

Tzu Chi Carries Out Winter Distribution for Vancouver Natives

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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On a freezing November day in the Pacific coast city of Vancouver, volunteers conducted their eighth winter distribution for native Canadians, giving out warm clothes and toiletries to 130 people. They live in the eastern part of the city, the poorest area of Vancouver, many of them on the street and HIV-positive.

Aborigines account for less than two per cent of 640,000 people who live in the urban area of Vancouver. They are descendants of people who have lived in the area for thousands of years, before the arrival of Europeans and Asians who account for the vast majority of the population. The distribution was held in the Vancouver Native Health Society Clinic, on a gloomy winter day; it had snowed and the weather was freezing. A total of 30 volunteers, in their blue and white uniforms, were busy setting up the distribution site. Volunteer Huang Yan-Hua was one of those who conducted the first winter distribution eight years ago: "The Vancouver Native Health Society Clinic is a non-profit society and most patients here are HIV+ infections," Huang said. "This area located in eastern part of downtown Vancouver is the poorest district. These patients are the minority in the area and are also our winter relief recipients."



While the volunteers were preparing, the recipients who were waiting started to help the volunteers hang the banner. Before the relief operation began, the volunteers did a sign language performance and sang Tzu Chi songs. Chen Chao-Hsian held up boards with English lyrics on them, while Lin Chiu-yueh and other volunteers sang as they performed the sign language. They sang: "there is no-one in the world I don't love. There is no-one in the world I don't trust. There is no-one in the world I don't forgive...." The soft melody warmed everyone's heart.

During the singing, the volunteers took out bamboo banks made of paper. They said: "Every one of you could save a penny into this bank every day and next year you could bring them back to us. Then we would collect the money to help more people. This is called the circle of virtue." The co-ordinator of the Vancouver Native Health Society Clinic, Doreen Littlejohn, was the first person to deposit money into the bank; then the rest of the native people joined. The "clink, clink..." sounds of the coins dropping into the bank was an echo of the virtue they symbolized.

Next on the agenda was lunch. One native played a drum and said a prayer for everyone: "we are one big family and we should learn to share. Please don't be afraid, we must love ourselves first, then we can love people around us." After they finished lunch, the 130 Aborigines entered the distribution area. The volunteers asked them what size of jacket they wore and help them to

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try the different ones, so that they could find one to fit them.



The winter in Vancouver is extremely cold. Volunteer Chan Chia-Chen said: "it is always windy and snowy in Vancouver. Many natives live on the streets, so we prepared wind-proof gloves to protect them against the snow as well as socks, water-proof padded jackets, underwear, toothpaste and toothbrush to cope with the chilly weather."

Alex Tam, owns a pharmacy next to the Vancouver Native Health Society Clinic. He still remembers what his father taught him: "when you drink from the stream, remember its source." He believes everyone should be treated equally and it is meaningful by helping others. He has helped the native people in the area for years and he is always with his smiling face chatting with Tzu Chi volunteers. He said, "There is no other organizations want to visit this place but only Tzu Chi volunteers comes every year. And Tzu Chi volunteers have been doing a great job for the natives."

Doreen Littlejone said with crying and laughing, "It's been eight years that Tzu Chi conducts the winter distributions. Each year we see the toiletries and warm clothes brought by the volunteers for natives, we are deeply moved. For them never have any new clothing and have nothing with them, Tzu Chi volunteers always bring what they needed - the warm clothes and caring love each year."

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