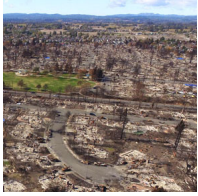


Tzu Chi Helps Survivors of Devastating Northern California Fires

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Thursday, 30 November 2017 16:08



Volunteers of the Tzu Chi Foundation are providing daily support to those who survived the devastating fires that swept Northern California a month ago. They are helping them recover and rebuild their lives.

The fire began in the Santa Rosa forest on October 8 and raged for nearly a month. It became the most serious forest fire in the history of Northern California. Over 245,000 acres were burnt and nearly 9,000 buildings destroyed, including about 6,000 private homes. Most sad was the loss of 43 lives, while others are still missing.

Because many people had to leave their homes and face a long road to recovery, the city government set up two relief centers in Santa Rosa and Napa. They are jointly managed by the Federal Government and NGOs, to help the survivors resume their lives. Tzu Chi volunteers from the Northern California branch have been going every day to these centers, working in shifts.

On October 28, one of the survivors named Marian (not her real name) was holding her 11-month-old baby and sitting quietly; she was waiting to collect the cash card given by Tzu Chi to the survivors. While she was waiting, she asked the volunteers to explain the story of this organization whose name she could not pronounce. They described how small amounts of money collected by the foundation's members around the world enabled it to carry out large acts of charity. Hearing this, Marian was very moved.



When a volunteer was about to give Marian her cash relief card, she brought out from her bag a bag of coins and put it on the table, as a gift to the victims of the fire. "Forgive me," she said. "These coins from a plastic bag are a little dirty. But please accept it – it is all the love I have to give back to you!" When she collected her cash card, she could feel all the love it contained. Although her house burnt down and she has many difficulties in her life, she was still able to give a little love in return. The volunteers eagerly accepted the bag of coins from the plastic bag. They felt the deep sincerity of her gesture.

All the volunteers at the scene were greatly moved by this bag of coins sitting quietly on the table. They praised her for donating it.

From October 17, the volunteers went every day to the Relief Center in Napa to help the survivors. On November 4, volunteer Howard Tan read out a letter of blessing from Master Cheng Yen; when he thought of the sufferings of the survivors, he could not control himself from sobbing. He had to force himself to stop. He handed tissue paper to the survivor and comforted

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him, saying: “We will stop for a moment and then continue to read. We cannot weep together ...” The two slowly calmed the sadness in their heart.



One of the volunteers in the center was Nataly, the Spanish interpreter. In the process of helping the Tzu Chi volunteers translate Spanish, she came to understand the meaning of the bamboo savings bank without the volunteers having to explain it to her. She could explained to the Hispanic survivors the meaning of Tzu Chi bamboo bank.

Every day the volunteers have warm interactions with the survivors. One of them, named Anne (not her real name), came to the center and collected her number for a cash card. She told the volunteers: “I must give up this card and give it to those who need it. Although I have been sleeping in my car for three weeks, you volunteers have already helped me during the coldest time. You laid a blue jacket over me. It was the warmest jacket I ever received in my life.” The volunteer who gave her the jacket was Chiung-Tz Chiou – the very person facing Anne in the center.

The love and care of the volunteers have greatly moved the survivors of the Santa Rosa forest fire in Northern California. Although they are now facing an enormous challenge in their life, they feel a strength coming back to them. A bag of coins, a jacket and the number of a credit card that is handed back – all are symbols of this Great Love between people.

Article by Yi-Jin Shie

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