

Making Strides in Colombo

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Sunday, 31 October 2010 00:00



Tzu Chi is expanding its philanthropic activities from the tsunami-hit southern town of Hambantota in Sri Lanka to the former capital city of Colombo, having nine needy families now on its support scheme. On 31 Oct, Tzu Chi volunteers helped Chandrani and her family move to a new house, keeping them in company while they began their new life.

Six years on since its arrival in Hambantota in Sri Lanka when it was hit by the tsunami that affected much of Asia in 2004, Tzu Chi is expanding its charitable activities to the capital city Colombo. The first step was taken in 2010 and the local volunteers have since identified nine needy families to be put on the support scheme in an endeavour to inspire the rich to help the poor.

Helping a family to settle down

21-year-old Chandrani Mallika lived with her mother, elder and younger brothers in a house made of wood and mud. Her younger brother is still attending school and the combined income from her and her elder brother is only enough for providing the basic necessities to the household; they couldn't afford to repair their shabby and dilapidated house, let alone having utilities such as electricity and water. For a long time, Chandrani and her family had to rely on water from the well and light from oil lamps. Though life was difficult, the four managed to lead a happy life together.

Chandrani works as an administrative assistant in a small company, earning 8000 Rupees (about 7USD) a month. Though having to support her family, Chandrani is determined to upgrade herself by taking a two year varsity course. She attends classes every weekend and aspires to be a teacher upon graduation.



Unfortunately, without prior notice, the owner of their house recently requested that Chandrani and her family move out of the house. As the owner was facing some legal problems, the house could be sealed and the family driven out anytime. As such, they lived in fear every day. While Chandrani and her family were feeling helpless, their plight was brought to the attention of Tzu Chi volunteers in Colombo. The volunteers later paid the family a visit to assess the situation.

After the first visit and assessment, volunteer Arosha Paranavithana prepared a detailed report and recommended that the family be given assistance by Tzu Chi.

One week later, in the company of the Colombo volunteers, Brother David Liu, who superintends Tzu Chi Singapore branch as well as Tzu Chi's missions in Sri Lanka, visited the family again on 9 Sep. On the following day, the decision to provide assistance to the family was made. The volunteers were forthcoming with their encouragement and care for the family;

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they were also looking for a new house and providing rental subsidy for the family to settle down.

Starting a new life with a new place

According to Sri Lankan tradition, moving house is a very important thing to be taken seriously. Sri Lankans take pain to choose auspicious dates and times to move houses, often by consulting monks or other relevant experts. They believe that if they move houses on auspicious dates and times, their future lives will be a smooth and safe one.

31 Oct was both an important and happy day for Chandrani and her family. They were finally going to have a peaceful and comfortable home to live in! The whole family was looking forward to moving into the new house that would bring them a new life and new hope.



Before they started moving, Chandrani's mother, U.K. Suneetha, followed local tradition by boiling milk in the living room till the milk boiled, foamed and overflowed from the container. The locals believe that practicing that ritual before doing any important or wholesome matter will bring the entire family blissfulness, health and wealth.

Despite being young, Chandrani's seven-year-old brother knew that moving house is an important moment that required all in the family to put in their effort. He made his contribution by inviting five of his friends to help out. Together with the ten Tzu Chi volunteers, all worked together to transport the simple furniture and other household items.

One could sense that Chandrani and her family were delighted to move into their new house.

Staying committed to helping the needy

Although the house moving was somewhat delayed due to rain, everyone remained enthusiastic and it resumed as soon as the rain stopped momentarily. Several volunteers new to Tzu Chi were perspiring profusely, but all of them were smiling, being grateful for having the opportunity to help others.

The volunteers said the day was a satisfying experience for they were able to help their own countrymen and experience the equality preached by Tzu Chi that transcends race, religion, and national boundaries at the same time.



The sunshine after rain was so bright. The volunteers had likewise opened a window that brought in sunshine for Chandrani and her family. With the company and support of Tzu Chi volunteers, hopefully Chandrani and her family will have more courage and strength to face

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their future.

Like the rain that cleanses away the filth, the teachings of Master Cheng Yen inspires and encourages Tzu Chi volunteers to give steadfastly worldwide. It can be seen that the Sri Lankan volunteers will one day spread Tzu Chi's compassion to the whole of nation.

Help oneself and help others

Chandrani is very grateful to Tzu Chi for finding her and her family a decent home. The family no longer has to live in fear and Chandrani can concentrate on her studies. She is even more grateful to Tzu Chi for supplementing her monthly household income, which helps to relieve her mother's worries and burden.

In the past, though many people promised to help after getting to know their plight, nothing happened in the end. Due to their past experience, they were not too hopeful when Arosha came to visit them and offered his assistance. But the care and sincerity exhibited by Tzu Chi volunteers through a number of visits helped to remove their doubts slowly.

Chandrani and her mother feel that they are the blessed ones as they are able to receive help from Tzu Chi. They feel that the donation from Tzu Chi should be offered to those more in need when they can earn their own living to fully support the household. They have thus vowed to make more effort to save money.

Though they can't afford to save much, the family believes in "many little drops make an ocean" and that one day they will be able to have their own house. When that day comes, they hope to give up the monetary assistance for others to have it, which to them is a way of repaying Tzu Chi.

Amassing collective efforts

It is expected that Tzu Chi will play a more important role in Colombo, hence the need to have more people to be part of it. Sensing the urgency to recruit more members, the Colombo volunteers organized a tea session in the evening after helping Chandrani's family move into their new house. Thanks to everyone's cordial invitation, a total of 15 new volunteers and residents turned up for the occasion.



Through a video screening session, the attendees learnt about the philanthropic activities that Tzu Chi had undertaken in Sri Lanka.

Tzu Chi Colombo volunteers had experienced many touching moments in the last two months when visiting and helping the needy families. They took the opportunity to share their feelings with the attendees, which allowed all to see that by just contributing a little time and money, one could help to improve the lives of the underprivileged, thereby inspiring many to come forward to participate in the cycle of love.

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Colombo volunteer Arosha shared with the rest how he was touched by Tzu Chi and how his life has changed after joining Tzu Chi. Through visiting the underprivileged, he has come to realize how fortunate he is in comparison and he has learnt to be grateful and contented. Being part of Tzu Chi, he is sure and confident about the direction he is taking—one has to have a sense of urgency in doing good deeds to create blessings for oneself, and that material wealth is not as valuable as spiritual wealth. He also encouraged those at the session to take the opportunity to join Tzu Chi and contribute to the well-being of the society.

A short tea session had fused the loving kindness of all. With the encouragement of the volunteers, many of the attendees expressed their willingness to join the ranks of Tzu Chi. We hope that in the near future, there will be more becoming Tzu Chi volunteers in Colombo and together shape the cities and towns into better communities.

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