

Tzu Chi Help Enables Malaysian to Realize His Dream as A Teacher

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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Tzu Chi volunteers in Malaysia provided financial support for eight years to a young Malaysian from a poor family, enabling him to realize his dream to become a secondary school teacher and change his life. During the eight years, they provided help and encouragement to overcome the many difficulties he encountered. Now he is a happy and self-confident individual who is able to support his family on his own.

The volunteers first met Muhd Radzman in 2003, when he was in the fifth year of secondary school. He lived in a mountainous area in the Penampang region, close to Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah in east Malaysia. He had to climb hills every day to attend school. His house was a small, shabby wooden hut that was home to a family of eight. With no electricity or running water, Radzman had to study on the floor and relied on candle light at night. His father had left the family for another woman, so his mother had to support the family single-handedly with her meager earnings as a seamstress. Since his two elder brothers had married, he as the third eldest, became the one on whom his younger siblings depended. He had to juggle school work and housework and, to make matters worse, he had to pay special attention to an intellectually challenged younger brother who suffered from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Despite this harsh environment, he never complained: hardworking and motivated, he had excellent grades and a good moral character and was well-liked by his teachers. His dilemma was whether to start working to support his family or continue his studies, as he wished; the question tormented him.



It was in 2003 that his teacher assisted him in applying for a bursary from the foundation. His application was approved and the volunteers entered his life. "He was always silent and looked worried, with his head hanging low, during our home visits," recalled Wong Chun Siong when he met him that year. "Poverty should not make you give up your ambition, the care and concern extended to me by Tzu Chi helped me pull myself together," Radzman recalled. Upon completing his secondary school education, Radzman initially decided to find a job to support his family. The volunteers could understand that he was anxious to give his family a better life, but continued to counsel him and encourage him to further his studies. "I remember the volunteers told me that finding a job then could solve my problem temporarily and only education can help me shake off poverty once and for all." The encouragement and concern from the volunteers persuaded Radzman to proceed with his pre-university education. Although the financial assistance from Tzu Chi eased Radzman's plight, it was still tough for him; he was always on the point of giving up. He said financial difficulties were relatively easy to deal with but that mental suffering was the toughest to overcome; all would come to nothing if not for his strong determination. During the home visits, the volunteers showed much concern about the progress of his studies. "Since they showered me with so much care, I can't be lazy." Radzman

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is grateful that the volunteers gave him moral support throughout the years.

To encourage him, the volunteers arranged for young people from the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association to interact with him: young people can influence each other positively. He began to ask himself: "if others can make it to the university, why can't I?" In addition to home visits, the volunteers invited him to participate in recycling activities, to show him how 'trash can be turned into gold'. "Do not underestimate the value of a aluminum can – just like every human being has his or her own value, one shouldn't look down on oneself." Radzman took the volunteers' advice to heart: "if you feel that you are the unfortunate one, think about others worse off than you. For every obstacle, there is a solution." Radzman took to heart such encouraging words from the volunteers and stayed undaunted in the face of his adversity. Very soon, results of the pre-university examination were released and he was admitted to the university.



But it was not plain sailing for him in the university. He had to be very careful with his spending. "I would be bluffing you if I told you there was no stress." He said he did not like to suppress mental stress but would take it in his stride; he would resolve it by practice marching, as a member of the volunteer army, to relax and attain peace of mind. Always pro-active, he also applied for and secured a government bursary, which gave him a sense of security. Then, due to the requirements of his course work, he spent the first installment of this bursary on a laptop and did not have enough for living expenses. He was at his wit's end and called his mother to tell her his problem; she quickly contacted Tzu Chi volunteers for help. They immediately contacted the Tzu Chi office nearest to his university, in Ipoh in peninsula Malaysia, on the other side of the country. Within two days, volunteers in Ipoh located Radzman and learnt that he used to earn 100 Malaysian ringgit a month as food allowance from his participation in the volunteer army. As there was no training during Ramadan, the period of fasting, he did not receive any allowance.

The volunteers based in Kota Kinabalu decided to grant him a subsistence allowance until he received a food allowance from the army again. Radzman has this incident ingrained in him: "I am very grateful to Tzu Chi for giving me the financial support to see me through my studies. Tzu Chi has taught me how to maintain an optimistic outlook at all times." Radzman has learnt how to adopt a positive attitude in dealing with problems that he encounters: "no matter how tough the situation is, hold onto your beliefs firmly and you will emerge victorious." Bearing in mind the advice and encouragement from the volunteers, he kept scaling new heights. But, during his second year in university, he was devastated to learn that his parents would divorce; he had always hoped his father would return to the family -- but his hopes were dashed and he lost the will power to carry on and improve himself.

His heart broken, he thought again of giving up his education. But very soon he thought of those Tzu Chi volunteers in their blue uniforms with white trousers and their inspiring words. "I thought of my mother and the Tzu Chi volunteers, I had to go on so as not to let them down," Radzman

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recounts matter-of-factly. The emotional upheavals and sorrows that he experienced were something unknown to others.

Finally, after four years of hard work, he graduated from Sultan Idris University of Education in Perak in 2010 and became a teacher in a secondary school in his hometown, Tubilu Tanjung Malim. He returned home with confidence. "Hardships give us maturity and wisdom," he said with a smile. Hardships make us feel despondent and hopeless; only by facing them directly can one change into a stronger person, as Radzman has demonstrated. When the volunteers meet him now, they have to address him as "Teacher". While they see the same dark complexion and youthful face, they notice for the first time that his teeth are sparkling white – because he has a wide, confident grin. The sense of confidence he exudes is felt by all those around him.



Since Radzman could support his own family, Tzu Chi stopped providing him with a family subsistence subsidy in 2010. In the following year, when the volunteers visited him again on Hari Raya, a Muslim religious holiday, they were treated to traditional Malay snacks prepared by Radzman's mother. To the surprise of the volunteers, Radzman has become a different person; he can now express himself confidently and with self-assurance and his hearty laugh is unforgettable. "Radzman has become cheerful," said Wong Chun Siong, the volunteer in charge of his case. He was pleased with the positive changes in Radzman. "Bearing in mind Master Cheng Yen's teaching, I kept saying positive words during every home visit in the hope of convincing him to further his studies," he said.

Volunteer Zheng Yue-fang carefully retrieved a photo from a paper bag, to the pleasant surprise of the family; it was a family photo taken years ago by the volunteers. She explained that she had kept the photo all this time and not shown it to them as she did not want to remind the family of a tragedy -- Radzman's intellectually challenged younger brother perished in a fire that engulfed their house shortly after the photo was taken. It was time to return the photo to its rightful owner after so many years. Holding it in his hand and gazing at it intensely, Radzman felt sentimental when he reminisced about the past.

"I am very touched seeing Radzman has made it," said Zheng. Before departing, she stepped forward to give Radzman a hug and burst into tears before she could utter a word. Leaning on the volunteer's shoulder, Radzman closed his eyes to re-live the heartwarming moment that he had missed so much. Shedding tears of joy at the sight of a young person who is making such a good contribution to society, Zheng was delighted that, from the beginning, she never gave up on Radzman.

To have experienced hardships himself makes Radzman more empathic to his students. "Do not be afraid of challenges, look at everything positively, cherish what you own at the moment and keep moving forward," he said. He gave an address at the Tzu Chi Kota Kinabalu bursary presentation ceremony on October 30, sharing his personal experience about overcoming all obstacles to attain success; he stressed that poverty is not an obstacle to success and encouraged the children at the ceremony to do everything to make their dreams come true. The

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audience of children, volunteers and parents were deeply touched by his message. "Seeing what Radzman has gone through, I no longer feel that I am unfortunate," said one parent in the audience.

The story of Radzman has demonstrated that, so long as one is determined and hardworking, no obstacle is insurmountable.

By Yong Chiew Fung

Translated by Dr Ong Eng Hong.