



Alexander M.



Elisa M.

# How We're HELPING REFUGEES

We didn't have to do huge things, we just had to speak the language of kindness.



Joseph M.

By Richard M. Romney  
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**E**lisa M., 15, who lives in Germany, will never forget the first time she met a refugee family. Her family decided to participate in a community *Patenschaft*, a mentoring program where they would befriend a family that had had to move from Syria because of the war. The two families met in a park to get acquainted.

"I was nervous," Elisa says. "I didn't know what to expect." The Syrian family had three children, ages 7, 4, and 2, and a baby on the way.

"My parents and their parents talked a little, but the children were kind of shy. They didn't speak. They were just observing."



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## BEGIN WITH PRAYER

“Begin on your knees in prayer. Then think in terms of doing something close to home, in your own community, where you will find people who need help in adapting to their new circumstances. . . . The possibilities for us to lend a hand and be a friend are endless.”

Elder Patrick Kearon of the Seventy, Apr. 2016 general conference.

## A KICK START

Then her brothers, Alexander, 12, and Joseph, 6, started kicking a soccer ball. That broke the ice. Soon the seven-year-old and the four-year-old started kicking the ball too. “We just had to show them where to start,” Alexander explains, “and *Fußball* [soccer] is a ‘language’ that we have in common.”

The families became friends. “We have helped them to better understand German, and to get settled in their apartment,” Elisa says.

Assisting others comes naturally to Elisa, who has already helped to make school kits for refugee children. “This summer at youth conference we sewed cloth bags and then filled them with pencils and other supplies they would need for the first day of classes.” Helping also

comes naturally to Alexander, who recently became a deacon. “Holding the priesthood means we should always pitch in,” he says.

Elisa and Alexander agree that actually meeting refugees increased their compassion for them. “Getting to know them makes you want to help them even more,” Elisa says. “They’re always thankful and have a smile on their face. Their example teaches me to be more grateful.”

“We keep finding out they’re like us,” Alexander says. “They joke, sing, laugh, and eat. And they know more about enduring tough things in life than we do, because they had to flee from war. By being friends with them, we’re doing what the Savior would do. He cares about everyone, and we should too.”





Vinzenz C.



Ida C.

## GROWING UNDERSTANDING

Three siblings in another family in the same stake have also joined in a community *Patenschaft*.

“The family we’re mentoring is from Afghanistan,” says Vinzenz C., 17. “They fled because bombs were falling around them and they were afraid they wouldn’t survive. They crossed the sea in a rickety boat, traveled through several countries, and lived in camps for a long time before they were placed in our community.”

Like Elisa, Vini (as his friends call him) had also previously prepared materials for refugees. He was one of about 50 youth who sorted donated clothing and toys. “I was carrying boxes around for about six hours,” he recalls. “It was exhausting, but it helped me to understand how much they need simple things we often take for granted.”

Meeting a refugee family in person deepened his desire to be of service, and the same is true for his brother Philip, 15, and his sister Ida, 12.

“I helped the elders quorum assemble bicycles that a company donated,” Philip says. “We attached the wheels and the pedals. You don’t need to do huge things, just do simple things and you can make a difference in refugees’ lives.”

“It’s difficult to be in a completely new environment, with new customs, foods, and languages,” Ida says. “If I had to go through what they’re going through, I’d be eager to just have a friend.” She says she has also learned from their example of sticking together as a family, even during desperate trials.



Philip C.



## MANY “LANGUAGES”

So, if you want to get to know refugees, where do you start?

“You can communicate in a lot of ways,” Ida says. “You can point, nod your head, or smile. Besides words, remember you can also communicate with feelings and emotions.”

There are, in fact, many “languages” everyone speaks—music, kindness, laughter, and love, for example. “You already speak many ‘languages’ that they understand,” Ida says. “Like *Fußball*. Start with those. Show that you care for them and that you want to help them.”

“It’s about understanding them,” Vini says. For example, refugees are often deeply religious and have faith and traditions of their own. “Reaching out to them is not about bringing them into the Church. It’s about treating them as brothers and sisters of our Heavenly Father, with respect and love.”

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

Abby P., 12, of Utah, USA, has witnessed such respect and love firsthand as her family has mentored a refugee family from the Democratic Republic of the Congo that came to America after living in refugee camps in Burundi and Tanzania, Africa.

She's also been impressed at how young women in her ward have rallied around four refugee teenagers.

"The family we're friends with has a sister in high school and a younger brother, Alimasi M.; a sister; and a cousin, all in junior high," Abby says. "We wanted them to be ready for school and for winter, so we organized some events to help them prepare."

First was an opportunity for the refugees to meet young people their own age. Abby's family organized a party "where we served food that you might see in Tanzania, like *mishkaki* [skewers of roasted meat and vegetables]." They also played games familiar to Americans, like tag. "Mostly we just introduced our refugee friends to everybody, so they could have friends when they started school," Abby explains.

They also learned that their new friends had never experienced winter, so they organized a clothing drive to gather coats, boots, pants, and stockings. And they learned that the refugees' younger brothers and sisters were homesick, "so we found some videos in French and Swahili [languages they understand] and put them on a flash drive so they could watch them with their siblings."



When someone asks Abby why she helps refugees, she says, "They're nice people, and they shouldn't be left to suffer." Then she shares the Bible story of Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt with two-year-old Jesus to escape Herod's soldiers, who were murdering innocent children (see Matthew 2:13–23).

"The Savior was a refugee, too," Abby says. "I think He must have a soft spot in his heart for refugees." **NE**

