

Tzu Chi Provides Monetary Assistance to Tornado Survivors in Northeast U.S.

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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On June 25, Tzu Chi volunteers gave more than US\$20,000 in cash cards to 106 households hit by devastating tornadoes in Springfield, Massachusetts in the northeast United States. They are planning a second distribution to 45 families who applied for help.

On June 1, at least three tornadoes struck Springfield, a city with a population of 150,000 in western Massachusetts. The tornadoes left three people dead and hit more than 1,000 homes, of which 319 were completely destroyed and nearly 600 so badly damaged that they will collapse if they are not repaired quickly. Most survivors live in poor neighborhoods, making a bad situation even worse. On June 2, the volunteers Sean Chen, Vict Ying, and Jennifer Ying went to the affected area to assess the damage. Working closely with the Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA), a government agency, they planned to draw up a detailed list of victims in the shortest time possible and provide them with the help they needed. On June 8, FEMA held a conference with the Red Cross, Tzu Chi Foundation and other charity organizations; together, Tzu Chi offered to provide monetary assistance to a portion of those affected. Then the foundation's Boston service center mobilized volunteers to visit affected people, many of Hispanic origin, and help them to fill up application. Between June 18 and June 24, Jennifer and others volunteers called each of those who had registered to remind them to come for the distribution.



Through FEMA's referral, Tzu Chi volunteers fixed the event at the site of a community charity organization, Springfield Partners for Community Action, at 1 p.m. on June 25. It was a 90-minute drive from Boston and two and a half hours from New York. Early on the morning of the 25th, 48 volunteers set out from the two cities and arrived at the location before 11 a.m. Then they prepared for the distribution, arranging where people would line up and sit and how they would allocate their different duties.



For many volunteers, it was the first time to take part in such an event: inside the hall, the atmosphere was solemn, with everyone busy with their tasks. Outside, people had started to queue early; with the first coming around 9 a.m. Third in the queue was Nancy, who arrived at 9.30 a.m. In front of her was Deborah, a person who lived in the same district but whom she had never met before; they became good friends. Nancy spoke of the day of the disaster, which still preyed heavily on her mind: "Until now, my heart is still terrified, with a sense of how such a great misfortune could happen." Many have received psychological counseling because it is hard for them to express all that is in their hearts.

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At 1 p.m., the door was opened and the recipients entered quickly; soon there was no empty seat and some had to stand. Since most of them had never heard of Tzu Chi, volunteer Vict Ying held a brief opening ceremony and explained the origin and history of the foundation. Then two volunteers, Alex Ying and Emily Huang, read out the Master Cheng Yen's letter of sympathy, one in English and another in Spanish. Initially, the attendants were anxious about the cash cards but their hearts were melted by the warmth of their reception. They listened attentively to the words of Master Cheng Yen. Then everyone stood up to sing together.



In all, 106 households received the cash cards, totaling US\$20,800. It is an important gift, enabling them to buy items they need. In addition, they received the love and support of all volunteers present and lifted their spirits. Many took home with them a bamboo coin bank, to save money. One of them said that she wanted to take the coin bank home because of the help she had received. In an interview with Daai Television, she could not hold back her tears: "I thank you so much. After I go home, I will fill up the bank and, when it is full, I will bring it back to Tzu Chi. Today I have received help. In the future, I want to help other people." A volunteer wrote down her name and telephone number: "please contact me when you need to and give me the chance to serve other people," she said.

During the event, 45 affected families walked in to fill up new applications. It is in the process of arranging a second distribution on July 2.