

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a maroon hoodie over a pink t-shirt, is smiling and holding a large grey bag. Next to her is a young girl in a grey sweatshirt and a pink fanny pack, also smiling. In the foreground, a young child in a pink jacket is looking towards the camera. They are standing on a paved path in front of a large, light-colored residential building with many windows. A white van is parked in the background. The woman is holding a large grey bag with a blue circular logo. She is also holding a white shopping bag with text on it, including "#biegnijublin", "mosir", and "Tublin".

**Continuing Tzu Chi Aid for
Ukrainian Refugees**

July 2022

The Power of Combined Love

Translated by Teresa Chang



Tzu Chi held its first distribution for displaced Ukrainians in Warsaw, Poland, on May 6. Tzu Chi volunteers and Ukrainian refugees also worked together to hold a charity concert on the same day. Pictured here are several volunteers and performers in the concert. Some are holding sunflowers, Ukraine's national flower.

ZHONG WAN-YIN

Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, Poland has taken in the largest number of Ukrainian refugees. Our foundation has been helping offer support to the displaced Ukrainians there. Volunteers from more than ten countries traveled a while ago to Poland and combined forces with local volunteers and personnel from other humanitarian organizations to hold distributions and provide other aid to the refugees. The Ukrainians who had fled to Poland were not staying in just one place, but were distributed mainly in four cities. Nearly 40 Tzu Chi volunteers divided themselves into groups and worked in the four cities to help. Their mission was to provide material aid and to bring warmth and emotional support to the refugees. They listened as the displaced people shared their pain and anguish, and they gave them hugs and a shoulder to lean on. Seeing how our volunteers gave to ease their suffering really touched my heart. This illustrates how living bodhisattvas go wherever there is suffering.

Besides giving aid and support to suffering people, our volunteers worked to inspire love wherever they were. For example, a group of Taiwanese students studying in Poland joined our efforts in Lublin, eastern Poland, to provide relief to displaced Ukrainians. Our senior volunteers treated the students as mothers would their children and shared with them the Tzu Chi spirit of "gratitude, respect, and love." They also shared with the young people how to go about a distribution to convey our love and care to the refugees. I hope the warm bond formed between them will inspire these youths to continue giving of themselves and become seeds of love wherever they may reside.

Our aid missions on the front lines couldn't have happened without the help of many people. Take the blankets we've distributed: they are a labor of love of countless people. Our recycling volunteers had to first collect used PET bottles, then sort and prepare them to be melted into pellets, extruded into yarn, and woven into fabric before the final products could be packed and shipped to Poland. Similarly, the gift cards provide by us, each loaded with 2,000 Polish zlotys (US\$450), were only possible because of the donations of many kindhearted people.

Many are contributing in whatever way they can.

When the Dragon Boat Festival was approaching this year, our volunteers in Taiwan organized charity sales of *zongzis* to raise money for our Ukrainian humanitarian response. [Zongzis are sticky rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves, traditionally eaten during the festival.] Some people donated rice and other ingredients, and others made the food. There were instances of people paying enough money for dozens of zongzis but then taking only ten home and donating the rest to be resold. There were also people who not only bought our zongzis but donated money to help Ukrainians. A volunteer in Taichung, central Taiwan, provided chopsticks made from ebony for charity sales too. A group of volunteers who were skilled at sewing made lovely stitched cases for the chopsticks out of recycled umbrella fabric. [The decorative cases made the chopsticks more appealing and allowed them to be carried easily for eating out.] Everyone gave in different ways with one goal—to help the refugees.

I am most grateful to everyone who donated time, goods, or money, and to the Tzu Chi volunteers who went to Poland to deliver our care and love to the displaced Ukrainians. We couldn't go there personally, but they went in our stead. We couldn't embrace the refugees ourselves, but they did it for us. Such is the relay of love. Those of us who can't go to the front lines must do what we can to help so that we can give sustained support to the needy. I am also happy to see our foundation joining hands with other charity or non-governmental organizations to help the refugees. When everyone works together, each contributing their strengths, we make a bigger difference and can offer better aid to those in need.

When others are hurt, we feel the pain; when others suffer, we feel the sorrow. Those of us who are fortunate enough to live in peace and safety must remember that while we are enjoying our blessed lives, a group of people far away are suffering and facing an uncertain future. Let's seize every chance to give and help love spread by inspiring others to tap into their kindness. When we pool our love together, we will accumulate limitless strength and allow love to reach every corner of the world. When that day comes, then transforming our world into a Pure Land will be more than a dream. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

July 2022



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1 THE POWER OF COMBINED LOVE

When we work together, our combined love has a powerful impact on the lives of the suffering. It can reach every corner of the world and transform it into a beautiful place.

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

To read our magazine online, please visit our website: web.tzuchiculture.org.tw or scan this QR code:



On the Cover:
Photo courtesy of Susan Chen



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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A photograph of a woman with long brown hair hugging a young girl from behind. The girl has dark hair with a large blue bow and is wearing a plaid shirt. The woman is wearing a dark blue jacket and has her hands on the girl's shoulders. The background is dimly lit with warm, yellowish light sources.

The Ukrainian War

Continuing Tzu Chi Aid

The Russia-Ukraine war has raged for several months now. More than five million Ukrainians who fled the war are still in Poland or other countries. Tzu Chi has continued to provide support for displaced Ukrainians. Volunteers embrace the same hope as the refugees, that the war will end soon so they can restart their lives in peace and safety in their home country.

Together We Go Far

Tzu Chi Joins Efforts With Other Humanitarian Organizations

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hector Muniente

Tzu Chi has conducted many distributions for displaced Ukrainians since the war started. Now, as the conflict grinds on, the foundation is working with its partners to implement mid- and long-term aid and support programs for refugees.

More than a hundred days have passed since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February 2022. Though heavy fighting continues in eastern Ukraine, the situation has mostly stabilized in other parts of the country. Some Ukrainians who fled to Poland, Moldova, Romania, and other nations have started to return home. According to statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), though more than 7.5 million people had escaped from Ukraine by June 15, 2.4 million had returned.

Returning refugees face many challenges upon their return. “With the exception of the capital Kyiv, water is an issue, whether in western Ukraine or the present war zone,” said Debra Boudreaux (曾慈慧), CEO of Tzu Chi USA. Boudreaux had visited Poland and nearby countries to confer with personnel from several international charitable organizations about implementing humanitarian aid work for displaced Ukrainians. “Several important waterworks and supply systems have been wrecked by missiles. That, coupled with pollution of water sources as a result of warfare, has made water supply one of the toughest challenges faced by Ukrainians.”

The CEO also pointed out several other issues. Civilian residences were destroyed in bombing attacks, forcing those who had lost their homes to temporarily shelter in tents. With agricultural

fields reduced to battlegrounds, the cultivation and harvesting of crops has been disrupted. Storing and transporting food has been impacted too. “Food shortages are now a problem, not just in Ukraine, but in nearby countries too,” said Boudreaux. “And the problems will just continue to grow.” The war has even contributed to inflation and food scarcity around the world.

With the end of the conflict hard to predict, several million Ukrainian refugees will continue to stay abroad. Tzu Chi is launching mid- and long-term assistance in response. Besides holding distributions and providing other support for displaced Ukrainians in Poland in cooperation with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), volunteers also visited Moldova and Romania in May, working to increase the reach of Tzu Chi’s aid.

Food, shelter, and emotional support

Debra Boudreaux explained that Tzu Chi has no office yet in Ukraine and Poland, but the foundation can still get its aid to the front lines by cooperating with other international organizations. She believed this is the biggest breakthrough for Tzu Chi’s relief mission this time. She also said that she has learned a lot from these organizations—things that can help Tzu Chi render aid in the future.

One of the organizations is Camillian Disaster Service International (CADIS), with which Tzu



Chi has signed a memorandum of cooperation. CADIS is a non-profit organization owned by the Order of the Ministers of the Infirm (Camillians), a Roman Catholic religious order. Tzu Chi has started working with that organization to help Ukrainians. The collaboration includes providing food, other basic necessities, medical services, psychological counseling, and temporary housing. The goal is to help more than 40,000 people over five months.

The CEO said that when she and others from Tzu Chi visited Warsaw Central Station in April, they saw a service station in the lobby set up by the Camillian Mission of Social Welfare (referred to as “the Mission” below). They had also erected two tents outside the station, one to provide daily necessities such as toiletries or food packages, and the other to provide hot food. Any Ukrainian refugee who could produce identification could access the services.

Aside from the service station at Warsaw Central Station, the Catholic organization has also set up service centers at train stations in Moldova and Romania. These locations are major transfer points for Ukrainians as they travel to other coun-

With the threat from the war decreasing, some Ukrainian women in Medyka, southeastern Poland, on the border with Ukraine, take their children on a long journey home.

tries or cities. The Camillian service centers also provide a platform for companies, social welfare organizations, and warm-hearted people to offer telecommunication services, food, and other necessities to displaced Ukrainians. They help bring peace of mind to the refugees and order and stability to communities.

The Tzu Chi team also visited facilities offered by the Camillian Mission of Social Welfare to serve as shelters for displaced Ukrainians. For example, a place run by the Mission for street people had taken in some Ukrainian mothers and children. Most of the mothers were wary of the visiting Tzu Chi volunteers, perhaps due to the trauma of war. The children, perhaps out of their natural curiosity, warmed quickly to the visitors.

Though the trauma these mothers carried was not easy to see on the surface, Boudreaux knew the pressure they must have been under. “Many

said they were proud of their husbands or sons for defending their homeland in Ukraine.”

The Ukrainians who have fled their country need more than material aid—they need psychological consolation too. Tzu Chi volunteers went with some Ukrainian mothers who were participating in a Tzu Chi work relief program to visit another Camillian facility, located in Łomianki, about 20 minutes’ drive from the city center of Warsaw. They came to conduct group activities for some Ukrainian women and children sheltering there.

“Head, shoulders, knees, and toes....” Anastasia Malashenko, who had been serving as an emcee in Tzu Chi distributions, led adults and children in getting some exercise. In the next room, some preschool-age children, under the guidance of other volunteers, were tracing their fingers on colored paper to be made into flowers. When they had completed their handicrafts, they presented them as gifts to their mothers, who had endured so much heartache as they fled with their children from their home country.

In addition to the service station at Warsaw Central Station and the two refugee shelters, the Tzu Chi team also visited a Camillian hospital

near Kraków, the second largest city in Poland. The hospital is more than a hundred years old, and has 60 beds. Twenty of them were being used by terminally ill Ukrainian refugees receiving palliative care. “They couldn’t go to a typical shelter for Ukrainian refugees, so the Camillian hospital took them in. At least they have a roof over their heads to preserve their dignity during the final days of their lives,” Boudreaux explained.

Most Ukrainians are Orthodox Christians, so Christian organizations like CADIS can offer spiritual support in addition to food, clothing, and shelter. That said, though Tzu Chi is a Buddhist organization, volunteers believed that with sincerity and love they could also bring a lot of warmth to refugees’ hearts.

UNICEF

Another organization Tzu Chi has joined hands with is the United Nations Children’s Fund

A Tzu Chi team visits St. Camillus Hospital of Tarnowskie Góry, near Kraków, Poland, which has taken in terminally ill Ukrainian refugees.

COURTESY OF TZU CHI USA



(UNICEF). The two sides have entered into an agreement with the plan to provide help to 15,000 Ukrainian families over a period of six months, including schooling for children, physical and mental care, and providing food and other necessities.

“What impressed me most about UNICEF was that they have established a whole set of standard operating procedures, borne from years of experience,” said Boudreaux. “For example, in Poland, they first talked with the ministries of education, internal affairs, foreign affairs, etc. Then they went back to the towns or villages that had taken in displaced Ukrainians and interacted with the local governments. Each town and village had their say in things and were included in the decision-making process.” After talking to UNICEF personnel, Boudreaux realized even more how helping refugees is a long-term, difficult mission.

Almost all the places in the world that are hosting refugees have Blue Dot hubs in them. Jointly established by UNHCR and UNICEF, along with local authorities and partners, Blue Dot hubs are safe spaces that provide refugee children and families with critical information and services. Besides food and shelter, such hubs offer legal aid, coun-

A UNICEF Blue Dot hub in Palanca, Moldova

seling and psychosocial support, and family reunification services to restore and maintain contact among family members, among other services.

Boudreaux visited several Blue Dot hubs and saw how their activity space for children was arrayed with all kinds of toys and stationery. With the help of trained staff, children were undergoing play therapy, a form of therapy that uses play activities to help children through mental and emotional issues.

“It’s not uncommon for the trained staff to suffer trauma themselves, after hearing sad stories every day—about war, about the painful journeys of fleeing from one’s home country, about human trafficking,” Boudreaux said. “So Blue Dot hubs offer counseling to their own workers too.”

Similar to work relief programs offered by Tzu Chi and other organizations to help refugees support themselves, UNICEF employs refugees to assist with their work too. For example, they have hired professionals from Ukraine, including teachers, doctors, and nurses. After training, they are



put to work providing psychological counseling and other services for refugee children and women in Poland, Moldova, Romania, and even Ukraine. The scale of the project is large and many have benefited, but there is still a long way to go.

“When people have experienced a trauma, seeing the doctor just once or having a single counseling session isn’t enough to help them recover,” Boudreaux explained. “You are not going to see instant results. A lot of time and patience is required for this type of work.”

Logistics

Healing the mind can’t be rushed but providing aid supplies is something that can’t wait. That’s why Tzu Chi has also combined efforts with IsraAID, a humanitarian NGO based in Israel, to get its aid to Ukrainian people. IsraAID is known for its capacity for organizing and managing logistics.

“The organization uses a specialized software program to collect information, say, from hospitals in Ukraine about the supplies they need,” Boudreaux explained. “Then they compile a list of the needs, and contact NGOs in France, Germany,

Tzu Chi is collaborating with IsraAID to provide psychosocial care at seven support centers in Moldova for children and mothers from Ukraine.

America, and other countries to inform them what supplies are needed by which hospitals. They also help donated goods get to the right place.” The Humanitarian Logistics Hub IsraAID created in Tulcea, Romania, in partnership with local NGOs and authorities after the Russia-Ukraine war broke out, is playing an important role in streaming and facilitating aid donations during the war.

In order to get supplies donated by Tzu Chi into the “humanitarian corridor” in Ukraine, Debra Boudreaux visited IsraAID personnel in Romania and Moldova. After the war started, IsraAID quickly set up the large logistics hub in Tulcea to allow trucks carrying supplies from Europe to unload there. Then staffers sort the goods before sending them to southern and eastern Ukraine. By working with IsraAID, Tzu Chi has been able to get its food packages, medical kits, medicine, and signature eco-blankets into Odessa, Kharkiv, and other areas in Ukraine.



A long road ahead

“It’s impossible to ask a child who has experienced a trauma to quickly recover,” Boudreaux reiterated. “It takes time to help the refugees emerge from their painful experiences.” She pointed out that the war is not over yet, and that the road to reconstruction will be longer than everyone imagines. Tzu Chi won’t be absent on the road.

Besides providing material aid, the foundation’s distinctive culture has played an important role in bringing encouragement to those who have received help from Tzu Chi.

“This is what Dharma Master Cheng Yen has always reminded us to do,” said the CEO. “In the process of bringing relief to others, we shouldn’t just focus on giving, but should also try to inspire people to pay forward the love they receive.” She commented that is why volunteers during the distributions have encouraged Ukrainian refugees to donate via Tzu Chi’s signature coin banks to help their fellow compatriots. “When the journey is long, one knows the strength of the horse,” Boudreaux said, quoting a well-known Chinese saying. “A lot of patience will be required in our

A Tzu Chi team poses with staffers from IsraAID at the Humanitarian Logistics Hub that IsraAID and its partners established in Tulcea, Romania, after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war. Tzu Chi has joined hands with IsraAID to get the foundation’s aid supplies into Ukraine.

future work as we accompany the suffering people through this difficult time. We’ll continue to work with like-minded organizations to pull off the humanitarian aid effort this time.”

In addition to CADIS, UNICEF, and IsraAID, Tzu Chi has also signed collaboration agreements with Airlink, Adventist Development and Relief Agency International, World Hope International, and other organizations to broaden the scope of the foundation’s assistance. Yen Po-wen (顏博文), CEO of the Tzu Chi charity mission, said: “An individual’s strength might be limited, but if we work together, we’ll be able to help all those who need a hand. At the same time, we hope that the war will end soon so that those displaced by the conflict will be able to return to their homeland and restart their lives in peace and safety.”

Tzu Chi's Ukrainian Humanitarian Response

Current Refugee Situation

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, triggering a mass exodus of people from Ukraine. According to June 15 statistics from the United Nations, more than five million Ukrainians who fled the war are still abroad.

The Ukrainian government banned men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country after the Russian invasion. Those who fled the country were as a result mostly older people, women, and children. Poland took in the most refugees, hosting nearly four million at one time. Another 2.4 million escaped to Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and Slovakia.

The threat of warfare has decreased in western Ukraine. People started returning home in April and May. However, severe fighting continues in eastern Ukraine. The infrastructure and many homes in the country have been badly damaged, and shortages of daily necessities have followed. Aid from the international community is still needed.

Aid From Tzu Chi

Tzu Chi launched its first distributions for displaced Ukrainians in March, in Poznań, Poland.

The foundation held more distributions for refugees or continued to donate necessities to organizations in Poznań, Warsaw, Lublin, and Szczecin in April and May. Gift cards and blankets were given out in the distributions.

To increase the reach and scope of Tzu Chi's aid, the foundation joined hands with more than ten organizations to offer support for displaced Ukrainians in Poland, Romania, and Moldova.

Tzu Chi's partner organizations include Camillian Disaster Service International (CADIS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), IsraAID, the Red Cross in Kraków, Caritas Internationalis, the Polish Women Can Foundation, Airlink, and others.

Distributions continued in June, with more planned.

Number of distributions held: 190

People who have benefited: 52,354 (including donations to organizations and distributions)

Gift Cards

Each gift card is loaded with 2,000 Polish zlotys (US\$450), redeemable at a major supermarket chain in Poland. A total of 22,267 cards have been given out.



Eco-Blankets

Tzu Chi's eco-blankets, made from recycled PET bottles, are light but warm. The weather was still cold in Warsaw, Lublin, and Poznań in May this year, with the temperature hovering around ten degrees Celsius (50 degrees Fahrenheit). The blankets provided by the foundation helped keep the refugees warm. A total of 23,711 blankets have been given out.



Last updated: June 15, 2022



From Istanbul to Warsaw

By Nadya Chou

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Alberto Buzzola

It was a challenge to launch distributions in Warsaw, Poland, where there is no Tzu Chi office and where we had to start everything from scratch. However, all our hard work was worth it when we embraced the displaced Ukrainians.

My husband, Faisal Hu (胡光中), and I are both Tzu Chi volunteers in Turkey. In late April, we went to Poland to help carry out Tzu Chi distributions for displaced Ukrainians. We set off from Istanbul, drove more than 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) through several countries, and crossed the border into Poland three days later. As strangers to the country, we didn't know what to expect and were thus a little uneasy when we entered a grocery store next to a gas station. However, our uneasiness was soon allayed by the store owner's affability. He could tell we were not from Poland, and tried to strike up a conversation with us. Though we didn't understand Polish, we could feel his friendliness.

After leaving the store, we continued to Warsaw, Poland's capital. When we arrived, what

we saw there instantly changed my impression of Warsaw, an outdated impression dating back to World War II. We saw a big, modern city: streets lined with office buildings housing large corporations, its general architectural style simple and clean. It gave me a feeling very similar to that of Finland, Denmark, and other northern European countries. I could feel a huge, vibrant energy emanating from the city. No wonder the country could take in so many refugees from Ukraine. I instantly took a liking to Poland.

To get a better understanding of the current refugee situation, we accompanied Debra Boudreaux (曾慈慧), CEO of Tzu Chi USA, to visit Poland's border with Ukraine. We found that very few people were crossing the border from Ukraine to Poland, whereas a long stream of vehicles was doing the opposite: going from Poland into Ukraine. The situation was apparently very different than it was just a month before.

Back in Warsaw, we visited the local Red Cross, the Camillian Mission of Social Welfare, and other humanitarian organizations to discuss our cooperation with

Tzu Chi volunteers from Turkey, Britain, and the United States pose with Ukrainian participants of a Tzu Chi work relief program.

COURTESY OF POLISH TZU CHI VOLUNTEERS



them or explore possible partnerships. We held our first volunteer training session on May 1. Among the participants were 16 Ukrainian refugees taking part in a Tzu Chi work relief program. We had the manpower and the gift cards ready, but we had yet to obtain aid recipient lists.

My husband and I considered replicating the operational model we used in Turkey, where we'd make home visits to Syrian refugee families to compile our care recipient rosters. But we found that that wouldn't work in Poland. Many Ukrainians were staying in the homes of local Polish families, which made it inconvenient to visit them.

My husband and a volunteer team in Turkey met online for several days in a row to work out a solution to this challenge. They eventually developed an online questionnaire for refugees to fill out to receive our aid. After refugees had completed the form and their identity was confirmed, a text message would be sent to notify them to come to us to receive their aid. This strategy respected the local government's wish to protect privacy while still allowing us to get our aid into the hands of needy people.

Getting this system set up and running

Tzu Chi volunteer Nadya Chou (周如意), the author of this article, interacts with a Ukrainian at a Tzu Chi distribution in Warsaw, Poland.

smoothly in Warsaw was possible due to efforts of Basil Khalil, Hani Aldib, and Hady Souki. Khalil and Aldib, both IT engineers, are Syrian volunteers in Turkey. Souki is also a Syrian refugee but lives in the Netherlands now. Their work saved us a lot of effort in compiling recipient information and also allowed us to estimate the number of people who would come for our aid, making it easier for us to prepare enough blankets and gift cards for distribution. They deserve many thanks for their outstanding work for Tzu Chi and the Ukrainians in need in Poland.

Conveying love with hugs

We decided to hold our distributions in Warsaw at a Salesian church's oratorium. Father Sławomir Szczodrowski said that his church had been providing hot food and daily necessities to displaced Ukrainians since the war started, but with that aid effort had come increasing financial pressure. "The help from Tzu Chi is just what we



need at this time,” said the priest. “We can work together to help these suffering people through this difficult time.”

More than 250 families (over 600 Ukrainians) registered for and came to our first distribution in early May. According to years of experience helping Syrian refugees in Turkey, this was just the beginning. Tzu Chi volunteers from more than ten countries had gathered in Poland to help conduct distributions or carry out other aid work not just in Warsaw, but also in Lublin, Poznań, and Szczecin.

In Warsaw, we began receiving more and more filled-out questionnaire forms. We needed to print

The gift cards distributed by Tzu Chi to displaced Ukrainians in Poland, loaded with 2,000 Polish zlotys each, are redeemable at Biedronka supermarkets, a widely available retail chain in the country.

out these forms before every distribution so that we could compare them with the identity documents produced by the people coming to our distributions. We also needed to send out text messages informing prospective recipients of the place and time of the event. We made careful arrangements at every distribution to make it easy for recipients to circulate through the venue. We

- **My husband and I have eight children. When I learned about the gift cards my family would receive, I cried with joy. It is enough to supply us with food for half a year or so.—Natalila**
- **Four other mothers and I arrived in Poland from Ukraine with 12 children in a nine-passenger vehicle. All five of our families received aid from Tzu Chi. We were so touched we decided each of our families would donate a gift card back to Tzu Chi to help our fellow compatriots.—Julia**
- **What you gave us was not only money, but also a lot of love. I’ll pray for you too, for heaven to protect you. Love is something we can share. It’s now my life’s mission to share love.—Sasha**



are indebted to the Ukrainians participating in our work relief program for successfully pulling off every distribution.

Many recipients cried as they listened while a consolation letter from Dharma Master Cheng Yen was read at the distributions. The gift cards distributed were worth 2,000 Polish zlotys (US\$450) each. Our Ukrainian helpers explained to everyone on-site that they were made possible by the donations of people in Taiwan and other places around the world, such as those collected on-site via coin banks or other containers. We encouraged the recipients not to forget to give back to the Polish families who had helped them.

At every distribution, we politely handed over envelopes containing gift cards to recipients. Then everyone hugged. Tears of gratitude and other emotions flowed. The recipients thanked us for coming from afar to deliver love and care to them.

I am back in Turkey now, but I still hear from our Ukrainian helpers. They told me they missed me and asked when I was visiting Poland again. When I was with them in Poland, I often felt we were like family. I often embraced them to convey my love for them. They embraced me a lot too, making me feel very warm at heart.

Aside from providing Ukrainian refugees with necessities and gift cards, Tzu Chi launched work relief programs for displaced Ukrainians in Warsaw, Lublin, and Poznań to enlist their help with Tzu Chi distributions. Pictured here is a volunteer training session held for such helpers in Warsaw. ZHONG WAN-YIN

I’m originally from Taiwan. Most Taiwanese people are shy and not used to such embraces, but this way of expressing affection grew on me after I started serving Syrian refugees in Turkey. The Syrian women receiving care from us often hug me, followed by pecks on my two cheeks—this is a habit of theirs. I can feel their warmth through such physical contact, and their gratitude for us is often written on their faces and in their eyes. I’m deeply thankful to have learned from the Syrians this way of interacting with others. When I was in Poland, I used it to pass on my love to the Ukrainians I encountered.

The Ukrainians and Syrians have both been victims of war, and they all need help, whether physically or mentally. Tzu Chi’s love will always be there for them, be it in the form of a consolation letter, a gift card, or a warm hug. We will always be there. ☸

Hoping to Wake Up in Kyiv

Text and photo by Zhu Xiu-lian

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Her life in Poland has settled into a routine. But how she wishes to wake up in her familiar bed in Kyiv, Ukraine, and start another new day there.

June 6. Another new week had begun. Marika, 31, pushed a baby stroller as she looked back and told her daughter Sofia to hurry and catch up with her. They boarded a bus just a second before it pulled away. Two stops later, they arrived at the school Sofia was attending. After seeing her walk into the school, Marika boarded another bus to get to a nearby supermarket, where she intended to buy some baby food for her younger daughter, Tiana.

Marika had received gift cards at a Tzu Chi distribution the previous Friday, good for purchases at a major supermarket chain in Poland. Each card was valued at 2,000 Polish zlotys, the equivalent of about 450 U.S. dollars. "I received three cards for my two daughters and me, which will sustain us for half a year." Once at the supermarket, she picked out the items she needed, then went to the counter to pay before pushing her stroller back to her present home—a shelter run by the Camillian Mission of Social Welfare. The shelter had taken in some displaced Ukrainians since the war began, like Marika and her daughters.

Marika was one of few Ukrainians who could communicate in English with Tzu Chi volunteers. A lawyer back in her hometown Kyiv, she worked at the legal department of a construction company there. Her husband served in a government health department. The family of four lived a happy life until a war that almost every Ukrainian found unbelievable turned their life upside down.

"When the war first broke out," Marika said, "my husband took us to the north, where it was relatively safe. Three weeks later, there was still no sign the war would end soon. Even worse, the situation seemed to become more and more unstable. So, we decided to move towards the border."

Marika was still rattled by the memory of the three days it took before they arrived at the border with Poland. She recalled how they had passed through cities being bombed. Sofia, her ten-year-old daughter, had been so badly shocked by the bombing that the sound of a thunderclap sent her into a panic.

"I try not to tell her what cruel things have happened," Marika said. "I want her young mind to retain the impression that the world is a beautiful one." She was also doing her best to keep her daughters' lives as normal as possible—just like what they had been before the war. It hadn't been easy though, especially considering that she had to take care of two young ones by herself, one of whom had just turned one year old a month earlier.

When Marika and her daughters first arrived in Poland at the end of March, they stayed in a place with five other Ukrainian families who had also fled the war. They slept on the floor at the time. In late April, the mother and daughters moved into the shelter in which they were living. A friend who worked for a priest of the Order of the Ministers of the Infirm (Camillicans) had made arrangements for them. They were given a room of about 178 square feet, which contained a bunk bed, a crib, and some essential furniture. They had a bathroom too. Their life finally felt more settled. "I'm already very lucky, compared with my compatriots who are still sleeping on the floor at a train station or who haven't found a fixed place to live yet," said Marika.

Marika longed to go back to work. But who would want to hire a lawyer who would have to take her one-year-old child to work with her? And that was on top of other challenges she'd have to overcome as a non-Polish citizen trying to find a job in Poland. She video chatted with her husband



every day, and asked him each time, "Can we go back now?" Without fail, he told her to wait a while longer. Weeks had dragged into months and it was just as uncertain when they'd be able to return to Ukraine and be reunited. "There was armed conflict in Kyiv just yesterday," Marika said. "Fortunately, nothing bad happened to my husband."

After they arrived in Poland, Marika enrolled her daughter Sophia in a school offering free schooling to Ukrainians. Sophia had since made new friends and looked happier now. She was even wearing a smile as she was going to school that morning. Marika was relieved her daughter had stopped asking her when they were going back to Kyiv, but was simultaneously worried that her daughter would get so used to her life in Poland that going back to Kyiv would be difficult.

Marika picked up a book her husband had sent her from Kyiv and began to read softly aloud from it. The familiar Ukrainian language and things the book described calmed her and helped her temporarily forget her cares. How she wished she'd wake

Marika reads aloud from a book her husband sent her from Ukraine, temporarily forgetting the weighty responsibility of having to care for two young children alone.

up in her familiar bed back at home the next day and start another busy but fulfilling day in Kyiv instead of having to idle her time away in a foreign country, sheltering under an unfamiliar roof.

She brought up a video on her cell phone, recorded when they were celebrating Sophia's birthday at the beginning of this year. "I feel bad for Tiana," said the mother, thinking of her younger daughter. "We had just arrived in Poland when she had turned one, and I didn't feel up to celebrating it at all." It was a good thing Tiana was still too young to realize that her birthday had come and gone without being celebrated. But Marika couldn't help but wonder: would her family still be apart when Sophia's birthday rolled around next year? She stopped herself before thinking any further, her eyes moist with tears. ♣

My 30 Distributions in Poland

By Chen Shu-nu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos courtesy of Susan Chen

Fleeing their homeland, taking refuge in a foreign country, being responsible for their young children, trying to make ends meet—all the while worried that their husbands would be killed in the war. Hearing what these women and mothers had to endure and yet having to remain strong brought tears to my eyes at almost every distribution.

I live in Germany. After the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, I often saw news reports of people driving back and forth between Germany and the Poland-Ukraine border to help ferry more Ukrainians to safer places. In Hamburg, where I live, the city government also took action to help. They set up large exhibition halls with partitions and beds, planning to put up about 2,000 displaced Ukrainians for one to two weeks. During that time, the Ukrainians could go to designated places to register for further accommodations.

The Hamburg city government had taken in Syrian refugees before and drew upon that experience this time around. Officials first called on those who had offered to put up displaced Ukrainians, determining the composition of the would-be host families and confirming whether the offered environment would be suitable or not. Once they ascertained the accommodations were satisfactory for refugees would they assign them to displaced Ukrainians.

Ukrainian refugees started arriving in Hamburg in early March. Fellow Tzu Chi volunteer Huang Bao-lian (黃寶蓮) invited me at the time to accompany her to visit the exhibition halls that were serving as temporary shelters. We wanted to see if there was anything we could do to help. We discovered that the shelters were very well set up with a sufficient supply of food. Our help didn't seem to be needed at the moment.

The Ukrainians who had fled the war in their country were mostly women, older people, and children. Most of them had escaped to Poland. When visiting the temporary shelters in Hamburg, I secretly

prayed that I'd be able to participate if Tzu Chi launched distributions in Poland. Thankfully, my prayers were answered. I arrived in Lublin, eastern Poland, in May. I took part in 30 distributions over two weeks, starting on May 16. More than 4,000 gift cards were given out through these events.

In addition to volunteers from Germany, others had arrived in Lublin to help from Austria, the Netherlands, and France. Most of them were older. I, in my 50s, was one of the youngest. I immediately set to work the day after I arrived, including attending meetings with people from the local chapter of Caritas Internationalis, one of Tzu Chi's partners in its Ukrainian humanitarian response. The organization was providing lists of recipients and the space for our distributions.

On the night of May 15, a Taiwanese student who was studying in Poland passed our distribution venue and saw that people were already lining up for the distributions the next day. Susan Chen (陳樹微), a fellow volunteer, immediately took a few of us there to check it out.

Spring was giving way to summer, but early mornings and nights were still very chilly in Lublin. Almost all those lining up at the venue were women. We tried to persuade them to go back home, but to no avail. They insisted on waiting through the night. It's easy to see from their insistence to stay in line how important the financial aid we were providing was to them.

The sound of love

We held seven distributions on that first day, because the venue was small. It could accommo-



date fewer than 50 people at a time. A group of Taiwanese students who were studying in Poland, assisted by some Ukrainians taking part in a Tzu Chi work relief program, took care of most of the distribution work.

Young mothers who had fled Ukraine with their children were the main recipients at the distributions. Some mothers had as many as four children, others had kids suffering from severe disabilities. They were all separated from their husbands, who were back home in harm's way defending their country. Not only did these women have to take care of their children on their own in a foreign country, they had to do it while worrying about the safety of their loved ones. They faced an uncertain future. My heart went out to them for all that they had had to endure.

When the Ukrainian refugees first arrived in Poland, many people offered them free accommodations, including hotel owners. However, as their stay dragged on, some places wanted to start to charge them. This was particularly worrisome, because they had no source of income. That explained the looks of gratitude on their faces when they received our gift cards, worth 2,000 Polish zlotys (US\$450) each. Some of them told us, when they were still waiting in line to receive their aid, that they could feel Tzu Chi was very different.

Tzu Chi volunteers, people from Caritas, Taiwanese students, and Ukrainian participants of a Tzu Chi work relief program joined hands to hold distributions for Ukrainian refugees in Lublin, eastern Poland.

They said they felt greatly respected at our events. I saw many cry during the distributions, not just because of their current situation, but also because they were so grateful for the care and help that had come to them from afar.

We were giving out many cards every day, but were able to keep track of everything because we had a clear list of which card went to whom. I have a background in finances and accounting, and so I knew we had a good system in hand, a system that allowed us to easily check if something went amiss. We could immediately find out if someone was trying to receive multiple cards, or if something wrong happened with a card, we could immediately determine the card number and the person receiving it, and take care of the problem without delay.

I went onstage during the distributions to speak to and interact with the Ukrainian families. It was my first time doing so at a Tzu Chi event, and it took me a lot of courage. We played a song sung by a Ukrainian band that had won the championship

in a European songwriting competition this year. We were hoping that the song might bring them some comfort and make them temporarily forget the pain the war had caused.

Volunteer Zheng Ci Lu (鄭慈璐) helped operate the sound system at the events. She'd play songs according to the atmosphere on-site. Sometimes the attendees asked us to play their national anthem, during which they'd arise en masse, put their right hands on their hearts, and sing along out loud in tears. I burst into tears very easily, and cried at almost every distribution during the first week.

I also mustered my courage and used my rusty English to introduce Tzu Chi's signature eco-blankets to the participants during the distributions. The blankets, which attendees were receiving, are made from recycled plastic bottles. We wanted them to know that Tzu Chi is working hard to help leave a beautiful Earth to our posterity. Since most present were mothers, what I shared resonated with them. I also shared how Dharma Master Cheng Yen had founded Tzu Chi by inspiring 30 housewives to each save a little of their grocery money every day in a bamboo coin bank to help the needy. I said that when we dropped money into our Tzu Chi coin banks every day, we made a good wish. "Our collective wish now is for the war [in Ukraine] to end soon so that you can return to your homeland and reunite with your families." Many children came forward to the stage to drop their

coins in our banks before I even finished what I was saying.

"This is the sound of love," I said, referring to the sound of a coin dropping into a bank. I told them that every penny they donated would be used to help the needy. This is because Tzu Chi volunteers pay for their own transportation and accommodations when they go out or travel to a different country for Tzu Chi work.

"We have different skin colors and ethnicities, come from different countries, even believe in different religions, but the same red blood flows in us, and we all live under the same sky and on the same Earth. We are family," I said. When the Ukrainian version of the Tzu Chi song "One Family" played, our volunteers led everyone in signing the lyrics. Many Ukrainians stood up, sang along, and signed the lyrics with us.

May our world be free of hatred

There is so much to talk about what happened in the distributions, I could never cover it all. But what moved me the most was how quickly the Ukrainian mothers had removed their children from the war zone. This was evident in the inno-

Tzu Chi volunteers visit refugees who are planning to wait overnight at a distribution venue so as not to miss Tzu Chi's aid.



cent smiles on the faces of the children who came to our distributions. I sincerely pray that the war will not plant any seeds of hatred in the children's minds, and that all they will remember is the love people have shown them.

When we said "Thank you" to the refugees who came to our distributions, they always responded: "It's us who should thank you!" A woman told me she was greatly impressed by Tzu Chi, that our volunteers have a heart of Great Love (unselfish love that embraces all humanity), and that she hoped Tzu Chi will set up a branch in Ukraine in the future. I told her she must have a lot of love in her heart too, and I encouraged her to seize every opportunity to put her love into action.

Right after that first day of seven distributions, Caritas offered a larger venue for us to use. The new site could accommodate 150 people, so we only needed to hold two distributions a day. May 21 was the only day within those two weeks in which we didn't hold a distribution. Other Tzu Chi volunteers broke into two groups on that day to visit two shelters for Ukrainian refugees with disabilities. I, on the other hand, accompanied reporters from Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV to visit some of our Ukrainian helpers. Two women approached us on our way and began to sign the lyrics of "One

Ukrainian refugees pray at a Tzu Chi distribution for the war in their country to end soon.

Family." Tears started to flow down their cheeks as they signed. They ended by saying, "Thank you," to us in English.

There was an older man, who appeared to be in his 70s, who recognized me as a Tzu Chi volunteer too and walked towards us with a smile on his face. He was able to speak German, and told me Tzu Chi had given him tremendous, tremendous, tremendous help. These generous expressions of gratitude stirred up endless ripples of joy in my heart. I believe the gratitude, respect, and love we showed them in our distributions struck a deep chord in them. That's why they gave us such heartwarming feedback.

I'm so thankful I had this opportunity to work with our European volunteers, Ukrainian helpers, Taiwanese students, and people from Caritas to pull off the distributions. Though the work was physically tiring, our entire team worked great together, and had a lot of laughter together. After this experience, I was even more convinced that we must seize every chance to give and leave meaningful marks on our path in life. ❀

Helping Ukrainian Refugees by Making Zongzis

1. Many Tzu Chi volunteers wanted to help, even though they couldn't go to the front lines to participate directly in the aid missions for Ukrainian refugees. Volunteers in Taiwan and abroad decided to make *zongzis* for charity sales to help Ukrainian refugees in connection with this year's Dragon Boat Festival. (Zongzis are wrapped rice dumplings, typically eaten during the festival.) This picture shows volunteers making the food at the Taoyuan Jing Si Hall in northern Taiwan. They prepared 53,000 zongzis.

XIE JIA-CHENG

2. Because of the severe COVID-19 situation in Taiwan, volunteers in Daya, Taichung, central Taiwan, were worried they couldn't get enough people to gather at the local Tzu Chi facility to create in time the 4,000 zongzis people had ordered. Thankfully, some volunteers decided to work at home to help meet the need. In the end, the 4,000 zongzis were completed on time, a labor of love for the Ukrainian refugees.

CHEN LI-XUE

3. While the war in Ukraine was raging in May, COVID-19 was raging in Taiwan too. Volunteers decided to make additional zongzis to give to frontline workers in Taiwan to thank them for their hard work during the pandemic. Volunteers in Wuri, Taichung, are pictured here delivering some zongzis and apples to a local police station.

LIN HUI-YUE





The Best Time to Say “I Love You”

Narrated by Huang Ming-yue

Compiled by Wei Yu-xian

Edited and translated by Rose Ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

When is the best time to say “I love you” to your family? Don’t wait until your wedding anniversary or until you’ve fallen ill and time is no longer on your side. Now is the best time.

I serve as a volunteer at Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, central Taiwan. Medical workers in the hospital’s emergency room (ER) once shared with me a memorable emergency situation.

One day, a man about 40 years old ran into the

ER, his hand holding his left chest. “I can’t breathe,” he said.

The ER personnel on duty immediately sensed he might be having heart trouble. An exam revealed that he was suffering from a myocardial infarction, commonly known as a heart attack. Wasting no

time, everyone jumped into action to treat him. The patient, still conscious, asked a nurse, “Can I do one thing?” “Just a second,” the nurse answered while hooking him up to an IV drip.

When everything was set up and they were pushing him to the cardiac catheterization room,

the patient asked again, “Can I make a phone call?” He told the nurse he wanted to call his wife. The nurse dialed the phone for him, but the call didn’t get through. She asked if she could take the message for him. The patient said, “I want to say, ‘I love you,’ to my wife.”

Hearing what the man wanted to say, the nurse decided to record a video with a cell phone of what he wanted to say to his wife. The nurse recorded the video as he was pushed to the cardiac catheterization room, then sent the recording to his wife.

Fortunately, the patient’s life was saved as a result of the cardiac catheterization. He was discharged from the hospital soon after. The biggest joy of a medical worker comes from being able to help save lives. Everyone was happy for the man.

I couldn’t help but wonder when I heard of this little episode: “What was the man thinking when he made that request to call his wife?” Perhaps he was thinking he might never get another chance to see his loved one, and felt the need to tell her he loved her while he still could.

Even before this incident, I had often said to my fellow Tzu Chi volunteers that while we often work to give love and care to others, we mustn’t neglect to tell our own family members, “I love you.” I encouraged them to bravely say those three words to their loved ones.

A few days ago, I ran into volunteer Liu Jie-zhu (劉揭珠). She’s about 80. She shared with me that one day when she returned home, she said to her son, “I love you, son!” Her son was stunned at first, but quickly recovered and, obviously touched, said, “Mom, I love you, too.” Then he embraced her.

His two sons saw him embracing their grandmother, and they piped up, “I want a hug, too.” The four of them ended up hugging together.

Jie-zhu told me that she has seen and learned a lot by serving as a volunteer. Master Cheng Yen’s teachings have taught her a lot too. She applies her teachings in her daily life and works on improving herself. She said now she often says to her son: “I’m truly grateful to you. You make me so happy. I love you so much.” Her son always responds very warmly, and often asks her not to get too tired volunteering, and to be sure to allow him to spend time with her more often.

When is the best time to say “I love you” to your loved ones? Don’t wait until it is too late; now is the best time. Don’t let another moment slip by unexpressed—tell your family and those you cherish in your life, “I love you!”



A homeless person, carrying all his belongings, roams the streets. There are nearly 3,000 listed homeless people in Taiwan, but the actual number is higher.

Homeless But Not Forgotten

Free Healthcare for Street People in Central Taiwan

By Zhang Li-yun

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Street people in Taiwan scrape by with the help of social welfare organizations, but when they become ill, even minor health problems can develop into serious issues. Because their poverty makes them reluctant to seek medical attention, Tzu Chi has stepped in to help.

It was a Saturday afternoon. Though a fine drizzle was falling, the Zenan Homeless Social Welfare Foundation's Taichung station, nestled in a small alley off Minquan Road in Taichung, central Taiwan, was abuzz with people and activity. A free clinic event offering treatment in internal medicine, surgery, and dentistry had begun in earnest. In addition to medical treatment at no cost, free haircuts were offered at the entrance of the station.

The Zenan Foundation is known for its homeless care, providing food, clothing, temporary shelter, job placement, and other services for this group of vulnerable people. The free clinic mentioned above is a monthly event, a joint effort with Tzu Chi. It has been going on for years.

Several volunteers in purple vests were busy at the event. They had been homeless themselves at one time. Wu (not his real name) was one of the volunteers. He had been criminally charged over ten years before, but was eligible for community service in exchange for jail time after receiving his sentence. The Zenan Foundation's Taichung station was where he performed his community service. He knew that landing a job at his age and without marketable skills would be difficult after his mandatory service had been completed, so he decided to stay on at the foundation. "I did wrong before," he said. "My volunteer work with the foundation has been a kind of redemption for me." He continued, shifting his focus, "Thanks to Dr. Ji for making these free clinics possible. They are a real blessing to the homeless."

As if summoned by Wu's words, Dr. Ji Bang-jie (紀邦杰) arrived at the event. He had come straight from work at his own medical clinic. Grabbing a microphone, he greeted the street people on-site. "It has been cold lately. Do you have comforters with you? Sleeping bags? Where have you been sleeping at night?" he asked those present.

The monthly free clinic was launched in August 2010 after social workers from the Taichung City Association for the Homeless (TCAH) asked Dr. Ji, a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA), to provide regular free medical events for the homeless. The doctor's weekend schedules at the time were already packed with Tzu Chi free clinic events and other volunteer work for the foundation. The only time he had available was the third Saturday afternoon of every month, so he earmarked that time slot for the homeless. He also called upon other TIMA doctors and nurses to join him in

serving the street people. Because the space TCAH could offer for the monthly event was too small, the Zenan Foundation's venue on Minquan Road was chosen as the site for this regular activity.

Each free clinic event serves 40 to 50 people. Patients can see the doctors and receive medicine, all at no cost. The homeless often experience improvements in their health as long as they are willing to seek help at the clinic. Dr. Xiao Rui-he (蕭瑞和) has participated in the event many times. He said that though some street people continue to drink alcohol against their advice, at least they come to the clinic regularly, which shows that they still care about their health. "As doctors, we are happy to be able to help them," he remarked.

The free clinic event each month is a lively, heart-warming affair, with singing, sounds of different musical instruments, and enthusiastic greetings filling the air. Tzu Chi volunteers who live near the venue prepare beverages for attendees, lead group activities, and help in whatever other ways they can. In addition to the homeless, the clinic draws underprivileged people living nearby as well. The TIMA doctors serve those people too, even though they may not actually be homeless.

A woman in her 80s complained about weakness in her legs as well as neck, shoulder, and back pains. Dr. Zeng Jing-xin (曾景新) taught her a few simple exercises to relieve her pain and strengthen her leg muscles. One exercise was raising her legs. Considering her age, the doctor was sure to remind her to hold on to a table or wall to steady herself when she lifted her legs. "Do this exercise every day so that your knees won't be weak." The gloomy look on her face when she arrived had been replaced with gratitude by the time she was done. She repeatedly thanked the health workers and support volunteers on-site: "Thank you, thank you! You people from Tzu Chi are really nice!"

Dr. Zeng stressed the importance of providing patients with emotional care in addition to medical treatment. Such love and care warms patients' hearts, making them feel as if they are meeting family when they come to the clinic. It doesn't matter that the medical professionals and support volunteers that staff the event may be different each time. All that matters is that the same love and care is there.

Dentistry is a must-have service at the event. Good oral hygiene is hard to maintain for street people because they don't have fixed residences. When dental problems arise, they usually wait



TIMA doctors Ji Bang-jie (left) and Liu Zeng-an (劉增安, middle) see a street person at a monthly free clinic held at the Zenan Foundation's Taichung station in Taichung City, central Taiwan.

until they can't stand the pain to seek treatment. They lose a lot of teeth this way. Dentist Lin Cong-qi (林宗祺) said, "When we first started our service at the free clinic, almost all the street people had serious plaque buildup. The teeth of some of them had become loose." Dentists at the clinic cleaned their teeth, gave them treatment, and shared oral health tips with them. "We told them bad oral health will affect their health in general, and to at least rinse their mouths out or brush their teeth after meals," said Dr. Lin. By and by, the oral health of the homeless people who regularly came to the clinic improved, much to the happiness of the dentists who serve them.

Everyone has their story

There are nearly 3,000 listed homeless people in Taiwan. According to statistics from the Taichung City government's Social Affairs Bureau, about 300 of them are registered with the Taichung City government. About 180 of these are from outside Taichung. Huang Tian-shi (黃天時) is a social worker who has served at TCAH for more than a decade. He said that after the 9/21 earthquake devastated central Taiwan in 1999, Taichung City offered many work relief opportunities, which enticed people from nearby cities and counties to flood into Taichung to find jobs. Some became homeless after failing to find steady employment. Two more peaks in the number of street people in Taichung occurred after the SARS epidemic of 2003 and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Taichung Park, the Taichung Station underpass, and Chungshing Hall have all become haunts for homeless people in the city.

There is a sad story behind every curled-up figure out in the streets in the depth of the night.

"Most of them have ended up on the streets due to economic problems," Huang Tian-shi explained. "A small minority have left home because of issues with their families. There are also some who are incapacitated by injuries and can no longer work." Huang, a veteran social worker for the homeless, said that every street person has their own reason for ending up on the streets; it is impossible to enumerate all of them. Because they don't have homes and often suffer from inadequate sleep, many of them have health issues. Some worry about their work or lack a sense of security, leading to signs of mild depression. Quite a few are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and illness as they struggle to get by.

"Some people in our society think negatively of the homeless," Huang continued. "They ask, 'How could an able-bodied person not be able to find a job?' Our association provides food and shelter for the homeless, but we also encourage them to try to get back on their feet as soon as possible. If they get used to their homeless life, it is harder for them to return to society."

According to the regulations of the Social Affairs Bureau, homeless shelters are allowed to put street people up for a maximum of three months, during which time social workers encourage them to go look for work. If a street person succeeds in landing a job and the hours they keep correspond to regulations, their residence at a shelter can be extended. Once they start earning a steady income, they can rent a place of their own. It takes resolve, as well as some help, to finally say goodbye to a homeless life.

Bao, 52, had a traffic accident in 2020, during which he sustained a severe injury to his head. He looked normal after surgery, but the aftereffects of the accident—dizzy spells—rendered him incapable of returning to his former position as a security firm employee. Depression followed. His parents had long since passed away and he had lost touch with his siblings. After he used up his savings and could no longer afford a rental, he lived on the streets for a while before seeking help at TCAH. The association put him up and put him to work helping them manage their homeless shelter, giving out meals, and taking care of other miscellaneous chores. With a focus back in his life, he stopped dwelling on negative thoughts and

Tzu Chi volunteers provide free haircuts concurrent with a free clinic for street people at the Zenan Foundation's Taichung station.



became more cheerful. "I hope to go back to gainful employment in the future so that I can lead a normal life again," he said.

The greatest fear—illness

Because the homeless don't have fixed addresses, most employers won't hire them for long-term work. Most of the jobs they can get are temporary, unskilled manual work, such as holding advertising signs. They can make more than a thousand New Taiwan dollars (US\$34) a day doing odd jobs like that.

According to TCAH, over half of the street people in Taichung have some form of work. Social welfare organizations in the city help them get paying jobs by submitting bids for work such as sweeping the streets or working on a farm and then sub-contracting the work out to them. Social workers with such organizations encourage street people to seize every opportunity to work so that they can reintegrate to society sooner and live

Tooth loss is common among street people. Besides providing treatment for the homeless at the monthly free clinic, TIMA dentists share oral health tips with them.

with more dignity.

Taichung has six social welfare organizations dedicated to the care of street people and other disadvantaged groups. Examples include TCAH, which provides shelter for males, the Good Samaritan Women Center, which mainly focuses on serving females, and the Zenan Foundation, which has branches all over Taiwan. All three organizations offer food, access to washing facilities, short-term shelter, and job-placement services.

Street people usually have no problems staying fed with the help of such organizations, but becoming ill presents a bigger challenge. In the past, a person's national health insurance card

(NHI card) would be cancelled due to failure to meet premium payments. When that happened, street people often avoided going to the doctor, thus increasing the likelihood of allowing a minor ailment to develop into a major one. Back then, Tzu Chi volunteer Wu Ping-chang (吳平常), who started helping street people more than 20 years ago, would take homeless people who couldn't afford a visit to the doctor to Dr. Ji Bang-jie for help. That's why TCAH approached Dr. Ji when they thought of providing regular free clinics for the homeless. Since then, Dr. Ji and other TIMA members have seen homeless patients at the Zenan Foundation's Taichung station every month for 12 years, helping many street people.

In June 2016, in order to better protect the public's healthcare rights, Taiwan's government stopped canceling the NHI cards of those people unable to make their premium payments. People having difficulty paying their premiums can apply for help from a government relief fund or choose to be referred to public service organizations, corporations, or individuals for assistance. They can also opt to pay off their premiums by installment.

The new measure provided the disadvantaged a way out of their healthcare predicament. Now they can see a doctor as long as they are NHI card holders. That said, when they seek medical attention at a clinic or hospital, they still need to pay registration fees and a co-payment. (The co-payment is an amount that individuals seeking medical treatment must pay themselves, intended to prevent inappropriate use of medical resources.) Though these required payments are not much money for most people, it's beyond the means of some street people. Thus, Tzu Chi free clinics for the homeless still play a role in keeping them healthy. By early 2022, TIMA members had served more than 5,000 patient visits at the Zenan Foundation's Taichung station. The free healthcare services are especially a benefit for those with chronic conditions. Regular follow-ups and long-term medication often lead to significant improvements in their conditions.

Dr. Ji's clinic

The free clinic is a monthly affair. When street people have medical needs on regular days, Dr. Ji's clinic opens its arms to them. "All lives are equal. By tending to their medical needs, we give them some warmth and hope, which might help them find the strength to stand back up," said the doctor. His loving care has touched and warmed



many street people. Many have continued to go to him for healthcare even after they've found a job and no longer live on the streets.

Dr. Ji's clinic offers treatment in surgery, urology, family medicine, and other fields, but when

street people are diagnosed with major illnesses, they still need to be referred to a hospital for treatment. "When Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital opened," said Dr. Ji, "it became my first choice when referring street people. It's easier for us to continue to

Dr. Ji Bang-jie's clinic has for many years offered free medical care to the homeless. Street people who need medical attention outside the days of the monthly free clinic at the Zenan Foundation's Taichung station can seek help there.



keep an eye on them there. Should they need help paying their medical bills, social workers at the hospital will assess their needs and then refer them to the Tzu Chi Foundation or connect them with other social resources.”

Lian is a street person afflicted with hereditary diabetes. Repeated business failures landed him deep in debt. Even his family turned their backs on him. Because of his unstable health condition, people with the Zenan Foundation suggested he seek help at Ji’s clinic. “Dr. Ji is a very warm-hearted person,” said Lian. “He shows a lot of care for us homeless people, whether it’s about our health or living conditions. He never charges us when we go to his clinic for treatment, and he even gives us monetary gifts or goods on major holidays. He’s the best doctor I’ve ever seen.”

Ji continued to see street people at his clinic during spikes in COVID-19 cases in Taiwan. He feels that as long as due precautions are taken,

Not all street people are homeless. A variety of reasons have led them to live on the streets. Many work and make do with their small incomes.

one shouldn’t worry too much about the infection. “I am a doctor,” he said. “How could I evade my responsibilities when I am needed the most? Some homeless people suffer from skin conditions and have lesions that need cleaning and dressing every day. If I stop seeing them, what would they do?”

Homeless people are an issue the world over. Some just need a hand to help them through a rough patch in life. In Taiwan, individuals and organizations have worked together to help this group of marginalized people. Everyone can get down on their luck—a strong safety net is how we can ensure that as few people as possible are left in the lurch when they are hapless. ❀

May There Be No More War

Tzu Chi Canada’s Support for Refugees

By Yungli Tseng

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

With a strong humanitarian tradition, Canada accepts 30,000 international refugees annually. Tzu Chi Canada has joined the effort to care for this group of people.

An 18-year-old boy opened the door and welcomed Lisa Liou (劉憶蓉) and two other Tzu Chi volunteers into his home. He told the visitors that he and his 13-year-old sister had just arrived in Canada. He said their father had passed away and their mother was still in Iraq. He had no idea when she would be able to join them in Canada. The boy also said that his sister missed their mom dearly and often cried thinking of her. Looking at the shy girl in front of her, Lisa thought of her own daughter. She had just left to study in Britain and often cried over the phone, saying, “I miss you, mom!”

Lisa said to the young girl, “Can I give you a hug in place of your mother?” Embracing the girl, she felt her small body quivering with sobs.

Canada, a country with a strong humanitarian tradition, has accepted 30,000 refugees annually over the years, and in 2021 it increased that number to 45,000. Of all the cities in the Greater Vancouver area, where the Tzu Chi Canada branch is located, Burnaby is where most newcomers are settled by the Canadian government. Byrne Creek Community School in Burnaby, for example, has among its enrollment more than a hundred students from refugee families. Tzu Chi has sponsored the school’s breakfast program for many years. In early 2015, the school’s settlement worker asked Lisa Liou, who volunteered at the school every Thursday to prepare breakfast for students, if Tzu Chi could provide help to five Iranian and Iraqi refugees who had just resettled in Canada. This opened a new chapter of refugee care for Tzu Chi volunteers in Burnaby.

Byrne Creek Community School organizes a hamper drive at the end of every calendar year, col-

lecting daily necessities, food, and seasonal gifts for students from refugee or low-income families. Tzu Chi Burnaby became the school’s partner for this drive in 2016. In early December each year, volunteers purchase rice, flour, beans, and other food items for the school, enough to pack about 80 hampers. Then volunteers help deliver to 20 to 40 beneficiary families, based on a list provided by the school.

In 2017, Mambo Masinda, a settlement worker who had worked in the Burnaby School District for more than ten years, expressed hope that Tzu Chi could provide support for three African families fresh out of refugee camps. Lisa Liou and other volunteers visited the families to determine how Tzu Chi could help. They saw for themselves what it was like to “have nothing but the bare walls in one’s house,” a Chinese idiom used to describe people who are utterly destitute. The three families each had seven to ten members, packed into cramped quarters. Their beds were nothing but blankets on the floor. Luggage cases standing against walls served as wardrobes. In one of the families, the only chair they had was where the children in the family did their homework. One child told Lisa, “I wish I had a real desk to do my homework!”

Since then, in addition to their sponsorship of the annual hamper drive at Byrne Creek Community School, the volunteers in Burnaby have been working with Masinda to offer supermarket gift cards, winter clothes, and furniture at the end of every year for newly settled refugee families.

What they want most—a job

The Canadian government provides support for new refugee families to help them get started. Such support includes a one-time household start-up

allowance and monthly income support payments for eligible households who cannot pay for their own basic needs. The monthly income support can last up to one year after a refugee arrives in Canada. Whether or not they qualify for government aid, however, most newcomers are eager to find a job as soon as possible. It's expensive to live in Canada.

When the coronavirus pandemic hit the world hard in 2020, volunteers prepared additional gifts and the most needed items—face masks—for newly settled refugee families. The pandemic couldn't have arrived at a worse time for these new immigrants. It hit just as they were adapting to their new lives. Some lost their jobs as a result. Fortunately, most of the breadwinners of the 30 families that volunteers visited were able to keep their jobs. Even though the work they did was mostly unskilled labor, they were content.

One of the refugees that volunteers visited was a man from Afghanistan. He had worked as a physician in his home country. Though he had been in Canada for three years, he didn't have the required license to practice medicine here. He ended up having to work as a security guard. His wife and five children had reunited with him in Canada just a few months before the volunteers' visit. The wife was very warm and cheerful to the volunteers, and

she repeatedly invited them to have tea in their home. But as soon as the subject of their new environment came up, she began to choke up. Due to the pandemic, the volunteers could only give her an air hug to comfort her.

In 2021, because of price spikes, volunteers decided to increase the value of the supermarket gift card for each refugee from 25 Canadian dollars (US\$20) to 50. They also asked Masinda to record each adult's clothes size and the age of every child on the list of refugee families he was providing to Tzu Chi. Volunteers would thus be able to collect the winter clothes for distribution based on the refugees' actual needs. The gifts Tzu Chi gave out this year were especially bountiful, including blankets and scarves made from recycled PET bottles, courtesy of the Tzu Chi Canada branch. A group of

Tzu Chi volunteer Alice Chang (張曉菁) and her family visit a woman who has just arrived in Burnaby, Canada, from Eritrea, eastern Africa, to bring her items to help keep her warm. It was late autumn and the weather was wet and cold, but the refugee had only flimsy clothes to wear. Burnaby has received more refugees than any other city in the Greater Vancouver area.

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younger volunteers also provided throw pillows they had made.

The 14 families that received gifts from Tzu Chi in 2021 were, like the year before, mostly from the Middle East and Africa. A man who had worked as a reporter in Afghanistan had just arrived in Canada three months earlier with his family of eight. He was still jobless. Despite the cold winter weather, he was wearing short sleeves when volunteers visited him.

Another family consisted of a mother and son from Afghanistan. They had been in Canada for less than three months. The mother said her family was large and that in order for all of them to leave Afghanistan as soon as possible, they had no choice but to go to different countries. She and her son had ended up in Canada, but others had gone to Europe. She had a daughter who was still in Afghanistan, for whom she was very worried.

The material goods Tzu Chi can provide are limited when compared with the needs of these refugee families. But volunteers believe that the warm feelings the gifts convey is what really matters. Just like Masinda said, when refugees first arrive in the country, it's natural for them to feel isolated. At such times, nothing beats helping them feel love and care from the community in which they've settled. "Helping them feel that their future in the country is promising brings them a sense of hope," said Masinda. Masinda himself had arrived in Canada as a refugee years ago from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After obtaining

Volunteers Yungli Tseng (曾永莉, from left), Margaret Huang (簡素珍), and Lisa Liou brought gift cards and seasonal gifts in 2018 to a single mother and her two children from war-torn Eritrea. The little boy in the family was attracted to a stuffed toy the volunteers had brought.

STEVE WANG

a PhD degree in Canada, he began working as a settlement worker, actively helping people in the same situation he had once experienced.

Refugees who have fled war or turmoil in their countries are unlikely to bring much with them when they arrive in a new country—how much stuff could a few luggage cases contain? Volunteers who have cared for this group of people over the years have seen again and again what it is like to "have nothing but the bare walls in one's house." While conflicts in the Middle East and Africa continue, a new war has broken out in Ukraine, giving rise to a fresh wave of refugees. Is world peace ever possible?

However sturdy a building is, it is impossible for it to withstand the ravages of artillery. Compared with the physical structures destroyed in warfare, a heavier toll comes in the form of lost human lives and the emotional impact on those affected by conflict. Volunteers sincerely pray for an end to suffering from war. They also hope that their efforts to welcome refugees into their new country will help set them on a path of hope and help them better transition to their new lives. ❀

A New Home for Emma

Information provided by Ya-Chi Yuan

Compiled by Ji Shu-zhen

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Tzu Chi volunteers in Eswatini

A Tzu Chi volunteer's house had collapsed amidst heavy rains, tragically resulting in the death of her husband. Her fellow volunteers decided to quickly build a new one for her family, so that her husband's coffin could return to a complete home.

Emma Dlamini, 65, lives in a rural area in Manzini, central Eswatini, the African country formerly known as Swaziland. She is a Tzu Chi volunteer and helps run a hot meal station in her community, providing food for orphans. Eswatini currently has 84 Tzu Chi hot meal stations like hers. They were established after Tzu Chi volunteers from Durban, South Africa, started visiting the nation in 2012, encouraging local people to take up charity work and care for their countrymen in need. These stations now serve more than 3,500 orphans and destitute families across the country. Emma has been in charge of her hot meal station for years. She provides hot food every Saturday or Sunday, rain or shine.

The rainy season in Eswatini runs every year from October to March. People there are used to

heavy rains that last several months in a row, but this year's rainy season was uncommonly long and characterized by heavier precipitation than usual. On January 13, 2022, driving rain again began to fall in Manzini. That night, Emma's entire family was gathered in their living room watching TV, when Emma's husband, Simon, said, "I'm tired. I'm going to go to bed." He then retired to his room.

Some time later, a deafening crash shook the house and shocked everyone in the living room out of their skin. They dashed to Simon's room to check on him and discovered to their horror that parts of the walls there were completely gone. Even worse: there was no sign of Simon.

Days of heavier-than-normal rains had caused their roof to cave in and parts of their walls to collapse. Simon and his bed had been buried in the collapse. Everyone quickly set to work removing the rubble. After a lot of effort, they finally extracted him and rushed him to the hospital.

Simon was in awful shape, his vital signs weak. Emma was not injured, but was so badly shaken by the accident that she was also admitted to the hospital for observation. Her family was rattled to the core. It was like a waking nightmare.

Caring for kids in the community

Emma's fellow Tzu Chi volunteers went to the hospital on January 15 to check on her and her

Simon Dlamini (left) stands next to his wife, Emma. Though of limited means, Simon showed strong support for Emma's volunteer work serving hot meals to orphans in their community.



husband. Simon was seriously injured, his bones fractured. Wearing an oxygen mask and attached to an IV drip, he looked very weak.

Despite his dire condition, Simon was deeply moved by the volunteers' visit. Mustering all his strength, he said to them, "I've always been very supportive of my wife's volunteer work with Tzu Chi. I told her to devote herself entirely to Tzu Chi and not to spend time on other organizations. I've 'donated' her to Tzu Chi."

As frail as he was, he only talked about Tzu Chi, not his injuries or himself. This really touched a chord in the volunteers. Everyone chipped in for an emergency cash gift for the couple to convey their best wishes to them. They scraped together 600 Swazi lilangeni (US\$38) and presented it to Emma.

The next day, volunteers arrived at Emma's home to find out how badly the house was damaged. They found the family busy moving and clearing away stuff. Only then did they learn that Emma lived with her son, daughter, and six grandchildren, one of whom was mentally disabled. Emma had never revealed to her fellow volunteers that she had a developmentally delayed grandson.

The volunteers felt nothing but respect and admiration for Emma when they saw all she had to care for at home. Even though she had grandchildren to take care of—including one that required special care—she still took charge of the hot meal station to provide food for underserved kids in her community.

Looking at the damaged house, the volunteers asked Emma's family if there was anything they could do to help. That's when they got the news

After Simon passed away in January this year, Emma resumed her meal service while still in her mourning period.

that none had expected: Simon had passed away that morning in the hospital.

When they had first stepped into the house that day, the volunteers had seen the family hard at work, tidying things up and clearing away stuff. But with the bad news, they realized the family was getting the house ready for the upcoming funeral. Tears welled up in everyone's eyes.

A complete home

"We must let Simon's coffin return to a home with walls and a roof," the volunteers decided. His funeral was scheduled to take place about a week later, so they didn't have much time to get the work done.

According to traditions in Eswatini, a person's body is moved to and kept in a mortuary when they first pass away. It is not sent home until the day before the funeral, which is usually set on the first Saturday after one's death. A burial site near home is typically selected for the final resting place.

Eswatini has a poor economy. Unemployment is high and people are generally destitute. The native Tzu Chi volunteers there are no exception. Even so, everyone contributed generously to help with the construction project. The amount they gave varied, from a hundred lilangeni (US\$6) to 500 (US\$32), but each gave what they could. In the end, however, the money raised was still a long way from paying for the construction. To build a new home for Emma, they would need about 850 cinder blocks, 60 sacks of cement, two truckloads of sand and gravel, in addition to windows and doors. What should they do?

Though it had been two years since volunteers from Durban, South Africa, had visited Eswatini due to the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers in the two countries had stayed in touch via the Internet. When Ya-Chi Yuan (袁亚棋), a volunteer in Durban, learned about the construction project, she proposed to let Tzu Chi make up the shortfall.

The volunteers in Eswatini declined the offer. "Don't you worry about us," they said with determination. "We'll figure a way out. Tzu Chi has been in Eswatini for ten years. We'll show you we can stand on our own. We'll work through this together."

True to their word, they set to work. Without wasting any time, they contacted Eswatini's

Disaster Management Department and Mr. Kareem Ashraff, the Honorary Consul General of Indonesia, who had been very supportive of Tzu Chi. Mr. Ashraff and the government officials the volunteers talked to were touched when they learned about Emma's story. In the end, the government decided to donate cinder blocks, cement, and other essential building materials to help. The construction materials were delivered to Emma's home on January 17.

Construction started the next day on a vacant lot next to Emma's home, with volunteers pitching in for the work. They started by digging the foundation for the new house.

Back to work soon

"I have no money nor strength to help with the building of the house," said volunteer Rodah Mthembu, 74, "but I still want to help. May I go over to Emma's place? May I?"

"Come over quickly," replied the volunteer who received Rodah's phone call. "We really need you here to keep Sister Emma company."

While others were busy with the construction, Rodah stayed indoors with Emma, chatting with her, keeping her from feeling lonely or sad, and making her feel warm at heart.

During break time at noon, all the volunteers gathered around Emma, talking and laughing

together. The happy atmosphere warmed Emma and her family's hearts.

In addition to the volunteers who worked in shifts during the project, Emma's son and three male volunteers who were skilled in construction worked every day, from morning to night, to speed the completion of the house. The project went smoothly, and in five short days, a sturdy house was ready to welcome the family.

Simon's coffin arrived at the new home on January 22. The following day, volunteers draped a blanket they had purchased together over the coffin. With the help of a few male volunteers, Simon was buried next to his home.

According to Swazi customs, women are required to stay housebound for a month after their spouses pass away. They also have to observe a year of mourning, during which time they can't travel far from home. But because Simon had said he had "donated" Emma to Tzu Chi, their children and other family members agreed that Emma could shorten her mourning period to half a year so that she could participate in Tzu Chi work. They only asked that Emma cover her head and face with a black cloth when she went out.

To everyone's surprise, Emma's hot meal station reopened on January 29, just 13 days after her husband had passed away. With her daughter's help, she continued providing hot food for children in the community.

Everyone was impressed. Emma had had a difficult time, what with the collapse of her old home and the sudden passing of her husband, and yet she was able to pull herself together in just two weeks and get her life back on track so soon.

After the funeral, volunteers painted the outer walls of Emma's new home. Then, on February 4, they held a simple ceremony to inaugurate the house. They arrived at her home early that day to give it a good cleanup before hanging new curtains and cutting a ribbon. Tying the keys to the house with a ribbon to the front door, they officially turned the house over to Emma. It was a simple ceremony, but full of love.

Without a doubt, love from her fellow volunteers and support from her late husband will help keep Emma going as she continues her volunteer work for Tzu Chi. ♣

The house volunteers built for Emma was made of cinder blocks and concrete, making it a lot stronger than a local mudbrick house.



No More Flooded Homes

A Housing Project for an Indonesian Village

By Metta Wulandari and Khusnul Khotimah

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Arimami Suryo Asmoro

After Tzu Chi built new homes for them, the villagers could finally leave behind the days when their houses flooded with each high tide.

Kamal Muara is a coastal village in North Jakarta, Indonesia. Most of the houses there sit lower than the surrounding roads, making them susceptible to flooding whenever the tide rises. The situation was brought to the attention of Tzu Chi in 2018 for help. Volunteers visited the village and decided to build new homes for some of the families in the village. The first batch of ten houses were handed over to their new owners in November 2019.

Unfortunately, the housing project was forced to halt soon thereafter due to the coronavirus pandemic. It wasn't until May 2021 that volunteers went to the village again to implement the second phase of the project, which was to build five more housing units. The handover ceremony for the five units took place on April 15, 2022, just in time for the residents to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Now they could observe the special occasion in their new homes.

Her first home with a bathroom

In addition to building the five houses, Tzu Chi prepared beds for the five beneficiary households. Volunteers collected other items among themselves for the families too, including gas stoves, rice cookers, electric fans, wardrobes, desks, chairs, and bedding. The residents had a complete range of new household items to use as soon as they moved into their new homes.

After the handover ceremony, volunteers split into five groups and helped the five families carry some of the household items home. Neneng, one of the villagers, hadn't been able to hide her

excitement when the ribbon was being cut earlier during the ceremony. She said to Teksan Luis, the volunteer standing next to her at the time, "I'm so happy! We're so blessed [to receive the houses]! Thank you so much!" The villagers were grateful to the Tzu Chi volunteers, who were with them throughout the entire process, from the initial inspection to the finished homes. Teksan Luis said to Neneng: "Don't cry any more, or else I'm going to burst into tears too. Congratulations again on your new house!"

Rasti is Neneng's granddaughter. She had cried too when she had first stepped into their new home. The girl was in her first year of junior high school; her dream was to one day become a teacher. She promised to keep their new home clean and tidy. "I always had to hurry when I did my school assignments at home in the past," said Rasti. "I rushed because I was worried that if the rain came, it would leak through the roof into the house and make my books wet. I'm thrilled to have this new home."

Kartini and Muhammad are a married couple who received a new home too. Kartini told Tzu Chi volunteers that she visited the new home for a look a few days before it was completed. "I cried," she said. "I knelt down in front of the bathroom and said a prayer of thanks. I've never in my life lived in a place with a bathroom. Thank our good lord, Allah. This is just wonderful!"

Kartini said they used to live in a poor excuse for a home. The walls weren't sturdy nor did the roof protect them from the rain. There was no bathroom or kitchen. She worked as a cleaner in a school, and used the facilities there to wash her-



↑ A volunteer congratulates a villager on her new home.

↓ Muhammad (second from right) and his family stand in front of their new home, while his wife, Kartini (right), invites Tzu Chi volunteers to be their guests during Eid al-Fitr.



self. She did it secretly so that the principal or teachers wouldn't know. Now, with the new house built by Tzu Chi, she no longer has to secretly wash at school.

Kartini's new home is 580 square feet and has two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Eid al-Fitr was just around the corner and she looked forward to celebrating it in their new house. "Now that we have a kitchen," she exclaimed, "we can make *ketupat* there with our

new rice cooker. [Ketupat is a dish in which rice is wrapped in woven coconut leaves]. The new gas stove will also be a lot handier than our old diesel stove. You must come to our home as guests during Eid al-Fitr!"

No room to stand up

Volunteer Teksan Luis is the coordinator for the housing project. When he and other volunteers visited the village for the first time,



Komarudin's home had made a deep impression on him. Komarudin's house used to lie next to a dry, vacant piece of land, but the area had since become a marsh due to repeated flooding from the sea. To keep dry during flooding, Komarudin used sea shells to make the floor in his home higher. But because the roof had remained at the same height, Komarudin and his family had to bend down whenever they were in the house.

Teksan had cried when he saw the house; he had never seen anything like it. His own house might not have been good, but when compared with Komarudin's, he knew he had nothing to complain about. "They had lived like that for decades without a word of complaint," the coordinator said. "They never asked others to take pity on them and help them out."

The volunteers also learned during that trip about the construction of a mosque which, even after seven years, had still not been completed. After discussion, Tzu Chi decided to help finish the mosque before proceeding to rebuild the homes for needy families in the village.

Because the residents didn't know Tzu Chi, they suspected at first that the volunteers might have an ulterior motive behind their support for the village. It was only after repeated interactions between the two sides that the villagers realized they had thought too much. Teksan explained that they hadn't done anything special to win over the villagers. They just went about their work with a genuine sincerity to help. Sensing their sincerity,

A volunteer bends down to enter a house in Kamal Muara, a village in North Jakarta. Most homes there sit lower than the surrounding roads and are susceptible to flooding.

ANAND YAHYA

the villagers eventually began to trust the volunteers. "As long as we give with love, people are sure to understand in the end," he said. "Now even children in the village say hello to us on their own initiative when we visit. When there is a Tzu Chi event, villagers come to help too."

Three years have passed since volunteers first visited the village. They've seen how it's become cleaner since then. Teksan is more than happy to see the positive change. "I'm thankful to the villagers for responding positively to our reminders to keep their environment clean," he said. "This is for better hygiene and for the benefit of their health."

The volunteer remembered that one time when he was inspecting the progress of the project in the village, a resident carrying two black bags dripping with water approached him. "This is for you—some fish I caught," the villager said to him. Teksan was a vegetarian, but he didn't have the heart to turn down the villager's warm gesture. He took the fish, deciding to pass the gift on to others. "We explained later to the villagers that we were vegetarian, and asked them not to give us anything in the future. We told them as long as they took good care of their homes, we'd be very happy." ❀

A Father's Solid Love

Tzu Chi Malaysia's COVID Relief

By Koh Poo Leng

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Sam Pin Fook

I'd rather starve myself than let my eight children starve. And no matter how poorly I'm doing financially, I'll always support their education.

—Sivakumar A/L Raman

“Look, here are three bags of rice. I chose the cheapest to buy. Now I don't have to worry about my children going hungry,” Sivakumar A/L Raman said to the Tzu Chi volunteers who were visiting his family. The 44-year-old father smacked the bags of rice with a big smile. Tzu Chi's aid had allowed him to breathe easier.

The volunteers' visit to Sivakumar took place on March 1, 2022. When they arrived at his home in Klang, Selangor, they were greeted by his chil-

Sivakumar A/L Raman (right) poses with his wife (left) and children outside their shabby but warm home.



When Sivakumar's work of setting up canopies and tents could not provide him with a steady income, he actively looked for odd jobs to make extra money so that he could keep his family fed and clothed.

dren, dressed nicely for the occasion, standing outside to welcome them. Sivakumar and his wife lit some incense and devoutly worshiped at their home altar. Then the master of the house began eagerly sharing with the volunteers how he had bought three bags of rice as soon as he had received Tzu Chi's cash aid for February.

“I immediately phoned Mr. Lee when I received the 950 ringgits [US\$217] of aid,” said Sivakumar. (“Mr. Lee” is how Sivakumar refers to volunteer Lee Eng Foo [李勇甫].) “He told me part of the money was to help my three children start a new school term.” Sivakumar expressed his heartfelt thankfulness for Tzu Chi before continuing: “After withdrawing the money from the bank, I bought rice and other food, as well as uniforms and school supplies for my children. The remaining money I put away for unexpected expenses.”

The faces of Sivakumar's children were lit with delight as they looked at the new uniforms, book bags, and exercise books their father had bought, arrayed neatly on a long table. Seeing their smiles, the visiting volunteers asked them why they were so happy. Sivakumar's second daughter shyly replied, “Because I haven't worn a new uniform to school in a long time.”

Looking at the youngsters thumbing through their new exercise books, the volunteers were thrilled to see how Tzu Chi's aid had led them to look forward to school. They were also happy to have helped lighten Sivakumar's burden.

Financial woes

Sivakumar is from a large family with 11 children. He never received any formal education, having had to help support his family growing up. He did all sorts of odd jobs to help his family

make do: felling trees, tending cattle, and cleaning ditches, among other types of work. He started working for Lee Chooi Kiat Garden at age 24, erecting canopies and tents. For 20 years, he earned daily wages, leading a regular and peaceful life. Never in his wildest dream did he expect a pandemic to upset his predictable life.

Volunteers made their first visit to Sivakumar last December, after a school referred him to Tzu Chi for help. Sivakumar and his family lived in a house converted from a shipping container. The peeling paint on the structure told a story 20 years old; the wooden walls, bearing signs of wear and tear, strained to shelter the family. The volunteers saw two dining tables of different sizes when they stepped into the living room. On one stood the only luxury in the home: an old television set. In a corner of the living room was a metal stand supporting a wooden plank. An altar had been set up there. Sivakumar and his wife prayed sincerely at the altar every morning. A coin bank on the altar had been brought home eight years before by Sivakumar's second son. It was from a Tzu Chi scholarship award ceremony.

Sivakumar fished out his work log for December from a fanny pack he was wearing and showed it to the volunteers. He said, “I've worked less than ten days this December, earning less than 500 ringgits [US\$114]!” He had been making 2,000 ringgits (US\$457) a month before the COVID-19 pandemic, so it was easy to imagine his misery, especially having to support eight children. “My boss had his worst year in 2020,” he added. “I didn't receive any pay for several months. Fortunately, this place is a dormitory provided by my employer, so I don't have to worry about rent and utility bills.”

He continued: “I always encourage my kids to apply themselves in school. I tell them if they are better educated, they can at least get a job in a supermarket and have a steady income. I don’t want them to end up like me, working outside in all kinds of weather, braving the hot sun and rain.” He said he’d do everything he could to support their studies as long as they are willing to stay in school.

With a family of ten to support, Sivakumar bent over backward to make a living. If he had no tents or canopies to set up, he asked around for other work opportunities, earning a daily wage of 30 to 50 ringgits (US\$9-11) doing odd jobs. He never received any help from his siblings, but he never complained. He said that everyone had their challenges to tackle, especially during the pandemic. He looked upon what he was facing as a test from heaven. He vowed that he’d rather starve himself than let his wife or children starve.

“I eat when there is enough food to go around,” said the father. “When there isn’t, I don’t mind going hungry.” He added that when he was doing better financially, he bought roti canai (an Indian flatbread) for his children to eat as breakfast. When he was doing even better, he bought Chinese chow mien, fried vermicelli, and fried rice to serve as dinner for his kids. “That’s what they look forward to the most. Even though they get to experience that kind of happiness only once a month or two, it doesn’t matter—what matters is that I live up to my promise of treating them to ‘fancy meals,’” he said with a smile.

Though strapped for cash, Sivakumar was grateful that all his children were in good health. His eldest son was 18 and worked as a lorry attendant, receiving daily wages. He told his son, “I don’t ask for much from you. I just want you to make the right friends and keep good company. Your future is bright when you walk on the right path, and dim when you go astray.”

Doing odd jobs wherever he can

Earlier this year, Sivakumar had been working especially hard to find odd jobs. The motor scooter he had used to get around for over ten years was broken, and it would cost several hundred ringgits to repair. He was trying to find extra work to defray that cost.

It happened that Tzu Chi volunteer Koh Chuan Gea (高泉藝) needed help assembling some metal framework at that time. Though it wasn’t something Sivakumar was good at, he quickly learned the ropes and pitched in. “It’s good to learn new skills,” Sivakumar said. “The tents I set up are sometimes higher than these metal structures, so I shouldn’t have any problems with this assembling work.” He worked intently on-site with his temporary boss and other workers, happy that he’d have some extra money to bring home that day.

Sivakumar’s friends knew he didn’t have a steady income, so whenever there was any work opportunity, they’d tell him about it. “If I just sit at home, no one is going to give me money,” he said. “My kids are still young. What if they fall ill? If things at home break, we need money to fix them too.”



Volunteer Lee Eng Foo is a husband and father too, like Sivakumar. “The house Sivakumar and his family live in would be considered normal—if we were living in the 80s,” Lee said. “But it’s quite primitive by current standards.”

Lee was even more stunned when he saw the family’s simple dinner. Fried greens, curry sauce, and curry chicken were each contained in different metal bowls, from which Sivakumar’s wife dished out the foods onto plates for her eldest daughter to distribute to the other children sitting on the floor. There was no furniture for them to sit on to eat. They had been eating on the floor since they were little.

“I am a father myself,” Lee said. “I know that raising four kids is difficult, let alone eight. But I’ve learned from my interactions with Sivakumar that he doesn’t mind how hard he has to work, as long as he can make sure his children are fed and clothed. He also puts such a premium on their education. I really admire him.”

Sivakumar’s daughters smile cheerfully, clad in new school uniforms their father purchased with money provided by Tzu Chi.

On March 18, when volunteers visited the family again, they brought with them a surprise present—a framed picture of the family taken during the volunteers’ previous visit. The entire family, adults and children alike, broke into smiles when they saw the portrait. The youngest son couldn’t take his eyes off the picture, his face radiant with delight. The scene moved volunteer Koh Poo Leng (許曉玲) to no end. She was the one who decided to have the picture developed and given to the family as a gift. She was really happy she made the decision.

When Sivakumar was helpless, Tzu Chi volunteers extended a helping hand and were able to witness a father’s solid love for his family. Their interactions revealed a heartwarming story of love and care. ❦

Tzu Chi Malaysia’s “Kita1Keluarga” COVID Relief Program

The Malaysian government implemented a Movement Control Order in March 2020 to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Its impact on the nation was significant and wide-ranging. To help families struggling through this difficult time, the Tzu Chi Kuala Lumpur and Selangor branch launched a COVID-19 relief program in July 2020.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country. The program’s name, “Kita1Keluarga,” came from Malay, meaning “we are one family.” Tzu Chi helped 2,178 families in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Putrajaya under the program, from September to November 2020, providing them with short-term cash aid. Tzu Chi later launched other aid projects in response to changing COVID circumstances, including providing electronic devices for remote learning and distributing food to needy families.

In the second half of 2021, 580,000 middle-income families in Malaysia were plunged into low-income status. Tzu Chi responded by initiating “Kita1Keluarga 2.0.” In addition to calling on applicants’ homes, volunteers took the initiative to visit over 260 schools and, with the help of teachers, located more families in need of help. The distribution of aid was completed this February, benefiting 2,012 households.

A photograph showing a man in a white short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers pushing an elderly woman in a wheelchair. They are walking on a paved asphalt path that stretches into the distance. The woman has white hair and is wearing a red vest over a light-colored shirt. The background features a row of residential buildings, some with balconies, and a bridge in the far distance under a clear blue sky with some clouds.

The Uneasy Road of Family Caregivers

More than 700,000 people in Taiwan are disabled, functionally impaired, or afflicted with dementia. Over half of them are cared for at home. A caregiver's role can be challenging, especially if they are the sole or primary caregiver. Such people need support and time off to get through the toughest days.

Lin Ming-ji, his mother's principal caregiver, pushes her wheelchair on a walk near their home.

YAN LIN-ZHAO



An Older Person Taking Care of an Even Older Person

Lin Ming-ji, 68, has taken care of his 93-year-old bedridden mother for three years. At night, he sleeps in her room to keep an eye on her. Every morning when they wake up, his first order of business is to help her defecate. When it's time to eat, he grinds her food before feeding it to her, spoonful by spoonful. On nice days, he takes her out for some sun. He also takes her out with him when he volunteers. He takes good care of her, and in so doing he honors the person who gave him life and who cared for him when he was young.

Taiwan's population is rapidly aging. According to projections from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the number of persons needing long-term care on the island may top a million by 2026. Of these, over 300,000 will be elderly and enfeebled. Their caregivers are likely to be their elderly spouses or their children, who are themselves advancing in years.

PHOTOS BY YAN LIN-ZHAO



Waiting for That Happy Moment

By Liao Ming-yu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Yan Lin-zhao

When he becomes frustrated taking care of his mother, he tells himself not to let it get to him. "She's sick—that's why she needs my care," he reminds himself.

It's not uncommon for a caregiver to experience burnout, chronic fatigue, or sleep deprivation as they strive to provide good care for an aging or functionally impaired loved one. That's why it is essential that caregivers ask for help when they need it. It's also advisable that they not quit their job or give up their hobbies. Regular breaks and something to take their minds off caregiving for a time is often what it takes to keep a caregiver going.

Lin Ming-ji (林銘基) is his mother's principal caretaker. He once was under so much pressure he felt he was near the breaking point. It was his volunteer work for Tzu Chi that kept him sane. He helps repair equipment for the foundation's assistive device program. He finds that when he is completely focused on his repair work, his mind settles down and he feels at peace.

Every morning, Lin freshens his mother up and feeds her breakfast. Around ten, he carries her to his car, settles her inside, and drives to the Tzu Chi Yilan office, near where they live in Yilan, northeastern Taiwan. Once there, Lin sets to work repairing second-hand electric beds, wheelchairs, or other similar items while his mother sleeps peacefully in his car. These assistive devices will be provided for free to families with disabled or functionally impaired members. While he takes a breather from his job as a caregiver by fixing the equipment, he is happy knowing that the devices, when restored to proper working order, will ease the burdens of other caregivers.

Lin's mother is 93. She had a fall three years ago and fractured her spine. Considering her advanced age, the doctors at the hospital decided

not to operate on her. The only thing Lin could do was to take her home to recuperate. Bedridden, she was unable to tend to her own needs. Every time she was moved, she'd knit her brows and wail out of pain. Fortunately, Lin and his family had the help of a hired foreign live-in caregiver at the time.

In 2020, just as COVID-19 was sweeping across the world, that foreign caretaker returned to her home country. Then Taiwan's government tightened their control on the entry of foreign laborers into the island, leading to a shortage of home care workers. Unable to find hired help for his mom, Lin was stumped. It just so happened that his job as a tour bus driver had also been severely impacted by the pandemic. No one wanted to travel for sightseeing during this time, which essentially put him out of work. He thought to himself, "Maybe this is an arrangement made by heaven?" So, just like that, he bravely took on the job of caring for his mother.

Lin's mother was living with him and his family in a hilly community in Keelung, on the northern tip of Taiwan, when she suffered the fall. To get out of the home, they needed to negotiate some steep steps, which made it difficult to take her to the hospital or for an outing. As a result, Lin decided to move with her into a metal house next to his sister's home in Yilan.

Ever since then, Lin has been his mother's principal care provider. He is no longer young himself, being in his late 60s, but he doesn't feel it is too much of a physical strain to tend to his mother's daily needs on his own. He is still fit



enough to move her out of and back into her bed every day. He finds changing her diapers or washing her the most challenging and frustrating of his responsibilities. His mother sleeps most of the time, and in her nebulous state of semi-wakefulness, she often doesn't know that the person taking care of her is her son. She only knows he is a gray-haired man. As a result, she often puts up a big fight when he is trying to wash her or change her diapers. She is embarrassed to have her intimate needs cared for by a man.

When that happens, he says to her: "Mom, I'm your son! When I was little, you cared for me like this too. I grew up under your loving care. Now it's my turn to care for you. Don't be afraid." It doesn't matter whether his mother understands him. All Lin knows is that life has to go on.

Lin has been a Buddhist for many years. As such, he believes he and his mom couldn't have become mother and son without forming karmic affinities over many lifetimes. Cherishing the bond between them, he tells himself not to let any difficulties he encounters in the process of taking care of his mother get to him. "She's sick—that's why she needs my care," he says to himself.

Lin's mother is only lucid about three or four hours a day. He makes good use of those precious hours by chatting as much as possible with her—about things that happened a long time ago or about their family members who are no longer around. His mother is always remarkably clear-

headed during those times and talks fluently. Lin enjoys immensely the back-and-forth conversations with her. "That's when I feel happiest," he said.

Even though Lin feels he can still handle his mother alone, his family was worried that caring for her day and night, day in and day out, would eventually take a toll on him, especially as he was getting on in years himself. That's why he applied at the beginning of this year for home care services offered by Taiwan's government under its long-term care program. He especially hoped that a female care provider could come to his home regularly to bathe or shower his mother. His application was denied, however, because when the foreign care provider who used to care for his mother went back to her home country, she didn't follow due exit procedures, thus disqualifying him from the government services. Fortunately, Lin's wife later quit her job and joined him in Yilan, so he now has her to help care for his mom.

On a gloriously sunny morning following days of rain, Lin drove to the Tzu Chi Yilan office, parked his car next to the warehouse used to store assistive equipment, and said to his mom in the car: "Be good and take a good rest in the car. The sun is out today. Soak in the sunshine and make your bones stronger!" It used to be his mother who told him to be a good boy; now their roles have been reversed. Life is a cycle, and his mother is now his sweetest burden. ❀

When a Professional Care Provider Becomes Her Mother's Caregiver

Text and photo by Liao Ming-yu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

As a professional care provider, she has cared for many older people afflicted with dementia. But caring for her own mother with Alzheimer's has still proved a difficult challenge.

Zheng Qiu-yun (鄭秋雲), 62, is a professional home care worker. She is also single. That's why she thought it a matter of course for her to become her parents' caregiver when they fell ill.

A bed with handrails is the first thing Zheng sees as she walks through the door to her home. Next to the bed is a wheelchair. Before she goes into her room to change out of her volunteer uniform, she walks over to the bed to check on her mother.

Zheng's younger sister has recently moved back with her and their mother. With her around to help tend to their mother's needs, Zheng finally has more time for herself. She uses that precious time off to volunteer. For her, volunteering is the best way to recharge her batteries and regulate her emotions.

Zheng used to run a boutique in Taichung, central Taiwan, but she lost all her store's goods to a break-in burglary more than 20 years ago, and ran up a huge debt as a result. It was only with the help of Buddhism, with which she came into touch later, that she came to realize life's impermanent nature. Since everything we own is ephemeral, it's best not to become attached to anything. That way of thinking eventually helped her to come to terms with her loss. After paying off her debt, she changed careers and became a licensed home care provider. Besides working as a caregiver, she also began serving actively as a Tzu

Chi hospital volunteer. Being warm-hearted, loving, and patient, she gained the trust of many older people and medical professionals.

Four years ago, her then 89-year-old father fell down and required care. Zheng moved back to her childhood home in Yilan, northeastern Taiwan, to help take care of him. He passed away three years later. But then her mother's health rapidly declined. She was diagnosed first with Parkinson's, then dementia. She became unruly. "She began to get easily depressed, agitated, and restless," Zheng said. "She refused to take medicine. She wore a permanent frown and was quick to lash out. When I drove her anywhere, she'd let loose with a torrent of abuse whenever we stopped at a traffic light. Just me leaving the car for five minutes to buy stuff could set her off screaming and crying."

Having cared for many older people suffering from dementia, Zheng knew that her mother was displaying dementia symptoms and that things would only get worse. She tried her best to build a mental fortress so that she would have the fortitude to take whatever came her way.

Zheng has now cared for her mother for about a year. Even though she is mentally prepared, there have been times when she felt she could not cope. For example, "My mom would ask to go to the bathroom every five or ten minutes at night. I couldn't get any sleep." There is only so much one can take. When Zheng feels she is losing it, she



tells herself: "She's my mom. She's sick. She isn't doing this on purpose."

A Tzu Chi volunteer has to abide by ten precepts. One of them is "Respect your parents and be moderate in speech and attitude." She uses this as a reminder to be patient towards her mother. At night, when she lies down in a bed next to her mother's bed to go to sleep, she chants the Buddha's name to calm her mind. She can't predict how much longer her mom will need her care. She prays for more patience and strength, and thinks back on the hard work her mother put into raising her. If for nothing else, she wants to do a good job taking care of her to repay her love.

Zheng has worked as a care provider at a seniors' daycare center in Su'ao, Yilan, since her father passed away. She takes her mother with her to the center, where she receives proper care while she works. When she has volunteer work to do and there is no one to look after her mom for her, she takes her volunteering too. For example, at the end of last year, Zheng and her fellow volunteers pitched in to help lay paving bricks for a Tzu Chi recycling station in Luodong, Yilan. While she worked hard in the sun moving bricks, her mother sat in a wheelchair under a tree nearby watching the work. That was one of the most peaceful moments she has enjoyed with her mom.

Though Zheng is a professional caregiver, caring for older people at work is a different matter from caring for her own mom. She can call it a day at work, but there is no such thing as "calling it a day" when it comes to caring for her mom. Zheng knows that she isn't getting any younger and that her strength or stamina is sure to decline down the road. She has told her younger siblings that they all have a responsibility to help care for their mother and that if one day none of them is able to care for her, they will have to make other arrangements for their mother to age in peace. Fortunately, though her siblings all have their own families to take care of, they do their best to help out. Whenever she asks for help, they never turn a deaf ear.

On this day, Zheng looked at the time and saw it was time to go volunteer. She quickly changed into her volunteer uniform. "We are delivering a second-hand bed to the home of an older person who lives alone," she explained. Both Zheng and her younger sister were sporting large dark circles under their eyes. Their mother must have been refusing to sleep at night again.

For Zheng, a change of work is as good as a rest. She headed out for her volunteer assignment, seizing another opportunity to recharge her batteries. ♣

Accompanying Them Through Their Old Age

Text and photo by Liao Ming-yu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

My parents fell ill one after the other, starting 20 years ago. In the process of caring for them, I learned how to age in peace, how to communicate with other family members about providing better care for our loved ones, and how to make difficult choices of life and death.

As people age, their bodies gradually weaken, and they eventually lose the ability to care for themselves. They are like withered leaves on a tree, swaying this way and that with the wind, barely hanging on to the branches.

Many people make plans for their lives, but how many have associated their old age with withered leaves? And how many have thought about the possibility they will need to become guardians of those leaves?

My parents fell ill, one after the other, beginning 20 years ago. Though I was totally unprepared, I became their main care provider. My father had a fall at 83, rendering him unable to take care of himself. I was an office worker, not yet 40 at the time. My siblings and I applied for the services of a foreign live-in care provider for my father. In the beginning, my parents were firmly against a foreign caretaker moving in, one who didn't even speak their same language. However, they eventually accepted the arrangement—there just wasn't a better option. For me, the services provided by these foreign care providers were a godsend. My father passed away ten years after his fall, but by then my mother's Alzheimer's had worsened. The foreign caregivers that came into our lives helped me through the darkest and most difficult periods of my life. I cannot overemphasize my gratitude for them.

My mother has lived with Alzheimer's disease for 14 years now. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia. One's memory is like a leaf slowly being eaten away by an insect. As the disease progresses, a patient might develop delu-

sions and become increasingly agitated. Their caregivers might as a result be badly affected and become depressed, anxious, and agitated too. The pressure might overwhelm them, making them feel suffocated.

Famed Taiwanese writer Chang Man-chuan (張曼娟) is her parents' caregiver. She once wrote: "The caregiver of a loved one is like a person trying to deactivate a ticking time bomb while carrying another ticking time bomb on themselves. They don't necessarily succeed in deactivating the bomb, and when the worst comes to the worst, the bomb they are carrying explodes in the process." In the process of caring for my parents, I often felt I had been injured so badly by the explosion of the bomb I carried that not a single inch of my skin was intact. Having experienced what I have, I'm always worried for any sole care provider I meet.

There were laughter and tears in my journey as a caregiver, but the tears outweighed the laughter.

On the day my father had the fall—he had fallen by accident into a large ditch—none of us were too alarmed. He seemed okay and had no detectable injuries, so we decided to wait until the next morning to take him to the hospital for examination. We couldn't have expected that he would experience difficulty breathing that very night. I let him sleep in my arms that night because he said he felt more comfortable half lying like that. When we arrived at the hospital the next morning, his condition had worsened to the point that a lung abscess had developed. Before he was rolled



into the intensive care unit, he exerted all his strength to tell me, "I owe you so much. I provided poorly for you—you even had to put yourself through school—and yet all along you've been the one looking after me." Despite what my father said, I never feel he owed me. I feel I owe my dad even more.

Our family used to be very poor. Hard pressed to make a living, my parents would often quarrel over money. After my mother developed Alzheimer's, she forgot almost everything good about my father—all that she remembered was how badly he had treated her. As a result, she'd often fling abuses at him. Being of limited mobility, my father couldn't leave home on his own and could thus only quietly endure her abuses. One time, he must have had enough of it because he called me at work to vent. Do you know how I responded? I told him I was very busy and asked him to call my older brother instead. How helpless my father must have felt at that moment. I regretted my response as soon as I hung up. I felt awful for being so unkind to Dad.

Dad departed from the world at 93. In the last few years of his life, he gradually lost all hope. My mom was living with me at my place at the time; Dad lived at our old home, looked after by a foreign care provider. Every morning, I'd take my mother to a daycare center on my way to work. When I got off work, I went to check on Dad to see

if he had any needs before I drove to the daycare center to take Mom home.

One day, I was very tired as I was driving home from the daycare center with Mom sitting next to me. To make things worse, Mom was having one of her fits and couldn't stop throwing insults at me. My temper got the best of me, and with my hands clenched tightly on the steering wheel, I yelled at her: "Why don't we die together?" My voice was so loud it drowned out her words. She froze. I was stunned silent too. A thought flashed across my mind: "If I couldn't carry on anymore, what is Dad to do?"

The older our loved ones get, the more we must help them live with dignity. This is especially true in the case of those who are functionally impaired. No one wants to lose the ability to take care of themselves, let alone lose control over their bodily functions. Being compassionate and thoughtful is the least we can do.

After his fall, my father could still move around on his own, though with a lot of difficulty. Often his bladder or bowels would let go before he reached the bathroom. When that happened, panic would be written all over his face, and he'd look over at me and say with an embarrassed smile, "I'm sorry, I just couldn't hold it." I'd step forward and, extending my arms to support him, would respond, "It's okay. Let me walk you to the bathroom and help you clean up." Who would

have the heart to scold their aged parents for losing control of their bladders or bowels, especially when we think of how they used to take care of us when we were young, changing our diapers and cleaning up any mess we made without a word of complaint?

Compared with my dad, I have felt even more for my mom. People with Alzheimer's gradually lose all ability to care for themselves and even to communicate their thoughts. My mother is 14 years into her dementia now. She can no longer verbally express herself. But I have not given up trying to engage her in conversation. When she occasionally responds lucidly, it's enough to make me happy for a long time.

Because Mom's chewing ability has also degenerated, her food has to be ground into a paste. Once when I was fixing dinner for her, she waddled clumsily back and forth near me, talking gibberish. I thought she just wanted to chat, so I didn't pay her much mind. Later, when I went to her room to check on her, I found her badly flustered. Her body, the walls, the sides of her bed, and where she had walked were smeared with her feces. I tried to calm her down before taking her to the bathroom to clean her up. Only when I was done washing her and cleaning up everything else did I feed her dinner.

Later that night, when all was quiet, I thought of the look of panic and agitation on Mom's face. I couldn't hold back and burst out crying. Mom had always been such a neatnik—what a state she must have been in when her body and surroundings were covered in her waste. I felt terrible. I couldn't help but blame myself for not having been more alert when she had needed me the most.

Mom is 96 this year. People tend to think that a long life is a blessing. But since she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's more than 10 years ago, her husband, eldest son, and youngest son have passed away. She hasn't grieved their passing; even worse, she has been completely unaware of their deaths. Her body, aged and wizened now, seems to be protesting silently about the unfairness of life, about why, after a lifetime of toil, she has to endure the ravages of illness.

Writing and photographing as healing

All the difficulties I have encountered over the years as a caregiver have helped me learn and grow. In the process of caring for my parents, I've learned how better to age in peace, how to communicate with other family members about providing better care for our loved ones, and how to

make difficult decisions of life and death. What's more, if I hadn't become my parents' caregiver, I wouldn't have encountered Tzu Chi volunteers in a hospital, obtained their help and support, and come to know Tzu Chi better.

The idea of giving up my volunteer work has never occurred to me, no matter how tired I am. Whenever my time allows and there is Tzu Chi work to do, I volunteer. A friend asked me, "Why do you still volunteer when you are already so tired?" I told her I appreciate every opportunity to serve because volunteering helps me adjust my mood.

I often help document Tzu Chi events or write about our volunteers' stories. I enjoy holding a camera in my hand, looking through the viewfinder, and working on how to take a picture that will speak to people. I'm not good at photography, but I have done my best to learn. When I focus on taking photos, I forget about all my pressure and worries. I laugh with everyone, and cry when moving things happen. It's a most amazing feeling. The world is so beautiful in those moments, and I tell myself: "You'll get better and better."

Every time I write about a volunteer's story after interviewing him or her, I experience their life one more time; I share in their joys and sorrows. I'm not highly educated, but I put in a lot of effort learning how to make a story vivid and engaging while keeping to the truth. I thank the volunteers who offer up their stories to me; their stories have enriched my life and made me a better person. Serving as a volunteer writer has also helped me form many good affinities. The volunteers I've written about often send me their regards and express their care and concern for me. I deeply cherish such warm-heartedness.

Having devoted a good part of my life to caring for my loved ones, I am now no longer the only person in my family providing for and caring for my mother. My financial burden is now shared by my family. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a shortage of foreign home care workers in Taiwan. Without a helper to look after my mom while I work, I've temporarily entrusted her to the care of a nursing home. But I look forward to taking her home to live with me.

Truth be told, the last 20 years was a difficult time for me. Even so, I cared for my parents willingly because I know how indebted I am to them for raising me. I took care of them not out of a sense of duty, but out of my love for them and a profound sense of gratitude. ❀

Hello, How May I Help You?

By Yan Fu-jiang and Liao Zhe-min

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

The Omicron variant began to spread rapidly in Taiwan in the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, hitting the island like a tsunami. Confirmed cases began to surge abruptly in the spring of 2022, with New Taipei City, northern Taiwan, being one of the areas recording the most infections. Since most people that tested positive were asymptomatic or suffered from mild symptoms, the majority quarantined at home. Those who had close contact with confirmed cases were at first required to quarantine too. As a result, the number of housebound people spiked. Because they couldn't go out, they needed assistance with all kinds of matters, from purchasing necessities to disposing of garbage, psychological counseling, pet care, and other emergency needs. At the request of the New Taipei City government, in late April Tzu Chi volunteers joined the effort to answer calls from people under quarantine who needed help.

In addition to listening patiently on the phone and providing necessary assistance, volunteers sometimes needed to calm angry callers who had had a hard time getting through. It was a job that

required wisdom and skill. A sense of humor came in very handy too. Volunteer Lu Fu-yao (呂福堯), for example, once received a call from a man who had been phoning for two days before he finally got through. After listening to his heated complaint, Lu said: "What a coincidence! I've been waiting for your phone call for two days too! Finally, I get to talk to you!" A short pause later, the caller burst out laughing. Lu's humorous and witty response had pacified the caller and dissipated the tension.

"Some people complained about not having yet received their quarantine care package [courtesy of the government], and since they didn't have enough food at home, they panicked. Some were worried about their work." Lu listened patiently to every caller and noted their needs. He also reminded them to drink plenty of warm water and take good care of themselves physically and mentally so that they could recover quickly and return to work or school as soon as possible.

In response to the various challenges posed by the pandemic, Tzu Chi has been doing its best to help. Volunteers are happy to contribute their time and energy to help society through this challenging time. The light at the end of the tunnel looks brighter when all sectors in society work together. ❀



At the request of the New Taipei City government, Tzu Chi volunteers answered phone calls from people under home quarantine due to COVID-19 to help address their needs.

The Illustrated JING SI APHORISMS

The Buddha says:

You are your own master,
and you are your own refuge.
Therefore, you must first discipline yourself.
Do not talk too much—contemplate quietly.
This is the first step in breaking your bonds.



The Buddha frequently taught us to control ourselves. You must always protect your pure, natural mind and allow it to remain tranquil.

When your mind is tranquil, you will naturally be able to control yourself. When you are thus self-possessed, you will live happily.



When a coworker of mine speaks to me, I often feel hurt by him. What should I do?

Master Cheng Yen replied: When people work together, they can't avoid talking to each other. You may have felt hurt, but the other person may not have intended this and may have no idea how you feel. Why should you take it so hard? Everyone needs to learn not to get hung up on little things. Don't be like soft tofu that falls apart with just one touch.

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

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



The United States

On May 15, Tzu Chi USA held a free medical clinic at Golden Valley High School, in Bakersfield, California, providing treatment in Western medicine, Chinese medicine, and dentistry. Many residents in Bakersfield are farm workers with low incomes. Volunteers in 1996 started providing healthcare services once every three months in the district.

May 15 was the first time in two years Tzu Chi had held a free clinic in Bakersfield. This regular event was forced to a temporary stop by the global pandemic in 2020. Though they couldn't hold a physical event during the last two years, volunteers continued providing medical consultations via telephone, as many patients suffer from chronic illnesses and need to stay on medications. Volunteers learned about these patients' conditions on the phone, then arranged for medicine to be mailed to their homes.

Jorge Alvarez, a regular at the clinic, was one of the patients who came to the May 15 event. He has no medical insurance and had been coming to the event for about five years when the pandemic hit. "When I was running out of my medicine," he said, "I received a phone call from a Tzu Chi vol-

Tzu Chi USA held a free medical clinic at Golden Valley High School, in Bakersfield, California, on May 15, serving 49 patients.

LUO SHU-LI

unteer, and my worries about having no medicine to take were put to rest." He had a telephone consultation with a doctor every three months, after which he'd receive his medicine.

Lorena Sánchez was a first-timer at the clinic. She had been bothered by a toothache for two years. At the event on May 15, she received dental treatment and also some medicine. "The doctor treated me with a lot of care," she said. "I'm grateful for everything. Tzu Chi has helped me a lot."

Paulina Ramirez is a local volunteer and also a patient at the clinic. She said that people with dental or other health issues would often ask her during the pandemic when Tzu Chi would restart the clinic. Now that the team was back, she said with a smile: "I've missed you all so much. Everyone is thankful you are back."

The clinic served 49 patients. Fifteen medical professionals, including doctors, nurses, and pharmacists, and 50 support volunteers together made for a successful event.



Volunteers unload rice to be distributed to fire survivors in Quezon City, the Philippines.

DANIEL LAZAR

The Philippines

A fire broke out in a crowded settlement on the sprawling campus of the University of the Philippines, Quezon City, on May 2. Eight people were killed, including six children. More than a hundred families were made homeless.

Tzu Chi volunteers visited the disaster scene in the immediate aftermath to assess the conditions and extend care to survivors. They also checked with the local government and relief agencies to appraise the needs of the affected families, hoping to provide aid that would most benefit the households. On May 5, volunteers held a distribution for 92 families, giving out a variety of items including gas stoves, casserole dishes, rice, cooking oil, condiments, blankets, soap, masks, disinfectant alcohol, and other goods.

Julie Valisno, one of the victims, said during the distribution: “I cried for our misfortune every night, but I told myself I had to be strong for my family. Thanks to Tzu Chi for addressing our pressing needs. The items you gave us, such as the cooking equipment, will come in really handy. Many people donated goods to us. We are very lucky.”

Jocelyn Madrigal, another survivor, told volunteers that her husband was among the thousands of jeepney drivers who had received aid from Tzu Chi during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their family received rice and other necessities from the foundation three times. “We’ll never forget the help you have given us,” said Madrigal. “Wherever there is a disaster, you go there to help. My immense gratitude goes to all Tzu Chi volunteers.”

Indonesia

On April 26, Tzu Chi volunteers in Surabaya donated 12 notebook computers to Madrasah

Ibtidaiyah Babul Huda, an elementary school in Jombang, East Java.

Indonesia’s Ministry of Education and Culture rolled out computer-based national exams a few years ago. This posed a challenge to the elementary school, which didn’t have any computers. School administrators coped by renting laptop computers for students to use during the exams. After learning about the tight spot the school was in, Tzu Chi decided to help.

Students broke into happy smiles when they received the gifts from Tzu Chi. They used to be able to use a computer only during the exams; now they will have the computers to use even on regular days.

Sixth-grader Saffar Nuraini said, “I used a cell phone last year for the national tests, and I even had to take turns using it with others. I’m happy and grateful for these computers.” ☘



A volunteer helps students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Babul Huda, in Jombang, East Java, try out a notebook computer. Tzu Chi donated 12 computers to the school on April 26.

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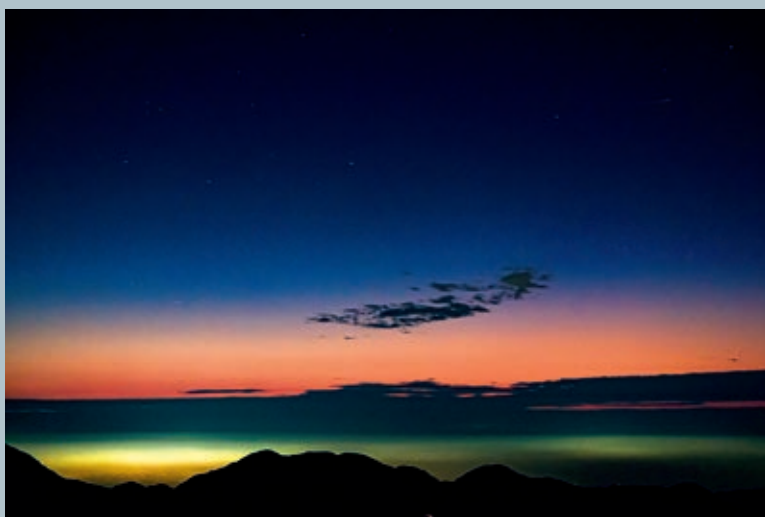
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To seize the present is to seize the future.
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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