

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

Repairing
Quake-Damaged
Homes in Taiwan



Wise and Blessed Are the Givers

Translated by Teresa Chang



After the 9/18 earthquake in Taiwan, Tzu Chi volunteers and staffers extended care and presented gift bags or emergency cash to families affected by the tremor.

CHEN YI-QIAN

A magnitude 6.8 earthquake struck Taitung, Taiwan, on September 18, causing some land to crack, bridges to tilt, and even caused damage to sturdy buildings. Many people were badly shaken.

Our staffers and volunteers quickly mobilized to assess damage in Hualien and Taitung. They visited affected schools to determine if they needed help with reconstruction or repairs. Hundreds of homes were damaged too. Thankfully, most people emerged unscathed. When our volunteers visited affected families, some people said they could fix the damage on their own; others admitted it was beyond them to handle the repairs by themselves. Among such families were people who were sick or disabled, or seniors with no one to depend on. Special note was taken of those people who might need our additional care and help in the future.

The government, the TSMC Charity Foundation, and Tzu Chi joined efforts to provide quake relief. Volunteers from across Taiwan, including those with backgrounds in construction, assembled in Hualien and Taitung. Then they fanned out to different areas in the counties to estimate the required manpower and building materials needed to make the repairs, which were launched immediately afterwards.

Our volunteers knew they had to help, so they overcame whatever difficulties that were in their way to go to the disaster area to serve. Some took time off their regular jobs to volunteer. There were also business owners who closed their stores for a few days so that they could volunteer. The love behind such selfless giving is truly beautiful.

Not only did our volunteers step forward to help, but they also applied a lot of care to their work. There was, for example, a household whose wall tiles were damaged during the quake. Because the tiles were old, it was difficult to find the same kind to match the undamaged ones. However, the volunteers in charge managed to find replacement tiles that were very similar in color and design to the original ones. It was important to them that the finished walls looked good and wouldn't, due to the discrepancy between the old and new tiles, remind the family of the frightful earthquake. I am truly grateful to them for their care and thoughtfulness.

I am also grateful to our hospitals in Taiwan for raising money for our quake relief work, and to our volunteers on the island who did the same. Overseas volunteers prayed for and gave their best wishes to Taiwan when they learned of the quake, and many children donated their pocket money to help. People outside of Taiwan know that we frequently give to the less fortunate around the world, so when Taiwan was hit by the quake this time, they did what they could to give back. This just goes to show that when we give, we sow blessings for ourselves too.

Many other natural disasters have recently been reported in other parts of the world as well. They included Hurricane Ian in the United States, flooding in Thailand, and an earthquake in Mexico. When volunteers in those countries told me after the disasters that they were ready to set to work surveying the damage and providing relief, I told them—like I always tell our volunteers every time a disaster strikes—that they had to be sure it was safe for them to visit a disaster area before they made their trips. While I'm happy our volunteers have nurtured such compassion in their hearts that they are always quick to jump into action to help in the aftermath of a disaster, I'm also worried about their safety. It's impossible not to worry when I think of them wading through water or riding on boats to visit flooded zones, or traveling along roads that have been damaged in a quake.

Man-made disasters have also caused much suffering in the world. I'm confident that if Tzu Chi volunteers are present, people who suffer will quickly receive help. But what about those areas where there are no Tzu Chi volunteers? It's a helpless feeling to see people in need of help with no one to bring relief to them. When that happens, I ask if our volunteers in nearby countries can reach out to help. Our world needs as many people as possible willing to give with Great Love, an unselfish love that embraces all humanity. It is my most sincere hope that we can inspire ever more people to put their love into action.

It's a blessing to give, and wisdom to give unconditionally. Every act of kindness we perform increases the value of our lives. Let us strive to let the places where we live be full of real-life bodhisattvas. If we can do that, then every family can enjoy happiness, and our society can prosper in peace and harmony. ☸

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Bimonthly

November 2022



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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* is owned and published by the Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, No. 2, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.
Wang Tuan-cheng, CEO
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For a free copy of the *Tzu Chi Bimonthly*, please contact your nearest Tzu Chi branch office (see inside back cover).

中華郵政台北誌字第910號執照登記為雜誌交寄

The Fast Fashion Disaster

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

While fast fashion has spurred purchases, it has also resulted in a lot of waste. The environment is paying the price.



An employee at a clothes recycling plant sorts garments from a mountain of clothing.

Announcements from a public address system advertising ongoing special discounts could be heard periodically in the clothing section of a department store in New Taipei City, northern Taiwan. They were designed to entice shoppers to open their wallets. The cheapest items of clothing sold for just a hundred Taiwanese dollars (US\$3.3) each—less than a meal at an inexpensive restaurant.

Fast fashion churns out new collections at break-neck speed and at easily affordable prices to keep consumers around the world buying. Many people now happily and frequently go on shopping sprees to renew their wardrobes. In Taiwan, long gone are the days when people were generally poor and some even had to wear garments made from the sacks that had been used to contain flour donated by the United States. No one thinks of those old Chinese adages extolling the virtue of frugality when they buy and dispose of clothes faster than the clothes go out of style.

According to statistics released by Taiwan's Environmental Protection Administration, 78,951 tonnes (87,028 short tons) of clothes were recycled across the island in 2020. That's about 11 items of clothing, on average, per person per year. With so much clothing being thrown away, dealing with the resulting waste has become a challenge.

Supply outstripping demand

"Many recycling merchants no longer accept secondhand clothing," said Zhang Han-jun (張涵鈞), head of the Section for the Promotion and Development of Environmental Protection Work at Tzu Chi headquarters in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. "Some recycling merchants who have long worked with us are still willing to help out, but the amount they can accept is limited."

When recycling dealers are taking in fewer and fewer used clothes—or refusing them completely—many Tzu Chi recycling stations have no choice but to stop accepting them too. This phenomenon is reflected in the declining amounts of clothing taken in by Tzu Chi recycling stations across Taiwan over the last five years. In 2017, 5,000 tonnes (5,510 short tons) of used clothes were accepted, but that dropped to less than 4,000 tonnes in 2018, and continued to plummet through 2019 and 2020. In 2021, only 2,300 tonnes were accepted. Although Tzu Chi recycling stations were temporarily closed for a time in 2021 due to the pandemic, the drastic reduction five years in a row reflects the general unpopularity of secondhand clothes on the market.

For this article, my photographer and I visited a used clothes recycling plant in Wugu, New Taipei City. In a large space built of corrugated sheet metal, we saw a multicolored mountain of clothes nearly four stories high. Employees sat at the foot of the clothing mountain, sorting one garment after another. The pile of clothes was so large it was easy to miss the workers if you didn't look closely.

"We receive and ship out clothes every day," said Wu Ji-zheng (吳基正), the owner of the business. "About 500 tonnes of clothes are processed here at our factory every month. The quality of recycled clothes is getting worse and worse, so an increasing amount is going straight into the trash."

Wu explained that since fast fashion became a trend, people have tended to purchase inexpensive but low quality clothes in large quantity. Not only are the materials used to make the clothing worse, but the workmanship is often subpar too. Given those factors, the decline in quality of the clothes that end up at his factory comes as no surprise. Generally speaking, only 30 to 40 percent of the clothes his factory takes in are good enough to be resold.

Contributing to the challenge of running a recycled clothes business these days is a reduced demand for such garments. "Fewer and fewer countries are needing secondhand clothes," Wu said. "More than a decade ago, most of our used clothing was sold into China. Now that their economy is doing better, they have become an exporter of used clothes themselves. Some Southeast Asian countries have followed the same path." Wu recalled that secondhand clothes from Taiwan used to be very popular—buyers would gladly accept even school uniforms bearing embroidered names. But now, with the supply outstripping demand, many of his fellow recyclers have had no choice but to close. "I wonder what we are going to do if one day Africa begins turning away used clothes," he said with worry.

A shadow over the fashion industry

Owners of recycled clothes businesses in Taiwan are up against other challenges, such as higher labor costs and rents than those faced by their competitors in other countries. Taking everything into account, Wu said frankly that he might fare better if he just shutters his business and rents his factory out to others. But he bites the bullet and keeps going because of a sense of social responsibility.



"I employ more than a hundred people," he said, as he looked at his employees organizing clothes or operating forklifts to stack bundles of clothing in the factory. "Many of them are middle-aged or older people, or have disabilities. We also work with about 20 social welfare groups in managing clothes recycling bins."

Social responsibility aside, he doesn't want to see clothing that can still be put to use go to waste. "If we quit," Wu said, "the government will have to take care of all the discarded clothes. What can they do but burn them?" Even burning them isn't such an easy chore in Taiwan. According to Wu, the incinerators used in Taiwan are generally older models, which can stand only lower heat. The heat produced by burning clothes is, however, higher than these older-model incinerators can take. To prevent the equipment from being damaged, used clothes are usually mixed in with other types of garbage to be burned, so only a small amount of clothing is put in with each load. "If we don't work to export used clothes," he said, "all of them will end up as garbage to be incinerated. If we keep going, we can at least allow some of the clothes to be used again."

Coupled with the problem of waste is the

The fashion industry churns out a gargantuan number of garments every year, catering to the needs of consumers from all walks of life.

impact the fashion industry is having on the environment. Not many are aware of it, but the textile and fashion industry is the world's second largest source of pollution, just after the petro-chemical industry. In order to evade the stricter environmental laws enforced in advanced countries, many textile companies have moved their production lines to poorer countries where the laws and supervision are more lax. This has led to irreversible damage to the environment in those countries.

In 2018, a TV news crew from Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV visited Bangladesh, one of the world's largest garment exporters, to report on the problem of pollution caused by the textile industry. The TV crew was accompanied by environmental engineering experts from Chang Jung Christian University in southern Taiwan. When the team arrived at a textile factory located in a suburb of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, to collect samples from the wastewater discharged by the facto-

ry, they found the water to be of a deep blue color. They tested it, and found the pH value over ten, indicating the water was strongly alkaline. In fact, one of the researchers was splashed with the water while collecting the samples, and experienced a burning sensation where the liquid landed on his arm. The team discovered that the wastewater discharged by the factory had polluted the soil and irrigation water for nearby farms, affecting crop yield and threatening the health of local residents.

In addition to the problems mentioned above, there are also issues of labor rights. Fast fashion requires more than cheap materials to work and be profitable—it needs cheap labor as well. A math teacher at El Menahil International School in Turkey once worked in a garment factory after he had fled the civil war in his home country of Syria. “A coworker of mine [at the factory] was just eight years old!” he exclaimed.

Fortunately, since the international community has been paying closer attention to corporate

social responsibility in recent years, quite a few fashion brands have promised publicly to safeguard their workers’ rights and protect the environment in the operation of their businesses. This is a positive development without a doubt. But to solve the fast fashion problem at the root, consumers will have to play the biggest part.

No buying on a whim

Chen Hwang-yeh (陳皇曄) teaches at the Marketing and Distribution Management Department of the Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology, in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. She recommended that everyone use a “green consumer mentality” when it comes to buying clothes. She suggested you ask yourself, “Do I really need this item of clothing, or do I only want

Tzu Chi and its partners distributing blankets and secondhand clothes to people in the West African country of Sierra Leone in 2019



How a Garment Comes to Be

Obtaining raw materials: natural fibers or synthetic ones derived from fossil fuels

Converting fibers into fabric, then dyeing

Designing, cutting, and assembling fabric into apparel

Environmental Impact

- The production of a cotton T-shirt requires 2,720 liters (720 gallons) of water, about the amount the average person drinks in three years.
- The processing of one tonne of cotton into finished fabric uses 65,000 kWh of electricity, enough to power 1,800 homes.
- The use of chemical dyes has made the textile industry the second largest polluter, after the oil industry.
- The textile industry is responsible for 1.2 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually, exceeding those from all international flights and maritime shipping combined.
- The textile and clothing industry produces 20 percent of waste globally. More than 92 million tonnes of textiles are discarded each year, 80 percent of which are not recycled or reused but instead end up being burned or dumped in a landfill.
- If nothing changes, the textile industry will be responsible for 26 percent of the world's carbon footprint by 2050, and consume 300 million tonnes of non-renewable resources annually.

Sources: the Circular Taiwan Network website, the Environmental Information Center website, *Global Views Monthly*, etc.

it?” She continued, “Don’t buy on impulse when you see something you fancy. Think before you make a purchase. Avoid overconsumption.”

Consumers can also help mitigate the environmental impact of fast fashion by shopping secondhand or by donating the clothes they are no longer wearing. “When you do buy clothes,” suggested Wu Ji-zheng, the used clothing business owner, “go for those that are made from better materials and that will be more durable. If there are clothes you want to donate, please sort them properly before you do.” Wu said that he had seen in piles of used clothes those so worn out they

were not fit for wearing any more. He had also seen clothing covered with dog hair. “If your clothes are in such shape that they belong in the trash, dispose of them as such.”

Though we don’t need to be so frugal that we deny ourselves what we need, maintaining habits that contribute to the sustainability of the environment is the duty and responsibility of every citizen of the Earth. It’s within everyone’s power to prevent unnecessary waste of resources and cut down pollution. Buy with discretion; use with care what you own to prolong its lifespan. In this way, it’s not difficult to reduce your fashion footprint. ☘

The Second Life of Jeans

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Denim, a durable cloth often used to make jeans, is one of the most resource-intensive materials in fashion. A young fashion designer is giving recycled denim a new lease of life to help reduce its environmental cost.

Zhan Ming-zhu (詹明珠), in her sixties, can operate a sewing machine with deftness, assembling pieces of fabric into a garment with skill and ease. She has difficulty getting around due to the aftereffects of polio, but she was endowed with the gift of good workmanship.



This has enabled her to supplement her family's income ever since she was young by sewing clothes for others. After she joined Tzu Chi, she applied her talent to teaching her fellow volunteers how to make reusable shopping bags from recycled fabric. A major part of her life has been spent amidst needles, threads, fabrics, and scissors.

Three years ago, Zhan learned from a Da Ai TV program about a social enterprise founded by a young fashion designer named Kuan Chen (陳冠百). Out of curiosity, she visited Chen's workshop on Dihua Street, Taipei, northern Taiwan, for a look. That eventually led to her working there.

"I put together pieces of cloth at the workshop," explained Zhan. "Every garment we make is unique." Assembling segments of cloth into garments is fun for her. She especially appreciates still being able to put her sewing skills to good use in a world dominated by machine-made clothes and where handmade tailoring has long been in decline. It's no surprise, therefore, that she is full of gratitude when she speaks of her employer, Kuan Chen, who is about the same age as her daughter. Zhan is quick to express her admiration for her, too. "After all, it's not easy for a young person to start a business."

Kuan Chen's hectic schedule testifies to the work she does as an entrepreneur. "Sorry, I'll be ten minutes late," she texted to a reporter. "I'm just getting off the train." Though she had taken an earlier train to be on time for the interview, she was running a bit behind. She was returning from

Zhan Ming-zhu, over 60, joined Story Wear, a sustainable fashion brand, to put her sewing skills to good use by transforming recycled denim fabrics into new clothes.

Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan, to Taipei, after participating in an exhibition the day before in the southern port city.

Chen has led a busy life since she founded Story Wear, a sustainable fashion brand, in 2018. Her time has been divided between attending exhibitions, both in Taiwan and abroad; visiting textile companies, public service groups, or recycling stations; and taking care of everything else related to running her business. What makes her brand stand out is that it transforms recycled denim into fashionable wear while creating work opportunities for disadvantaged women and senior seamstresses looking for employment. The combination of a social enterprise and sustainable fashion makes Story Wear a story worth telling.

In the name of the environment

"Our clothes are generally thicker, and the weather is very warm in Kaohsiung, but the sale of our clothes [at the exhibition] was still very brisk," said Chen about the event she had participated in the day before. Her joy was palpable as she recounted the enthusiastic response her brand had received at the port city. She said that each article of clothing produced by Story Wear has a label on it that bears the handwritten signature of the seamstress who made the garment. It also includes the number of hours taken to make it. "People who buy our clothing find that touching," Chen observed.

Chen first learned about the concept of sustainable fashion when she went to the UK in 2013 to pursue a master's degree in fashion management. It was during her time in that country that she came to realize the various problems caused by fast fashion. "The textile and clothing industry is the world's second largest polluter," she said, "accounting for 20 percent of marine pollution. There are other issues as well, such as the use of child labor in cotton cultivation and the highly polluted work environments faced by workers in the industry."

Inflation has caused everything to go up in price, but a T-shirt sells for a lower price than it did 20 years ago. Operating on the basis of mass production and low cost, fast fashion's "low-margin, high-volume" business model has come at the expense of people and the environment. What's more, overconsumption of fast fashion is resulting in a large amount of waste, making the disposal of used clothes a headache for countries around the world.

The crux of the problem, Chen pointed out, is that too much has and is being produced. "If we

add up all the fast fashion items of clothing produced in a year," she said, "the number might be as large as the world population. The ultimate way to solve the problem is to get consumers to buy less and opt for better quality. This is the only way that will cause manufacturers to produce less."

In response to the fast fashion phenomenon, demands have been placed on companies in the industry to meet their social responsibility. As a result, some fast fashion brands have urged their supply chains to protect their workers' rights and cut back on pollution. Some have even begun to use materials obtained from recycled PET bottles to make apparel. Environmentally conscious consumers have also taken action to buck the fast fashion trend, leading to the popularity of second-hand clothes stores and rent-instead-of-buy services. This has made sustainable fashion a noticeable trend in Europe and the United States. "The fashion industry is hoping to achieve net zero emissions by 2050," said Chen. "The global market is now very supportive of sustainable fashion. This might be a very good opportunity for Taiwan."

Things weren't as promising five years ago, when Chen first decided to establish Story Wear. Back then, an attitude of responsible consumption when it came to clothing hadn't yet emerged in Taiwan. There was a surplus of used clothes, a problem exacerbated by the difficulty faced by recycling dealers in finding buyers from abroad. Even public welfare organizations were overwhelmed with donated clothes that had nowhere to go.

Chen did some on-site research work and found that among the secondhand clothes discarded or donated by people, those made from cotton comprised the largest percentage, especially cotton T-shirts. However, because the materials used to make such items were usually soft and thin, they weren't suitable to be cut up and remade into new apparel. Even converting them back into raw textile materials would be difficult. Denim jeans, also made from cotton, were a different story though. Their characteristics made them ideal for being remanufactured into new garments.

"Denim fabrics are tough and durable, and they don't go out of fashion," said Chen. "After being recycled and remade into new clothes, they can still be worn a long time. Even if they fade in color, they still look trendy."

Denim jeans were invented in the 19th century for the Gold Rush miners in the American West who needed sturdy, durable clothing. Because of their toughness and durability, they later became

popular with cowboys. After World War II, the image of American cowboys clad in jeans spread across the world via Hollywood movies. This type of attire was therefore dubbed “cowboy pants” among Chinese-speaking populations. Chen’s first Story Wear garment was made from such “cowboy pants” and part of a suit belonging to her late father, Chen Xiao-qing (陳曉慶).

Denim is actually one of the most resource-intensive, environmentally damaging materials in fashion. It is made from cotton, the production of which requires a lot of water: more than 8,500 liters (2,245 gallons) per kilogram (2.2 pounds). That, coupled with the chemicals required in the dyeing process, the wastewater that results, and the carbon footprint of its transportation, easily makes the environmental cost of jeans hundreds or thousands of times what they are sold for on the market. It’s therefore best for the environment if denim is recycled and reused.

Aside from helping the environment, Chen hopes to help take care of the disadvantaged and revive the art of seamstressing via her social enterprise too. To that end, she has joined hands with the Awakening Foundation, the Cerebral Palsy Association, and other public service organizations. She’s also invited retired seamstresses to teach disadvantaged women tailoring skills so that they can become independent or help support their families.

“More than ten seamstresses are working with us to pass on their skills,” Chen explained. “They are all very willing to travel to different places to share their expertise with the women we are trying to help.”

Chen receives the materials used to make Story Wear garments from individual donors as well as textile companies, which provide sample fabrics and unsold inventories. Tzu Chi is also an important source.

“A customer once asked me, ‘Since your materials are mostly donated, why do you still charge so much for your products?’” Chen said. Indeed, Story Wear clothing is sold at prices not easily

Kuan Chen (left) started a social enterprise based on the ideal of sustainable fashion. She encourages mothers with children afflicted with cerebral palsy to work for her brand as a way to join the workforce.

COURTESY OF KUAN CHEN

affordable by everyone. She went on to explain why. “It’s because our production process is time-consuming and labor-intensive. For example, it might take 20 to 30 minutes to disassemble a pair of jeans, though an experienced seamstress might be able to cut that time down to ten to 15 minutes.” Chen also insists on paying all designers and seamstresses a reasonable wage, which is reflected in the prices of her apparel.

She emphasizes that what motivated her to start her business was not to make as much money as she could, but to add a warm, human element to the fashion industry and to inspire people to shop consciously and cherish the clothes they buy. “Buy less and better,” she says. She believes that only by getting people to change their overconsumption habits is it possible to reverse the fast fashion trend and tackle the pollution problem caused by the industry at its root.

Her efforts to contribute to sustainable fashion have won recognition. In 2020, she was chosen by Tzu Chi to participate in a sponsorship program for young people with good ideas to better the world. Her story might inspire us to think about what we, as end consumers, can do the next time we are tempted to buy yet another piece of clothing. ❦



Clothes Hunting at a Recycling Station

By Yeh Tzu-hao

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

If you want to save money and reduce your impact on the environment, shopping for secondhand clothes might be a good choice.

It was near noon on a Friday. Taking advantage of the lighter traffic, Mrs. Gao, 72, traveled from her home to the Tzu Chi Bade Recycling Station in the Zhongshan District, Taipei, northern Taiwan. She is familiar with the thrift store at the recycling station. She knew there were many “treasures” to find there.

Pulling her grocery cart, she leisurely browsed the store for secondhand clothes, not just for herself, but also for her son, daughter-in-law, sister, and a second-grade granddaughter. She knew their sizes by heart, and she could always find something suitable for them at the store.

“There are a lot of items to choose from and the prices are such a bargain,” said Mrs. Gao. “I always have a great time shopping here, and everyone is happy about what I find for them. My son, daughter-in-law, sister, and I get almost all our clothes here.” She was also very satisfied with the quality of the clothes in the store. For her, secondhand didn’t have to mean second quality. “I’ll come again when we find ourselves in need of clothes again.”

Reducing waste

The Bade Recycling Station is located in the city center of Taipei, close to many high-end communities. Chen Song-tian (陳松田), one of the volunteers there, said that that’s why the used clothing that ends up at the Bade station is of a better quality than those at other locations. Every time a new batch of clothes donated by community residents arrives at the station, volunteers pick out the items in the best shape for the thrift store there.

The clothes are not only nice, but economical as well. An item of clothing priced at 300 New Taiwan dollars (US\$10) at a regular shop might go for just a few dozen NT dollars at the thrift store, so it’s a good place to shop for those who want to help reduce waste or who are on a tight budget. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, because of the low prices, many foreign migrant workers would patronize the store; some even went on shopping sprees to buy gifts for their relatives and friends in their home countries. Many Tzu Chi volunteers made purchases there too. When a wedding was coming up, for example, they knew they might chance upon some inexpensive special occasion wear and accessories there.

“The garments we wore to our daughter’s and son’s weddings were all purchased here,” said Xiao Xiu-zhu (蕭秀珠), Chen Song-tian’s wife. “You help conserve resources by shopping here, save some money, and support a charitable cause, all at the same time.” It is, in other words, a win-win-win.

A lot of garments end up at the station, so the display area in the thrift store is always packed with attire. More clothes lie off to one side in unorganized heaps, waiting to be sorted. Clothes not chosen for sale are set aside for recycling dealers. After the dealers take their pick, any remaining apparel is handed over to the city’s sanitation workers to be disposed of for a fee.

“We are grateful that the recycling dealers are still willing to come by to take their pick,” Chen Song-tian said. “The collections at some places are of such inferior quality that the dealers don’t even bother to go in.” The dealers, who purchase the



Heaps of clothes wait to be sorted in the thrift store at the Tzu Chi Bade Recycling Station in Taipei. Some are so new they still have their price tags attached.

clothes by weight, typically visit the station every Friday.

The going rate for recycled clothes is currently among the lowest of all recyclable items, fetching even less money than plastic bags—just two Taiwanese dollars (US\$0.07) per kilogram. The dealers take away less than half of the clothing, so a

good part of what ends up at the station is ultimately collected by sanitation workers and incinerated.

Though it isn't easy, volunteers do their best to keep the current operational model going. "We don't really care about how much money we can make," said Chen. "We just don't want things to go to waste. We hope to prolong the lifespan of things as much as possible."

Discarded clothes likewise cram the racks at the thrift store at the Tzu Chi Xiufeng Recycling Station in the Xizhi District, New Taipei City, northern Taiwan. That station stopped taking in used clothes last May, when Taiwan's COVID-19 alert was raised to level three, so all the clothes at the station were from the time before. Even so, it's not difficult to find something you fancy from the large collection there if you are patient.

It's mostly housewives who shop at the thrift store, said volunteer Liu Yue-e (劉月娥). Foreign migrant workers frequent the location too. "We charge less money from the migrant workers, since they make less money." Similarly, street people needing clothes can get them for free at the station, which goes for other disadvantaged groups as well.

Prior to the level three alert, community residents notified volunteers at the station whenever they had clothing to donate. Volunteers would then go pick up the clothing from the donors. Other donors just dropped bags of used clothes at the door of the station. As to the quality and condition of the clothes inside, no one could know until the bags were opened.

"Some were in pretty good condition, very clean and neatly folded," said volunteer Chen Qiong-ling (陳瓊玲). "Some bags contained pitifully few clothes that were still serviceable. Some clothes were even covered in dog or cat hair, or mixed with regular garbage."

Secondhand, but still good

Lin Qiu Xiu-rong (林邱秀絨), an 85-year-old Tzu Chi volunteer, has found great bargains at the Xiufeng Recycling Station. She once came upon a cheongsam there that was perfect for her, shortly before her granddaughter's wedding.

Lin Qiu was married into a notable family in Guanshan, Taitung County, southeastern Taiwan, when she was young. The wealth of her husband's family allowed her to lead an afflu-

ent life, but that ended when his business failed. Afterwards, she worked as a caregiver, a cleaning lady, and did other jobs to help support her family. It was only after she turned 70, when her eldest son had become successful in business and all her grandchildren had grown up, that she began breathing easier in life.

After she had lived frugally for decades, the only formal wear in her wardrobe was a blue dress and a cheongsam—both Tzu Chi uniforms. When her granddaughter was getting married, she knew she would have to find herself something else to wear to the wedding. Naturally, she went to the thrift store at the Xiufeng Recycling Station.

"I'm used to dressing casual," said Lin Qiu, "but a wedding is a big deal after all. Happily, I found a cheongsam at the recycling station that really became me and that suited the occasion. I needed some outer wear to go with it, but Sister Qiong-ling happened to have a black jacket that she had never worn and that matched my cheongsam." So, voilà, she was able to show up at the wedding looking very nice. No one could tell that her mandarin gown was recycled. Even her granddaughter didn't find out about it until after her wedding.

"I also found the clothes I'll wear to my grandson's wedding at the recycling station—one for the summer and one for the winter," she said. She had a close brush with death in the train derailment accident that occurred in eastern Taiwan last April. After that experience, she let go of all attachments to material possessions. She even plans to donate the clothes she purchased at the recycling station back to it so that more people can use them.

In a world where overconsumption dominates, maybe we can all learn a thing or two from people like Lin Qiu. Shopping secondhand is sometimes preferable to buying new and one of the easiest ways to a greener planet. ♣

A recycled cheongsam and a borrowed jacket allowed Lin Qiu Xiu-rong to look good for her granddaughter's wedding.

COURTESY OF LIN QIU XIU-RONG



Sharada's Wish

By Cecelia GC Ong

Abridged and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting



Sharada Harijan, a visually impaired mother in Nepal, was shy to ask for help from Tzu Chi volunteers. But she said she did have one wish: to send her daughter to school.

On April 28, 2022, I arrived in Nepal again from Malaysia, along with three fellow volunteers, Tang Kiat Beng (陳吉民), Ching Chen Hua (莊苑佳) and Lee Meow Hong (李妙紅). We were there to help with Tzu Chi work. Two days later, we traveled to Lumbini, the Buddha's birthplace. On May 4, we explored areas in the vicinity of Lumbini Park, taking in the living conditions of local residents. Looking curiously around, we saw cattle on the road, huts with their outer walls coated with cow dung, and village women dressed in colorful saris. We felt as if we had entered a time tunnel and had been immediately transported back to the Buddha's time.

As we were wondering whether the Buddha and his disciples had once crossed the nearby wooded area 2,500 years ago, we suddenly heard volunteer Chuan Yeong Ming (莊永銘), also from Malaysia, cry out: "Look!" Everyone turned toward his voice and saw a little boy covered with dirt, squirming on the floor of a house, trying to reach a nursing bottle with his mouth. Despite his struggles to feed himself, he wasn't having much success.

Volunteer Tang Kiat Beng, a medical doctor, entered the house. He picked up the nursing bottle, cradled the boy's head with one hand, and began feeding him the milk. The boy eagerly sucked on the bottle, making a happy "um, um" noise. He was swaying his head and hands at the same time, as if trying to express his joy and satisfaction at the ease with which he was eating.

Dr. Tang said that he had grown up in a rural area and that his family had once kept pigs. The little boy reminded him of how he had once seen newborn piglets, their eyes still closed, trying to reach their mothers' teats with their mouths to suckle. "This child, lying on the ground like a cat, working to reach his bottle with his mouth...what dignity does he have?" At this, the doctor became too overcome with emotion to say anything more.

That was how we first met Aman, Sharada Harijan's three-year-old son.

Visiting with the family

We met other members of the family that day. After talking to them and finding that they were having difficulty getting by, we decided to first help them with food for the month.

A few days later, we purchased rice, beans, nuts, cooking oil, salt, sugar, and coconut powder at a local store, and packed it all into a large plastic bucket. Then we all crammed into a small car driven by local volunteer Lilamani Sharma Poudel, nicknamed "Jupiter," to deliver the goods. We turned from a main road onto a small, uneven dirt road. Our car swayed left and right as our driver tried to avoid the potholes in our path, making us feel as if we were riding in a boat.

Finally, after much bumping and bouncing, a small brick house came into view—the same house where we had encountered the little boy a couple of days before. Jupiter parked his car under a large tree and we climbed out.



The house had been built by the local municipal government for the destitute family. It had no windows and only two doors, one of which was hung with a worn cotton cloth to serve as a door curtain. When we arrived, the grandma of the family was lying on a bed in a room. Jupiter asked us to wait outside while the people in the house readied themselves to meet us.

The grandma soon walked out to greet us. As we approached her, we saw Aman just inside the door, crawling on the floor. He was cute with a head of thick, curly hair and a pair of large, pearl-like round eyes. Had he been born into a wealthier family, he would have been lavished with love and attention. We walked over to him and picked him up.

All of a sudden, he tugged hard at our clothes. He seemed unused to the height now that we had lifted him in our arms. We inferred from his reac-

Sharada Harijan's daughter, Aniska, has begun going to school with Tzu Chi's help.

UNISH KHYAJU

tion that his family must have rarely held him. That was why he was so tense and scared about the height.

Aman wasn't wearing any pants, so we asked his grandma to get him a pair to put on. The grandma called out to Aman's father in the house to fetch a pair of pants for his son. When he brought some out, we tried to put them on Aman, but they were too small. He brought us another pair, but they were too loose at the waist. We eventually decided they would make do for now.

Through all this, Aman's mother, Sharada Harijan, was squatting near us on the porch, listening to everything that was happening. We went over to her and introduced ourselves. We

told her we were from the same charity organization that had distributed rice to them during the pandemic and that we were visiting them because Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of our organization, was concerned about their welfare.

Sharada was visually impaired. She told us her parents had told her that she could still see up until she was five, but after that her vision gradually deteriorated until she went completely blind. Khor Seok Hoon (許淑芬), also a volunteer from Malaysia, turned on the light of her cell phone and asked if Sharada could see the light. She shook her head no.

To Sharada, the world was a total blank—like her windowless bedroom, devoid of any light, any shadow. The colorful world she once was able to see had receded so far back in her memory, it was as if it had never existed.

Showing respect to Master Cheng Yen

After Sharada had told us her story, I put my hand to her cheek and said, “We Tzu Chi volunteers are here. We are here for you.” Sharada reached up to touch my hand, then said to Brother Jupiter, who was interpreting for us, “This hand is so soft.” Her hand soon moved to the bracelet of Buddhist prayer beads I was wearing on my wrist. Jupiter told her many Tzu Chi volunteers wore such a bracelet. Sharada responded with a smile, saying: “The beads must be very precious.”

We told Sharada there was a picture of Master Cheng Yen on the largest bead on the bracelet. As soon as she heard that, she stopped smiling and the expression on her face turned solemn. She bowed her head, and then touched her forehead on the picture of the Master, clearly showing her respect for the Master. We were surprised and touched by her sudden gesture of reverence.

From that day onward, every time we visited, Sharada would walk out of her room with a big smile on her face and look for the bracelets on our wrists to pay her respect to the Master.

Losing her eyesight was just one of the misfortunes of Sharada’s life. Along with her vision, a happy life seemed to be beyond her reach, too.

We asked the grandma of the family why she chose Sharada as her daughter-in-law. She answered, “My son has mental issues, and Sharada can’t see. Since both are disabled, they make a good pair.”

In this family of five, the only healthy one, aside from the grandmother, is a six-year-old daughter, Aniska. She might be the best hope the family has.

A decision

We called on Sharada and her family again the next month, on June 19. Between our visits, we had returned to Malaysia and come back to Nepal. Sharada had been on my mind a lot while back in Malaysia, and I had often dreamed of Aman. But in addition to providing the family with food, we hadn’t yet found other ways to help them.

Sharada held my hand tightly in hers during our visit on June 19. As we sat chatting outside the family’s house, I asked how old she and her husband were. I thought the question was straightforward, but no one seemed to be able to give a definite answer. The grandma said about 30, but Sharada shook her head no. Quite a few neighbors had gathered around us—even one who was passing by on her way to graze her sheep—and everyone put in their two cents as to their age. After an animated discussion, they reached some consensus: Sharada was 35 to 40 years old, and her husband was about 50.

Sharada suddenly gripped my hand tighter, so tight I could feel perspiration forming between our hands. I asked, “How would you like us to help your family?” Sharada answered after a short pause: “You should know by now what my family is like. We’re all illiterate; that’s why we can’t even calculate our own age. I’m shy to ask Tzu Chi of anything, but I do have one wish: I hope my daughter can go to school.” I patted her hands, saying, “We heard you.”

Afterwards, we invited Manoj Dhawal, a community coordinator who had accompanied us to Sharada’s home and who was also taking Tzu Chi volunteer training courses on-line, to come to our hotel to discuss how to help Aniska go to school. As soon as we were all seated, we asked him how much money it would cost to send the girl to school. “Our public schools do not charge any tuition fees,” Manoj said. “You can enroll a child in such a school as long as you have the money to buy uniforms and school supplies. But a family like Sharada’s can’t afford even the uniforms. Besides, they live too far away from a public school.”

“What other options do we have?” we asked.

“There is a private school close to Sharada’s home,” Manoj answered, looking a little awkward, “but you’ll need to pay tuition fees to study there.”

We asked him how much we would need to pay for the registration fee and tuition for three months. Manoj said in a low voice, “About 3,800 Nepalese rupees [US\$30].”



Volunteer Lee Meow Hong made a quick calculation on her cell phone. Looking at the result, we three volunteers from Malaysia looked at each other, then said to Manoj we had decided to help Aniska go to school. We suggested enrolling her in the private school the following day.

We gave Manoj 3,800 Nepalese rupees and wrote a simple letter of authorization right there. After signing on the letter, Manoj paused in thought for a moment. Then he sat down, rolled up the paper bills in his hand, and gripped them tightly. Raising his head, he said to us: “Sharada and I are from the same hometown. Our fathers know each other. I’ve long hoped I could help her in some way, but I didn’t know how.”

He added that during the pandemic, Tzu Chi had distributed rice to Sharada’s family twice and that the family received additional food from the foundation last month—a rich variety of food. “But no matter how much food you give them,” he said, “it will eventually run out. Your decision today to send the child to school is the ultimate way to help the family: only with education can the family have hope.” He had made the statement slowly, with tears in his eyes, his voice choking up.

Tzu Chi volunteers asked how old Sharada was on a visit to the family on June 19, but no one seemed to be able to give a definite answer. Even neighbors joined in the discussion.

LEE MEOW HONG

Going to school

June 22 was Aniska’s first day of school. It was a significant day, not just for the girl and her family, but for us Tzu Chi volunteers as well. Volunteer Unish Khyaju, who had traveled with us to Lumbini from Kathmandu, Nepal’s capital, helped photograph the events of the day. He said, “We should make a toast for the occasion. We’ve done something very meaningful, something so valuable you can’t put a price on it.”

A class director from the school made a special trip to Sharada’s home on a motor scooter to make sure that Aniska could go to the school. With him leading the way, Aniska’s grandma and father, we Tzu Chi volunteers, and community coordinator Manoj accompanied the girl to school. We probably made up the largest team that had ever escorted a child to school in the village.

In fact, the school is within sight from the yard

of Sharada’s home. Many children pass the house on their way to the school every day. But despite its proximity, it might as well have been a hundred miles away for Aniska—she never would have been able to attend because her family couldn’t afford it.

A tailor came to the school on Aniska’s first day to measure her for her school uniform. The girl stood with a look of bewilderment on her face when the tailor looped a measuring tape around her neck. She had no idea what was happening. But she was back to her usual self when a teacher told her she could now enter the classroom to attend class with the other children. She waved to us and said, “Goodbye, Nana!”

“Nana” is what she uses to address her grandma, and the only form of address she knew for a family member other than those for her father and mother. We didn’t know what “family” meant to Aniska, but we were certain she could already feel our care for her; that’s why she called us “Nana.”

Just two short weeks after she started going to school, Aniska looked completely different in appearance. Even volunteer Hong Siew Ling (方繡凌), who often visited the family, could hardly recognize her. She cupped Aniska’s little face in her hands and wondered if this was the same girl who used to stand with her arms akimbo, who didn’t like to wear clothes, and who often ran amok all over the yard of her home.

In the days that followed, Aniska experienced many more “firsts” in her life. We brought new

clothes to her and her brother, Aman, from Kathmandu. She also accompanied her brother in a car to a clinic to see the doctor.

It was the first time Aniska had ever ridden in a car. She looked curiously at the four wheels that could move and listened with great interest to the sounds from the radio. Hardly able to contain her excitement, she talked incessantly with a smile on her face, not caring if the Tzu Chi volunteers riding with her could understand her or not.

Early on the morning of August 5, volunteers Tulsi Narayan Matang and Unish Khyaju made a “spot check” on Aniska. They were concerned she might have had difficulty getting adjusted to school life. They wanted to find out how things were going: would the girl have taken a dislike to school?

As soon as they parked their car, they saw that Aniska was already up and getting ready for school. When Aniska saw the two volunteers, she grabbed her new toothbrush and ran to the water pump. Pumping some water into a cup, she brushed her teeth in earnest. She was showing off her new skill to the volunteers.

When she was done brushing her teeth, she went to her room to change into her school uniform. Then, shouldering her book bag, she set off to school. She looked so refreshed and spirited, walking on a trail amidst green, lush paddy fields. The mere sight of her inspired joy. She was as full of life and vitality as the rice seedlings in the field doing their best to grow.

Aniska (right) is intrigued by the novelty of everything as she rides in a car for the first time, accompanying her brother to the doctor.

LEE MEOW HONG



Medicine for Aman

After meeting Aman on our first visit to Sharada’s home, Dr. Tang Kiat Beng had emphasized the need to take him to the doctor for an examination to find out why he wasn’t developing as well as other children his age. Even though he was three, his legs were still too weak to enable him to stand and walk. Volunteer Lee Meow Hong arranged for the trip. At the doctor, Aman was diagnosed with epilepsy—the result of a fever not treated in time when the boy was younger.

Aman’s epilepsy medicine needed to be imported from India. Siddhartha Gurung, a volunteer in Lumbini, asked a friend to buy the medicine for him in India. When he received the medicine from the friend, he delivered it to Aman.

Aman’s condition gradually stabilized after he started on medicine. He used to suffer from several seizures a day, but the medicine was so effective the fits stopped. He was also able to sleep

Aniska brushes her teeth as she gets ready for school on an early August morning.

UNISH KHYAJU

more soundly, and was finally responding to his family when they called him.

Another happy development was that his family started to pay more attention to him. I still remember that when we visited the family for the first time, we saw how unkempt he was, covered with dirt. We asked his grandma at that time if we could help wash him, but she replied that there was no need for us to take the trouble. “He’ll just get dirty again in no time,” she had said. Hearing that, we realized that was probably how kids were treated locally.

We included the family on our long-term care recipient list in May. Three months later, when Dr. Tang visited the family again, he found that Aman’s legs had become stronger than when he



had first seen him. Happy for the boy, Dr. Tang asked his grandma to help Aman up on his feet whenever she could so that he could practice standing. The grandma did as the doctor had told her. A week later, when we passed Sharada's home, we saw from our car window the grandma helping Aman practice walking. We immediately got out of our car to take a look. As we approached the grandma and grandson, we saw the clear footprints Aman had made on the dirt ground, indicating firmer steps. We were all so excited.

On September 15, Goh Lam Kia (吳南凱), a fellow volunteer from Singapore, and Tulsi Narayan Matang, who among all our volunteers knew Sharada the best, delivered food to the family. From the video they took of their visit, we saw Aman as he was learning to walk. Though his steps weren't very steady yet, we were as happy as could be. Although Aman had missed the best time to go to the doctor, resulting in his inability to speak and walk properly, we sincerely hoped

Volunteer Siddhartha Gurung (right) poses with Sharada and her family after delivering medicine for Aman's epilepsy to the family late on the night of August 1.

COURTESY OF SIDDHARTHA GURUNG

that with our help and with his family now knowing how to take better care of him, he would make good progress every day.

We know there are more people waiting

We don't know how long Sharada had waited until she met Tzu Chi. We don't know either whether there are many more Sharadas in Nepal needing our help. But no matter what, we'll continue to reach out so that we can meet more Sharadas and help make a difference in their lives. That's how we can emulate the Buddha's heart and embrace Master Cheng Yen's mission as our own in the country in which the Enlightened One was born. ❧

Planting Seeds of Kindness

By Marika Gvagvaliia

Photos by Anna Mankus

Taken from the home they knew, these Ukrainian children in Poland are learning positive life skills and values through Tzu Chi's character education program.

Many Ukrainian families with children were forced to leave their homes after Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24. Many of them fled to Poland, where they were forced to start a new life: find housing, start a new job, or begin school in a foreign land. Most children are scared or uncertain in their new environment; some have suffered traumatic experiences escaping the war. In response, Tzu Chi volunteers are providing Tzu Chi's character education program, originally developed in the United States, to assist the children to heal and adapt to their new situation.

Helping Ukrainian refugee children solve life issues

Many Ukrainian mothers in Poland couldn't go to work because of childcare issues, so the Camillian Mission for Social Assistance started a preschool and kindergarten in their shelter in Lomianki, together with the Polish Spynka Kindergarten Animation Group. As a part of their collaboration with the Camillians, Tzu Chi volunteers would often visit the shelter. They noticed that many of the children were scared and withdrawn. Among Tzu Chi's Ukrainian volunteers in Poland, some had worked in education before escaping the war. After discussing ways they could help, they decided to start providing Tzu Chi's character education to the children at the preschool.

The curriculum, which had been developed in English for preschool children in the United States, was translated into Ukrainian and adapted

for differences in culture and educational styles. Sara Kao, Tzu Chi's lead for the mission in Poland, explained: "It was a perfect match." Superior Father Roman Zajac, director of the Camillian monastery in Lomianki, was very happy with Tzu Chi's initiative to conduct the classes, expressing his enthusiastic support for the program.

The character education curriculum is developed for children ages three to six. It's aimed at connecting teaching themes such as Respect, Compassion, Courage, Thankfulness, etc., to everyday life. It teaches the children to cultivate positive qualities and virtues that will help them solve challenges in various areas of their life, whether at



Tzu Chi volunteers with their students of the preschool character education program



home with their family, in kindergarten with other students, in the store, or on the playground.

At the beginning of the project, the children were emotionally closed off, stressed, and still attached to their mothers. Sometimes they cried and didn't want to stay at the kindergarten. But they slowly began to open up over the course of the program, like flowers opening their petals.

"We see the children begin to change"

Kindergarten teacher Oksana Horlenko, who moved from Ukraine to Poland 11 years ago, said: "We are very grateful to the Tzu Chi Foundation and Tzu Chi volunteers for implementing the program and helping children learn what kindness is, and for developing a sense of gratitude in children. We see the results of the work; we see how children begin to change and behave differently."

She gave an example of a girl named Ksyusha, from Kharkiv, who was studying with them. She was constantly afraid at first, very withdrawn; she even sat under the table and was afraid to come out.

Tzu Chi volunteers posing with their students of the character education program while studying the topic "Respect"

"When the volunteers from Tzu Chi started coming," Oksana explained, "we were able to show the child with our adult behavior that she was safe and that she could trust us. Ksyusha is completely different now. She communicates with the other children, and can talk to adults too." Oksana said that she can give many such examples. She believes that the program, activities, and volunteers envelop the children in warmth and kindness.

She added that not every family will return to Ukraine because some have nowhere to return to. "Many people's houses have been destroyed. That's why this joint project was created, so that it would be easier for children to adapt to living here long term. We have one common goal, to show kindness to children, to show them that we need them."

Character education makes an impact

Lesia Stepanenko is a refugee from the city of Netishyn in the Khmelnytskyi region of Ukraine, which is known for its electricity production. As the mother of a kindergarten child—and a kindergarten teacher herself—she shared her impressions of the curriculum: "The Tzu Chi organization came to our kindergarten and offered us their character education training program. We decided to go with it. We met the teachers from Tzu Chi, Ukrainian-speaking girls, with higher pedagogical education and extensive experience. They teach the children to speak words of courtesy and to help each other. As a teacher, I see positive results. Now, when there is a conflict, the children try to come to an agreement among themselves."

She said that she can also see the results as a mother. Her youngest son, Zakhar, for example, has begun to negotiate with his elder brother, ten-year-old Makar. Zakhar also helps at home, joins in the cleaning, and prepares salads with her. "Zakhar has started to thank me; he hugs me," said Lesia. "I can feel that the child has a warmth that he wants to share. It is very important for me."

Now, she feels reassured. "My children have found a common language. I think it is due to the fact that we transferred all the positive experiences we received in the kindergarten to the family." She pointed out that Makar has noticed changes in his younger brother too. The older brother said that Zakhar has started helping him more, listening to him, sharing and playing with him. He also mentioned that the relations between them have become warmer.



Dina Brazhnyk with a student of the program. Children openly demonstrate their emotions during learning.

Another mother and a kindergarten teacher, Alyona Chaikovska, from Dnipro, Ukraine, learned about the kindergarten from Facebook and started taking her youngest four-year-old son there.

Alyona said her son really likes the kindergarten. He's met friends from Ukraine who speak his language, so the place is like a part of home. "And we learned that character education is taught in the kindergarten," said Alyona. "The children are taught to be kind, compassionate, grateful, polite." She said her son now often says "thank you," asks permission when he wants to take something, doesn't scatter things around, and cleans up after himself.

"For him, all this is interesting as an element of play, but he transfers these concepts to his own life. As a mother, I am pleased that my child is polite. And he has learned to negotiate with his peers." She is grateful to Tzu Chi for the program activities. "They are very interesting and useful, and the children like them."

Beautiful flowers of kindness

Dina Brazhnyk, a Tzu Chi volunteer and program teacher, told about her acquaintance with Tzu Chi. She had worked as a teacher in Ukraine and had started working for the foundation as a temporary volunteer, but after learning about the character education program for children, she became a permanent volunteer.

As Dina explains it, "The program is about respect, good actions, and humanity. We teach children how to behave in society, how to behave in the family, and how to love each member of the family."

She said she values working in the program and that it really benefits the Ukrainian children. "The children arrived very tired, withdrawn, aggressive. Every child has his own story. At first they didn't want to communicate with us, but gradually they opened up.

"We still have a lot to learn from Tzu Chi philosophy and to teach it to our children. These concepts have a very positive impact for the future of the children, and of the adults as well." She felt that she learned a lot from Tzu Chi and can now pass it on to the students.

Dina points out that if you show children kindness from a young age, they will grow up to be good people. She explained it with a simple analogy: "If you plant a seed in the ground and take good care of it, a beautiful flower will grow." And that's exactly what these Tzu Chi teachers are doing: planting seeds of kindness and love to produce a field of beautiful flowers.



The Ability to Listen

By Cheah Lee Hwa

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

There is more to listening than simply hearing another person. Listening involves compassion, empathy, and the willingness to extend understanding to another.

Many years ago, a student of mine told me he heard a goose laughing. I teased him for being inattentive, telling him that geese don't laugh—they honk. And just recently, a friend of mine began losing his temper frequently, snapping at others. I figured something was wrong with him and tried to ignore him. He complained a lot too, which drove me further away from him.

What is the thread connecting these two stories? It's that they show I lacked the ability to really listen, something that my student who could hear the goose laughing probably possessed.

What is the ability to listen? A person who can listen patiently and compassionately never derides others for what they say. A person who can listen

attentively and sincerely never turns a deaf ear to others; they hear what is really troubling the speaker and can detect their fear and anxiety. They can even hear cries for help from people whose temper has gotten the better of them.

In fact, most people who have a bad temper or who like to complain are that way because they have not received enough love in their lives. When you listen with sincerity, attention, and compassion, you encourage them to give voice to their problems. Even if what they say is full of misguided views and prejudices, they very likely will become more peaceful because of your patient listening ear.

Many people take their problems to Dharma Master Cheng Yen and ask for her advice and guid-

ance. You can sometimes even see them, deeply troubled by their problems, crying in front of the Master. But it often happens that just a couple of words from the Master can soothe their pain, perhaps even make them laugh through their tears. How does the Master do it? She stresses the importance of observing and listening with compassion and wisdom.

The Master once explained the importance of listening with care by telling a story about an impoverished woman and Ananda, one of the Buddha's disciples.

In the story, the impoverished woman took a detour whenever she saw the Enlightened One coming her way; she did her best to always avoid him. Everyone was perplexed by her behavior and

thought it very strange. After all, the Buddha was held in high esteem by many people. They couldn't understand how the woman could dislike him so much that she went out of her way to elude him.

The Buddha explained that the woman's behavior was because he had failed to form good affinities with her in a previous life. Ananda, on the other hand, was just the opposite. He had formed very good affinities with the woman.

To prove this, the Buddha instructed Ananda to go to the woman. He told his disciple that the woman would follow him back to himself. Though doubtful, Ananda did as he was told. As the Buddha had predicted, the woman followed Ananda to the Buddha obediently.

The Enlightened One then told everyone what had happened between the three of them in a former life.

Many, many eons ago, two monks went begging for alms together. On their way, they saw a woman crying. The monk who walked in front asked the woman why she was crying so sadly. The woman said: "My husband passed away, and my son died in an accident too. I have no one to rely on now. That's why I'm so sad." The monk told the woman: "Death is just a part of life. There is no need to be sad and cry about it." Having said that, he went on his way. As soon as he walked away, the woman began crying even harder.

Seeing this, the second monk approached the woman and asked what was troubling her. The woman repeated what she had just said to the first monk. The second monk took great pity on her and tried to soothe her the best he could. He took out a handkerchief and handed it to the woman for her to wipe her tears away. With a voice full of compassion, he encouraged her to be strong. Drying her tears, the woman felt greatly soothed. She felt this spiritual cultivator in front of her truly understood her and empathized with her grief.

The Buddha told everyone that the first monk was him, and the second was Ananda. "I was too rational. Ananda was more empathetic and compassionate. The good affinities he formed with the woman planted the seed that caused joy to rise in her heart at the sight of him."

By listening with compassion, Ananda gave the woman comfort and relieved her pain, sowing a good karmic seed in the process. We can all learn from Ananda and try to be a person who listens with understanding and brings relief to others. We may help someone through a hard time in their life, while at the same time forming positive affinities with them. ❀

Tzu Chi Repairs Quake-Damaged Homes

A magnitude 6.8 earthquake rocked eastern Taiwan on September 18, 2022, damaging over 900 homes in Taitung and Hualien counties. Tzu Chi volunteers reached out to residents needing assistance to carry out repairs.

Volunteers at work on October 6 in a home damaged in the 9/18 quake. The tremor had badly cracked the floor. The volunteers first had to use power tools to remove the damaged floor tiles before new tiles could be installed.

LIN JIA-RU



Here We Are, Yuli

By Ding Bi-hui

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Yang Kai-cheng

They've come from all over Taiwan—with backgrounds in masonry, civil engineering, metalworking, or plumbing—to speed up recovery efforts after an earthquake.

It was early October in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. Two weeks had passed since a massive earthquake had hit eastern Taiwan, on September 18. The train station in the town of Yuli, less than 50 minutes by car from the epicenter, was all hustle and bustle. One tour bus after another pulled up to the station, paused for a few minutes to pick up passengers, then pulled away again just as quickly. The tremor had rendered the next train stop on the line out-of-service due to damage, so the buses were shuttling transfer passengers to the next available train station.

A similarly busy scene could be seen in front of the Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall in Yuli, though the atmosphere there was quite different from that in front of the train station. Volunteers from all over Taiwan had arrived at the Jing Si Hall by car, on bike, or on foot, carrying tools with them. They were all there for one purpose: to carry out repairs to homes damaged in the tremor.

On the road across from Yuli Elementary School, the back walls behind several households had collapsed or were badly cracked. Braving the hot sun, a team of volunteers started working there to

rebuild or repair the walls. While some set out to take down damaged walls or make repairs, others used wheelbarrows to dispose of the masonry waste. Everyone was absorbed in their work, their faces soon covered in sweat and their blue uniforms soaked.

Volunteer Cai Ming-hong (蔡明鴻), from Taipei, northern Taiwan, explained that an advance team had assessed damage at the site on September 29. His group launched the repairs on October 2. They were using corrugated metal sheets and C-beams to repair or erect new walls. Such building materials were relatively easy to install and the finished walls would be more durable and earthquake-resistant than the original structures.

Cai said that only two families on the road had originally applied for repairs, but when their neighbors saw Tzu Chi volunteers visiting the neighborhood and learned about the foundation's repair services, they asked for help repairing their places too. In the end, eight families received help from Tzu Chi.

Because most of the tools used on-site were prepared by the volunteers themselves, some-



Repairs to Quake-Damaged Homes in Hualien

Six hundred and sixty households in Hualien County reported damage to their homes in the aftermath of the 9/18 earthquake.

- ▶ The county government asked Tzu Chi to help 222 of those 660 households repair their homes.
- ▶ Of the 222 households, 151 were located in Yuli.
- ▶ Tzu Chi started the repairs on October 1. By October 18, work at 98 homes had been completed.
- ▶ A total of 1,974 volunteer shifts were logged during that time.



times there was not enough to go around. When that happened, Cai immediately went to purchase some out-of-pocket. He didn't mind spending his own money. He said it was more important that their work could be carried out smoothly. Besides, he knew the tools would come in handy again.

Jiang Chuan-yi (江傳義), from New Taipei City, northern Taiwan, is a plumber and electrician. He left behind his work—and opportunities to make money—in order to volunteer in Yuli this time. To him, helping others is more important than making money. He was thankful to his customers for being willing to wait for him.

Huang Zheng-xian (黃正賢), also from New Taipei City, has participated in many disaster relief operations before, including those after the 9/21 earthquake, Typhoon Morakot, and Typhoon Soudelor. He knows impermanence can strike at any time, so he always tells himself to seize every chance to serve. He is grateful for every opportunity to give. He knows that when it comes to the right thing, one should just do it.

It took five days to complete the reconstruction of the walls for the eight households. More than 30 volunteers participated in the work. Zhao Qi-wen (趙琦文), the chief of the neighborhood, visited the site every day. Sometimes she brought drinks for the volunteers, sometimes face masks or goggles. She never failed to remind the volunteers to be safe. "Thanks to Master Cheng Yen, and to all of you volunteers," she said. "Without

Liu Qiu-ling (劉秋伶), a staffer for the Tzu Chi Department of Charity Mission Development in Hualien, briefs volunteers on a repair project Tzu Chi undertook after the 9/18 earthquake.

XU JIN-SHENG

Tzu Chi's help, our residents would have been quite at a loss for what to do."

Zhao recalled that she received a phone call from a resident soon after the earthquake. The caller said amidst sobs that a wall at her home had collapsed and that the floor had cracked. She said she was scared and didn't know what to do. Zhao comforted her on the phone and told her she had had a meeting with people from Tzu Chi and they had said they would help. The next evening, the same resident called Zhao again. There were no sobs this time. Instead, the caller told her with a hint of a smile in her voice that Tzu Chi volunteers had started making repairs to her home.

Mrs. Chen was one of the residents who benefited from the repair work offered by Tzu Chi. Knowing that the repairs to the walls on her road would come to an end on October 6, she opened her door early that morning, waiting for the Tzu Chi team to arrive. She explained that she had had to work when the repairs were being made, so she had never met the volunteers. She was very happy about the new wall rebuilt by them behind her home. She happened to have the day off, so she was finally able to say "thank you" to the volunteers in person.



Are You From Here?

By Zhang Li-yun

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Yang Kai-cheng

Even the tiniest sound would scare them after an earthquake toppled a wall at their home, but help from a group of strangers set their minds at ease.

After a strong earthquake rocked eastern Taiwan on September 18, Tzu Chi volunteers made home visits in Yuli, one of the hardest-hit areas, to extend care to affected residents. Volunteers presented them with gift bags or emergency cash, and determined if they needed further help. On September 27, the Tzu Chi Foundation signed a memorandum of understanding with the Hualien County government to help repair homes in the disaster areas, in con-

junction with the TSMC Charity Foundation and other organizations. Tzu Chi decided to start the project by making repairs to homes with minor damage. A repair team of volunteers from various parts of Taiwan launched their work on October 1. The foundation's construction department aided their efforts by finding four business-

Volunteers rebuild a wall for Mr. Zhou on October 6.





es that sold building materials so that the volunteers could obtain what they needed to get on with their work.

On October 3, a group of volunteers arrived at the Taichang neighborhood in Yuli, accompanied by the neighborhood chief, Li Jia-liang (李家樑). They were there to visit 12 households that had just been added to the list of families who required help with repairs to their quake-damaged homes. The volunteers were checking what repairs would be needed for the families and what building materials they'd have to prepare. Mrs. Wang, 72, belonged to one of the 12 families.

"Are you from here?" Mrs. Wang asked one of the volunteers that had come to her home.

"No, we are from Taichung," the volunteer answered.

"What? You came all the way from Taichung [to help us]?!" exclaimed Mrs. Wang. Surprised and visibly moved, she gave the volunteer a sudden hug, leaving the latter happily flustered.

Scared survivors

Mrs. Wang lives with her daughter, Ms Wang, in a house behind the Yuli branch of Taipei Veterans General Hospital. Their house was built in the 1970s. It had weathered quite a few typhoons over the course of the years but was still in relatively good condition. Sadly, it had been damaged during the earthquake this time. The tremor had toppled their front yard wall, scattering the ground with debris and giving the mother and daughter a good scare. The quake left cracks in walls inside their house too.

Before the quake, the mother and daughter would fall soundly asleep at night listening to the rustling of leaves on an old camphor tree outside their front yard wall. After the quake, however—especially with the wall collapsed—any sound rattled their nerves and disturbed their sleep.

When Tzu Chi volunteers visited their home for the on-site checkup on October 3, volunteer Zhang Fu-jin (張富進), who works in construction, suggested to Ms Wang that they take down the remaining part of the toppled wall and replace it with one built of corrugated metal sheets and C-beams. Ms Wang said she was okay with any

After Tzu Chi initiated the earthquake repair project, volunteers visited the households in need of repairs to assess their damage. They inventoried the items to be fixed so that the required building materials could be prepared.



A volunteer repaints Ms Wang's home.

kind of wall, as long as there would be no space after the wall was completed to allow things like snakes to crawl into their home. She said that she and her mom once saw a large snake crawl past the entrance to their home in the night, frightening them out of their wits. Zhang assured her that once the wall was built, there would be no space or gaps to allow any snakes in.

Four volunteers arrived at the Wangs' home early the next morning to take down the remaining part of the wall. Zou Xian-liang (鄒顯亮) was the leader of the team. He had been diagnosed with coronary artery blockage about seven years ago, and had had two stents placed in his heart afterwards. He continued volunteering for Tzu Chi after he recovered. When asked about the condition of his health, he said that he exercised regularly and his recycling work kept him physically active too, so he was doing quite well. Speaking of the mission this time, he said, "We communicated with the owners of the houses before carrying out any repairs to their homes. We intend to give them five-star service. We hope they will be happy with our work."

Li Xue-lin (李學林), wearing a volunteer vest, picked up broken bricks from the dismantled wall and put them in garbage bags to be transported with a wheelbarrow to the entrance of the alley for disposal. A retired teacher, he had joined Tzu Chi's repair project at the invitation of his former colleague, Yang Yi-ming (楊易明), who is a Tzu

Chi volunteer. The two men had worked together building temporary homes for a Tzu Chi project launched after the 9/21 earthquake 23 years ago. They hadn't been in contact for some time, but a photo from that time prompted Yang to reach out and invite his former coworker to join the current earthquake repair project.

More than two decades had passed since the 9/21 earthquake, and Yang was sad to see impermanence strike again, causing people to suffer. "Master Cheng Yen said it is a blessing to give," said Yang. "Since we're healthy and able, we must do our best to help so that the lives of the quake victims can return to normal as soon as possible."

The two retired teachers worked together to clean up after the other half of their team, and provided assistance as needed. All four men were in their 70s or 80s, but were still nimble. Volunteer Zhang Chen-jia (張宸嘉), the fourth member of the quartet, was a little hard of hearing. He had been doing a little farming after he retired to stay in shape. Speaking of his volunteer work, he said, "I consider it my duty as a Tzu Chi volunteer to do whatever work that comes my way. Besides, it helps me build up my physical strength."

Another household

The same group of four men, joined by a fifth volunteer, 81-year-old Shi Jiao-yan (施教岩), arrived that afternoon at the home of another quake victim, Mr. Zhou, to dismantle another wall. The wall was located in an alley so narrow the volunteers' work was made more difficult. Further compounding the lack of space was that the surrounding area was overgrown with grass and cluttered with objects. Even so, the volunteers quickly set to work, dismantling the wall and cleaning up the masonry waste. Li Xue-lin, aided by Shi Jiao-yan, disposed of the debris with a wheelbarrow.

Mr. Zhou, in his 50s, felt a little uncomfortable seeing the group of older people, their hair gray and faces laced with wrinkles and speckled with age spots, doing the hard labor for him. He quickly retrieved a lawn mower from a storeroom and began to mow the grass near the wall to make it easier for the volunteers to work.

Volunteer Zou Xian-liang reminded everyone to be sure to tidy up everything when their work was done so that the area would look good afterwards. Hearing him, Mr. Zhou said politely, "There is no need. I'm grateful enough you came to take down the wall for me. To be honest, I'm surprised about this repair service by Tzu Chi."

Another team of volunteers arrived at Mr. Zhou's home early on the morning of October 6 to build a new wall. Upon their arrival, they found that he had already laid the first row of bricks. "I worked until after 11 last night," he said. "I wanted to save you some work." To ensure the quality of the finished wall—that it would not only be sturdy but also look good—the volunteers stretched a mason's line to aid their work. Mr. Zhou took out his cell phone and told the volunteers that his sister had sent him a text message telling him to be sure to thank Tzu Chi.

Minds at ease

The corrugated metal sheets and C-beams needed to rebuild the wall at Ms Wang's home arrived at 2:30 on the afternoon of October 5. Seven volunteers who had just arrived in Yuli at noon that day immediately began installing the wall at the mother and daughter's place.

The seven volunteers often take part in Tzu Chi's emergency response work. Whenever a disaster strikes, they go wherever they are needed to help out. When they learned this time that the foundation was calling for volunteers to implement the repair project, they knew they had to come to give a hand.

To his dismay, volunteer Qiu Ming-wen (邱銘文) found the electric welding machine he was going to use refused to work when he turned it on. He suspected it was due to insufficient voltage. Just as he was beginning to worry what to do, neighborhood chief Li Jia-liang happened to drop by to check on the volunteers. He took Qiu to a neighboring home to see if they could borrow electricity from the neighbor.

Mr. Wang, the owner of the neighboring house, walked over to Ms Wang's home to better understand the situation. Qiu said to Mr. Wang, "I was thinking if nothing else worked out, I'd go buy some electrical cords and come back tomorrow to set things up so we could work." Mr. Wang told him he had a two-in-one generator and welding unit at home, and offered to have someone bring it over so the work could continue without delay. "You came all the way from Taichung to help us," said Mr. Wang. "How can I, a neighbor right next door, not do what I can to help?"

Time went by quickly. Soon it was five-thirty and dusk began to fall. "We'll work overtime today," the volunteers on-site said. "Get someone to bring us some boxed meals for dinner." As darkness fell, staffers from Tzu Chi's Da Ai TV quickly provided some illumination equipment



they typically used in their filming work for the volunteers. With everyone's help, the wall was completed later that evening.

"Are you happy with our work?" a volunteer asked Mrs. Wang, who answered by giving the volunteer a hug. The older woman and her daughter had been watching the volunteers work in their yard. "I feel safer now with the wall rebuilt," Mrs. Wang said. "My daughter and I can sit in the yard again chatting under the camphor tree."

Her daughter was all smiles too. "I never expected Tzu Chi would send people to help us," she said. "I can rest easy now knowing no snakes can get in."

Another team of volunteers arrived the next morning to repaint the house, both inside and out. They were all in their 70s or 80s too, but this group was from Miaoli, northern Taiwan. They repainted the walls as well as the skirting boards. Volunteer Zhang Huan-qi (張煥奇) said, "Since

Mrs. Wang, 72, hugs a volunteer to thank her and her fellow volunteers for coming all the way from Taichung to rebuild a wall at her home.

we repainted the walls, we had to give the skirting boards a makeover too. They were too dark, so we repainted them fuchsia to match the color of the sofas better. It also looks more refreshing this way."

Mrs. Wang was looking a lot better on this day, no longer wearing the same scared look as she did before. Neighborhood chief Li said that many residents in his neighborhood felt helpless after the earthquake—they didn't know where to start to fix their homes. "Thankfully, our county magistrate asked for help from Tzu Chi," he said. "We also owe a big thanks to Master Cheng Yen, and to the volunteers who traveled such a long distance from central Taiwan to help us." ❀

New Pipes Deliver Water and Happiness

Text and photo by Shi Jin-yu
Translated by Tang Yau-yang

The 9/18 quake damaged his home and disrupted his water supply. Tzu Chi volunteers put in nearly a hundred shifts in six days and restored his home.

“Unbelievable!” said Mr. Wei, 80. “I didn’t expect anyone to help, but as it turned out, not only did you come to help, but you did a better job than I had expected. Its quality is better than I could have imagined! Words can’t begin to express how touched I am!”

An earthquake struck eastern Taiwan on the afternoon of September 18, damaging Mr. Wei’s home and shaking him out of his daily routine. Many things in his house fell, his water pipes burst, and part of a brick wall on one side of his yard collapsed. “The most painful thing is the broken water pipes,” he said. “I have no water to use.”

Mr. Wei lives in the Taichang neighborhood in Yuli, Hualien County. His wife works in Taipei, and their two children are in college out of town. He can’t get around freely because of his age and a weakness in his right leg, so after the quake he could only fetch a little water from a neighbor to brush his teeth and wash his face. He used the toilet at the train station to relieve himself and went to Antong Hot Spring to take a shower. To keep himself hydrated, he drank bottled water. After seven days of living this way, the administrators of his community got someone to connect plastic water pipes for him to bring water back to his house. But the plastic pipes were just a temporary solution; he needed something more permanent. Luckily, a team of Tzu Chi volunteers who were professionals went to his house to solve his water and other problems once and for all.

A professional team in sync

On the afternoon of October 3, eight volunteers came to Mr. Wei’s house to survey the damage.

They found broken water pipes, a collapsed wall in the yard, cracked floor tiles in the dining room and kitchen, and a damaged water tank. They decided to repair them according to Mr. Wei’s needs.

During their visit, they noticed a piece of wood placed under a mat at the foot of the stairs leading up to the second floor. It turns out that the starter step—the first riser of the staircase—was as high as 30 centimeters (12 inches), making it hard for Mr. Wei to take that first step upstairs. The elderly man had created his makeshift solution to make that first step easier. The volunteers decided to add a step to the staircase to make it easier and safer for him to use the stairs.

The next day, more than a dozen volunteers started the repair work. First, they cleared fallen leaves from the yard and disposed of some roof tiles Mr. Wei said he wouldn’t need any more. Lin Qiu-ben (林秋本), a seasoned electrician and plumber, worked together with his son, Lin Yu-xun (林鈺勛), to measure the distance from the wall in the yard all the way up to the water tank at the top of the house.

It is more than 400 kilometers (250 miles) from the Lins’ home in Taichung to Yuli. Lin Qiu-ben had originally planned to come alone for the repair project, but his son didn’t feel comfortable with his father driving such a long distance by himself, so he decided to accompany him.

Yu-xun, just 22, has been working with his father for five years, and he is accustomed to working quickly and professionally. He found that the volunteers worked relatively inefficiently. He said, “When we arrived at the site, we had to wait on the materials for the job, and half a day



was gone just like that.” However, he soon discovered that the volunteers made up for their less-than-ideal efficiency with a large number of workers. If he or his father needed anything, a volunteer would be around to fetch it for them, saving them time. Lin Yu-xun felt a great sense of respect for the volunteers, hard at work and sweating profusely in the sweltering heat.

Seeing the volunteers working in the yard, a neighbor standing on the third floor of her home said to them through a window, “Thank you for helping Mr. Wei repair his house.” She said that after the earthquake, she had seen Wei twice climb up an old wooden ladder to the top floor to inspect the water tank. That worried her greatly, so she was relieved the volunteers were now fixing things for him.

Other volunteers inside the house were getting ready to remove the damaged floor tiles. They had bought a large piece of plastic sheet beforehand, and after cutting it to size, covered the things in the kitchen, such as utensils and cabinets, to keep them clean and dust free while they worked. They also sealed the opening to the stairwell that led to the second floor to prevent dust from getting

After the quake, only air emerged from the faucet in Mr. Wei’s bathroom. Lin Qiu-ben cleaned the filter and took care of it in no time. Now water flows out of the faucet like rapids after a good rain.

upstairs. Once they had sealed and covered everything, they used power tools to remove the damaged floor tiles. Their work was ear-piercing and very dusty, but the volunteers were so focused on the tasks at hand they seemed oblivious.

Mr. Wei watched the volunteers work and took pictures to send to his wife, who reminded him: “Remember to buy some snacks for the volunteers.” He told her in response, “They brought their own. The volunteers work in three teams—one team does the repair work, another cleans up, and the other keeps up with the supply. They are like a well-organized army. I don’t know where I can be of help to them.”

In fact, Mr. Wei had already bought two packs of bottled water for the volunteers. When he noticed that the volunteers had also brought their own water, he quickly said to them, “You must drink the water I have here.” The volunteers

couldn't bear to turn him down, so they gladly accepted his hospitality.

Nobody is idle

The volunteers weren't idle for a moment, not even while waiting for the materials to arrive. They tried to make themselves useful, looking for other work to do, while they waited.

The trees on either side of the yard were resplendent with luxuriant foliage, but they were interfering with the power line and hanging over the sheet metal roof of the next house. After gaining permission from Wei, volunteers trimmed down the trees. The ditch by the flowerbed was originally covered with wooden planks. Volunteers brought cement boards that others no longer needed and laid them over the planks. Mr. Wei said with satisfaction, "The wooden planks were beginning to rot, giving a little when I walked on them. Now I feel safe."

Outside the wall at the yard were some plants, but they were being overtaken by overgrown weeds. Volunteers eradicated the weeds and used bricks to border the flowers and other plants, turning it into a beautiful, eye-catching flowerbed. They also cleaned up the area by the roadside. Volunteer Zhou Ming-zhong (周明鐘), a carpenter, even repaired three chairs while the materials were being readied. Mr. Wei said happily: "Now our whole family can sit comfortably in the chairs and have nice chats again!"

The water tank on the top floor had been dented, and the metal frame supporting the water tank had also been bent out of shape. Sheet metal technicians Xu Shu-lan (徐樹蘭) and Zeng Ming-song (曾明松) worked together to repair the tank and metal frame. While they were working on the top floor, they had nothing overhead to shade them from the sun, so the two sweated profusely and were soon soaked. Xu, 74, took out from his pocket a piece of tissue paper, created two makeshift ear plugs, and stuffed them into his ears. Then he picked up a wrench and crawled into the water tank, where he tapped out and smoothed the dented area. His work made sounds like a giant drum being beaten.

The public water system does not extend to Mr. Wei's neighborhood, so Wei and his neighbors had been using mountain spring water. Consequently, thick sludge had accumulated in Wei's water tank. The two volunteers dumped the muddy water out of the water tank. Then Xu went back in with a bamboo broom to clean up the inside before the two of them righted the water tank.

After returning the water tank to its proper position, they discovered that the connection between the tank outlet and the pipeline to the house was leaking. Zeng went into the water tank, and the two, one inside and the other outside, worked together to secure the connection. Their clothes were all wet and filthy by that time. When they were finally done with everything, they took photos for Mr. Wei to check. He said after careful inspection: "You guys fixed it very well." His approval made their day after an afternoon's hard work.

While Xu and Zeng were repairing the water tank at the top of the house, Lin Qiu-ben and his son were working to connect the intake pipes to the tank and the plumbing to the rest of the house. When they were done, Lin asked his son to go downstairs to open the inflowing water pipe. As soon as the pipe was opened, a clattering sound came out of the water tank. Mr. Wei was standing on the third-floor balcony, watching them work. Lin asked Wei, "Can you hear the sound of water entering?" Mr. Wei said, "Yes! The water tank is fixed, and you replaced my buried pipelines with above-ground pipes. I'll never have a problem locating plumbing issues again!" Soon it was five o'clock in the afternoon, and the volunteers were scheduled to call it a day, but Lin Qiu-ben was still dealing with some water and electricity problems in the two bathrooms. Fortunately, with his expertise and experience, he soon resolved the issues without incident.

It's like Chinese New Year

On the fourth day of the repair project, Hsu Chen-wei (徐榛蔚), the magistrate of Hualien County, stopped by to have a first-hand look at the repair project. Mr. Wei told the magistrate that the Tzu Chi volunteers had done a great job putting his house back in shape. He said that when they were working on the wall in the yard, they had even taken the time to clean out a ditch by his house that had been clogged by mud. "They do everything very well," he said. "My property has had a complete makeover."

The magistrate entered his house and saw the bright floor tiles in the dining room. She said to Mr. Wei, "They look brand-new! You're going to have a good Chinese New Year." Mr. Wei said with a smile, "I feel like I'm already celebrating the New Year."

That afternoon, an in-home helper came to Wei's house for a scheduled visit to help the older man with his housework. As soon as she walked through the door, she said in surprise, "Did I enter



the wrong house? It's so beautiful! What happened?" She couldn't help but give the work a thumbs up after learning that the makeover was due to the volunteers who had come to repair the damage after the earthquake.

On October 8, volunteers grouted the tiles. Pan Sheng (潘勝), who had nearly 50 years' experience laying tiles, had had spinal surgery at the beginning of the year. He had thought that there wouldn't be many professional tile layer volunteers who would be participating in the repair project, so he told himself he had to come and do as much as he could. When his back got sore from squatting for too long, he'd stand up to rest.

Volunteers first walked into Mr. Wei's house for a preliminary damage survey on October 3. After they worked close to a hundred shifts, all the earthquake damage to the house had been repaired. October 8 was their last day at Wei's house. When they were getting ready to leave at the end of the project, Mr. Wei gave them an open invitation: "If you ever come to Yuli, you must

The floor tiles in Mr. Wei's dining room and kitchen were badly cracked. Volunteers worked together to remove the damaged tiles and install new ones.

YANG KAI-CHENG

come to stay at my house. I have reserved five rooms for you."

On their way back to central Taiwan, where the volunteers lived, Gan Qing-wen (甘清文), the coordinator for the volunteer team, received a message from Mr. Wei. A condensed version of his message read: "On September 18, the wall fell, the floor cracked, the water tank collapsed, and an old man was lost and helpless. Volunteers in blue and white uniforms descended on my house, helping me the best they could. My house was reborn with their work. Their righteous acts frequently choked me up."

In this short but powerful message, Mr. Wei provided the best testimony to the mindfulness and impact of these dedicated volunteers. ❀

The Power of Unity

Kunshen Recycling Station

Text and photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Leaving the city center of Tainan, southern Taiwan, I headed toward the southwestern coast of the island. My destination, the Tzu Chi Kunshen Recycling Station, is tucked away in a small countryside alley in the village of Sikunshen, Tainan. With a hint of salt in the air and sea breezes flowing, Sikunshen possesses a charm wholly distinct from that of a bustling city with lots of traffic and a cacophony of noise. The warm hospitality of the local people is especially unforgettable.

There aren't many volunteers at the Kunshen Recycling Station, but they work great together. Instead of being responsible for sorting just one kind of recyclables, they each fill in wherever they are needed. They are quick to step up to the plate with regards to the various types of work at the station.

Team leader Wu Qiu-yan (吳秋燕) broke into a bright smile when four other volunteers took their position next to her and posed for a group photo during my visit on May 9. The four encircled Wu, who beamed like the sun from the middle of the group. Seeing Wu's radiant smile, I recalled her telling me how they—the group of volunteers working there—had created this recycling station from scratch. They used to work in a crude open-sided structure, consisting of four posts supporting a black-net canopy. They had no access to running water or electricity, and it was especially hard when it rained or when the wind blew hard. After moving locations twice, they finally settled in the present location and built the station up. Wu is deeply grateful to the volunteers who have joined her in taking up recycling work for Tzu Chi at one time or another over the last 20-plus years. Together, they have made the Kunshen Recycling Station possible. Along the way, they have been there for each other like a close-knit family, keeping each other company on the worthy path of environmental protection.



Team leader Wu Qiu-yan smiles brightly, surrounded by fellow volunteers (clockwise from top left) Cai Yu-mei (蔡玉梅), Cao Chen Ai-zhen, Li Yue-li (李月里), and Cai Zhang Zhen-e (蔡張真娥).



Doing the Earth a Good Turn

The oldest volunteer at the recycling station is Zheng Chen Qing (鄭陳青), 86. I struck up a conversation with her and learned that she was born and raised locally and used to sell fish in a market. Now that she is older and no longer needs to work to make a living, she puts her time to good use by reclaiming reusable resources at the station. Though she is advanced in years, her eyes are still sharp. In fact, she shows a proficiency in her work that could easily exceed that of younger volunteers. When I approached her this day, she was deftly using a utility knife to remove plastic sheaths from electric cables to retrieve the copper wires inside. The cables came in various lengths and widths, but she tackled them all with just the same ease.

Cao Chen Ai-zhen (曹陳愛貞), who was folding and stacking old newspapers, was working in the same space. I stood aside and observed her for a while, impressed by the meticulous care with which she went about her work. She peeled one sheet after another of newspaper from an untidy pile, folded them neatly one by one, and then stacked them into neat piles. When she was done stacking a pile, she checked the edges and patted on them until everything was as even and aligned as possible. Only then would she tie the stack into a secure bundle and call it a job done. She applied such care to her work because neat piles of newspapers sell for a higher price.

Seeing how our recycling volunteers work patiently and tirelessly to reclaim reusable resources is always a touching experience. A cleaner, beautiful world requires everyone to work together. Our recycling volunteers surely are doing their best to help.



Warm, Beautiful Home

I made several trips to the recycling station in the spring of 2022. Back at home, my mind was immediately transported back to the station as I reviewed the photos I had taken. I remembered how one morning, carrying my camera, I had walked quietly towards the sorting area for PET bottles. My steps were slow and light; I didn't want to disturb what I was seeing in front of me. Every volunteer was so engrossed in their task that a tranquil quietness had descended on the area. There was no chatting at all. All I could hear were the birds from the trees nearby and the sound of PET bottles bouncing against each other as they were tossed on the pile.

It was spring, and the Madagascar almond trees at the station were beautiful, sporting luxuriant leaves of a lighter shade of green. According to volunteers at the station, the trees were planted 16 or 17 years ago. They have grown four meters (13 feet) tall by now. "We used to have to shelter from the sun under umbrellas while we were sorting recyclables here," said a volunteer. "Now with the shady trees and roofs built with aluminum materials provided by volunteer A-yu, we no longer have to worry about the hot sun."

With one heart, people at the station have created a warm, beautiful "home" where they can gather together for recycling work. They not only give of their time and strength to make work at the station possible, but have donated building materials to make the station better. I was touched by the power of everyone working together and pitching in with the same sense of purpose guiding them forward.





Volunteers Cai Zhang Zhen-e (left) and Li Yue-li work perfectly together in the glass bottle sorting area.



Volunteers in the PET bottle sorting area. From left: Zhang Jin-zhi (張金治), Wei Bao-cun (魏寶村), Yang Jin-hui (楊金惠), and Ye Xiu-qin (葉秀琴)

Close-Knit

During one of my trips to the station, team leader Wu Qiu-yan suddenly asked me a question: "Do you know the most distinctive feature of our recycling station?" Before I could think of a response, she answered her own question: "It's 'unity.'" Unity has always been Dharma Master Cheng Yen's expectation for her disciples. The volunteers at the Kunshen Recycling Station have lived up to that expectation. They join efforts with other like-minded volunteers and give in unison for the good of the Earth.

Serving at the station, you often get to snack on team leader Wu's signature stewed dried tofu. Volunteers are often served sliced fruit or other food to replenish their energy, too. Some volunteers work here every day from early morning until late afternoon, bringing their own packed lunch so that they can get more work done. They remind each other to check their blood pressure, looking out for each other's health.

There are more than ten male volunteers sharing the responsibility of collecting recyclables by truck for the station. Some set out for their collection trips before four in the morning; others start at noon or in the evening. Some collect on the weekends or even during holidays. Though the volunteers all have to work and attend to their own families, they still make time to volunteer. Wu is touched by their spirit of service and is most thankful to them. "I'm very proud of this group of volunteers," she kept saying.

I felt again and again the strong bond between the volunteers there during my time at the station. In them I see the power of cohesion, of unity and synergy. They are a happy, close family, bonded not by blood, but a shared sense of mission. ☸



From left: Xue Yue-zhu (薛月珠), Cao Chen Ai-zhen, Ye Yang-ming (葉揚名), Luo Chao-rong (羅朝榮), Cai Jin-mu (蔡金木), and A-mei (pseudonym)

No Longer on My Own

Interviewed and written by Zhang Ling-hui

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Graphics by Qiu Yu-sheng

"I'm going away to make some money and won't be back for a few days," my mom said, before putting 500 Taiwanese dollars into my hand. After that, she often disappeared for long periods from my life—even though I was only a third grader. Without her, I was all on my own.

Mom has been the only family I've had for as long as I can remember. Before I entered the third grade, I followed her everywhere selling Taiwanese-style fried chicken. We moved a lot back then, but since I was used to such a life, I was fine with it.

Mom never doted on me, but neither did she leave me untended. She kept me fed and sheltered. I had a normal elementary school life, with teachers and classmates I liked. I thought things would carry on like that until I was old enough to become independent. Little did I know that it was not to be, and that what I took for granted would be gone in an instant.

One day, a customer who patronized Mom's stall asked to use the toilet. When he was done and had come out, he walked to the sink to wash his hands. The sink was right next to the deep fryer. As soon as he turned on the faucet, the water splashed out of the sink, causing flames to lick out from the deep fryer. The customer and Mom couldn't dodge the flames in time and were both badly burned.

The fire that followed destroyed the food stall that had provided us with our livelihood. Mom was devastated, both physically and emotionally, and underwent a dramatic change of personality. She began to get drunk and even used violence against me. We were not insured against fires or other accidents, so Mom incurred a large debt overnight. We didn't have any savings, so we took to hiding from our creditors.

Later, she rented me a small studio apartment located above a convenience store; she said I'd be safer that way, with people downstairs 24 hours a

day. After transferring me to a local school, Mom and I took a train and then a bus before we arrived at a busy temple. I thought we were there to visit the temple, but Mom took me to a lottery store nearby instead. She exchanged a few words with the store owner, then turned to me and said, "From now on, whenever you have a day off from school, you need to travel here on your own to help the boss sell lottery tickets. If you don't, you won't have anything to eat."

When we were back at the studio apartment, Mom told me, "I'm going away to make some money, and won't be back for a few days." Then she gave me 500 Taiwanese dollars (US\$17) and left. From then on, she was often away for long periods and only returned home occasionally. I realized later she was doing that to avoid our creditors.

Thus began life on my own. I lived alone. I walked to school alone. I took the train alone and then the bus alone to go sell lottery tickets. I was forced to learn to keep track of the money I had left. In fact, I had to manage everything alone.

Maybe because I was tall and strong and didn't have the kind of baby face other children my age had, no one ever questioned why a young kid like me was left on my own. For a long time, I lived all alone just like that.

My pay

On the days I worked, I earned 800 Taiwanese dollars (US\$27) for every hundred lottery tickets I sold. At first, I hated having to earn my own living. I thought unhappily to myself, "Why couldn't I just sleep in on the weekends or holidays like my classmates? Why do I have to work?" But my

mindset changed one day when I received my usual pay of 800 Taiwanese dollars—suddenly I was filled with a fulfilling sense of security I had never experienced before.

"With these 800 dollars, I can go a week without worrying about going hungry," I told myself. "My classmates make no money at all sleeping at home, but I get a chance to earn my keep as long as I'm willing to get up early and go to work. Isn't that something?"

You see? Often a shift of mindset is all it takes.

After I moved up to the fourth grade, I continued peddling lottery tickets in front of the temple, where there was a lot of foot traffic. One day, when I was hawking tickets the best I could before the temple as usual, a classmate saw me.

I was filled with dread when I went to school the following Monday. I was worried all eyes would be on me when I walked into the classroom. To my immense relief, nothing like that happened. No one paid me any mind. Everyone just went on minding their own business, like any other day. I was as happy as could be.

But some things did change from that day onward. I began getting larger portions of food during school lunch. My homeroom teacher took to packing school lunch leftovers for me to take home. My classmates also began to interact with me more often.

I had been in the habit of keeping my distance at school. I didn't want to become too invested in my relationships with my teachers or classmates because I didn't know when Mom would uproot me again and move me to another place without giving me time to properly say goodbye to them. It wasn't a good feeling to be cut abruptly from the ties you'd developed with others, so I just avoided making those ties.

It never occurred to me that when others learned about my circumstances, it would result in my being better fed and clothed. Aside from those school lunch leftovers, my teachers applied for scholarships for the disadvantaged on my behalf and let me use sample textbooks. They tried to find ways to help me cut my expenses. It was also because of them that a group of strangers walked into my life.

Who can you trust?

"Hello, I'm a Tzu Chi volunteer," a woman said to me. "May I have a word with you?"

"What is a 'Tzu Chi volunteer'?" I wondered. "Why does she want to talk to me? Is she coming to learn if I need help?"



I figured I was managing quite well by myself and didn't need anyone's help. But to be honest, the real reason I didn't want help was because I had a general distrust of others. I couldn't even count on my own mom—who else could I really trust?

But whether I liked it or not at the time, these Tzu Chi volunteers had entered my life, just like that. They first showed up during my sixth-grade summer vacation, and they are still with me, even though I'm now a graduate school student.

Since Mom wasn't completely absent from my life, they met her at the very start. But Mom was never at home when they visited me afterwards. I always told them she was still at work. Since they visited me just once a month, they probably didn't find it too unusual.

Things went on like this until I was in my first year in junior high school. One day, I injured my leg during a physical education class—a new polyurethane running track was being installed at school, and I missed my step on the uneven ground. The injury made me unable to get around by myself.

"How could you get injured?" Mom said when I told her what had happened. "Is it really so bad you can't take care of yourself?" It wasn't care and concern I heard in her voice, but suspicion and reproach.

Mom did eventually return to check on me, but it was my Tzu Chi moms—that's what I ended up calling the volunteers—who showed genuine care and concern. They were really worried about me. Every time they visited, they reminded me over and over again how to care for myself and of

things I needed to pay attention to.

Gradually, I began to feel what it was like to be loved and cherished.

It was during this time they discovered that Mom was often away from home. The law only stipulated that children under six years old couldn't be left unattended, so my living alone was not illegal. Still, Mama Shu-lan told me, "You must try to find a way to live with your mom—only then will home feel like home."

Mama Meng-jun was on a mission of "getting me to live with my mom." She often asked me if I wanted Mom to move back in with me. At first, I tried to evade such questions. I knew she meant well, but I didn't want to live with Mom. I preferred living on my own.

I rarely said bad things about Mom to others, maybe out of a fear of losing her completely. She was my mom after all. Mama Meng-jun must have sensed something was up, but she never pushed too hard. I liked it that way; she put my mind at ease. Eventually I came clean and told her I didn't want to live with Mom because I had suffered emotional abuse from her for a long time.

Forced to move

Having to fend for myself made me sensitive and guarded.

In the very beginning, when Mama Meng-jun tried to teach me how to do housework, I bristled and blurted out: "Stay out of my business!"

Thinking back on it now, I realize how childish I was. Thankfully, my Tzu Chi moms weren't driven away by my insolence, but continued to guide me with patience. It's a good thing; otherwise I probably would never have gotten to experience the feeling of being loved.

Even though the volunteers were attentive to

all my needs and had my best interest at heart, it took me a long time to convince myself to let down my guard. I finally realized the love they were giving me was unconditional, with no strings attached. It was the kind of love in which I didn't have to worry about getting hurt.

I lived in that small studio apartment until my freshman year in college. The convenience store downstairs was closing down, and the new tenant wanted to rent the entire building, so I had no choice but to move. I was given very short notice to find a new place to live.

My eviction really threw me for a loop. I had no idea where to go. I also worried whether I'd be able to afford my future rent—that is, if it would turn out to be higher than what I was paying. All of a sudden, all kinds of problems surfaced in my mind, and getting a place to live became all I could think about.

It was then I thought of my Tzu Chi moms. When I told Mama Li-jun about my predicament, she wasted no time relaying the news to Mama Shu-lan and Mama Meng-jun. Using their connections, they found me a new home in no time. It was a bungalow that felt more like a home. In addition, it was located near a bus stop, with buses running to and from my school.

They helped me move, too. Though I didn't have a lot of stuff, it would have been a hard job without their help.

I didn't want them to spend any money improving my new home, but Mama Meng-jun insisted on having a screen door put in so that I could get better airflow without worrying about bugs or mosquitoes. And that wasn't the only improvement they made to my new place. Whenever they found the house lacking in something, they took the initiative to improve it without my ever asking. The care they gave me far exceeded what one could expect from family, but still they kept giving.

My new place might have been shabbier than the studio apartment which I had called home for nearly nine years, and it was farther away from the city center, but at least it was more spacious.

I continued selling lottery tickets during my free time while going to school. I only stopped when, with a teacher's recommendation, I got a part-time job at the school office in the second term of my freshman year.

A ticket seller's advice

I remember a day waiting for a train to take me to work, back when I was still selling lottery tick-

ets. I looked at the booking clerk sitting in the ticket office of the train station and was suddenly struck by a thought: "I'm at the mercy of the elements, selling lottery tickets outdoors, but the ticket seller has no such concerns. It doesn't matter what the weather is like—he works the same whether the weather is good or bad, windy or rainy. He even has air-conditioning during the hot summer months. What a nice position." I began to hope someday I might get a job like his.

After a few tries, I finally got up enough courage to talk to him. Shy and nervous, I asked the man, "Sir, could you tell me how you came to work here?"

"Kid, you need to apply yourself in school," he responded. "If you study hard, one day you might sit here like me too!"

His words that day had a huge impact. Though I was still young, that's when I decided that my goal in life was to test into the Taiwan Railway Administration (TRA) and become a booking clerk.

I'm thankful to that man to this day. Without him, I wouldn't have realized that "studying hard" could change my life. I wasn't the kind of student who got terrific grades, but I began working hard in school after that.

I rarely had spare money to spend and always had to pinch pennies. When Mama Meng-jun and a social worker learned about my plan to sit for the civil-service TRA recruitment exam, they applied to Tzu Chi for tuition aid for me so that I could have more time preparing for the exam.

I majored in English when I was in university and continued to study English in graduate school. My English language skills have made me more confident. I now feel I have more career options in life. For example, even if I fail the TRA recruitment test, I can still teach English at a cram school.

Taking advantage of my leisure time, I tutor students at a junior high school who are having trouble with their schoolwork, helping them with their English. Though I teach only an hour each week, I cherish the time I spend with the teenagers. I even buy them small gifts as prizes to motivate them to study harder. Young people their age could be rebellious or easily give up on themselves, so I also share my life experiences with them, hoping to help them think more positively.

One day, Mama Shu-lan asked me if I'd be willing to tutor for free two young brothers from a family receiving long-term care from Tzu Chi. I



agreed without hesitation. So, in addition to the students at the junior high school, I now help the brothers with their English every Monday and Thursday night. Mama Shu-lan is happy. She says that it's really great I can give unconditionally like that.

My Tzu Chi moms visit me at least once a month, mostly just to see how I'm getting along. They have allowed me to see life's beauty. Take Mama Li-jun and her husband for example. When they helped me move, they were always so gentle and loving with each other. They were always quick to express their gratitude to each other, instead of letting little frustrations negatively affect their moods. I saw in them an admirable example of a loving couple. The way they treated each other and others around them—with perpetual smiles on their faces—also showed me what respect for others looked like.

I often get around on a bicycle. One time, when Mama Meng-jun learned that I had missed some part-time work opportunities because I was getting around so slowly, she encouraged me to learn to drive a motor scooter. But I didn't take to it—the speed made me really uncomfortable. Mama Meng-jun didn't push me. She let the matter drop.

This illustrates that in the process of caring for me, my Tzu Chi moms have always tried to hit the right balance between helping me and letting me do things on my own. They want me to feel their care and to do me good without making me feel they are pushy. It's a good feeling having them around. Though they can't always be at my side, I know I can always go to them when I need help or advice. Come what may in this life, I'm no longer on my own. ❦



A Labor of Love

By Chen Yi-lin and Li Ming-mu

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Li Ming-mu

He fixes and delivers second-hand assistive equipment to families with functionally impaired members. The volunteer work keeps him busy, but he has come to realize that it's never tiring when you do things you love.



Zeng Qing-an serves as the contact person for a service outlet of Tzu Chi's assistive device program. The outlet is located at the Bade Jing Si Hall in Taoyuan City, northern Taiwan. He also repairs and delivers equipment. Hsiao Yiu-Hwa

"Your hospital bed and wheelchair are broken? No problem. I'll come over and take a look after work today," Zeng Qing-an (曾慶安) said into his phone. He noted the address, and made the visit after he got off work that day, just as he had promised.

"The headboard is broken, and the remote control isn't working," Zeng said while checking the bed for the family. Next, he found that the wheelchair brake had become loose too. "I'll deliver another bed and high-back wheelchair to you tomorrow morning."

The next morning, a Saturday, Zeng arrived again driving a small delivery truck. The household was located in a small alley off Guangfu Road in Taoyuan City, northern Taiwan. The narrowness of the alley made it difficult for him to get there with his truck. "Fortunately I drive pretty well," Zeng said with a smile to his company's factory director, Qiu Da-hao (邱大豪), who had accompanied him on the trip.

Mr. Wang, 68, is the master of the household Zeng was visiting. He had, with the help of a case manager at a hospital, applied to Tzu Chi's assistive device program for a hospital bed, an air mattress, and a wheelchair on behalf of his wife. That was four months ago, and now something had gone wrong with the bed and wheelchair. Mr. Wang contacted Zeng again with the help of the case manager.

Zeng went into Mrs. Wang's bedroom. Lying in her bed with her eyes wide open, she could see the visitors but was unable to speak. There were protective gloves on her hands to prevent her from pulling out her nasogastric tube. "She has colorectal cancer and cerebral edema," explained Mr. Wang. "She fell ill just eight months ago and became like this in that short time."

Zeng prepared to move Mrs. Wang from her bed to a regular bed so that the new hospital bed could be put in. Before he began, he told her what he was doing so that her muscles wouldn't tense up out of nervousness. Mr. Wang helped him move her to the regular bed. The two worked well together. "You did a good job," he praised the husband. When Mrs. Wang was settled on the regular bed, Zeng carefully placed a pillow under her head and a bed cover over her body.

Zeng was mindful of every detail in the process. Experience had taught him it took more than brute force when moving a patient. You need to put the patient at ease and guide the family helping you by your side. Paying attention to those aspects ensures that the job can be done more easily.

After moving the broken bed away and replacing it with the new one, Zeng asked Mr. Wang to test out the space by the bed to see if it was large enough for him to move around and work there. Then he taught him how to use the remote control for the bed and at the same time double-checked if the bed was working properly. When everything was in order and confirmed to be working well, they moved Mrs. Wang onto the new bed.

Mr. Wang was as grateful as could be. He said the assistive equipment provided by Tzu Chi had made it a lot easier for him to take care of his wife. "You sent over the equipment as soon as we applied. Because of your service, we don't have to fork out extra money to buy the needed equipment. I'm so thankful to Tzu Chi for reducing our financial burden."

The broken bed wouldn't go into the trash. Instead, it'd be checked and repaired for further use. Zeng explained that the equipment provided by Tzu Chi's assistive device program is all second-hand and it's natural that things sometimes break. For example, the buttons on a remote control might refuse to respond when pressed, or a motor might cease to function. When things like that happen, they repair the devices or replace parts to try to make them work again.

Zeng is the owner of a metal machining company. He is also a Tzu Chi volunteer. When a service outlet for the foundation's assistive device program was set up at the Bade Jing Si Hall in Taoyuan City in 2020, he began serving as the contact person. He also helps deliver equipment. He is dedicated to his work for the program and is always ready to help when his assistance is needed.

A volunteer and a boss

Zeng was born in Yunlin County, central-western Taiwan, in 1963. He has an older brother and a younger sister. When he was seven, he moved with his parents to northern Taiwan, where his parents worked at a brick kiln. When the young Zeng saw how hard his parents had to work to earn a living—12 hours a day all year around—he decided to stop going to school when he graduated from junior high school and to start working to ease his parents' financial burden.

At his uncle's invitation, he became an apprentice at a factory that produced rattan chairs. While he was working there, three high school graduates were hired to work part-time. They happened to bring with them some textbooks to study dur-

ing their free time to prepare for the joint college entrance exam. During a lunch break one day, Zeng chatted with them. He said, “I’ve never been to high school. Can I take a look at your textbooks?” As he was browsing the textbooks, one of the graduates asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” “Sure,” Zeng answered. “This is easy.” The three graduates didn’t believe him and began throwing random questions from the textbooks at him. Zeng answered almost every one correctly. The graduates said afterwards to Zeng’s uncle, who was a team leader at the factory, “You must let your nephew go to school. It’s a waste of his talent working here.”

Later, Zeng tested into the night school of Taoyuan Agricultural and Industrial Senior High School with a high score. He studied in the department of mechanics. That led to his involvement with computer numerical control lathes, and eventually his own business. He currently has 16 employees. Because he is the boss, he is freer to arrange his work schedule to accommodate his volunteer work.

In early 2013, Zeng’s father, who suffered from black lung disease due to his work, was diagnosed with heart and lung failure, resulting in frequent visits to an emergency room and an inten-

sive care unit. Zeng arranged for his parents to move in with him so that he could help care for his father.

Don’t say things that vex people

Zeng joined Tzu Chi after seeing the relief work carried out by the foundation after the 9/21 earthquake in 1999 and Typhoon Toraji in 2001. Both times, he went to the disaster areas to help victims and was able to witness firsthand the work of Tzu Chi volunteers. He recalls helping clear sewers in a village in Lugu Township, Nantou County, that had been hit by landslides after the 9/21 earthquake. As he was going about his work, he saw many gravel trucks bearing Tzu Chi flags hauling away waste soil and other debris to help local residents. Impressed by Tzu Chi’s quick and efficient action, he decided to train to become a certified Tzu Chi volunteer. He received his certification as a Tzu Cheng Faith Corps member in 2003 and as a Tzu Chi commissioner in 2018.

Zeng Qing-an (left) and a fellow volunteer check and repair a piece of assistive equipment at the Bade Jing Si Hall.



He has worked as a team leader in Tzu Chi for 16 years. He’s changed a lot during that time. He often has to find people to undertake certain tasks, and as a result he has become more gentle, patient, and flexible when it comes to dealing with people.

“I used to snap at people in my company,” Zeng said. “Even when I knew that something I said would vex others, I still said it.” But he said that he is now better at putting himself in others’ shoes. He gave an example of a foreign migrant worker employed by his company. Though the employee was new at the company, he often took time off work without apparent good reason. What’s more, he continued to do so despite repeated exhortations. One day people at the company told Zeng the foreign worker was taking time off work again, for itchy skin due to an allergy. Zeng said, “Okay. Let him.” He even purchased lotions, handmade soap, and probiotics out-of-pocket for the employee.

Zeng believes in showing care for others instead of being critical of them. When employees don’t perform well, he hopes to patiently move or inspire them to do better instead of being harsh to them. He wisely said, “When you hire a good employee and he performs well under your guidance, it doesn’t say much about your leadership skills. But it’s another matter when you hire a bad employee and he performs well under your guidance. You learn and grow as well in the process.”

Zeng has another employee with a bad temper, and who often takes time off work too. One time the employee’s father, who lived in southern Taiwan, was badly injured at a construction site. Zeng told the employee to take more days off work so that he could spend more time with his father and help care for him. He also said to him, “If your father needs assistive devices when he is discharged from the hospital, let me know. I’ll ask my fellow Tzu Chi volunteers in the south to deliver the equipment to him.”

Scratching his head, Zeng said a little shyly, “Try as much as possible not to say things to others that we wouldn’t want to hear ourselves,



Zeng (right) talks to Mr. Li, who is the principal caregiver of his bedridden brother. Zeng made five trips to the family to deliver assistive equipment, doing his best to help them.

because it wouldn’t go down well. Say things that people like to hear and that will do them good—this is a better way of dealing with others.”

Looking out for others’ needs

Zeng has greatly enjoyed his volunteer work for the assistive device service outlet at the Bade Jing Si Hall. “I often think of myself when I visit a family to deliver equipment,” he said. “I remember how I brought a hospital bed, wheelchair, and four-wheeled walker home for my dad to use a few months before he passed away. Because my family once needed such assistive equipment, I feel especially deeply for the families we serve.”

In fact, he doesn’t just deliver equipment. Every time he visits a family, he discreetly looks around and asks the family questions to discover if they might need help beyond the equipment he has delivered. For example, sometimes he learns that a family needs more assistive devices than what they’ve applied for. When that happens, he makes another trip—sometimes more—to deliver the items to them. “If their needs extend beyond what our assistive device program can offer—for example, if they need help cleaning their homes or financial aid—I refer them to our volunteers who visit and care for needy families for assessment and assistance. In other words, we don’t just deliver equipment; we try to find out people’s

other needs and then address them.”

Zeng shared about a family he has recently helped. The Li family consists of two brothers. The older brother, in his 70s, cares for his bedridden younger brother, in his 60s. The older brother has no other family member to help him. The first time Zeng visited them, he delivered a wheelchair to them, which was followed by another trip to deliver an electric bed and an air mattress. When talking to the older brother during his second visit, Zeng asked, “Your brother sleeps on the first floor. Where do you sleep?” The elder Li said that he slept on the second floor but was planning to move down and sleep on the floor beside his brother’s bed so that it’d be easier for him to tend to his needs during the night. That led Zeng to make a third trip to the Li home—to deliver a sleeping cot—so that the older brother wouldn’t have to sleep on the hard floor.

But that wasn’t the end of the story. On the fourth trip, Zeng delivered a wedge pillow, an overbed table, a transfer belt, and diapers. The wedge pillow was to help keep the younger brother’s body in position when the older Li was turning him over, changing his diapers, or sponge-bathing him.

The older brother mentioned that his brother’s wheelchair belt couldn’t keep his body in place and that his head wobbled too much when he sat in his wheelchair, so Zeng delivered a high-backed wheelchair to them the next day. The older brother told Zeng that his brother’s legs were getting stronger, and that with the help of a home care provider, he could already move slowly in a wheelchair, so a high-backed wheelchair was exactly what they needed most at the moment. He couldn’t stop thanking Zeng for doing his best to help them; he said that society needed more people like him.

“In those five visits, I served not only the younger brother’s needs but also the older brother’s,” Zeng said with joy written all over his face. “I was so happy I sang my way home after the fifth visit.”



Zeng (left) poses with his parents. His father taught him to reach out when he sees people in need.

COURTESY OF ZENG QING-AN

I’ve done what my dad told me to

Zeng said that Tzu Chi has been receiving more and more applications for assistive devices from people living in Taoyuan City. In the winter-time, they receive an average of seven to nine applications every day. In the Bade District alone, volunteers deliver assistive devices to three families every week on average. Coupled with the trips volunteers make to take back the equipment no longer needed, they may end up serving five to six families every week. “Most of the families we serve are underprivileged families,” Zeng explained. “There are also households with single-parent families or older people taking care of other older people.”

Zeng’s grandfather fell ill many years ago, which resulted in his family’s poverty. When he passed away, the family was so destitute they couldn’t have afforded to bury the body if it hadn’t been for the help of a kind-hearted person who donated a coffin. “I always remember what my dad once said to me,” Zeng recalled, “that when I see people in need, I must reach out to help them.”

Zeng likes delivering assistive devices because it allows him to help others. “I’m thankful to the families who apply to our program for giving us the opportunity to help them. I’m also thankful to them for teaching us life’s impermanence via their illness.” He continued, with tears welling up in his eyes: “I believe I’ve done what my dad told me to.” ❧

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



The United States

Hurricane Ian slammed into the state of Florida in late September, causing such extensive damage that officials said it could take years to rebuild. Tzu Chi volunteers had carried out relief work in Collier County, Florida, in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma in 2017. The connections Tzu Chi formed at that time enabled them to quickly launch relief operations in Naples, a hard-hit area in Collier County, when Ian devastated Florida this time. Tzu Chi volunteers assessed damage in Naples with the assistance of County Commissioner Penny Taylor, then followed up with a distribution on October 23 at the Naples Botanical Garden. This was the foundation’s fourth distribution for survivors of Hurricane Ian.

Each family received a cash card ranging from US\$800 to US\$1,200, based on the size of the household. Tzu Chi’s signature eco-blankets, made from recycled PET bottles, were also among the distributed items. More than 30 local residents came on their own initiative to volunteer their services for the October 23 event. With everyone’s help, 425

A volunteer hands a Tzu Chi eco-blanket to an aid recipient during the October 23 distribution in Naples, an area in Florida that was hit hard by Hurricane Ian.

HUANG YOU-BIN

families were served that day.

Cynthia Schultz, a volunteer from the Freedom Water Foundation, was one of the locals who helped at the event. She said she really liked how Tzu Chi encouraged people to show their compassion and think of helping others every day by saving money every day in a coin bank for the needy. That’s why, after she had received a coin bank from Tzu Chi, she asked for one more to give to her family. She resonated so much with the foundation’s beliefs and values that she wanted to join it. The day after the distribution, she emailed two Tzu Chi volunteers she had met at the distribution and expressed her hope to become a part of Tzu Chi and to “help carry your message through our community and the world.”

Loretta Grantham, a hurricane victim, said that

she had often reported on charitable or public service events during her 35 years working as a journalist, but she had never met an organization like Tzu Chi, one so attentive to the needs of disaster survivors. She was also impressed by how the foundation delivered aid personally into the hands of those in need. Lifted by the heart-warming atmosphere at the venue, she expressed her deep thank-

fulness for the volunteers who had come to her community to help. She said she would find out more about the foundation and Dharma Master Cheng Yen and pay forward the love she had received. Tzu Chi had helped 1,073 families, or 3,467 people, by October 23, weeks after Hurricane Ian's onslaught. The cash cards distributed had a total worth of US\$966,100.

Thailand

Because Thailand did not sign the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, many refugees there have no choice but to live in the country illegally. As illegal residents, they aren't allowed to work. It was already difficult for them to get by before COVID-19 but the pandemic added to their financial challenges. Tzu Chi Thailand had been helping them through this difficult time. On September 20 and 21, Tzu Chi distributed aid, including food and other daily necessities, to this group of people again. Bier is a refugee from Vietnam. He left his home country ten years ago to escape religious persecution. His father followed in his footsteps a few years later. Bier made a living by working as a construction worker before the pandemic, but lost his job when COVID-19 broke out. Fortunately, he later found employment at the Bangkok Refugee Center, thanks to his ability to speak both Vietnamese and Thai. He now works four days a week at the center. Even though he has a job, he was very grateful to receive Tzu Chi's aid. "It would have cost me several days' wages to buy the

stuff Tzu Chi distributed to us," said Bier. "The food alone will last my father and me for three weeks. The care from Tzu Chi has really warmed my heart." Farhia, a single mother from Somalia, came to the distribution site with her four-year-old daughter. She arrived in Thailand nine years earlier. She said that she and her children generally relied on subsidies from the United Nations to make ends meet. "The prices have been rising lately," she said, "and I have to support two kids. With the food from Tzu Chi, I won't have to worry about our three daily meals for three weeks." Lazer and his family of six escaped from Pakistan to Thailand in 2014. His mother was diagnosed with cancer some time after they arrived and they faced many medical issues as a result. Seeing their needs, Tzu Chi extended a helping hand to them. Though his mother passed away last year, Lazer deeply appreciates Tzu Chi's help. His two sons have now joined the Tzu Chi team to help other people. Anthony, his older son, said, "Tzu Chi has been caring for and helping my family. Now that I have the ability to give back, I'll cherish the opportunity to do so." Both Anthony and his younger brother, Suleman, served at the distributions. Many other refugees, like Anthony and Suleman, helped on-site. They all felt the joy that came from being able to serve others. "Tzu Chi is like my second home," said Joel. "I value every chance that allows me to participate in a Tzu Chi event. I not only get to help others in the process, but learn and grow as well. I always share my joy of giving with my mom when I return home from a Tzu Chi event. I've won a lot of approval from my family." All told, the distributions helped 1,443 families. Givers and recipients alike set out on their way home happy.



A refugee mother and her child thank Tzu Chi Thailand for the aid they received at a distribution on September 20. PINTICHA JANSUKSRI

Jordan

A free medical clinic organized by Tzu Chi Jordan took place in the village of Huweyja, Mafrq, on July 22. The event, staffed by 43 volunteers, offered treatments in cardiology, internal medicine, ENT, and dentistry. Tzu Chi Jordan had continued to conduct small clinics over the course of the pandemic providing services in cardiology, internal medicine, and ENT, but not dentistry. The July clinic marked the first time in two and a half years the Tzu Chi chapter had been able to help people with their teeth. There were a lot of matters to organize before the free clinic could take place. They included sending out the message so that people could learn about the event; inviting doctors to volunteer; registering patients who had signed up; preparing needed equipment, utensils, and medications; and arranging for power generators, since the clinic was being held in a desert area where there was no public electricity supply system. Between July 14 and 21, volunteers put in 32 shifts to organize equipment, utensils, and other items and move them from Amman, where the Tzu Chi office is, to the free clinic site. They also worked together to set up the venue.

Thirteen doctors, including ten dentists, volunteered at the event. Afnan Alaomari was one of the dentists. "Having come here," she said, "we'll do



People wait for their turn to see doctors at a free clinic held by Tzu Chi Jordan in Huweyja, Mafrq, on July 22. CHEN CHIOU HWA

our best to help every patient. Tzu Chi does wonderful things. Helping others is a wonderful thing. Even if we don't look at our medical services, by greeting the patients warmly and expressing care for them, by asking them, 'How are you doing?' we're giving them great emotional support." She said she hoped that she'd be able to participate in every Tzu Chi free clinic in the future.

The free clinic, offering treatments in cardiology, internal medicine, ENT, and dentistry, served 193 patients. CHEN CHIOU HWA



One hundred and ninety-three patients signed up for the medical services; all of them turned out for the event. Most of them were Syrian refugees from the Zaatari refugee camp. After the patients saw doctors at the free clinic, 103 were determined to need follow-up treatment. They included children with tonsillitis or hernias as well as elderly

people needing dentures. Tzu Chi would help them with their follow-up treatment. Volunteers in Jordan hoped that, with the world full of suffering, they could help as many people as they could. But even if they helped just one person, that's one person whose life will be improved.



Guatemala

On October 9, Tzu Chi Guatemala held a distribution for needy people in the town of Alotenango, Sacatepéquez, benefiting 660 families. Sergio Sul, the mayor of Alotenango, said during the distribution ceremony that the COVID-19 pandemic had rendered many people's lives difficult—some had lost their jobs and didn't have enough food to eat. The government had been doing their best to help everyone. "Thanks to Tzu Chi for working with us to help affected people get by," said the mayor. Zhang Ci Ran (張慈燃), head of Tzu Chi Guatemala, gave a short talk during the ceremony too. She observed that the global pandemic and natural disasters caused by climate change had caused suffering around the world. Dharma Master Cheng Yen was deeply concerned about it and had always instructed Tzu Chi volunteers to go wherever there were needy people to help them. Zhang

Sergio Sul, the mayor of Alotenango, gives out rice to recipients during a distribution held by Tzu Chi Guatemala in the town on October 9. YE WU LI-ZHU expressed her gratitude for having the chance to serve local people, and urged everyone to pray for world peace. The distribution items included rice, pasta, beans, cooking oil, sugar, and biscuits. Because the weather had been colder than normal, Tzu Chi also gave out blankets to help the recipients stay warmer at night. The mayor personally distributed rice to participating families in the event; employees from the municipal government helped in whatever way they could too. Even police officers who were on-site maintaining order helped recipients carry the stuff they had received. Positive vibes filled the venue, warming everyone's heart. ❀

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*Happiness is not about wealth, power, or position; it is
about living in peace, joy, and ease.*
—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

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