

Spring Cleaning to Usher in Christmas

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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76-year-old Grandma Chow has many a time declined her neighbour's offer to do spring cleaning for her but find it somewhat difficult to turn down the enthusiastic Tzu Chi volunteers.

On 6 November 2011, shortly after 8am in the morning, 40 Tzu Chi volunteers armed with various cleaning tools gathered at the void deck of Grandma Chow's HDB block, all ready to clean her home.

The senior lives alone in a single-room apartment full of junk items, leaving only a small walkway for her to move about. Clothing was scattered on the bed and the floor and there was much grease and dirt on the kitchen cabinet. The furniture was also dusty and a foul smell lingered in the house.

Grandma Chow couldn't stand for long but with a smile she briefly stood up to welcome the volunteers when they arrived.

After a briefing by home visit cadre Judy Lo, the volunteers divided themselves into different groups - some started with moving things from the house to an open space downstairs so as to not block the common corridor, a few got themselves busy wiping and cleaning the furniture, while some were carefully picking old items for disposal. Back in the house, different groups were diligently cleaning the kitchen, bedroom and living room, while also tidying up the items in the drawers and cupboards. Cobwebs were being swept away, kitchenware in kitchen were being cleaned and wiped. The volunteers' professional skills were also put in use in replacing the old torn floor mat and faulty electrical sockets.



It was a scene of bustling activities both outside and inside the apartment, attracting curious neighbours to come and take a look in an otherwise quiet and peaceful weekend morning.

Upon knowing they were volunteers doing spring-cleaning for Grandma Chow, all of the neighbours felt happy for the senior. Many of the neighbours, who have been friends with Grandma Chow for years, were unanimous that she is a friendly and cheerful elderly. One of them even told of how they had volunteered to clean her apartment but she had always turned them down not wanting to trouble them.

Not deterred despite unexpected hospitalization

The 76-year-old Grandma Chow is a sufferer of diabetes and heart disease. Due to poor blood

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circulation in her toes that makes her less sensitive to pain, she has always failed to notice any new wounds and hence worsening the condition.

In September this year, the medical social worker of National University Hospital referred her to the Tzu Chi Free Health Screening and Medical Clinic in Jurong East, hoping that the medical staff can help clean and dress her wound regularly. After some evaluation, Dr Edwin Lim and Nurse Joyce Foo of the Free Clinic began visiting the senior two to three times a week to monitor and treat her condition.

The moment they saw the messy and damp environment she lived in, the medical staff and volunteers had thought of cleaning the place for her, but the senior did not concede. After much sincere persuasion from the volunteers and realizing that her wounds could get worse in a filthy environment, the senior who had earlier declined the idea decided to accept the offer eventually.

The team of volunteers started planning for the spring cleaning one month in advance. One of the coordinators, Florence Chew, shared that they had also planned to get a new bed for Grandma Chow as her bed had been used for such a long time that it stank and was infested with bed bugs.

However, just a few days prior to the spring cleaning, Grandma Chow was hospitalized as the wound on her left leg had worsened. The senior was somewhat disappointed thinking that the spring cleaning would likely be called off. Fortunately, after close to a week of hospital observation, she was discharged and the first thing she did when she reached home was to contact the Tzu Chi volunteers and expressed her wish to have the spring cleaning conducted as soon as possible.



Much to her delight, the volunteers got down to work the following day and when they were all busy in their cleaning activities, Grandma Chow who was sitting at the corridor outside kept peeping into the house through gaps of the blind. The volunteers understood that she treasured her belongings very much so they let her scan through the items to let her decide whether to keep or dispose of them. The volunteers were surprised that she could remember how much she paid for each of her garments and laughed away when she covered her eyes like a child repeating "I don't want to look at it anymore!" when she finds it hard to decide.

Interestingly, every now and then Grandma Chow would enquire when the new bed would arrive – an indication that although she longed for better living conditions, she didn't want to trouble her neighbours for it as they are also in their old age. Like what her neighbours said, she is indeed a kindhearted person.

Smiling ear to ear, Grandma Chow enthused, "I was so happy that I couldn't sleep last night, especially when I think of the new bed that is coming my way. I can sleep soundly tonight and

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look forward to celebrating Christmas in my 'new' home!"

Imparting medical humanism in duties



Nurse Foo still remembers her uneasiness the first time she saw the filthy and messy environment that Grandma Chow lived in.

Having been in the profession for 13 years, she had never thought of cleaning house for her patients as in the past, being a nurse was just a job and taking care of patients medically was all the job required. It was until half a year ago after becoming part of Tzu Chi and rounds of house calls with the volunteers did she understand the importance of imparting humanism in the medical care she gives. This time round, she too joined in the "sweeping and wiping" after cleansing the festered wound on Grandma Chow's foot.

After nearly seven and a half hours of hard work, the volunteers could finally call it a day. Sitting on the new bed, Grandma Chow kept saying how comfortable it was and how much she liked it. She was also elated that her apartment has taken on a fresh new look, just like a new unit!

The neighbours all agreed that her apartment has become more spacious and brighter. A lady who lives a few units away even offered to wipe the floor for her every day so as to help her maintain a decent living condition.

Before bidding goodbye, the volunteers presented a small cake to Grandma Chow to celebrate her 'new' home.

"I will visit Tzu Chi after I have recovered" was the wish she made and although she ate only a small mouthful of the cake concerning her diabetic condition, the sweetness was definitely like the sweetness of love showered by the volunteers.

By Sim Lit Wee

Translated by Dr Ong Eng Hong