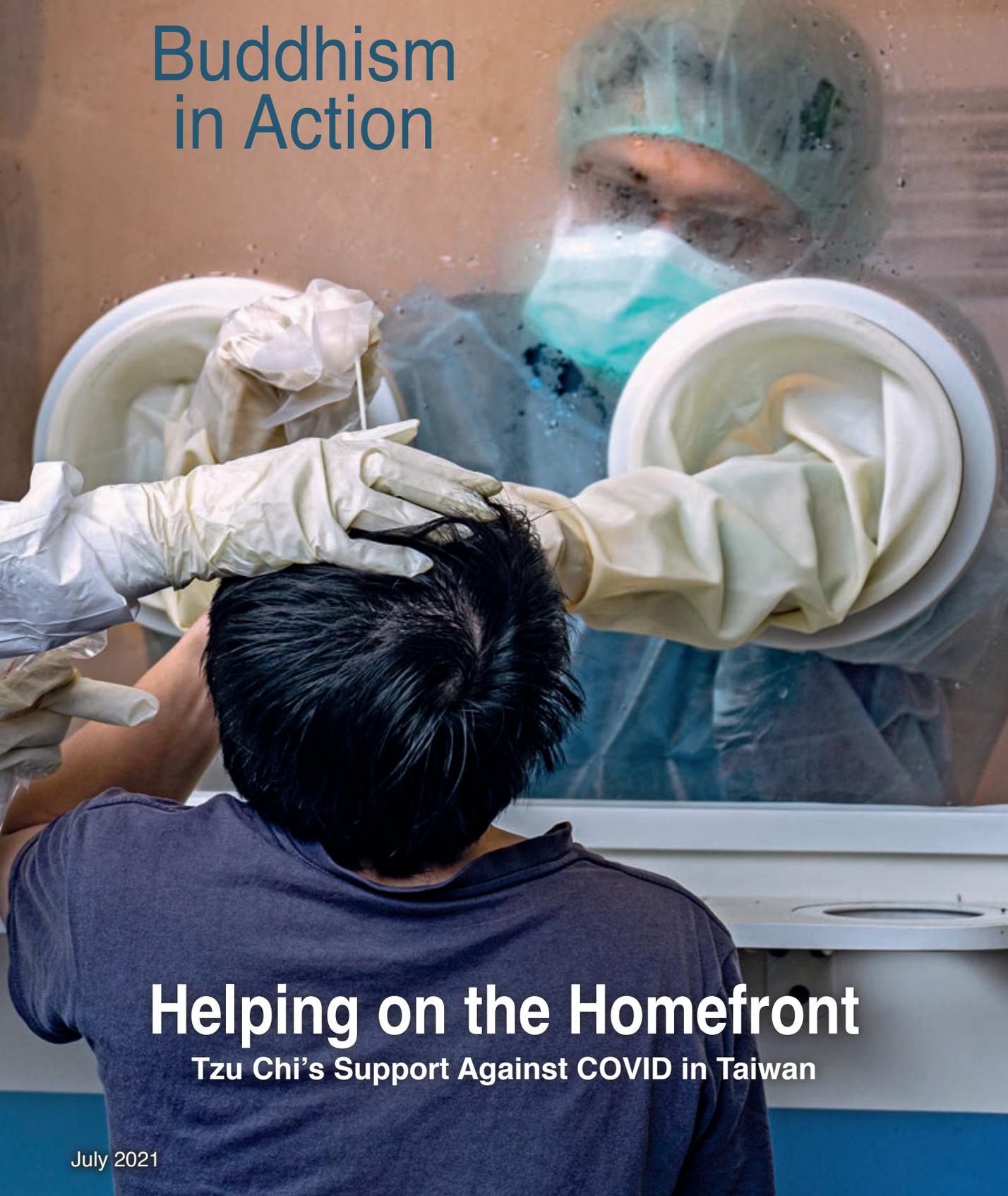


慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism
in Action



Helping on the Homefront

Tzu Chi's Support Against COVID in Taiwan

July 2021

It Takes Everyone to Curb the Pandemic

Translated by Teresa Chang



Superintendent Chao You-chen (趙有誠) of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital presents gifts to medical staff working in the wards dedicated to the care of COVID patients to thank them for their hard work.

LIAO WEI-QING

For over a year, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought much fear and worry to many in the world. Taiwan was relatively untouched by the pandemic until a recent surge in confirmed cases began in May 2021. In response, medical professionals in Taiwan have been working hard around the clock to save lives; their burden has been huge. Doctors and nurses in our Tzu Chi hospitals have likewise been working their hardest to care for COVID patients. Their workloads run them ragged, but they press on, doing their best to safeguard lives. I'm deeply moved by and grateful for the dedication of these front-line workers.

The pressures on these healthcare workers and the sacrifices they are making are beyond our imagination. They even refrain from going home, concerned that they might take the virus home to their family members. Clad in layers of protective gear, they endure discomfort and inconvenience while caring for patients. Even taking a drink of water is difficult. They are like armored warriors bravely safeguarding their homeland and people against an enemy that is invisible and can't be touched.

Not only do our doctors and nurses have to take careful precautions, but they also are going above and beyond to tend to both patients' physical and emotional needs. Realizing how hard they are working, I've asked our hospital superintendents to urge our medical staff to take good care of themselves. I've also asked the superintendents to help me look after the medical workers and send my gratitude to them.

My gratitude extends to all healthcare professionals in Taiwan. Our foundation is here to provide help and equipment, such as PPE, to any hospital that has need for it. Volunteers and staffers from all our four missions have mobilized to help during the crisis. Employees from our medical mission nurse COVID patients and soothe their fear; volunteers and staffers from our charitable mission support front-line workers by delivering needed equipment and supplies to them; people with our educational mission work closely with those from the medical mission to develop related medicine; and staffers working for the cultural mission deliver truthful news reports and positive stories to guide the public

to better protect themselves against the virus and ease their anxiety.

The end of the pandemic is nowhere in sight yet, but fear and anxiety will not do us good. This pandemic is like a wakeup call, a reminder for us to reflect on ourselves and our lifestyles. Now is the time to examine our behaviors to see if we are giving undue rein to our desires and adding to the distress of the world. For example, do we really need meat to sustain ourselves? We don't. A plant-based diet provides us with enough nutrition. Instead of encroaching on animals' rights to live and slaughtering them for food, we should let them live freely. Living in harmony with other creatures is how peace will reign in the world. If we live as though animals exist for our consumption, we're sowing bad karma for ourselves. The world's collective bad karma will eventually cause a backlash as powerful as a tsunami. If everyone could eat vegetarian, imagine how many lives we would be able to save for just one meal. The spiritual merits we would accumulate would be immeasurable.

We've seen during the pandemic how medical workers, police, and firefighters work to protect lives. Without a doubt, they deserve a lot of respect and appreciation from us. But it takes more than these front-liners to curb the pandemic—it takes every one of us. If we can tap into the love in our hearts, more blessings will follow. If everyone's heart is rich in love and willing to do good, the combined good karma we create would be great enough to cancel out any disaster. Eating vegetarian is one way to show our love; reaching out to help others is another. I've seen our aid recipients in the Philippines—despite their limited means—donate all the money they had on them to Tzu Chi to help other needy people. When everyone is willing to contribute what they can, these small trickles of love will add up to do great good.

This pandemic is like a grand lesson for us, prompting everyone to walk the path of goodness. Life and death are separated by only a breath. Impermanence can strike at any moment. Let's all strive to live each moment fully and meaningfully, and contribute to the well-being of the world instead of taking away from it. Please be ever more mindful. ❀

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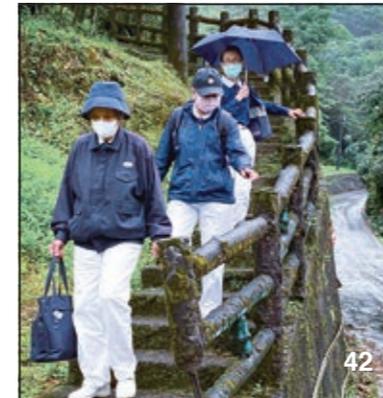
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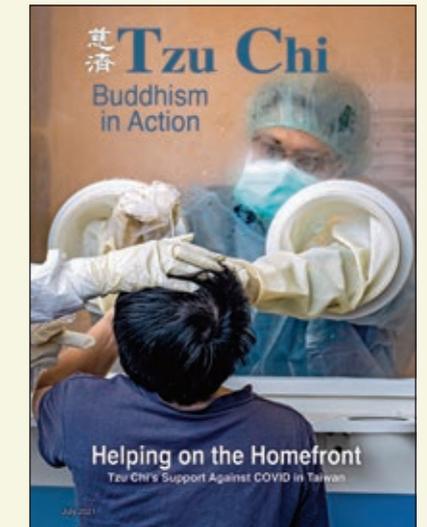
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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right 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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Helping on the Homefront

Tzu Chi's Support Against COVID in Taiwan



Wanhua, Taipei, was a COVID-19 hotspot after domestic cases began to increase rapidly in Taiwan in mid-May 2021. Roadside stalls and stores in the district were temporarily closed in accordance with pandemic policies. This was what Mengjia Night Market in Wanhua looked like on the evening of June 3, 2021, nearly three weeks after the COVID-19 alert for Taipei was raised to level three. The scene was a sharp contrast to what it is like on a typical bustling day (see inset photos). It is not hard to imagine the impact of the virus control measures on the local economy.

PHOTOS BY HSIAO YIU-HWA

By Liao Zhe-min

Translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Tzu Chi has been taking action to blunt the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in Taiwan ever since the first local case emerged in late January 2020. When the pandemic became more widespread on the island in May 2021, Tzu Chi expanded its services to help more people in need. The foundation built outdoor screening stations in communities or for hospitals to increase Taiwan's capacity to rapidly screen for the virus. They provided disadvantaged students with computers and internet access for online learning at home, and packaged and supplied relief goods for needy families. As long as COVID-19 poses a threat, as long as society has unfulfilled needs, Tzu Chi will be there to help.

“We in Tzu Chi have been in the fight against the pandemic for more than 500 days now,” said Yen Po-wen (顏博文), CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission. “We’ve never stopped taking action to help.” The first domestic case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Taiwan on January 28, 2020, the fourth day into the Lunar Year of the Rat. On that very day, Tzu Chi established a daily morning meeting at its headquarters in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, to organize and coordinate its response. For example, when the need for face masks spiked in Taiwan, volunteers swung into action to make cloth masks to help relieve the shortage. The foundation also provided people in quarantine with gift packs and financial assistance to families or students impacted by the pandemic.

The anti-coronavirus actions that the Taiwanese government took in 2020 successfully warded off COVID-19 and kept the virus mostly at bay, allowing Tzu Chi to focus most of its resources on aiding viral hot spots outside of Taiwan. But when the pandemic situation on the island took a turn for the worse in May 2021, the Tzu Chi headquarters pivoted its focus back to Taiwan.

The foundation quickly extended aid to several sectors in society. It donated personal protective equipment (PPE) to support medical professionals working hard to take care of an increasing number of people diagnosed with COVID-19, and also to other front-line workers including police, firefighters, and military personnel. And when the COVID precautionary measures enforced by the govern-

ment made it hard for underprivileged families to maintain their livelihoods, the foundation provided daily necessities and emergency cash to help see them through the crisis. Throughout it all, the number of volunteers mobilized to deliver the aid was kept at a minimum to prevent the spread of the virus. This was in accordance with the government’s safety protocols.

Weng Qian-hui (翁千惠) is a Tzu Chi volunteer who has long helped provide support and care for the police. Though her movements outside her home were curtailed due to the pandemic, she decided to focus on the productive things she could do instead of giving in to fear and worry. She asked herself, “What can I do? What more can I give back to society?”

She talked to some police officers and firefighters she knew and asked about their needs, then worked with the Tzu Chi Association of Police, Firefighters, and Their Families to pool together resources to donate some PPE. Finally, she got a few volunteers together and, donning masks and face shields, delivered the needed PPE to these front-line workers.

After the pandemic situation got worse in Taiwan, volunteers switched from personally visit-



ing needy families under Tzu Chi’s long-term care to calling them at home. In the second half of May alone, volunteers in northern Taiwan made more than 5,000 such calls. Volunteers had also been making face shields at the Tzu Chi Kaohsiung Jing Si Hall in southern Taiwan, but switched to making them at home to stay in compliance with regulations limiting the size of gatherings. These examples demonstrate that though volunteers made adjustments in response to changing circumstances around the

A medical worker at the Yangming branch of Taipei City Hospital collects a sample from a man for rapid testing for COVID-19. A surge in confirmed coronavirus cases in Taiwan during May and June resulted in a spike in people scrambling to be tested for the disease.

HSIAO YIU-HWA

pandemic, they never wavered in their dedication to spreading love and warmth.

Meals and screening stations

On May 15, the Taiwanese government raised the COVID-19 alert level for Taipei and New Taipei City to level 3, the second highest level. Four days later, on May 19, the same alert level was expanded to the entire island. Pandemic regulations forbid restaurants from providing dine-in services; only take-out orders were allowed. Ji Ya-ying (紀雅瑩), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Taipei, explained that she and other volunteers pooled funds with the Tzu Chi Friends Association and the northern chapter of the Tzu Chi Honorary Board Members Association and found restaurants to make vegetarian boxed meals, which were delivered and given to front-line workers free of charge. Not only did it help restaurants stay afloat during the crisis, but it was a

great way to honor and thank front-line workers. A participating restaurateur in Taipei said of this experience, "I hope that the veggie energy in the meals will fill the recipients with vitality and vigor." This program went on for two weeks.

One of the persons that benefited from the program was Chen Mei-hui (陳美慧), a head nurse at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. Many front-line workers, like Chen, wore protective clothing and gear that covered them from head to toe when they cared for COVID patients. It was quite an undertaking for them to put on such an outfit, so they often spent long periods of time wearing it. They had no choice but to endure the discomfort that came with such clothing. Trapped body heat and moisture were uncomfortable and going to the bathroom was very inconvenient. Witnessing them endure such discomfort and inconvenience to care for patients, Ji Ya-ying wanted to do something for them to

cheer them on. Her solution was to provide the boxed meals so that when they finally took off their protective gear for meal breaks, they could have quality food to eat immediately. The meal project also promoted vegetarianism and the idea of not killing animals for food. By inspiring love and compassion in people's hearts like that, Ji hoped to create blessings for the world and help the pandemic end as soon as possible.

After receiving meals from this project, Nurse Chen wrote a thank-you note to the volunteers who organized this project: "Our pandemic team here has received your lunch of love, which not only fed us but also bolstered our spirits to keep on fighting the pandemic. We are very touched that you arranged to have such delicious vegetarian meals delivered to us. Even our non-vegetarian colleagues enjoyed eating the food. You've truly nourished us with your love and care. It's great to have you around."

Tzu Chi set up two prefabricated buildings and donated them to the Tainan City Government to be used as COVID screening stations, one at Xinhua Sport Park (below, top photo) and the other at the Tainan Songbo Recreational Center (below, bottom photo). The buildings were completed two days ahead of schedule, despite the fact that workers had to work in the rain. The stations provide a comfortable and safe place in which to work as well as expand the screening capacity of the city.





Like nurses, police officers were kept especially busy after confirmed coronavirus cases started to surge in May. They helped with contact tracing and urged people to put on face masks—and that was on top of their usual work of conducting patrols, issuing citations, and handling traffic accidents or law enforcement cases. Their work often involved close physical encounters with people and as such elevated their risk of infection. Realizing the risks they were exposed to, Tzu Chi donated protective clothing, gloves, and disinfectant alcohol to the police across Taiwan to help protect them from infection.

As the number of people in Taiwan who needed to be screened for the coronavirus skyrocketed, many screening stations found that they didn't have the capacity to handle the volume. As a result, local governments reached out to the foundation asking for help to set up prefabricated buildings to be used as screening stations. Tzu Chi volunteers checked the sizes of the proposed sites for the stations, and quickly found professional help to acquire building materials and do the assembly work. By mid-June, Tzu Chi had completed 25 such screening stations spread across 11 counties and cities in Taiwan.

One of the prefabricated stations is located at the Yangming branch of Taipei City Hospital, Taipei. It is a high-grade screening station, 855 square feet, complete with a waiting area and a rest and observation area. Deng Nai-ren (鄧乃仁), a staffer with Tzu Chi's Construction Department, was in charge of this construction project. He said the contractor, upon learning how the project would serve the public interest, did everything in his power to speed its completion.

This included rushing orders for materials and asking for overtime from the limited number of workers he had. Similarly, another team of foundation staffers and professional workers in Tainan worked in the rain to finish two screening stations in just five days, one at Xinhua Sport Park and the other at the Tainan Songbo Recreational Center. The two stations were donated to the Public Health Bureau of the Tainan City Government for use.

Helping hand for disadvantaged children

The public was urged to minimize their outings when the pandemic alert was elevated to level 3 on May 15 for Taipei City and New Taipei City. Anticipating that some disadvantaged families would have difficulty purchasing daily necessities or even lose their jobs, New Taipei City's Social Welfare Department contacted Tzu Chi and asked the foundation to help provide daily necessities for needy households in the city. Tzu Chi quickly made the required purchases and packaged the goods. In just five days, they had delivered 3,000 care packages to the social welfare centers in Sanchong and other locations for New Taipei City's Social Welfare Department to distribute to needy families. Each package contained more than 10 items, including noodles, biscuits, multi-grain porridge, and rice. It was welcome relief for struggling families.

Huang Feng-ming (黃逢明), an official from the Social Welfare Department, pointed out that each care package had changed the way things would unfold for each recipient family. For example, a grandma raising her grandson alone in a skip-gener-



ation family had been worried that her grandson would go hungry as her income stream had been disrupted, but she could now breathe easier with Tzu Chi's aid in hand. Each care package also contained a copy of *Jing Si Aphorisms*, a book of wise sayings by Dharma Master Cheng Yen. A recipient family had been placed in quarantine because one of their family members had been diagnosed with COVID-19. This upset the family and left them feeling unsettled, but they gradually settled down after reading passages from the *Jing Si Aphorisms* book that was contained in the care package that they had received.

Huang Feng-ming said that though the pandemic had disrupted many families' lives and adversely affected many people's livelihoods, he was deeply moved to see government and private sectors working together to help everyone through this difficult time. The love and warmth from society would surely go a long way to lessen the impact of the pandemic.

The Ministry of Education announced on May 19 that all schools would be closed for in-person classes but that instruction would continue online. Tzu Chi volunteers called the needy families under their charge and quickly learned that some of the low-income families did not have computers for online learning. As a result, their children were forced to use cell phones to join the online classes, a very difficult task given the small screens of the phones. Volunteers brought this issue to the attention of Tzu Chi social workers. After evaluating the situation, a decision was reached to subsidize the families for the purchase of computers. Some volunteers who had extra

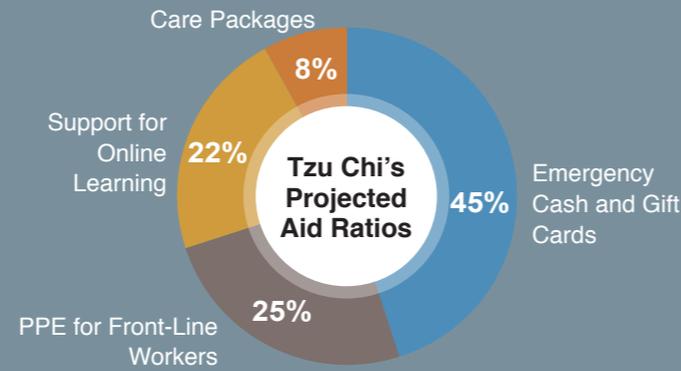
Volunteers deliver face shields and gloves to police (above, photo by Ding Yue-e) and firefighters (opposite page, photo courtesy of Liu Bao-ju). Front-line workers such as police and firefighters are exposed to a higher risk of infection during the pandemic.

notebook computers to spare also donated them to help underserved students learn remotely.

Chen Yi-shi (陳宜適), a Tzu Chi social worker based in northern Taiwan, gave an example. A girl in a family under Tzu Chi's long-term care was studying advertising design in a vocational high school. She did not have a computer, so she often had to borrow one from her classmates just to complete her homework assignments. Her teacher noticed the quandary of this hardworking girl and reported her situation to a Tzu Chi volunteer. Volunteers helped the girl pick out a computer suitable for her specialized learning. She now has no problem following her school's online courses.

Tzu Chi also helped some families pay for broadband connections for three months to facilitate at-home learning. The foundation also joined a project to provide wireless routers for underserved students. This project came about after Professor Yeh Ping-cheng (葉丙成) of the Department of Electrical Engineering at National Taiwan University and his team discovered during the pandemic that nearly 20,000 underprivileged students in Taiwan had no access to the Internet at home. He therefore sought out Tzu Chi for help to provide wireless routers for

Tzu Chi provided the COVID-19 aid listed below to police, firefighters, medical workers, and underprivileged families in Taiwan from January 1 to June 21, 2021:



PPE and Other Supplies for Front-Line Workers: 1,665,764 items



Support for Needy Families and Front-Line Workers: 347,468 items



these students. Other organizations that participated in this project included KKday, an e-commerce travel platform, and Jetfi Technology Company. The project was able to obtain 15,000 wireless routers, which Tzu Chi would rent for two months. The devices were sent to government educational departments across Taiwan on June 7 for distribution to underserved students.

The Level 3 alert was scheduled to remain in force until July 12, into the summer vacation for schools. To ensure that disadvantaged children have enough to eat during the break, Tzu Chi reached an agreement with the Keelung City Government on June 11 to help feed those children. The foundation planned to provide more than 2,000 needy families in Keelung with vegetables, fruit, and other food. The food will be delivered to the families in two installments in July and August. Volunteers are in discussion with other local governments about similar initiatives.

"Many people have asked me what Tzu Chi has done during the latest pandemic wave in Taiwan," CEO Yen Po-wen said. "I tell them that Tzu Chi has been around all along doing all sorts of things to help out. We've actually kept very busy." The CEO explained that just procuring and packaging the goods to be provided to people in quarantine (who received gift packs) and needy households (who

Jing Si Abode nuns and foundation employees pack relief goods to be delivered to underprivileged families.

LIU QIU-LING

received care packages) had been an enormous task, but it was made even harder due to the government's COVID regulations, as it was impossible to assemble volunteers to work together in large groups during this time. As a result, the nuns at the Jing Si Abode and foundation employees in Hualien had done most of the packaging work. "The Jing Si Abode has always provided the most solid support for Tzu Chi volunteers around the world," said Yen.

Upholding the spirit of "great mercy even to strangers and great compassion for all," the foundation has always striven to deliver hope to suffering people. "Our records show that from January to mid-June 2021, Tzu Chi donated more than two million items in Taiwan to aid front-line workers in the battle against COVID-19 and to help tide needy families over during this trying time," Yen continued. "That sheer number, two million, tells a story that we in Tzu Chi have never stopped working. So long as the pandemic persists, our anti-COVID efforts will never come to a halt."



Aiding in the Battle Against COVID-19

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi Vietnam

Tzu Chi Vietnam distributed aid to more than 6,900 needy families in the first half of 2021 to help them overcome the financial challenges of COVID-19. A relief operation like this may not have been difficult to carry out in normal times, but these aren't normal times. Nothing is easy or straightforward in a pandemic.

In April 2021, COVID-19 reared its head again in Asia. One of the countries adversely impacted was Vietnam, which had been noted for its exemplary management of the virus since the disease broke out over a year before. With a population of 98 million people, Vietnam had recorded just fewer than 3,000 confirmed cases by the end of April 2021, but that number spiked to more than 7,300 by the end of May. Despite the surge in infections, the country is still considered a model in the fight against COVID, especially when compared with other member states in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

A major contributing factor to Vietnam's success in containing the spread of the virus was the stringent precautionary measures the government had enforced. For example, a community would be put on lockdown as soon as infections were detected in it. The same applied to factories. People diagnosed with the disease were rushed to the hospital for treatment, and fellow community residents were quarantined on-site, forbidden to leave the area until the lockdown was lifted. Daily essentials were provided by the government during such lockdown periods.

Such an aggressive strategy successfully reined in the virus, cutting it off before it could spread to

more people, but it also resulted in a heavy economic toll. People who were financially better off managed to get by, but the underprivileged were not so lucky. Making ends meet became a struggle.

"Since 2020, everyone's life, not just mine, has been turned upside down," said Nguyen Thi Le Hoa, a Vietnamese Tzu Chi volunteer. "Many businesses have gone bankrupt, causing a lot of people to lose their jobs. The impact has spread beyond the economy. Everyone fears for their lives; wherever they go, they worry about being infected."

Nguyen works in a foreign-owned company. When infections were diagnosed once again in Ho Chi Minh City during the latest wave of infections, her company forbid its employees living in the city to go to work in its factory in nearby Tây Ninh Province. The shuttle bus service provided by the company was suspended as well.

Nguyen is a finance executive at the company, so she began working from home. But not everyone in her company has fared as well as she. "Our company has had to lay off 50 percent of its employees since the outbreak of the virus last year



to reduce our operational costs," she explained. "Some of those who have lost their jobs have been able to regain employment, but others haven't. The latter group had no choice but to live on unemployment relief."

Spreading the distributions out

In addition to the underprivileged from before the pandemic, the number of people needing help continued to increase after COVID-19 erupted. Tzu Chi Vietnam responded to the need by working with the government to help families cope. From January to May 2021 alone, volunteers distributed food to more than 6,900 households in Ho Chi Minh City and the provinces of Hải Dương, Tây Ninh, and Trà Vinh.

The pandemic had made such events a challenge to carry out. In part, this was because citizens were urged to strictly follow the Vietnamese

Working with local organizations, Tzu Chi Vietnam distributed aid to needy households in Tây Ninh Province in January 2021. Each family received a bag of rice weighing ten kilograms (22 pounds) and other necessities.

government's "5K message" to protect them from the virus. The 5K message included "Khẩu trang" (face masks), "Khử khuẩn" (disinfection), "Khoảng cách" (distancing), "Không tụ tập" (no gatherings), and "Khai báo y tế" (health declarations). Among these precautionary protocols, "distancing" and "no gatherings" especially presented a challenge to volunteers.

"We arranged six distributions in January," said Chen Da-yu (陳大瑜), head of Tzu Chi Vietnam. "But the pandemic situation escalated after we'd completed just two, disrupting our

schedule for the others. As a result, we had to rearrange our distribution venues and times, redesign how to conduct the events, and notify households on our recipient rosters of the changes.” Volunteers scaled down the events to reduce the crowd at each distribution, but planned more distributions to make up for the downsizing. The original events would have been completed in two days, but the adjusted distributions were spread over a week.

Compiling recipient rosters was another challenge during the pandemic. Because the number of government staffers that could report to work had been reduced, there wasn’t enough manpower to help Tzu Chi prepare the rosters. As a result, volunteers were not able to obtain complete information about the recipient households. They couldn’t, for example, obtain data about the number of people in each family, or their gender and age. Tzu Chi sidestepped the problem by distributing enough food to each household to last three people for a month.

The items distributed included rice—a staple in Vietnam—along with noodles, cooking oil, seasoning, and masks. The food helped ease the burdens of the needy during a time when their livelihoods were impacted by the pandemic. The masks directly reduced the chance of disease transmission, and the food might have had the same effect, albeit indirectly. After all, if those who earn a living by doing odd jobs were able to cut down on the times they had to work, they would have had a lesser risk of contracting the disease.

In addition to distributing the daily necessities during this difficult time, Tzu Chi Vietnam kept up its tradition of awarding tuition aid to disadvantaged students. In the past, volunteers would set up only one event venue in a city or district to award tuition aid. In response to the pandemic, however, they increased the number of venues to minimize the crowd at each event. For example, volunteers held award ceremonies at 11 locations in Hải Dương City, eight locations in Thanh Hà District, and six locations each in Tứ Kỳ and Thanh Miện Districts.

All the areas mentioned above were in the northern province of Hải Dương. Ta Thi Len, a resident of the province, has been a Tzu Chi volunteer for 20 years. She said the tuition aid distributed this May was a real blessing to her fellow residents. The province had experienced a particularly difficult time due to the pandemic. There had been a sudden surge in confirmed infections in Hải Dương this January. Strict preventive mea-

asures were put in place as a result, with neighboring provinces and cities limiting the interactive flow of people and goods with the province. The farm produce from Hải Dương had as a result sold very poorly.

The business sector suffered along with the agricultural sector. The government required the employees of local companies to be tested for COVID-19, and only those companies with a hundred percent negative tests were allowed to resume operation. Transportation regulations restricted the entry of raw materials into the province and the movement of products out of the area. All of this made it difficult for a company to operate.

Under these circumstances, the tuition aid provided by Tzu Chi was especially important for local needy families. Volunteer Chen Da-yu originally intended to travel north from Ho Chi Minh City to Hải Dương to assist in the distribution of the financial aid, but government officials in the province that were working with Tzu Chi to organize the distribution strongly urged him against doing so. They cited the danger of spreading or picking up the virus. Chen thus decided to leave the matter entirely in the care of local volunteers.

Volunteers conducted the events according to the government’s COVID-19 safety protocols. They overcame time and effort challenges presented by the increased number of events and successfully pulled off the mission despite the pandemic. All told, 215 elementary students each received one million dong (US\$45); 364 junior high and 132 high school students each received 1.6 million dong (US\$70) and two million dong (US\$87), respectively. This regular aid from Tzu Chi was like timely rain for the students.

“The money will help the students pay off part of their school expenses and increase their chances of staying in school, thus lifting a load off their shoulders,” said volunteer Ta Thi Len.

Giving whenever possible

Volunteers also donated personal protective equipment (PPE) to help the country battle the virus, especially for the use of front-line workers on the border with Cambodia. They made the donation with the help of the Union of Friendship Organizations and the Red Cross. The items donated included medical masks, gloves, protective gowns, safety goggles, infrared thermometers, and other similar equipment. Aside from the PPE, volunteers also donated backpack disinfectant sprayers and solar power lights. The latter



Volunteers held tuition aid distributions for underprivileged students in Tây Ninh Province in April (above) and Hải Dương Province in May (right). Following the government’s COVID safety protocols, everyone kept a distance of at least one meter (3.3 feet). A student displays a coin bank she received from Tzu Chi to save money to help other needy people.

Looking Back on the Critical Year

By Nguyen Thi Le Hoa, Tzu Chi volunteer in Ho Chi Minh City

- Vietnam has experienced four waves of COVID-19 since the first case was diagnosed in the country. Each wave spread faster than the previous one. All schools in Ho Chi Minh City are now temporarily closed, so my son has moved home from school and is learning remotely. My parents are old, which makes them more vulnerable to the virus. So, our entire family stays home as much as possible to avoid infection. We keep our rooms clean, maintain a simple, healthy diet, and exercise to stay fit. I am grateful that all my relatives and friends have stayed safe and sound.
- Every evening, I watch *Life Wisdom*, a Da Ai TV program featuring Master Cheng Yen's Dharma talks. Taking the Master's words to heart, I have tried to transform my fear of the virus into concrete action to help others. Though everyone is having a hard time during this crisis, we should still do our best to give. I've also been encouraging others to eat vegetarian and pray sincerely for the pandemic to end as soon as possible. Our pious sincerity and kind thoughts will help see us through this crisis.

was provided "because some places on the border do not have electricity," Chen Da-yu explained.

"The border personnel mainly deal with people trying to smuggle themselves into Vietnam," Chen added. He said that the pandemic situation in Cambodia was even more severe than that in Vietnam, so reinforcements had been sent to that border to help out. With the added manpower there, the need for PPE also increased.

In a crisis like the pandemic, Tzu Chi volunteers in Vietnam would like to do more for the country, but they knew they had to be very circumspect about every step they took. This was due to the severity of the COVID-19 situation in Vietnam and the strict precautionary measures enforced by the government. After the latest wave of infections started in late April, they had no choice but to cancel some of their scheduled work. But they were happy that at least they accomplished as much as they did when COVID restrictions were less stringent.

"I was so moved when I saw aid recipients bursting into tears after receiving goods from us," said volunteer Nguyen Thi Le Hoa. "I'm sincerely grateful to Master Cheng Yen for giving us the opportunity to form good affinities with our fellow country people." With her heart full of joy from giving, Nguyen has continued cheering on her fellow volunteers in Ho Chi Minh City. "The government has urged against gatherings, so we suspended our recycling work," she said. "But,

working in small groups, we have continued to visit our long-term care recipients to check on their needs and help them through this challenging time. I've also called on everyone to attend our online study group sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings [for spiritual nourishment]."

During this difficult time, volunteer Ta Thi Len, of the northern province of Hải Dương, thanked her counterparts in southern Vietnam for their support over the years. Their support has helped strengthened her determination to serve others. She said she had often reminded herself to study the Master's teachings with diligence and seize every opportunity to give. She will always remember what a volunteer once said when Tzu Chi entered its 50th year: "The Master's shoulders are small, but she is carrying the load of the world." Ta knows that the best way to share the Master's burden is to inspire more people to do good to help others, and to encourage more people to eat vegetarian. She's been trying to do both things as much as possible.

Providing compassionate relief to hurting and suffering people around the world is the mission of Tzu Chi volunteers. Even though social distancing and travel restrictions have limited their movements, they will continue working for those in need and strive to provide help in a timely manner. Volunteers in Vietnam too will stay the course and help local underserved people ride out this crisis. ❀



Thailand

Medicine for Refugees, Food for the Needy

By Liao Zhe-min

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi Thailand

Everyone fears getting infected with the coronavirus during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people avoid leaving their homes to reduce the risk. Read how Tzu Chi volunteers in Thailand continue to care for the health of refugees and provide aid for the poor during this challenging period.

A third wave of coronavirus infections started in Thailand in April 2021. The number of diagnosed cases rose from dozens to hundreds every day; by June, the number of new daily infections had reached into the thousands. All told, the country has recorded more than 190,000 cases since the pandemic began. The latest surge in infections prompted the Thai government to designate Bangkok and its nearby provinces as "dark red" zones—indicating the strictest level of control. Starting on May 1, gatherings were capped at 20 people. Sit-down dining was banned in restaurants; only takeout orders were allowed. Venues where the possibility of infection was higher, such as fitness clubs and gymnasiums, were ordered to close. Business hours at shopping centers and convenience stores were also shortened.

The tightened restrictions made life more difficult for people who worked odd jobs and did not have steady incomes. It also impacted those receiving long-term aid from Tzu Chi. Volunteer Chang Huei-lan (章惠蘭) stressed the need to reach out to people on the fringes of society in a time like this. Love and compassion are required even more in such difficult times. Despite the challenges posed by the virus, volunteers with Tzu Chi Thailand remain committed to aiding the impoverished.

Volunteers have also continued helping the sick. The free clinic center at the Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall in Bangkok, inaugurated in January 2021, caters mostly to refugees and low-income people. Though

it is temporarily closed because of the pandemic, volunteers have worked out a way to continue serving patients. Many of the refugees the clinic cares for suffer from chronic illnesses, and their medical needs don't come to a halt just because of the pandemic. "We must continue giving to them to safeguard their health," said Chang Huei-chen (張惠珍), head of an administrative team for the free clinic task force of Tzu Chi Thailand. "Our medical service cannot come to a stop."



Volunteers, wearing masks and gloves to protect themselves, visit a needy person in Thailand in May 2021.



Medicine delivery service

Thailand is about 14 times larger than Taiwan, or about the size of Spain. The country hosts many refugees from a variety of other nations. Most do not enjoy the right to work, and their lives are difficult. If they become sick or suffer from chronic conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease, they miss out on timely treatment. They just can't afford the medical bills.

To help address this need, Tzu Chi Thailand started providing free monthly medical services to this group of people in 2015. Over the past six years, they have logged more than 31,000 patient visits. At the beginning of this year, a free clinic center was inaugurated at the Jing Si Hall in Bangkok in order to help even more people in need. The center was open for treatment every Tuesday and Saturday, but had to temporarily close in mid-April due to the pandemic. In the wake of the closure, the center's medical team became concerned about patients requiring medication for chronic illnesses. They decided to initiate a service to deliver medicine to these patients' homes to help maintain their health.

The team first reviewed all the medical histories at the clinic to determine which patients might need help. Then they started prescribing medicine for pharmacists to dispense. Volunteers followed up by packing the medicine for delivery. Precautions were taken while the work was being carried out to reduce the chance of infection.

Marinthorn Samlord, a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association, helps dispense medicine for the project. "We first check when a patient last obtained his medicine and when he or she will need more. Based on that information, we are able to prepare more for them, so they do not run out during the time of closure."

Volunteers send some medicine through the mail and deliver other prescriptions in person. They also organized a work relief program through which refugees could be paid to deliver medicine

Tzu Chi Thailand provides long-term care to refugees in the country. Its free clinic center, catering mostly to refugees and low-income people, temporarily ceased operation in mid-April 2021 due to the pandemic. In its place, the medical team there launched a prescription delivery service to continue serving patients.

to fellow refugees living near them. No matter how it is distributed, the steady flow of medicine during this time is invaluable. Yasir Medmood, one of the refugees that benefits from this service, said, "I'm an asthma patient, and medications that treat my condition are really important to me. I'm truly grateful to the Tzu Chi team for delivering medicine to my home."

Most medicine for chronic illnesses can be stored at room temperature, but some, like insulin, needs refrigeration. Volunteers took care of this need too. "We use cold storage boxes that we pack with ice cubes to help the medicine stay fresh during our delivery trips," explained Sukanya Rimphanawet (林純鈴), CEO of Tzu Chi Thailand.

Patients can also use an around-the-clock hotline or a messaging app to report their health conditions and provide photos of the medications they are currently taking. This allows Tzu Chi doctors to track their condition and adjust their medicine. Chang Huei-chen said that this service and their medicine delivery efforts will continue until the pandemic situation has eased. The free clinic is also planning to implement referral and psychiatric services to safeguard patients' health in a more comprehensive way.

Distributions for Tzu Chi care recipients

Before the coronavirus pandemic, families under Tzu Chi Thailand's long-term care would come to the Jing Si Hall in Bangkok at fixed times to receive aid from the foundation. More than 200 families routinely received help this way. But after

Looking Back on the Critical Year

By Chang Huei-chen, head of Administrative Team, Free Clinic Task Force, Tzu Chi Thailand

- With the virus looming over everyone and everything, I feel immense pressure making every decision and seeing it through. But the plight of the refugees keeps me and the rest of the team going. Besides trying to reduce our chance of infection, we use technology, a work-relief program, and other ways to continue our medical service for the underprivileged.

COVID-19 broke out last year, such distributions were made smaller and spread out over more locations to protect the health of recipients. This new arrangement resulted in more work for volunteers, but they willingly rose to the challenge.

Volunteers Chen Hsiu-chia (陳秀佳) and Chang Huei-lan don face shields, masks, and gloves to help in the smaller distributions. They travel to the event venues in communities to distribute financial aid and daily necessities such as rice, cooking oil, salt, soybean milk powder, toothbrushes, and toothpaste to needy households.

Chang Huei-lan explained that Bangkok covers a large area and has a large population. There is a wide gap between the rich and the poor there. She mentioned a mentally disabled aid recipient who lived in a makeshift shed built of wooden sheets and canvas. His living conditions were terrible. "Tzu Chi's aid could at least help him stay fed and warm," said Chang.

Chen Hsiu-chia said that during one of their distributions, they discovered a skip-generation household living next to a sewage ditch. The entire family was jobless. They had no money to buy food, so often went without. After evaluation, the family began receiving Tzu Chi's emergency aid.

Chang, Chen, and other volunteers realized that though they had no choice but to cut down their home visits to the needy during the pandemic, suffering had continued to exist in many corners of society. They thus could not let up their efforts to give. Though they could not help everyone, one more person helped meant more suffering was relieved.

Taking precautions while helping others

Chang Huei-chen recalled that when the team at the free clinic center first started delivering medicine to patients, they thought a single set of protective gear each would be enough. But after repeated discussions, they decided to bring extra sets of protective gear and disinfectant alcohol on their delivery trips. They had concluded that it was "better to

be safe than sorry" when it came to protecting themselves while helping others. Chang added, "You protect not only yourself but also others when you take proper precautions."

Chang admitted to feeling fear and anxiety serving others during this critical time. She said that with the virus looming over everyone and everything, she feels immense pressure making every decision and seeing it through. In addition to the fear of getting infected, every team member needs to deal with the stress of being stopped and questioned by the police on their delivery trips. But the plight of patients they serve keeps them going in the face of such challenges. The needy would be left on their own without Tzu Chi's help, so the volunteers are braving whatever risks they must to continue serving them.

Volunteer Chang Huei-lan also admitted fear about going out to conduct distributions for destitute households during the pandemic. "I'm actually very afraid," she said. "But if I don't do it, who else could go out to help?" She knows that under the circumstances, the best thing she can do is protect herself the best she can. She takes all necessary precautions when she goes out to meet the needy, and she takes a shower and changes into a new set of clothing as soon as she arrives home.

Chang's fellow volunteer Chen Hsiu-chia is just as careful. Protective equipment such as face shields and masks has become a part of her, and she disinfects her hands with sanitizer as often as she can.

When asked, "Why are you still willing to come out to care for needy households in a critical time like this?" they both said that there aren't many volunteers locally, and considering that older people are at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, they balk at enlisting help from that age group of volunteers. "Since we still have the ability to give," they said, "we should step forward at a time like this—after taking due precautions."

With COVID still raging, dedicated and brave volunteers like these in Thailand will keep up their efforts to bring light to dark corners of society. ❁



Warming Migrant Workers' Hearts During the Pandemic

By Zhang Yu-fan

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi Singapore

Of the more than 60,000 people confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 in Singapore, 90 percent have been migrant workers. The services of these workers are vital to many sectors in the Singaporean economy. In response, the government has offered them testing and treatment, in addition to enforcing a quarantine to contain the spread of the virus. Tzu Chi has done what it can to help these foreign workers weather this viral storm.

In its Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific called on countries to include migrant workers in their COVID-19 vaccination plans. Such persons are exposed to a higher risk of infection. The rights of migrant workers, with their relatively disadvantaged situations, call for special attention in a crisis like the pandemic.

Singapore, known for its world-leading economic competitiveness, is one of the countries that has reported COVID-19 cluster infections among migrant workers. After the coronavirus emerged in the country in January 2020, the government used technology to help tackle the pandemic. For example, they launched digital tools such as TraceTogether App/Token and SafeEntry to facilitate contact tracing. Though the efficiency of such tracking systems was highly praised by epidemiologists from Harvard University, large-scale cluster infections began popping up at the end of March. Most of these were in dormitories housing foreign workers. The government quickly implemented a “circuit breaker” response, a measure similar to a lockdown. The order required people to stay home for work or schooling, dine-in meals were forbidden, and more than 300,000 migrant

workers in the nation were tested or quarantined.

The government’s quick response successfully brought the outbreaks under control. In fact, the country did so well that Bloomberg News ranked Singapore the world’s best in weathering COVID-19. That was on April 25, 2021. But soon thereafter, in May, the country experienced a spike in community cases, prompting the government once again to tighten its control measures, including those at dormitories for migrant workers.

On May 17, less than two weeks after the tighter restrictions were imposed, the Tzu Chi Humanistic Youth Centre received a phone call from an official at the government’s Ministry of Manpower. The official expressed hope that Tzu Chi could resume their care for migrant workers through programs similar to the “Stay Home Quilt” carried out last year. That program was designed to enhance the emotional well-being of migrant workers. The official hoped that Tzu Chi could come through again for these essential workers and help them through the challenges of COVID-19.

Doing the right thing

After the outbreak of infections among migrant workers last year, the government provided them with treatment expenses, quarantine facilities, and

food. They even requested that employers continue paying salaries to their foreign workers diagnosed with the disease, then subsidized the employers for the payment.

But even after the outbreak was successfully contained and the government had eased its preventive measures for most of the city-state, the country’s migrant laborers still faced strict movement restrictions. They remained mostly confined to their dorms, with meals delivered to the doors of their dorm rooms. Once every few months, their employers would charter vehicles to take them to locations designated by the government. There they could buy daily necessities, wire money home, or do other activities. Other than that, they could leave home only for work. This way of life certainly wouldn’t be considered free, but they were happy just to leave their rooms and get fresh air.

To help migrant workers through this difficult time, Tzu Chi joined a collective effort to care for them. Volunteers made and donated cloth masks to them, spruced up an isolation facility for infected workers, and prepared daily necessities for the workers. Working with other organizations, they also launched an art project called “Stay Home Quilt” and encouraged migrant workers to join in. Each participant received a sewing kit from the Tzu

Tzu Chi Singapore held an exhibition in November 2020 featuring fabric works created by migrant workers and others under a project called “Stay Home Quilt.”

Chi Humanistic Youth Centre to create any patterns on a piece of recycled fabric. Participants were encouraged to express their emotions and creativity through the act of sewing.

Later, Tzu Chi Singapore invited foreign workers who participated in the project to donate their fabric artwork. Local artist Jimmy Ong (王文清) then consolidated the artwork with similar creations made by members of the public into a work of art symbolizing “home.” This work and other fabric artwork created under the project were put on display at the Tzu Chi Humanistic Youth Centre for the public to view. The exhibition attracted a lot of attention and struck a chord with many who attended it.

Lim Choon Choon (林杏純), manager of the Tzu Chi Humanistic Youth Centre, pointed out that the art project had used large amounts of recycled materials, such as fabrics and buttons, that had been obtained from used clothes found at Tzu Chi recycling stations. The recycled materials were





given new life in the project and became a medium through which the underprivileged could share their stories and give vent to their pent-up emotions.

At the request of the Ministry of Manpower in May this year to offer a similar service, Tzu Chi Singapore decided to join hands with other NGOs again to reach out to foreign workers. They planned to organize on-line forums, art workshops, and sewing and poetry reading activities as a way to care for their social and emotional well-being.

The Tzu Chi Singapore branch also sought permission from the Migrant Workers' Centre during the pandemic to have Tzu Chi volunteers visit migrant workers and organize stress-relieving activities at their dormitories. "Except for my roommates, you are the first person I have seen in the past four months!" That was the first sentence that an Indian worker said to Lim Choon Choon when the latter visited a migrant workers' dormitory. Lim still remembered how emotional the worker was, the sight of which made her eyes well up. She said that she teared up not just from seeing the worker's unfiltered helplessness but also because "I felt I'd done the right thing by visiting the dormitory."

Singapore suffered tens of thousands of COVID-19 infections after the pandemic hit over a year ago. Between 80 and 90 percent of those infections were from foreign laborers. The Tzu Chi volunteers visit-

Participants of the "Stay Home Quilt" project work at the Tzu Chi Humanistic Youth Centre to create an art piece in the shape of a house.

ing migrant workers' dormitories were thus understandably worried about the possibility of becoming infected themselves. Some volunteers wore four masks under a protective face shield to avoid infection, and others refrained from going to the restroom for up to five hours.

"Even with all the precautionary measures, I still couldn't be sure whether I had escaped being infected," Lim said. In fact, none of the volunteers could be certain, but it was their action in the face of that uncertainty that moved Lim the most. Despite their fears, volunteers bravely visited the dormitories just to send a little warmth to those helpless workers.

Apart but not alone

The pandemic also impacted how Tzu Chi Singapore helped needy households receiving long-term aid from the foundation. The "circuit breaker" lockdown went into effect in April 2020 and wasn't gradually relaxed until early June 2020. Tzu Chi volunteers during that period had to suspend their regular monthly visits to needy families, among which were more than a hundred households consisting of older people living alone or liv-

Looking Back on the Critical Year

By Lim Choon Choon, manager of the Tzu Chi Humanistic Youth Centre
Compiled by Pang Lun Peng

- When people needed face masks, we sewed masks for them. We had planned to make 500, but we ended up making 50,000. When infections spiked in the dormitories of foreign workers, we went there to offer care. What society needed, we delivered.
- Whatever your nationality or ethnicity, we live together in Singapore, so together we shall plow ahead through the pandemic. This past year was a challenging one, but for me it was also a fulfilling year replete with positive thoughts, optimism, and gratitude.

ing with other older people. Unable to visit in person, volunteers telephoned these seniors frequently to check on them. The conversations revealed that many older people couldn't obtain personal protective supplies. As a result, they were reusing face masks repeatedly. Volunteers responded by preparing gift packs for them containing masks, hand sanitizer, and dry food. Volunteers also attended to the special needs of some families by donating wheelchairs or baby essentials to them.

All items intended for the needy during the "circuit breaker" period were delivered by aid recipients and Tzu Chi volunteers who worked as taxi drivers and whose incomes had been adversely affected by COVID-19. Tzu Chi Singapore initiated a work relief program by engaging the services of the volunteers and aid recipients. The pro-

gram provided a win-win-win solution: the drivers delivered precious supplies and earned a little money, the foundation achieved its goal of getting supplies to needy families, and recipients received things to help them along.

Despite restrictions during the pandemic, volunteers did their best to help the vulnerable. Goh Leay Ying (吳麗瑩), deputy manager of the Tzu Chi Charity Development Department, shared a story about a family under Tzu Chi's long-term care that had happened earlier during the pandemic. A middle-aged woman would not leave her home in fear of becoming infected outside and bringing the disease inside to her bedridden husband, whose immune system had been weakened. But staying within the confines of their home all the time, day after day, had taken a toll on her. At times, she would shout from a window at home at the top of her lungs to let out her pent-up stress from being housebound. When a Tzu Chi volunteer called her to extend care and check on her, she told the volunteer that she had not eaten bread in the longest time. That very evening, another volunteer who lived in the same community brought a loaf of bread to her and left it at her door.

Afterwards, the woman called the volunteer who had delivered the bread to her and thanked her. The volunteer could tell from the voice on the phone that the woman was quite ecstatic. Goh said, "Bread is something easily obtainable for us, but for the woman, it was like timely rain and a great blessing from heaven." She added that though the pandemic had blocked some of the usual interpersonal connections, it also fostered a sense of gratitude for some of the smaller pleasures in life. Things which might have been taken for granted before—a loaf of bread, for example—now were a cause to be cheerful and thankful. ❀



A volunteer makes a bed at an isolation facility for infected workers. Volunteers also pasted posters carrying aphorisms by Dharma Master Cheng Yen on walls in the facility.

When Breathing Becomes a Luxury

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi Hualien headquarters

India, with a population of over 1.3 billion people, has been one of the world's hardest hit areas during the pandemic. The South Asian country recorded nine million coronavirus infections in May 2021 alone. Medical institutions were overwhelmed by the sudden surge of patients needing care as COVID-19 spiraled out of control, which resulted in a staggering death toll. Here is how Tzu Chi reached out to help.



COVID-19 vaccines started to be approved for use at the end of 2020, bringing hope to a world reeling from the disease. There finally seemed to be light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. Months later, however, instead of a decline in confirmed cases, the global COVID-19 rates hit a level even higher than the peak in 2020. The main reason was the runaway outbreak of the disease in India.

According to an official tally by the Indian government, the country recorded more than nine million diagnosed cases and nearly 120,000 deaths in May 2021 alone. At its highest, there were more than 400,000 infections and 4,000 deaths per day. India's second coronavirus wave hit the nation like an unstoppable tsunami.

With an insidious new variant complicating matters, the nation's medical system collapsed in April. New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and other major cities became hotspots for the disease. Over 1.3 billion people faced a collective crisis as the infection ravaged the country. The country's crisis spread far beyond its borders, impacting the global community as well.

India is the world's largest producer of COVID vaccines, and the main supplier to COVAX, a worldwide initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID vaccines. But as the coronavirus pandemic grew out of hand in India, the government began to restrict vaccine exports to satisfy domestic demand, resulting in delivery delays to other countries. As the world struggled to overcome the coronavirus, the crisis in India could not be overlooked.

In view of the situation and based on humanitarian and compassionate considerations, the Tzu Chi Foundation sped up its efforts to combat the disease by providing life-saving medical supplies and equipment to India and neighboring countries, including Nepal, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Laos.

Urgent need for oxygen

"We have been admitting an average of 250 to 300 suspected COVID-19 patients per day. Of those, about 150 have had to be moved into the intensive care unit. However, only about 30 people are discharged from the hospital every day. The load on our medical capacity is huge. We currently need oxygen concentrators the most."

Those words were from Prof. Lt. Col. Dr. A.

PPE donated by Tzu Chi arrived in Kathmandu, Nepal, at the end of May 2021.

Ravikumar, when he appealed to Tzu Chi for help via videoconferencing earlier this year. Ravikumar is the Pro-Vice Chancellor of SRM Medical College Hospital and Research Centre in Kattankulathur, Tamil Nadu, India. He was describing the severe need for medical oxygen driven by the spike in COVID-19 cases. Due to the critical shortages of oxygen, many people in India were spending large sums of money buying oxygen on the black market, even though such sources were dubious. Those too poor to afford it could only watch helplessly as their family members died in pain. It was heart-wrenching to see one sad scene after another of people losing their loved ones to the coronavirus.

In response to the urgent need, Tzu Chi jumped into action to provide oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders, ventilators, and other equipment to 88 religious, charitable, and medical institutions in India and six neighboring countries. The foundation is also planning to donate ten liquid oxygen storage tanks for hospitals to use.

Because patients suffering from respiratory failure can die in a few minutes for lack of oxygen, hospitals must be able to provide an endless supply of oxygen to their patients to save lives. That's why they need equipment like the oxygen storage tanks. The tanks store low-temperature, liquefied oxygen, which, after processing, is delivered via pipeline to hospital wards for use. The purchase of such equipment requires specialized knowledge. Fortunately, the Tzu Chi team in charge of the purchase and transportation of the equipment has been able to enlist the help of Dr. Lin Chin-lon (林俊龍), CEO of the Tzu Chi medical mission.

"We are also very grateful for the help of Mr. Hou Zhe-hong [侯哲宏], of Kaohsiung, [southern Taiwan]," said Huang Jing En (黃靜恩), a Tzu Chi staffer who helps organize the foundation's aid to India. "He provided 600 47-liter [12.4-gallon] oxygen cylinders to us. Thanks also to volunteers Pan Ji-li [潘機利] and Huang Jian-zhong [黃建忠], also of Kaohsiung, for connecting us with Mr. Hou and helping make some arrangements." Huang Jing En explained that the foundation received a request in early May from the International Buddhist Confederation in India for 2,000 oxygen cylinders to help meet the need in India. When Hou learned about it, he promptly worked to obtain as many oxygen cylinders as he could for Tzu Chi to help save lives. Hou deals in a variety of merchandise, including medical equipment and supplies.

Hou was eventually able to obtain 600 oxygen cylinders. He and his employees started working overtime in mid-May to inspect the equipment and



get it ready for shipment. Their hard work paid off. Everything was loaded for shipping on May 24 and sailed for New Delhi in early June. Everyone was worn out by the time they were done with the task, but they were full of joy for being able to help and contribute.

Tzu Chi staffers and volunteers worked equally hard to obtain oxygen concentrators for India. By the end of May, one thousand concentrators donated by the foundation had arrived in the nation. Of those one thousand machines, 200 were delivered to Mumbai, and collected by Tzu Chi volunteer Pravin Bhalesain. Twenty of those 200 concentrators were provided to the Missionaries of Charity, 80 to Sneha Charitable Trust, and one hundred to ABM Samaj Prabodhan Sanstha. ABM, a Buddhist non-profit, held a prayer service after receiving the donation from Tzu Chi in the hope that Buddhism could give everyone more strength. The aforementioned Pravin Bhalesain, a member of this non-profit, also called upon local Buddhists and entrepreneurs to eat vegetarian.

Another local Tzu Chi volunteer, Girish Shenoy, of Bengaluru, Karnataka, received ten concentrators donated by the foundation. When India's second coronavirus wave broke out this year, he purchased oxygen containers out-of-pocket, filled them at oxygen filling stations, then provided the oxygen free-of-charge to impoverished COVID patients. When he received the ten concentrators from Tzu Chi in early June, he immediately used the machines and a donated generator to set up an oxygen filling station to help more people. "I'm so

happy to see our local volunteers stepping up to the plate during this difficult time," said Simon Shyong (熊士民), deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission.

Another two hundred of the one thousand oxygen concentrators were delivered to Tamil Nadu. The donation was enthusiastically received by the local government and people. The members of the social elite who worked with Tzu Chi on the project promised to deliver the machines to needy hospitals. "Though they are not Tzu Chi volunteers, they decided to work with us when they learned what Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi do," Huang Jing En said.

Volunteering to care for the sick

Tzu Chi's COVID aid to India started as early as April 2020. Lockdowns were implemented in the country in March and were extended again and again, devastating the livelihoods of countless people, especially those who lived from hand to mouth. In response, Tzu Chi started working with the Missionaries of Charity, the Camillians (a Roman Catholic missionary order based in Italy), and Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India to provide aid to local vulnerable people. Thanks to the help of these organizations, the foundation's aid has been able to reach areas Tzu Chi volunteers haven't been able to visit personally.

The aid goods donated by Tzu Chi included rice, cooking oil, salt, and other food, as well as personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks. By April 2021, Tzu Chi's partners in India

had distributed 190,000 food packages to the needy, each enough to last a recipient household for a month.

After India's second wave of COVID-19 erupted in April this year, local destitute people found themselves worse off than last year. Disregarding the risk of infection to themselves, many priests and nuns from the organizations that worked with Tzu Chi helped the poor in the streets every day or served the sick at medical facilities.

"With the pandemic so severe, why do you still insist on going out into the streets to give?" Tzu Chi staffers asked nuns from the Missionaries of Charity. Their answer was deeply moving: "If we don't help the poor, who else will? We must do all we can. If the worst should happen to us and our lives end, we'll simply return to the Lord's side. But as long as we are still breathing, we'll make the best of every day by giving to hurting and suffering people."

Similarly, members of the Camillians were doing their best to help during this trying time. Like the nuns from the Missionaries of Charity, they were ready to sacrifice their lives to help the less fortunate. In late April, the first group of Camillian priests and nuns donned Tzu Chi-supplied PPE and ventured into hospitals packed with COVID-19 patients. There they provided help and support to front-line medical personnel. They fed patients, cleaned up after them, and even helped dispose of the bodies of the deceased.

"They all underwent rigorous training before they could go into hospitals to serve," Huang Jing

Volunteers in Singapore load medical supplies donated by Tzu Chi into a shipping container to be transported to Cambodia. Volunteers in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore have been helping the foundation purchase necessary equipment and supplies and arranging for them to be transported to India and six other countries (photo 1). When a shipment of Tzu Chi-supplied medical items arrived at an airport in Nepal in late May, the government gave local volunteers special permission to clear customs on-site (photo 2). Since the pandemic broke out, Sera Jey Monastery in southern India has helped Tzu Chi distribute aid to local needy people. When the foundation learned earlier this year that the monastery was in dire need of protective equipment to fight COVID-19, they sent items such as protective clothing, disinfectant spray, anti-bacterial gloves and masks, and oximeters to the monastery. The items arrived in mid-May (photo 3).

En explained. "They even had to submit a written affidavit stating that their decision to serve in the hospital was theirs alone." Huang felt for and worried about the safety of these priests, nuns, and youth volunteers who willingly chose to serve patients in such difficult environments. Dharma Master Cheng Yen was just as concerned when she learned that the priests and nuns were prepared to "never make it out." She said in a choked voice, "No, we mustn't let the worst happen to them. Each of them must come out safe and sound."

On May 17, the Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, received the happy news that the 40 priests,

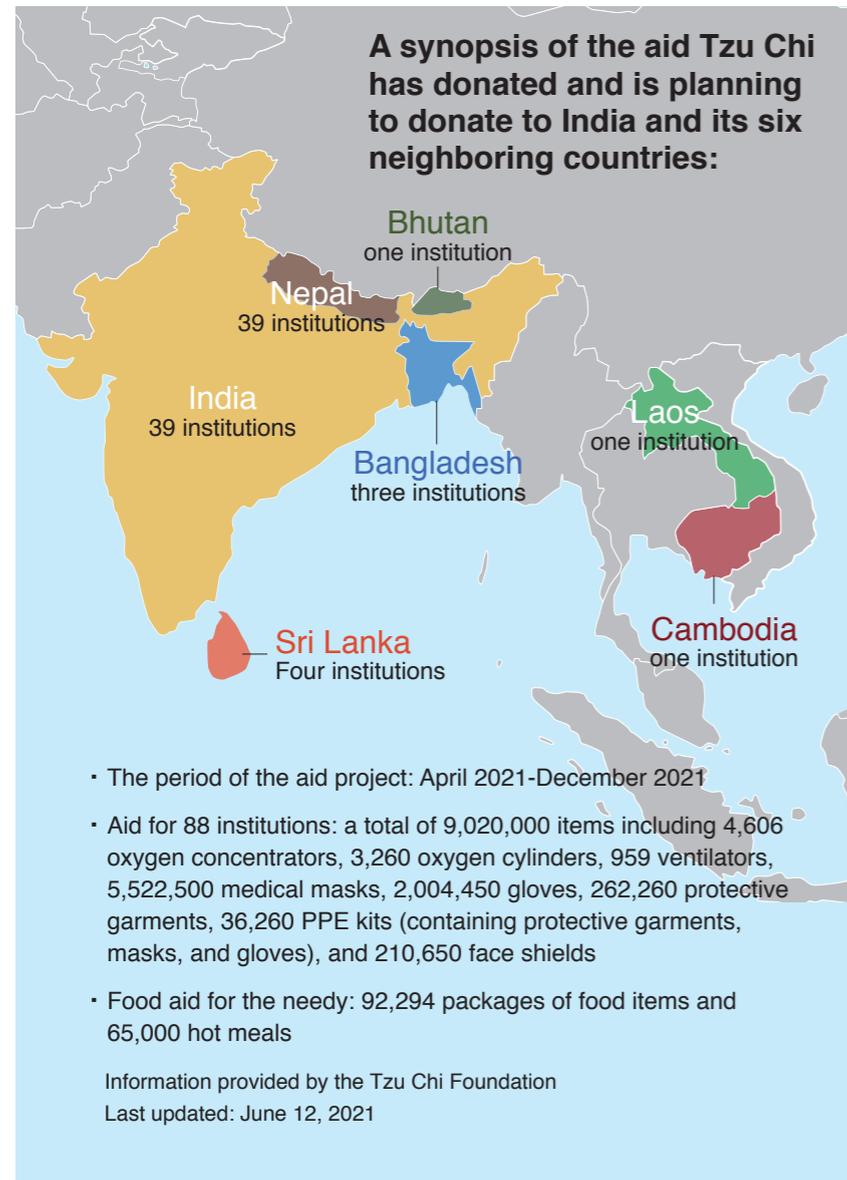
nuns, and volunteers who went into two Catholic hospitals to serve had safely completed their three-week service period. A second group of Camillian members would take over and volunteer in three Catholic hospitals in the next phase. Though by early June a few of these clergy members had been diagnosed with the coronavirus, they were all eventually able to recover and return home. Father Baby Ellickal, M.I., head of the Camillians in India, said in a message to Tzu Chi that he felt nothing but gratitude and appreciation for the cross-religious help provided by the foundation. He thanked Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi volunteers for their

continuous support for the Camillians in India. He promised that he and his fellow brothers and sisters would do their absolute best to never let the Master and Tzu Chi volunteers down.

Speaking of the Camillians and the other Tzu Chi partners in India, Master De Chen (德宸) of the Jing Si Abode relayed a message from Master Cheng Yen. She said that the Master had stressed the necessity of providing enough protective equipment for all those working on the front lines. It was imperative to help them be properly protected as they worked to help others. "The Master called on all Tzu Chi volunteers and all others around the world to harbor gratitude for front-line workers and to give them encouragement, best wishes, and the best support."

Aid to Nepal

One of the countries adversely impacted by India's latest COVID-19 outbreak was Nepal, which borders India on three sides. With a population of about 30 million, Nepal recorded a daily average of over 5,000 COVID cases in May 2021,



accompanied by a rapidly climbing death toll. A major reason for this surge was that many Nepalese had traveled to India earlier to attend Kumbh Mela, a major Hindu festival held every 12 years and believed to be the largest religious gathering on Earth. The Nepalese who went to India were believed to have brought back the virus that caused the surge of infections in their own country. The rapid spread of the disease in Nepal raised concerns that their outbreak might mimic India's.

In early May, Tzu Chi received a request from Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH) in Nepal for medical equipment and supplies. The university was in desperate need. After days of work that included inquiring about prices and arranging for transportation, five ventilators and 70,000 medical gloves arrived at the healthcare institution. The hospital thanked Tzu Chi for its generous donation and said that the ventilators had already been used to save the lives of several patients.

The Missionaries of Charity have been working with Tzu Chi to distribute daily necessities to help vulnerable people through the coronavirus crisis.

In addition to donating medical equipment and supplies to TUTH and other institutions in Nepal, the foundation also asked local Tzu Chi volunteers to check and confirm some local needs. "Sister Qiu Yang [邱揚] purchased needed medical equipment in Kathmandu, the nation's capital, and delivered it to the remote Manang District Hospital," explained Liu Jin-kuan (劉勁寬), a Tzu Chi staffer at the foundation's headquarters in Hualien. "It was a difficult journey, lasting 17 hours." The trip was challenging because it involved travel across mountainous terrain. Happily, the shipment of supplies, including oxygen concentration equipment, oximeters, and infrared thermometers, arrived safely at the hospital on May 19.

The equipment donated to Manang District



Four hundred underserved families in Mysore, Karnataka, India, received Tzu Chi-donated daily goods on January 27, 2021.

Hospital was purchased in Nepal. However, the country didn't have a well-developed manufacturing industry, so most of the medical supplies and equipment the country needed had to be imported from abroad. Given the circumstances, Tzu Chi volunteers in China, "the world's factory," were given the responsibility of purchasing needed equipment for Nepal and arranging for its transportation.

Determined to deliver

The first chartered plane carrying Tzu Chi-donated supplies and equipment for Nepal took off from Lanzhou, northwest China, on May 24, but the goods on that flight had been manufactured 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) away, in Kunshan, near Shanghai. Volunteers in Kunshan had been entrusted with the assignment of escorting the shipment to Lanzhou.

"The elevators at the logistics company in charge of the delivery were broken when we were loading the supplies and equipment onto trucks to be delivered to Lanzhou," said Liu Jin-kuan. "There were over one hundred boxes. Our volunteers had to move the supplies, one box at a time, from the third floor to the first to be loaded onto the trucks."

When the volunteers accompanied the shipment to Lanzhou, they encountered another unexpected situation. They were told that due to the pandemic, the chartered plane couldn't fly directly over the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to Nepal as scheduled. Instead, the plane had to land in Cambodia first and be sanitized before it could fly over to Nepal. After that first plane had completed its mission, all the following chartered planes—seven in all—followed this "direct flight with stopover" flight plan. Even though the plan wasn't as smooth as first envisioned, Liu Jin-kuan reflected, "As long as any channel remains open that allows us to get our aid into Nepal, we're grateful."

By mid-June, the aid from Tzu Chi, including life-saving oxygen concentrators, had reached 39 religious, medical, and charitable institutions in Nepal's seven provinces. This was possible only with the help of Tzu Chi volunteers in Nepal, Nepal's Ministry of Health and Population, and various other organizations. And it wasn't just



hospitals in urban areas that would benefit—volunteers planned to deliver equipment and supplies to health stations in outlying areas unreachable by car too.

Deputy CEO Simon Shyong talked about the difficulties that might be involved in such delivery trips, using Manang District as an example. “Manang District is located at an elevation of over 3,000 meters [9,840 feet] above sea level; the hospital there that received our aid in May sits at 4,200 meters [13,780 feet]. When they received the medical equipment we donated on May 19, they had planned to deliver some of the items to even higher places with the help of donkeys.” However, the plan to transport the items to five more outlying villages with donkeys was derailed by days of rain and a magnitude 5.8 earthquake that hit central Nepal on May 19. The quake and rain affected the road conditions. In the end, porters were employed to deliver the supplies to their destinations. Shyong

Camillian priests and nuns volunteered to go into hospitals to serve patients after India was hit by a second coronavirus wave this year.

summed up their herculean efforts to get the supplies out: “No matter how arduous the roads are, or how high a place is, we and the organizations that work with us are determined to beat all odds to accomplish our delivery missions.”

Aid to the Buddha’s birthplace

The aforementioned aid was provided to Nepal in May and June this year, but Tzu Chi’s help had begun even earlier than that. The foundation sent anti-coronavirus supplies to the nation last year. And in January 2021, the foundation started offering a work relief program in Lumbini, the Buddha’s birthplace, to help people in the area get through the pandemic.

The program, a joint effort between Tzu Chi and the International Buddhist Society in Lumbini, pays local women to make cloth face masks for schoolteachers and students. The program serves a dual purpose: participating women earn some income to help them get by, and students and teachers receive some basic protection against the coronavirus.

Just as Tzu Chi started 55 years ago with the help of 30 housewives, Venerable Bhikkhu Maitri, head of the International Buddhist Society, launched the mask-making project by engaging the services of 33 women. After they had been trained, they quickly got up to speed and made 20,000 masks in just 12 days. If each recipient received two masks each, that was enough masks to benefit 10,000 people.

With the program off to a good start, Bhikkhu Maitri decided to expand the project from one district to three by late April. But before he could do so, “the pandemic rates started shooting up,” said Liu Jin-kuan, “forcing the government to impose a lockdown. The 96 project participants could no longer gather at community centers to work. Instead, Bhikkhu Maitri had the sewing machines delivered to the homes of the women so that they could continue sewing masks.” Liu said that though the participants were able to keep up their sewing work at home, the schools were closed after the lockdown measures were implemented, so the masks they made were donated instead to law enforcement agencies.

From late April to May, Bhikkhu Maitri supplied more than 20,000 cloth masks made by the women and Tzu Chi-donated face shields, gloves, disinfectant, and other similar items to eight government and private organizations, including the police department in Lumbini.

In early May, the Lumbini city government made an appeal to Tzu Chi for hospital beds, ECG (electrocardiography) equipment, and other medical devices for an isolation facility. The Tzu Chi personnel in Hualien who handled this request for help couldn’t understand why an isolation facility would need hospital-grade equipment, so they asked Bhikkhu Maitri to help the foundation further understand the situation. After making inquiries, he reported back to the Tzu Chi personnel that the isolation center would continue to operate after the pandemic as a healthcare institution. The Tzu Chi staffers then consulted with professionals, including Dr. Lin Chin-lon, before deciding to help equip the isolation facility. To speed things up, Bhikkhu Maitri temporarily shifted money from

the mask-making project to help pay for the required equipment.

Thanks to Bhikkhu Maitri’s help, Tzu Chi has been able to implement its COVID aid to Lumbini more smoothly and efficiently. The Buddhist monk’s connection with Tzu Chi isn’t recent, however. He said that he had visited Tzu Chi in Taiwan 30 years ago, when he came to the island to attend an international Buddhist youth event. In 2015, when a major earthquake hit Nepal, he also had the opportunity to get to know some Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan and Malaysia who were visiting his country to carry out relief work after the temblor. His connection with Tzu Chi, spanning decades, bears witness to this saying by Master Cheng Yen: “It is never too late for a deep-rooted karmic affinity to blossom.”

On May 3, the team at the Tzu Chi Hualien headquarters in charge of organizing the foundation’s COVID aid to India, Nepal, and the five other countries started holding daily meetings to confirm the medical items that were badly needed and the numbers required. The team also held online meetings every evening with various organizations in India and Nepal to understand how things were going in their countries and discuss aid related matters. Despite challenges presented by lockdowns and suspended flights, foundation staffers and volunteers worked hard to get life-saving supplies and equipment to the front lines.

Due to the implementation of lockdowns and vaccination plans, the pandemic situations in India and Nepal have fortunately started to improve in June. However, many people are still bearing the brunt of COVID-19. Tzu Chi’s aid projects are therefore still on-going. Volunteers and staffers in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore have continued to purchase needed items and transport them to countries in need.

Regarding Tzu Chi’s aid to India and the other countries, Master Cheng Yen instructed volunteers to move quickly and enlist all necessary assistance to allow the foundation’s aid to reach those countries as soon as possible. With everyone’s combined efforts, the aid provided by Tzu Chi is bearing fruit. The equipment the foundation donated to various medical institutions has helped relieve their oxygen shortages, and protective gear supplied by Tzu Chi has also helped shield many front-line workers from COVID-19. All this wouldn’t have been possible without the love and help of many people. ❀

A Person's Greatest Emotional Need

By Gao Ming-zhi

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa



Xiao-ya was a five-year-old girl who had a working mother. When her mom, Li-an, was busy, she left Xiao-ya in the care of her parents or in-laws. One day, Li-an discovered that her daughter liked to play the piano at her parents' home, but not so when she was at her in-laws' place.

Li-an learned that when Xiao-ya played the piano at her maternal grandparents' home, the couple would applaud warmly every time she finished a tune. They'd also compliment the child for playing the instrument very well and for doing better than last time. When she played the piano at her paternal grandparents' home, however, her grandpa would be quick to find fault with her playing, saying that she should have made a certain part louder and another part slower, or that she had hit a wrong note somewhere. Her grandma would say things such as, "Your classmate Ming-li plays the

piano really well. You should try to emulate him." When Xiao-ya said she had had enough playing for that day and wanted to leave the piano, her grandmother would say, "The little girl next door can play two hours straight without feeling tired. You've played just 30 minutes and you're tired already?"

When Li-an determined where the problem lay, she pointed it out to her in-laws, hoping that they would change their way of mentoring Xiao-ya. Unfortunately, her hopes were dashed. Her father-in-law refused to say a word after hearing what she said. Her mother-in-law, on the other hand, responded in a raised voice: "We wash our hands of mentoring your child in anything!"

The couple's reactions were food for thought. Like most other people, they didn't take kindly to being corrected or criticized. They became emotion-

al when corrected by their daughter-in-law, but it didn't occur to them that they were doing the same to their granddaughter by criticizing her. No wonder Xiao-ya didn't want to play piano at their home.

It's important to learn to recognize another person's emotions, which is especially true if you are a parent of a child. Additionally, you should not compare your children with others. When you pay attention to your kids' emotional states and offer words of encouragement to them, they will feel cared for and respond in a more positive way.

"The greatest principle of human nature is the craving to be appreciated," said William James (1842-1910), the father of American psychology. Everyone, in the depths of their hearts, feels the need to be appreciated and valued. We should therefore try to find the good in others and pay them sincere compliments. Doing so will bring

sunshine and good cheer to the lives of others.

After much research, I have developed three principles to follow when praising others.

First, be sincere. In his book *The Weakness of Human Nature*, Dale Carnegie writes about a time when he was visiting a post office and noticed a clerk who seemed very bored. He wanted to make the clerk feel better by complimenting him on something he liked about him. He looked at him and, seeing something he sincerely liked, he told the clerk that he wished he had hair like his. A very pleasant conversation between them soon followed. This demonstrates how even small gestures of appreciation, if genuine, can cheer another person up. But such appreciation must be based in sincerity. People can sense when your admiration isn't honest. Empty flattery, instead of making one feel good, can elicit negative emotions.

Second, be timely. One day as a man drove his wife to work, he noticed that she had taken time to dress up and was looking really good in her new outfit. But because he wasn't used to complimenting others, he didn't say anything about it. It wasn't until he picked her up from work that he said her dress looked really nice. With hurt in her voice, the wife said in response, "Why didn't you say so earlier? It shows you were not paying attention."

It can make a world of difference whether you deliver a compliment at the right time or the wrong time, so it is better to not delay.

Third, be concrete. It's hard for an abstract or unspecific compliment to leave an impression. For example, complimenting a salesclerk by saying, "You provide great service," is not likely to leave a lasting impression. It's just generic praise. Your praise will go much farther if you say to her, "You are a real asset to your company for selling so many shoes. Thank you for recommending such comfortable shoes to me and even helping me dispose of my old ones." Saying something like, "Your scarf is beautiful, and it perfectly matches your clothes," certainly beats blandly mentioning, "Your scarf is beautiful."

In the natural world, wild geese fly in a V-shaped formation, each depending on the other. Doing so allows them to fly for a long time before they must stop for rest. This can provide a useful analogy for us. It is almost like the geese are supporting and cheering each other on. In the same way, we can help each other carry on using the power of praise and positivity. Each of us can "fly farther" when we support each other than we can alone. That certainly provides a lesson for us on which we can reflect. ❁

Untying Knots

By Ye Wen-ying

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphics by Liu Jia-wen

She was not yet 40, but already near the end of her life with cancer. She had two children, both still young. Divorced and not wanting to leave her children to her alcoholic and violent ex-husband, what was she to do?



Ms. Nguyen, less than 40 years old, lay in a hospital bed, her swollen legs limp. She was severely ill with advanced cancer and could no longer walk. She knew her days were numbered, but it wasn't those thoughts that clouded her mind. Instead, she was worried about her two children, one in junior high and the other in elementary school. Where would they go after she died?

"Alcoholic and abusive!" This is how she summed up her ex-husband. He wasn't worth considering as an option for her kids. But to whom could she entrust them when she was no longer around?

A struggling single mom

Nguyen and her children began receiving Tzu Chi's assistance after a schoolteacher referred the

family to the foundation. Guo Shu-jing (郭淑菁), a Tzu Chi volunteer in Tainan, southern Taiwan, was helping care for the family. She had learned their story after taking on the responsibility to provide them with help and support.

Nguyen, originally from Vietnam, moved to Taiwan after she married a man on the island. Sadly, they didn't live happily ever after; their marriage ended in divorce. Though her husband obtained custody of their children when the couple parted ways, they didn't live with him. Instead, the young ones lived with his parents, who also took care of their daily needs. A few years later, one of the grandparents passed away and the other fell ill. Eventually, the children ended up back with their mother.

"The father was alcoholic and abusive," volunteer Guo mused to herself. "After the divorce and gaining custody of his children, he failed to live up to his responsibilities as a father. He left the kids in the care of his parents, but that didn't last either. When the old ones were unable to care for the kids, he let them move in with his ex-wife. He expected her to fend for them, even though her financial means were limited." Guo couldn't help forming a negative view of the father.

Nguyen was later diagnosed with cancer. During the terminal stage of her illness, she was often confined to the hospital. With their mom down, the kids were completely on their own. They packed themselves off to school each morning and took care of their own meals. They often spent nights at home alone.

After learning of the situation, Nguyen's mother flew from Vietnam to Taiwan to take care of her daughter and grandchildren. She couldn't speak Chinese, and the kids couldn't speak Vietnamese, but they managed to communicate simply with gestures and body language. Fortunately, it wasn't difficult to convey the meaning of essential things like eating, taking a shower, or making a phone call. The grandmother from Vietnam thus fell into a daily routine of caring for her daughter at the hospital during the day and spending time with her grandchildren at night.

The family, however, soon began to falter under financial burdens. Nguyen's illness had prevented her from working, and with her savings draining away, paying the rent and living expenses became a challenge. Guo and other volunteers visited the family to assess their needs after their plight was brought to Tzu Chi's attention. The foundation promptly began providing the family financial aid to help see them through their difficulties. But Guo

knew they needed more than monetary assistance. Another pressing issue was to decide with whom the children could live when their mother was no longer around.

Father or grandmother?

What did the two children think of their father?

The daughter, who by that time was a teenager, had no love lost for her father. This was likely due to her mother's influence. Her dislike for him was written all over her face whenever the topic came up. The son, still in elementary school, let his sister take the lead on this issue, but his feelings didn't run quite as deep or as negative as hers.

One day, the boy fell ill with a fever. The doctor who treated him prescribed a week's rest at home for him. But how could that happen? It was impossible for the grandmother to be two places at once, caring for her daughter at the hospital and for her grandson at home. With no other choice, Nguyen phoned her ex-husband and asked him to go to her home and tend to their son.

Guo found this surprising and was worried for the children. She thought to herself, "How can a father like that properly care for his son? Will the kids even be safe with him?" The husband had been physically abusive towards Nguyen, so Guo was naturally concerned that he might get drunk and become abusive towards his children too. Having never met the father, all Guo knew of him was based on his wife's description of him, and the picture Nguyen had painted of her husband had been quite negative.

Guo was uneasy all that week. She wondered if Nguyen was just as worried as she was. Did Nguyen really have no other choice but to turn to her ex-husband for help? Or, was it perhaps that her ex wasn't all that bad?

The week eventually passed, and the son, having regained his health, returned to school. Guo heard afterwards that the daughter would glare at her father every day that week when she returned home from school before quickly retreating and locking herself in her room. But other than that, nothing untoward happened. There was no physical abuse, and the father and daughter avoided a major clash.

Knowing that she wouldn't be around for long, Nguyen began making final arrangements. She told her mother she wanted to be cremated after she died and her ashes taken back to Vietnam to be buried there. As for her children, she wanted them to accompany her ashes to Vietnam and then stay there permanently instead of returning to Taiwan.

When Guo learned what Nguyen had envisioned after her passing, she wondered whether her plan would work. Even if the kids agreed to go to Vietnam with their grandmother and live there, would their Vietnamese relatives kindly accept them into their lives and help care for them? And what about the language barrier? Unable to speak Vietnamese, how would the kids be able to attend school in Vietnam? More than anything, that would have a negative impact on their future prospects.

Guo raised her concerns with Nguyen and mentioned the thorny legal issues involved. She said, "Your ex-husband has to first renounce custody if your children are to go to Vietnam with your mother to live there."

"If he doesn't agree to my plan, we'll flee before he can do anything!" Nguyen threatened in response.

"But if you flee, the kids will end up with no legal identities in Vietnam. Even more so than the language barrier, that will negatively affect their schooling and future employment prospects," Guo said.

That said, Guo knew that if Nguyen was to take a sudden turn for the worse and pass away before the matter was settled, the kids would probably end up with their father—that is, if there was no solid proof that he would be unsuited to his role as a father. But would ending up with their father be the best for the kids? Guo felt that if Nguyen died before the matter was satisfactorily resolved, she wouldn't be able to go in peace.

Guo made frequent visits to the hospital and to the kids' schools as she continued to care for the family and tried to help them work out a solution. She asked Nguyen's friends and government social workers their opinions on the issue too. She even consulted a free legal counsel provided by the court.

Meanwhile, she reminded Nguyen to prepare the kids for her eventual passing and to encourage them to learn to take better care of themselves. One day, Guo sounded the kids out by asking, "If one day your mom was no longer around, would you like to move in with your dad?" The kids burst out crying at the same time in response, throwing her for a loop.

The daughter was unhappy with her father because she felt he didn't value her because she was a girl. He had punished her several times before on account of something trivial. She was so mad at him she had left home several times when she was still in elementary school. It's no wonder she felt strongly against living with him.

After seeing the children's reactions, Guo pondered if there were other options. Since there were

not many foster families in Taiwan, perhaps well-run institutions that took in young people were a possibility?

Then, one day, a schoolteacher passed on a bit of advice to her: "Don't just listen to one side of the story."

Seeking out the husband

Guo thought that advice made a lot of sense. After all, all that she and the other volunteers had learned about the family was just "one side of the story." With the best interests of the children at heart, she decided to seek out the father and hear his side of things.

Guo decided to go straight to his place to talk to him, and she didn't even phone him first to arrange for the visit. She wanted to catch him off guard so that she could get a better picture of what he was like. He might not be home, and she might come away empty-handed, but that possibility didn't deter her. She could just make another visit.

The father lived in a house in a small town. When Guo arrived at the place, she smelled the aroma of cooking. He had just finished fixing his lunch. When he learned why Guo had come, he agreed to talk to her—but only through the screen door.

During their conversation, Guo learned that even though his daughter had been cold to him when he last spent a week with them, he had visited them again later to persuade them to move in with him. But to his great disappointment, his daughter turned him down outright. He was thus very surprised that a stranger had arrived on his doorstep to talk to him about their situation.

"Nguyen will probably be gone soon," Guo said to him. "How about visiting her at the hospital and talking things over with her? It will help her go in peace."

She continued: "You probably don't know what to say to your wife and children. If you want, I can be there to help out." She suggested to him that this might be a good chance for reconciliation. He could apologize to his ex-wife in front of his mother-in-law and children, thank her, and say goodbye to her. His visit might even bring him and his children closer together.

Guo could tell that the man wasn't opposed to her suggestion. Through the screen door, she could see that his home was quite tidy. His ability to cook impressed her too. She could also sense that he seemed honest and down-to-earth. Though his speech wasn't refined, he didn't look a bit like an alcoholic idler.

What surprised her the most was that he admit-

ted to having a drinking problem, but he said it was in the past. He had quit drinking on a doctor's advice when he started having health problems. He had been making a decent living by farming on a piece of family land for several years now.

Guo's visit to the man allowed her to hear the other side of the story. It also helped her realize that he wasn't what he used to be. She realized this could be a turning point.

Guo had heard Nguyen say before that her brother-in-law had been very nice to her and the children and had helped them a lot, so she decided to speak to him too. She phoned him, told him how Nguyen's illness had progressed, and put out feelers to find out what he thought about the children's future custody issue. The brother-in-law said that he'd respect his brother's decision on that matter and do his best to help him care for his children.

Guo subsequently set up a date on which the father and his brother would come to the hospital to meet Nguyen, the children, and the grandmother.

Reunion

By that time, Nguyen had been moved into the intensive care unit. She had been placed on a ventilator and couldn't speak. However, when she learned that her ex-husband was coming to visit her, she appeared agitated. She eventually settled down, but it took a while.

"My mother-in-law has always been very nice to me," said the father when he came to Nguyen's bedside and saw his former in-law. The two nodded at each other and smiled. Guo thought that if the man had really treated her daughter that badly, the atmosphere wouldn't have been like this.

"We all make mistakes," Guo started. "Let's not focus on the past. Whatever a person was like, he could become a different man. Your dad has quit drinking and is now leading a normal life. He keeps his house clean and tidy. Smile and call him 'daddy,' will you?" Guo put her arms around the children and gently encouraged them. The daughter, shy by nature, looked uncomfortable at first, but eventually did as Guo suggested.

When Guo had met the children's uncle and father earlier, they had explained to her why Nguyen had accused the father of being physically abusive. Their explanations helped her realize that things were never simple. Life was not black and white. In a nutshell, personality clashes had led to their unhappy life together and the eventual demise of their marriage.

Surprisingly, Nguyen's ex-husband had visited her several times in the hospital, and had even

brought her things she liked to eat. He had tried to extend an olive branch. His face, tanned from working outdoors under the sun, clearly showed that he felt sorry and helpless about what had happened between him and his wife.

Guo guided the adults and children in the ward to hold hands. She encouraged them to forgive and thank each other. Nguyen's eyes were clear and steady, indicative of a lucid mind. At this crucial moment, she agreed by nodding her head to let her children live with their father after she passed on.

Three days later, she departed from this world. She left with her mind at peace. Guo had a long talk with Nguyen's mother afterwards with the help of a Vietnamese friend of Nguyen's, who interpreted for them. The mother said that she'd do as her daughter had asked and take her ashes back to Vietnam to be buried there. She also said she was happy to entrust her grandchildren to the care of her former son-in-law.

After the children moved to their father's town, Guo phoned the daughter to check on them. The daughter told her that they were adjusting pretty well to their new life with their father and with their uncle's family, who lived nearby. Guo was happy to hear that. Because the father was able to earn a stable living, the family no longer needed financial aid from Tzu Chi. But volunteers living in the same area as the family would take over from Guo and continue visiting the family to offer emotional support.

Reflecting on the time she had served the family, Guo was pleased the matter had come to a satisfactory ending. And she felt she had learned a lot. Most of all, she had learned the importance of looking at things from different angles. She had learned that to fully understand something, especially something as complex as a human relationship, one has approach it with an open mind, walk around it completely and look at it from all perspectives, and seek the truth instead of rushing to a quick judgement. ●●●





Serving Families Through the Years

Text and photos by Zhu Xiu-lian
Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Tzu Chi volunteers from Wenshan District, Taipei, have visited underserved families in Pingxi and Shiding, New Taipei City, numerous times over the last dozen years. They strive to deliver hope and relief, one family at a time.

“Hello there, we’re here to see you. Are you happy?” Tzu Chi volunteer Zhang Jin-shi (張金時) called out to the old, bedridden woman. Zhang has checked on her once a month for more than ten years.

“Yes, yes. I’m very happy to see you!” the woman responded.

The two broke into an easy chat, just like old friends.

The elderly woman, a Tzu Chi care recipient, had been rushed to the hospital not too long before for emergency surgery due to an intestinal condition. She recalled that time to Zhang with lingering fears: “I could have lost my life if not for the protection of the bodhisattvas.” She said she chanted the Buddha’s name for a couple of hours every day. Zhang complimented her for her piety.

“We’re about the same age,” the woman continued, “but you’re mobile, and I can only lie here. I really envy you.”

The woman, 76, was just two years older than Zhang but had been bedridden for a long time. He tried to comfort her with words of encouragement. “Whatever happened has happened,” Zhang said. “Let’s try to think positively. Think of your good son. He takes good care of you!”

She was not the first care recipient suffering from a lingering illness that he and his fellow volunteers had visited that day. Some of the others were older than she, some younger. Whatever their age, Zhang’s heart ached for all of them when he thought about them.

Meeting their needs

Heavy rains had started the night before, and had only tapered off a little by the morning of April 29, 2021. The rain was welcome at a time when almost the entire island of Taiwan was experiencing a severe drought. Despite the rain, Tzu Chi volunteers from Wenshan District, Taipei, were visiting needy families under the long-term care of the foundation in Pingxi and Shiding, New Taipei City. Though the rain caused traffic to be a little congested as they traveled through the busier urban areas, it only delayed them for about a quarter of an hour. Being a weekday, there were few tourists about in Pingxi and Shiding, so the streets were mostly clear for traffic there. Along the way, the snow-white flowers of *tung* trees were in full bloom on the hill-

Volunteers Chen Yue-e (left), Zhang Jin-an (middle), and Wang Mei-chun on their way to visit needy households in a mountainous area in New Taipei City.

sides, and some of the petals drifted down with the wind. It was quite a sight to behold. “We also get to see the sights along the way when we visit needy families nestled in the hills. It’s kind of a jaunt, too,” said volunteer Chen Yue-e (陳月娥).

“Charity work is the root of all Tzu Chi missions,” she continued as the car traveled along the road. “If the needy can’t come to us, we must go to them.” Charity has always been an important mission of the foundation.

Chen explained that a potential case is always carefully assessed before it is accepted. This acceptance is followed by regular visits, often lasting years, before the case is closed. “Once a case is accepted, it remains open and active until the subject of the assistance has built a stable livelihood for himself or herself,” Chen remarked.

Visiting the needy involves more than just showing up on a care recipient’s doorstep. Associated tasks range from making phone calls, to setting up appointments, to recording what transpires during the visits. These are no easy tasks, but Chen does them cheerfully. She doesn’t mind that new cases are regularly being added to her existing workload either. She’s happy and grateful for the opportunities to give.

Chen is quick to express her gratitude for other volunteers, too. She is thankful to Lin Jun-chen (林峻辰) and Gao Bing-kun (高炳坤), who have always stepped up to the plate and done whatever needs to be done. And she is especially grateful to Zhang Jin-shi. “Since 2008,” she said, “Brother Jin-shi has driven me and other volunteers to Pingxi and Shiding to visit the needy. It has been 13 years now. Given all that driving, scratches to his vehicles and flat tires have been unavoidable. He’s paid for all the repairs, no matter the cost.”

To drive more easily and safely on hilly terrain, Zhang Jin-shi replaced his old car with an SUV. Not long ago, he took the vehicle in for service. Its three-year-old tires were already worn out. He replaced all four tires without a second thought, notwithstanding the substantial cost. It’s clear he cares more about the safety of the team than money.

Because so much of Zhang’s work involves driving in a mountainous area, he must know how to skillfully navigate the winding roads and occasional sharp turns of the thoroughfares. But the driving is even more challenging than that—some roads are so narrow that although he can drive to the home of a needy family, he may be unable to turn his vehicle around to drive out. In those instances, he has to back all the way out. That type of driving is far more difficult than passing the



road test for a driver's license, but Zhang always breezes through it. "I've driven these roads for more than a decade," he says, which explains why he feels at home on the challenging roads. "Besides visiting underserved households here, I used to come here with other volunteers to collect recyclables."

Along the way, Zhang and Chen pointed out houses they had visited before. Some of the households were able to get back on their feet, so they no longer needed Tzu Chi's help. Other care recipients had passed away. Nothing is forever—change and impermanence are the eternal truth of the universe.

The vicious cycle of illness and poverty

"Watch out, these steps are slippery!" one volunteer called out, cautioning the others to tread carefully. Quaint, almost ancient-looking, the steps leading to a house the volunteers were visiting were covered with moss. Chen Yue-e and her fellow volunteers Zhang Jin-an (張謹安) and Wang Mei-chun (王美春) carefully negotiated the steps. A dog barked non-stop at the approaching visitors, but the volunteers commented that the dog really wasn't as fierce as it sounded. In contrast, they had visited homes guarded by dogs so threatening that they had to honk their horns to alert the hosts to securely chain up the dogs before they dared to get out of the car.

The volunteers were visiting a former aid recipient whose mother had just passed away. "She looked fine just before the Chinese New Year holi-

Volunteer Zhang Jin-shi, 74, drives volunteers to mountainous areas in Shiding and Pingxi, New Taipei City, to care for disadvantaged families. He's been doing this for 13 years.

day," one of the volunteers said. "This was so unexpected." The aid recipient was receiving a low-income subsidy from the New Taipei City Government, so Tzu Chi decided to cease its aid to this family, but now they were faced with this new development. The aid recipient said that her mother had fortunately not suffered much before she died. "She didn't want to burden us," she said. The volunteers offered her some money and asked her to sign for it. They reminded her to use the money wisely.

Most members of the family were mentally challenged, and relied on government assistance and odd jobs to get by. The children's grandfather had built their house and it still remained sturdy, so the family had at least been able to live decently. Their father, 60ish, looked older than his age. He even looked older than the visiting volunteers who were older than he was. The volunteers urged him to take advantage of the nice natural setting around his home to boost his own health by, for example, taking walks on nice days.

The group next visited the home of a prospective aid recipient whose house needed repairing. A local health official drove ahead of the volunteers,

leading the way to the household. When they arrived, the volunteers were a bit befuddled: the house looked good and didn't appear to be in disrepair. But the official passed that home and led the group further into a large galvanized metal building. Stuff was piled up everywhere inside, but the place didn't look like it needed repair either. Walking further inside, they came to a stuck door on which hung an official address plate—an indication of a legal address. It turned out that it was a home within another home. "No wonder I couldn't find this address with GPS!" Zhang Jin-shi exclaimed.

"How could anyone live in this?!" Pushing open a side door, the volunteers saw a small wooden hut with a broken roof. The rickety structure appeared ready to collapse at any time. It was a scary sight.

The official called out the name of the person they had come to see, but there was no answer. "He might be at the community nursing center," the official offered. Chen Yue-e asked him to lead the group to the nursing center, where they soon found the man. He was partially deaf, so people needed to speak directly into his ears. After they had talked for a while, the volunteers and the official began to urge the man to move into the social welfare center where the official had arranged residence for him. He had no legal ownership to the rickety "home within a home," and it was uninhabitable anyway. The man's neighbors that were around joined in to persuade him. They pointed out to him that the social welfare center would provide him with room and board and so he wouldn't have to worry any more about how to get by. The man eventually nodded his consent to the new arrangement. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

The volunteers' next stop was the home of a centenarian woman. She greeted everyone warmly and apologized for not having chairs for everyone. The sight of her lying in bed saddened the volunteers. She used to be up and about and would sing for the volunteers, but had become bedridden about two months before. All she could do was lie there and listen to the radio. She spent her days at home alone when her relatives living nearby went to work. They could only come to feed her when they got off work.

The volunteers visited 13 households that day. Mother's Day was approaching so they gave out Mother's Day presents. Families with cancer or recuperating patients received additional gifts of multi-grain powder and noodles. A few of the families had more than one patient to care for. "When it rains, it pours" was not just an abstract proverb for these families, but a very real situation. Some peo-



Led by a local official, volunteers visit the home of a prospective aid recipient to assess his needs for help.

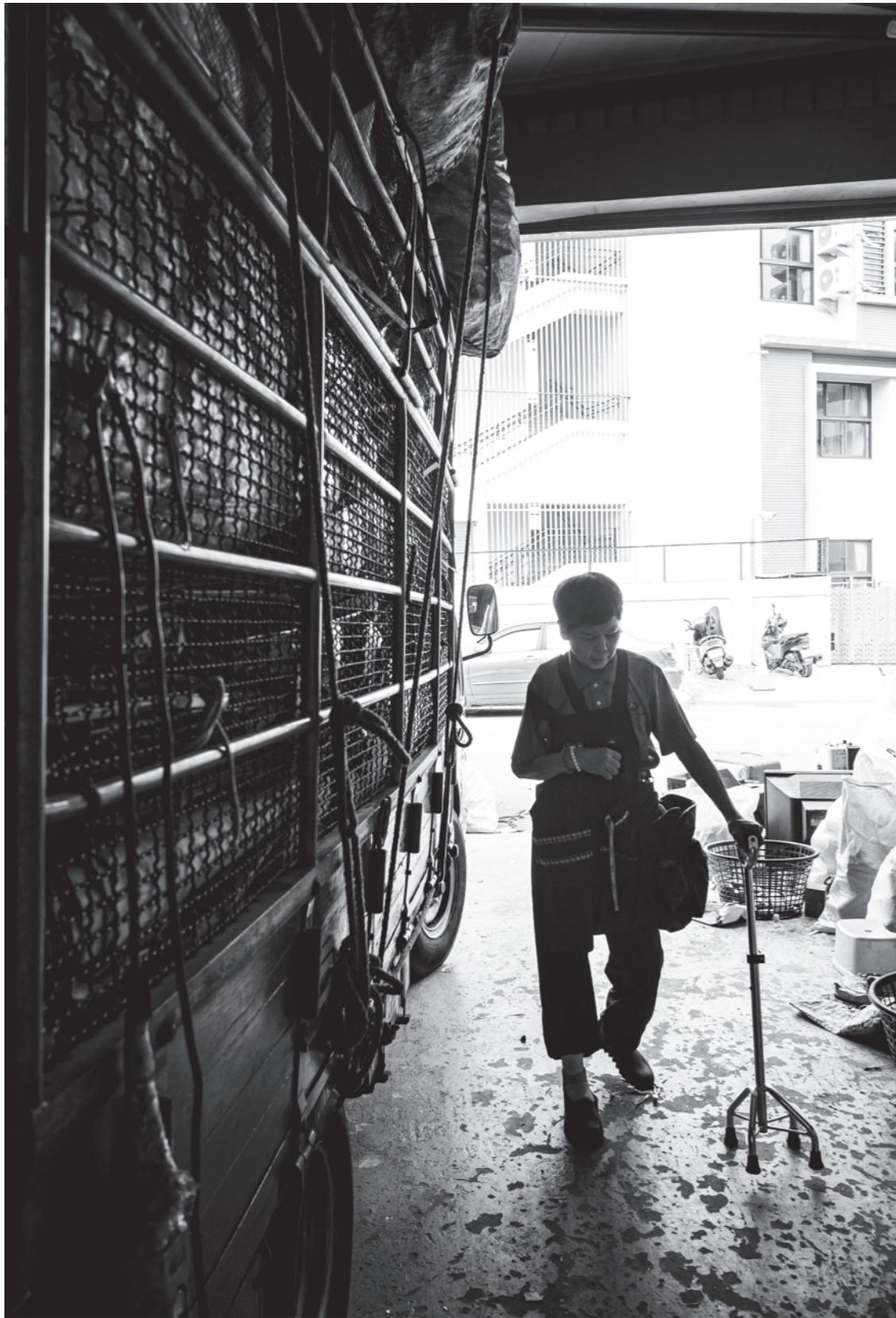
ple become poor because of illness while others become ill due to poverty, but regardless of which leads to which, they all end up poor and sick. There are many such families in the dark corners of society who are in dire need of help.

Fortunately, the picture is not all grim. The volunteers visited a family that day in which the mother had fallen ill but the child had worked hard nonetheless and earned admission to a very good high school. That took a big load off his father's shoulders. Another family had received assistance from the district government office to fix their roof and had thus been able to get their lives back on track. The family's home was so clean it sparkled. Events like this were uplifting for the volunteers.

In the process of visiting underprivileged families, Tzu Chi volunteers have come to realize that many more social welfare organizations are caring for the needy in society, especially the elderly. That's something in which they take comfort. However, they also know that their workload will only increase with Taiwan's rapidly aging population. "That's why we won't reduce the ranks of our home visit volunteers," Chen Yue-e said.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen has always instructed home visit volunteers to put themselves in the shoes of the underprivileged when they conduct their visits. Chen and her fellow volunteers keep those words firmly in mind. Whatever the weather and wherever care recipients may live, Chen and the rest of the team keep up the visits, month after month, year after year, because "that's the duty of Tzu Chi volunteers," she said.

Tzu Chi volunteers deliver love, warmth, and hope to those in need—not only in Taiwan, but in many other places in the world. They welcome the participation of more like-minded people. Everyone has a role to play to make the world a better place. ❀



Down But Not Out

Recycling Volunteer Zheng Hua-qi

By Huang Xiao-zhe and Cai Yu-xuan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Every recycling volunteer has their own life story and their own reason for joining Tzu Chi's recycling cause. Zheng Hua-qi (鄭驊琪), for example, is a Tzu Chi care recipient-turned-recycling volunteer. I first met her in early April this year at the Tzu Chi Fuxing Recycling Station in Taichung, central Taiwan. Seven years ago, when she was 60—an age when some people are already enjoying a laid-back retired life—fate dealt her a hard hand. She suffered not one, but two strokes that year. The strokes resulted in the paralysis of her right arm and leg and made her financially constrained life even harder.

Zheng was plunged into such despair that she contemplated suicide. But thanks to Tzu Chi volunteers' unfailing support and care, she was able to rediscover a sense of hope and pick herself back up. The volunteers touched her so profoundly that she made a pledge to herself at the time: "Once I get better, I'll start helping others and collecting recyclable garbage for Tzu Chi to help the foundation do good."

And that was exactly what she did. It has been seven years since she had the first stroke, and even though she still can't move her arm and leg freely, she works hard at recycling. She even donates money every month for charitable purposes, despite her limited means. You can tell from her backlit figure in the photo that she relies on a walking aid to move around. Her physical limitations, however, are no match for her determination to help others and contribute to society. She demonstrates through her altruistic actions an indomitable spirit that refuses to succumb to life's tribulations.



Sorting recyclables with one hand and leg

Zheng volunteers at least twice a week at the Fuxing Recycling Station, even though every trip out of her home is a test of her physical stamina and psychological willpower. She rides a three-wheeled motor scooter to get around. Because her right hand has deformed and atrophied as a result of the strokes, she first uses her left hand to spread apart the fingers on her right hand before placing it on the handlebar. She also wears a drop foot brace on her right foot for support.

She arrives by eight in the morning on the days she serves at the station, and works in the plastic bag sorting area. A woman of few words, she goes about her work quietly. Her right hand and leg are too weak to be of any help to her, but she functions well enough with her left hand and leg—she just needs more time to finish a task.

During a chat with her, she told me that she originally lived in Keelung, northern Taiwan. She had moved to Taichung just a year before, when she learned that her son had fallen ill. Before her first stroke, she drove a small truck every day to a fishing harbor to run a food stall. She never thought her simple life would change—who was to know that two strokes would hit her within a year and alter her life forever? Fortunately, she was able to take up recycling work, which filled her with a renewed purpose after her illness rendered her unable to work.

When she still lived in Keelung, she made daily trips on her three-wheeled scooter to Badouzi Fishing Port or Shen'ao Fishing Port, familiar places to her, to pick up recyclable garbage. She collected recyclables from people living nearby too. She kept at it, rain or shine, cold or hot, unbothered by the stench of garbage or the injuries she sometimes received from fish hooks mixed in with the garbage she rummaged through to find reusable resources. She kept up her volunteer work after moving to Taichung, remaining as steadfast as ever in her commitment to recycling.



Persistence at physical therapy

Zheng goes to the hospital five days a week for physical therapy. She persists at such a regimen to prevent the atrophy of her paralyzed muscles and to regain as much physical function as possible. Her treatment is complemented by acupuncture, which helps relieve the pain from tense muscles.

On one of the days I visited the recycling station, I decided to go with Zheng as she was leaving the station at 11 a.m. for the hospital for her rehabilitation. After seeing her do all the stretching and other exercises to strengthen her limbs, I came to a deeper realization of the inconveniences she has to endure every day. When she was doing the stretching exercises, she had to first lie flat on a rehabilitation bed. Just the simple action of getting herself onto the bed and lying down—something that would take a normal person just a few seconds—took her nearly ten minutes to complete. She had to use all her might and bite through the pain that came with the simple movements. It's difficult for an outsider to imagine the mental and physical ordeals she must have had to go through every day for the past seven years.

Her path to recovery seems so long and painful, but she doesn't consider it a hardship. She views all she has to go through as her spiritual training, and has thus been able to adjust her mindset and think more positively. Not only that, but she uses the parts of her body that can still function normally to do good. Her strength and resilience are admirable.





Overcoming a rough patch

Another day at the recycling station, I saw Zheng, having finished sorting some plastic bags, grip her quad cane with her left hand before slowly rising from her stool and straightening up her body. Then she removed her mask, took a breath, and broke into a rare bright smile. She told me that when she first started volunteering at the recycling station, everyone was wonderful to her, even though they barely knew her. She wasn't good at classifying plastic bags at the time and her movements were slow, but the volunteers were very patient with her, teaching her what she needed to know and giving her a lot of encouragement. Their kindness and support made the recycling station feel like a big, warm family.

"These two bracelets were given to me by Master Cheng Yen," she said as she pointed to the bracelets of Buddhist prayer beads on her right wrist. She said she was lucky to have the help of Tzu Chi volunteers and the guidance of Master Cheng Yen when she had her strokes. During that time she was hospitalized for more than a month. Tzu Chi volunteers visited her in the hospital and gave her a lot of support. The Master's televised Dharma talks likewise gave her a lot of encouragement. She said that without the Master and the volunteers, she wouldn't be where she was now. They had inspired her to take up recycling and do what she could to help others.

Having turned from an aid recipient into a help giver, Zheng is now even able to use her own story to inspire and instill hope in other people. I sincerely hope that after all her tribulations, her life will get better and better and that peace and joy will accompany her every day. ❁



Pooling Together Love for the Greater Good

Tzu Chi in Japan

By Xu Li-xiang, CEO of Tzu Chi Japan

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

A massive earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan ten years ago, in 2011. In its aftermath, Tzu Chi volunteers across 39 nations and regions raised donations to help the survivors rebuild their lives. Some of those that received aid from the foundation later became Tzu Chi volunteers themselves. This year, they've made 500 coin banks and worked to enlist 500 people to adopt them, all to mark the tenth anniversary of the compound disaster. They hoped to emulate the spirit of the Thousand-Hand Guan Yin Bodhisattva.

Japan has a tradition of announcing its word of the year at the well-known Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto at the end of every year. The word chosen for 2020 was “mitsu,” meaning “close” or “dense.” It was reflective of a new lifestyle borne of the coronavirus pandemic. Due to the raging virus, the Japanese government has urged people to avoid closed spaces, crowds, and close contacts.

The Japanese government has announced a state of emergency three times in response to COVID-19. The first was in April 2020, and the second was in January of this year. The second state of emergency was lifted in March, around the time the cherry blossoms were blooming. Not long after, Japan experienced a fourth wave of infections, forcing the government to declare its third state of emergency in late April.

We in Tzu Chi Japan have adjusted our charitable activities during the pandemic, according to the government's policies and the pandemic situation in the country. For example, volunteers in Tokyo have held meal distributions at Yoyogi Park for the homeless twice every month for 12 years. To avoid prolonged gatherings and reduce the chance of infection during the pandemic, volunteers decided to switch from dishing out hot food, such as curry rice, to distributing rice balls, fruit, and drinks. In addition, the number of volunteers serving on-site was cut down to as low as possible.

Another example is the meal distributions at a nighttime shelter for the homeless in the Nishinari

District in Osaka. Volunteers there began providing rice and other ingredients for shelter workers to make into rice balls to give to the homeless. Though they took precautions to protect themselves and others, they strove to continue to help street people stay fed and warm.

Despite the pandemic, Tzu Chi Japan continued to receive requests from families to chant the Buddha's name to bless their departed loved ones. Volunteers did their best to satisfy such requests, but worried that they might disappoint the families. After all, the number of volunteers that could show up for the occasions had to be smaller than before. Fortunately, the families were all very understanding. They were moved and very grateful that the volunteers came out to them to help them during such a difficult time.

Coin banks

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. In the aftermath of the 2011 world-shocking compound catastrophe, Tzu Chi volunteers across 39 nations and regions worked together to raise donations to help survivors rebuild their lives. Some survivors that received aid from the foundation became Tzu Chi volunteers themselves. To commemorate the anniversary and to thank Tzu Chi for helping them after the disaster, some survivors-turned-volunteers have made 500 coin banks and worked to enlist 500 people to adopt them. The people who



adopt the coin banks could then use them to save money to help the underserved. In this way, the volunteers hoped to emulate the spirit of the Thousand-Hand Guan Yin Bodhisattva by combining the love and strength of 500 people.

As COVID-19 continued to escalate in Osaka, our volunteers there who were responsible for organizing distributions for local street people shared with our volunteers in Tokyo that the manager of the nighttime shelter for the homeless in the Nishinari District had joined Tzu Chi as a donating member. The manager had always allowed us to place coin banks on-site whenever we were distributing hot food at the shelter. Street people could then deposit their spare change into the banks, which would be used for charitable purposes. The manager had also designed posters encouraging the homeless to put their love into action by doing a good deed a day. Becoming a Tzu Chi donating member meant he would make regular monthly donations to the foundation.

Like their counterparts in Osaka, our volunteers in Tokyo placed coin banks on-site as a way to solicit love from street people whenever they were distributing food at Yoyogi Park. They shared with the homeless who came for the meals how small amounts of money, when pooled together, could be used to help many people. Our volunteers were always moved beyond measure whenever a street

Volunteers in Japan launched a “500 coin banks” campaign this year to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake. YANG XIU-WAN

person ferreted out a coin from his dowdy clothes and put it into a bank.

When Tzu Chi Japan held major events in the past, such as the annual blessing and thanksgiving ceremonies, people always brought their coin banks to the event venues and donated the money inside. But no major events were allowed this year because of COVID-19. Instead, we arranged an online blessing and thanksgiving ceremony on January 31, during which volunteers from Tokyo, Osaka, Yamanashi, and northeast Japan met. In one part of the event, participants shook their coin banks to cheer each other on. It was a moving, emotional moment. Looking at the scene, I was touched but sad at the same time. I didn't know how much longer we had to wait before we could meet in person and freely give each other hugs and express care to each other instead of doing so virtually.

Working for the common good

On account of the coronavirus, we can no longer take things for granted. Meeting in person is one of the things we can't take for granted anymore. I used to travel more than four times a year



to Taiwan to visit Master Cheng Yen at the Jing Si Abode, the spiritual home of all Tzu Chi volunteers. But after the pandemic swept the world, it became so much more difficult to make such a trip. Even though nearly one and a half years have passed since COVID-19 broke out, visiting the Jing Si Abode still seems a distant reality.

Fortunately, we can still connect online; we can still meet the Master via videoconferencing and listen to her talk and expound the Dharma. On March 27, other Tzu Chi volunteers and I in Japan had a heartwarming online meeting with the Master. We reminisced during the meeting about the quake and tsunami that rocked Japan ten years ago, and survivors-turned-volunteers expressed their gratitude to the Master for the love Tzu Chi gave them after the compound disaster.

Shinnichi Ito was the first Tzu Chi volunteer in northeast Japan. Over the past decade, he has kept in close touch with our volunteers in Tokyo. He's also helped arrange the distribution of Tzu Chi scholarships in northeast Japan. He expressed remorse for having taken part in fewer volunteer activities since he suffered two serious bouts of illness. Seiichi Iwahana and his wife both became Tzu Chi volunteers after receiving cash aid from the foundation after the disaster. Serving as volunteers is their way of paying back. They have also helped organize the distribution of Tzu Chi scholarships for disadvantaged students. Zhang Jun (張君), originally from China, lost her daughter in the compound disaster. Master Cheng Yen's teachings

Tzu Chi volunteers in Japan have held meal distributions for the homeless twice every month at Yoyogi Park for 12 years. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, they switched from dishing out hot food to distributing rice balls, fruit, and drinks.

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and support from Tzu Chi volunteers helped her through that difficult time in her life. She is now a Tzu Chi commissioner, the first in northeast Japan. (A Tzu Chi commissioner must receive training and establish a roster of people who make monthly donations to the foundation.) With tears rolling down her cheeks, Zhang thanked the Master during the online meeting for creating Tzu Chi. She also pledged to do her best to carry out Tzu Chi work in northeast Japan and inspire more people to work together to serve people in need.

Chiyoshi Kameyama is good at calligraphy and painting. She and Zhang Jun have led volunteers in Ishinomaki and Higashimatsushima to carry out Tzu Chi missions. They have, for example, hit the streets to raise money for victims of Cyclone Idai in Africa. The two of them also came up with the idea of the "500 coin banks" campaign.

Japan was hit by the massive compound disaster just as Tzu Chi Japan was entering its third decade. Those of us in Japan are very grateful to the Master for helping calm our minds when the catastrophe happened and for guiding us in how to go about the relief work for the survivors. We are also greatly thankful to Tzu Chi volunteers

across 39 countries and regions for launching fundraisers in their countries to help us provide relief to the disaster areas. Backed by the guidance of the Master and the love of Tzu Chi volunteers around the world, we will continue to do our best to solicit love in Japan and find more like-minded people to work together for the greater good.

Going strong

In 1998, eight years after the Tzu Chi Japan chapter came into existence, I returned to Japan with my husband, whose work had once again brought us to the country. At the time, the local Tzu Chi office was in an apartment provided by senior volunteer Song Du-zhi (宋篤志). The apartment was small, as was our chapter: we had just ten commissioners. Though we were a small branch, the atmosphere was very warm. I had at the time just received my certification as a commissioner in Taiwan. Buoyed by the fresh commitment I had made to emulate the Buddha's heart and carry out the Master's missions as my own, my mind was focused on how to extend the Master's compassion in Japan and make Tzu Chi known to more people there.

I expected my husband and I to stay in Japan for five or six years before his job took us away again. Little did I know that we would still be here after so many years, or that I'd get to see Tzu Chi Japan grow from its humble beginnings to what it is today. We have had a lot of laughter and tears along the way; we've experienced sadness and happiness. But as I reflect on all the years that have gone by, I find I no longer remember what caused me to shed tears. Perhaps I've purposefully tried to forget the sad parts or perhaps I've become wiser, but what I remember the most is how other volunteers and I have laughed together, how we have shared many joyful moments of positivity.

This year marked the 30th anniversary of Tzu Chi Japan. I've been with the branch for 23 years now. My love for the foundation is as strong as ever, my commitment just as firm. Never a day goes by without my doing Tzu Chi work. The Master's determination to relieve the suffering in the world inspired me to follow her. My desire to do charity work and benefit the world led me to join Tzu Chi, but little did I expect that I'd learn so much from the Buddha's teachings. The Enlightened One taught us the Four Noble Truths: "suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the path to freedom from suffering." He also gave us the Six Paramitas (Perfections) to practice on our path of spiritual cultivation: giving,



Two survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake pose with an envelope that contained the cash aid they received from Tzu Chi ten years ago. They have joined the "500 coin banks" campaign and will save money in the coin banks they received from Tzu Chi to help the needy.

ZHANG JUN

moral discipline, patient endurance, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. Such teachings are important as we go among people to give, because working in this world is not easy. Setbacks and challenges are inevitable. It's through practicing the Six Perfections that we can endure challenging conditions, stay focused, and steadfastly continue our work without our attention being diverted from what really matters.

Tzu Chi has entered its 55th year. There have been numerous challenges along the way. The Master has often reminded us not to forget the aspirations that set us on the Bodhisattva Path. She tells us that love requires action. In the depths of the night, I often ask myself: "Is my love missing a piece? Is my love complete? Have I stayed true to the Buddha's and the Master's teachings?" Even though we are thousands of kilometers from our spiritual home in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, I will continue to foster unity among local volunteers and pool together their love to serve hurting and needy people. When we take one meaningful, fulfilling step after another, when we continue to grow in wisdom on the path we've chosen, then we are taking the Master's teachings to heart and easing her burden.

Love for Zimbabwe

By Zhang Li-yun

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hlengisile Jiyane

"Please spread my ashes over the places I've visited in Zimbabwe. I want to continue to help suffering people in this country in my next life." These were the instructions from Tino Chu, a Tzu Chi volunteer in Zimbabwe, to his wife when his condition became critical after he was diagnosed with COVID-19.

The government in Zimbabwe announced a nationwide lockdown in March 2020, even before the coronavirus began to escalate in the country. Public transport was banned, checkpoints installed, and police went on patrol to stop anyone who was out and about without movement permits. It was all but impossible to leave one's home, let alone travel to another village or out of town.

Under such circumstances, Tino Chu (朱金財), head of Tzu Chi Zimbabwe, had no choice but to

stay at home like other people in the country. Though he remained homebound, he was deeply concerned about destitute families in the country. After all, they had no ability to stockpile food and were likely on the brink of hunger.

Tino Chu (left) and other Tzu Chi volunteers in Zimbabwe distribute rice and blankets to underserved families in Gutu, Masvingo Province, to help them through the difficult time of the pandemic.



On the third day of the national lockdown, a customs broker delivered some shipping container documents to Chu. Seeing that the broker was still able to move around freely despite the restrictions, Chu asked him how he had obtained his movement permit. Soon thereafter, Chu contacted the responsible authorities and asked about applying for movement permits for him and other volunteers. "We were fortunate in that Tzu Chi's charity efforts in Zimbabwe had won affirmation from local government officials," Chu explained. "As a result, five other volunteers and I were granted movement permits."

As soon as his permit was in hand, Chu drove two carloads of daily necessities to the other volunteers' homes to be delivered to needy people. Concerned that they might be robbed on their way to deliver the items, the volunteers opted not to transport their goods with hand trucks. Instead, they wrapped the goods in cloths and, balancing them on their heads, delivered them to one household after another. The poor didn't need much to get by. They were overjoyed when they received the rice, cooking oil, sugar, and salt from Tzu Chi.

The lockdown, extended again and again, lasted about six months. During that time, people were not allowed to go out to work, public facilities were closed, and only one in ten government

employees were able to report to work. But thanks to their permits, Chu and the five other volunteers were able to surmount all difficulties and continue distributing aid to the disadvantaged. They and other volunteers were even allowed to start providing hot food at a few fixed locations.

Shortly before Christmas, Tzu Chi held 14 distributions in 11 towns and villages to help people have a better Christmas. Nine thousand impoverished households benefited from the distributions. Volunteers reminded each other during each event not to relax their precautionary measures. "Watch out for your own safety when you help others," they'd say.

Despite all the precautions he took, Chu became infected with the coronavirus. "I was surprised when I fell ill in January this year," he said. He explained that it started with a slight cough and a fever. He didn't think it was COVID-19 at first, and it was only when his condition continued to worsen that he, at the urging of his family, went to the hospital to have a checkup. More than ten days had passed by that time, and he was so

A family in Hatfield, Harare, Zimbabwe, happily displays the rice, cooking oil, sugar, and soap Tzu Chi volunteers delivered to them during lockdown.





ill when diagnosed with the disease that he had to be put on a ventilator.

Despite the treatment, his condition didn't improve. On the third day of his hospitalization, he had such difficulty breathing that he felt that he might not survive the night. As he drifted in and out of consciousness, he started putting his affairs in order. He told his wife to spread his ashes over the places he had visited in Zimbabwe. "That way, I'll remember to come back to the country. There is so much suffering here. I must come back here in my next life to continue helping the people here."

Chu's wife was very worried about him. She knew that her husband cared most about relieving the plight of impoverished people in Zimbabwe, and had felt that way since they had immigrated to Zimbabwe from Taiwan over two decades ago. Therefore, to strengthen his will to live, she said to him, "I promise to do anything you ask me to do. But has it occurred to you that if you leave the world now, what will all those suffering people in Zimbabwe do? You should work harder to get well instead of pinning your hope on your next life. You should consider what you can do now to provide immediate relief to the people who are struggling to get through the pandemic."

Though he was very weak, Chu drew a sharp breath when he heard the words "Zimbabwe"

Tino Chu interacts with young children in Epworth, Harare. He cares for the underserved in Zimbabwe so much that he wants to continue serving them in his next life.

and "suffering," and he felt his mind clear all of a sudden. He thought to himself: "That's right. If I die now, leaving all those Zimbabweans behind, how long will they have to wait until I come back?" His wife's remark was like a wakeup call bringing him to his senses. He told himself he had to fight hard to live on.

When the Tzu Chi volunteers in Zimbabwe learned that their beloved "Brother Chu" had fallen victim to the coronavirus, they all wanted to go to the hospital to visit him. Chu asked his family to tell them, "Please keep on working for the needy. I'll soon be back with you to continue working with you."

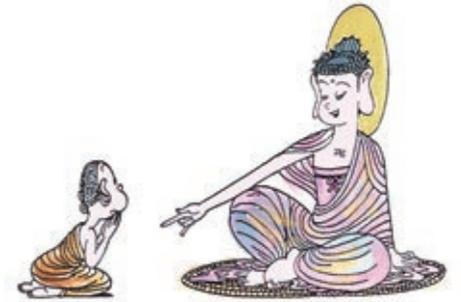
Chu's condition improved two weeks later. Thinking back on his close brush with death, he realized that it was the needy in Zimbabwe that had given him the strength to live on.

After his recovery, he shared with his fellow volunteers what he had experienced during his illness. He encouraged them to keep going, to carry on the torch of Tzu Chi, so that they could serve as many people as possible and inspire hope and love in each person. ❀

The JING SIA Illustrated APHORISMS

The Buddha says:

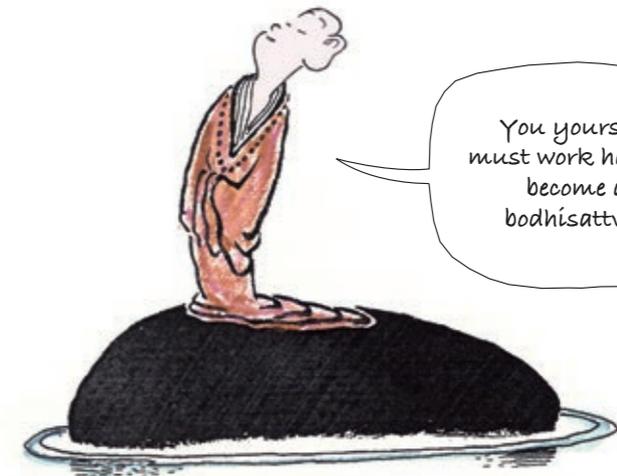
Use yourself as a lamp to show the way,
use your true self as a refuge to come home to.
Use the Dharma as a lamp, use the Dharma as a refuge.
Besides these two, there is nothing else you can depend on.
So trust yourself as the light, trust the Dharma as the light
to show you the way.



Don't underestimate yourself,
because human
beings have infinite
potential.

A journey of
a thousand miles
begins with the first
step. All the saints
started out as ordi-
nary human
beings.

You yourself
must work hard to
become a
bodhisattva.



A TV producer: "All the programs that I produce emphasize positive reports of people, places, and things in Taiwan."

Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "Your work is to reveal the beauty and virtue in Taiwan, while mine is to reveal the goodness in people."

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

Mortuary Cosmetologists Mend Broken Hearts

By Chen Mei-yi

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphic by Su Fang-pei

In the aftermath of Taiwan's deadly train crash on April 2, 2021, a group of volunteer mortuary cosmetologists from a non-profit organization called "76 Monks" rushed to Hualien, where the accident took place, to help reconstruct corpses. Members of the organization offer to repair the bodies of those killed in disasters and accidents using their own time and money.

I'm a Tzu Chi volunteer, and often write stories and articles for the foundation's publications. On April 8, I arrived at the Hualien Funeral Home. In the rest area for journalists at the funeral home, I asked Angela Wang (王薇君), the spokesperson for 76 Monks, how their corpse reconstruction work was coming along. She said, "We were having difficulty mending a victim's head—her face was badly damaged above the jaw. We originally planned to recreate a head for her, but then a miracle happened."

"April 5 was one team member's birthday," she continued. "We bought a birthday cake for him. The wish he made that day was that we'd be able to restore the cadaver of every deceased victim to great shape." Less than 30 minutes after he made that wish, a half face was found in a body bag. It looked as though it might belong to the woman. After more than 20 hours of DNA testing, it was determined that it did indeed belong to the woman.

"Heaven above must have heard our prayers," Wang went on to say. "We recovered not only what the woman had lost in the accident, but also a leg belonging to a man."

When they were done reconstructing the female victim's head and applying makeup to her, her family came to claim her. Her mother called out when she was about three meters (10 feet) away: "Yes, that's my child." After a closer look, she said, "So beautiful!"

Wang said to the mother, "We're sorry that you had to wait so long [for her body to be restored]."

"No matter how long we had to wait, this would be the last time we needed to wait for her for anything." The mother's words made everyone around tear up.

The work that members of 76 Monks do for families that have lost loved ones is difficult to overstate. Sometimes the body of a deceased per-

son is badly damaged, adding to the pain family members feel upon seeing it. Sometimes the bereaved are so heartbroken upon seeing their loved one's broken body that they faint. The restoration of a disfigured body to wholeness and its former likeness brings the family of the deceased a lot of comfort. Members of 76 Monks have repaired or reconstructed over 300 corpses since it was founded in 2015.

"Some people think our work unnecessary," Wang remarked. "They say, 'Why spend 20 or 30 hours reconstructing or mending a body just to

have it cremated soon afterwards?' But we believe that helping the grieving families find solace matters more than anything else. It's also our wish that the deceased can leave this world with dignity."

After the train wreck in April—a tragedy that took 49 lives—more than 100 volunteers from 76 Monks left their jobs and own families behind and threw themselves into helping the deceased and their families. Some worked for 40 or 50 hours at a stretch to repair the bodies. Chen Hsiu-chiang (陳修將), the convener of the NPO, said, "The media said that we worked around the clock to repair the



bodies. That's true, but that doesn't capture the extent of our effort. They didn't know that some of our members passed out from fatigue and needed to be put on IV drips."

The volunteers had no time to spare. Once they started working on a cadaver, they needed to finish their task as soon as possible—the longer they worked, the more the body thawed and deteriorated. They also didn't want to make the families wait too long. They worked on three or four bodies at the same time, with about six people laboring on the same body. The space in which they worked wasn't large. When they didn't have enough tables to carry out their repairs, they put some plastic stools together and placed trays on them to work.

Injuries were inevitable. Some volunteers were pricked by suture needles, jabbed by sharp broken bones, or even cut by the broken glass in the cadavers during the restoration process. But the volunteer cosmetologists paid little mind to their injuries—they just didn't have the time to spare. They'd just squeeze the blood from their wounds and apply some simple bandaging before resuming their work.

Medical professionals from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, concerned about the risk of infection, provided tetanus shots to the cosmetologists who were injured and treated their wounds. They also drew blood from every team member to be tested. They will track the volunteers' condition for half a year to safeguard their health.

"Tzu Chi has provided us with folding beds so that our team members can lie down for a rest. They need it after working 20 or 30 hours straight," Wang said. She showed me some photos on her smartphone. In one of the photos, I saw two persons, blankets wrapped around them, sleeping curled up on a bed. The bed wasn't big, but they managed to squeeze themselves onto it.

Another photo showed one of the volunteers sitting on a box, slumped against a wall, sound asleep. They were working so hard around the clock they didn't want to return to their free hotels to sleep. Some of them slept in their cars to save time, and others just crashed on-site.

On the morning of April 11, six representatives from the organization visited Dharma Master Cheng Yen at the Jing Si Abode and talked with her for more than an hour. Chen Hsiu-chiang shared with the Master and the others present how their organization had come into existence. In July 2014, a passenger plane crashed in Penghu, off the western coast of Taiwan, killing 48 people. Just a week later, a series of explosions caused by an

underground gas leak hit an area in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, claiming 32 lives. Chen and 26 other professional morticians responded to both tragedies by rushing to the front lines and repairing—for free—the cadavers of those killed in the accidents. The team restored a total of 76 bodies across the two disasters. Afterwards, they founded 76 Monks, which has been in operation for over five years now.

At first, the organization admitted only other funeral service professionals into its ranks, but now their members include volunteer police officers and firefighters, teachers, nurses, beauticians, and even family members of those killed in accidents who had received their help.

Chen said that he had once been a gangster and had even served time behind bars. "I remember reading *Jing Si Aphorisms* [a collection of maxims by Master Cheng Yen] and stories about Tzu Chi in prison." He quoted an aphorism by the Master: "If we look at a chipped cup from another angle, it is still round." He said that the sentence had a profound impact on him. It inspired him to learn to look at things from another angle. He thanked the Master for planting seeds of wisdom in him.

The Master felt for the team for the hard work they had put in, and expressed appreciation for their services, saying that they were doing things not everyone could do. She also said that their giving brought a lot of comfort to families of the deceased and was truly meritorious.

Ten days after the train crash, the group's work was coming to an end. At four p.m. that day, a police car and a hearse from Taipei were preparing to transport one of the deceased victims of the accident home. The decedent's name was Miss Wu. Miss Wu's family was present, and her aunt took out a necklace and placed it around her neck.

Wu's body had been badly damaged in the accident, but it had been restored to the best state possible. Moved by the work of the volunteers, Wu's mother said to Chen and Wang, "I want to kneel in front of you [to express my gratitude]...." Hugs followed. Then the volunteer cosmetologists lined up to see Miss Wu off. As the hearse carrying her body slowly moved away from the site, they bowed deeply as if they were seeing off one of their own family members.

Many people have heaped praise on the cosmetologists, saying that they are truly extraordinary and remarkable. Chen said in response to such compliments, "We are just a group of ordinary people, and what we do is really nothing out of the ordinary." ❊

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*Each act of goodness becomes a blessing
and reduces suffering in the world.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

PHOTO BY HUANG XIAO-ZHE