

Multilingual volunteer big help for expats

Yang Jian

Hu Zhuomin's multilingual repertoire has made him one of the most popular anti-COVID-19 volunteers among Shanghai's foreign residents during the city's ongoing fight against the resurgence of the coronavirus.

The 29-year-old civil servant of the Hongkou District Archives can speak seven foreign languages. He is proficient in English and Japanese, fluent in German and French, and can even talk in Dutch, Italian and Spanish.

Since the original coronavirus outbreak in 2020, he has been serving thousands of local expats, offering guidance on COVID-19 vaccination as well as explaining latest policies for quarantine and "grid screening" during the current COVID-19 resurgence.

"I think most expats who are still living in Shanghai amid the epidemic have a deep emotional bond to China," said Hu. "We try our best to make them feel at home."

"Talking in their mother tongue can help the expats feel warm and relaxed, especially during the pandemic," he added.

Douglas Brubaker, a senior American engineer at Amsted Automotive, found he could not get the QR codes on the city's healthcare app Jiankangyun for his family and himself.

His neighborhood in Hongkou District was quarantined on March 12 for COVID-19 screening. Every resident is required to register on the mobile app to have a QR code for scanning before the nucleic acid testing.

Hu offered timely help. After multiple tries, he found the QR codes would appear after selecting "overseas passports"



Hu Zhuomin poses with the family of Douglas Brubaker during a recent lockdown of their community in Hongkou District. — Ti Gong

rather than "normal passports."

"Hu has been very kind and helpful throughout this entire lockdown process. He is always very understanding and courteous," said Brubaker, who revealed that Hu came on the first day of quarantine to help translate instructions and answer questions.

"He has made us feel very safe and welcome," Brubaker said. "We are very thankful to have him here with us in Shanghai."

There are about 10 households from abroad living in the Yueting Neighborhood of Tianhong Community, Jiaxing Road Subdistrict. Wang Jinghua, the Party secretary of the neighborhood committee, said she was wondering how to explain to the foreign residents after the neighborhood was put under a two-day lockdown plus another 12 days

of home quarantine when Hu applied to be the first volunteer on her WeChat.

Hu accompanied her to visit each of the foreign households and explain the quarantine rules and anti-COVID-19 tips.

Hu said most foreign residents could not understand the various lockdown measures, such as "2+12" or "7+14," as well as "six banned activities" during home quarantine. Many of them also wanted to know why there were so many asymptomatic cases in Shanghai and their treatment measures.

Finland's Philp Olof and his son said they were totally confused when the neighborhood was locked down. They do not use WeChat and knew almost nothing about the quarantine rules.

Again, Hu and other community staff knocked on their door in time. Hu explained the situation in detail and offered many COVID-19 prevention tips. Olof said that his explanations greatly relieved their anxiety.

Hu served as a volunteer at the COVID-19 vaccination site for expats in Jiaxing and Liangcheng subdistrict's public health service center in Hongkou between March and June 2021. About 800 expats from over a dozen countries took the vaccines at the centers every month.

A German resident asked for a vaccination record on his vaccine passport after getting the jab at the Liangcheng center. Hu helped to coordinate with the



Hu Zhuomin and a community worker explain the temporary quarantine measures to Douglas Brubaker. — Ti Gong

hospital and solved the issue for him.

Hu's reputation then spread among the local German community and many German residents came to get the vaccines and the record on their vaccine passport.

A young man from Pakistan wanted to make a Vlog about the vaccination service in Shanghai and promote it back in his country. Many residents declined over privacy concerns.

Hu then helped to shoot a video of the youngster undergoing the whole vaccination process. The Vlog later received hundreds of clicks on YouTube and Facebook.

"As a civil servant, I think it is my duty to serve both Chinese citizens and expats in Shanghai," Hu stated.

Hu studied the multiple languages both at school and by self-study. The postgraduate of Monash University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University owns dual master's degrees in international relations and Chinese politics and economy.

He once worked for the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and has taken part in many Model United Nations Conferences both at home and abroad since middle school. These experiences have helped him learn about different cultural backgrounds and communication skills with people from different countries.

He studied French at the Shanghai Foreign Language School Affiliated to Shanghai International Studies University and other languages mainly through travelling and watching foreign TV series.

"There is no boundary to studies and I just would like to learn a little about everything," Hu said.



Hu (third right) and other community volunteers — Ti Gong