

Tzu Chi Helps 644 Families in Oklahoma Hit by Tornado

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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From May 25- June 9, Tzu Chi volunteers from the southwest American city of Dallas provided cash cards and blankets to 644 families in Oklahoma hit by devastating tornados.

In the United States, the months between March and May is the tornado season. Since May 15, the southwest of the country has been hit by a series of fierce tornadoes. On the afternoon of May 20, one hit the town of Moore in Oklahoma with peak winds of 210 miles per hour. It killed 24 people, including 20 children, destroyed 13,000 homes and affected 33,000 people; the state Department of Insurance said that insurance claims for damage were likely to exceed US\$1 billion.

Homes, schools and other buildings were swept aside, presenting a tragic scene; roofs and furniture were scattered like matchsticks. Moore no longer looked like the picture book town it had been a few days before; the change was hard to imagine. Yuan Liang Ling, Executive regional director; of Tzu Chi Central Region in Dallas, said: "The place has become a wasteland. Who lived where – nobody knows."

On May 25, together with the Red Cross, volunteers of the Central Region Dallas office drove to the town of Little Axe in Oklahoma to survey the damage and distribute cash cards. It was one of the first place to be hit by the tornado. Its homes were devastated; the volunteers could not find the words to describe the terrible things they saw. Before the major tornado struck, the town had been hit by a smaller tornado; but there had been no time to rebuild.



Volunteers from Dallas and Oklahoma gathered in the town's distribution center. They distributed cash cards and blankets to 67 households. On May 27, the Dallas volunteers made the three-hour drive to Moore for a second distribution and to show their concern; as they embraced the victims of the tornado, they could feel the unease in their hearts. They again gave out cash cards and blankets; these were both of practical help and also were a sign of the love of Tzu Chi people, to give those affected the courage to face the future. A total of 124 households benefited -- 418 people all together.

Among them was Christina, who received a blanket; she did not want to let go and held it tightly, because she could feel in it the warmth of Tzu Chi members around the world. Many of the others were like her, in a state of shock. After receiving the love and concern of the volunteers, everyone did not feel afraid any more. One of them, Mary Ann, said: "the volunteers said that the disaster has passed and they have come to help. Now all I have to do is accept the aid and open my heart. Truly, this is very hard to do."

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For the four trips of Dallas volunteers to Moore, it was a long journey. Moore is 320 kilometers (198 miles) north of Dallas, a drive of three hours. After completing the drive, they immediately set to work and distributed the cash cards and blankets.

The volunteers will continue distributions to help the people whose lives have been devastated by the tornado until they can walk out of the shadow of the disaster.

Report by Volunteer Wu Peng-fei in the United States