

The 110th Mobile Dental Mission

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Under the sweltering sun, volunteers in Manila on May 18 held their 110th mobile dental mission in the Binondo district, treating 82 patients who live in the neighbourhood. They are people who cannot afford the high cost of private dental care. They held the clinic at the Maxim Building, owned by a Filipino-Chinese who allows it to be used as a recycling center by the foundation.

Seven dentists, assisted by nine dental aides who are students from the Foundation's Livelihood Training Program, provided a comprehensive services – 29 patients had teeth extracted, 20 had teeth restored, 27 had check-ups and six were checked for dentures. The clinic started at around 10 in the morning and finished at three in the afternoon. Also in attendance were 41 volunteers. The patients, most of whom were experiencing 'Tzu Chi care' for the first time, were smiling and satisfied at the end.

Forty one-year-old Erlina Cedeño, who brought six of her children, is one of the many who benefited from the services of the foundation for the first time. She learnt about the dental mission from a Filipino-Chinese volunteer; she and her children hurried to the venue a short distance from their house. All had their teeth cleaned and checked. "For once, we are very happy to benefit from this mission," she said. "In private clinics, the cost for extraction is 200 (pesos) per tooth and around 400 for cleaning. We could never afford to have it all at once. Instead of having our teeth cleaned, we prefer to buy food. Thanks to the Tzu Chi Foundation, now we can smile and show our teeth."

Another patient who experienced the services of Tzu Chi for the first time was Ronnie Baquiram, 40, who had a decaying tooth restored. During the interview, he shyly smiled and said that the dentist performed the procedure with great care and made him feel at ease. "I am so happy because I feel my tooth has been repaired. Thank you very much to the dentists and to Tzu Chi Foundation in general for allowing me to be part of this dental mission," he said.



During the event, the volunteers shared with the patients remarkable stories about Tzu Chi stories and how it was started by the Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen. They also told them about the foundation's recycling work, which aims to save the environment from degradation and destruction. "Three weeks ago, we started to use part of this building as Tzu Chi's recycling point in Binondo, as permitted by my aunt who owns the place," said Xu Bi Yuan, a Chinese volunteer. "During the first two weeks, the residents responded well with our call to save Mother Nature, bringing here sacks of recyclables they had picked up. We transported them to Tzu Chi Great Love Campus' Educational and Recycling Center in Sta. Mesa."

During the dental clinic, four Tzu Chi volunteers and staff went to the house of 56-year-old

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Pabio, who has long been an active donor of recyclables. He started to take part in the environmental program after the foundation provided medication for his daughter Mary Ann, now 24, who has suffered from tuberculosis in the stomach since 2003. "This is my way of at least giving back the help we received from the Tzu Chi Foundation and from my friends," he said. "If not for them, Mary Ann could have died years ago."

A Catholic, Pabio said that he is grateful to the Buddhist organization and its Filipino-Chinese volunteers for extending help to people regardless of their nationality: "the Tzu Chi Foundation is a blessing from above that is made to touch our lives for the better." He thanked all his friends in the building, for their constant help since 2003. He used to work as a security guard in one of the buildings there; so he was able to create an affinity with them. They help him collect recyclables which he donates to the foundation. He hopes that more people will share the missions of the foundation, which will help more lives and brings back more color to the world.

The volunteers hope that the 110th mobile dental mission will lead to more and better participation in the recycling program by local residents around the center in Binondo as well as in other parts of Metro Manila.