

Japan - Hot Miso Soup

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Monday, 05 January 2009 00:00



For the hundreds of thousands of contract workers who had lost their jobs to the current economic recession, the year end presented a special challenge as government offices were closed for the holidays and job hunters had nowhere to get help. From December 31, 2008, to January 5, 2009, more than 20 labor unions and charities maintained a tent village at Hibiya Park in Tokyo for unemployed contract workers. Free food, lodging, medical care, and legal counseling were provided. "This village could be life-saving for some of these unemployed people," said a volunteer village administrator.

The village had been in the limelight for several days. Chen Jin-fa (陳金發), a Tzu Chi volunteer from Taiwan, was visiting Japan and saw a report on the village. He felt that the Tzu Chi Japan branch could do something to help, so on January 4 volunteers went to the village to inquire.

Thanks to extensive media coverage, the village actually had adequate help, except for the morning of January 5, when most Japanese workers returned to work. The village needed people on January 5 to prepare breakfast for the unemployed, take down the tents, and clean up the area.

Though the village had received many donations of food, the park lacked a facility with a kitchen. Therefore, Tzu Chi volunteers took the foodstuffs back to the Tzu Chi Tokyo branch, where many volunteers washed, cut, and readied them for cooking the following morning at the village. Many helpers got little sleep that night.

At five o'clock in the morning of January 5, the first group of volunteers went from the branch office to the village and started cooking. Another group arrived after six to help serve breakfast, dismantle tents, clean up, etc.

At around eight, some 500 people lined up to receive hot miso soup. As the volunteers handed the soup to them, they encouraged them not to give up hope.

Several volunteers walked around the tents collecting garbage and sorting out recyclables. Omura Hideaki, deputy minister of Health, Labor and Welfare, was on hand for the closing of the village. He was surprised to see a Buddhist group from Taiwan helping in his country, and he thanked the volunteers repeatedly for their help.

Source: Tzu Chi Quarterly Spring 2009