

Stories FROM THE FIELD



CIRCLE OF HOPE Our Beginnings

by Cheryl Fugate, an Alliance Worker in Mexico

The Circle of Hope ministry began in August of 2018 in answer to the great needs the Breath of Life Church was encountering in their church community. Women and children did not have the means to sustain themselves adequately or were in desperate situations due to the violence in Mexico. So many women and children were coming to our doors, finding hope, and learning about Jesus, but they also needed help in practical, physical ways.

In November 2019, we were one of the recipients of the Alliance Women National Project and received a very generous donation that spurred the ministry to begin to dream about how to truly become a place of caring and hope for so many in the community surrounding the Breath of Life church plant in Guadalajara.

The Circle of Hope began to offer different workshops for women in our community, giving them job skills, dignity, and the ability to move forward and advance in society. Each workshop began with a verse from the Bible and a short thought on that verse. These mini devotionals were prepared by the women leading the workshop. Usually, that woman was herself someone who had experienced some form of abuse, abandonment, or violence in her life. The one difference was that the women leading had found Jesus as their Savior and now had hope through the grace and mercy that Jesus gives!

The workshops offered were basic haircutting techniques, professional makeup and nails, basic English classes, introductory calligraphy (just in time for Christmas and homemade Christmas cards), artisan jewelry, and sewing (birthed from the COVID-19 pandemic where we began making facemasks).

As we grew in 2020, Circle of Hope began to look for a larger building. The initial space we were renting was a one-room office where we were very restricted on space. We could only have one workshop at a time with a small area left for counseling, but at least we had a space. With the infusion of the support from Alliance Women, we began looking for different rentals that would meet our needs to facilitate more ministry.

Due to the economic crisis of 2020 in Mexico from the pandemic, we were able to rent a home with a large first floor, a covered outside patio area, and four bedrooms upstairs. Our director, Lety Avila, is now living on site at the Circle of Hope home. During the week, there are several workshops that happen simultaneously—it is a house filled with hope! Laughter can be heard in each room. In one room, women gather to learn new techniques on cutting hair while in another room, a group of women learn about the Fruit of the Spirit through a Bible study led by one of the lay leaders from the church. In yet another room, Lety and I are look at the new year and determine what new workshops we should plan for and what our budget allow us to dream about.

Alliance Women is committed to prayer and financial support for the Circle of Hope ministry in Mexico. We have set a goal to raise \$16,600 for this vital ministry to women. To participate, please visit www.alliancewomen.org/give.



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CIRCLE OF HOPE Coming Together to Care

by Cheryl Fugate, an Alliance Worker in Mexico

Many will see 2020 as the “year of the pandemic” when churches and ministries closed down. But the Circle of Hope will see the year 2020 as a time when we all came together and began to minister to one another. The needs became so great that the care going out became even greater. People were concerned for each other, and the women of the Circle of Hope came together to provide hope, love, and care.

Together, we went to the city market and bought hundreds of kilos of rice, beans, oatmeal, potatoes, soy, onions, cleaning supplies, toilet paper, and candy for the kids. We put together food bags—120 at a time. Each bag was filled not only with enough food for ten days but with spiritual food as well—tracts and Bibles for each family.

The women gathered to put the bags together every two weeks. They helped distribute the bags, taking them to neighborhoods with families that were hit the hardest by the pandemic. One woman, who is not a Christian yet, (she always tells me, “I am a Catholic for life”) helped us distribute 22 bags to people in her neighborhood. As she delivered bags to each home, she told me she felt like she was being the hand of God for some of these people.

Alliance Women is committed to prayer and financial support for the Circle of Hope ministry to women and children who do not have the means to sustain themselves adequately or who are in desperate situations due to the violence in Mexico. We have set a goal to raise \$16,600 for this vital ministry to women. To participate, please visit www.alliancewomen.org/give.



Stories FROM THE FIELD



CIRCLE OF HOPE Our Dreams of Expansion

by Cheryl Fugate, an Alliance Worker in Mexico

In December of 2020, the Circle of Hope made its first trip to the town of Quniceo in the state of Michoacan—four hours south of Guadalajara—as part of an integrated church planting strategy to reach and train the Purepecha, an indigenous people group. The goal is to plant a new church, Breath of Life, in the nearby town of Paracho and establish the community development ministry of Circle of Hope. Once a suitable office is found in Paracho, the church and Circle of Hope will begin to offer Bible studies, spiritual counselling, legal aid, and job skills training for home micro-businesses.

A great challenge for Circle of Hope will be to identify and then train women in this distant city who will become workshop leaders and future leaders of the ministry. Workshops being considered for this area are focused on meeting the needs of the women in this indigenous community, relieving the poverty and illiteracy so that the gospel can bring hope and dignity.



Workshops under consideration include:

- Literacy and GED-Type Programs—In this area and in many parts of Mexico, many women are taken out of school after fifth grade to work, either in the home or as helpers in other homes or to begin the process of learning their indigenous crafts and selling them in the city square. Boys are allowed to continue their education, which causes a great inequality in education, jobs, and pay. This situation is more prevalent in indigenous communities.
- Sewing—In this community, the women create tapestries and clothing made of intricate stitching designs, and it can take up to six months to finish one skirt. Each design tells a story of their beliefs and traditions, which are usually syncretistic in nature, including many gods. The Circle of Hope sewing workshop would include techniques known to the women but would be presented in a different medium, possibly through a type of quilt-making workshop where women would learn how to make coverings for beds. The designs in each square would be biblical, telling the God-story instead of the animistic symbols and gods with which they are accustomed.
- Artisan Jewelry—This would give each woman a new skill and an outlet to earn money, either by selling their finished products along with their typical indigenous crafts or making bracelets for the Circle of Hope ministries around the world as we distribute bracelets to churches and ministries in the Alliance world.
- Basic Health Care Instruction—This is a vital element of the indigenous and rural Circle of Hope, providing basic training for mothers with an emphasis on nutrition for young children. This instruction will depend on the support from outside sources such as short-term medical teams.
- Computer Skills—Our focus would be on school-age girls and single mothers. Circle of Hope would be willing to launch into this area given the lack of employment opportunities for young women. We believe that with the provision of stable Internet, we can dedicate one room permanently to computer access as we develop a micro-business for women at the center focusing on skills in database entry and graphics arts design.

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CIRCLE OF HOPE

Vero's Story

by Cheryl Fugate, an Alliance Worker in Mexico

From the age of five, Vero lived alone in the central plaza of Guadalajara, Mexico. She tells of finding a big tree in the plaza that she made into a little resting place to get out of the blazing sun. Vero's life in the plaza was a refuge from what she was experiencing at home. Her mother was practically a prostitute and brought a different man home each night. At her lowest point, Vero was offered to the men as a special gift for extra money. There was a reason Vero had to escape her home and live in the plaza.

By age 15, Vero had her first child. After many men and four more children, she settled down with one man and found herself at our Circle of Hope office space taking the first workshop we offered—basic haircutting. We began each workshop with a verse of encouragement, introducing women to the Bible and Jesus from the very beginning. We would talk about the hope we can have in Jesus and why we were called the “Circle of Hope.”



One day, Vero asked me, “What is this hope you are always talking about? Is this something someone like me could have, too?” This simple question began Vero's discipleship journey. She attended the Breath of Life Church, received the great news of Jesus as her Savior and Lord, attended baptism classes, and was baptized in 2020 along with two of her children.

Vero's transformation is a work in progress. God has His hand on her life, and she is growing like a wildflower, looking beautiful in the process! Vero, who yearns to be able to finish her high school education, is leading the Sunday School in one of the Breath of Life Church campuses. She makes the teachers' calendar, organizes the curriculum, and plans special days for the children. This would seem impossible if one looked at Vero as the world sees; but with God, nothing is impossible!

Vero has been transformed by the hope that she was looking for and received from Jesus! She belongs to a community of faith, a family that loves her and sees her through the eyes of Jesus. Her past is wiped away, and she is a new creature in God! Vero is now an important part of our community and has found her place to belong in the family of Jesus here in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Alliance Women desires to support women like Vero with our prayers and financial support. We have set a goal to raise \$16,600 for the Circle of Hope ministry in Mexico. To participate, please visit www.alliancewomen.org/give.

Stories FROM THE FIELD



CIRCLE OF HOPE The Purepecha Story - Part One

by Cheryl Fugate, an Alliance Worker in Mexico

Alberto and Julia left their little town of Quinceo, Mexico, in 2012, following the birth of their daughter, Abigail. Julia had been “robbed” by her boyfriend/husband at the age of 14 and promptly taken to the United States to begin a new life (see side box).

Julia couldn't bear to be without her only daughter, even though the customs and traditions of their indigenous people called the Purepecha allowed the husband to do whatever he wanted with his new family.

Alberto and Julia received visas for the United States and settled in West Virginia with their young son. Alberto worked as a roofer, and Julia worked in the kitchen of the local hospital. They continued looking for their daughter, but it was not easy. The husband did not want any interference from the family of his young wife, so he kept changing where they were living.

After another son was born to Alberto and Julia, they learned of the whereabouts of their beloved daughter. Abigail had reached out to her parents asking for help. She, at the age of 16, had two young children and was diagnosed with leukemia.

Alberto immediately drove to southern California, picked up his daughter, and brought her back to seek treatment at Johns Hopkins Medical Center. He would not let Julia care for their grandchildren, but at least Abigail was found and would be able to receive help for her illness.

People from a local church heard about their story and began to minister to this family. They sat with them in the hospital and shared with Alberto and Julia about Jesus. The family soaked up this message of hope and received Jesus as their Savior and Lord. In Mexico, they had never heard this message; their indigenous community put their hope in things, spirit animals, and nature. Never had they heard of salvation by grace, a free gift from God.

The family felt whole, free, and grateful to rest in Jesus and His promises. It is an amazing transformation when someone is truly freed from the shackles of idol worship, animistic beliefs, and non-life-giving rituals. The message of “Jesus only” changed their world—Alberto and Julia and their family were truly free!

In December of 2020, the Circle of Hope made its first trip to the town of Quinceo in the state of Michoacan, four hours south of Guadalajara, as part of an integrated church-planting strategy to reach and train the Purepecha, an indigenous people group. The goal is to plant a new church, Breath of Life, in the nearby town of Paracho and establish the community development ministry of Circle of Hope. Once a suitable office is found in Paracho, the church and Circle of Hope will begin to offer Bible studies, spiritual counselling, legal aid, and job skills training for home micro-businesses.

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THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

In the culture of this indigenous group called the Purepecha (poor-RAY-pay-cha), there is a custom that they practice even today where a young man (16-19 years of age) picks out his wife (14-16 years of age) and “steals” her to take her as his own. In this story, Alberto (19) “stole” his wife Julia (15), showing up in a taxi outside of her school. Julia was like Cinderella, even losing her shoe as she was pushed into the taxi to be swept away by Alberto. Julia says that she cried for a year but followed along with their cultural way of getting a wife. The girls that are taken are usually not as surprised as Julia; they have talked with the boy and want to be taken as a wife. Alberto went to Julia's parents to ask permission to take Julia, but the parents said “no” because they wanted Julia to finish high school. But Alberto could not wait and “stole” Julia on her way from school. It is this cultural tradition still practiced today that forms the foundation of this story of tragedy, death, and redemption in the midst of the darkness in Mexico.



Stories FROM THE FIELD



CIRCLE OF HOPE The Purepecha Story - Part Two

by Cheryl Fugate, an Alliance Worker in Mexico

Alberto and Julia grew in the Lord and started attending an evangelical church in their small town in West Virginia. The leukemia treatment for their daughter was not having much effect and, unfortunately, Abigail died at the tender age of 18.

Alberto's father demanded that the family bring her body back to their small community in Mexico so that she could be buried in her homeland. The family acceded to the wishes of the grandfather and patriarch of their clan. As the family returned to the little town of Quinceo, the spiritual darkness of this indigenous community was so strong and almost overwhelming for the family. As they held a service for Abigail, Alberto and Julia wanted to make it a celebration of not only her life but of the new life the whole family had experienced. The service reflected their faith in a living Savior, Jesus Christ.

Their immediate family did not know how to handle this “new” Alberto and Julia and began calling them “hallelujahs”—a common derogatory term for evangelical Christians in Mexico. Alberto and Julia could feel the oppressing darkness of their community; it was in stark contrast to the freedom and light they had experienced through their new life in Jesus. As they say in their own words, “We didn’t have any theological training, but we had life training through our church in West Virginia, Bible studies, our personal experiences as believers, and our fellowship with other believers. There was darkness all around us. We HAD to share with our family this new life we had experienced, this freedom, and our certainty that we would see our daughter again in heaven! Our family didn’t know anything about Jesus!”



After the funeral, Alberto talked with Julia and said these words: “How can we return back to our comfortable life in West Virginia when there are so many people dying every day in darkness and wrong beliefs, going to hell, being lost forever?”

Julia wasn't so convinced at first. She liked her life in the United States. She had a beautiful home that they had built little-by-little. Their two boys were deeply involved in church, school, and sports in West Virginia. But the intense darkness that enveloped their family in Mexico began to work on her heart, and Julia knew that she had to obey and stay in Quinceo. Julia would once again begin a new life and become a witness to her community of the amazing power of Jesus and all that He does for His children.

Alberto and Julia received land as part of the indigenous community and were also able to buy some land in town where they built a home for their family. Using the back patio, they began to build an area that they would open to the town. Alberto and Julia started holding church services every Friday evening and Sunday afternoon. Alberto began to preach, sharing from the Bible and from his life testimonies of what Jesus had done for him and what Jesus wanted to do for others in this community.

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CIRCLE OF HOPE The Purepecha Story - Part Three

by Cheryl Fugate, an Alliance Worker in Mexico

Music is very important to this indigenous community. Luis, Alberto's son, began a Christian music group with other young people that began to come to their Friday night services. The group learned the indigenous language and began to sing evangelical songs in their local Purepecha dialect. They began to be invited to different family gatherings, and word spread in the community that "their message is so different, so freeing, so without guilt!"

Of course, this began to enrage the local priest of the traditional religion, and the community elders were very upset that Alberto was "turning their world upside down!" It was a story just like what had happened in Acts chapter four. Alberto was called to a meeting with the community elders and the local priest. Just before heading out, someone came to warn Alberto that they were planning to burn him alive in the town square. Alberto did not go to the meeting, which enraged the elders and priest even more.

The townspeople began to plot against the family, blacklisting them at the local stores. No one would sell them any merchandise, forcing Alberto and Julia to drive into the next town to buy their groceries. Alberto bought a taxi and was accepted into the local taxi union, but no one would take his taxi.

One day, a crowd with baseball bats and knives gathered in the street in front of Alberto's home. They began to shout obscenities and storm the front gate. The mob was ready to handle this family once and for all, make them leave town in disgrace, and ex-communicate them from the traditional church and the indigenous community. This would mean that Alberto and Julia would have to give up their home, land, and life in Quinceo.

As the mob advanced on their home, Alberto relates the following: "As they began to bang on our gates, out of nowhere, two big dogs came at the crowd, one from each side, and began to bite at the people. There was blood flowing in front of the house, and the people were screaming because they had never seen these dogs before in town. We didn't own any dogs either. The mob began to disperse in fear, running for their lives and screaming from their wounds all the way to their homes."

The next day, the town elders and priest came to the front gate to talk with Alberto. They told him that his family could stay in town and that the blacklisting would stop because "your God is greater than anything we have ever seen or encountered in our town." They were also allowed to keep having church on their back patio.

Today, more than 100 local people gather weekly to praise God in their native dialect and listen to a message that helps them grow in their faith and that evangelizes to the visitors that come. They are outgrowing the back patio and have put a down payment on a parcel of land that is a little bit outside the center of town. If they can buy this piece of land and build a church, it would be the first evangelical indigenous church in that town ever! It is a daunting task, but this family has faced huge mountains before, and our powerful God always takes care of them.

As an Alliance church in Guadalajara, we have come alongside this indigenous church during the last four years, getting to know them, taking work teams and ministry teams from our church to their community, and becoming involved in their lives like a sister church. We have begun to take monthly offerings to help this new church reach into their community and share the message of the hope and light there is in Jesus.

What began as a family following their "stolen" daughter to the United States became a story of God being in control of each step in the lives of Alberto and Julia, leading them tenderly and showing them love and mercy. In response, Alberto and Julia became obedient to God's call on their lives to go and share with their community so that no one would perish but have eternal life. Their daughter Abigail's death has been the catalyst for hope in this very dark and lost community.

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Stories FROM THE FIELD



CAMACRAFTS

Lia's Story

by a Ministry Partner in the South Pacific Region

Lia* was so tired. She hated her job at the garment factory. She could handle the long days—six days a week—with few breaks, but she hated the way her supervisor constantly shamed her for not working fast enough. She hated mindlessly sewing the same patterned pieces together all day, and she especially hated the blatant harassment from the men who hung around at the doors as the women entered and exited the factory.

But Lia was lucky that her family lived in a small apartment near the factory. That meant that Lia could stay with them where it was safe, and she didn't have to live in the crowded, factory-provided housing. A number of those women ended up working in the nearby brothels during their hours off.

Then, Lia heard about a job opening at CAMACrafts. Her grandmother had done embroidery work for the CAMACrafts handicraft business when their family fled to the refugee camps in Thailand after the Vietnam War, and she continued embroidering for CAMACrafts when the family returned to their home country shortly before Lia was born. Lia was fascinated by the intricate patterns and longed to be able to make the same beautiful, traditional art that her grandmother did.

Lia gathered her courage and asked about the job. She was surprised that the CAMACrafts manager agreed to hire her even though she had so little work experience. She later learned that CAMACrafts valued being able to provide young people with work experience to begin their résumés so that they would have better opportunities in the future.

Lia quickly caught on to the hand stitching method for the reverse-applique patterns. The older woman who supervised the embroidery producers offered to teach Lia how to fold and cut the patterns into the cloth—a process that took extra patience and practice to master. The practice paid off when a foreign customer special-ordered a tablecloth with an especially difficult pattern; Lia felt honored when the supervisor chose her to do the intricate embroidery work. Lia especially enjoyed the company-sponsored “Creative Days” when the employees were encouraged to use whatever supplies they liked, working alone or in groups to come up with new products. Lia felt so proud when several of her original designs quickly sold at CAMACrafts' local retail shop.

Please pray for the many young women who lack opportunities for safe and dignified work in this region of the world. Pray for families who see no option but to accept dangerous or demeaning work to make ends meet. Pray for CAMACrafts whose goal is to provide work and opportunity for new producers from a second ethnic group.

Alliance Women is committed to prayer and financial support for the CAMACrafts ministry in the South Pacific region. We have set a goal to raise \$17,000 for the expansion of this vital ministry to women. To participate, please visit www.alliancewomen.org/give.

**name changed*



Stories FROM THE FIELD



CAMACRAFTS

A Family is Shown Love

by a Ministry Partner in the South Pacific Region

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a CAMACrafts staff member's nephew in Southeast Asia became gravely ill. The local, district, and provincial hospitals did not have the resources to help this little boy. In desperation, the family gathered all the funds they had and brought the little boy to one of the best hospitals in the capital city. Shortly after they arrived, a COVID outbreak struck the city, and all travel in and out of the capital was shut down to prevent the spread. Later that week, the doctors told the family that there was nothing more they could do for the little boy.

What was the family going to do? They had no place to stay in the city, and there was no way to get back home under the COVID travel restrictions. The family was worried that they would spend all their money and go into debt while they waited for the travel restrictions to be lifted, and they were horrified to think that this little boy would succumb to his illness far from home. The family feared that they would not be able to give him a proper funeral so far from their friends and relatives. In their culture, people deeply value the thought of spending their last moments on earth in their homes and with their loved ones.

Some believers on the CAMACrafts staff realized the situation their coworker and her family were in and felt deep compassion for them. The staff members took the initiative to negotiate with the hospital and the local government's COVID taskforce to hire an ambulance to take the little boy and his family back to their home village. This was the only way the family would be allowed to travel. The staff members also approached CAMA for the funds to hire the ambulance, an amount equal to a month's salary for an average worker.

Sadly, the little boy did not recover. He passed away a few days after returning home.

But it is during times of great struggle or pain that people need to know that there is a Father who loves them and a family that is eager to come around them in love. This CAMACrafts employee remembers the compassion that her believing coworkers showed to her relatives. She talks about the sacrifice they made of their time and resources to see that her relatives could return home during the travel restrictions. She now listens a little more carefully when they tell her about a compassionate and all-powerful Father who is calling her to be His own.

Please pray for CAMACrafts. The company's goal is to train additional producers from a second minority group this year.

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HANDS OF HONOR

Dana's Story

My name is Dana. In my village and in many others throughout West Africa, girls like me face an uphill battle. Because of the poverty in our homeland, we are forced to work from a very early age. When we reach our early teens and sometimes even sooner, many of us are forced into arranged marriages with older men while others become pregnant out of wedlock.

Sometimes we endure horrible things like genital mutilation that our cultural practices often force on us and because of gender inequalities, we are denied opportunities for education.

We feel alone, frightened, and trapped.

Last year, some women from CAMA's Hands of Honor program approached me and told me about Jesus' great love and care for me. They showed me that there was hope for a better future because I am God's child.

Today, I'm writing worship songs in my native tongue, and Jesus is calling me to reach my own people who have never heard about His mercy and grace. And even though I face persecution—sometimes under threat of death—I will never go back to my old religion.

I know that the odds are still against me in many ways, but I also know that Hands of Honor will walk with me every step of the way—just like Jesus!

Alliance Women encourages you to partner with Hands of Honor through your prayers and financial contributions. We have set a goal to raise \$25,000 to help Hands of Honor expand its ministry to young West African girls. For more information, please visit www.alliancewomen.org/give.



Stories FROM THE FIELD



HANDS OF HONOR

Fatima's Story - Part 1

by an Alliance Worker serving in West Africa

Fatim was born out of wedlock to her fifteen-year-old mother. She was given to an uncle and was raised as his “lamonden,” his live-in maid. She was not given the same privileges as other children in the home and was not accepted as their equal.

Fatim was 14 years old when her uncle took a second wife. Her workload doubled, and the sister wives began to fight over her.

Mah, Fatim's mother, never got past the stigma of having a child out of wedlock and had been ostracized by most of her family. In her early 20s, she moved to Senegal to open a small restaurant in a slum community in Dakar. Mah kept in touch with her daughter and visited several times over the years and always ensured that Fatim had her current phone number.

When things progressively became worse for Fatim, she reached out to her mother. Mah talked to the family and asked that Fatim be allowed to move in with her. She even made a trip back to Mali to speak to the family in person. But to no avail, they refused to let Fatim leave, and they cut off all communication between the mother and daughter.

Fatim persisted and found a way to reach her mother through a friend. Once a week, she was allowed to go to Koranic school, and she'd use her friend's phone to call her mom. Together, Fatim and her mother came up with a plan to be together.

Pretending as if it was like any other day for Koranic school, Fatim left the house, but she took a taxi to the bus station when she was out of sight. Mah had sent her bus money through her friend and arranged for Fatim to travel to Dakar with two acquaintances traveling on the same bus. It seemed as if the plan was foolproof until they got to the Senegalese border.

Fatim was kicked off the bus and denied entry into Senegal as she lacked the appropriate paperwork. The two ladies traveling with her could not help, but they showed her what bus she needed to take back to Mali.

Fatim was terrified to return. Her uncle was a violent man, and she feared his reaction after she'd attempted to leave his household. As night was falling, a man recognized Fatim's distress and offered to help her. Having no other options, Fatim went with him. He allowed her to use his phone to call her mother in Dakar to explain the situation. He told Mah that she needed to send him \$120 to get Fatim her paperwork.

I got a frantic phone call from Mah in the early hours of the morning; she was so distraught that I could hardly make out what she was saying. She shared what was going on and told me that she only had half the money for Fatim's paperwork and asked if I could loan her the other half. I assured her that we would help, and then together, we prayed for Fatim's safety.

Mah wired the money to the stranger at the border, and then it was two days of silence.

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Stories FROM THE FIELD



HANDS OF HONOR Fatima's Story - Part 2

by an Alliance Worker serving in West Africa

It wasn't until Fatim called her mom from the bus station in Dakar that we knew she was safe. The man hadn't gotten the appropriate paperwork, but in the dead of night, he snuck her across the border. Once in Senegal, he bribed someone to let her on a bus headed for Dakar. I spent a lot of time praying with my friend, Mah, in those days of waiting. She told me she felt God's peace when we prayed.

God revealed His care and concern for Mah by protecting her business. In all of the stress, one night she left the keys to her restaurant in the lock. She couldn't believe it when a neighbor she didn't even know returned them to her the next day without anything having been stolen. Extreme poverty is a reality my friend lives day in and day out. It forces her to make choices that you and I could never imagine.

Several months after arriving in Dakar, Mah hired out Fatim as a maid to a Senegalese family. I struggled with my friend's decision to put her daughter into child labor. Through Hands of Honor, I've been an advocate in my community against child labor and focused so much energy on bringing an end to it. I encouraged Mah not to go in this direction; I told her that Hands of Honor could help send Fatim to school, but Mah didn't need a daughter in school, she needed the \$45 a month that Fatim would make to pay her rent. The impact of the pandemic on her restaurant was making it difficult for her to make ends meet.

I made sure to keep in touch with Fatim and asked her often if she was treated fairly by her new employers. Our family's relationship with Mah and Fatim grew. They became more receptive to us sharing our relationship with Jesus; they asked us to pray for them and even joined us on Easter Sunday at our local church.

As the months passed, I assumed that the opportunity for Fatim to attend school was over until a recent visit with Mah. She was so discouraged. The rains had come in Dakar and with them, the unbearable living conditions in the slum community where Mah lives. She'd been in a relationship with a man who'd promised to marry her, but she'd recently come to realize that he was only using her. In our conversation, she looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "I don't care what it takes; I don't want this life for my daughter. Can you still get her into school this fall?"

I had a visit from Fatim yesterday. Grinning from ear to ear, she said to me, "Did you hear? I'm going to school!"

Your partnership and generosity with Hands of Honor allowed Fatim to enroll in a private vocational school in October 2021, where she is thriving and learning a skill set that will provide her with safe employment. Mah and Fatim are being disciplined weekly by Hands of Honor staff, and they are on a journey to Jesus.

Alliance Women encourages you to partner with Hands of Honor through your prayers and financial contributions. We have set a goal to raise \$25,000 to help Hands of Honor expand its ministry to young West African girls. For more information, please visit www.alliancewomen.org/give.



Stories FROM THE FIELD



HOPE HOUSE

Hope's Story

by an Alliance Worker in Eastern Europe

Hope is a 34-year-old Central Asian woman. When our director met her, Hope was in her 35th week of pregnancy and was determined not to keep her baby. The father was unwilling to have anything to do with her during the pregnancy, and he did not want to accept the child. Hope said she planned to leave the baby at the birthing hospital after delivery. She feared not only that her baby would never be accepted but also that with a newborn on her hands, she would be unable to continue supporting her family. Hope also worried that if her mother found out about her pregnancy, she might mistreat her other two children who were being cared for by her mother back in their homeland.

On October 16, 2020, Hope gave birth to a baby boy. The child was born early at 36 weeks. Though the labor was difficult, her shame and fear dissipated, and Hope changed her decision regarding giving up her child. During Hope's postpartum recovery, our staff remained in contact with her, taking baby items and supplies as needed. Hope was grateful for the help and support she received.

Our house mom continued to develop a relationship with Hope throughout 2021, bringing her groceries, counseling her, encouraging her, and providing advice. In April 2021, Hope made the decision to get trained as a manicurist so that she could support herself. Our house mom invited her to stay at Hope House during her two, 10-day training sessions. During that time, staff and volunteers helped care for the baby, paving the way to intentionally pursue deeper faith conversations. Hope commented that she had never experienced love like she received from our staff; she now considers our house mom to be like a mother to her.

We praise God that He is working in the life of this migrant mom, Hope. She has been afraid of the rejection and shame she might face if her family found out about her unplanned pregnancy. She asked the maternity home staff to pray for her situation, and God gave her the courage to tell her mom, who responded with great understanding. Pray that migrant moms like Hope would respond in faith and trust God with their whole life. Pray for our staff to have ongoing opportunities to share with other moms in crisis.

Alliance Women is committed to prayer and financial support for the Hope House maternity home ministry in Eastern Europe. We have set a goal to raise \$20,000 for this life-giving ministry to migrant women. To participate, please visit www.alliancewomen.org/give.



Stories FROM THE FIELD



HOPE HOUSE

Nicole's Story

by an Alliance Worker in Eastern Europe

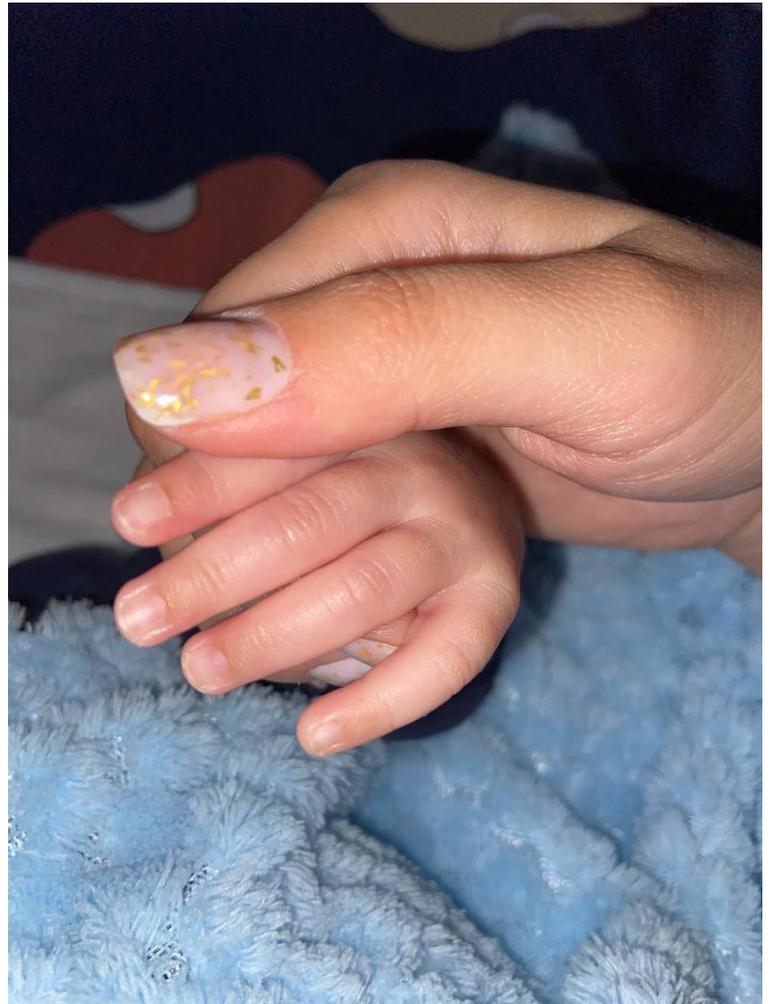
Nicole is a 38-year-old migrant mother who had a baby boy in October 2020. Soon after our more severe COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were lifted, Nicole moved into Hope House. Our staff began working with her on how to properly feed her newborn son. Nicole had been feeding him a diet of mashed potatoes and bananas, which had caused severe intestinal issues for the baby.

Nicole was also taken to a Christian clinic to receive medical care; she had a severe breakout on her face, which she had been improperly treating. There she was prescribed a proper treatment plan. During her time with us at Hope House, Nicole was able to hear the gospel many times.

Nicole had two other children (a teenager and an almost one-year-old) back in her home country who were being cared for by her mom. Both her daughter (17 years old) and her mom are Christians who had been praying that Nicole would be able to return home in time for her son's first birthday.

Nicole's daughter had been made fun of by classmates in school and mocked for her faith. "Where is your God?" they had laughed at her continuously, day after day. God in His compassion honored this teenager's prayers. Her mother, Nicole, boarded a flight back to her home country the day before her brother's birthday. Pray that Nicole will have an encounter with Jesus that would lead to saving faith.

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Stories FROM THE FIELD



HOPE HOUSE

Annie's Story

by an Alliance Worker in Eastern Europe

Annie, age 22, comes from a rough family background. Raised on the streets by alcoholic parents, she became a Christian when she was miraculously healed of a brain tumor. Annie moved to our metropolitan city to try to find work so that she could support her mom financially.

Annie was introduced to a young man who was the only son of a reputable family from her homeland. They got married, but only two weeks into the marriage, he started drinking and became physically violent. He refused to reform, deciding instead to return to their homeland.

Shortly after his departure, Annie discovered she was pregnant. Due to her previous brain tumor, Annie was not strong physically. She had a hard pregnancy. In early February 2022, after a difficult delivery, she gave birth to a baby boy, David.

Annie is not sure how she will be able to keep working to support herself. Fearing shame, Annie often suffers from panic attacks, yet she has been unwilling to reach out to other believers from her same ethnic background.

Our staff has provided help with practical and medical needs as well as spiritual and emotional support. Pray that Annie's family will find freedom from addiction and that they will experience healing in Jesus' name.

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Stories FROM THE FIELD



HOPE HOUSE

Maude's Story

by an Alliance Worker in Eastern Europe

Maude is a 32-year-old Central Asian woman who came to our big city with her two small children to join her husband. After arriving, she learned her husband had taken another wife. Their relationship became volatile, leading to a deep strain between them.

In a modern-day version of Rachel and Leah, Maude's husband had shown strong preferential treatment for his new, younger wife. Their family relationships were plagued by deceit, conflict, and some practices of witchcraft. However, in a conversation with her husband, Maude determined that he seemed to want to try to make the relationship work.

Maude decided to remain with her family, although she has struggled with pain and depression because of her situation. Our staff met Maude in person when they took her to a clothing ministry to find needed items for herself and her children. In addition, volunteers through a local church donated a stroller and more clothing for the family.

Both the director and house mom have remained in close contact with Maude, offering encouragement, support, and counsel. Recently, she learned that she was pregnant again and greatly feared her husband's reaction to the news. Unfortunately, she lost her baby in the early stages of pregnancy.

Pray for Maude and her husband's relationship. Above all, pray that Maude will find truth and freedom as Jesus' love is shown to her.

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Stories FROM THE FIELD



RAIN ALLIANCE

The Transformation from Stranger to Friend

by Irma Chon, RAIN Alliance, Hilliard, OH

Since 2010, Cornerstone Christian Fellowship (CCF), a C&MA church in Hilliard, OH, has been reaching out to local disadvantaged families, immigrants, and refugees. We have a team of dedicated volunteers who have been involved in building relationships and providing resources to underserved people. The following story is a testimony by one of our Welcome Team volunteers at CCF.

I am part of our church welcome team that is hosting a family from Afghanistan. It is a privilege to share a few of the experiences that I have had with our new Afghan friends that God has placed in our midst. I was one of the team members who met the family in December as they arrived at the house that God had found for them.

When our new Afghan friends arrived at their new home, we were all smiles. We were happy and excited to meet them! The family, however, was understandably fearful, apprehensive, and guarded. As we entered the house with them and walked into different rooms, the children began to let their guard down as they came upon various “kid-friendly” items. Their little faces lit up as they discovered coloring books, crayons, cars, trucks, backpacks, school supplies, and balloons. Before we knew it, they showed us their appreciation with great big hugs!

An interpreter and I gave the parents a tour of their new home. We pointed out several important features pertaining to the doors, windows, oven, dishwasher, and other appliances. Immediately, the wonderful parents made tea and prepared a plate of nuts and berries for us. They were saying “thank you” in a universal language—food!

While the adults were busy in the kitchen, I played with balloons with the kids, which brought forth giggles and laughter from them all. At this point, their parents clearly did not want me to leave. I sensed that they were not only feeling comfortable with me but were literally experiencing the love of Jesus in those moments and hearing our Father’s “welcome home.”

Since our first encounter, I have had the privilege of helping them on several occasions. Last week, I went to help the mother learn how to use the washing machine. When I got to their house, she was confused. She had a pile of dripping wet clothes and a washer half full of water.

Think about it. She didn’t know English, and I didn’t know Urdu, and the phone app that we used for translating gave us some very “funny” and misleading translations. We laughed our way through it and eventually celebrated our successful outcome—she was able to use her washing machine. We bonded as we persevered through a very ordinary process.

I am grateful that God has allowed me to demonstrate the love of Jesus to this precious family from the other side of the world and that He would use common, everyday situations to transform our relationship from stranger to friend.

Alliance Women is committed to prayer and financial support for the RAIN Alliance ministry in Ohio. We have set a goal to raise \$25,000 for this hands-on ministry to refugees. To participate, please visit www.alliancewomen.org/give.



Stories FROM THE FIELD



RAIN ALLIANCE The Simplicity of Friendship

by Irma Chon, RAIN Alliance, Hilliard, OH

Since 2010, Cornerstone Christian Fellowship (CCF), a C&MA church in Hilliard, OH, has been reaching out to local disadvantaged families, immigrants, and refugees. We have a team of dedicated volunteers who have been involved in building relationships and providing resources to underserved people. The following story is a testimony by one of our Welcome Team volunteers at CCF.

Many years ago, I heard an Alliance missionary say, "In the future, one of our largest mission fields will be among the immigrants and refugees coming to America." This has certainly proven true in our small, suburban church. We have had an active ministry with internationals in our community.



Arabic, Japanese, Latino, and Jordanian people have participated in our English conversation gatherings, community garden, farmers market, and Good Tidings Christmas Store. Now, we have an opportunity to welcome and support a refugee family from Afghanistan.

For many weeks, members of our Afghan welcome team underwent training, spent time in prayer on how to best help the family that God was going to send to us, and invested both time and money in furnishing a home for them. As part of the welcome team for an Afghan family, I was given the privilege to write a story about my interactions with the family.

In December, we welcomed a family—Daddy, Mama and five children ages 2, 5, 6, 8, and 10. They came with very few possessions and could speak very little English; however, with the help of Google Translate (which is not always successful), through body language, pointing, and lots of prayer on our part, we were able to communicate. There were humorous mix-ups, and I'm sure they sometimes thought that we were crazy Americans!

The day after they arrived, two of us took the children to a nearby playground. The family had been staying in a nearby hotel for several days. We had great fun getting to know one another. Shortly thereafter, I had a great time taking the children to the library and to a larger playground that the oldest girl called "a beautiful park." She also indicated I could be their "grandmother." That really touched my heart because they had to leave all their family and friends in Afghanistan.

This family's most important needs are learning English, getting the children into school, and finding a job for the father. Once the children get into school, I'm sure they will learn English quickly as they are already picking up words and phrases. The entire family is attending an ESL class two evenings a week, which provides childcare and teaching for children.

Also, because they live in a suburb, the family will need a vehicle as they are not within walking distance to grocery stores, doctors, etc.

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Stories FROM THE FIELD



RAIN ALLIANCE Good Soil

by Irma Chon, RAIN Alliance, Hilliard, OH



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As office administrator for CCF, I have been blessed with the privilege of getting to know and work with a beautiful young lady from Iraq for almost two years. I have been able to help her with any paperwork that she needs, etc. Even though she speaks very good English, her heart language is Arabic, and oftentimes she does not feel like her English is good enough verbally or on paper.

Throughout the time that I have worked with this amazing woman, I have never seen her without a smile on her face and a good word to say. Even when chemo treatments have at times left her weak, she has remained kind, encouraged, and full of hope. It has truly humbled me to see her genuine love and hospitality in serving others. When you go to her home (no matter how she feels), you are greeted with tea and various cookies, candy, or nuts.

Every Sunday, she brings coffee and tea, and most of the time, donuts, to offer the people at church after the church service. She is participating on the welcome team for our Afghan family and has volunteered to work in our church nursery as she is able.

The word “survivor” means different things to different people. To this young lady, it means that she hopes to be able to support herself and take care of her two beautiful children and see them grow into strong individuals with a solid trust in God and faith in Jesus Christ. I have come to know and love this courageous woman who I feel like our Lord refers to as “good soil.”

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Stories FROM THE FIELD



SCHOLARSHIPS

Eric's Story

by Eric Carpenter

My name is Eric Carpenter. My family lives in Kansas City, MO. I've been married to my beautiful wife, Terry, for the past eight years. Four years ago, God called us to plant a church with another family. Through the process of pastoring this church in downtown Kansas City and going through the pandemic in 2020, we decided that we wanted to benefit the church in another way.

God opened the door for me to get some training in counseling through Crown College. I hope to graduate from this program in the next two years and continue with full-time pastoral ministry. I am thankful for Alliance Women. I have received a forgivable loan through past gifts of Alliance Women to multicultural ministries.

My future hope is to serve the church well through one-on-one counseling, marriage counseling, and whatever else is necessary to grow healthy disciples in our Christ-centered, Acts 1:8 family.

Alliance Women is committed to continually support the efforts of the Multicultural Ministries Office (MCM) of Church Ministries. Starting in the summer of 2022, MCM will begin hosting leadership development cohorts for Next-Gen leaders selected from the U.S. C&MA's ethnically based districts (4) and associations (10). We desire to see younger, ethnic leaders prepared to serve God in The Alliance. The cohorts will meet three times during an 18-month period. Each cohort meeting will be in the format of a three-day retreat.



Alliance Women has set a goal to raise \$25,000 to cover the expenses of one retreat. To participate in giving, visit www.alliancewomen.org/give. We also encourage your prayer support. Please be praying for the MCM Next-Gen Leadership Cohort participants and instructors.

Bio: Eric brings leadership and vision to the scattered church at Citylight KC Church. Eric graduated with his doctorate from Alliance Theological Seminary. Before planting Citylight KC, Eric led the local missions team at Christ Community Church in Omaha, NE, for eight years. He and his wife, Terry, have four children. Eric and Terry love spending time traveling, going on dates, and rooting on the Chiefs and Huskers!