

‘We need to be Christ’s love’

CBF field personnel help refugees create new lives in California

When Nadera’s husband was murdered, she knew she had to get her three young daughters out of Afghanistan. So she left behind her family, her way of life and all she knew to start over in California. Her daughters are now safe, but immigrating to the United States created a new set of challenges — finding a job, enrolling her children in school and learning how to live in a new culture.

But, for Nadera, the toughest part of starting over was the loneliness. The only other Afghan she knew in the United States was her caseworker. She didn’t know how to use the phone, and even if she did, she didn’t know how to speak English.

After a couple days of sitting in her

apartment crying and talking to her children — all under age 4, she ventured out to find a new friend. In Afghanistan, it’s customary to stroll into a neighbor’s house unannounced and say hello. Nadera quickly learned that’s not the case in the United States. Her neighbor reacted to her by yelling and threatening her. So Nadera went back to the apartment to cry. She found herself longing for life in Afghanistan. Her life might be in danger there, but at least she had someone to talk to.

The first four months were the hardest. Eventually she met other Afghans at the bus stop and slowly built a circle of friends. She found work as a caretaker for older women.

Someone gave her a car. She didn’t know how to drive, but undaunted, she taught herself. It took a little longer to learn how

to park. Sometimes she left the car running in the street.

She also met CBF field personnel [Rick and Lita Sample](#), who minister among refugees and immigrants in the communities surrounding San Francisco.

The Samples have helped her so much, Nadera said. The Samples found a quiet, safe apartment with better schools for her family. They helped her daughters with homework and brought them together for parties where they could make new friends.

With help from the Samples, she has been able to build a better life for her daughters, a life where she can start to dream about their futures. She wants them conversant in not only English but Farsi and Spanish, to be doctors and engineers who help build a better Afghanistan.

Her oldest daughter said she’s glad she’s old enough now to help her mother and to help her younger sisters with homework. More than anything, she’s glad she can be a friend to her mother.

“Now she has someone to talk to,” her daughter said.

The Samples have a calling to minister among refugees and immigrants such as Nadera — helping to meet their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

It’s heartbreaking to hear the stories, Lita said, knowing “true healing only comes through Jesus Christ. I wish I could just give that to them, but it’s something they have to choose.”

Nadera is one of thousands of immigrants in the San Francisco Bay area of California. Persians, Turkish, Karen and the largest concentration of Afghans in the United States live in the communities surrounding San Francisco. Many come to escape perse-



(Right) Lita Sample, left, ministers among refugees in the Bay Area of California. (Opposite) The Samples' ministry includes visiting with families in their homes and hosting events for refugees to connect.

cution by their governments. Others come to escape the horrors of war. Some have seen family members executed in front of them. All come seeking a better life. They face common challenges — feeding their families, navigating American systems, learning English and the American culture.

The Samples connect immigrants with food banks, tax preparation services and English classes. They also host holiday parties where families can meet others and have fun around a cup of tea or a craft project. And, they help with the sometimes daunting task of completing the correct paperwork.

For one widow with seven children, Lita learned that the children weren't receiving lunch at school. It turns out the school district employee responsible for approving free lunch applications had a backlog of hundreds of applications completed incorrectly. The Samples got the paperwork straightened out, and the children had school lunch the next day.

Through these tangible services, immigrants realize that Christians in America care and more than that, Christ cares. Rick said their ministry is the presence of Christ in the local community.

"Whatever we are doing, it is because of Jesus," he said.

Ministering among immigrants is a long-term process that requires investment in a relationship. So, much of the Samples' ministry consists of visiting families. They drop by for a 10-minute visit. Then the platters start coming out heaped with chicken and rice. Ten minutes stretches into hours.



Over time, these relationships build trust. The Samples always tell families, "we will pray for you," which is usually welcomed.

"Of course, we want them to know

Christ," Lita said, "but regardless we need to be Christ's love."

By contributing writer John Foster

GIVE Your gifts to the CBF Offering for Global Missions enable the ministry of Lita and Rick Sample. Please give and support these life-changing ministry. www.thefellowship.info/givenow