



'Let us help you' platform goes viral

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My father is in hospital and has run out of diapers. Please help him right now!"

"An 84-year-old woman living alone is insulin-deficient and needs medication urgently."

"My grandmother needs sleeping pills. Do you have any to spare?"

Such pleas for assistance keep emerging on an anti-COVID-19 charity platform that has recently gone viral. Behind it is a community support network that transcends space and tries to help people by making use of the Internet.

On April 7, the platform, "Let Us Help You" (www.daohouer.com), was launched. It has since drawn much attention, benefitting many.

The platform was created by a group of Shanghai-based Internet professionals. Founder Lin Tianyi is an entrepreneur in his 30s. He was reputedly inspired by shared documents and the "leaders of group buying" in WeChat groups.

Since Shanghai was locked down in late March, people who organize group buying have begun using shared files to document individual needs in neighborhoods. However, in addition to food, residents also encounter other difficulties that are generally not addressed in group buying, like medicine.

"I wanted to create a website that would publish information netizens had previously posted and allows people to express their needs, to set

up an information-gathering platform," Lin explained.

He claimed that one advantage of centralizing information on the website over shared documents is that it could effectively avoid the problem of "information being changed at will."

The platform team started off with only three people, but they began working in a matter of hours, being familiar with technical aspects.

The website has a simple design, with a top-level information bar divided into three sections: "Help," "Post Help" and "Contact Us."

On the "Help" page, assistance requests are listed chronologically, and they are denoted with different colors indicating the level of urgency. The page also displays information about each person's request, district of residence, and contact information.

If you require assistance, click "Post Help" and complete the required fields, which include the nature of help needed, address, contact person, and phone number. Then the information will be published on the platform.

Lin said he had not anticipated such high numbers of website visitors. They received more than 2,500 requests for help in the first week.

"At its peak, the site received hundreds of help requests per minute, and on an average day there were 10-plus pages of help requests," Lin said. "I had no idea it would get so much attention when we got started."

According to Huang Wei, the platform's operations manager, the team consists of volunteers, including

college students, office workers, and some individuals from outside Shanghai. They are divided into groups, with duties ranging from fact check, seeking solutions, and contacting those who could help.

However, in spite of the more than 200 volunteers, the sheer volume of work is still monumental.

"I worked from 10am until late at night on my first day as a volunteer," said a volunteer surnamed Yun. "I made over 30 phone calls and assisted several elderly people living alone in obtaining groceries, diapers and medicine. I was exhausted, but I wanted to contribute during this difficult time."

Aside from the hectic schedule, the team is overwhelmed by the kindness and understanding of those seeking assistance.

According to Lin, many people in need of help have added his WeChat account. "One of them later told me that his needs were not that urgent and we could prioritize those with urgent needs because he found many people's condition was worse than his."

At the same time, they were moved even more by the fact that residents are willing to support with medicine and household goods.

"Some companies send their staff supply packages," Huang said. "And as far as I know, many people fill out contact information for those in need of assistance so that supplies would go directly to them."

Also, the team has proposed a different solution to those in need of

medication, the most requested item on the platform.

According to Huang, the team now has a "transportation group," which consists of some local security services staff. They use their time off to go to hospitals and collect medicines, which are then delivered to people in need.

The platform has also set up a connection with an Internet-based hospital platform. Patients can seek medical advice via the Internet hospital, upload previous visit vouchers, have their medicine prescribed, and then have the supply chain docked behind them to be handled by volunteers.

With the platform assuming a more significant role, it is gradually providing services that have exceeded Lin's initial idea.

A few days ago, the team received a call from Fudan University's counseling group, expressing an interest in assisting in counseling services.

"We may have been unable to provide psychological counseling in the past," Lin said. "However, thanks to the participation of this counseling team, we can now do it."

The team has also received requests for help from expats.

"Our staff also understands English, and we welcome expats to post their needs," he said.

As the platform's developer, Lin and his team members have the same wish: They all want the platform to "go offline soon."

"That means the end of the pandemic," he pointed out.