

*Lord, You know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will listen to their cries and comfort them. You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed, so people can no longer terrify them*

Psalm 10: 17-18 (NLT).

**R**efugee and immigrant children are those who, for various reasons, are living away from their home areas. Immigrant children have parents who have chosen to take up permanent residence in another country in hopes of having a better life. Refugee children are defined by international law as those who are unable or unwilling to return to their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or social group.

The UNHCR paints a graphic word picture that gives us a deeper understanding of the meaning and plight of becoming a refugee or perhaps leading one to become an immigrant.

Imagine that you're living in a remote rural village, quietly preparing the midday meal. Its aroma mingles with the wood smoke that rises slowly in the still air. Your family will be in from the fields soon, clamoring to be fed. Life is hard, you think, but good.

Suddenly, the peace is shattered, Hooves thunder, bullets fly, machetes flash, houses crack and burn. Terrified, you run like you've never run before, barefoot, into the stony desert, praying you're not being pursued. Days go by. Bruised and bleeding, racked with thirst, you scabble in the dirt for roots and insects. You've reached the end of your endurance.

Then, miraculously, you hear kind, reassuring voices. You're given food, water and the shelter of a tent. You look around. As far as the eye can see stand



thousands just like you—alone, bewildered, but safe. Yes, you are a refugee. You have nothing. Nothing, that is, except the one possession that nobody can take away: hope. The indestructible hope of one day finding a place to rebuild your life. A place to call home.

Latest statistics (UN) count 50 million people around the world who could be described as victims of forced displacement:

- 14 million are refugees who have fled their countries due to civil wars and ethnic, tribal and religious violence and who cannot return home
- 6.6 million are internally displaced persons—people forced to flee their homes, but who have not crossed a border
- 2.4 million are stateless people
- 1.6 million are returnees
- 773,000 are asylum seekers
- 960,000 are others of concern

Sandee Sledd, a children's pastor serving refugee and immigrant children in Atlanta's International Village, takes us inside the lives of immigrant children whose caregivers have chosen America as their place of refuge. She emphasizes the imperative of understanding an immigrant child's culture and personal life experiences in their home country. By discovering and understanding this requisite, one can learn to touch the heart of a child and minister to him or her on the deepest level. Cherilyn Orr, missionary to refugee children in Athens and Canada, describes three Sudanese children's process of acclimatizing to a new culture as they adjusted to life in a strange culture. She also highlights the struggles project leaders face when working with refugee children.

In Caregivers' Time-out, Laura Dewing takes us to Jericho as she shares from her heart a lesson the Lord taught her on "both hope and quietly wait." What a much-needed recipe for busy, harried caregivers!

Keep the resources, articles and feedback coming in. Let us know what issues you would find helpful for us to address. And, do search out the immigrant or refugee children in your areas who need a compassionate touch.

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# REACHING A CHILD ON THE REFUGEE HIGHWAY

4 million children on a journey to refuge

—Cherilyn Orr

Over half of the 8.2 million refugees in the world are children, according to the United Nations (unhcr.ch). They leave behind war, famine or persecution in search of a safe home, but often they encounter similar traumas in the transit countries, temporary homes en route to their final destination. The route they follow in search for safety is called the “refugee highway” (refugeehighway.net).

The journey often takes several years, producing a migrant community of children in crisis who grow up in an environment of chaos and ongoing trauma.

## SIMILARITIES TO OTHER CHILDREN IN CRISIS

A refugee child has many of the same needs as any child in crisis. The theories and strategies used for one, will often be applicable and effective for the other. Refugee children have experienced extensive loss and will be going through the grief process and exhibiting similar characteristics to any traumatized child: loss of trust, fear, limited concentration, inability to play and developmental delay.

## UNIQUE NEEDS

However, there are differences. Unique challenges such as transience, the presence of multiple languages and cultures, the involvement of all family members and the reality of ongoing trauma will affect the programs and strategies used. Each of these challenges will be discussed below and practical ideas suggested.

## TRANSIENT POPULATION

No one group of refugees is the same as another. The country and culture they represent and the trauma they are fleeing influence the issues they face. In a transit country, the specific refugee population will change with the current world crisis.

- Conduct a needs assessment interview with families before implementing your program, paying special attention to their current transit country context.
- Design the program to be responsive to changes in the population and their needs.

As a family navigates the refugee highway, children may be part of your program for a day or a year. Often they have had little or no formal schooling because of their transient lifestyle.

- Previous attendance should not be essential for involvement or understanding of the current lesson/activity.
- Make each day’s lesson/activity self-contained.
- Provide informal schooling that focuses on life skills (e.g., reading, writing, ESL, counting, making change, filling out a form or practical skills such as sewing or carpentry).

## MULTIPLE LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Refugees arrive from all over the world, which means that numerous cultures and languages are present. This creates obvious challenges in communication. How do you tell a Bible story to children representing nine different languages and countries?

- Keep everything simple.
- Use repetition.
- Model all activities.
- Sing! Songs are a wonderful tool to gather a crowd, make a transition, communicate truth, or just have fun.

**Warning:** When the wrong song is used it can be a waste of time, confusing, or even harmful. The child’s culture and the trauma she has endured should influence the songs chosen. Many Sunday school songs are not relevant or true for a refugee child. Be aware of songs that use abstract concepts or concepts to which these children cannot relate. Do not sing, “*God is good...He’s so good to me.*” Although this is an absolute truth, it is not an evident truth to a child who has endured trauma. Songs like “*I’m in the Lord’s army,*” and “*The blood of Jesus washes me white as snow...*” could have negative implications for a child traumatized by war and/or may be too graphic for children who have seen blood that was spilled in violence, not love. The words that remain with a child need to be the trustworthy promises that God Himself has given us. “*He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands*” reminds us that God is in control no matter who or where we are, as does “*Great Big God*” (Nigel Hemming, Jo Hemming, [www.vineyardmusic.com](http://www.vineyardmusic.com))

- Use a variety of visual aids.
- Know *what* your refugee children are fleeing from and present your Bible story in an appropriate context.

Telling the story of Joseph and emphasizing how *he* was good and helpful in hardship could be construed as condemning to a child who is actively working through the anger stage of the grief process. However, using Joseph's story to point out that even though he was a refugee and in prison God was with him and loved him in the midst of his trauma will bring home the point that God is with them and loving them too.

**THE FAMILY IN CRISIS:**

Refugee families have learned that it is not safe to trust others, and that temporary separation can become permanent. One little girl I knew crossed the border with an older sister, three people ahead of her parents in the queue. Suddenly the border closed behind her. It was the last she ever saw of them. Respect this need for families to stick together in your program.

- Design programs that are inter-generational. Don't push to separate siblings or parents for *your* convenience.
- Meet the needs of the whole family. Provide food, clothing, help filling out forms and resources to navigate government bureaucracies.
- Have used clothes for mothers to pick through during the children's games and stories.
- Organize a "family fun night" where the whole family comes for a picnic and outside games at a local park.
- Provide chairs at the back of the room for mothers. Serve them tea, while children do crafts and songs at the front.

**ONGOING TRAUMA:**

Refugee children have no permanent home, little food and few clothes or possessions. During our ministry in Athens we realized that the children weren't starving, but they were malnourished. So we began each activity with a snack of fruit, vegetables and milk. As well as poverty, ongoing trauma exists due to the uncertainty of both the present and the future.

- Provide food. Children's behavior improves when their stomachs are full. The food doesn't have to be complex or expensive. Rather, focus on filling nutritional gaps.
- Consider hanging children's artwork on the walls of your center. They may have no home in which to display it, and you have an opportunity to show a child he has value.
- Create comfort kits of "things" children can call their own. This gift helps anchor their identity to something tangible

**Comfort Kit**

Essentials	Rationale
Backpack	To keep all "their" stuff in
Flashlight	Decrease fear in the dark
Stuffed Animal	A safe thing to love
Paper/Crayons/Markers	To express emotions that may not be verbalized

**CONCLUSION:**

Working with a transient population whose needs are many can be frustrating. Don't despair. Even a small difference you make in a child's life can impact her for a lifetime. In Athens I developed the following philosophy: With each child,

*Build a positive memory today,  
Create dreams for tomorrow, and  
Hope for the future.*

*Cherilyn, her husband and three school-aged children live in Toronto, Canada. Her experience working in Africa, with refugee children in Greece and now as an Inner-City Children's Pastor in Toronto have fitted her well for producing her book titled "Creating Hope for Children in Crisis - A Practical Manual."*

**COMING SOON**

*Creating Hope for Children in Crisis: A practical manual, by Cherilyn Orr, Anne Jones and Wendy Leaver.*

For more information contact Cherilyn Orr at <markcher@yahoo.com>

**EVENTS**



GATEWAY Missionary Training Centre is offering training sessions using the *Offering Healing and Hope for Children in Crisis, Module 1, Trauma and Crisis Care*, September 25-29, 2006. GATEWAY is located in Surrey, BC, Canada. For further information contact: Adrienne Pilkey <nakimuli@email.com> or Trudy Agawin <info@gatewaytraining.org>



The Eastern European Summit for Children at Risk will be held in Moscow and Vladimir this fall, November 10-14. The event will focus on post-orphanage transition programs, including foster care, ministry centers, and live-in programs. This will be the first gathering of its kind in Russia with leading western and national orphan-care organizations participating. Specific information on registration

Creating a mosaic of immigrant children in her neighborhood,  
**SANDEE SLEDD** outlines some challenges in ministering to

# AMERICA'S CULTURAL PETRI DISH

In 1998 I chose to cross borders, intentionally moving from an upper middle class suburb to a multi-cultural neighborhood. My immediate neighbors are Mexican, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Native-born American, African-American who immigrated from a country in Africa and a family from Jamaica. You might say it is "a cultural Petri dish." Language barriers are our most obvious hurdle.

Living among these immigrants helps me understand my cultural filters. My ability to take risks has broadened.

*My life is exciting, involved with a multi-cultural ministry as well as a multi-cultural church.*

Research done by *InFocus* shows "one in five children in America lives in an immigrant family." "The poverty rate of children in immigrant families is 21 per cent, as against 14 percent for children in native-born families. Nearly one half of children in immigrant families have family incomes below 200 percent of poverty, compared with only 34 percent of native-born children. Children and their parents from Mexico, Asia, Central America and the Caribbean, tend to be poorly educated. In spite of these statistics, we find some exciting strengths about these immigrants.

Immigrant children have a strong sense of family connections. Once they grasp English, they tend to do well in elementary school, have a strong work ethic and are healthy.

Not all immigrant children should be put "in the same basket," as my mother would say.

The experiences of the child from India whose parent is a doctor or technology consultant is very different from a Mexican child.

## IMMIGRANT CHILDREN FROM INDIA

An article in the August, 2006, issue of *LITTLE INDIA* states that first generationals are moving into the suburbs and not into immigrant clusters. Cities with high-tech industries are a lure for a diverse population. When I speak to the young adults from India they tell me of their "bipolar" experiences. They are moving beyond learning the Western accents to becoming "more direct" in their conversations, taking classes to learn how to be more service-oriented and be a part of an innovative global leadership team. Their children are not concerned about *survival* as are many other immigrant children. The pressures on the immigrant child from India are on performance. You must measure up. You must go to college. You must become a professional.

Parents of immigrant children from India, though they do not understand our educational system, will be at the school conferences. Many children from India proudly tell you they do not eat meat. They attend the local temple, worship a variety of gods and are part of a larger community who share family experiences such as weddings and parties. My experience is that for the most part, the immigrant child from India is a happy child.

## LATINO IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

Down the road from where I live are rows and rows of older apartment complexes. Cross-Cultural Ministries, Inc. operates a

ministry from an apartment there. Even though the area is called "The International Village," the population has become predominantly Latino. Across the USA Latinos make up the second largest population group. These children have had much different experiences from other immigrant children when they "crossed the border."

Estimates show that 5.1 million children in this country are from Mexico. In school, because of the "No Child Left Behind" educational law, these children are expected to meet the same academic benchmarks as English-proficient children.

Most immigrant children with whom I work are from households of very limited education in their native language and little English proficiency. Their school experiences are unique. Because they are often the second largest language group, they have a larger community of friends at school. Many teachers have learned Spanish and communicate in the children's native language, making their transition easier. However, most of these children have no educational support from home. School information is translated into Spanish but many of the parents cannot read and although the children can speak Spanish they cannot read it. The school where I work sends correspondence home with English on one side and Spanish on the other, so at least the older children can read the information.

The newest Latino children are on the free breakfast and lunch program at school. Work for the parents is difficult and the days are long. The older children are the caregivers for the younger children. Parents can often be seen with their children, walking and carrying bags of groceries home from the market.

Healthcare for Latinos is better than for many other language groups. Some reforms bar many illegal immigrants from federally-funded health programs. However, most Latino children I know receive adequate health services.

I love their parties. They are colorful, with an abundance of food and the music creates a climate of joy. Families transform a carport or driveway into a festive atmosphere. Their parties are intergenerational with games, dancing and laughter.

#### **ASIAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN**

My neighbors from Asia tend to be “lumped together.” Many of the children from Southeast Asia do not have a strong safety net. Their parents were not true immigrants but refugees as children. They suffered tremendously as children and have many unresolved issues. No holistic services were available for the refugees when they came to the United States. They work in dead-end jobs in factories and the work is exhausting. I see many depressed parents children.

*America isn't what they thought it would be. The road has been long and hard and they are tired.*

Even though first-generation Asian-Americans were born in the U.S., they often are treated as immigrant children. They still struggle with educational issues. Many of their parents do not understand enough English to help them with homework. School correspondence is not translated into the parents' native language. Children again act as translators for their parents. They are embarrassed that their parents know so little English. Many drop out of high school.

A large percentage of immigrant children from Chinese and Korean families in Atlanta have parents who were educated in America. Immigrant children from wealthier families benefit from a “network” that explores the best schools. (There also may be cultural, economic and other enrichment program networks.) The parents are optimistic because of the opportunities they know exist in America. They might express a de-

sire for their children to go to Yale or Harvard. The pressure on these children in school is performance. They must keep their GPA up and do well in every scholastic area. They must not let their parents down.

The immigrant children from Chinese or Korean families with limited education and/or English skills are outside the ethnic network. The parents' goal for their children, however, is still for them to succeed and excel even though they are unable to help them with homework. They expect their children to use their time wisely and cram. Often the summers for these children consist of helping their parents in the restaurant or bakery.

Regardless of the economic situation, in my opinion, the Chinese and Korean children have limited exposure to different cultures and life experiences. From close-knit families—Americans would call them controlling families—they attend a Chinese or Korean church, visit a Chinese or Korean doctor, shop at Chinese or Korean stores and eat Chinese and Korean food.

At one of our elementary schools, a “Chinese” bus picks up about 25 Chinese children after school, takes them to the “Chinese Day Care where they learn a Chinese language, practice Chinese dance and do their homework.

#### **IMPACT ON YOUR MINISTRY**

How will these life experiences of the immigrant child impact your ministry? Begin by searching your own heart. A ministry among immigrant children living in America is very different from the children's ministry of an established church or from reaching a child who lives in another country. It isn't “Oh, let's bring those immigrant children to church and tell them about Jesus!” or filling them with the knowledge of God and memorizing scripture or playing exciting games.

Multi-dimensional, this ministry is about learning to touch the

heart of the child with the words of our Lord and ministering to the child on the deepest levels.

Culture has been defined as “the set of values, attitudes and practices held in common by a group of people.” Usually these are defined by traditions, language and ancestry. I believe it is imperative to take the time to research the opportunities, problems and challenges the immigrant children in your area are facing. Language issues will be different here in the U.S. Ancestry will mean something different in their new country. Values and attitudes will change. Culture can become very blurred.

Consider two children from the same family. One child was born in a foreign country and then immigrated here with the parents. The younger sibling is born in America of these same immigrant parents. That child will not have an experience of moving to a strange country, learning a new language and leaving family and friends behind. Yet, frequently we treat them the same.

How will you deal with the immigrant family's maintenance of the culture of origin? What opinions will you form when you see immigrant children functioning in adult roles for their parents in this new land? What will be your level of respect for parents who do not take the time to learn English, resulting in mounting pressure on the children? How will you feel when scores at the school your children attend begin to drop because of poor performance due to the influx of immigrant children? How do you feel about the reshaping of your community?

Children of immigrants are the fastest growing component of the child population in the United States. Ministering to immigrant child is complex and demanding. Will we take the time, make the effort to prepare and go to tell them about Jesus?

# CAREGIVER'S TIME-OUT

—Laura Dewing



**T**he scene: Jericho city—walled in, tight and secure. Within—the enemy firmly planted, ready to fight. Without—the children of Israel, the men of war, men of God *and* the Lord, mighty in battle, strong in defense.

**The action:** walk around the city once a day, quietly, without speaking or making any noise—except for the trumpet players. On the seventh day—repeat performance, but this day march around seven times. The seventh time around—listen for the trumpet sounding the battle cry. Then, SHOUT the victory, and watch the walls fall down before you. Move forward onto enemy territory to take the land.

**The lesson:** Both hope *and* quietly wait on the Lord

Persistence pays as we ask again and again for the Lord to move in the battle that is coming against us. Too often, though, we come before Him crying out in despair, uttering a lot of words, demanding an answer, insisting that the Lord tell us the why's of the battles in our lives, or in the lives of those for whom we are concerned. We merely mourn because of the oppression of the enemy. Our eyes are on the enemy. Our minds are trying to figure out how to get out of the battle, or we are cast down because the enemy has taken control

How, then, may we appropriately persist in coming before the Lord time after time concerning the

same issue, the same battle, the same need? Instead of coming with vain repetitions and wringing of the hands because the situation looks hopeless, we approach Him with calm assurance. We hope against hope, believing in hope because we know the Lord is faithful to His Word, and able to lead us through. We both hope *and* quietly wait upon Him. We merely rest at His feet and wait, pouring out our devotion on Him rather than writhing in despair. Coming with this attitude makes us ready to run through the troops and leap over the walls.

As the children of Israel circled the wall day after day, the trumpets were playing. What did the Lord tell them to do now? Go home? Continue to fret and despair? Mourn because of the oppression of the enemy? Lift the white flag and surrender to the enemy? NO! He told them to go out onto the battlefield, face the enemy and merely sing and praise God in the beauty of holiness. Obediently, the children of Israel circled the enemy territory as the music played unto the Lord.

As we hope and quietly wait, we may pray as did Jehoshaphat in his battle. (Read about it in 2 Chronicles 20.) He cried out to the Lord, "O Lord, wilt Thou not judge them, for we have no might against this great company that comes against us, neither know we what to do: *but* our eyes are on Thee" (Verse 20, emphasis mine).

Right now two of my friends are facing a horrendous, nightmarish trial that seems to be

increasing in hopelessness day after day. This couple has such a sweet first love for the Lord and a devoted love for each other. Their eyes are on the Lord, trusting Him to bring them through this battle, though there seems no way. The lesson on Jericho ministered deeply to me to continue coming before the Lord for this precious couple. I'm encouraged to continue to believe in hope, having my eyes on Him and His Word.

A statement in Jeremiah 51:58 (KJV) about a particular man really stirs me: "And this Seraiah was a quiet prince." Oh, that I might have that quiet spirit of assurance and trust, as I both hope and quietly wait on the Lord.

*Laura received Jesus as her Savior and "treasure" in 1962. "Children have a very special place in my heart," she says. "I know the Lord is touched by the plight of so many little ones. Proverbs 31:8-9 is a fitting verse in reaching out to them."*

## NEWS



VIVA Network has started "Children at Risk Prayer News," a fortnightly e-mail publication aimed at recruiting prayer support for Christians around the world involved in projects to help children who are living in vulnerable circumstances.



Some educational Web sites and good links for children's ministry helps:

kidinfo.com  
sitesforteachers.com  
teachers.net  
pbskids.org



Crisis Care Training International is a ministry of WEC International. Phyllis Kilbourn, Director <crisiscare@comporium.net> Marjorie McDermid, editing and layout