

Creating awareness of Tzu Chi medical services amongst foreign workers

Written by Yeo Kim Keow

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Since its inception last November, the Tzu Chi Free Clinic ran by the Singapore Branch of Tzu Chi Foundation aimed to benefit work permit holders earning less than S\$800 a month by providing them free health screening.

On the evening of 28 March 2009, seven medical volunteers and two doctors from Tzu Chi Free Clinic visited Centurion Dormitory at Toh Guan Road East. Their goal was to create awareness of the medical services offered by Tzu Chi Free Clinic amongst the foreign workers staying at the dormitory.

The dormitory's security officers made arrangements for the volunteers to set up their station at an empty space outside the living quarters. The two sisters present were assigned to the registration counter while the brothers were responsible for distributing pamphlets. As foreign workers from various countries (such as China, India and Sri Lanka) returned to the dormitory after a hard day's work, the volunteers stepped forward to spread the message. In order to overcome language barriers, the volunteers spoke to them at a slower pace.



While talking to them, the volunteers realized that many of the foreign workers do not receive any medical benefits from their employers. When they are sick, they would buy over-the-counter medicine. When they have toothaches, they would endure the pain instead of seeing a dentist. The foreign workers do not earn much (about S\$15 to S\$25 daily), and they must turn up at work in order to get paid.

The foreign workers were very surprised to learn about the free consultations and health screenings offered by Tzu Chi Free Clinic. It was moving to hear them repeatedly question the volunteers in order to make sure that they had the right information.

In all, 46 foreign workers made appointments for health screening, 24 for dental consultation, and seven for medical consultation. At the same time, two foreign workers volunteered to help with interpretation. They are now under the lead of Brother Shankar from the English team.

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Photos by Ni Tsan Yen

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