

Volunteers Are Partners in Dementia Elderly Community Outreach

By Tseng Yu-Ling, case manager in Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital Dementia Care Center

I still remember the spring two years ago, I went from Geriatric Psychiatric Day Care Center in Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital to the Dementia Elderly Community Outreach, transferring from familiar traditional medicine to community medical service. Fenglin dementia elderly community outreach is located in Fenglin Jing Si Hall (Fenglin Township Hualien County) and started undertaking the care center plan planned by Ministry of Health and Welfare on September 21, 2015. Although I had many things to adapt when I first came to the community, the outreach service went smoothly because of the support and affirmation from volunteers.

With the company of Sister Wu Ren from the north Hualien region, I drove 20 miles from Hualien two days a week to provide service to the elderly and their families. During the outreach, Wu Ren helped to receive the elderly. From the way she interacts with the elderly, we feel her affability. Although I am experienced in taking care of elderly patients with dementia for 15 years, I still encounter some difficulties when I began my service in the community outreach. Inside a hospital, we have well defined



Fenglin Dementia Elderly Community Outreach, thanks to volunteers' companion.



responsibilities among each other; such as administration managers handling with administrative affairs, clerks handling with paper work, janitors handling the cleaning. However, we had to do everything in an outreach; thus, we tried hard to adapt to different roles. Whenever I face challenge, Wu Ren always inspires me with her life experience which encourages me very much. Sometimes when I am caught up in things, she would reach out to me and ask, “Is there anything I can help?” which is really heartwarming.

In addition, I want to say thank you to the local volunteers in Fenglin. They accompanied me during my stay and helped us achieve the outreach goal. Without their help, our service couldn’t finish successfully.

Lai Li-Zhen was the first person I met when I came to Fenglin Township two years ago. I still remember it deeply the first time I met Li-Zhen when she shared with me the local cultural character enthusiastically. With her help, I learned the majority of people in Fenglin are Hakkas. Understanding the local educational culture and its history helped me master the cultural background of the local dementia elderly and their families in a short time. Every time when the administrative affairs needed promotion, Li-Zhen always tried her best to recruit volunteers. Li-Zhen also shared with me her experience in Tzu Chi; her kindness impressed me and affected me.

I am also grateful to these two Tzu Chi sisters: Tsai Su-Mei, our multi-media volunteer, and Xiao Chun-Ying, also called teacher Xiao. Su-Mei always took photos during our community outreach services without any complaints, catching the most precious moments of the elderly on camera. Chun-Ying is our culinary volunteer, she is mindful for the food for the elderly, and brings seasonal food items. She cares so we can eat healthy and fully.

There were so many people supported us during the two years. Without going into the details to thank each one of them, I am thankful to all Tzu Chi volunteers for their companionship in serving the dementia elderly. They not only helped patients with dementia but contributed to the society in bringing happiness to the elderly and their families. Working in the outreach program is full of ups and downs. Volunteers here gave us energy and they influenced us deeply. We learned the beauty of the Tzu Chi humanistic culture.