

Indigenous Art Class for Typhoon Survivors in Taiwan

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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In Shanlin outside Kaohsiung, the foundation is building a new community, the 'Great Love Village', for 1,000 survivors of [Typhoon Morakot](#) which hit south Taiwan last August. To give the residents a source of income and become financially self-sufficient, the foundation has started classes in indigenous art.

The survivors of the typhoon belong to the Aboriginal peoples who inhabited Taiwan before the arrival of the Han Chinese in the 17th century. They have their own language, culture and way of living, which they are eager to preserve in their new homes. So the foundation opened classes in weaving, wood- and stone-carving and making beaded accessories at its Qishan liaison office, near Shanlin. It aims to pass on this ancestral knowledge and enable the practitioners to earn a living.

One of the teachers is Ke Bao-mei, who has mastered the traditional weaving skills of the Bunun tribe since she married into it. "Our indigenous art has great meaning, so we cannot take it lightly," she said. "We are delighted to have more people learn – the more people, the more products." One of the students, Chen Qiu-siang, said that the classes stimulated their brains. "How do we make money? We need to exert ourselves. There is still a lot that we have not touched on. We need to work harder." Another student, Liu-lin Hui-chen, said that, after they moved into the new village, they could use the skills on a daily basis and also make money. Student Sun Cian-Chi said that it was a new experience for him. "Before, we just saw others doing it. Now we get a sense of accomplishment by making it ourselves." Volunteer Wu Jia-lin said that the classes would enable the students to generate income and preserve their culture. "They have the talent to train the younger people and help them get acquainted with the culture of the tribe."

Tzu Chi wants to care for the material and spiritual needs of the residents, in the present and in the future. It is striving to turn the Great Love Village into a sanctuary of peace and stability.