

Volunteers in Penghu Islands Help Relatives of Air Crash Victims

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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More than 60 volunteers of the Tzu Chi Foundation are helping the relatives of those who lost their lives and injured when their plane crashed in the afternoon of July 23 in Penghu island, in Taiwan. Of the 58 people on board, 48 died and 10 are being treated in two hospitals in the island.

Flight GE-222 of TransAsia Airways was originally scheduled to depart from Kaohsiung for the Penghu Islands at 4 p.m. on July 23; it was delayed due to bad weather. The plane finally departed at 5:43 p.m. While it attempted a second emergency landing in the Penghu islands, it lost contact with the control tower, also due to the severe weather. It was later found to have crashed into a residential area.

In the evening, over 200 relatives of the passengers went to look for news of their family members. The volunteers went to the two hospitals – Penghu Hospital and Tri-Service General Hospital Penghu branch – and to the funeral home where the bodies were taken, to accompany the relatives. At 1.00 a.m., the home posted photographs on the walls to help their relatives identify their love ones. Until 3.00 a.m., there were nearly 20 photographs remained without having been identified. The volunteers will continue their service on July 24, providing assistance to the relatives.

Among the volunteers is Wang Liyun who lives opposite Penghu hospital. After seven o'clock on July 23, she heard the sirens of the ambulances and saw the television news. As soon as she realized what had happened, she went quickly to the emergency ward of the Penghu hospital. Then five to six other volunteers followed, going there or the Tri-Service General Hospital, to comfort the wounded and the relatives caring for them.



The parents of a Mr Chen were on the plane. After he heard the news, he rushed to the hospital; anxious for news of his parents, he was obviously restless and uneasy. Volunteer Wang had previously worked in the hospital; after consultations with the hospital staff, she received permission for the volunteers to enter the emergency ward and comfort the relatives waiting there.

At 9.20 p.m., Wang and several other volunteers went together to the crash site in a rural area in the west of the island, to get a better understanding of the situation. As the night descended, each second counted in the effort to save lives. The rain increased the difficulty of the rescue operation. When the volunteers reached the site, the rain was continuing to fall. Soldiers were moving the bodies of the victims and transporting them to the funeral home. Because the aircraft had caught fire, the temperature was still high. But the road out of the crash site was a narrow lane. All this made for a chaotic situation and the volunteers were unable to look after

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the people at the site. At the same time, the team of more than 30 volunteers went to the funeral home and the airport to be with the families.



At about 10 p.m., 13 volunteers of the foundation returned to the Penghu Jing Si Hall for a meeting on how to divide the work and show how Taiwan could provide personnel and materials to those who need it. At 11 p.m., when the injured had entered the hospital wards to rest, the volunteers left the two hospitals and divided into two groups. One group delivered drinks and buns to those still working at the crash site, including the soldiers who were spending the night in the search operation. The other group delivered ginger tea, hot water and delicious congee to the funeral home, so that the relatives could feel a sense of warmth.

The hearts of those going to the home were full of anxiety and confusion. On the one hand, they desperately hoped that their loved ones would not among the photographs on the wall; on the other hand, if they were, they must identified them. When they recognized them, some family members could not contain their grief; the volunteers were at their side to hold and comfort them.

Of the passengers, about 80 per cent were residents of Penghu. Once the person in the photograph had been identified, the body was moved to freezer. For those who were not recognized, it was necessary to wait until the next day, July 24, for their DNA to be check. By three in the morning, nearly 20 photographs had still not been identified. With heavy sadness in their hearts, the family members went home.

The Tzu Chi volunteers of Penghu, Kaohsiung and Taipei continue showing their concern and provide assistance.

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