

Argentina-Agustín Smiles Cheerfully

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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When Tzu Chi volunteers met Agustín at a sport club in Quilmes, 17 kilometers (10 miles) from the capital city, Buenos Aires, he folded his palms in front of his chest and greeted the volunteers. When asked how he learned to greet people like that, Agustín said that he had seen the volunteers doing that the previous month, when they distributed school supplies at the sport club to students from needy families.

Agustín lives near Bahía Blanca, a port city in the southwest of the province of Buenos Aires. Having suffered from spinal problems since birth, he cannot walk normally like other children. When he walks, he has to rely on a walker and a pair of special shoes to keep balance.

The only local public rehabilitation center was too swamped to provide physical therapy for Agustín. Worried about their son, Agustín's parents put his photo on some coin banks and asked some local shop owners to let them place the banks in their stores in the hope of soliciting money for their son to get treatment out of town.

This summer, when Agustín turned nine, a lady vacationing near the port happened to learn about his predicament through the coin banks. She then referred Agustín to her friend, the owner of a sport club in Quilmes where Tzu Chi volunteers often held distributions or events. The owner kindly agreed to help and referred Agustín to Tzu Chi volunteers. That was how they came in contact with Agustín and began finding ways to help him.

When the volunteers learned that the special shoes Agustín wore no longer fit him, they took him to have a new pair made. The boy was about to undergo a 9-month treatment in Quilmes, and for that he would transfer to the local school. At his mother's request, the volunteers also bought school uniforms for him. When asked whether he needed any new school supplies, Agustín replied that what he had received from the volunteers at the last distribution was enough for him to continue his studies at the new school.