

Monthly Free Medical Care for Refugees in Bangkok, Thailand

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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In recent years, refugees from 47 different countries in the world have been pouring into Thailand. In January 2015, 645,000 refugees have passed through Thailand earnestly to be resettled in a third country.

According to statistics released by UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), a large number of refugees in Bangkok, stateless, jumped from 2,000 to 8,560 people. As Thailand is not among the signatory countries of 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as well as the revised version of the Convention in 1967, stateless refugees are regarded as illegal migrants in Thailand, which means if caught, they will be sent out of the country, not to mention a chance to see a doctor.

Beginning of free medical service for refugees in Thailand

Because of refugee overload in Bangkok Refugee Center, and success of free clinics held in other countries, Embassy of the United States, Bangkok recommended Tzu Chi Foundation Thailand Branch providing medical services to the refugees. Soon, in August 2014, Tzu Chi Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Department of State and began its very first Community Medical Service on 25th January, 2015.

Therefore, the clinic is held regularly on the fourth Sunday of every month at the Tzu Chi Thailand Branch right opposite Suan Luang Rama 9 Park. Until October 2015, free medical service has provided to 4,804 cases and reached out to 1,484 refugees in health education, supported by more than 200 medical professionals and Tzu Chi volunteers. In the latest free clinic held on 25th October, 20 doctors, 48 nurses, 11 pharmacists, together with 122 Tzu Chi volunteers and 44 translators supported the medical service and treated a total of 613 patients.

Good medical services for refugees



In order to lessen the fear of being caught when the refugees come to town for treatment, Tzu Chi volunteers visited the police station beforehand to kindly not to catch these refugees on the day of monthly free clinic. The volunteers also prepared shuttle bus service for refugees to the venue. Furthermore, there are 44 translators covering 9 different languages to support the medical service, including Urdu, Arabic, Vietnamese, Somali, Tamil, Cambodian, French, Persian and Hmong language, so that the patients could explain their conditions clearly to the doctors without language barriers. Although the majority of Tzu Chi volunteers speak Mandarin and Thai only, they still tried their best, with a bright smile on the face, to make the refugees feel at home.

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Tzu Chi volunteers also prepared fresh vegetable sandwiches for meals, equipped with the room for the mothers under breast-feeding period, as well as children's corner where volunteers took children for educational activities while their parents saw the doctor.

An Urdu translator, Mr. Ghafoor said "Being able to serve others felt more blessed than being served. Today is truly a beautiful day. Besides helping myself, I also help Tzu Chi volunteers in serving others. I felt so touched that Tzu Chi gave these refugees in Bangkok such huge assistance. I felt very happy and looking forward to more opportunities like today to serve others."

Niamat, a Pakistani living in Thailand for over one year, came to free clinic by the information from circular. He happily said "We sixteen members are all coming to see the doctor." His elderly parents suffer from chronic diseases and have to take a long-term cure. He once took his ill parents to many local hospitals for treat but in vain due to no subsidy. Language obstacle makes harder for them in job, so paying a large amount of medical fee is a burden. Tzu Chi free medical service really benefitted to his families.



The UNHCR officer, Mr. Francisco, was impressed by the non-pushing or unrest cases in the venue under the friendly guidance of Tzu Chi volunteers. Besides, serving refreshments, water and even arranging a special corner for children are also astonishing to Mr. Francisco. Another officer from UNHCR, Mr. Katsunori Koike witnessed the joy of the refugees. He shared "I felt happy for these refugees because they really need the medical services. I really hope such events can be continued." He explained that most clinics for the refugees he attended before often have no doctors on site, so they could only provide simple prescription. As for Tzu Chi free medical service, they provided vital measurements, blood tests, injections, internal medicine, pediatric, dentistry, and also health education.

Safeguard the Health of All with Great Love

Thailand volunteers took responsibility and cooperation to do the monthly community medical service, which made Tzu Chi Thailand branch a new history. A free clinic would not be possible without the selfless service from over 50 medical professionals for the first medical treatment in January 2015. Superintendents of Ramathibodi Hospital, Banphaeo Hospital, Photharam Hospital and Krathum Baen Hospital were also among the ranks to see patients personally..

Dr. Surapong Boonprasert, superintendent of Banphaeo Hospital, has been a great support since the very first free clinic, bringing 12 doctors, 28 nurses as well as 5 pharmacists to volunteer at the clinic. He came down to the venue two days before the actual event with his vice superintendent and pharmacist department head to oversee the preparation. He even brought from his hospital computers, measuring equipment and four treatment beds to support the clinic.

