

Volunteers in Holland take wheelchair-bound elderly on rare four-day outing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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In May, volunteers in the Netherlands took a group of wheelchair-bound elderly on a four-day outing so that they could enjoy the fresh air, the birds and the beauty of the countryside. It was a rare pleasure for people who spend most of their time confined to their home.

The Netherlands is a country with a developed and mature welfare system which takes good care of its young and elderly alike. However, there are many wheelchair-bound seniors who need to rely on Tzu Chi volunteers for outings for a change from where they live. 2011 is the third consecutive year that the volunteers have organized such an event for residents of the Maria Dommer Home for the Aged in Maarsssen, a city of 40,000 people in the central province of Utrecht. They believe that they should contribute to the society wherever they live.

The first outing took place on the 14th of May, 2009: the volunteers were all smiles while taking the elderly out for a walk. Though some threw tantrums as they



were not familiar with the volunteers, they were very soon beaming with happiness after the volunteers won them over with patience and wisdom. Sister Wang Lijing tried her best to please an old lady all the time: though she was not kind in her words, all could see the positive change as her face broke into a big smile. Though some of the seniors are friendly, they tend to be forgetful and kept repeating what they had said. The volunteers were patient, knowing that old people are talkative and expect people to listen to them attentively. After a few outings, a strong foundation was laid for Tzu Chi and Maria Dommer Home for the Aged to continue with this activity.

This year, after many discussions, the volunteers agreed with the management of the home to take the elderly on a four-day outing from May 16 to 19; it was the first time they had taken them out for such a long period. A total of 37 Tzu Chi members, as well as other volunteers, took part. It was a long journey for them to reach the home. Some traveled nearly 40 kilometres from their homes in Amsterdam. Three others -- Terri, Lily and Fengzhi -- made an even longer trip from Rotterdam, while Shuping and Zhang Lei had to drive over 100 kilometers. Unfortunately, due to construction work, they could not exit the highway and go directly to the old people's home. They had to make a few detours and were very worried that they would not arrive in time, although they had left their home earlier than usual that day. Thank goodness they arrived in time and did not miss the opportunity to accompany the 'old bodhisattvas' for their outing.

What is special for the old people is the opportunity to spend time in the countryside and see the wild rabbits running around in the bushes and unknown birds perching on tree branches -- common sights for most people but unusual for them since they are usually confined to their home.

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