

Introduction to TIMA USA

Northwest Region

- 1 | TIMA San Jose (March, 2002 est.)
- 2 | TIMA Fresno (April 16, 2003 est.)
- 3 | TIMA Sacramento (August, 2005 est.)
- 4 | TIMA San Francisco (July 16, 2004 est.)
- 5 | TIMA Modesto (June, 2007 est.)
- 6 | TIMA Seattle (June 26, 2004 est.)

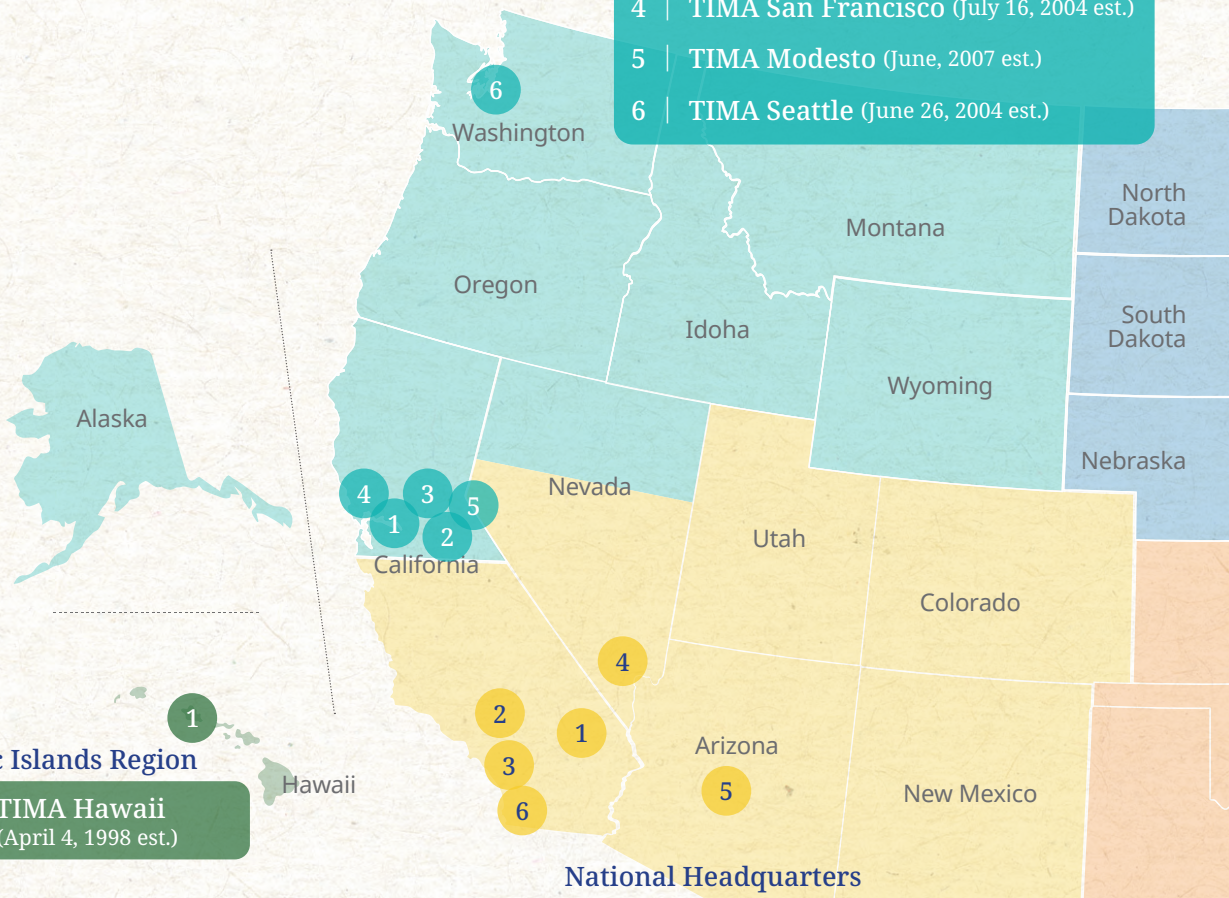
Pacific Islands Region

- 1 | TIMA Hawaii (April 4, 1998 est.)

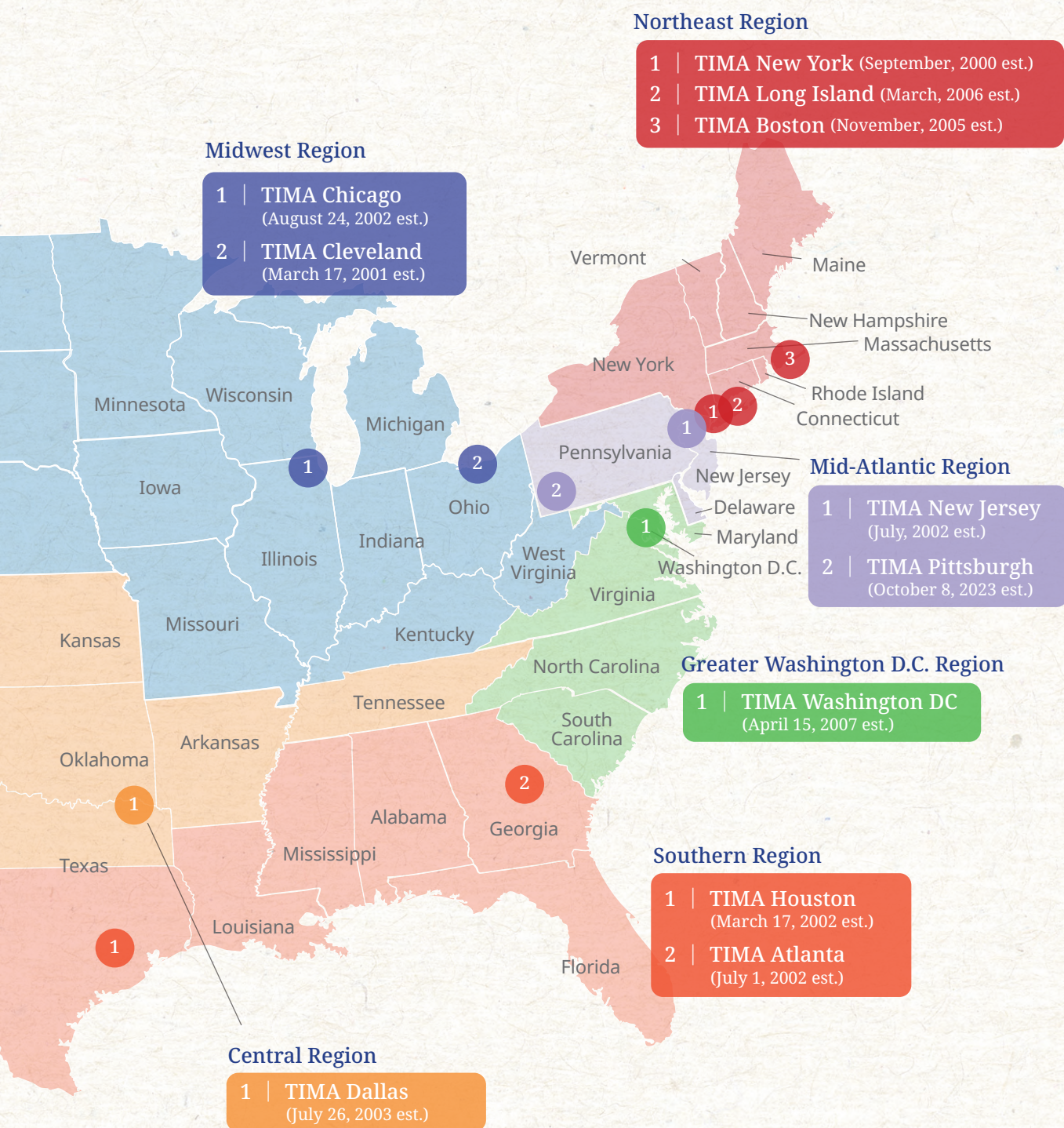
Notes: Since the establishment of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association in the United States (or TIMA USA) on April 4, 1998, all healthcare-related activities in Southern California, including across the Inland Empire, in Midwest Los Angeles, in San Diego, and across Orange County, were established with the development of free medical outreach events and the adjustment of the overall organizational structure of Tzu Chi's operations.

National Headquarters

- 1 | TIMA Inland Empire (April 4, 1998 est.)
- 2 | TIMA Midwest LA (April 4, 1998 est.)
- 3 | TIMA Orange County (July 12, 2002 est.)
- 4 | TIMA Las Vegas (February 8, 2004 est.)
- 5 | TIMA Phoenix (February 16, 1999 est.)
- 6 | TIMA San Diego (April 4, 1998 est.)



Tzu Chi's nationwide medical events, including those offered by the Tzu Chi Mobile Clinic fleet, have provided exactly 1,674,968 free healthcare services to patients from 1993 to 2022. While free medical events were put on pause in 2020 due to the pandemic, service gradually resumed the following year.





Foreword:

Written by Yingying Lee

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**I wish for all beings to be free from suffering,
and I do not seek happiness for myself.**

Dharma Master Cheng Yen

With the goal of serving those in need with compassion, a Tzu Chi chapter in the U.S. was formally approved by the State of California in 1984. An office was set up in Alhambra in 1989 to promote Tzu Chi's four major missions in the United States, which include medicine. Thus began Tzu Chi USA.

Almost a decade later, in 1998, the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) launched in Taiwan. In the same year, TIMA chapters in Southern California and Hawaii were also created, expanding Tzu Chi's ability to deliver humanistic health care to those in greatest need.

Around the world, TIMA members contribute their medical expertise and time to provide quality, patient-centered care to patients no matter where they are or their ability to pay. To date, there are 24 TIMA chapters across Tzu Chi USA's nine regional service areas.

There are up to 1,500 active TIMA members who provide free dental and vision care, acupuncture, and chiropractic services through Tzu Chi USA's Mobile Clinics. They also



When there are no football games, the Los Angeles Coliseum becomes an ideal venue for large-scale free clinics.

Photo/Emerald Hsu

conduct free cancer and healthcare screenings, and deliver lectures on public health topics. Concurrently, TIMA members are the backbone of our international medical outreaches, often serving communities hard-hit by disaster and those who otherwise cannot afford the high price of modern health care.

Yet, even before TIMA was established in the U.S., Tzu Chi USA had set up the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra in 1993. Dedicated local medical professionals and volunteers began to provide compassionate care to those who were either uninsured or underinsured. Many of those served faced language, cultural, or even practical barriers such as transportation that hindered receiving proper care. Others dealt with great difficulty outside the realm of health,

including extreme poverty, grueling jobs in California's agricultural sector, nonexistent citizenship status, and even homelessness.

From our humble days of renting tour buses to transport agricultural workers to Tzu Chi's Free Clinic in Alhambra to operating an entire fleet of state-of-the-art Mobile Clinics and three Health Centers (all accredited with Federally Qualified Health Center Look-Alike status), Tzu Chi USA's medical mission has been dedicated to providing quality care to patients in need wherever they are. And, like the growth and hope that comes with every spring, we hope to see this mission continue to blossom year after year.

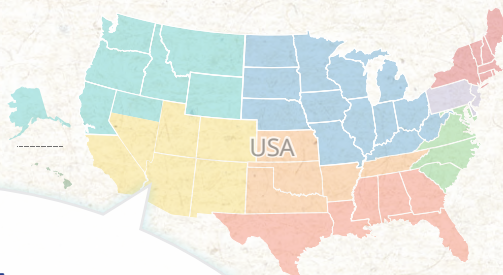
SECTION 1—

TIMA USA National Headquarters Region

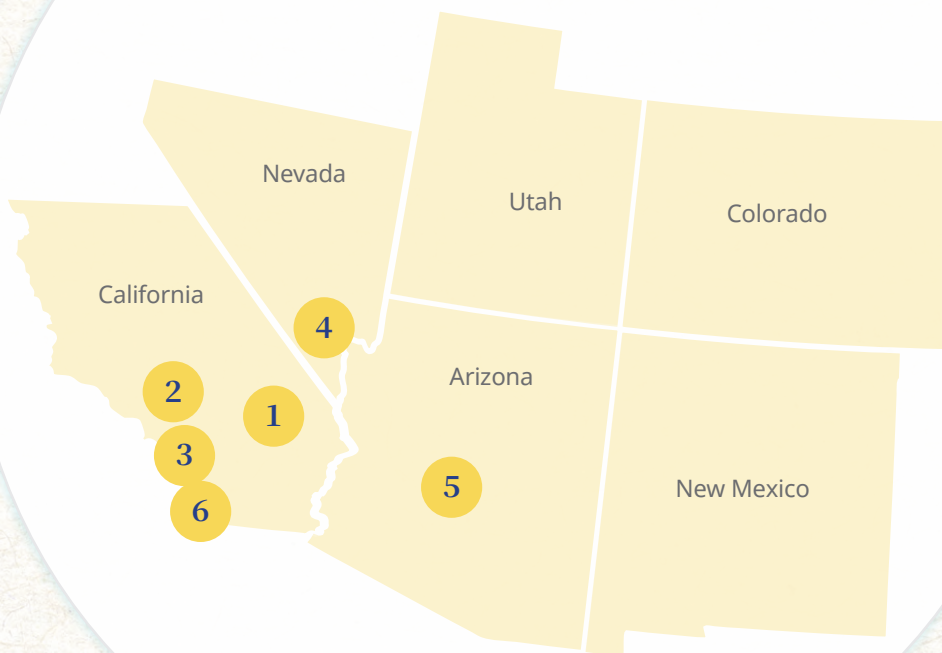
Written by Jixin Lin, Shuli Lo, Wen Ren, Dilber Shatursun, and Rujing Zheng

Translated by Ariel Chan

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Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters Region TIMAs



1 | Inland Empire

2 | Midwest LA

3 | Orange County

4 | Las Vegas

5 | Phoenix

6 | San Diego



In 2015, TIMA doctors, nurses, and volunteers, including Dr. Shirley Chen (seen here), participate in the Care Harbor Free Clinic Marathon held at the Los Angeles Coliseum for four consecutive days. *Photo/New York Times*

With blue skies and sea and gentle breezes, most areas in California have a Mediterranean climate, hot, dry summers and warm, humid winters. In such a pleasant climate, the sun seems to shine every day. The economy of the State of California is also the largest in the United States, comprising high-tech companies, biotechnology, airlines, and financial institutions. If we regarded California as an independent country, its 2015 and 2017 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would surpass that of Brazil, France, and the United Kingdom, respectively.

However, impoverished communities exist within California, unseen and in relative obscurity, some in remote regions. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates that nearly a quarter of the undocumented immigrants in the United States, over two million people, have settled in California. Most are low-income families due to their lack of legal status and unstable jobs. In addition, more than 25% (about 150,000 people) of those experiencing homelessness in the U.S. live on the streets of the State, most in Southern California, which has warm sunshine all year round. Since they can't afford medical insurance, they are also at the highest risk of developing physical and mental health problems.

Alhambra to San Bernardino



Agricultural workers at Lucky Farms work under the bright California sun, doing the same movements day after day. Photo/Linhao Yan

The Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) in the United States, which is primarily composed of healthcare professionals, was established in 1998. However, a dedicated group of healthcare professionals and volunteers began providing free medical services in California as early as 1993, when Tzu Chi established the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra. Many people would queue up and wait for assistance during each clinic session.

Wendy Kung, a senior TIMA registered nurse, recalled assisting at the free clinic 30 years ago: "I was involved in preparations for the Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra. I still remember the first person hired. The nurse was Miss Gao, and we even helped her find uniforms. After the opening, every free clinic session

was crowded; there were so many people, and it was very busy. Although every free clinic was very tiring, when I returned home after the event, I felt very content. I was quite happy because we could serve so many people in need." As warm memories flooded her mind, Kung laughed as she talked, her face full of joy. During that period, every volunteer nurse was a jack of all trades: "We had to draw blood ourselves and then send it for testing, so we nurses had to do a lot of things at that time."

The number of people served by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra grew quickly, and later, its free clinic activities expanded with outreach to other areas. Kung remembers that the first free clinic outreach she participated in was in San Bernardino.

The Most Impoverished County

San Bernardino is the most impoverished county in California. It has long been ranked among the top three worst places for families to live in California and is one of the most dangerous cities in the nation. It was in such a place that the team from the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra first started outreach free clinics, marking an important milestone in the advancement of Tzu Chi's medical mission in the United States.

The team first offered medical services for the residents of this area by adopting a "fixed-point gathering" system in the parking lot of Lucky Farms in San Bernardino County, transporting patients between San Bernardino and Alhambra with two school buses rented by Tzu Chi. It took one to two hours to drive patients back and forth. Each free clinic session required seven or eight round trips and served 200-300 people.

To serve more impoverished San Bernardino residents, the team adapted the system starting from the following year. Local Catholic churches and non-profit organizations notified patients to wait for consultation in the parking lot of Lucky Farms. Concurrently, the free clinic team transported medical equipment to the parking lot to hold the free clinic events there, making it convenient for more low-income and uninsured people in the area to seek medical treatment. Such an adaptation led to an increase in the number of attendances. From the fourth year, the free clinics could serve as many as 600-800 people each time.

The current CEO of Tzu Chi USA, Debra Boudreaux, explained how Tzu Chi volunteers expanded the free clinic to San Bernardino, saying, "Tzu Chi organized food distribution at Lucky Farms in 1996. Through the owner of Lucky Farms, Gary Liao, and with the assistance of community leader Dr. Tom Rivera, we held regular free clinics at the farm and in the Catholic church's parking lot."

Because they were expanding to remote areas to provide free clinics, the medical team, including Wendy Kung, had to get up at 5:00 or 6:00 AM before dawn. After gathering, they traveled to the free clinic site by bus, which took about three to four hours round trip. "When I got home from there, it was already dark again, so it was quite a long day," Kung shared.

The free clinics were always extremely busy and overcrowded, with many patients coming for medical care. "At that time, a free clinic could serve 800-900 people and wasn't indoors. San Bernardino was an inland area, and it was very hot. We set up a big tent outdoors. Everyone was sweating, and the free clinics were open to all patients. Our frequent patients were Hispanic farmworkers, many of whom are undocumented immigrants who work very hard and have no money. We went to care for their children and their parents, and you could see they were really hard working," Kung recounted.

Since the free clinic was busy until noon, sometimes it was so hot that you couldn't eat at all, but there were a lot of watermelons at Lucky Farms, so I felt very satisfied just eating watermelon all day.

Wendy Kung

TIMA Registered Nurse



Registered Nurse Wendy Kung checks the legs of patients struggling with mobility at the free clinic event in San Bernardino on June 23, 2012, co-organized by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra and Molina Healthcare. Photo/Meixue Lin Yan



When the Tzu Chi Mobile Clinic comes to remote areas in San Bernardino County on May 2, 2004, to serve agricultural workers, Hispanic volunteers are an essential communication bridge between doctors and patients, resolving language barriers. *Photo/Mary Keh*

Later, since Tzu Chi was holding distributions at Lytle Creek Elementary School in San Bernardino, the annual free clinic was held at the school in the 11th year of charity aid, serving students and parents from five schools nearby in this disadvantaged area. Until 2006, Tzu Chi offered the free clinic at Lytle Creek Elementary School four times yearly to provide more effective services. Because of its long-term charity distributions and free clinics, Tzu Chi earned the recognition of teachers, parents, and students at the school. Through the trust established, Tzu Chi also brought its Character Education program, which focuses on humanities, to Lytle Creek Elementary, marking the first time Tzu Chi's educational mission had entered the U.S. public school system. It has since expanded to other elementary schools. Thus, Tzu Chi's charity, medical care, and humanistic education gradually began to have a subtle uplifting influence in low-income communities struggling with poor resources and crime.

Lighting a Beam of Light

One day in 2016, the sunshine in California was as bright as ever. Volunteer J.D. Chen's heart, however, was gloomy as his beloved wife, Xiaoxuan Wu, had just passed away. Remembering, he recounted: "Of course, I had just arrived in the United States not long ago, and the death of my wife was a big blow to me. I started to contact free clinics. There were many Hispanic farmworkers in San Bernardino, and I saw that they worked very hard and didn't earn much. Tzu Chi distributes food and conducts free clinics there. When I saw that the lives of farmworkers were more difficult than mine, I felt that I wasn't the most miserable. This greatly encouraged me and gave me the strength to stand up again. Helping others can also encourage you to put down your sad emotions and stand up so that you can live a more meaningful life and realize the value of your life."

Chen was mainly responsible for the preparation and aftermath of free clinic outreach: “It’s a more hands-on job, mainly loading and unloading goods, moving equipment, and bringing it to the designated location for assembly, and then moving it back to the car and putting it away after the event.” At first glance, it sounds like just transportation is involved, but it’s actually an essential part of the free clinic since many medical equipment items are hefty and delicate. A slight mistake could cause permanent damage. Those tasked with the preparatory and clean-up work are always the first to arrive and last to leave. They are in charge of the most laborious tasks while conducting free clinics.

“Master Cheng Yen has always told us, ‘See suffering and know blessings; help those who are suffering.’ I had just arrived in the United States not long ago, and I felt that being able to help them was also a kind of fate. I was really honored and happy,” Chen said with a smile as he reflected. When you redeem others, you’re also redeeming yourself amid the ups and downs and trenches of life. Embrace those who are weak, and their

body temperature will warm you in turn. Light a beam of light for others, and you can then stand in its afterglow.

Chen had a long-standing connection with Tzu Chi: “In 2004, my classmate was a Tzu Chi volunteer in Guangzhou, China. We took a business management class together. He was very devoted to Tzu Chi and introduced me to it. At that time, I became a member who had been donating for a long time yet had not yet taken the initiative to join the team of Tzu Chi volunteers. I would participate in the Buddha Bathing ceremony, just scratching the surface. In 2009, my wife Xianxuan Wu was sick, and I was worried about her, so I introduced her to Tzu Chi. She devoted herself wholeheartedly and did more Tzu Chi things than I did. At that time, I was very ambitious and busy with my career. I only showed up at Tzu Chi occasionally. I encouraged my wife to participate in Tzu Chi more to distract her. She did an excellent job and recruited many new members in just a few years. She fully realized the value of her life, but who knew that it would be so short...”



TIMA volunteers regularly visit Bakersfield to hold free clinics every three months. On November 20, 2022, the team loads all the equipment into the truck for transport back to Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters. Photo/ J.D. Chen



J.D. Chen installs the required equipment before the first free dental clinic in Phoenix, held on June 26, 2022.
Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center

Later, to treat his wife's illness, the couple moved to the United States without any kin networks. When Chen's wife was hospitalized, Tzu Chi USA volunteers came daily to care for her: "At that time, Sister Shirley Yang asked me if I had participated in activities such as free clinics and distributions. I thought it was quite meaningful to be able to devote myself to doing something in life, so I went to participate," Chen recalled.

And before his wife passed away, even though she was sick, she never forgot to help the disadvantaged and ill.

Both my wife and I felt the spirit of Tzu Chi... My wife was in great pain during her illness, but she still insisted on doing Tzu Chi work. Sometimes, she drove to very far places, even eight or nine hours, to go to very suburban areas. She persisted wherever she went.

J.D. Chen
TIMA Volunteer

Arriving at their destination far away, under the scorching sun, the volunteers saw an orchard neatly filled with rows and rows of fruit trees. An older Hispanic farmworker was picking apples on a ladder. Although he wore a hat for protection from the sun's rays, their persistent heat still made him sweat. Moreover, his face was already full of grooves and wrinkles due to his exposure to direct sunlight for years. After picking the apples, he threw them into a huge iron bucket. He could pick several buckets per day. These fruits would then be packed in boxes and shipped to supermarkets, beautifully packaged for people to buy.

However, this older migrant worker can't make much money at the end of the day, and his income is meager. What should he do if he gets sick? Endure it? Dental care is so expensive in the United States, and he has no dental insurance. What should he do if he has a toothache? Does he do his best to tolerate the pain? Many such farmworkers in the San Bernardino community can only rely on charitable groups like Tzu Chi for medical treatment.

"Once, I went to a free clinic and saw an older migrant worker. Tzu Chi helped him a lot. Because he had a low income and no insurance, he could use Tzu Chi's services of Chinese medicine, Western medicine, and dentists. Dental treatment in the United States is costly, and most people can't afford it, so we dispatched a Tzu Chi Mobile Clinic, which carries so many medical supplies every time, dispatching so many volunteers and medical staff; it almost seemed like a large mobile hospital. On the one hand, our free clinic can help these people save money. It's a lot of money. On the other hand, all our doctors' professionalism is recognized," Chen shared.

Among the many disadvantaged farmworkers, this older man left the strongest impression on Chen. Even though the man's life was so difficult, he still maintained a warm heart and felt inspired by Tzu Chi's spirit of giving, Chen remembers. Every time he came to see a doctor, he brought a Tzu Chi bamboo bank with change in it: "Although his income is low, he abides by Master Cheng Yen's teachings, saving a portion of his daily allowance for donation. He saves change daily for a donation out of the kindness of his heart."

In addition, Tzu Chi's Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and acupuncture treatments have also provided tremendous help to many patients in San Bernardino. Marilinn Trudell, now in her older years, had skin cancer when she was younger. After chemotherapy, she often felt numbness in her feet due to drug allergies, which bothered her for many years. Having heard that Tzu Chi's TCM treatments had miraculous results, she came to the free clinic to receive such a treatment and seek a solution.

"For my feet, I went to seek medical advice everywhere..." After receiving an acupuncture treatment, Trudell found that the numbness was much relieved. "I want to know more about acupuncture. This really is a very good experience," she concluded.

TIMA volunteers have worked in the San Bernardino area for over 20 years and have developed deep friendships with the local community. Although Tzu Chi temporarily suspended free clinics due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the volunteers overcame all difficulties to restart the outreach in 2022, carefully and attentively accompanying the residents here to escape the cycle of poverty, illness, and suffering.



A patient at a free clinic in San Bernardino on May 3, 2003, holds TIMA volunteer Dr. Eugene Taw's hand to give thanks. Photo/Mary Keh

The scale of a free clinic in March 2023 was as usual, with more than 250 volunteers mobilized to protect the health of 122 residents. At the same time, Tzu Chi provided daily necessities off-site to alleviate agricultural workers' economic pressures.

As for J.D. Chen, he gained a lot of insights along the way: "We go out to free clinics to help people with medical treatment, and at the same time inspire the kindness of those in need; this is the meaning of what we do. Although we give unconditionally, our giving has inspired them to constantly change for the better and become kinder, which then motivates them to help others," he said. "This is a cycle of love and inspiration of love. I think entering Tzu Chi is the most meaningful thing in my life. If you want to do something, follow Master Cheng Yen and study with your fellow volunteers," Chen concluded.

The TIMA team served the San Bernardino community and also drove miles to any free clinic event with an insufficient workforce. Just like Chen, when he discovered that Tzu Chi would hold large-scale free clinics in the Los Angeles area and human resources

were tight, he went to make up for it: "Free clinics require a lot of human resources. Shirley Chen, a TIMA dentist, invited me to work more in this blessed field. I think it's quite meaningful. I also went to Phoenix, Arizona, Las Vegas, Nevada, and surrounding cities. Volunteers Shirley Chen and Min Leu remember well. Sylvia Wihardjo especially has an excellent memory of things. I call her the little prodigy. Now, our free clinic activity has a core team that organizes planning and expansion to help more people." Chen may talk about his experiences of helping those in need lightly, but the day-after-day dedication behind it is absolutely incomparable.

"Once, when I went to Phoenix, Min Leu and I drove there to do the pre and post-treatment, helping the dentist assemble the movable treatment bed, install the wiring, remove waste like blood from dental treatment, etc. We did everything. At that time, Jason Wong taught me a lot. He was very familiar with the equipment and had rich experience in free clinics," Chen recalled with gratitude. Everyone on the team devoted themselves selflessly and achieved free clinic marathons one after another across vast terrains.



Tzu Chi volunteers never cancel a medical outreach event, no matter whether rain or shine. Here, we see preparations for a rainy weather medical outreach event in San Bernardino on December 11, 2022. Photo/Henry Nhan

Central California



Tzu Chi Northridge volunteers take the lead in caring for Central California's agricultural and industrial workers. In addition to holding free clinics in their communities, they also bring medical resources to farming communities in Central California that lack them. The picture shows a free clinic in 1997. Photo/Shirley Chen

California is nicknamed the "Golden State," and Silicon Valley and San Francisco are the centers of the technology and financial industries in the United States. However, although California's average income ranks among the best in the country, this is not the case in Central California. For example, the agricultural city of Bakersfield continues to rank among the top five cities in the United States for poverty ratios in annual census statistics. Bakersfield's economic situation is like a desert in a large oasis. Many residents here face economic challenges, isolation, and a lack of medical care, often barely surviving. Volunteers from the Tzu Chi USA Northridge Service Center, relatively closer to Central California than other Tzu Chi offices in Southern California, led the care mission for Central California farmworkers, even though it meant driving two hours one way to reach them. Jean Hsu, a volunteer from Northridge, mobilized medical staff and volunteers from all over Southern California

to participate in the medical outreach services and invited local doctors from Central California to join as well.

An Heirloom of Love

"Bakersfield has two major industries, agriculture and petroleum, which are the key economic projects of this community. Many of the residents here are first-generation immigrants. They can barely make ends meet and are in great need of care, especially Tzu Chi's free clinics," a dentist from Bakersfield, Phu Truong, originally from Vietnam, explained.

Wherever there is poverty and hardship, there are Tzu Chi volunteers. Since 1996, TIMA volunteers have been going to Bakersfield every three months to hold free clinics for disadvantaged farmers and workers.

One patient, Estela Dorado, shared that she had no place to get medical services except

at a Tzu Chi free clinic: “I hope to continue to come here for medical treatment because I discovered the benefits of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Acupuncture treatment is very helpful for my condition, and they’ve been helping me treat my arm and other ailments.”

Pedro Ramirez, another patient, came to a free clinic with a bag full of coins. Inspired by the kindness and empathy he had experienced at past clinics, this was his way of expressing his love and appreciation.

I suffer from diabetes. I learned about the free clinics from my friends, so I started coming here to receive treatment. I’ve been receiving treatment here for ten years. Every time I come, I bring coins I’ve been collecting for three months to donate. You guys have helped us, and I want to give back.

Pedro Ramirez
Free Clinic Patient



TIMA regularly provides free clinics in Bakersfield. After receiving medical care, residents return home smiling joyfully, as seen here on August 11, 2002. Photo/Linhao Yan

“A long time ago, a friend suggested that if you were free this weekend, we could volunteer at a free clinic together. That’s when I started getting involved with Tzu Chi and continued participating in free clinics. When they were in about sixth or seventh grade, my daughters also started volunteering at free clinics,” Phu Truong recalled about how he first joined the Bakersfield Free Clinic.



Patients waiting at the free clinic in McFarland in Kern County, Central California, receive scarves knit by Tzu Chi Northridge volunteers. Photo/Huiping Wang



Dr. Phu Truong lives in Bakersfield and gives back to the community with love, inspiring his family members to volunteer, too. Photo/Luca Yeh

Truong's eldest daughter, An, recounted, "My father would always share his experiences with us after the free clinic, such as what he gained from participating in the Tzu Chi free clinic or his thoughts on being a Tzu Chi volunteer. After hearing this, I really wanted to volunteer with him. We hope to be able to help, especially to impact our community through free medical clinics." At first, she just helped lead patients to various departments for medical treatment. Later, after understanding the flow of free clinics, she helped at the dentist's front desk. "Although I'm only helping patients register at the front desk now, one day when I graduate from medical school and become a doctor, I also want to help with free clinics," she said.

Not only did Truong's two daughters follow their father in using charity to give back to

the land that raised them, but his wife, Mimi Nguyen, and her younger sister also became Tzu Chi volunteers. "Our home is in this community, so I fully understand that there are many impoverished people here who need medical help. My daughters and I also volunteer in homeless shelters, and we understand that some unhoused people are not homeless, but they're just very poor, so they have to go to homeless shelters to get food. Because I have seen it with my own eyes, I understand," Nguyen shared.

"Actually, we're very lucky. Our whole family is very blessed," Phu Truong expressed. He and his family are spreading love and upholding virtue through serving in the free clinics, with gratitude. "We can volunteer because we have Tzu Chi alongside us."



In-person free clinics restart on May 15, 2022, after suspension for two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Photo/Shuli Lo

Returning to the Golden Valley

During the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, although Tzu Chi suspended in-person free clinics, TIMA volunteers continued to provide free medical services over the phone. Since many patients with chronic diseases need long-term medication, the volunteers would assess their condition over the phone and mail the medicine to their homes.

We regularly conducted telephone consultations every three months, targeting older patients, and providing needed medicines to patients who continue to be cared for. We would pack these medicines, add some gift items, such as masks, hand sanitizer, etc., and mail them over. It's not until today that we have the opportunity to meet face to face again.



Boren Deng
TIMA Physician

"Today," in Dr. Boren Deng's words, was May 15, 2022, when Bakersfield patients could finally look forward to Tzu Chi's reopening of free clinics. Doctors, volunteers, and patients no longer needed to connect over the phone

for consultations. Everyone was excited and grateful as they reunited at Golden Valley High School.

At five o'clock in the morning, when the sky was slightly bright, the volunteers first gathered at the Tzu Chi Health Center in South El Monte. Since Bakersfield is about a two-hour drive from Los Angeles, it usually takes more than half an hour for most volunteers to get to the gathering place from home. Therefore, many woke up at three or four to prepare and set out in the dark. Going to the countryside to provide free clinics in person is motivated by the volunteers' sense of mission and loving concern for the residents of Bakersfield.

The bus drove for two hours and arrived at Golden Valley High School at about eight o'clock in the morning. A group of volunteers were already on site to register and fill in information for residents. The team also conducted on-site temperature checks and rapid COVID-19 screenings to protect everyone's health and safety.

Since they had prepared in advance sufficiently, the volunteers found their workstations as soon as they arrived and began

setting up the equipment. They were busy but orderly in their work. In a short time, the three free clinic departments, Dentistry, Western medicine, and Chinese medicine, were ready. The new volunteers saw the environmentally friendly multi-functional tent developed by Tzu Chi DaAi Technology. With a slight twist, a clinic consultation space appeared before their eyes, reducing the effort needed to set up. Everyone felt amazed and excited.

In addition, there were other “careful” highlights. During the pandemic, the medical team wasn’t idle. They took advantage of the period when there were no free clinics to think about how to improve the free clinic process and put a lot of effort into integrating equipment. “This is also our first attempt to re-integrate dental equipment,” Dr. Shirley Chen said. She hoped to do the most with the smallest workforce: “Each clinic station has a responsible point person to make the entire flow smoother.”

On this day, they met with the local CSF Medical Non-Profit Foundation. Dr. Deng was looking forward to it since they could provide more comprehensive patient services by

joining hands with other organizations. It was the so-called “blessed fate” that everyone worked together, he shared. “Our weakest point is that we’re unable to provide further detailed services. By cooperating with this organization, they can provide specialist services to patients in the future, including surgery; this is excellent news. It’s our first contact, and we’re still learning from each other. We hope to have further cooperation,” Boren Deng declared.

CSF personnel came to the clinic on the same day. Although they didn’t provide on-site consultation, they could offer specialized medical care in the follow-up, which made up for Tzu Chi’s shortcomings in specialized medical care. Through bilateral cooperation, Tzu Chi will be able to refer patients to the organization when they need further treatment in the future.

Overall, from continuous innovation in free clinic equipment to improving processes and integrating more organizational cooperation, every change and step aimed to provide patients with better care.



During a free clinic in Bakersfield, with a slight twist, volunteers set up a simple tent that served as a consultation space, ensuring patient privacy. Photo/Shuli Lo



On August 12, 2009, Remote Area Medical holds its first large-scale free clinic in a metropolitan area, with a seven-day free clinic at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Tzu Chi is one of the principal partners. Photo/Tony Yang

Tzu Chi cooperated with different non-profit organizations to conduct large-scale free clinics year-round from 2009 to 2017 at the Los Angeles Sports Arena or The Reef exhibition hall in downtown Los Angeles, serving uninsured and low-income patients. "TIMA first worked with Remote Area Medical, referred to as RAM, to host large-scale free clinics, and later joined Care Harbor to conduct free clinics in the city center every year," said Debra Boudreaux, former Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation CEO.

Each free clinic was held for four to seven consecutive days, treating more than 1,000 patients almost every day. It was Southern California's largest free clinic event, with over 50 charity groups and 3,100 volunteers participating. "Care Harbor held a huge free clinic on October 31, 2013, which happened to be on Halloween, so there were only around 800 patients on the first day. After that, more than a thousand patients came to the clinic every day for three consecutive days," TIMA volunteer Jane Lu recalled. "The doctors, nurses, and volunteers came from all over

the country and contributed their own money and efforts as well as their love."

Among them, Tzu Chi was one of the partners that contributed the most. The medical services provided by Tzu Chi at the large Care Harbor free clinics included internal medicine, dentistry, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and ophthalmology. Tzu Chi also had three Tzu Chi Mobile Clinic units on site, two dental and one vision. The Dental Mobile Clinics offered 63 sets of portable dental diagnosis and treatment equipment, 63 diagnosis and treatment chairs, nearly 500 sets of dental cleaning, filling and extraction equipment, a complete set of high-temperature sterilization equipment, and a dental pharmacy.

Moving such diagnostic and treatment equipment is no small matter. For example, in the 2015 Care Harbor Annual Free Clinic, 16 volunteers set out from the Tzu Chi Community Clinic in South El Monte before dawn, and on the first day, three Tzu Chi Mobile Clinics and two trucks loaded with medical

equipment drove to the venue. They arrived at the empty stadium early in the morning. In the non-air-conditioned interior, the volunteers worked up a sweat as they set up one room after another from scratch, toiling from morning to night. They set up 15 Chinese medicine treatment rooms, 20 for Western medicine, eight for gynecological care, and 16 comprehensive clinics for podiatry, chiropractic, and psychological consultation services.

The next day, the volunteers returned to the venue in the dark early in the morning to continue the unfinished work of the previous day. In the dental care area, they installed two air compressors for dentistry. Chenwei Hsu carefully fixed the compressor air pipe with wooden strips, Kleeve Lin installed the dental treatment chair, and Pengming Hsiung inspected the dental equipment. Jason Wong, who is always present when help is needed, was responsible for preparing equipment and planning the clinics for each department.

At that time, Hsu and Limei Lin hosted every large-scale free clinic, driving a large truck south from Northern California for eight or nine hours to transport dental equipment. Dr. Stephanie Wang would lead her team from Northern California to the south to support the free clinic. After arriving at the venue, she immediately sorted the dental instruments and completed the disinfection work.

The 2015 Care Harbor clinic set up the registration area outside the venue. Inside, the organizers divided the space into six sections. The first, the largest, was for dental care, with more than 300 dental care staff on site. Led by the Tzu Chi team and dentists Daniel Cheng and Shirley Chen, they ran the entire operation process of tooth cleaning, tooth extraction, tooth filling, medication, instrument sterilization, personnel control, etc. They also provided two dental cars for more extensive treatments.

“Large-scale free clinics serve low-income and unhoused people. Some patients come in line at two or three in the morning to wait for medical services,” Susan Huang, a TIMA senior dental assistant, explained. And yet, she remained calm even in the face of hundreds of patients needing dental treatment and was always eager to learn more. eager to learn more. “Care Harbor is a very experienced and large organization. They provide tooth extraction and cleaning services,” Huang said, “Care for teeth, dentures, root canal treatments, etc., were all carried out in an orderly manner. We learned a lot from this experience, and Tzu Chi began to operate independently after 2017.”

The second section, hosted by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Medicine, was for consultations in



At a large-scale free clinic event in 2013 held in cooperation with Care Harbor, volunteers spray paint the Tzu Chi logo on new dental equipment to prevent it from being lost. Photo/Meixue Lin

various specialties of Western medicine. A mobile medical vehicle was also in the area to promote AIDS prevention and treatment.

The third section, jointly supported by Tzu Chi, UCLA, the University of Southern California, and the Southern California Ophthalmology Association, was for ophthalmology. The first three groups each provided an ophthalmology cart at the site, while the Academy of Ophthalmology provided a mobile cart for ophthalmology tours. Tzu Chi's vision care included free prescription glasses.

The fourth section was for TCM and Tzu Chi. The fifth was for general preventive medicine, medical information sharing, and health insurance promotion, while the sixth was for referrals. Seven medical vehicles were also on-site to provide various services, of which three were Tzu Chi Mobile Clinics. Vaccination services for influenza, tetanus, pneumonia, shingles, etc were also available.

Volunteer groups could be seen everywhere in the dental care section, paying attention to the needs of every dentist or patient and replenishing appliances at any time. In addition to a complete set of dental services, the latest dental scanner was also on site that could instantly make dentures, and braces could be

fitted to the patient immediately. People who can't afford dentures could be matched with a beautiful pair of teeth on the spot and then smile again confidently.

The dental equipment and other medical equipment provided by Tzu Chi are very holistic. As a dentist, I can get twice the result with half the effort when treating people.

Paul

Care Harbor Free Clinic Dentist

Looking back at the medical services provided by Tzu Chi at the Care Harbor event in 2015, the dental department had continued the oral cancer screenings offered in 2014 yet expanded the on-site production capacity for dentures. In 2014, only making front teeth was possible, but a year later, the team could make every tooth on-site, and the equipment and facilities were comparable to those of a hospital or clinic.

As for TCM, people seeking treatment packed the 15 Chinese medicine and acupuncture rooms. After years of trialing acupuncture, patients who had tried it had taken the initiative to spread the word to others. Many people came to the Care Harbor free clinic to try TCM specifically. Contrary to being a



On January 22, 2017, Tzu Chi Dental Mobile Clinic dentists serve patients at The Reef exhibition hall. Photo/ Guoxing Yan



On November 19, 2017, TIMA volunteers participate in a large-scale Care Harbor free clinic. *Photo/Lily Chang*

supporting cast, TCM was no longer just a department where patients kill time while waiting for other types of treatment. TCM practitioners helped patients with acupuncture and promoted the common sense ingrained in TCM health care and the importance of rehabilitation. Acupuncture helped reduce Jose Hertcraul's waist pain significantly, and he felt much more agile. After her treatment, Gerbil Loghoa praised the doctor's superb medical skills and offered a warm hug.

In terms of Western medicine, to provide more diversified services, the medical team invited doctors specializing in mental health consultation, public health, preventive health care, and STD and AIDS diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Thus, the team could address the complicated diseases of our times.

In addition to routine influenza, tetanus, and pneumonia vaccinations, Care Harbor added the herpes zoster vaccine in 2015. Volunteers at the Tzu Chi booth promoted health education and explained how to prevent the "three highs" (hyperglycemia, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia). They also reminded everyone to pay attention to their diet and learn to take good care of their bodies. Patients and their families benefited greatly.

Tzu Chi volunteers used this opportunity to introduce Tzu Chi and its missions to more people and encourage them to join the path

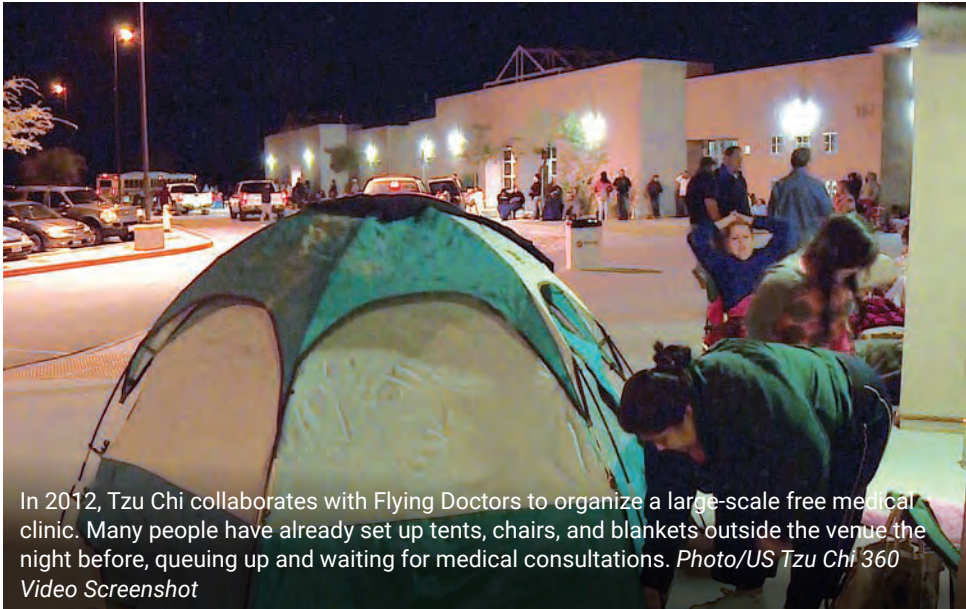
of good deeds. To the volunteers, this constitutes "Bodhisattva Enrollment," as human bodhisattvas love and care for all sentient beings and aim to relieve suffering. They offered Tzu Chi bamboo banks and invited people to take one home to begin donating money to charity. Event attendees were also welcome to register as Care Harbor volunteers.

Tzu Chi volunteers additionally embellished the compact free clinic venue with floral arrangements. Their placement of the Zen-inspired contemplative flower arrangements around the space aligned with the recent emphasis on psychological well-being in Western medicine; the sight of the mindfully placed flowers therapeutically enhanced the patients' mental and psychological state. The public praised the initiative.

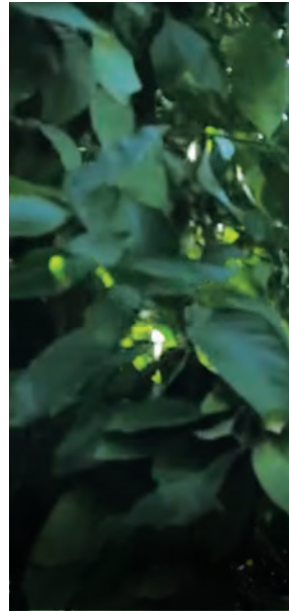


At a Care Harbor free clinic event, young Tzu Chi volunteers promote vegetarianism to prevent cardiovascular diseases, protecting the health of disadvantaged families by encouraging them to examine the impact of their dietary choices. *Photo/Guoxing Yan*

East Coachella Valley



In 2012, Tzu Chi collaborates with Flying Doctors to organize a large-scale free medical clinic. Many people have already set up tents, chairs, and blankets outside the venue the night before, queuing up and waiting for medical consultations. Photo/US Tzu Chi 360 Video Screenshot



Southeast of Los Angeles, 130 miles away, lies the East Coachella Valley. It has fertile soil and booming agriculture, but the agricultural and industrial settlements are like a backward third-world country.

“Revealing the Invisible Coachella Valley,” a study by UC Davis (University of California, Davis), shows that local tribes govern this area because it is a Native American reservation. This designation means that federal law has limited jurisdiction here, so the federal government provides minimal subsidies to these areas, and essential public facilities are almost non-existent. At the same time, it is also a haven for illegal immigrants.

Eating Instant Noodles With Dirty Hands

“This area is mainly based on agriculture. We have a large area of farmland that produces many crops, such as dates, strawberries, peppers, and all kinds of things. Farmers all live here, and they harvest crops for a

year. The economy contributes half a billion dollars, but these farmers are the most impoverished people, working in appalling conditions, and they don’t even have enough money to feed their families,” Rodolfo Piñon, Director of Community Development of Pueblo Unido, a local community building organization, explained. Living conditions in the East Coachella Valley are horrendous, with more than 15,000 migrant farmworkers living in more than 125 illegal trailer parks.

“When it rains outside, the house leaks and is damaged, but it’s our home, and we live here. We love it,” Santiago Zaragoza, an East Coachella Valley resident, said. The “home” he referred to was an old trailer over 40 years old. The entire trailer lacked electricity and had holes in the windows, floor, walls, and toilet. The family had covered the holes in the ground with wooden boards. “Spiders and snakes will enter through the holes if not covered. I’ve seen a big spider, this big,” Santiago’s sister pointed out, gesturing with her hands as she spoke.



A farmworker picks limes in the East Coachella Valley. Photo/US Tzu Chi 360 Video Screenshot

Their mother, Myrnal Lopez, works alone and supports her family of five with a meager income. The only job she could find was picking fruits and vegetables in an orchard. At about 4:30 in the morning, before dawn, she comes to the orchard, steps on a ladder, and checks the condition of the fruits. She picks them if ready and packs them: “We pick the limes and put them in large containers. Sometimes, we can only fill one large box or one and a half boxes a day. If we pick two large boxes of

limes in one day, we can earn \$16. This is a heavy job. But it’s the only one where we can find work.”

In addition to the disadvantaged living environment, the East Coachella Valley also lacks medical resources. The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research found that 36% of adults here have no health insurance, and this study only looked at adults with children, so it can only be said to be a conservative estimate. In addition, the report pointed out that many agricultural workers suffered from toxic neurological diseases due to inhaling large amounts of pesticides. Still, they had no money to see a doctor and had to fend for themselves.

Through Facebook, David Hoy, a Spanish-speaking Tzu Chi and TIMA volunteer, reconnected with his high school friend Mario Beltran, who had grown up in the East Coachella Valley. “David Hoy told me that he was volunteering for a non-profit organization, Tzu Chi, and I thought maybe Tzu Chi could come and see if it could provide some resources and help,” Beltran said.

Accepting Beltran’s invitation, Hoy came to the East Coachella Valley and realized that this prosperous and powerful country has communities as impoverished as those here



The environment in the Coachella Valley is harsh, with most households living in dilapidated trailers. The trailers offer little protection from the cold in winter and heat in summer, and leak when it rains. Photo/US Tzu Chi 360 Video Screenshot

and that local farmers and workers have almost nowhere to seek medical treatment. Hoy couldn't believe what he saw in front of him – the sky was full of dust, shabby trailers were everywhere, garbage piles, tattered clothes were hanging crookedly on the clothes-drying racks, and flies were flying all over. In the smog, a little boy about five years old held a bowl of instant noodles in his hand, pinched the instant noodles with his dirty fingers, and stuffed them into his mouth with a smile.

"You cook this for yourself?" Hoy asked the little boy in Spanish.

The child smiled and nodded, then grabbed a few more strands of instant noodles and put them into his mouth.

"You just add water?"

The boy nodded and licked his hands as he ate.

"Do you eat instant noodles every day? No real breakfast? No ham or eggs?"



Tzu Chi and TIMA volunteer David Hoy reconnects with Mario Beltran, a close friend from high school. Photo/US Tzu Chi 360 Video Screenshot

The boy nodded again and told Hoy his mother didn't have time to cook for him. The locals here had no way to seek help to escape the hardships of poverty, hard farm labor, poor nutrition, and health problems.



This little boy eats instant noodles for his three daily meals, while his parents work hard all day and only earn a low income. Photo/US Tzu Chi 360 Video Screenshot



Flying doctors arrive in the East Coachella Valley by plane, including medical professionals, healthcare workers, and volunteers who will provide dental healthcare services during a large-scale free clinic event in 2012. Photo/US Tzu Chi 360 Video Screenshot

Collaborating With Flying Doctors

In 2011, TIMA USA National Headquarters Region volunteers first went to the East Coachella Valley area to vaccinate many residents who had never received a flu shot. In 2012, they took the initiative to join forces with Flying Doctors of America to hold a large-scale free clinic event, outreach that spanned several days.

Flying Doctors of America is a famous medical volunteer organization in the United States that has provided free medical services since 1990. Medical volunteers will fly, some in their private aircrafts, to various parts of the nation, especially areas without access to medical assistance, to provide free care to the residents there.

In Tzu Chi's collaboration with Flying Doctors, both parties provided medical staff. TIMA and Tzu Chi volunteers were also

responsible for providing all mobile medical equipment and taking on the tedious work of setting up the free clinic venue. In addition, they also conducted in-depth publicity in the community to inform more local residents about the event. "It really surprised me when one of these farmworkers told me that he had never been to the dentist in his life. He told me that he had no money, so he couldn't go to the dentist, and the free clinic was very important to him. This would be the first dental visit in his life," TIMA volunteer David Hoy recounted. He went door-to-door to inform residents about the large-scale free clinic event the next day. They were overjoyed, exclaiming, "See you tomorrow!"

I'm very grateful. These farmworkers work hard every day so that we have food to eat, and we must do something for them.



David Hoy
TIMA Volunteer

But actually, people met each other even earlier. A long queue had already formed outside the venue the night before the medical outreach. Some patients came to line up at eight o'clock in the evening and sat outside the venue wrapped in blankets. It was drastically cooler at night, yet they waited all night in the cold to see a doctor. "I'm waiting for my eye exam," one patient said expectantly, bundled up in a blanket to stay warm.

Before the medical outreach began, Flying Doctors volunteers quite literally flew in. Helicopters descended from the sky, and doctors, hygienists, and volunteers stepped out, introducing themselves. "I'm Larry Tabor, a San Francisco Bay Area dentist," one said.

On their part, TIMA volunteers drove several hours to reach the designated medical outreach location, bringing medical equipment. They then began intensive preparations, installing portable dental chairs and various equipment at the venue.

"We brought a lot of dental equipment, as well as acupuncture and medical equipment. Except for ophthalmology, Tzu Chi provided

all the equipment," Steven Voon, then Deputy CEO of Community Promotion at the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, explained.

It's really good to come to Tzu Chi's medical outreach event to help out because all the medical equipment here, such as ultrasound equipment, is something you can't see in other free clinics! With this equipment, we can be more efficient in providing medical treatment locally and serve more people.

Joan Abittan

Flying Doctors of America Dental Hygienist

Patients filed in on the first day of the free clinic as soon as the doors opened. The venue provided various medical services such as dentistry, ophthalmology, acupuncture, and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) cupping. Half of the patients at the site were farmworkers, and this was their once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "We can only see 300 dental patients a day, but more than 500 people came to the site," Karen Torres, a Flying Doctors volunteer nurse, said while controlling the flow of people in and out.



Flying Doctors of America volunteers provide dental services to the public during the free medical outreach event. Photo/US Tzu Chi 360 Video Screenshot



Feeling extremely tired, those who waited in line all night for the start of the free clinic fall into a deep sleep as soon as they sit down in the waiting area. Photo/US Tzu Chi 360 Video Screenshot

"Here in the Coachella Valley, a lot of residents have oral disease issues, and we see a lot of people with gum disease and a lot of people with multiple cavities at one time," Flying Doctors dentist Larry Tabor said. As TIMA dentist Shirley Chen treated a patient, she shared, "He has a lot of cavities, almost twenty in his mouth."

In addition to dentistry and ophthalmology, TCM treatments were also very popular at the free clinic event. Since many local agricultural workers do hard work, they often suffer from pain and other problems. "We've been here in the Coachella Valley area since 2011. Most of the patients we've seen in the past two years have some pain problems," Dr. Shincung Chen, a TCM practitioner and TIMA member, recounted.

"What a miracle!" After receiving acupuncture, the patient felt that his whole body was much more relaxed and pain-free.

"How do you feel?" the doctor asked.

"So much better!"

Dr. Tabor has cooperated with many organizations. He was deeply impressed by Tzu Chi's sincere care for patients from beginning to end: "Unlike other groups that hold large-scale free clinics, where they come in to set up equipment and then leave, Tzu Chi has excellent follow-up services."

The TIMA volunteer team, including Steven Voon, worked step by step to build a good reputation for Tzu Chi's free clinics. "As we become more professional in organizing free clinics, other partners will want to work with us," Voon concluded.

The multiple-day free clinic event in the East Coachella Valley benefited thousands of people through the medical services provided. TIMA and Flying Doctors of America volunteers were busy until late each night. Seeing the patients leave with satisfied smiles and their pain relieved, Tzu Chi volunteers felt genuine happiness in their hearts.



On August 25, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers in Orange County hold their first free clinic in Santa Ana, beginning with an opening ceremony. Photo/John Lin

"I don't have insurance!" "Is it really free?" "Will you come again next month?" Every time there is a large-scale free clinic, the patients who come after hearing the news always ask such questions. There are two wealthy cities in Orange County, Southern California: Anaheim and Irvine. Neighboring Santa Ana is only a five-minute drive away, but it is an immigrant community living below the poverty line.

On one free clinic day, around 6:30 in the morning, when the sky just got bright after dawn and the volunteers were still setting up the venue, people started queuing up on the lawn outside the Boys & Girls Club of Santa Ana. "Good morning. How early did you come to line up today?" the volunteer asked as he greeted the young man who was first in line. "Six-thirty," he replied, smiling shyly. He said his friends who lived next to the Santa Ana Club saw the flier and told him there was a free clinic today, so he came to check his teeth.

Parents came, followed by several children. Mothers pushed their youngest in strollers, accompanied by their elementary school-aged siblings. A few people arrived alone and slowly walked into the tent on the lawn outside the Santa Ana Club, with a bit of uneasiness and shyness in their eyes. After being greeted cordially by Tzu Chi volunteers and Spanish-speaking community volunteers wearing vests, they filled in their preliminary medical history information with the volunteers' help.

Tzu Chi has been protecting the Santa Ana community since 1989. Every August, the "Happy Back to School Day" is one of its most important projects. Tzu Chi volunteers provide services to disadvantaged families (including low-income families, those experiencing homelessness, those in foster care, etc). When students received new backpacks and stationery supplies, and the volunteers interacted with them and teachers, they discovered that the families here also had urgent medical needs.



During the first Tzu Chi free clinic in Santa Ana, pharmacists prepare prescriptions and explain to patients how to use them. *Photo/James Huang*



Tzu Chi organizes the first free clinic in Santa Ana in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Santa Ana. *Photo/John Lin*

The Orange County TIMA chapter was established in 2002. In 2003, it entered Santa Ana primary schools to teach dental hygiene to schoolchildren and established seminars on health in Orange County. Later, it paused its activities due to dental care plans provided by the school district. In 2011, Orange County started the first Happy Campus backpack food distribution in Santa Ana and found many families lacking dental insurance. Orange County volunteers held the first free clinic in Santa Ana in 2012, protecting the health of residents and pushing beyond missions of happy campuses to happy families.



Wendy Kung
TIMA Registered Nurse



Having restarted free clinic services in Orange County after the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 26, 2023, Tzu Chi again cooperates with the Boys & Girls Club of Santa Ana to provide Western medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine, dentistry, ophthalmology, and other medical services. *Photo/Guoxing Yan*



On September 20, 2015, Tzu Chi San Diego volunteers hold a free clinic at Mountain Empire High School to provide medical services to impoverished residents. Mark Ostrander, who planned this free clinic, poses for a photo with his wife Lorrie (both are Tzu Chi volunteers), to remember the moment. *Photo/Tsung-Chang Sung*

"As early as 2013, Tzu Chi had already held charity medical free clinics in the Oceanside and Fallbrook communities of San Diego, California. At that time, Hue Wang was the medical team leader, and this was also the beginning of my participation in Tzu Chi's free clinics," Tzu Chi and TIMA volunteer Mark Ostrander recounted. "We then held a free clinic in Boulevard, San Diego County, on the U.S.-Mexico border. At that time, there were no medical clinics here at all, and residents had to drive more than 70 miles to find a doctor for treatment, so I organized a free clinic here. I remember that we provided about 50 to 60 dental services for free dental clinics. Since then, we've held regular free clinics twice a year," he explained. Since Tzu Chi began to provide help in the area where he lives, Ostrander has been responsible for the tasks related to the free clinic.

A Repurposed Fire Station

The rural communities along the border between the United States and Mexico have a small population. On the one hand, this is where the American dream begins for many new immigrants. They are non-native English speakers, most of whom speak Spanish as well as many other languages, even Mandarin, as undocumented immigrants come from all over the world. Immigrants have no health insurance, bring their families with them, and often come from low-income families. On the other hand, many impoverished older people are living alone in this community. They suffer from poverty and illness, and some can't even go out all year round due to physical reasons. Tzu Chi exists to bring help and care to these people in need.

"The first large free clinic was in 2015 in Campo [an unincorporated community in San Diego County] at Mountain Empire High School, next to an Indian reservation. If I remember correctly, I believe we had 92 patients. We provided acupuncture, dental, and vision services at that event," Mark Ostrander recalled. Opening a free clinic can't be accomplished overnight. There were few patients initially because the locals knew nothing about Tzu Chi or its free clinics. People's understanding of Tzu Chi deepened by word-of-mouth over time and through interactions as volunteers helped those in need, offering charity aid, conducting home visits, and providing disaster relief. "Some people saw results after coming to the free clinics, and then at the next free clinic, more people made appointments. Eye exams and acupuncture services were the most popular," Ostrander said.

At the same time, finding local doctors willing to provide free clinics is one of the many challenges. Ostrander still remembers the first dentist who worked with Tzu Chi in 2015, May Chou: "She was an older dentist, but she knew other dentists while she had retired by then. She was the first one I remember, introduced by volunteer Hue Wang."

In 2018, a local non-profit led by Ostrander purchased an old fire station locally and converted it into a Resource Center. Ostrander calls it Tzu Chi South, as they routinely interact and work with Tzu Chi San Diego. Local people can come here to receive free supplies from the weekly Food Pantry, participate in a Mattress Recycle Program, and use it as a household recycling drop-off, which Tzu Chi San Diego helps run. At the same time, it also provides local residents with medical assistance. "We can provide dental and acupuncture services in this building. We've successfully integrated this facility into the assistance work and gained the community's support," Ostrander explained.

Since 2018, TIMA has held a large-scale free clinic here, with as many as seven dentists, four acupuncturists, two optometrists, an ophthalmologist, and 30 non-medical professional volunteers participating.

Roger Wilson came to see the doctor with neuropathy that left him almost unable to walk. During the free clinic in 2018, Wilson arrived in a wheelchair. "He needed glasses. Together with other volunteers, we carried him to the Tzu Chi Eye Clinic for a vision



Volunteers introduce Tzu Chi to everyone before the San Diego Service Center's free clinic on August 2, 2015, benefiting Mexican farmers, low-income households, and families without medical insurance. Photo/Tsung-Chang Sung

examination and glasses. He got a pair of glasses, and at least now he can read,” Ostrander said with great relief. Wilson relies heavily on a wheelchair and a lift chair for daily life. The chair lift has become a place for him to sleep because he can’t climb into bed to rest. Once, when Ostrander and volunteers visited Wilson’s home, they found that his lift chair was broken: “We helped him purchase a new lift chair through Tzu Chi’s charity services.”

“Merry Christmas!” Several children surrounded Santa Claus with joyful faces. The tall Christmas tree behind them sparkled with small decorations such as snowmen, angels, sleds, and reindeer. In this joyous and peaceful atmosphere, people took photos with Santa Claus one after another. “It’s Christmas again!” they shouted. Each year around this time, Tzu Chi volunteers in San Diego hold Christmas activities with Bruce playing Santa Claus. However, just a few years ago, he couldn’t walk since he couldn’t see.

“An older person came to the eye examination point in Boulevard. Through the eye examination, Tzu Chi volunteers discovered that he had difficulty with his vision,” Ostrander recounted. “We managed to provide him with the surgery he needed to correct his eyesight. I think it’s very touching that he needed someone to guide him because he had difficulty seeing when he came. But after the surgery, he volunteered to participate in Christmas activities and play Santa Claus, and he always remembered Tzu Chi and talked about it.” In Ostrander’s recollections, this is the most touching thing he ever encountered. Whenever he thinks about it, he feels warmth in his heart that inspires him to do more good deeds and help more people in need.

We even had a special Santa costume made just for him in the right size because he’s a pretty tall guy.



Mark Ostrander
Tzu Chi Volunteer



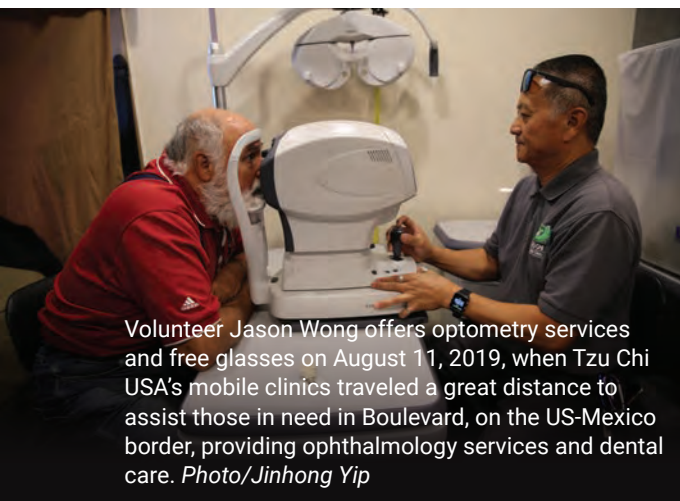
Volunteers work together to carry medical equipment and medicines off the bus in preparation for a free clinic at Mountain Empire High School in Pine Valley, San Diego County. Photo/Bin Li

A Place for Lonely Older People

Mark Ostrander actively partners with local charities. First of all, there are many impoverished and lonely older people in the area, some of whom are even bedridden all year round due to illness. Tzu Chi volunteers try to bring such individuals to Tzu Chi's free clinics for medical treatment and health check-ups. The volunteers also help them connect with programs like PACE (Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly), whose professionals can pick them up, take them to the doctor or to shop, and provide various activities to keep them active.



On March 29, 2015, Tzu Chi San Diego volunteers hold a free clinic at Ibarra Elementary School to provide medical services for those in need in the local community. TIMA volunteer David Hoy (second left) teaches other volunteers how to use computers to log in patient information. *Photo/Bin Li*



Volunteer Jason Wong offers optometry services and free glasses on August 11, 2019, when Tzu Chi USA's mobile clinics traveled a great distance to assist those in need in Boulevard, on the US-Mexico border, providing ophthalmology services and dental care. *Photo/Jinhong Yip*

Secondly, volunteers at the Tzu Chi USA San Diego Service Center can't operate so many medical services entirely independently, so Ostrander contacted local organizations and recruited volunteers from the San Diego County Fire CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), American Red Cross, and the community. When these volunteers participate in Tzu Chi's free clinic activities, Ostrander will provide them with training, including the operation of Electronic Health Records, Tzu Chi's operating methods, and central values.

"I'll explain to them why we do this, that there are no strings attached to our charity, that we're grateful for the opportunity to serve, and that we serve with compassion," Ostrander said. "All the people who come to help say that they feel very happy and satisfied every time they provide services to the community with Tzu Chi. They may feel tired, as sometimes the work of the volunteers is very hard, and sometimes the people who come for treatment may be impatient with the volunteers. Still, they said that because of the sincerity of Tzu Chi volunteers, the overall atmosphere of the free clinic is warm and welcoming, and they feel very happy to serve the underprivileged and sick side by side. They always ask, when is the next free clinic?" Speaking of this, Ostrander was full of pride.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tzu Chi suspended free clinic activities for three years, but Ostrander spoke excitedly and conveyed that they were ready to go when this outreach resumed. "This year (2023), I've contacted the San Ysidro Health Center, a medical institution near the U.S.-Mexico border. They plan to carry out medical day activities and cooperate with Tzu Chi to provide medical services at the U.S.-Mexico border. More services for vulnerable families at the border!"



Brandon McCain, who is struggling with homelessness, came to the free clinic. Dr. Richard Chang takes a close-up photo of his teeth. Photo/Ruijing Zheng

"No one cares about me. My relatives and friends don't care, and the government doesn't care. I'm left with a mouth full of rotten teeth falling out one by one..." Patricia Milligan shared her grievances. In 2016, the Tzu Chi medical team went to the Foothill Unity Center to hold the first free dental clinic to provide services to unhoused people, impoverished families, and those suffering from health issues.

An Alliance with Foothill Unity Center

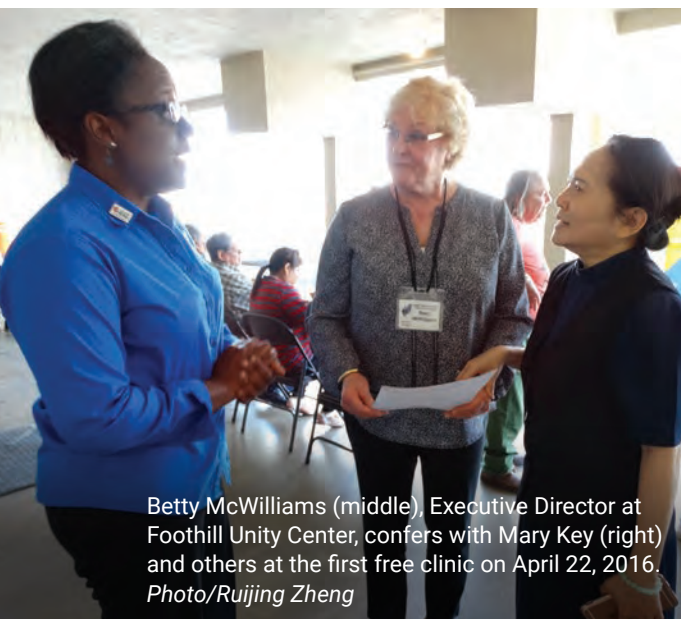
TIMA dentist Richard Chang examined Patricia Milligan's few "remaining teeth" and shook his head, "The braces and fillings are broken, and the repair and treatment will be a big project!" Since Milligan became homeless in 1996, she had been seeking treatment by every means for 20 years, but no one offered her help. It wasn't until the Tzu Chi dental care team came to the Foothill Unity Center on April 22, 2016, that the nightmare ended.

Tzu Chi and Foothill Unity Center, Inc., two charitable organizations, allied after a meeting in 2014. Volunteer Shuqing Wang understood that there are many low-income immigrant families in the San Gabriel Valley, while Foothill Unity Center, Inc. was actively seeking medical resources to provide services to impoverished families needing health care. At the end of 2015, Dr. Boren Dang exclaimed emotionally during a sharing session with volunteers: "The Mobile Clinic only goes out a few times a year. It is such a waste of medical resources. It should be used more!" So Wang brought up this existing case, and William Keh, CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, and his wife Mary Keh, a dedicated Tzu Chi volunteer, spearheaded the initiative. The team visited Betty McWilliams, Executive Director at Foothill Unity Center, Inc. The two parties agreed to hold free vision and dental clinics monthly in 2016. The first free vision clinic occurred in February, and free dental clinics started in April.

Foothill Unity Center, Inc. was established in 1980 and provides services in 12 communities in the San Gabriel Valley. It helps neighbors in need with programs focusing on food, health, crisis case management, job development, volunteerism, and housing and homeless services. As a federally designated Community Action Agency and the region's primary provider of integrated resources, it receives long-term government support and sponsorships from non-profit organizations. After strict review by the Foothill Unity Center, Tzu Chi provided a list of those needing medical services. The first free dental clinic mobilized three dentists, Richard Chang, Zhimin Zheng, and Shirley Chen, plus nurse Nianci Lin, two dental assistants, and eight volunteers to provide medical services such as screening, teeth scaling, fillings, and tooth extractions.

Collecting Food From Trash Cans

Patricia Milligan, who had only half her teeth left, enthusiastically said to the volunteers: "I have learned Chinese! My neighbor taught me Chinese in 1970." Because of her affinity, she told the volunteers about her misery.



Betty McWilliams (middle), Executive Director at Foothill Unity Center, confers with Mary Key (right) and others at the first free clinic on April 22, 2016.
Photo/Ruijing Zheng

Her parents both passed away in 1993, and after their house was sold, she had no place to go and, over the years, became homeless. She once stayed at a friend's house, yet from 1996 to 2011, she was veritably living on the streets. The police often reprimanded her for no reason, and she was even mistaken for a criminal.

It wasn't until September 2011 that Milligan applied for a low-rent apartment. However, there was very little left over from her limited social security funds after paying the rent. She could only go to the Foothill Unity Center to receive food. She had no money to see a doctor or have expensive dental treatment. "Fortunately, Tzu Chi has this free clinic. This free clinic is so important to the community!" Milligan said. "I have a friend who lost all his teeth after a fight. He was reduced to picking food from trash cans to eat. I want to introduce him to Tzu Chi for dental care. I hope you can heal him, too."

Before leaving, Milligan said sadly: "I may have to go back to the streets." It turned out that the rent had increased to the point where she could no longer afford it. Dr. Richard Chang reluctantly asked: "What will you do? Where are you going?" She shrugged and said sincerely: "Here is Tzu Chi, there is the Foothill Unity Center, and many good people are here to help us! I want to stay here!"

Brandon McCain was another person experiencing homelessness who came to the clinic that day. His last dental visit was four years ago, and he now had tooth decay. He was very grateful for Tzu Chi: "The doctors at Tzu Chi are skilled, fast, kind, and friendly, and they don't hurt at all!" Brandon lived a nomadic life in the San Gabriel Valley, which he described as "place to place." With no fixed abode, he visited many charities that provided beds. He queued up daily for a temporary bed and would wake up wondering where to

sleep the next night. The cheap dental fillings he got many years ago were in tatters. He felt fortunate that Tzu Chi came to provide free dental care services.

McCain had terrible eating habits, often drinking soda as plain water. “My mother said that drinking milk can strengthen teeth. I thought drinking milk after drinking Coke would be enough!” he told a Foothill Unity Center physician. After Dr. Chang treated McCain, he offered oral hygiene instruction: “Healthy teeth actually have nothing to do with whether you drink milk or not, but how you maintain them. You must brush your teeth after meals. It’s better to consume less Coke and candies!”

Only the Most Conservative Damage

During free clinics, Dr. Richard Chang always smiled from beginning to end and treated every patient as his own family. In 2016, TIMA arranged 29 free clinics in the San Gabriel Valley, and Dr. Chang attended more than half of them. He always remained relaxed, helping his dental patients relax. Moreover, Chang would explain as he worked, for instance, that the shape of each cavity is different, and a different approach is needed to treat it.

Dentists from TIMA will try their best to do only the most conservative damage when treating a patient’s teeth.



Richard Chang
TIMA Dentist

As he held up a small bottle of medicine during one clinic, he explained to the patient, “This can treat large cavities, prevent damage caused by nerve pumping, and even regenerate nerves. Although this is a free clinic, we must care for every tooth.” TIMA dentists, including Chang, strive to do their best despite space and equipment limitations so that every patient will smile from the bottom of their heart after treatment.

One patient opened his mouth and complained of a hole in his tooth. Dr. Chang looked for a long time but couldn’t find it. He also asked a Spanish translator to assist. The patient insisted that “it felt like there was a hole.” The medical team was very patient and took X-rays. When the doctor received the X-ray results, he could prove there was no tooth decay at all. While the patient’s issues turned out to be psychological, he could return home with peace of mind.

For some reason, another patient, retired from the military, had all his teeth extracted a week before. He learned he would have to wait three months before he could get a complete set of dentures. He exclaimed, “Doctor! It’s so inconvenient. I want them all. I have to use a juicer to crush food before I can eat it. Can you help me install dentures now?” Dr. Chang replied: “Actually, your gums are currently swollen, but this will subside. The size of the teeth made now would not be suitable. You must wait, then return to the hospital or apply for insurance payment as a veteran.” The patient went home understanding his situation better, grateful for the doctor taking the time to explain and go beyond offering just dentistry services.



Dentist Rongrong Liu and the Tzu Chi Mobile Clinic provide dental care at the Foothill Unity Center.
Photo/Mary Keh



The Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Las Vegas began in 2000. Medical volunteers from the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra, California (now the Buddhist Tzu Chi Health Center Alhambra, a Federally Qualified Health Center Look-Alike) went to Las Vegas to conduct the first free clinic and bone marrow donation registration for the local Chinese community at a trade center hall in Chinatown. One hundred fifty-five people participated in the free clinic, and 21 registered for bone marrow donation.

Although the Tzu Chi USA Las Vegas Service Center didn't exist yet, the charity services performed by Tzu Chi volunteers in the general area had already created a reputation in the community. Therefore, the free clinic venue was provided free of charge by local restaurant owner James Cheng, who also informed the Las Vegas Times to publicize the free clinic news on the front page and report about the bone marrow donation event.

Moreover, New Asian Weekly spread the free clinic news in two consecutive issues, sent leaflets to subscribers, and posted them throughout Chinatown. Local practicing doctors also brought Hispanic nurses to help translate and serve patients, jointly supporting the medical care work.

You Have Come

Tzu Chi's first free clinic in Las Vegas occurred over 20 years ago. At that time, Tsulin Valenzuela worked in a local hospital's pediatric intensive care unit and didn't have time to participate in this first free clinic. However, since then, her footprints have been part of every step of its development.

"My earliest encounter with Tzu Chi began with a magazine. When I came to the United States, I picked up Tzu Chi's magazine, Tzu Chi Bimonthly, at a Chinese supermarket.



Regular free dental clinics are a life-saving service for the unhoused in Las Vegas. Photo/ Ruijing Zheng

I was very moved when I saw the stories in it. From then on, I started writing checks and mailing them to Tzu Chi USA,” Valenzuela recounted.

One day, she read in the newspaper that several students from National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan had an accident in Death Valley in the United States and ended up in the hospital where she worked. When she visited them, she found that volunteers from Tzu Chi were already at the hospital. The volunteers were very enthusiastic and warm in caring for the injured students, which was refreshing to her. There was no Tzu Chi Service Center in Las Vegas at that time. Still, Tzu Chi volunteers from Southern California insisted on caring for the group even if they had to travel far. They didn’t miss a day until the students were discharged and returned home.

“Not long after, when I was having dinner with friends, I heard someone say that Tzu Chi was coming to Las Vegas to set up a Service Center, but it would take 50 people to set it up, so we informed each other to come. I was one

of the 50 people,” Valenzuela recalled. After gathering 50 people, the volunteers worked tirelessly to go to Las Vegas to give classes and training. “There was no Service Center at that time, so we met in the public library for routine meetings for a year,” Valenzuela said.

By 2002, a Tzu Chi Las Vegas Site was officially established (promoted to Tzu Chi Las Vegas Service Center in 2004). One day in 2003, William Keh, then the director of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra, California, asked Valenzuela, “You’re a nurse; do you want to join TIMA?” They also found a local doctor named Henry Wong. When Dr. Wong heard this, he agreed on the spot and became the first convener of the local TIMA. “We needed a director-general here, and I served as the director-general of TIMA at that time,” Valenzuela said with a smile. In this way, they officially formed the TIMA Las Vegas chapter in 2003.

After Tzu Chi established the Las Vegas Service Center, it offered charity relief and care in the community, plus medical lectures. Valenzuela clearly remembers: “Our first medical lecture was on hypertension. We invited local doctor Weifeng Cheng to give the lecture. Nearly 60 people attended, and the response was very good.” Starting from these medical lectures, the community outreach activities of TIMA Las Vegas continued to branch out.

Do You Still Need a Dentist if You Have No Teeth?

Since 2012, TIMA Las Vegas has teamed up with multiple medical and charity groups to hold two health fairs at the Tzu Chi Las Vegas Service Center every year, providing free flu vaccinations to low-income or uninsured people, breast cancer screening, and assisting people to apply for food stamps, Medicaid and other services, especially in the

early years when community medical care was scarce. The highest record showed that 230 people benefited, but this was only limited to consultation and assistance, as there was no physical diagnosis and treatment until Dr. David Ting showed up.

"If you're poor, you can take care of yourself; if you're successful, you can help the world," Dr. Ting said. After decades of hard work, Ting transitioned from working on the front line in a dental clinic to becoming a manager and businessman, owning more than a dozen clinics in Nevada. Ting became connected with Tzu Chi when his two daughters attended Tzu Chi's humanistic school. However, his love for Tzu Chi and his path to becoming the promoter and leader of Tzu Chi's free dental clinics in Las Vegas stemmed from a trip to a faraway destination.

In 2014, Ting traveled to Iran. He took a tourist tour, and after driving to Bam Citadel, the car stopped, and the guide said: "Let's take a rest stop here." This place was in the middle of nowhere and quite deserted, but when he got out of the car, Ting saw a building in this remote area. The tour guide said: "A group

from Taiwan built a girls' school here." Sure enough, as Ting looked around, he noticed Tzu Chi's logo next to the building.

"In such a place with nothing, in a Muslim country, Tzu Chi actually built a school for girls so that girls can have the opportunity to receive education. This moved me very much," Ting shared.

Dr. Ting has a daughter himself. Regardless of religious beliefs, he believes that girls should have the same right to education as boys. Reflecting on this, Ting felt that Tzu Chi's provision of educational opportunities for Muslim girls was an immeasurable act of kindness. He suddenly felt that he should do something as well, so he reached out to Tsuilin Valenzuela.

"I'm somewhat successful now. Traveling and playing around like this, what is the meaning of my life? I also want to give back to society. So, what can I do?" he asked her. Valenzuela replied: "You're a dentist. Do you want to make some contribution to your professional field?" And so the two began to plan a free dental clinic.



On September 29, 2019, street residents line up in long queues outside the free clinic jointly organized by TIMA Las Vegas and the Salvation Army. Photo/Ruijing Zheng

They told Kailun Zhang, the head of the Las Vegas Service Center at the time, about their ideas. Zhang suggested: "Should we go to Downtown Las Vegas (the birthplace of casinos on Fremont Street) to find people who need our free dental clinic services?" And they subsequently set this idea in motion.

When TIMA Las Vegas was preparing for a free dental clinic on December 7, 2014, Ting offered half a day in one of his dental clinics as the venue for the medical team and volunteers to conduct a "trial run" of a free clinic event.

On April 11, 2015, TIMA Las Vegas held its first free dental clinic to provide dental diagnosis and treatment services to people living on the streets. At the venue provided by the Catholic Church of Southern Nevada, nearly 100 men struggling with homelessness were finally able to smile after the free clinic. As the number of people coming to free dental clinic events continually increased, the team needed a larger space, so by the third clinic that year, the operation moved to the Salvation Army.

Although the doctors and nurses, revered as angels in white by many, are professionals trained to get along with all patients, they are all still only human beings. When the free dental clinic started, some doctors might understandably have been worried about close contact with unhoused patients living on the streets. But those individuals moved Valenzuela deeply.

They were all cleaned up, had put on their cleanest and best clothes to see the doctor, and came to show us their teeth. We were shocked and moved. Although unhoused today, they also have dignity, so we treat them respectfully.

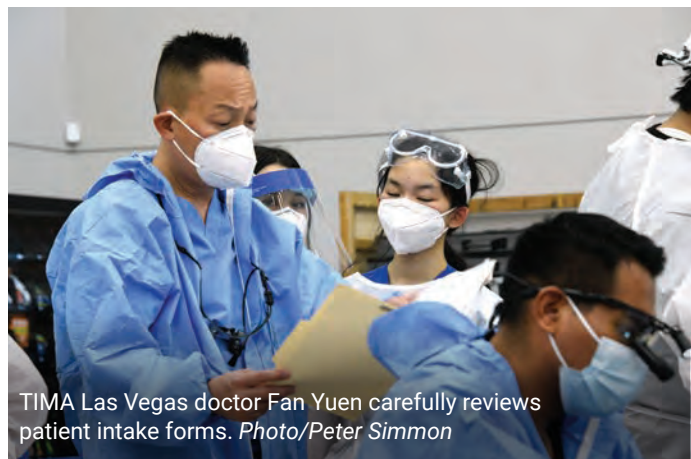


Tsuilin Valenzuela
TIMA Nurse Practitioner

Valenzuela remembers that once, as she was guiding one unhoused patient towards the dental treatment area, a dentist ran over and asked discreetly, somewhat embarrassed: "All his teeth have fallen out. Do you still want me to see him?" She thought for a moment, then replied, "Yes. Look to see if there is oral cancer."

As night fell, the free dental clinic came to an end. A woman who was experiencing homelessness said to Valenzuela: "I haven't had my teeth cleaned for more than ten years. I'm very grateful." She smiled as she spoke, the orange sunset illuminating her face with a warm glow.

Tzu Chi now holds two to three free dental clinics annually in Las Vegas. In addition to calling on caring local doctors and dental





Volunteers take stock of opportunities during the free clinic to introduce Bamboo Banks to patients and non-Tzu Chi affiliated medical volunteers. Photo/Huiyi Cen

assistants to provide free dental care, Tzu Chi USA's medical team also mobilizes to transport medical chairs, X-ray machines, dental instruments, and sterilization equipment from elsewhere for support. Las Vegas volunteers also continue to go to Downtown Las Vegas to inform street residents about this free clinic service.

People who are unhoused struggle with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, where to sleep, and transportation. When medical issues arise, they can feel helpless and without a voice. When Tzu Chi volunteers visit people living in tents along the street, they will ask, "Excuse me, does anyone need free dental services?" One man responded, opening his mouth and laughing as he exclaimed: "I lost all my teeth a long time ago!"

Others were panic-stricken, sharing their woes when seeking help: "I want to go, but who can help me look after my property? This is all my property!" The volunteers looked at the tent cloth hanging on the big tree, the bottles and cans on the cart, and the dirty and torn clothes. They felt disheartened and could only encourage those they approached to guard each other's property and take turns going to see a dentist.

To allow more people to benefit from free dental clinics, volunteers also invite various groups to recommend services to patients needing them at mainstream charity outreach events in Las Vegas. Therefore, in addition to unhoused individuals, the clinics also serve people from drug or alcohol treatment centers and domestic violence shelters for women and children. The goal is to ensure the Tzu Chi team won't miss anyone suffering from a toothache or needing dental care.

An unhoused man who initially queued up to receive a free breakfast saw a volunteer coming to promote the free clinic event, so he quickly gave up breakfast to line up for a dental appointment instead: "I had teeth extracted last time, and I want to have my teeth cleaned today!" Due to time constraints, a patient can only request one service per day so that other patients can receive medical care. Kailun Zhang, then head of the Las Vegas Service Center, saw the man sweating as he rushed to the free clinic and gave him a ride to get there in time. Other street residents heard about the free clinic at the Salvation Army Activity Center and immediately came on their own to seek medical treatment.



At a clinic on February 16, 2008, volunteer Yiliang Lian explains the medical treatment process to waiting patients. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center

In Arizona, bordering Mexico, the capital, Phoenix, gathers people of different ethnicities and is a melting pot of new arrivals, especially those from Central and South America. Many of them are undocumented immigrants without status. They either have no medical insurance or don't have the means to see a doctor. As a result, minor illnesses can turn into serious ones.

Interstate and Transoceanic Love

In August 1995, a severe car accident occurred in Tucson, approximately two hours drive from Phoenix. The vehicle carrying a Taiwanese student, his wife, and his in-laws, who were visiting, overturned on the road. The accident resulted in one fatality and five people sustaining varying degrees of injuries. Upon learning of the family's distress, Meiyue Lin, a regular donor to Tzu Chi who was originally from Taiwan and now residing in Phoenix, took the initiative to contact the

Phoenix hospital where the injured were and inquire about their needs and those of their families. Hearing about this care from Lin, other donors contributed money and effort, taking turns cooking and caring for the injured and consoling their families. (That year, Tzu Chi mobilized local resources to assist in this accident and another major Grand Canyon plane crash. This effort led to the Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center's establishment in 1996, with Lin becoming its first coordinator.)

The case of those severely injured in this car accident became one of the models for Tzu Chi's medical volunteer work in the United States. The student's father-in-law, Mr. Tsai, was paralyzed from the neck down and depended on an oxygen machine for breathing, while his mother-in-law passed away at the scene of the accident. Tzu Chi volunteers from the Tzu Chi USA chapter (now Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters) immediately flew to Phoenix to visit and share the caregiving responsibilities for the injured.

Since the hospital refused to allow Tsai to stay there for treatment due to insurance issues, and he also hoped to return to Taiwan to reunite with his relatives and friends, Phoenix volunteers worked with the Tzu Chi USA chapter to resolve his medical and personal concerns. Firstly, they obtained financial support locally in Phoenix, raising over \$30,000 in donations. Subsequently, the Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra, acting on behalf of Tzu Chi, urgently negotiated with the hospital in Phoenix. They swiftly arranged the special procedures necessary for the severely injured patient to leave the country and coordinated with the airline for all the matters concerning his international transfer. Within ten days, the volunteers had completed everything required for Tsai's transport home across borders.

After Dr. Mingchang Hsu, a physician from the Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra, discussed with Tsai's attending physician, he learned about the need for a ventilator, head support, and feeding equipment. Dr. Hsu, along with free clinic volunteer team leader, Debra Boudreaux, planned and arranged for the necessary support. They also discussed the possibility of Tsai seeking medical treatment in Taiwan with Dr. Chinlong Lin (the first director of the Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra, who later returned to Taiwan and served at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital). Simultaneously, they coordinated the arrangements for Tsai's return to Taiwan and other matters with Tzu Chi Taipei.

On the early morning of October 29, nine volunteers from the Free Clinic set out in two groups to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) to await Tsai's arrival. Around nine o'clock, Tsai landed at a nearby private airstrip on a small medical aircraft equipped with various life-saving devices. The volunteers assisted the paramedics in transferring Tsai to LAX via ambulance. Three volunteers from the Free Clinic helped the paramedics place Tsai in the ambulance, offering comfort and reassurance to ease his mind. Medical personnel and two volunteers accompanied him to the aircraft, connecting the ventilator to the in-flight life support system. Thanks to their wholehearted cooperation, the volunteers completed the extraordinary task of transporting this critical patient safely.

Tsai's eldest daughter expressed gratitude for the immense help received from Tzu Chi. Facing such a significant accident in the United States, the family not only needed assistance with the substantial medical expenses but also had to cope with the aftermath of their mother's passing. Tzu Chi's proactive assistance during their most helpless moments was truly appreciated. The warmth extended in a foreign land left the family with nothing but thankfulness, especially to Meiyue Lin and her husband, who unconditionally covered all their living expenses. "I will always remember this kindness," Tsai's daughter said.



On February 16, 2008, patients wait for treatment under a tent outside the Phoenix Service Center.
Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center



TIMA Phoenix conducts blood tests for bone marrow donation during the 1999 Phoenix Chinese Week event. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center



Since then, the Tzu Chi USA chapter (now Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters) in San Dimas has strongly supported the Phoenix Service Center, holding medical consultations and free clinics and providing case care at various stages. Although the two locations are over 300 miles apart, making a round trip on the same day difficult, the compassionate doctors from both places selflessly contribute to medical services, tirelessly shuttling between the locations.

An Infusion of Care Blooms in the Desert State

The Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center is dedicated to medical and emergency relief work. Tzu Chi volunteers here adhere to Master Cheng Yen's teachings to keep their heads above the clouds in the sky and their feet on the ground as they progress step by step, building capacity brick by brick. In December 1996, less than a year after its establishment, the Service Center joined one of the 24-hour emergency rescue organizations operating in the area and now receives, on average, one to two hundred cases annually. Not only does the Phoenix Service Center have the most Tzu Chi charity cases in the United States, but it also combines charity relief with medical treatment. Despite a small number of volunteers, the Service Center's activities have made a big difference. Even

before its founding anniversary, it provided medical consultation and basic health examination services to low-income households in the community and people without health insurance.

Starting from events providing blood tests toward bone marrow donation, the Phoenix Service Center gradually accumulated experience and resources in organizing large-scale medical events. In addition to providing health consultation to low-income households in the Service Center on weekdays, it has also participated in the Phoenix Chinese Week event since 1997, setting up stalls on site to introduce Tzu Chi's missions and provide free medical consultation as local Chinese celebrate the Lunar New Year.

Since then, volunteers in Phoenix work for three consecutive days every year for the Phoenix Chinese Week event, carefully preparing to offer charity sales, sign language performances, and medical consultations.

On April 5, 1998, the Phoenix Service Center marked its second anniversary. In addition to the celebration and programs offered as an expression of thanks, many local physicians from family medicine, medical oncology, pediatric oncology, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and acupuncture provided consultations at the venue.



In 1999, Stephen Huang, then CEO of the Tzu Chi USA chapter, advocates blood testing for bone marrow donation, which could save a life without harming oneself. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center*



During Phoenix Chinese Week 1999, Tzu Chi volunteers bring people to Tzu Chi's booth to fill out forms and participate in blood tests for bone marrow donation. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix*



On March 20, 2010, Dr. Ruth Tan Lim, convener of TIMA Phoenix, treats a young patient. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center*

Stephen Huang, then CEO of the Tzu Chi USA chapter, William Keh, then head of Tzu Chi's Long Island Service Center, and others made a memorable trip to offer their blessings. The Phoenix Service Center invited many people it had cared for to attend the event. One of

them, an Afghan who had received medical assistance from Tzu Chi, expressed his gratitude to the Buddhist Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Alhambra, California, as he had been referred there through the Phoenix Service Center for eye surgery.

On February 16, 1999, the TIMA Phoenix chapter was officially established and participated in the three-day Phoenix Chinese Week event. Tzu Chi volunteers thoughtfully designed a carnival, presenting a perfect combination of charity sales, sign language performances, and medical consultations. Huang came to Phoenix and took the stage to advocate for blood testing for bone marrow donation during the carnival. Dr. Gayle Robert was in charge of the medical booth, with several doctors and nurses providing free health consultations and blood tests for bone marrow donation for people attending the event. More than a dozen volunteers were also on-site to explain and facilitate, leading people to the Tzu Chi booth to fill out forms for blood testing, resulting in a fruitful outcome.

After establishing TIMA Phoenix, professional healthcare providers and enthusiastic medical volunteers formed a strong team. They conduct one to two annual free community medical consultation events for residents in need. Over the years, the program has expanded to include internal medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, oncology, dentistry, acupuncture, ophthalmic examinations, and influenza vaccinations, among other service areas. In the early stages, Dr. Robert led the initiative, and later, Dr. Ruth Tan Lim, a dedicated coordinator for the medical association, worked tirelessly. Due to Dr. Lim's contributions to both local health care and the arts, the community recognized her efforts. Consequently, more local physicians and groups were inspired to join, contributing to medical consultations and basic health check-ups, benefiting numerous families in need.



On February 21, 2015, Dr. Gayle Robert from the Department of Oncology treats patients at a free clinic. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center



Sleeping on the Carpet

Although the Phoenix Service Center was small in the early days, it played a significant role. In addition to participating in food bank activities, the number of cases it handled ranked the highest among Tzu Chi USA regional chapters. The space was indeed limited, but it had all the crucial features.

In August 2002, Austin Tsao, then CEO of Tzu Chi USA, Dr. Eugene Taw, Dr. Peter Zhang, Luen Li, and Trisha Yeh, a group of five people, came to a homeless shelter run by the Primavera Foundation in Tucson. Alongside TIMA Phoenix doctors, including Dr. Gail Robert and Dr. Ruth Tan Lim, they held the first Tzu Chi free clinic at the shelter, which had up to 100 beds. It was the first time outsiders could hold a free clinic event here. Although only about 20 people came to see a doctor, the volunteers left a very good impression, laying a base for future free clinics.

After the event, several doctors shared their experiences and discussed enthusiastically drawing blueprints for future free clinics. That night, more than 20 people slept on the carpet in the Phoenix Service Center, their hearts filled with abundant love and gratitude.



On November 7, 2009, TIMA's free community medical consultation service offers an eye exam. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center



On February 25, 2012, Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners perform cupping on patients. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center



To purchase sophisticated dental equipment, in the spring of 2022, the Phoenix Service Center holds a walking charity fundraising event. Although the road uphill is difficult, everyone gathers their strength and moves forward together. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center

The Flame Becomes a Red Lotus

Tzu Chi's large-scale community medical outreach in Phoenix has benefited many residents during the 20 years from 1999 to 2019. Due to an increase in the number of large-scale Hispanic charity medical institutions in recent years and investments from Native American groups running gambling businesses near urban areas, social welfare medical care has dramatically improved. There are more opportunities for daily

medical visits and consultations, so fewer families need large-scale community medical outreach. Still, Tzu Chi and TIMA volunteers knew unmet needs persisted in low-income communities.

The TIMA Phoenix chapter has always wished to purchase dental equipment and hold free dental clinics for the community since dentistry is one of the many services offered in free clinic activities. However, due to a lack of complete dental equipment, doctors can only provide oral and dental health consultations and medical advice on-site, and not the treatments people need most.

On June 26, 2022, the Phoenix Service Center finally held its first Tzu Chi free dental clinic event. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation, more and more families are struggling financially. The number of families who come to the Service Center to receive fruit and vegetable food bags has doubled. There is an urgent need to combine charity and medical care. The free clinic, which provides substantial dental treatment, targets families, low-income households, and disadvantaged groups who come to receive food supplies.



Volunteers test patients for COVID-19 outdoors during the pandemic before allowing admittance inside the Phoenix Service Center. Photo/Jennifer Chien



The day before the first free dental clinic, Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters sent a truck to bring dental treatment equipment and medical supplies. The volunteers work hard to transport and arrange everything properly. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center

In the scorching midsummer heat, outdoor temperatures in Phoenix can reach over 110 degrees Fahrenheit, as they did that day. Yet, the warmth of good intentions in the hearts of Tzu Chi volunteers on the occasion of their first free dental clinic here was much hotter. This time, the free dental clinic broke through the previous dilemma of lack of equipment and could finally provide substantive dental diagnosis and treatment to people in need. After experiencing this extremely challenging free clinic event, the volunteers finally realized the wish they had formulated many years ago. The Phoenix Service Center had also taken a big step forward in offering charity medical care, spreading its wings like a phoenix on fire, preparing to take on even greater missions.

This was Phoenix's first Tzu Chi dental free clinic. Because it was so hot, everyone was sweating profusely, but that didn't stop them from putting their heart and soul into the work.

Ren Liu

Contact Person

Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center

Ren Liu thanked the volunteers who came to the venue early in the morning to prepare so that patients who had also arrived early and queued up could register for treatment.



Jenjung Pan from the Gastroenterology Department and his wife assist during the first free dental clinic in Phoenix, taking patients' temperature and blood pressure. Photo/Jennifer Chien

He was an important promoter of this free clinic. After later assuming the role of head of the Service Center, he has been working hard to implement the free dental clinic, hoping to improve the oral health problems of disadvantaged families and long-term care residents.

In 2021, the volunteers happily responded to fundraising calls, organizing tea parties, walking activities and tours, and more, and successfully raised over \$200,000 in donations. "The fundraising at this stage was to purchase medical equipment for the free clinic in Phoenix, including three sets of portable dental diagnosis and treatment equipment and two sets of ophthalmology

equipment,” Liu explained. “The ophthalmology services can now provide a free pair of glasses within 48 hours after the vision examination. In the future, the Vision Mobile Clinic will have lens grinding equipment and can provide a free pair of glasses within two hours,” he said.

After Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters offered support toward obtaining hardware equipment, yet it was still to be purchased, the next step was to recruit and train medical volunteers. With assistance from National Headquarters, the Phoenix volunteers initially participated in online training. To enhance their understanding of free clinic operations, Liu led the free clinic team to Fresno, California, and Las Vegas, Nevada, to participate in Tzu Chi’s free clinic activities there so the volunteers could learn on the go.

In 2022, the day before the first free dental clinic, seven TIMA USA National Headquarters

Region volunteers and a truck loaded with medical equipment came across state lines to support the event. When they arrived, it was already the hottest part of the day, yet with two experienced volunteers on the team, one in charge of the free clinic, Min Leu, and the other responsible for the transportation and installation of medical equipment, J.D. Chen, it took only about two hours to work with Phoenix volunteers to put all the equipment and computer systems in place. With that, the preparatory work was ready.

“We brought most of the dental equipment because Phoenix does not yet have complete equipment. We hope to help them start free dental clinics so they can hold them regularly in the future,” Sylvia Wihardjo, in charge of medical equipment management, said. She overcame all difficulties in bringing dental treatment chairs, professional dental equipment, and all the necessary appliances to Phoenix.



On June 26, 2022, Joe Chang (left), a professor from a dental school in Phoenix, and TIMA dentist Shirley Chen (right) work together to clean patients’ teeth. *Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center*

"This free clinic not only provided medical help to low-income patients directly, but also allowed more people to know Tzu Chi and become one of us. Through free clinics we can see the active participation of community residents in Tzu Chi activities and our ongoing 'Bodhisattva Enrollment,'" TIMA dentist Shirley Chen, who came to offer support, said.

Thanks to everyone's willing efforts, the free clinic was successful and helped many people. At the same time, many community doctors and volunteers pledged to join Tzu Chi's activities, too. Tzu Chi volunteers David T. Chiang (who participated in Tzu Chi USA Central Region's free dental clinics many times in his early years) and his wife Jenny Chen, a dentist, immediately returned to the team after learning that Phoenix would provide patients with substantial diagnosis and dental treatment, no longer limited to just oral hygiene education and care. Wenhsiu Wang, a local veteran dentist who has a connection with Tzu Chi, also responded immediately.

Dr. Joe Chang and his wife, Dr. Jenna Y. Lau, both dentists who teach at a dentistry school near the Phoenix Service Center, responded

too. They saw the Tzu Chi free dental clinic information online and immediately signed up, bringing three students. Seeing patients' suffering firsthand and their happiness following treatment moved the students. Word of mouth spread after they returned to school, so at the second free dental clinic, as many as 13 dental school students participated. Dr. Chang has since volunteered to help the Service Center provide fruit and vegetable food bags to those in need on Saturday mornings. He assists in food packaging, distribution, and purchasing at supermarkets beforehand. His volunteering story is the best example of how being moved inspires people to act.

The large-scale dental free clinic also resonated with other organizations. Due to years of cooperation in distributing fruit and vegetable boxes, three hygienists and three volunteer translators from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to support the large-scale free dental clinic in the spring of 2023. The six caring volunteers saw Tzu Chi at work and were impressed by the team's dedication during the preparation, aftermath, and entire free clinic process. They subsequently brought a positive report about Tzu Chi's medical outreach to the Church.



Ren Liu, head of the Tzu Chi Phoenix Service Center (third right), takes a group photo with Dr. Joe Chang (first right) and Dr. Jenna Y. Lau (second right), both dentists and dentistry professors, and three dentistry students who came to volunteer at the free clinic. *Photo/Jennifer Chien*



On April 2, 2023, six caring members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints support Tzu Chi's third large-scale free dental clinic. Photo/Tzu Chi USA Phoenix Service Center

Soon after, representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to the Phoenix Service Center for a visit and sharing. Since then, the two parties have exchanged visits and cooperated. More volunteers from the Church come to help on fruit and vegetable stocking days, and the Church puts our dental free clinic information on its community platform to recruit medical volunteers. Additionally, the Church donated \$10,000 in food, clothing, socks, shoes, toys, and more to the Service Center.

Tzu Chi has also become integrated into interfaith meetings and activities. At the 2023 United Food Bank Annual Partner Agency Conference on September 21, United Food Bank selected Tzu Chi USA's Phoenix Service Center as one of nine award-winning organizations among more than 100 food distribution organizations. The community recognized our charitable fruit and vegetable bag distributions and free dental clinics. Moreover, in November, by invitation, Tzu Chi led people in prayer for three wishes before the end of interfaith concerts in two cities. That night, the organizer donated all the online donation funds to the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation.

I'm very grateful that we can cooperate with Tzu Chi. I believe that no matter your faith, the most important thing is that we're compassionate and serve the public: This is the greatest happiness.



Eric Sawyer

Bishops' Storehouse Director

Under the pressure of the pandemic and inflation in the past two years, most patients who come to free clinics have challenging lives and financial constraints and can't afford dental treatment. Most of them usually adopt a passive approach to deal with dental problems as long as they can tolerate it. The large-scale dental free clinics help them solve chronic diseases that have troubled them for many years, so when they leave, in addition to being grateful, they also look forward to returning for treatment in the future. Tzu Chi volunteers serving in the Phoenix area cooperate across religious divides, integrate congregations' love and community resources, combine charity and medical care, and go deep into the community to relieve suffering and bring hope and happiness.

Striving for Improvement in Medical Care



TIMA volunteers from various countries arrive at the Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters campus one after another on March 27, 2019. Photo/Yue Ma

"Good morning, everyone! Welcome to Tzu Chi USA: This is your home!" Dr. Han Huang, then CEO of Tzu Chi USA, said on March 29, 2019, at Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters in San Dimas, California. He served as the host and represented Tzu Chi volunteers from across the United States to more than 500 people from 16 countries who had come to participate in the 2019 TIMA Global Forum, whose theme was "Enlightened Wellness." Everyone exchanged sincere greetings and responded with bright smiles like the golden sunshine of Southern California.

The First TIMA Global Forum in the United States

Under the lead of Tzu Chi volunteers, professional medical staff from different countries, wearing their traditional attire, walked into the Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters San

Dimas campus auditorium. Although their language and cultural backgrounds differed, all the participants shared one mindset: During the 2019 TIMA Global Forum three-day conference, they would jointly learn to uphold compassion for people and respect for life. This gathering marked the first time Tzu Chi USA was hosting a TIMA Global Forum, an event held in cities in different countries from time to time.

Professors and researchers from well-known academic medical institutions in the United States, such as the University of Southern California (USC) and the University of California, Los Angeles, were invited to attend and discuss holistic care. Topics included geriatrics, mindfulness-based stress reduction, climate change impact on the human body, traditional Chinese and Western medicine integration, body donation, liver care, ophthalmology, cancer treatment, knee care,

and more. The interdisciplinary exchange enabled participants, typically busy studying in their respective fields, to escape from the ivory tower and learn new knowledge and technology from other disciplines.

Aaron T. Hagedorn, Instructional Associate Professor, USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, didn't just share his professional knowledge in geriatrics in this forum: "I listened to the lectures of others. These lectures were very in-depth, just like being in medical school, and I learned interesting knowledge."

For Gilda Valdez, a Mexican doctor who joined the TIMA Mexico chapter after its establishment in November 2018, integrating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Western medicine was her favorite topic at the Forum. As a doctor, she found the courses were

particularly helpful in shortening the distance between herself and her patients and broadening what she could offer. "I can treat certain medical conditions through acupuncture while advising patients to use Western medicine, too," she explained. "Doctors in Mexico generally don't understand how acupuncture, TCM, yoga and other Eastern techniques, and exercise can help patients, and they look forward to bringing the concepts, experiences, and gains they have learned back to Mexico to share with peers."

New York physical therapist Yichen Liu, who usually posts videos and articles to teach the public how to exercise correctly and promote scientific knowledge, found that the Forum opened everyone's eyes as they learned about the interconnection between each part of the body's health and that of others. For instance, they wrote in their notes: "The arrangement of teeth and body posture is related to body control. Dentists focus on the dentition and the movable part of the mandible of the temporomandibular joint, while physical therapists treat the whole body. However, problems caused by teeth will affect the body's activities, and there may also be problems with bodily activities, which in turn affect dental problems. How can we combine physical therapy and dentistry? The cervical spine and the lumbar spine, as well as walking and movement of the shoulders, are closely related. How can dentists and physical therapists find ways to cooperate..."

Participants' notes also recorded a breakthrough in cancer treatment delivered by the director of the Hualien Charity Hospital. "Glioblastoma Multiforme is extremely difficult to treat, and the patient's two-year survival rate is low. Xinrong Lin, Director of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, is committed to fighting this cancer and has successfully reduced patients' tumors through targeted drugs..."



The first TIMA Global Forum in the United States opens on March 29, 2019, and regional TIMA chapter representatives take a group photo during the opening ceremony. *Photo/Shuchao Liao*



Invited leaders in the medical field share at the Global Forum on March 29, 2019, introducing the latest developments in various fields. *Photo/Lina Lee*

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) was also a focus of the Forum since more and more medical journal studies have found that physical and mental health are closely related. MBSR instruction can be part of patient treatment and benefit medical staff immersed in high-pressure environments for a long time. "Too many things distract people and prevent them from focusing on the present. People react directly and emotionally to everything, and their mental state is on 'autopilot.' Research shows that 32% to 46% of doctors suffer from burnout," MBSR teacher Lindsey E. Kugel said. "Medical staff are originally very compassionate and can empathize with the suffering of others, but if they're too focused on patients' pain, it can easily lead to professional burnout, negative emotions of self-depletion, and a decline in care for the suffering of patients," Kugel pointed out, as she urged medical staff to listen more, pay attention to every thought, and use mindfulness to never retreat from compassion.

"Tzu Chi's humanistic medical care is the core value of our medical care, which is completely different from other medical institutions. Currently, other medical institutions are very professional and progressive in



On March 31, 2019, Tzu Chi community volunteers from Ecuador share about participating in TIMA's large-scale free clinics in their country. Photo/Lina Lee

academics. Still, their understanding of humanistic medical care is not deep enough," then-CEO of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, William Keh, explained as he led the working team to brainstorm ways to bring love and medical expertise together. "In addition to treating patients, our humanistic medicine is also very important. We need to take care of patients with a caring heart. If the patient can't come to us, we'll visit the patient," he said. "Caring for patients with such love is impossible in a utilitarian society like the United States. But when I



The 2019 TIMA Global Forum includes a ribbon-cutting ceremony for two new Tzu Chi Vision Mobile Clinics on March 29. Soon after, volunteers would drive them to New York to serve children in need. Photo/Regan Wang



At 7:00 AM on March 30, 2019, Zongrong He, Deputy Director of Hualien Charity Hospital, leads TIMA Global Forum participants in Tai Chi practice. Photo/Regan Wang

share our experiences with others, people are willing to follow in our footsteps, participate in free clinics or our activities,” Keh revealed.

Technical and academic discussions are, without a doubt, essential, but awakening a proper approach to medical care is also critical, as captured in the Global Forum’s 2019 central theme and purpose of fostering “Enlightened Wellness.” After listening to the free clinic experiences shared by TIMA volunteers from all over the world, Xochitl

Vazquez, a nurse from Mexico, learned how to face suffering with compassion.

I learned new knowledge in this Forum, which changed our mentality towards patients because we’re all human beings and should not differentiate between each other.

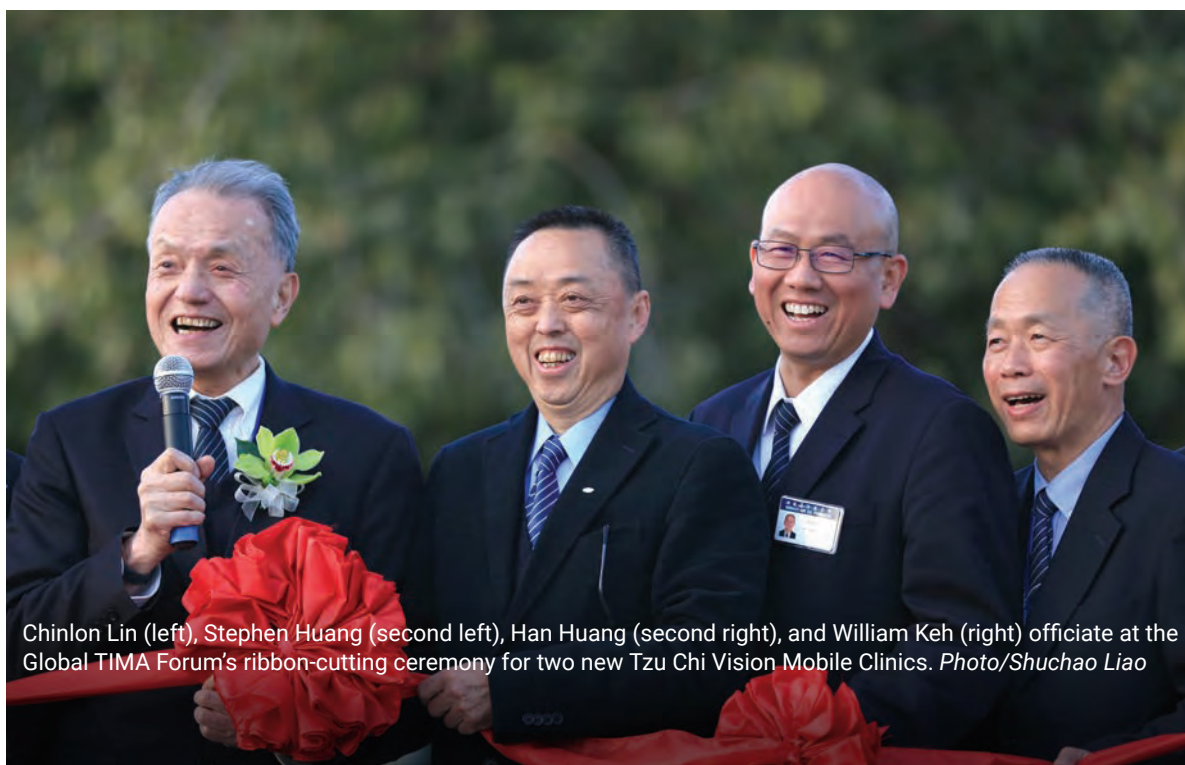


Xochiti Vazquez

2019 TIMA Global Forum Participant

Corina Quintana, an attendee from Guatemala, pointed to the location of her hometown when she followed the tour guide to a world map filled with Tzu Chi flags displayed in a garden on the Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters campus. “I want to put the Tzu Chi flag here!” she exclaimed, vowing to be the first seed to bring Tzu Chi to Guatemala.

The TIMA Global Forum is a baptism of body, mind, and medical skills, gathering the power of global TIMA volunteers and guiding everyone to rediscover the noble original intention of practicing medicine and their root enthusiasm for exploring and advancing life sciences.



Chinlon Lin (left), Stephen Huang (second left), Han Huang (second right), and William Keh (right) officiate at the Global TIMA Forum’s ribbon-cutting ceremony for two new Tzu Chi Vision Mobile Clinics. Photo/Shuchao Liao



Dr. Shirley Chen (second left) says that dental assistants are the main contributors to the success of free dental clinics. Photo/Meixue Lin

Dental Assistant Training

For TIMA volunteers to complement each other, in addition to medical professionals, non-medical professional volunteers must also move forward simultaneously. Before Tzu Chi USA held the 2019 TIMA Global Forum, it trained numerous free clinic assistants with medical standards, especially dental assistants. The scale of each training always started with dozens of people.

Since it's costly to visit a dental clinic in the United States, and many new immigrant workers and people struggling with homelessness don't have dental insurance, the demand for Tzu Chi's free dental clinics is very high. At the free clinics, dental diagnosis and treatment are team efforts. In addition to skilled dentists, it also requires a large number of dental assistants to achieve success.

"It is not easy to find a large number of suitable and qualified dental assistants continuously. Often, people will say, 'I can't come today' or 'I have something to do next week,' and then there will be a shortage of volunteers. But our free clinics have never stopped, and

we have regular free clinic timetables," said TIMA dentist Shirley Chen, who is the soul of Tzu Chi's free dental clinics. The dental team must ensure sufficient assistance for each session not to disappoint the expectations of patients who need care.

After much thought, the best solution was to hold in-house courses to train one's own dental assistants.

It's not easy to host free dental clinics. There are a lot of dental equipment, complex projects, and high safety considerations. To give both doctors and patients a safe environment, the assistants must be very skilled. For decades, we've trained our own assistants.



Shirley Chen
TIMA Dentist

Volunteers trained by Tzu Chi have a huge advantage: They are dental assistants who specialize in "tailor-made" Tzu Chi dental treatments. "Our free clinic service only provides tooth extraction, filling, and cleaning. We focus on training in this area and impart specialized knowledge to them. It

doesn't need to be extensive, such as dental implants, root canals, or corrections. We don't do any of these at free clinics," Chen explained. She is very proud of the internal courses she has provided over the years: "We still need our own people to carry and assemble the equipment, help the doctors, clean and disinfect afterward, organize the cabinets, and other things. The disciplines are different, and dentistry is a free clinic project requiring a large team."

The large amount of work that a dental assistant needs to undertake after assuming the job requires a lot of effort. However, everyone adheres to Master Cheng Yen's guidance on the right approach: "Be willing to do it and enjoy it wholeheartedly" and "Don't underestimate yourself because people have unlimited possibilities." Thus, Tzu Chi volunteers study without hesitation, and the final results are gratifying.

Dental diagnosis and treatment are a collaborative process comprising five workstations. The team will assign specific dental assistants to each workstation.

First, there is the assembly workstation and team. "Dental assistants in this unit must

transport equipment, dental chairs, many pipelines, water and gas, air compressors, etc.," Chen explained. "They also need to know how to assemble the equipment and connect water, gas, and electricity to the right pipes to let electricity, air, and water come in."

Next is the central supply station. Volunteers organize and place all the required and sterilized utensils and materials in this area so that everyone can see all the equipment at a glance. Of course, there is also a dental X-ray station, which requires volunteers to know how to take oral X-rays and then print them out on a computer for diagnosis by the doctor. There is also a dental assistant next to the treatment chair. These assistants are responsible for helping the doctor, delivering equipment and dental materials, adjusting the lighting, and pumping the mouth. In the last group of sterilization stations, assistants must sterilize used dental instruments before the items can return to the central supply station, where they will be sorted and used for the following medical session.

"The disinfection process is very rigorous," Chen pointed out. "Dental assistants must understand the disinfection process. What to throw away? How to throw it away? How



TIMA volunteers learn how to assemble a portable dental chair. Photo/Shuli Lo

to sort everything, remove the needle, discard the medicine, brush off the blood, and then clean the blood and re-categorize what needs ultrasonic cleaning for disinfection,” she explained. Finally, “Tooth filling and tooth extraction equipment can only go back to the central supply station after cooling to ensure that the supplies in the central supply station are clean,” Chen said.

Dental treatment is a minor surgical procedure in a free clinic.



Shirley Chen
TIMA Dentist

Dental assistants will also face some dangers while sterilizing dental instruments since they are relatively sharp and have germs and blood on them. Only a very professional assistant can handle them properly. “We require that the blood be cleaned immediately after use because if not cleaned immediately, it will contain germs. The instruments must be treated on-site so that they can be used efficiently in the next event,” Chen detailed. She has trained

countless outstanding dental assistants over the years. These Tzu Chi volunteers are active in every free dental clinic, working diligently and tirelessly.

“Free clinics must be run by volunteers from TIMA, who must comply with standard operating procedures and, at the same time, help many doctors on site. In short, whether they’re assisting our own doctors from TIMA or outside doctors who come to participate in free clinics, our volunteers must meet high professional medical standards at every step,” Dr. Shirley Chen concluded.



On August 13, 2023, TIMA holds a dental assistant training event at Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters, with more than 70 students participating. Photo/Shuli Lo



At a free clinic in San Bernardino on June 12, 2022, a dental assistant cleans and disinfects used dental instruments. Photo/Victor Rocha



For the first time after the COVID-19 pandemic, on August 13, 2023, TIMA holds a dental assistant training event at Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters, where participants learn how to use dental tools and much more.
Photo/Shuli Lou

Over the past thirty years, TIMA and Tzu Chi volunteers in the Tzu Chi USA National Headquarters Region have established standard work procedures for free clinics in the region, and the volunteers' ingenuity is visible everywhere. The foundation laid by the senior volunteers who pioneered the mission in the early days became one of the main reasons the free clinic system enjoys an infinite life. "We first set up a core team and decided how many free medical clinic stations should be included in the service area. Each station would have a station manager and two deputy station managers to take charge of it and establish an inheritance mechanism," recalled Wendy Kung, a TIMA registered nurse who first planned the system, along with other volunteers, back when she was a community medical officer. The protocol was conducive to "copying" and "pasting" free clinics in other areas, thus, in the past 30 years, free clinics successfully expanded outwards based on this model with convenience and flexibility.

When a free clinic is to start, the core team holds a meeting first to set up the method of conducting the event. When the plan matures, the team will invite local

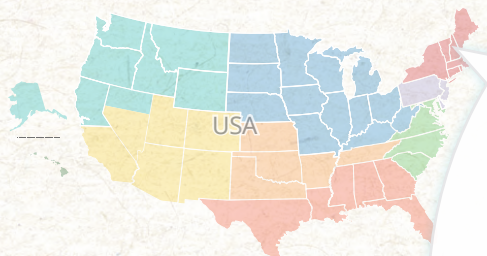
community volunteers to a meeting concerning the process of the free clinic and the human resources required. It will then begin to recruit more volunteers. Two weeks before the free clinic, there will be a briefing session to invite all participating volunteers to learn the methods of the free clinic and the mission behind it. A leading core team is always helpful in organizing free clinics. Today, volunteers from various local TIMAs follow this system, allowing free clinics of all sizes to operate in an environment with sufficient human resources exhibiting Tzu Chi's humanistic approach and medical expertise.

From 1993 to the present, with 30 years of ups and downs and lots of laughter, TIMA USA National Headquarters Region volunteers can be seen everywhere, from Alhambra to San Bernardino, and in Central California, Los Angeles, East Coachella Valley, Santa Ana, San Diego, San Gabriel Valley, Las Vegas, and Phoenix. As Master Cheng Yen taught: "Everything starts from a determination, a seed." A seed of perfection 30 years ago has now taken root, sprouted, blossomed, and produced abundant and gratifying fruits. 🌱

TIMA USA Northeast Region

Written by Daphne Liu and Jinger Ning

Translated by H.B. Qin

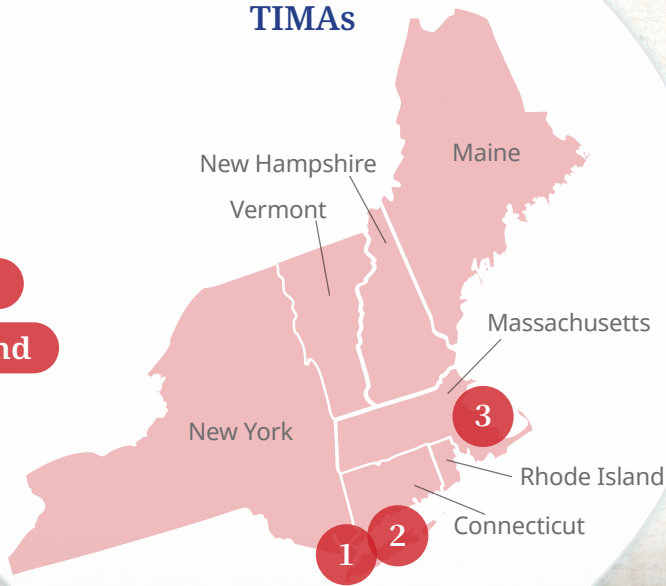


1 | New York

2 | Long Island

3 | Boston

Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region TIMAs



Tzu Chi's free clinic services mobilize volunteers of all ages who work together to guard people's health in New York with love. Pictured here is a free clinic event in October 2018 for family members of Tzu Chi USA Long Island Branch Office volunteers. Photo/Huaihsien Huang

The human right to health care has always been a topic of debate in the affluent United States. Despite recent reforms that improve access to health insurance coverage for all, the achievement of worry-free medical care still has a long way to go.

Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region volunteers are mindful of Master Cheng Yen's words, "Other people's sky is above our heads, other people's soil is under our feet. We must know how to give back to the local community" and began to help immigrants in the

region who couldn't afford to pay for medical care under challenging circumstances. The Northeast Region formed its medical team after the chapter's establishment in 1992. Since then, the team has developed alongside social changes and evolving immigrant and community needs, its services now covering Flushing, Long Island, Manhattan, and Brooklyn in New York, and Boston in Massachusetts, upholding a commitment to make up for the shortcomings of the U.S. medical care system while leaving touching footprints in Tzu Chi USA's medical mission.



The Early Stages: Healthcare Education and Screening



Shushi Min (middle), a 96-year-old Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) doctor, takes the pulse of a Tzu Chi volunteer's family member at the Long Island Branch Office in 2016. The Northeast Region Office in Flushing, or sometimes the Long Island Branch Office, has offered an annual free clinic for family members since 2007. Min's daughter Eva, a TCM doctor, also often volunteers at Tzu Chi free clinics. Photo/Peter Chu

"Medical service is about reaching out to people and communities," Susan Su explained. Su was the first seed of Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region's medical mission in New York and started her career in community health care with this idea in mind. As a nurse who served at Elmhurst Hospital, she formed a medical team with Dr. Henry Ding. Dentists Dr. Kenneth Liao and Dr. Hueiju Lin later joined the team, with more medical professionals coming in after that.

"In the early days of free clinics, Tzu Chi contributed human resources and cooperated with other organizations," Su recalled. In 1992, Tzu Chi organized the first free clinic event in collaboration with Taiwan Center Inc., which was a first for Flushing and laid the foundation for Tzu Chi's later free clinics. Since 1995, the community free clinic, or Health Fair, has been held annually in collaboration with various

medical institutions, including Elmhurst Hospital and Flushing Hospital. Tzu Chi's role was to coordinate as well as mobilize volunteers.

In 1997, Liao took over as head of the medical team. "At that time, free clinics were mostly about health counseling and screening, with no treatment," he recounted. In the free clinics' early stages, they offered healthcare counseling, blood sugar and oral cancer screenings, flu shots, and dental care. "These medical services may not relieve pain and suffering, but they reach out to the community and let more people know about Tzu Chi." Liao learned more about Tzu Chi through his participation in the free clinics, too.

Don't underestimate the importance of brushing your teeth; it can help patients a lot and save a lot of unnecessary medical expenses every year.

Kenneth Liao
TIMA Dentist

Many healthcare service providers helped Tzu Chi with its efforts to reach out to the Flushing community, which is predominantly Chinese. Their health lectures on Sundays in 1992 were an unforgettable tribute to early immigrants. "New immigrants scramble to make a living, which makes them neglect their health, and in the end, their lives are at stake," volunteer Peggy Yao explained. Having helped many cancer or chronic disease cases, she invited professional nurses, social workers, dietitians, and community physicians to provide healthcare education by sharing information about hepatitis B prevention, diabetes, and other topics. Yao, who majored in psychology, also started a series of mindfulness and stress relief courses, which helped many new immigrants.

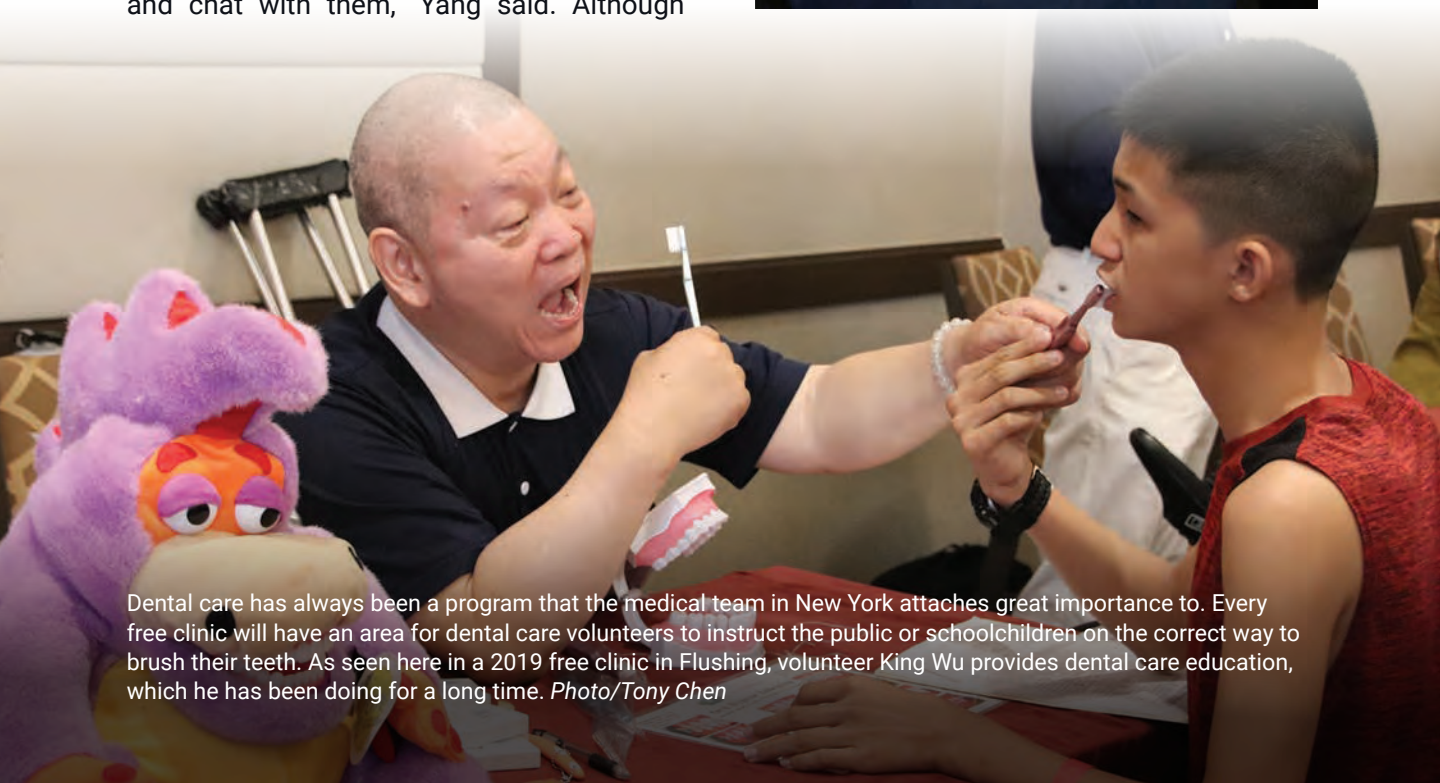
In 1997, Tzu Chi provided blood pressure measurement services on Saturdays. Medical volunteer Suying Yang, who lived in Upstate New York, traveled three hours by public transportation weekly for the two-hour blood pressure service. "Once the train was seriously delayed. Changing trains took me four hours. When I arrived, it was almost past the service time. But a group of older people had not left and had waited for me to come and chat with them," Yang said. Although

these healthcare services didn't involve medical treatment, the care and love brought by the volunteers was what the community also needed.

In addition, the medical team also promoted blood tests for bone marrow donation in the early days. Moreover, in 1997, Elmhurst Hospital designated a medical vehicle to serve low-income individuals every Saturday. Tzu Chi volunteers assisted in making appointments, greeting patients when they arrived, and taking down their information. The impetus to introduce and develop Tzu Chi USA Mobile Clinic services in New York later on originated from this activity.



In the early days of free clinics, Dr. Kenneth Liao conducts an oral cancer screening. Photo/TIMA Long Island



Dental care has always been a program that the medical team in New York attaches great importance to. Every free clinic will have an area for dental care volunteers to instruct the public or schoolchildren on the correct way to brush their teeth. As seen here in a 2019 free clinic in Flushing, volunteer King Wu provides dental care education, which he has been doing for a long time. Photo/Tony Chen

Development Through Service Expansion



In 2006, Suffolk County in Long Island invited Tzu Chi to organize large-scale free clinics. At a 2010 free clinic, County Commissioner Steve Levy (second left), then convener of TIMA Long Island, Dr. Richard Huang (left), then Long Island Branch Office director Joan Sung (second right), and dental surgeon Dr. Hueiju Lin of TIMA New Jersey (right), take a group photo in front of the Tzu Chi USA Dental Mobile Clinic. Photo/TIMA Long Island

In 2001, the Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region took on its first solo large-scale free clinic, marking a new milestone in its medical services and extending its outreach to Long Island and Brooklyn. The year before, in 2000, with the establishment of TIMA earlier in 1998, healthcare workers in New York had formed the TIMA New York chapter, mainly composed of medical professionals. The establishment of the TIMA Boston chapter in 2005 and the TIMA Long Island chapter in 2006 would follow.

Scaling Up Free Clinics

During that period, the free clinic service began to involve more than 20 doctors from different medical specialties, and large-scale free clinic events took place twice a year. "The first one took place at the Sheraton Hotel Flushing in 2001; the site for free clinic events since then. The free clinics attracted many doctors, including Dr. Fansun Yao, the convener of TIMA New York, who joined the free clinic activity in 2002," Dr. Kenneth Liao shared. He added that many new immigrants

can't afford insurance, which results in high medical costs. Due to the complexity of referrals to specialists, Tzu Chi's free clinic service, which covers nearly 20 departments, allows people to solve all their problems in one trip. Yao was the main contributor to this. "As anesthesiologists are busy with surgeries, I used my free time or holidays to call colleagues or students I know and invited them to the free clinics. They were all very willing to give back to the community," Liao said.

The biggest advantage of running the free clinic on our own was that it could build up medical records for people in the community and help new immigrants.



Susan Su
Tzu Chi Volunteer

Susan Su and the medical team designed a process that allowed everyone to bring back a health checkup report, which also helped with referrals. Moreover, the subsequent time care recipients came to a free clinic event, they would have a medical record. At this point,



Flushing's annual free community clinic mobilizes more than 100 volunteers, with the one in 2016 being the grandest, in which over 200 volunteers participated. Dr. Fansun Yao (left), the convener of TIMA New York, explains the process and precautions before the free clinic begins. *Photo/Hsiuchun Wong*

the free clinic service had already taken on the concept of a clinic office.

In 2003, the Long Island Branch Office provided low-income families with medical counseling during each hot meal distribution at St. Ann & the Holy Trinity Church, which marked the start of the regular free clinic model. Then, in 2006, TIMA Long Island was founded, with Dr. Richard Hwang as the first convener. The first large-scale Tzu Chi free clinic event took place in September of the same year at the invitation of Suffolk County, Long Island. A team of 145 medical professionals and volunteers from New York and Long Island joined hands and served 84 low-income minority group individuals, benefiting 392 patients.

The current convenor, physical therapist Joe Chang, was one of the founders of TIMA Long Island. "Physical therapy and Chinese acupuncture were quite popular in every free clinic. As many of these low-income families are blue-collar workers, pain or occupational injuries are very common," Chang recalled.



Roger Tsai, a physical therapist from Long Island attends to Hector, who lost his leg due to diabetes. Tzu Chi volunteers raised funds to pay for airfare to send Hector back to his home country, the case revealing how Tzu Chi's care combines charity and medical support, aiming at comprehensive attention. *Photo/TIMA Long Island*

The compassionate physical therapist often bought pain patches for his patients at his own expense and provided instruction in rehabilitation exercises. "Sometimes, when I saw a patient, I chatted with them. Once they felt cared for, their pain often was halfway gone," he recounted.

Despite the relative affluence of Long Island residents, Tzu Chi free clinic volunteers still saw cases of people suffering. Kenneth Liao recalled when he and Hueiju Lin went to Long Island to help care recipient families with oral care education. Hector, a patient, had his leg amputated due to diabetes, and Lin took the initiative to learn about his condition, which led to his inclusion in Tzu Chi's individual care recipient cases. Liao explained that medical care is just the beginning. Tzu Chi's comprehensive care involves teamwork and the continuous support of medical professionals.

"Tzu Chi volunteers are the strongest pillar of all medical activities," he said.

Susan Su, who has experienced the hardships the Northeast Region's medical mission has faced, is grateful to her friends Shuhung Hung, a nurse; Chinshen Liu, an activity team volunteer; successive Tzu Chi team leaders Shenhsiung Hsiao and Tom Chuang; and Shouyun Yan, the head of the volunteer team, who integrated a large number of volunteers and fully dedicated to every large-scale free clinic.

TIMA Boston began organizing free flu shot health days after its establishment in 2005. When Boston volunteer Stone Chen learned that free flu shots were not available in Massachusetts at the time and that disadvantaged ethnic groups lacking medical resources could not get care, Tzu Chi held community health days in different towns and cities every fall, with the later addition of other free medical services, such as health checkups, nutritional counseling, and dental care. It was not until 2011, when Massachusetts achieved medical coverage and free flu shots for all, that Tzu Chi suspended such free clinic activities.

Building a Reputation Through Blood Drives

In 2002, Tzu Chi New York held its first blood drive at the Landmark Building office in Flushing, with 264 bags of blood donated. "This blood drive was a first for the Chinese community and changed the perception of Americans that Chinese are indifferent to public affairs," Kenneth Liao, who had been actively promoting blood donation, explained. As the summer vacation season is a period of blood



TIMA Boston doctor Dr. Howard Liu has been committed to community medical care since 2005 and shared his medical expertise online in 2020 during the pandemic. Photo/Jinger Ning



At the 2019 New York Blood Center's annual award dinner, Tzu Chi wins the Diamond Award, the highest honor, with a record 328 bags of blood donated in 2018. Volunteers in the medical team who were the leading promoters of the blood drive, Kristine Tseng (right), Kenneth Liao (second front right), and Joe Chang (front left), are among those in the commemorative photo. Photo/New York Blood Center



Freeman Su, Executive Director of the Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region, participates in the November 2020 blood drive in Long Island. The Region's volunteers worked with the New York Blood Donor Center for 20 years, from 2002 to 2021, without interruption. *Photo/Huaihsien Huang*

shortage, Tzu Chi later increased the blood drive to three times a year, with the highest record of 300 people participating in a day in 2006. Tzu Chi Long Island also began to promote blood donation. "At first, we held the event in the office, and then the blood donation vehicle was stationed outside Tzu Chi Academy. In recent years, we moved inside the school. There could be 30 bags of donated blood each time," Joe Chang recounted.

Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region's promotion of blood donation set a record for the highest number of blood donations by an Asian organization, which has influenced the neighboring Mid-Atlantic Region and Greater Washington D.C. Region chapters. Other Asian organizations, such as Fo Guang Shan and Herald Community Center, also joined

one after the other. Over 20 years, Tzu Chi participated in the New York Blood Center's annual dinner ten times to receive commendations and was one of the few Asian organizations awarded; in 2019, Tzu Chi received the Diamond Award, the highest honor. "Even during the 2020 pandemic, we still held a blood drive in Long Island and New York in October and November, respectively," Liao said. According to the New York Blood Center, blood in stock was below the 50% alert level, and the Center thanked Tzu Chi for its willingness to call on the public to donate blood even during the critical pandemic period. Statistics as of early 2021 show that the Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region had set a record high of 487 bags of blood a year, and the cumulative blood donated is 6,455 bags.

Gaining Experience as the Medical Mission Evolves

The free clinic activity grew bigger in scale over time. When the Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2016, the free clinics encompassed nearly 40 specialties. "I remember doctors who came from out of state to support the activity were impressed and marveled at our free clinics in New York," Kristine Tseng, the then medical officer in charge of large-scale free clinics in the New York area, said. "Many patients came to us for a second opinion from a different doctor, which helped them a lot, and the community needed our free clinics," Tseng added.

Daw Hlakyi, a Burmese diabetic patient, couldn't afford his expensive medical bills because he didn't have medical insurance. Dr. Jonathan Chang, a Burmese-Chinese TIMA doctor, referred him to the free clinic. While attending the event, Hlakyi said, "My daughter and I saw the doctor today and were relieved. I hope Tzu Chi can organize free clinics every year."

The First Free Dental Clinic

During this period of free clinics, the team no longer only offered counseling and consultation; Tzu Chi added dental treatment for the first time at free clinic sites in New York and Long Island. Kenneth Liao recalled that in 2014 and 2015, the Northeast Region secured 12 dental chairs from the National Headquarters Region. Scaling and extraction services started from then on. At the Northeast Region's 25th-anniversary celebration event in 2016, Liao shared that the free clinic had 27 beds available for dental services, "the most ever," he said.

With the dental scaling at free clinics, the number of clinic attendees increased yearly, and many people came early to queue up for this deep cleaning service.



On the occasion of the Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region's 25th-anniversary celebration in 2016, a large-scale community free clinic takes place at the Sheraton Hotel in Flushing, covering nearly 40 specialties across two floors. Doctors from the Queens County Dental Society support the event with 27 dental beds, the highest ever for a free dental clinic. Photo/Peter Chu

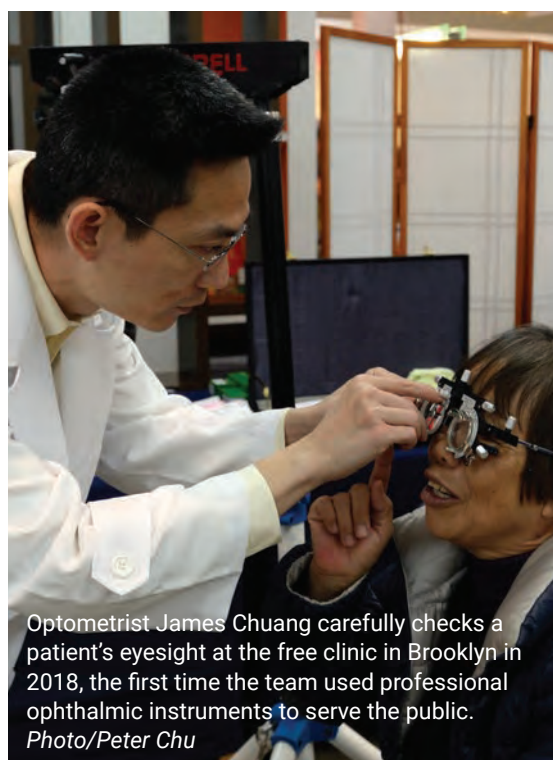


I remember the first person who came in was experiencing homelessness. It took me quite some time to clean and examine his teeth. I can't forget the look on his face when the treatment was over.

Richard Yang
TIMA Dentist

Beyond Dentistry

In addition to dentistry, the Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region later included ophthalmology testing services. The first glaucoma testing took place in 2017 at the Columbia University Medical Center, providing vision, visual field, intraocular pressure, and fundus examinations. In 2018, the Northeast Region purchased its first ophthalmology testing





Tzu Chi volunteer Ken Tan (right corner) instructs young volunteers on using electronic medical records at the 2019 free clinic at St. Anne's R.C. Church in Brentwood. Tzu Chi USA began promoting electronic medical records in 2015, with Ken Tan and Joe Chang, the then-and-current convener of TIMA Long Island, being the first seeds. Photo/Huaihsien Huang

equipment. It was what optometrist James Chuang and ophthalmologist Liwu Chen used, and quite helpful in preventing glaucoma, retinal perforation, and macular degeneration. Zhugu Li, a patient who had long suffered from floaters, came to a free clinic for a glaucoma checkup. "The doctors were very polite to the patients, and there were also volunteers who helped to translate and explain a lot of medical terms, which moved me to tears," he shared.

Ophthalmology's glasses fitting services launched at a free clinic in Brooklyn in October 2018. The Northeast Region's Medical Officer, Kristine Tseng, often prepared 5,000 lenses with volunteers at the office after work, continuing until 10:00 PM when she went home. "We're grateful for the support of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation's Deputy CEO, Steven Voon, who taught online from California, as well as support from ten Tzu Chi volunteers, including Ting Liu, Kally Wang, and Fang Huang," Tseng said. Sixteen people benefited from the first glasses fitting service, which warmed up to the launch of two Tzu Chi Vision Mobile Clinics in 2019.

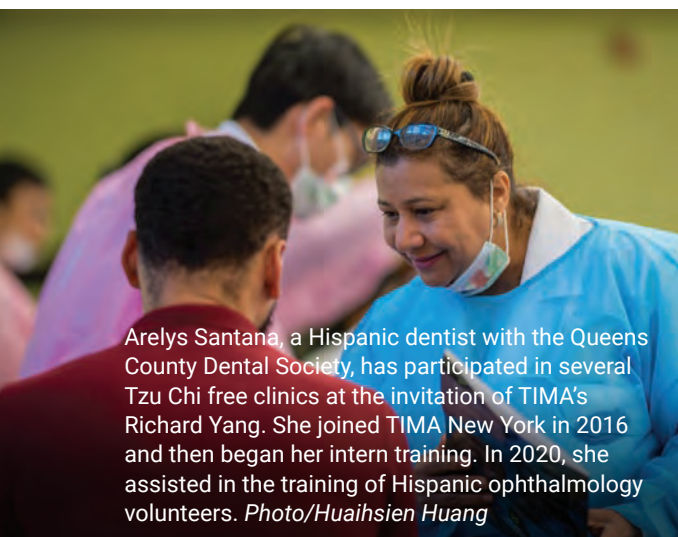
The community has widely recognized Tzu Chi's free clinics in various places in New York, and the large-scale free clinic in 2016 was essentially the biggest free clinic in the history of the Flushing community. A free clinic event in the Brooklyn Borough Office followed in November of the same year. With the increasing number of new immigrants in the New York area, Tzu Chi volunteers saw a growing need for medical care. A free clinic was also held immediately following the establishment of the new Brooklyn Service Center in 2017. "Here is a place where the need for free clinics is even greater than in Manhattan and Flushing," Fansun Yao, the convener of TIMA New York, said, noting that often immigrants lack medical insurance and many have never even seen a doctor. For instance, Al, an immigrant from Guatemala who came to New York 18 years ago, was uninsured and had never had a medical checkup. "My trip here solved my stomach pain and teeth issues; I'm very thankful for Tzu Chi," he said after attending a free clinic.

The Manhattan Service Center hosted its first free clinic in 2019. Meanwhile, TIMA



Physical therapist Joe Chang (left) often participates in free clinics in New York and invites peers to join him. He introduced Tzu Chi to physical therapist Haili Gao (second left). Here, both consult patients at the first free clinic in the Manhattan Service Center. *Photo/Huaihsien Huang*

Boston also resumed its free clinics in 2019. Its convenor, Jack Huang, a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) doctor, organized four free TCM clinics in response to the community's need for TCM. "Each of these activities is the best way to introduce Tzu Chi," Kristine Tseng, the Northeast Region's Medical Officer, said. She was pleased that many of those who came to the free clinics felt deeply moved by the mobilizing power of Tzu Chi and joined the team as a result, which led to the regular training of dental and ophthalmology volunteers.



Arelis Santana, a Hispanic dentist with the Queens County Dental Society, has participated in several Tzu Chi free clinics at the invitation of TIMA's Richard Yang. She joined TIMA New York in 2016 and then began her intern training. In 2020, she assisted in the training of Hispanic ophthalmology volunteers. *Photo/Huaihsien Huang*

Facing Challenges in the Post-Pandemic Era

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020 disrupted the lives of people worldwide. Greater New York area TIMA teams took on the role of providing support to frontline medical professionals and traveled around the region to deliver medical supplies. "When people are full of fear, TIMA is responsible for calming them," Dr. Richard Yang said. The medical team held more than 20 online medical lectures during the pandemic, promoting vegetarianism and advocating healthy habits, fitness, and physical activity, hoping to inject a positive force and hope into the community. In 2021, there was an urgent need for the COVID-19 vaccine in the United States. The Northeast Region partnered with the Coalition of Asian-American Physicians to provide vaccination services to the Chinese-American community in the Greater New York area.

A challenge could be an opportunity. Although the pandemic halted many free clinics and community services, it gave the volunteers the best training and preparation to continue working for the next 30 years of the Tzu Chi USA Northeast Region's medical mission. 🌱