

Volunteers Bring Medical Care, Full Meals to Myanmar School

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Tzu Chi volunteers came to Myanmar in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, which devastated the country in May 2008, and have stayed there ever since. They have brought many blessings to its people, including free medical clinics and how to improve their production of vegetables.

The cyclone, the worst ever to hit the country, left at least 138,000 people dead and caused damage worth US\$10 billion. Tzu Chi was the first foreign NGO to arrive on the scene and provide relief to the survivors. It began to organize free clinics in one of Asia's poor countries. Inspired by this, a local doctor named Tin Mar Htet began to volunteer. Since January this year, she and her fellow doctors have been holding clinics twice a month at the Buddhist Khaymayama school for nuns. "When volunteers come from overseas to help, it makes me feel that, as a Burmese person, I should help too," she said. One of the main diseases of the students is skin infection, a result of the fact that the school does not have a sufficient supply of water. "They have infections on the leg, the foot and the head," said Doctor Tin. During one clinic, 70 novices received treatment for skin complaints as well as coughs. One problem is that, since many of the novices come from mountainous areas, they do not speak Burmese, the national language. "A [Jing Si aphorism](#) gives me strength," said Doctor Tin. "People have limitless potential. Do not look down on yourself. I like this aphorism. When I hear these words, I feel I have so much ability and, yes, energy." Since the volunteers started going in January, their number has steadily increased. Their work is greatly appreciated by the abbess of the school, Sandar Malar: "Tzu Chi volunteers coming here to organize a free clinic is a great help, because there are many novices here. If we want them to see a doctor, we can only take one or two at a time."



The Kamaryama Temple School, with more than 200 students, which was established to provide education to children of poor families. After the cyclone, farm experts came from Taiwan to teach the students and their nun teachers how to grow vegetables and become fully self-sufficient in food. When you enter the school's lush, green garden, you can see the evidence of their work all around you – fruits and vegetables growing in abundance, such as bitter melons and cucumbers. "The novitiates can eat until they are full," said one of the nuns. "They are thrilled at this. These are all seasonal vegetables. In addition to providing for the temple, this also saves us money. Now that it is in the rainy season in Myanmar, it is the perfect time to grow vegetables, because we do not need to water them so much ourselves."



In addition, the volunteers passed on the philosophy of vegetarianism. This began in the

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immediate aftermath of the cyclone, when the school did not have enough food. The volunteers provided a vegetarian meal once a month and later passed the task on to local Taiwan entrepreneurs. Volunteer cook Xu Jiuzhang said that they came to the school because of the cyclone: “after joining Tzu Chi, I felt that it has done a lot of good work here. So we Taiwan entrepreneurs were happy to participate. We come whenever we have time.”

The volunteers spent more than four months renovating the school’s kitchen and used the opportunity to introduce the school to the culture and philosophy of [Master Cheng Yen](#) . Soon the teachers and students adopted an entirely vegetarian diet. “Sometimes people would come and give us food, including meat,” said one of the nuns. “But we would avoid the meat and eat only vegetables. We did not eat much meat before; now we have taken it out of our diet completely.”