

Relay for life

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Submitted Apr 02, 2012. Accepted for publication Apr 25, 2012.

doi: 10.3978/j.issn.2224-4336.2012.05.02

View this article at: <http://www.amepc.org/tp/article/view/643/692>

In a relay of 138 days, more than 30 people donated their blood, thousands gave money, and tens of thousands kept their eyes on, only for saving the life of a severely ill child they had never met before. Human seems so fragile when death grabs him by the throat, yet valuable - in the relay of love, countless ordinary people created a miracle of love and embodied the noble and strong virtues of life through their own actions.

Shengwang Zou, a little boy who likes painting (*Figure 1*), was born in a small village in Shanwei City, Guangdong Province. At his age of ten in May 2009, Zou was referred to the Third Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, and diagnosed with aplastic anemia and subarachnoid hemorrhage. Since then, Zou had been struggling on the edge of life and death for more than two years. The long treatment course did not keep him from drawing sunshine and beauty in life, an embodiment of his inner desire to survive.

Zou's family was poor. The enormous medical costs made their lives even worse. In 2009, though Zou began to show some signs of improvement, he had to be discharged due to lack of treatment costs. Unfortunately, his deteriorating condition brought him into hospital again in April 2011. The daily cost of hundreds of dollars for life-sustaining platelet transfusions became a burden for his family, relatives, even friends as well. As suggested by his attending physician, the only way to cure and save his life would be a bone marrow transplant.

A successful bone marrow match between Zou and his sister, the dawn of the child's survival, made their parents burst into tears. However, a cost as high as fifty thousand dollars for the surgery and subsequent treatment was the despair of the family - a penniless one with all furniture sold off and debts of thousands following Zou's treatment in the past two years. The family of eight had squeezed in

a rented clayhouse of less than 50 square meters, running on a shoestring with their private plot of one acre to grow vegetables, and a few farm cattle they bought with borrowed money. Obviously, the family had no way to pay the bone marrow transplant costs, but would they just let their lovely child pass away sadly? No. The desperate mother even wanted to sell her kidney for the money. Helplessly, Zou's father again called his fellow villager Jiixin Yang, who had offered help twice before. Mr. Yang was working in the pharmaceutical industry and a member of the Guangdong Lions Club. With the help of Yang, Zou's situation was known to the enthusiastic members of Guangdong Lions Club.

It was a crucial turn on October 14, 2011 when Zou's platelet count dropped to 4,000 (normal range was 100,000 to 300,000). His life was at stake, but Yang, who had the same blood type, was in another city. Yang quickly called Long Li, member of Mingdao Service Team in the Club, saying that Zou was in urgent need of B-type platelet. Other club members were informed of the situation immediately through the Secretariat. A few minutes later, the Secretariat was told that Dong Zhou, one of the members, would arrive at the blood center in 30 minutes for platelet donation. Zou was saved in a timely manner.

From October 14, 2011 to February 29, 2012, members of the Lions Club began to bring a wide range of social resources under charity and published Zou's situation and the family's need for help to the society through the Internet and other media. Television and newspaper reporters from Zou's hometown also came to Guangzhou to interview with the family. The reports came to the attention of the local municipal people's congress, the municipal department of education and other departments. As reports went around, Zou's clear and persistent eyes, as well as his paintings full of vitality, touched the hearts of many caring



Figure 1 Some of Zou's paintings.

people and raised wide social concerns. It was encouraging that, through the joint efforts of the Lions Club and kind-hearted people, thousands of people had donated money in less than three months. In Huizhou City, a six-year-old child even contributed his lucky money of 80 dollars to Zou via the service team. One of the kind-hearted people even came from Zhuhai to the child's ward and donated over three thousand dollars without leaving his name. "All I hope is that the child may grow up healthily and help others in future," said he. Eventually, the cost for the transplant was raised on December 3, 2011.

In the 138 days awaiting surgery, Zou was in urgent need of platelets from time to time. To save the child, Dong Zhou, member of the Hope Service Team of the Guangdong Lions Club, took the first baton on October 14, 2011. The "relay baton" was taken on by more than 30 people who donated their blood - without even knowing each other. In those days, Zou had to receive the life-sustaining platelet transfusion at least once weekly. To address that, a B-type platelet donation group of nearly 50 volunteers was established in the club with multiple donors scheduled for each transfusion in case of any unsuccessful



Figure 2 A: Members of Guangdong Lions Club visiting little Shengwang Zou; B: The father giving little Zou's painting to Ms. Ye as a present; C: Zou's discharge accompanied by members of Mingdao Service Team, Guangdong Lions Club.

transfusion. The group was supported by a number of good-hearted volunteers, ready for donation any time, and their touching stories as well.

On October 19, 2011, Yue Qiu of the Hope Service Team did not succeed in his donation because he had had greasy food that day. He returned to the blood center but the donation was still unsuccessful the next day.

On October 23, 2011, following Qiu's unsuccessful blood donation, Wang Lianwei of the Mingdao Service Team took the place, only to find that her donation was still unsuccessful. Due to shortage of platelets for days, Zou's condition was quite critical as bleeding spots were present on the eyes and all over his body skin.

On October 27, 2011, Jiabin Yang persuaded Guanghua Lai, one of his colleagues in Maoming, to go to the Guangzhou Blood Center on that night, who successfully donated one unit platelet.

On November 5, 2011, one of Yang's colleagues, Ms. Huang, applied for donating platelets after learning about Zou's story.

On November 25, 2011, Liang, reporter of Guangdong Southern Television, came to visit little Zou with several club members (*Figure 2*). The next day, she came to the blood center for donation as she had the blood type B, though she was told that her weight was too low for the procedure.

On November 30, 2011, Jiazhang Huang of Mingdao Service Team and volunteer Zhao did not succeed in their donation. Ms. Yang rushed from Zengcheng City to Guangzhou Blood Center and successfully offered two units of platelets. At the same time, Ms. Chen arrived in just thirty minutes after the phone call from the center. When she was told that Yang's blood donation was qualified and sufficient for that day, Chen left without any complaint but

kept saying "call me any time whenever there is a need."

On December 8, 2011, Ms. Xu and Gu arrived at the blood center from Baiyun District. Although Xu was not an eligible donor for having consumed health food, Gu donated her platelets successfully.

On December 16, 2011, one day before Zou's bone marrow transplant, Mr. Zhang came to Guangzhou after an overnight travel of over five hours from Puning to donate platelets on the morning of the 17th. Unfortunately, his red blood cell count was too high to justify his donation following that fatigue journey, and he had to return home at noon. Chen, member of the Central Service Team of Guangdong Lions Club, did not succeed, either. Later, Guanghua Lai, who had donated platelets for Zou one month before, came along from Maoming after Yang Jiabin's emergency call. The flame of life for little Zou was rekindled. Zou left his new painting half way through before he entered the transplant ward. He was strong enough to face life in the battle with the illness!

On December 22, 2011, Zou developed cerebral hemorrhage after surgery, an emergency situation. Hearing the news, Chen took his leave and came down from Nansha to the blood center. Ms. Ye, who was babysitting her child at home, also arrived that afternoon. Thankfully, the blood types of both volunteers were qualified and four units of blood were collected successfully. Zou went through that tough night as his bleeding stopped, making people sigh with relief.

On December 28, 2011, the platelets were depleted. Ms. Chen, who failed in her last scheduled donation in the past month, promised to come for another try on the next day. On the other hand, Mr. Zhang, who had missed several scheduled visits due to business or illness, became eligible right then. After his successful donation on the afternoon



Figure 3 Unfinished work before his entry into the transplant ward - expected to be completed!

of the 28th, the Secretariat immediately called Chen to cancel the appointment, and she happily acknowledged with the same statement - "call me any time whenever there is a need!"

On January 6, 2012, Zou was in urgent need of platelets again. Yu, member of the Central Service Team of the Lions Club, came to help though he was ineligible for having donated within the past six months. Other volunteers also promised to come the next day. Mrs. Jing, who was unable to donate due to poor physical conditions, even brought her husband for a shot. Delightedly, his donation succeeded.

On January 19, two days before the Spring Festival, Zou ran out of platelets again. The Secretariat of the Mingdao Service Team called every volunteer, only to find that most of them back home to celebrate the Chinese New Year. Long Li had no choice but to forward the SMS to all his friends describing the emergency, and one of his friends again forwarded the information to all friends of his. The



Figure 4 Zou smiled happily on discharge.

efforts brought Mr. Long's family of three, staying in Guangzhou for that festival, to come to help. Their kid even insisted to donate blood many times, though he was too young to do so. The kind-hearted family once again helped little Zou overcome the most difficult period.

On January 25, the New Year's third day, Zou was in urgent need of platelets, again. However, none of the volunteers were able to help that time. At the critical moment, Ms. Chen, who missed her opportunities many times before, offered her timely help.

On January 30, Zou developed a high fever with very low platelet count. The mother was sobbing in her calls for help. Jian Liao, member of Ping'an Service Team, rented a car to take four of his colleagues who had B-type blood to Guangzhou for donation. Unfortunately, his colleagues were not unable to donate without their ID cards. At last, Liao donated one unit of his platelets.

The baton was taken over and over again in the relay for the life a child. They did not even know the kid before, but they created a miracle of love to overcome the difficulties all along the way with a common belief. Thanks to the help of so many caring people - even if some were unable to actually donate their blood - Zou came through the toughest times and his life was saved.

On February 29, 2012, Zou was discharged in good condition (*Figures 3,4*) and returned his home in Shanwei for recovery. Going through one after another critical moments, the kid has embraced a fortunate rebirth from his severe illness. His precious and strong life is witness of the infinite power of love.

Zou's story has evoked wide concerns in society. By this chance, Guangdong Lions Club and the Guangzhou Blood Center have teamed up to launch the "Red Action & Blood Bank" platelet donation campaign in Guangzhou on March 24, 2012, with the goal to mobilize more people to donate and establish a platelet donation volunteer database. Hopefully, the action will bring together the power of love from more people to support one and another hard-won life in future.

Love knows no boundaries; the relay for life needs your

support!

Acknowledgements

None.

Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Cite this article as: Chen S. Relay for life. *Transl Pediatr* 2012;1(1):58-62. doi: 10.3978/j.issn.2224-4336.2012.05.02