

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Tuesday, 06 March 2012 15:47



In the playground of a school in California, children were playing after Friday class. When they saw Tzu Chi volunteers walking in an orderly line into the school, they shouted excitedly: “Tzu Chi, Tzu Chi”. This is the happiest moment of the week for the 40 students of the Lydia Romero-Cruz Elementary School in Santa Ana, California, the moment they all look forward to.

Santa Ana is the poor relation of nearby Irvine, a city of 210,000 that ranks among the top 10 in the United States in terms of average income. It is a different story in Santa Ana and its two primary schools -- George Washington Carver and Lydia Romero-Cruz. Most of the nearby houses are old buildings from the 1940s and 50s. Many families are Latino or Mexican immigrants; half sub-let living rooms or garages as their bedrooms. The recession has made their fathers and mothers lose their job. The free breakfasts and lunches provided by the government are very important for the children; but, during weekends, there is not enough food.

It was in 2011 that Tzu Chi volunteer Jian Wan-ping discovered the plight of students from these low-income families. In September that year, volunteers began the ‘happy campus backpack’ food program in the school. The students took the backpacks home after school on Friday and brought them back, empty, to school on Monday. Volunteers then purchased more food, refilled the backpacks and prepared to give them out again on the upcoming Friday. This has since become a regular event for all those involved.



With her previous experience of a backpack food program in Las Vegas, Jian knew that it was not enough only to distribute food, but also necessary to bring the seeds of love to the children. In the first month of the food program, students learnt how to say “Tzu Chi”, “grateful”, “I love you” and other words in sign language. The volunteers bring not only warmth to the students but also Tzu Chi culture into the school.

They teach the students to have a grateful heart. At the distribution, they explain to the children where every item comes from, to show them that every donation is love from others which they should receive with a grateful heart. When they grew up, they can learn to turn their palm down to help others.

Ms. Edna Velado, principle of both elementary schools, explained the positive influence which book donations, the backpack food program and a tutoring program by members of Tzu Chi Collegiate Associate have had on the children over the past decade.

“Tzu Chi has brought so much hope to the school. When there is no hope, the families will be discouraged and the dreams will vanish. The children may even lose the motivation to search

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for a bright future. The donations from Tzu Chi have made many dreams possible in the two schools. With this hope, our children dare to dream that they can do it.”

Two years ago, both Caver and Lydia Romero-Cruz were designated as “failing schools” by the Federal Education Department. In 2011, the schools received an award as “the most improved”. With emotion in her voice, Ms. Velado said that, in education, there is an adage: “It takes a village to raise a child’. For us, Tzu Chi is the village.”