

MCC: Summer Service Worker in California offers compassionate help for migrant families

By Julie DeLuca

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REEDLEY, Calif. -- When Claudia Jiménez meets immigrant families at West Coast Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)'s office, she remembers her own experience of becoming a legal resident of the United States.

"I know what they're going through; I know how they feel and I let them know that," said Jiménez, an MCC Summer Service Worker who helps undocumented workers, often families from Latin America, to apply for legal status in the U.S.

Families who come for assistance often seem worried about the process of immigration. "By my experience, I think it's real important to let them see that they feel important to you. That you're helping them, that they're important to be helped."

Jiménez, a social work major at Reedley College, acts as a liaison between the families and legal representatives. She translates information, helps them to fill out official documents and often drives them to and from court.

Jiménez was born in Mexico and moved with her parents to Fowler, Calif., when she was 6 years old.

When she was 8, she and her mother had to return to Mexico to fulfill the United States immigration requirements. To do so meant separation from her father, who moved back and forth between the two countries every six months to provide support for his family.

"It was really difficult because I had to leave just when I was getting used to being here at the United States. At that point, I felt really confused on what was going on -- if I was going to stay at Mexico or I was going to come back," Jiménez said.

Jiménez and her mother remained in Mexico until they received their permanent residency cards three years later. Jiménez came back to the U.S. as a permanent resident when she was 11 years old.

"When I came back to the USA I remember that I was really happy because my family was going to be together because since my dad was always in this country and he would just go back to see us," she said.

Jiménez heard about the help provided by MCC through her aunt, who came for assistance with her documentation.

She recently sought the office's help to apply for citizenship and learned about the Summer Service program. Now a U.S. citizen, Jiménez reaches out to other immigrant families.

"Claudia being an immigrant herself and having to go through the immigration process makes her sensitive and very compassionate to the struggles of immigrant families," said Miriam Cárdenas, Immigration and Documentation Coordinator for West Coast MCC.

The MCC office is located in Reedley, California, a town where over half of the population consists of Spanish-speaking people. The immigration program's primary focus is to assist those within the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ communities in Central California.

Cárdenas said the work at the office extends beyond helping the families apply for legal status in the U.S. She desires Christ's love to shine through her and wonders, "Those who are not legal, will they know that they're loved?"

"God plays a big role in here," said Jiménez. The stories of the people who come into the office have a differing rhythm but are all connected to the same need -- and serve the same God, she said. "He keeps us all together."

Julie DeLuca is a summer writing intern for MCC.