

Hope, Health, and Happiness in Santa Ana

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Wednesday, 02 October 2013 15:09



While Orange County is prosperous with cities such as Irvine, just 5 minutes outside of Irvine lies Santa Ana, where most of the residents live below the poverty line. For more than 10 years, Tzu Chi has an initiative called the “Happy Campus Program”, where Tzu Chi volunteers provide tutoring, house visits, care packages, dental assistance and check-ups for less fortunate students. This program provides children the resources to overcome their difficult situations. Most of the parents of these students have long work days and they live in cramped homes. Providing for daily necessities is a struggle for them, let alone being able to purchase health insurance.

For the past 3 years, the volunteers who participated in providing food backpacks have grown closer to the community members and school students. When the school asked the volunteers to join its first advisory board, Tzu Chi volunteers learned more about the charity organizations in Santa Ana. Through the executives, such as Frank Montes, CEO of Boys and Girls Club of Santa Ana, Ed Gerber of Lestonnac Free Clinic and the Coalition of Orange County Community Clinic, the organizations started working together to provide better services to the local residents.



On August 25, 2013, Tzu Chi Orange County hosted a free clinic together with the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Ana, providing free dental and health check-ups such as blood pressure, cholesterol checks, and acupuncture services. The Lestonnac Free Clinic, the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Ana and Lowell Elementary school all brought bilingual volunteers (51 volunteers in total) to breach the language barrier between physicians and patients. Apart from that, there were 48 medical professionals, 110 Tzu Chi volunteers, 4 Tzu Chi Collegiate Association volunteers, and one Tzu Chi high school volunteer serving 135 patients.

At 9 am on the morning of the clinic, the Principal of Lowell Elementary, Lisa, personally called 900 parents to inform them about the free clinics. Lisa even brought her own family to the clinic and was the first to try acupuncture and praise its effectiveness in providing relief.



People started lining up already at 6:30 in the morning. Many of the patients did not have health insurance. One of the volunteers, Li Xuyong, who is fluent in Spanish, introduced Tzu Chi and she also patiently answered any questions from the visitors. Through the respectful and sincere interaction with the volunteers, the patients gained confidence about the event, and many contacted friends and family to also join. From 12 pm and all the way up to the expected end

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time, there were still people flocking in.

Wang Jiayin had invited six Western University Health Sciences pharmacy students to help out at the event. One of them, Jose Soza, was not only responsible in the dispensary, he also helped bridge the language barrier between patients and doctors. Eager to learn, he utilized any free time to interact with the doctors and was amazed by the medical team which was made up of volunteers from different organizations. He was elated that he could use his own native language to serve the patients.

The CEO of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation USA, Debra Boudreaux was very touched by the active participation of so many doctors, nurses and volunteers in TIMA, the Tzu Chi International Medical Association. Tzu Chi regularly cares for the students by distributing food backpacks to them, embracing the Foundations of charity, medicine and education. She hopes that if the conditions allow, the Foundation will be able to come back regularly to hold free clinics every three, four months or six months. This is the first step in guarding the health and love of the residents.



Dentist Zhou Changyi was enthusiastic in providing dental services to the patients. She was very concerned about the dental hygiene of the locals, as what she saw there was quite different from what she was exposed to in her own clinic. As such, she expressed that the free clinic service is essential to the people in Santa Ana. Dr. Zhou's collaborator Liu Zhenxi has been involved in free clinics since 2003, and could not even remember how many times he has come here to help. A lady was sobbing during her periodontal scaling procedure; it had been 6 years since she had her teeth cleaned. Although she was aware of the importance of dental hygiene, poverty had deterred her from getting proper dental treatment.

Besides providing medical services, Tzu Chi also hoped to ignite the kindness of the residents through this free clinic service. Every patient received a bamboo bank after their treatment, hoping that one day they will be the ones who extend their helping hands to the needy. Rosalia brought her daughter to the clinic and donated some money. When asked for the reason for her action, she replied: "I also want to help others." There were two daughters who accompanied their mother to receive treatment, and they also wanted to adopt bamboo banks.



Through the high school volunteer Weng Aimei's Spanish language skills, Tzu Chi volunteer Jian Ciheng discovered the case of a woman who worked in a restaurant to support her family after an accident had disabled her husband. She was very grateful for Tzu Chi's treatment, and adopted a bamboo bank before she left.

One of the volunteers, Zhu Yizhong said that he was astonished by the effort of all the

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volunteers. It was an overwhelming success, as it attracted people from the community to help out, especially volunteers who were involved in translation. He hoped that those volunteers would come back and continue spreading their love to the community.

Written by Andrew Chu, Sophia Shui, Ju Shua Tan, Loritta Chan and Shao Wei Chia

Edited by Johan Alwall