

## Volunteers to Build High School in the Dominican Republic

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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It was a natural disaster that brought Tzu Chi volunteers to Haiti. So it was in the neighbouring country of the Dominican Republic, which shares with Haiti the island of Hispaniola. They arrived in the country in 1998, when it had been devastated by Hurricane Georges, and visited La Romana, one of the worst hit areas. In 2000, they built an elementary and middle school for the town.

Now they are preparing to build a high school nearby, to save the children the long journey to their current high school in a nearby city and reduce the likelihood of road accidents along the way. Some of the children cannot continue their education because they cannot afford the commute to the city. The volunteers have secured a site of 7,000 square metres from the local government, thanks to Altegrown Polomo, who was formerly the principal of the Tzu Chi school and now heads the local department of education.

The volunteers maintain a close contact with the elementary and middle school. Each year 200 children graduate and the number increases. Its faculty frequently contacts the volunteers for help; they provide the children with backpacks, stationery, bus fares and other daily provisions. They also regularly visit the homes of the students and their families. One is Maria Esmir, who is raising nine children, two of them adopted. She is also caring for her husband, who suffered a stroke. "He used to be very healthy and to care for his wife," said volunteer Zhang Ciyang. "However, he had a cerebral hemorrhage and now his wife is helping him." Maria herself has difficulty moving since her leg was injured in a road accident and one child is bed-ridden after a fall. Since her children attend the Tzu Chi school, volunteers were informed about the fall and quickly came to the rescue.



"We schedule a visit every month," said Zhang. "Each time we bring rice, corn flour, powdered milk, pasta and other daily necessities. This helps a lot." They also visit Dania Michel, whose two daughters graduated from the school and now attend high school in the city. Fearful that the daughters would drop out because they could not afford the bus fares to the high school, the volunteers give them US\$56 a month to cover the fees. Through the virtuous cycle of love, they are determined to give these children an academic future.

Sister Ciyang is a devoted member not only in her spare time but also during her work, at a paper-making factory owned by a Taiwan entrepreneur. A manager at the plant, she has inspired 14 of the 180 Dominican employees to become regular donors to the foundation, from the earthquake in Taiwan in 1999 to [Typhoon Morakot](#) last August and now the earthquake in Haiti. They give between US\$2 and US\$10 each time. "The financial situation is not good for many people, so they really need help," said Bianca Suriel, one of the 14. "I am willing to donate every month to help them." Another, Alberto Sanchez, said that he knew the volunteers went to

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La Romana elementary school to help the children and local residents. “They also help victims of natural disasters in Haiti and even China. I am proud to be a Tzu Chi member.” Each Tuesday, the company holds a meeting of the administrative staff where they share Jing Si (Still Thought) aphorisms. On one day it was: “even if you are like a little screw, it is important to tighten the screw properly, to function well.” Chairing the meeting was the sales manager, who brought a real screw, to illustrate the point.

The local employees only earn a modest salary – but their generosity is remarkable.