

## Taiwanese compatriots include the ill and poor

Written by Mayo Kuo 郭美玲

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It is said that in big cities, social welfare organizations assist the poor, but it is a fact that the poor are often ignored by the law simply because they only have a small amount of money in savings.

This is precisely why people like Huang Yi-hua (黃宜華) — who goes by the nickname “Sweet Potato mama” and is a member of independent Taipei mayor-elect Ko Wen-je’s (柯文哲) team of advisers — came out strongly in support of Ko, saying that he is their only hope of turning their lives around.

The humiliating and tragic life of poor people in the city is the result of the government’s heartless protection of predatory businesses, something that has been highlighted recently by the plight of the laid-off freeway toll collectors.

In 1982, I heard a tragic story of poverty combined with ill health.

According to the person telling the story: “An Aboriginal child with meningitis — who lived in Jianshi Township (建士鄉) in Hsinchu County — and the child’s parents walked for six hours over mountains, then traveled by bus for one-and-a-half hours and arrived at the emergency room at Taoyuan General Hospital, which was the best there was at that time, in the evening.”

“That evening, when I gave the father the prescription for his child’s medicine, which cost NT\$76, the father hesitated. When I asked him why, he said that he only had NT\$50 on him, so I immediately gave him a NT\$100 bill and told him to hurry up and get the medication,” the person said.

“During the two weeks that the child was in the hospital, I helped the child’s father with money on two other occasions. On the day the child left the hospital, I could see the happiness in their faces and the tears in their eyes,” the person said.

This year, when providing free medical consultations in the Lala mountain area in Taoyuan

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County and poverty relief in Hsinchu County's Jhudong Township (竹東), I met another two poor Aboriginal families where five of nine people were seriously ill and awaiting treatment.

Once again, because they had only a small amount of savings, they were ignored by authorities, and we had to send four shipments of supplies to each of these families to relieve their situation.

We must tear down walls and not forget the poor. We must stop limiting the poor by building walls around them based on a heartless piece of legislation and instead take a more tolerant, merciful and caring approach toward such families. We must treat families suffering from poverty and ill health with love and care.

In 1927, a doctor named Chiang Wei-shui (蔣渭水) said: "Compatriots must unite, unity is power." The term "compatriot" includes the many poor Taiwanese.

Yesterday morning, the day after the nine-in-one elections, we took four students from medical departments and rice, noodles, milk powder, diapers, clothes, shoes and other supplies to the Lala mountain area.

We provided free medical consultations for Aborigines living there and experienced the power of helping the poor and sick, of not forgetting the poor and relying on love and caring in order to tear down the walls that divide the poor from the rich.

*Mayo Kuo is a Taiwan-based pediatrician.*

Translated by Perry Svensson

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