



Spain's Raquel Sanchez Montes poses for a group photo with her neighborhood volunteers who deliver food in their community in Changning District. — Ti Gong

Expats drive away lockdown blues with volunteer services

Yang Meiping

Expats in Shanghai are helping in their communities and on campuses amid the COVID-19 lockdown through various voluntary services, experiencing joy and togetherness in the process.

Fashion volunteer

"Small things that make you happy these days ... a little bit of human contact, a little bit of fresh air and feeling productive," Raquel Sanchez Montes, a Spanish national living in Changning District, wrote in her WeChat Moments recently after finishing her first volunteer experience in her locked-down compound.

As a trend forecaster, fashion consultant, stylist and collector of sunglasses, Montes has been living in China for more than six years and moved to Shanghai last November.

She explained that it was her first lockdown experience as she was back in Spain during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

"It's OK because my apartment is not very small. I can walk from one room to another," she said about the lockdown in Shanghai since late March.

"There are some days that I feel like I want to go out, but I think I'm just being patient. I'm totally connected all the time with people. I have so many friends from Spain, from around the world, and they are calling me all the time. And I'm working at home. So it's OK for me."

Montes said she spent hours talking on phone with her family and friends every day.

She has also been keeping positive and happy. She does pilates or dance every day, and now serves her neighbors as a volunteer.

It's her Chinese neighbor Melinda who invited her to do voluntary work in the community.

Melinda established contact with Montes on WeChat on the first day of

the lockdown to keep her updated on happenings in the community and offer a hand when she needed something.

They soon became friends and then one day, Melinda told Montes that she was going down to help deliver food in the compound and asked whether she would like to join her. "Sure!" Montes said.

"So I went down," the Spaniard said. "I'm happy to help because the security guys are bringing packages to us all the time and they must be exhausted. I also want to feel that I'm doing something for others."

Montes and three other volunteers delivered bakery products to their neighbors in the 24-floor building, with three or four boxes for each floor. They put the boxes in front of the door, knocked and left.

"It was quite fun," she recalled. "When I went home that day, I felt much much better because I did something and I got some fresh air. It was a good feeling. I told Melinda, if they need me, I can go every day and help out."

Through voluntary work and community WeChat groups, Montes has come to know more Chinese and foreigners

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I think we are all becoming friends now. It's good because my community is really nice. Everyone is helping each other and sharing food, sharing everything. I'm happy.

Raquel Sanchez Montes

A Spanish national living in Changning District



International student volunteers at Fudan University — Ti Gong