

MidCoast Bushfire Relief

Written by □□□

Sun, 12 Jan 2020

21st December 2019 – MidCoast Bushfire Relief Event

21 December, Tzu Chi Australia held a bushfire relief event in MidCoast.

Since November, the Australian East Coast has been plagued by bushfires, covering an area of 3350 KM², killing at least 6 people, damaging 680 properties with more than 6 million people facing a “catastrophic condition” warning. MidCoast, 376KM away from Sydney, was heavily impacted. For several weeks, Sister Kim Lee had been in constant communication and on 5 December, confirmation was granted by MidCoast Council, who assisted Tzu Chi in notifying affected families to attend the relief event on 21 December.



December in Australia is Mid-Summer, temperatures reached 40° on the 21st. Although the temperature was high, it could not beat the passion of the Tzu Chi volunteers. The event was two phase, one was the relief goods distribution and another was home visits. Volunteers each had different roles, arriving at the event site before dawn. Although it was a warm day and the event site had no air conditioning, residents arrived early, from their helpless eyes, everyone could feel the trauma caused by the bushfire and their need for assistance and support.

Australians are mostly Catholic or Christians, with this in mind, before the event officially started, emcees introduced “Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation” and Dharma Master Cheng Yen, to let everyone understand “tzu” means compassion, and “chi” means relief: with open hearts and helping hands, there are no barriers across religions. It was told that the relief funds came from Tzu Chi donators’ donations, and the relief aid package would contain a small bamboo bank, if we could save a coin a day, from a little change we could generate enough to help others in future. A few short lines, everyone realised they could transform from a victim needing assistance to a “bodhisattva” who could help others. Emcees read Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s letter to everyone, she told everyone, “life is impermanent”, all difficulties will become the past as time goes on, all will return to the norm. Although many adversities exist at present, it would slowly become better in the future. Everyone is from different cultures, different religions but we stand together as one. Her words warmed those present, giving everyone hope for the future.



However, “Tzu Chi” was still a foreign name to locals, a foreigner’s organisation. To alleviate any concerns held, Tzu Chi Australia CEO Randy Sung said gratefully “Tzu Chi is a charity organisation with no borders or barriers. When we first arrived in Australia, the people of Australia gave us much assistance, now it’s time for us to give back. In Chinese, there is a saying “When One is in trouble, help comes from all quarters”. We will stand with everyone to

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face the challenges together, pray for peace and harmony for the land. Because we are a family, we share a dream, let us sing: I am, you are, we are Australians". Tzu Chi volunteers' singing and sign language performance of "One Family" touched everyone in the audience, many residents and volunteers embraced in hugs, tears rolling down their faces.

"I feel happy when you laugh cheerfully, And when you are crying, I hurt even more deeply" Compassion originates from one's empathy towards those in suffering. Although we were not directly affected by the fires, we are potential victims too, we understand the pain and anxiety of losing their homes overnight, hopefully through practical actions, we can help them rebuild, for them not to feel lonesome.



Although 81 families had to receive aid packages, but the process was smooth and orderly, showcasing Tzu Chi volunteers' care and discipline. Families were organised into groups of ten, dedicated volunteers led them through the process of receiving relief goods and funds. A hug and the words "Gan En" (meaning: thank you) warmed hurting souls and left many in tears. Sister Gui Lan stood at the door with Jing Si Aphorisms for everyone to pick up, to many people's surprise, the aphorism they received answered questions in their heart.

The aid package consisted of eco blanket, Jing Si Aphorism and Dharma Master Cheng Yen's letter, upon reading the letter a lady broke into tears, repeatedly saying "beautiful letter!" She showed us photos of her property on fire and the ruins left after the fire. In the end, we saw the home's original appearance – a house built was large grassy lawn. The photos in complete contrast was a realisation of the impermanence in life. As Dharma Master Cheng Yen says: "This world expounds Dharma to us at every moment, silent dharma often can be more powerful than spoken words". The resident says: all is lost, nothing is left. Master Cheng Yen's letter made her feel very warm at heart. This is a beautiful letter, Tzu Chi's relief event made her feel blissful about the upcoming Christmas festive. A few hundred dollars may not be able to resolve large problems, but this is a beautiful sum of money, she can use it to help others. This lady's daughter is a teacher, she requested for extra copies of Jing Si Aphorisms. The words written in the book were wonderful, she wanted to share it with her students. Every day before class, she would teach her students a Jing Si Aphorism.

Another couple recalls, they have lived here for over 30 years and never seen a bushfire of this magnitude. The fire destroyed everything they had, through Tzu Chi's event, they found hope for the future. They are grateful for Tzu Chi and its volunteers. The couple pointed to the bamboo bank within the aid package, mentioning this was what they wanted to do – although they were victims, but they have received help and hope to pass on this assistance to others.

As they left, the bushfire victims' expressions were completely different to when they arrived. When they entered, their brows frowned, unwilling to open up; as they left, their faces were lit with joy, gratitude and hope, actively sharing their joy and experience with us.

