

livingCity

Living for the city foster children *Living City* Aug Sep 2016

The call went out

How a community cared for two children after their family's tragedy

Last year in December, a tragedy happened in our local Korean community. A young father of two little girls, ages 1 and 2 1/2, killed his wife. The young father was sent to jail and has been undergoing psychiatric evaluation. His two girls were immediately sent to foster care.

The two children were distraught. They couldn't speak or understand any English and were only used to eating Korean food. They cried all the time and were having a lot of trouble adjusting to foster care. They were transferred to three different foster homes in one week.

We learned this story through a member of our Word of Life group, Maria (names here are changed), who is the godmother of the young couple. When she shared this story with us, crying, the suffering could no longer be only hers; it became ours right away.

One of us, Monica, felt the call to help them. She said: "I said 'yes' inside without delay, but I wasn't sure what my family would think about it. My husband and children loved the idea and agreed. The social worker who took care of the children visited my home and asked us to take care of them immediately."

Of course Monica needed help from our community. Because the girls' home was a crime scene, the police would not let us take a single item out of the house. So within one day, we had to get everything needed for these two girls.

"I sent an email to our whole Focolare community sharing our needs, from children's clothing and shoes, diapers, a stroller and anything else they could think of to help," she said. "I also prayed for a baby crib, saying, 'Jesus, those who need a baby crib is you in these girls, who have to suffer so much.' Within 10 minutes, I got a message from a community member saying, 'I have a baby crib! I will deliver it this evening!'"

Every one of their needs arrived miraculously. It might have looked simple, but it was very meaningful. It seemed that one side of the world is dark, but the other side heals wounds with love. This providence gave us new strength and confirmed us that God was with us.

"Quickly, our life with the two babies started," Monica shared. "It was Advent at that time, so I thought I would love baby Jesus inside the little girls. But reality was different. It was like Chiara Lubich once wrote, 'Love isn't some kind of joke. You have to move your muscles and love concretely; pretending to love is not just enough.' Night after night, I had to take the baby to the living room and hold it all night long, because she was waking up every hour."

Preparing meals for eight people and taking care of the babies every single day was a challenge, physically and emotionally. We realized that the help of our community was needed continuously. And the ripple effect started: The priest of the young couple's Korean parish visited the family's home and made a signup sheet for his parishioners to take turns delivering meals for the whole family. He also decided to visit the father of two girls in jail.

People of our group took turns to babysit to give Monica a bit of rest.

The challenges continued, especially one time that Monica could not attend a school event of her daughter's, and doubts came into her mind if the decision was right. But while praying and attending Mass, she felt comforted and encouraged to start over. Despite the challenges, or maybe because of them, the unity in her family grew.

Finally three months later, a judge decided that the babies could go and live with their grandparents in Korea.

Last April, when Monica went to Korea, she visited the two girls at their grandparents' home. Their grandparents, who are not particularly religious, have been so moved by this initial outpouring of support. One day they even said that they would like to live a deeper religious life and to become Christian. They said that they always thank all of us.

Even though the two girls are now in Korea, they are still in our prayers and in our hearts.

— *C. K.*