

Volunteers Bring Fragrant Tea and Calligraphy to Dutch Nursing Home

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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On Valentine's Day, residents of a nursing home for the elderly in Holland received an unexpected surprise – a presentation of tea-making, Chinese calligraphy and Tai Chi by a group of Tzu Chi volunteers. It was a treat for a group of people who rarely have such visitors.

The nursing home is located in Careyn Snavelenburg, Maarssen. The program for the residents was started by Wieke and Hannah, two women from Brilliant, an NGO. The two invited the volunteers in Holland to host a sensory therapy session for the residents. This session aims to give love and care to their clients through programs that stimulate their senses.

On February 14, against all expectations at the approach of spring, it started to snow. Many volunteers in different cities in Holland were concerned about road conditions because of the snow. Around 1:10 pm, everyone overcame the traffic conditions and arrived at the nursing home on time. Seeing that all the volunteers had braved the storm to keep a promise, everyone was elated.

The volunteers prepared a special performance suitable for the elderly, including calligraphy, making tea, Tai Chi and sign language. Liu Shun Hua, who lives in Maarssen, was the first to arrive at the nursing home. She brought Jing Si songs, Jing Si tea and the tools for calligraphy as well as the volunteer vests; she warmly welcomed every volunteer.



Immersed in the scent of tea and art of calligraphy

One volunteer, Zhu Xue Dong, brought the tea set and tea from home. She had done research in advance; she carefully introduced the art of tea-making. The scent of the tea together with the sound of a zither made it a wonderful experience for the residents.

Most of them need wheelchairs. Some are able to handle the chairs themselves, but others need assistance. In addition, there are some patients who are seriously ill; they are not able to move around and have to stay in their room upstairs. One of them is blind, yet very humorous and optimistic. When Zhu Xue Dong was introducing jasmine tea (in Dutch: Jasmijnthee) to him, he joked "this is my coat (de jas van mijn)." Watching the old man's smiling face and hearing his funny words, everybody present was very happy.

Volunteers Chu Meng Ling and Zhang Xiao Ling were responsible for the calligraphy group. They specially chose the postcards in the cheerful red color for the elderly to write their Chinese names on. While Chu was busy preparing the writing brush and ink stone, she noticed that someone was approaching her in a wheelchair -- but was not sure whether to go on or back up. She quickly walked towards him, said hello and happily led him to the calligraphy desk.

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Some of the elderly can say their Dutch names. For those who were not able to fully express themselves, the volunteers read their names from the name cards on the wheelchairs and then wrote them in Chinese, using brush. The elderly held the cards in their hands; it was heart-warming to see how happy they were.



There was a man aged between 70 and 80, who came with his wife. She was dressed in red and looked good, but her eyes were a little lifeless - she is an Alzheimer patient. The old man held his wife's hands and carefully led her to the calligraphy desk, then asked for a card with her Chinese name on it. They left the desk with their hands still together. When they were sitting in front of the desk, he had been holding her hands all the time, whispering to her and gently watching her. This touching scene made people feel that they were one of the blessed couples in the world.

Tai Chi and sign language to express gratefulness

It was the first time that Xu Yuan Yu had been invited to attend a Tzu Chi care event and perform Tai Chi. During the afternoon, he demonstrated several sets. Volunteers Wei Feng Zhi and Zhang Lei performed with him. Xu Yuan Yu taught the residents how to relax their body and how to adjust their breath; he kindly helped the blind people with several postures. The performance was closely followed by the residents; Xu successfully persuaded them to participate. Even those in the wheelchairs joined in and followed the instructions with their hands. Love and care warmed the nursing home, which usually has few activities.

Before the afternoon program ended, the volunteers performed songs in sign language 'Love is in the world' and 'We are families'. The latter is simple and straightforward and encourages everybody to participate. The volunteers were really touched when they saw the elderly raise their hands and learn the gestures. We give many thanks for this opportunity to share happiness between the elderly and the volunteers. On this special day, the volunteers saw the most beautiful Valentine's Day in the world and were deeply touched.

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