

A Volunteer From Holland Learn to Give in Manchester

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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On December 12, volunteers carried out a winter distribution for 150 homeless people at a day center in Manchester, northwest England. It was the fourth year of the distribution and aimed to help the recipients endure the cold of winter.

The Cornerstone Day Center, in Moss Side, a poor district of Manchester, belongs to a charity under the Catholic diocese of Salford. It is run by a small team headed by Sister Lucy Dunne, aided by a large team of volunteers. It provides services to vulnerable and disadvantaged people, especially the poor, homeless, the socially isolated and those suffering from poor mental health and drug and alcohol addiction.

On December 11, the volunteers went to the center to make preparations. They made ready 150 pairs of gloves, scarves, hats and underwear and 120 blankets. They also prepared more than 100 bags and rucksacks for those who did not have them. On the outside of the bags was the Tzu Chi logo and a card on which they could write their name next to a Jing Si (Still Thought) Aphorism. Since the aphorisms were written in Chinese, volunteers Xu Li-ren translated them into English, so that the recipients could understand the meaning.



Since it was the fourth year of the distribution, many regulars of the center have started to recognize the Tzu Chi volunteers in their blue and white uniform. This time they introduced the spirit of the 'bamboo bank', to enable the homeless to learn the spirit of giving and experience the happiness of helping others. The volunteers showed a short film of the foundation's work in helping cyclone victims in Myanmar: although they are very short of material goods, each day they set aside rice in a tin to donate to those who need it. Many of those who heard this story were moved and immediately made a donation. One man named Tomy, whose hands do not function properly, gave 20 pounds. Many volunteered to take a bamboo bank and donate money each day to help others. Alexandra, a member of the center staff, and Sister Lucy Dunne strongly support this concept; they believe that, by giving a little each day, a person can not only benefit others but also bring happiness to himself. For the weak and disadvantaged, it is a way to rebuild self-confidence.



The success of a distribution depends on the proper allocation of duties. Each time, a young volunteer, Wu Kun-ji, uses his free time in the morning to help; he comes with his mother.

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Volunteer Xu Ji-rui and Liu Ci-jun are a husband and wife team who are devoted Tzu Chi members. For the previous two days, they provided their home for the use of the volunteers from London for Tzu Chi Collegiate Associate's life camp; they looked after their daily needs and provided support. Half way through, they hurried to Manchester to take part in the distribution. Jose, who lives in Holland, came to learn of Tzu Chi because she met Qiu Di, Tzu Chi volunteer, at work; she was very curious to find out what kind of organization had won the admiration of a woman who was so strong at work. "Would it not be better just to give money?" asked Jose. So that she could understand better, Qiu Di invited Jose to England to take part in the distribution. She was initially uneasy to join a group of people she did not know in a foreign country. She had not expected to find such warmth and cordiality; it made her forget any strangeness and made her feel that she had worked with them for a long time.

Jose was packing a bag and had a song in her mouth. The volunteers working with her could feel her good heart. Jose said: "I feel very honored to wear the Tzu Chi's volunteer vests. I am very moved by its unusual method of contributing. As I interact with Tzu Chi people, I begin to understand, giving is not only the act of handing something over."

One homeless man was having lunch and said to a volunteer: "you have done even better than last year!" The volunteers felt relieved; they saw a larger number of people than a year earlier. They were not only giving them blessings but also leading them on the path of Bodhisattvas. They hope the number of people suffering will decrease and that of Bodhisattvas who are giving will increase every day!