

Neighbors help locked-down students

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Norman Dong, a senior student at Shanghai New York University, is grateful to his neighbors who have been donating food during the lockdown of their community due to the COVID-19 resurgence in Shanghai.

Dong and two of his classmates live in a rented apartment in Yujingyuan compound in Huamu Subdistrict of the Pudong New Area.

When the city government announced on March 27 that it would impose a lockdown, they found the food in their refrigerator may not be enough. They scrambled to order food online but found it pretty difficult.

Dong then contacted his mother, Monica, who is a Chinese-American based in Chicago, to see if she could help. "She entered a lot of groups on WeChat. I'm not exactly sure how she did it, but she managed to find someone in our neighborhood who was willing to help me and my roommates," he explained.

"And what happened was she gathered some people here in the neighborhood and they pulled together a list of items people could donate to us. And by the end of the day, they had amassed about an entire fridge's worth of food for me and my roommates."

Monica told Shanghai Daily

that she has been living in the US for about 30 years and was unfamiliar with the online shopping platforms in China.

But she saw parents of other NYU Shanghai students in a WeChat group talking about the necessity to help international students under lockdown and sharing information about how to buy food online. "I tried all the popular online stores but failed," she said. "I did succeed in placing orders on some smaller platforms on March 28 but they haven't received the deliveries yet. So I was worried."

Later, one of the mothers helped her get connected with Gabriella Chen, a resident in the compound where her son lives. "She introduced me to several WeChat groups for residents in the compound," Monica revealed. "In one group, I saw people talking about donating food to those in need, so I said I need food for my son and his classmates living there, their refrigerator is empty now."

"The group leader then asked me the room number of my son and built up a list of possible donors. That night, they donated several bags of food to Norman and the government supply also arrived later. So their refrigerator was full immediately."

Dong said at least seven to eight neighbors contributed food, including carrots,



Volunteers unload supplies from a vehicle in a compound in Minhang District. In recent days, in order to coordinate with Shanghai's citywide COVID-19 screening, some residential areas have implemented lockdown measures. Volunteer teams made up of residents have helped in distributing daily supplies and assisting in COVID-19 screening. — Xinhua

potatoes, Chinese chives, noodles, rice and canned fish.

"They gave us a lot more than what was expected and what we needed," he noted. "I'm incredibly thankful to all of them. It feels so nice."

He added that the lockdown of the community has been extended because it reported a positive case from nucleic acid testing and the neighbors are still giving food to them. Dong tried to give something in return but the neighbors refused, telling them to take care of themselves.

Monica said both she and her husband are from China and sent their son to study at NYU Shanghai to build up a bond between him and China.

"He can speak Chinese, but he didn't communicate much with the neighbors because of some cultural barriers. The neighbors in the community are so obliging. I think this experience really made him part of the community in Shanghai."

Dong and his roommates now have plenty of food at home.

Chen divulged that she had noticed Dong and his roommates when she volunteered during the nucleic acid tests but didn't know about their difficulties. "We actually have a lot of WeChat groups about how to overcome difficulties during the lockdown, including some group-buying channels, but they didn't know," she observed. "Maybe it's because they were too shy to ask."

"I understand their dilemma because my husband is also a foreigner and if I were not at home, he and our children would be in the same situation. So I was glad to help them when Norman's mother contacted me."

Chen said the neighbors acted very quickly to get to know what they had and what the students needed.

Then a security guard

collected the items from the families and delivered them. Chen also donated some bread to Dong and his roommates.

"I was baking bread for my children so I made some more for them as well," she remarked.

Chen pointed out that she now also shares all information with them and Monica, including local policies and online shopping.

"I also told them not to be embarrassed to ask for help when they need," she said. "Actually, there are about 2,000 families in the community and everybody is ready to help others during such difficult times."

According to Chen, there is a food bank in the lobby of her building, where people leave surplus food and pick up what they need.

Volunteers are helping senior residents living alone with registration for nucleic acid tests, using antigen testing kits and buying medicines.

"Norman and his roommates are also great as they keep asking what they can do for the community," she noted. "I feel the community is growing more warmer than before."



Food items that Norman Dong's neighbors in their Pudong New Area community provided when they learned of his plight ahead of the lockdown.



Dong and his roommates now have plenty of food at home. — Ti Gong