

Caring: Providing Meaningful Support for Your LTCCW

By Lydia Reynolds and Jerry Reddix

After you have selected and sent your Long-Term Cross-Cultural Worker (LTCCW), the fun begins. You will begin to see lives changed and hear about God's miracles. But what makes for these kinds of results is ongoing care from you – the sending structure.

Ongoing care need not be difficult. In fact, it's easy to overlook. Churches can be so busy with what is in front of them that ongoing support gets set aside. You may think that your LTCCW seems to be doing fine, but how much better could he be if he had more attention from you! What you put into it will be what you get out of it.

Provide Continual and Relevant Support

First and most obvious, you need to make sure you provide continual and relevant support for your LTCCW. Examine the topics discussed in the "Sending" article as well as the items listed in this website's checklist. Some LTCCWs will need more care, and different types of care. It will take focused effort from the support structure to identify what types of care are needed. A five-minute meeting will not do it. Continually checking to see how the LTCCW is doing will help you assess any ongoing needs they may have. Let's examine some of those key areas.

Keep in mind his significant relationships – is he married, in a team, in a family, or by himself? Considering his partner status and his needs, next you'll need to make sure that someone in the sending structure can speak directly to his needs and is willing to do so. If he's a single man in Bangkok, perhaps the singles pastor could familiarize himself with the challenges facing men in that city, and then keep regular contact to counsel and provide accountability to the LTCCW. Some sending structures prefer to have training for the LTCCW's care providers. The Vineyard Missions website lists resources for this level of care, sometimes called Member Care or Pastoral Care. Also, consider the care providers who have offered services that are specific to the needs of your LTCCW. For instance, "Link Care and Healing for the Nations" specializes in caring for LTCCWs in particularly emotional stressful situations.

Care for Family and Close Friends

Another significant way to care for your LTCCW is to care for his family and close friends. They may be rocked with news about the country, such as crime reports or natural disaster news, so be sure to care for them as you would want others to care for your family if you were gone. Consider which specific expressions of care are appropriate for the individuals involved, such as phoning them regularly or sending a parent to visit the LTCCW. This can also include caring for the LTCCW's family at difficult times in their lives, for example sickness, job loss, financial difficulty, divorce, death, etc.

My church has supported Jack and Kate as LTCCWs to the underground church in China for a number of years. They are a young couple who train Christians about Scriptural truths, Vineyard teachings, church planting, leadership and more. They have had some

frightening experiences in their ministry, but they are energized for their project. In fact, they just had their second baby! The church sent Jack's mother, who is a member of our church, to visit during that time. His mother brought him some needed materials, returned with an enthusiastic report on the project, and the LTCCWs felt incredibly cared for.

I saw Jack's mother in church last week. She was beaming. The church helped her install Skype on her computer and she listened to her grandson call her "Grammie" for the first time.

Consider Your Own Limitations

The sending structure will also want to consider its own needs, as it applies to their caring ability. If the sending structure feels like it is unprepared to care in these ways, than training a few church members to care for the LTCCW can be useful. Some churches encourage their small groups to adopt a LTCCW to focus their prayer for, correspond with, send care packages to and help organize events for the LTCCW's return home.

Look for Training Opportunities and Resources

The Vineyard USA Missionary Care Team can assist with training the members of your sending structure who are the most appropriate for the job. They may want additional training in keeping regular communication with the LTCCW: the methods, the frequency and the message. They may want training in how to mentor a LTCCW who is far away, and knowledge about the country which Vineyard experts can offer. They may want training in what kinds of systems have proven successful as a prayer support group: frequency, formality, etc. Finally, they may want training in debriefing your LTCCW after a crisis event or a normal end-of-term review. Since these are significant times for the LTCCW, providing trained care may be in order.

At this point you may want to evaluate the role of Vineyard Missions. Missionary Care Teams are designed and ready to visit your LTCCW on the field or at home if he needs care which your sending structure feels is beyond your ability or availability. Vineyard Missions feels it is more important that the LTCCW gets the help he needs through the available assistance than to just trust that he'll be able to handle the challenges of his new life alone.

Consult a Support Specialist

Then there's the simple but crucial details of daily living for which your LTCCW will need continual support. A good option to consider for your caring team is the support specialist. Think of who is willing to partner with you for ongoing or special needs of your LTCCW. Financial planners or experts can aid greatly with international financial issues. Legal and security advisors are others who are good to have on the team.

Relevant to that is the education expert. Any parent cares about his child, so ease his concern with this step. Be sure to have educational specialists ready to advise your LTCCW about educational options and educational tracks. Home schooling, local schooling and boarding school are all good options, but have someone available to talk

your LTCCW through that decision. Your LTCCW will also likely have questions during the educational process that an expert will be best able to answer, so have one ready.

Medical and mental health care professionals can be valuable helpers. It's good to have a listening ear, but if a LTCCW saw gruesome events in the midst of war, she may benefit from an understanding Christian psychologist or psychotherapist. And some medical issues will be overlooked unless a medical expert is available for email consult or preparedness when the LTCCW returns. Doctors or travel nurses with whom your LTCCW can correspond may identify infections much more quickly if they know what kind of medical knowledge to research before the home visit. This may save time, money and unnecessary tests.

Another method of healing is going straight to the Healer. Prayer and healing ministries can be of great use to your LTCCW, and those trained in deliverance and healing may be called upon. They may be used in intercessory prayer as well, especially if the LTCCW is not home yet.

A situation where support specialists can be of particular use is during crises. Having an effective crisis response for missing people, hostage and natural disaster events can be priceless. Your pastor is likely too busy to take on the overwhelming task of dealing with the legal and family issues of your LTCCW being kidnapped by the Taliban. Don't wait for the crisis to have a plan in place of who will head this, and don't hesitate to designate an outside specialist for that role. Likewise, trauma debriefers are specialized professionals who have training on dealing with major crises. Don't hesitate to have one on deck in case of emergency.

I'll never forget Uganda 1997 when I, as a journalist, was interviewing missionaries who had just been evacuated from the Congo. They literally ran away from rebels with only portions of the Bible they'd translated. Many of their African colleagues had been murdered. During an interview with one man, extreme reactions of grief, rage, bitterness and displacement made an unforgettable impression on my mind. Although it's highly unlikely that you will go through something as extreme as this, it is important to realize that your LTCCW will want to share his story with your church and may need some special care in processing it first. In fact, many NGOs require their workers who have been in the field for a certain amount of time to go through counseling. See the website for more details on how your church and the Missionary Care Team can care for your LTCCW in this way.

Keep in mind that your church, as well as the global Vineyard family, has many resources available to help you provide quality care for your LTCCW. The Vineyard Missions team is standing by to provide answers and resources for your success. Be sure to follow the steps in the checklist and call us any time. And be sure to enjoy the ride!