

Volunteers From American Samoa Learn About Tzu Chi

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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A team of volunteers from National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), American Samoa and U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in American Samoa last week visited the foundation in Taiwan, to learn about its organization, missions and recycling. On July 22, they had a meeting with Master Cheng Yen.

The FEMA is a branch of the Department of Homeland Security, which is responsible for protecting U.S. territories from natural or man-made disasters and helping citizens recover from the results of them. American Samoa is a territory of 200 square kilometers in the southern Pacific Ocean, with a population of 60,000. Last August the island was hit by an earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale; Tzu Chi volunteers went to help, which was how the FEMA there came to know of the foundation. The team came to Taiwan in the hope of building a partnership and taking back some of its ideals with them.



The six-member team visited the Ba De recycling station in downtown Taipei, where volunteers explained to them the proper way to recycle food packaging. “The first step starts at home,” said volunteer Zeng Cihui. “We wash used PET bottles with water saved from washing clothes or vegetables.” The station reuses many clothes and household appliances after cleaning and minor repairs. The visitors were surprised to see the wide selection of items. They listened intently to what they were told, because they want to use the same methods at home. “This is an idea that we can take back with us and develop,” said Harry E.B. Stevens Jr, one of the team.

“So we can clean up our environment and also change ... try to educate people and change their way of thinking, so they can start recycling and cleaning up too.” Another team member, Gabor H, said that they were looking to Tzu Chi to learn the process and maybe develop a partnership in recycling and the use of relief goods.



They also went to the foundation’s headquarters in Hualien, where they visited Jing Si Hall, to learn more of its history, organization and missions. They went with representatives of the Department of Emergency Management of the state of Arkansas. They came to know of the foundation through its disaster relief work in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, as well as its work in American Samoa. One of the visitors, Kim Burgo, of the U.S. National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD) said: “no matter where you go, in the United States or elsewhere in the world, you can rely on the fact that Tzu Chi will provide for everybody, with the same care and compassion that it demonstrates in this hall.” In American

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Samoa, the foundation worked with NVOAD, to provide relief supplies and emergency cash for communities hit by the earthquake and those ruined by the tsunami that followed. Volunteer Zeng Cihui said that, in the U.S., they could co-operate with the Federal or State governments or NGOs, dividing into teams and working together. “As the Master has instructed us, we work together with the American community and share our relief principles with them.”

By learning more about each other and sharing experiences, Tzu Chi is joining with strong allies which it can call on, when the next disaster strikes.