

Tzu Chi Improves Bathrooms for 103 Elderly in Hualien Villages

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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Over the last two years, volunteers from the foundation have improved the bathroom and toilet facilities for 103 elderly Aboriginal people who live in three rural communities in Hualien, east Taiwan. This has greatly enhanced the quality of their life and brought a broad smile to their faces.

The three communities are Xiulin, Xincheng and Fengbin. The foundation launched the programme in 2011 with the aim of providing a safe living environment for elderly Aboriginal people who live in remote rural areas: it was called the “Plan to Improve the Homes of the Elderly”. So far, volunteers have completed the improvement of the washing and toilet facilities for 103 families. Among them are 17 in Jingmei village in Xiulin: the volunteers will make the improvements to 15 more next month.

One of those who has benefited in Jingmei village is Grandmother Zhu who waited 20 years to have a proper toilet. She is deeply grateful to the foundation for its help, as is her son, on which she is dependent. Zhu, 72, lives in the Jiawan district of Yingmei village. She had nine children and lost her husband 20 years ago; now she lives with one of her sons, who is 44. She has lived in Jiawan for 40 years; for the last eight years, she has needed kidney dialysis treatment.

Twenty years ago, her toilet ceased to work. Since then, she has been forced to use a bowl as a toilet, throwing the contents into a ditch after use. In recent years, as she had become older, her legs have become increasingly stiff and she sometimes falls over. So going to the toilet has become very inconvenient.

After a report from the village chief, the Foundation did an assessment on what they had to do to reconstruct Madame Zhu’s toilet, which had not been working for so many years. They found that it was a complicated task: they would have to rebuild the leaking roof and install new water pipes, bricks on the floor, a toilet seat, a pool to collect the waste and a rail for her to hold. She was extremely grateful to the foundation for providing her with a completely new toilet.



Her son, Mr Zeng, had a stroke more than 10 years ago and fell to the ground; now he moves with the aid of a walking frame. Despite that, he is a filial son, taking good care of his month. In the early stages of her diabetes, he injected her with insulin each morning and evening. After his mother began kidney dialysis treatment three days a week, he was responsible for preparing dinner; when his mother returned home from the treatment, she found a lovely hot meal waiting for her.

Walking is not easy for Mr Zeng; but he still does recycling work close to the house and uses

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this modest income from this to support the family. He is, like his mother, full of gratitude for the new toilet and regularly expresses this to the Tzu Chi volunteers.

Another recipient is 83-year-old Grandmother Lin, who lives in the Sanzhan area. Several months ago, while she was going to the toilet, she slipped on the wet floor and was taken to hospital. The volunteers took the opportunity to install a handrail in her bathroom. When she came back from the hospital, she used the new handrail and made a big smile.

Grandmother Su lives in the Jiawan district and needs a walking stick. She uses a bathroom and toilet at the back of her house; she must walk along a 20-meter corridor. The volunteers installed a handrail from the entrance along the corridor into the bathroom and next to the toilet. So Madame Su can hold the handrail as she walks to the bathroom, reducing the likelihood of a fall.

The foundation says that making these simple improvements provide safety and security for the old people living in these rural areas. When they see the smiles of joy on the faces of the old people, the volunteers are encouraged to do more to look after them.

(Report by Wu Ji-chun in Hualian 2013/7/22)