

New life Begins at Shanlin Great Love Village

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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A new life is beginning at the Shanlin Great Love Village in southern Taiwan, with one mother with her new born baby, the first services at its churches and the start of a recycling program among the residents.

Tzu Chi Foundation officially opened the village, built for survivors of Typhoon Morakot last August, on February 11; the first 500 families moved in, out of a total of 1,500 when the project is completed. Among them is Lin Yayun, who was nine months pregnant and delighted to have a new home before the arrival of her third child. "I am settling in and feel secure. Having a home of your own makes a huge difference," she said. She and her family lived in Namaxia township which was badly affected by the typhoon; they lost their home and were fortunate to survive. "I do not have to worry about mudslides any more. It is safer here and my children can grow up happier." The family and the new born baby boy look forward to a bright and secure future.

Songs of worship

Last Sunday was the first day of both the lunar new year and of worship for the villagers in their new churches. The village will have four, of which two have opened so far. "This is the first time I have been here since moving in," said Deng Xiuyu as she attended her church. "It feels wonderful. I feel very grateful." She and other members of the congregation sang hymns of praise and thanks; they also expressed the hope for a Happy New Year to Master Cheng Yen and all the Tzu Chi people. "Back home in the mountains, I did not always attend every service," said Hu Lizhu. "But here I will because I want to show my gratitude."

The churches are part of the new lives and the new community they are building in the village. Volunteers from Tzu Chi are standing by to help them adjust. "Now they are physically safe, they must feel spiritually at ease as well," said Wang Huizhi, from the foundation's Religious Culture & Humanitarian Aid Department. "So we have arranged group activities to help them get to know their environment and their new neighbours." In the village, love is universal and transcends religion. It binds the residents together, bringing happiness and laughter.



Stop drinking, do recycling

One of Tzu Chi's legacies to the village is its environmental mission. During the construction, the future residents took part in a relief-for-work program which enabled them to participate in building their new homes. They learnt the importance of keeping the community clean and avoiding waste; among them, 28 have undertaken to continue the work of recycling within the village. Chen Qingdang, 77, is one; he was one of the first group to move into his new home and, instead of celebrating at a housewarming party, spent an enjoyable day recycling. He worked with volunteer Zeng Zhangling to sort recycled goods. "I am from the Xishe recycling station in Kaohsiung," explained Zeng. "I am here to guide the 28 people in the hope that they will sow the seeds of environmental protection." Chen said that his participation in the program

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had helped him to talk and to give up a bad habit of drinking alcohol. "We are like a family here. We do not argue. Everyone works together," he said. Chen lost his home in Liugui township to Typhoon Morakot. The relief-for-work program gave him a sense of stability and an understanding of the importance of preserving the planet's natural resources. This group of 28 bodhisattvas plan to make recycling a regular part of life in the Shanlin village; they are confident more people will join them, to keep it a clean and tidy place.

Stricken village recovers

One of the areas worst hit by the typhoon was Shalu village in Namaxia township in southern Taiwan; nearly half of it was washed away by landslides. A Tzu Chi reporter visited the township to see how it is recovering from the disaster:

As you drive into Namaxia, there is 10 kilometers of road without pavement. Then there is a swath of wasteland, with pylons of a vanished suspension bridge the only thing left standing. The typhoon destroyed nearly all of the 20 such bridges in the area, all of them the work of a builder named Zhang Fansheng, who has returned in the hope of finding one still standing. He went to a nearby township named Alian. "The bridge used to be just over there, in front, but it has all gone," he said. "I cannot see any of it. It is a pity. When a normal bridge cannot be used, a suspension bridge is the only way to get across." The suspension bridge lives on in the memory of local people. "When we went to work and the tide had not gone out, we used the suspension bridge," said one resident named Ye. "If you did not go over the bridge, you used bamboo stalks. These were dangerous, since they would flip over when the water rose. So everyone from my generation and my father's remembers it with fondness." The bridge was dismantled five-six years ago because it had fallen into disrepair. So the bridges built by Zhang can only be seen now in photographs.

Namaxia township has a cultural museum that was badly affected by the typhoon. "The entire first floor was inundated by debris," said Jiang Huiling, a staff member. During the typhoon, curators stayed there the whole night, to guard the indigenous artifacts. "We had to ask workers to bring in heavy machinery to help with the clean-up," Jiang said. "We told everyone to dig carefully because we did not want them to break anything that might be intact." She showed a calendar used by the Bunun tribe, of which she is a member. "A year has so many days. We use a triangle to mark what we should do on a particular day. One may be a day to weed, another to hunt." Bunun artists have adapted the calendar in their embroidery and ceramics. Li Wenguang is a local ceramicist as well as a policeman; he works in a studio with over 200 square metres. "I learnt pottery from my father and mother; they taught me all I know. Everything I heard is in my head and I create pottery to express it." He showed one of his pieces: "this is called Mala-ta-ngia, a coming of age ceremony that lasts 20 days. Each of these triangles indicates a day." While Bunun artists in the past used pottery to show religious motifs or as items for daily use, Li uses it in new ways. The village's escape from the terror of the typhoon is another theme in his work. "Whatever happens to us, the Bunun tribe, we pick ourselves and go forward to meet the next challenge," he said.

The typhoon has left a scar on Namaxia township; the Bunun people will need time to recover fully and start again. It is a challenge they meet with confidence.