

Millions volunteer help in fight against virus



Distribution of urgent supplies, free therapy and tutorship among the services offered by Shanxi residents

By YUAN SHENGGAO

More than 3 million people in North China's Shanxi province spent their "Volunteers Day" by contributing to the battle against the novel coronavirus pneumonia. March 5 was designated by the Shanxi government as the local volunteers day, to mark local people's efforts to make society better.

Since the outbreak of the epidemic in late December, these volunteers have engaged in various jobs, including distributing preventative supplies, offering psychological services, advocating new policies on disease prevention and control, and maintaining order for local communities.

He Wenying from Linfen city is a boss of a labor service company. He has been concerned about local workers who were unable to return to work, either in Shanxi or other parts of the country, due to transportation issues caused by the epidemic.



From left: Volunteers in Pingcheng district, Datong, carry groceries to families quarantined in their homes. WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY Volunteers in the provincial capital of Taiyuan disinfect parcels that have arrived at a residential community. RUAN YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



To solve this problem, he hired a fleet of buses to send local laborers to their work sites.

To date, more than 700 local workers have been driven to destinations in Tianjin municipality and Jiangsu and Anhui provinces.

During the past month, it has not been easy for people to have their hair cut because most barber shops are not open.

In Changzhi, the local volunteers association has called for barbers to volunteer their services to medical staff and others working for disease prevention and control.

A total of 34 barbers came forward to serve.

Li Shuanlong, a 73-year-old veteran barber, was the first to answer the call.

"At this moment, people working on the front line battling the epidemic are the most respectable," Li said.

"I'm glad to serve them with my skills," he added.

Wu Liang is the chief of a volunteers organization in Taiyuan devoted to helping senior citizens and underprivileged people.

He noticed that many seniors were not able to get health supplies including face masks, disinfectant and disposable gloves.

He and his fellow volunteers

bought masks and distributed them to the elderly for free.

However, dispatching masks is the easiest part of the volunteers' work.

Every early morning, when people are still asleep, Wu and his colleagues are busy disinfecting the residential communities of their neighborhood.

In Changzhi city, university students, especially those majoring in medical sciences, used their knowledge to help residents better protect themselves from the epidemic.

Zhang Ruichong is a grade-four student in Shanxi Medical University. She is now publicizing public

health knowledge and offering psychological services in a residential community in the city.

As part of local epidemic prevention measures, schools in Shanxi are still locked down and students are required to study online at home.

In Pingcheng district of Datong city, staff members of a local public service center noticed that equipment for online education was not available to some impoverished families.

To tackle the problem, the center recruited 36 local university students to help the children in need.

The volunteers brought their

iPads and smartphones to the families, helping the children access various online lessons.

In addition, they worked as tutors for these students, helping them to get familiar with all of the educational apps and answering their questions relating to their curriculum.

According to the Shanxi Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, there are more than 3.13 million volunteers and more than 26,900 volunteer organizations in the province. These people are playing an important role in local epidemic prevention and control.

Li Yali contributed to this story.

Milestone as last critical patient is cured



In Shanxi province, the last critical-condition novel coronavirus pneumonia patient is cured and discharged from hospital on March 9. The patient, aged 86, was the oldest of the critical cases in Shanxi. He was transferred from a hospital in Shouyang county to the Taiyuan No 4 People's Hospital on Feb 11 after he developed a fever, cough and difficulty breathing. He recovered with the help of a ventilator tube and therapies that combined Western and traditional Chinese medicine. By 12 pm on March 11, 131 of the 133 confirmed cases had been cured and released from hospitals. LIU TONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Grottoes reopened to welcome back tourists

By YUAN SHENGGAO

With preventative measures in place, Yungang Grottoes, the globally renowned historical site and tourist destination in Datong, Shanxi province, reopened to sightseers on March 1.

The site had been closed since Jan 25 in response to the novel coronavirus outbreak in the country.

According to a proposal released by the National Cultural Heritage Administration on Feb 27, the country's cultural and historical sites are suggested to open gradually according to the risk level in their areas.

Datong, where the Yungang Grottoes is located, is a low-risk city

recognized by the Shanxi provincial government, so the site has reopened to tourists.

Yao Jie and Zhao Xu were the first two tourists welcomed at the scenic spot since its re-opening.

"The weather is lovely with a blue sky and the lake in front of the caves is as bright as a mirror with thin ice," Yao said. He added that he feels privileged to be able to visit the globally renowned attraction with only few others, as it is usually crowded year-round.

According to the administration of the scenic spot, Yungang received 130 visits on March 1.

Wang Yanxiang, Party secretary of the administration, said he believes

the number of visitors will grow gradually as the epidemic subsides and the weather gets warmer.

He Jianguo, deputy chief of the administration, said the scenic spot is not currently open to tour groups.

He said the site will be free to medical workers throughout the country, to give them thanks for their contributions to fighting against the novel coronavirus epidemic.

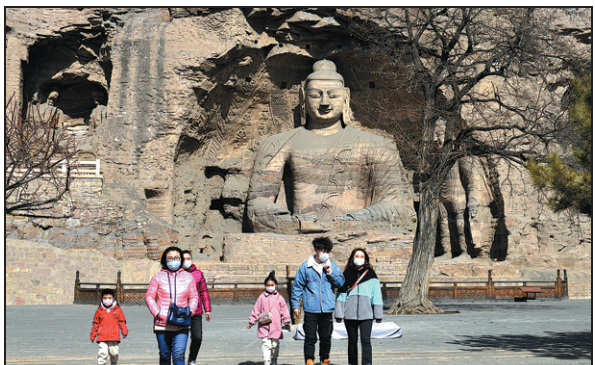
Located at the southern foot of Wuzhou Mountain, some 16 kilometers west of Datong city, the Yungang Grottoes is one of the three famous Buddhist cave clusters in China.

Comprising 252 caves and 51,000 statues within a carved area of 18,000 square meters, the Yungang Grottoes represents the outstanding achievement of Buddhist cave art in China during the 5th and 6th centuries. The Five Caves created by famous monk Tan Yao in 453, with their strict unity of layout and design, constitute classical masterpieces of the first peak of Chinese Buddhist art.

While influenced by Buddhist cave art from South and Central Asia, the Yungang Grottoes combines Buddhist cave art with distinctive Chinese character and local spirit. As a result, the grottoes played a vitally important role among early Oriental Buddhist grottoes and had a far-reaching impact on Buddhist cave art in China and East Asia.

The Yungang Grottoes was added to the World Cultural Heritage List in December 2001.

Li Yali contributed to this story.



Tourists visit the Yungang Grottoes in Datong on March 1, the first day of its reopening. WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Public transport gets moving again as nationwide epidemic slows down

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As the novel coronavirus epidemic in Shanxi begins to come under control, the province's public transportation is gradually getting back to normal, according to the local traffic authority.

Sources from the Shanxi Department of Transportation said that public highway passenger transportation services from Taiyuan, the provincial capital, to other cities and counties in Shanxi resumed last week.

On March 5, passengers lined up at the entrance to the Taiyuan Jianan Bus Passenger Terminal, waiting for health checks by terminal employees before setting off to long-awaited destinations.

A passenger named Pei Yanglin couldn't hide his excitement.

Pei and his wife, residents in Yangquan county, visited their son in Taiyuan before Spring Festival.

His original plan was to look after his grandson during the first days of the winter vacation and then take the whole family back to Yangquan for the Spring Festival reunion.

However, the scheduled trip was delayed by the novel coronavirus outbreak for more than a month.

"I missed my pets and flowers in Yangquan," Pei said.

"When I learned that local emergency response was adjusted from level one to level two and bus services resumed, I knew it was time to go back home," he added.

Excited as they were, Pei and his wife waited in the well-spaced line. On the bus they were asked to be seated at a required distance from each other.

"The resumption of long-distance bus services is a good signal, showing that the epidemic is likely to be over in the near future and everything will be back to normal," said Cao Qing, a passenger about to travel by bus to Zuozhan county in the east of the province.

Amid the outbreak of the virus, public transportation was among the biggest hit in Shanxi.

According to Wang Jin, deputy chief of the Shanxi Department of Transportation, with the lowering of the emergency level, the long-distance public transportation sector can gradually get back to normal.

"We are resuming operations according to the risk levels in various regions," Wang said.

The official said transportation services are now fully open to low-risk regions, which included 109 counties and cities.

And services for the remaining eight medium-risk regions are likely to resume in the near future,



From top: A passenger boards a long-distance bus after registering his health condition. ZHONG QING / FOR CHINA DAILY A bus sets off to Yangquan in the east of Shanxi. ZHONG QING / FOR CHINA DAILY



The resumption of long-distance bus services is a good signal, showing that the epidemic is likely to be over in the near future..."

Cao Qing, a passenger to Zuozhan

Wang said, adding that there are no high-risk regions in Shanxi province currently.

Despite the epidemic seemingly more under control, Wang said transportation companies are required to take strict preventative measures.

"For instance, buses should be disinfected on a daily basis and passengers are asked to wear masks," Wang said.

For inner-city passenger transportation, bus companies have

adopted new ways of operation to avoid contagion.

For instance, Taiyuan Public Transportation Group is providing chartered buses for passengers working at certain local companies.

"The point-to-point chartered bus service is a safe way for passenger transportation and it can avoid cross contagion as passenger health conditions and travel history are traceable," said Chen Yunfang, a staff member of Taiyuan Public Transportation Group.

In the railway sector, train services are resuming in a considered manner.

"For the safety of passengers, the occupancy of every train is capped at 50 percent," said Liu Feng, an executive at the Taiyuan bureau of China Railways.

Civil aviation is also getting back to normal with Taiyuan Airport open to 74 air routes linking 49 cities in China, according to Deng Baoping, deputy chairman of Shanxi Aviation Industry Group.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.