

## Introduction

This month's Educare contains two articles: one on church mission partnership, and the other the personal story of an adult TCK. Much of the content of the first article is derived from a Global Connections day conference held in the UK at Birmingham organised by the inter-agency core group.

## Church-Mission partnership in TCK care

A range of support structures is needed in order to provide the best possible support for a missionary family. *Sending out a family needs a range of support structures to work best.* This multiple support can come from sending churches and missions partnering together from the beginning.

Increasingly we are seeing some workers go as almost total independents. The attrition rate of totally independent workers is very high, and early casualties are common. The lack of support or accountability, combined with often rushed and poor planning, all combine to make such independence difficult to sustain. One organisation working with families from new sending countries noted that some families had arrived overseas just a month after the parents made the decision to go. The consequences of the very high failure rate for the children are enormous, with educational disruption, poor transition experiences and severe behaviour disturbances. This is an avoidable scenario if more effort is put into developing good sending partnerships before going.

A much more common growing trend is that churches are sending directly. This can work very well if certain pitfalls are avoided. One of the biggest is that there is often a duplication of effort with many workers ending up in the same Christianised parts of the world, missing out on unreached areas. However, from our perspective of caring for MKs, a serious early mistake can be that there is a lack of training and preparation for the family going out. In a minority of cases there are sending church leaders who have an inbuilt mistrust of Christian training colleges and missions. More often though, the need for training and preparation simply does not occur to the family or the church leaders. Few churches have all of the relevant expertise to do the training themselves, but even when some expertise is present, it is all too common to find that it is not used.

### Case study

One church that we know of was about to send a family for at least a year to a developing country to work with local Christians in Bible teaching. No real thought was given to any training on transition or preparation for the family, including the children, and there was a total absence of any well-thought-out plan for education, including a reserve option if using the local school did not work out. This church had members who were experienced field workers with their own children. It was only when those experienced people took the initiative and recommended training and preparation that action was taken. Even then the church leaders did not initially see the full relevance of what was being proposed. However, the preparatory training took place in individual sessions with the family. Once

this started, all concerned appreciated how necessary it was, and saw the long-term difference that it would make - and did make when the family arrived.

The same lack of support can show up later as well, with little contact or obvious pastoral care while the family are living overseas, and a poor understanding of the effects of re-entry. So many do not know about these basic and necessary concerns for the children, with the result that sometimes little or nothing is done. It can be easy for some sending leaders to see the assignment simply in terms of money. This mindset that providing enough money solves all the other problems affects the corporate world to the detriment of many TCKs growing up in it. Many church leaders come from that kind of world and are affected by that thinking.

That said, the best churches that send directly know these pitfalls and work hard to avoid them. Recognising the need for specialist expertise, they often link up with missions and other organisations to get the best training and support without forming specific partnerships.

Another common approach historically was of the mission sending with the church having little or no input. This has pitfalls of its own. With the church not really involved, there is no chance for the development of a collective mission vision. Biblically the sending church is the pattern, not just missions supported by small groups of enthusiasts. Inevitably, if church leaders and members are isolated from the sending process, there is no sense of ownership or involvement. This leads to low levels of pastoral, prayer and practical support at all stages from sending, on-field service and home leave through to re-entry.

### Case Study

One family went into mission back in the 1980s sent out from a church via a mission agency. Although there was some involvement of the church, it was clear that the mission controlled the process, occasionally informing the church leadership of developments. The church had no say in the training and placement of the family, although to some extent recognising their lack of experience they were quite happy to hand things over. While the family worked overseas and during home leave there was minimal contact between the church and mission, with neither side initiating anything other than one visit when a mission leader was staying nearby already. Despite the parents' efforts, the church didn't really take them on, with low levels of financial support, sporadic prayer backing and a handful of enthusiasts interested in the work. Eventually the small amount of financial support dwindled to nothing and left the family with no sending church. Because of this, their re-entry was more problematic with a very limited budget to work with and the need to rebuild their lives in another area.

A much better model is that the church sends and the mission enables that process by providing sending, on-field and re-entry support structure, training, guidance, and advice. This is all achieved by setting up and maintaining good working and friendship-based partnerships.

Our premise is that in order to provide the best care for families, churches and missions need each other. However, it can sometimes be tricky to work in close co-operation. One leader likened it to a couple trying to get their in-laws together. Just as the two families to be linked together by the marriage have different inbuilt assumptions and traditions, so do organisations, including churches and missions. Those differences mean that a good working relationship is not automatic, and has to be worked at. Add in the often strong-willed "couple", and the possibility for

something to go wrong is high. However, by God's grace and with a determination to partner together for the sake of the Gospel, we can - and must - make it work.

Working together means that the family, including the children, get the best of the knowledge, wisdom and expertise in both the mission agency and the church. A much more comprehensive support and accountability system is provided when this is working properly. For example, concerns about the children struggling in a difficult local school may be expressed only in discussion with the pastor or church missions leader, and possibly not shared with local colleagues, or vice-versa. Both partners knowing about something like this, and knowing who is responsible for what, can make positive support more possible. It is important to clarify areas of responsibility with one another, otherwise there is the risk that neither partner looks after the family. They can then suffer from under-funding, lack of prayer, lack of guidance, advice or leadership, while each party looks to the other to provide the necessary care.

### Case study

One family was caught in a lack of communication and understanding between the church and the mission agency, and a lack of clarity on who was responsible for what. As a result of under-funding, the parents chose a poor quality, cheap home education programme. This lack of funds came about because of the failure of church and mission agency to work together with the parents. The family was affected by neglect stemming from a lack of initiative from either side. Sadly, the situation continued only partially recognised for some time, as the parents were not 'pushy' in making their needs known, and were more inclined simply to continue making sacrifices.

Partnership is not just about money. Apart from working out finances together, the same partnership is needed for family support, even in salaried or self-funded positions. There can be a danger that some agencies, and even more so some workers, see churches as a 'cash cow' to be milked. There is also the danger of some church leaders and members seeing the sole responsibility (and sole privilege) as providing enough money and then handing the family over to the mission agency with their part of the supporting work "done".

Also, partnership is not just for times of crisis, such as the need to evacuate, major health issues, or the obvious failure of an educational option. We need to have partnership structures in place all the time, in order to share and pray through the routine issues of ongoing care. This should not involve micro-management from the sending country, either from the church or from the agency sending office. There has to be trust from both parties in the ability of those 'on the ground' to make local decisions based on the culture and the children's needs. However, the sending country partners should have some say in big decisions where they can see that the welfare or educational future of the children is being affected. It would be useful to consider at the beginning of a partnership what to do if there is a clash of interests where the church wants one thing and the mission wants another. In a case like this, the parents may take one side or want something different again, or maybe a compromise. A strong relationship needs to be built and good open communication established, in order to avoid such a disagreement becoming a crisis in its own right.

It is the responsibility of the parents to provide ongoing, accurate communication. This should neither be relentlessly upbeat, to try to create a good impression, nor a litany of family crises asking for help. Many families are sent out with good support

and on a wave of good will and encouragement - it is important to reward that good will with plenty of communication. Supporters want to know how to pray. Also, in an era when charities' use of money is under scrutiny - and criticism for misuse at times - many want to know that the money they give is being positively used.

How can a partnership work best? A good basic principle in such a partnership is for the mission and church leaders to empathise, putting themselves into the position of the family concerned and think "What would YOU need and want if it were your family?" Normally if the responsibilities are divided something like this the partnership is on the right lines.

### **The church**

- Pastoral input and systematic prayer support - lead partner during sending, home leave and long-term re-entry
- Practical help to get ready, including setting a realistic budget that includes all costs for the children
- The leaders need to be satisfied that the assignment is correct for the family
- Set up links with Sunday school children, church-based families and "aunts & uncles"
- Debriefing and re-entry support for children
- Relating to the mission agency as a partner
- Relating to any other sending churches

### **The mission agency**

- Pastoral input and prayer support - lead partner when overseas and in mission-based training
- Long-term educational planning with TCK/MK staff: this includes setting up a realistic budget for the children's needs
- Ongoing advisory support, again with TCK/MK staff
- Correct placement for the family with guidance and support to stay there
- Training on living in a restrictive society if that is the family's destination
- Emergency and crisis plans
- Pre-field orientation for children, on-field education and welfare reviews, re-entry preparation, debriefing and support
- Relating to sending church or churches to partner

How well do mission agencies do in reality? An honest appraisal of this shows a patchy performance - some missions struggle to relate well to all of the sending churches because there are too few people on staff in the home office to regularly contact them. That leads at best to a focus on transition points like sending, home leave and definitive re-entry plus any crises. Mostly the missions know what is good practice (usually it is written down in very well-worded documents), but are unable to do it for lack of personnel. Sometimes it is lack of communication within the agency and a lack of clarity as to who is supposed to build ongoing relationships with sending churches.

Some churches are very easy to work with. They often have former field workers and/or current home-end missionaries on their mission committees and therefore tend to know what is required. They anticipate support needs of all kinds, initiate Sunday school to TCK communication, partner families with families and 'aunties and uncles' who relate well to children.

A few other practical guidelines for church mission committees and leadership are:

- Send out small gifts and birthday cards. We were blessed by people looking after our children during home leave when away for a few hours. The most consistent of these "babysitters" went on to regularly send letters as well as birthday cards and small gifts to the children while in Senegal. She continued when we relocated to the UK - both in recognition that we were still in mission and because of a long-standing relationship already built up.
- Make pastoral visits to the family. It is really important to include someone who wants to see the children, not just the parents. One of the visitors should be a church leader, as this helps with understanding of the local situation. Most visitors become enthusiastic advocates for the family when they return.
- Make contact with the family's field and team leaders. Ask to see a copy of any reviews of how well the family are doing - including the review of the children's education and welfare. It is a good idea for this to work the other way round too, for the field or team leader to contact the church.
- Check the family's budget annually at least to ensure that they have enough money to pay for all necessary expenses, including a good educational option. Let the mission know that you want these figures.

### Case Study

One former field leader who now leads a church mission committee often made contact with sending churches while in leadership. While recognising that the prime responsibility for this lay with the sending office, she contacted when there was an obvious need that the parents were reluctant to speak about. On several occasions she wrote along the lines of: "They won't say this to you, but we can see that they are short of money, is there anything that can be done to help?" Each time there was a positive reaction from the church once they realised that there was a need.

One last point. Adapting the slogan about pets, we can say that "missionaries are for life not just for Christmas". That mission lifespan works from first application to reintegration on re-entry and is just as true for MKs as for adult workers. It is all too easy for a family to be sent out on a wave of enthusiasm and then gradually be forgotten - out of sight, out of mind. In caring for a family with impressionable and vulnerable young lives involved, consistency in partnership is essential. That means consistency from the parents to keep everyone accurately informed, and consistency from the church and mission in a determination to make the partnership work.

### Martin Donovan's story

Martin was born in Kenya, in a local hospital run by Dutch missionaries in the African bush. As a child, he lived at various places in Kenya. His parents were missionaries with AIM: his mother was a nurse and his father was involved in ministry trips and worked with the Africa Inland Church. Martin has one younger sister. Growing up in the bush he had a lot of local friends, and grew up speaking Swahili.

He liked living in the bush, but there were no suitable education options there, so he was sent to a European-style boarding school at the age of seven. This was an

older-style boarding school where he lived in a dormitory with around 30 children and a matron. He was able though to see his parents every two weeks. Boarding at this age in a more institutional school was not easy and was probably his most difficult childhood experience. He was there until the age of 10, after which the family moved to Nairobi.

As far as faith was concerned, like many other MKs, he grew up with a lot of head knowledge about the Bible. He came to know the Lord for himself later in his teens.

At the age of 12 or 13, Martin moved back to the UK with his family. The experience of entry into the UK culture was an enormous challenge, and there was no preparation whatsoever - this was sadly very much in common with most other TCKs back in the early 1980s. For Martin this experience was 'entry', not 're-entry', as he was born in Africa. He was shocked by the attitudes and behaviour that he encountered in the state school - things like rudeness to the teachers, laziness, and practices such as looking at star signs and horoscopes. It took years even to get used to UK life, and he always longed to go back to Africa.

There were plus sides though to life in the UK - being able to watch TV, for example. It had not been available at their home in Kenya. He was excited about seeing his grandparents, and he noticed that the countryside was very green, not beige like his area of Kenya.

Martin said that it has taken him 20 to 30 years to feel as if he belongs in the UK, and whenever he goes back to Africa, it still feels like home.

*We asked Martin about the ways in which his childhood as an MK had an impact on his development into an adult.*

He said that it was overall very positive, and contributed to his character development. He met people from many different nationalities, especially when they lived in Nairobi. Despite the struggles in boarding school he would not have changed the overall experience. Childhood though was a fantastic experience for him, and if he had the choice he would do it again.

He would see two negatives still affecting him now: a lack of business acumen due to absorbing the more laid back aspects of the local culture, and a naiveté resulting from a more sheltered upbringing.

For many years as an adult there was a pull to go back to live in Africa because of the strong childhood attachment and feeling that it is home. However, after a more recent visit to Kenya, he no longer feels that he wants to go back and work in Africa.

Martin is now in his 40s and runs his own building and maintenance business. He is married to Cathy from Uganda and they have 3 daughters.

*Educare is a free e-magazine for TCKs, parents of TCKs, and any organisations, family members or supporters concerned for TCK welfare. It is ministry of WEC International.*

*"A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture." Dave Pollock*