



“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7

This year as Christmas approaches, nativity scenes emerge, and the story of Jesus’ birth is told and sung, I feel an affinity with the Innkeeper. As the new Immigrant Resource Coordinator at Center for Healing and Hope, I have the unfortunate task of communicating to many people that the Inn is essentially full. Community agencies are at maximum capacity, homeless shelters are occupied, food pantries are accessible only on a limited basis, and churches have restricted resources. And yet at the same time I sense a desire on the part of many neighbors to open the door of our neighborhood to strangers—something not easy to achieve, yet necessary to relieve the ache that afflicts many hearts, to simply belong.

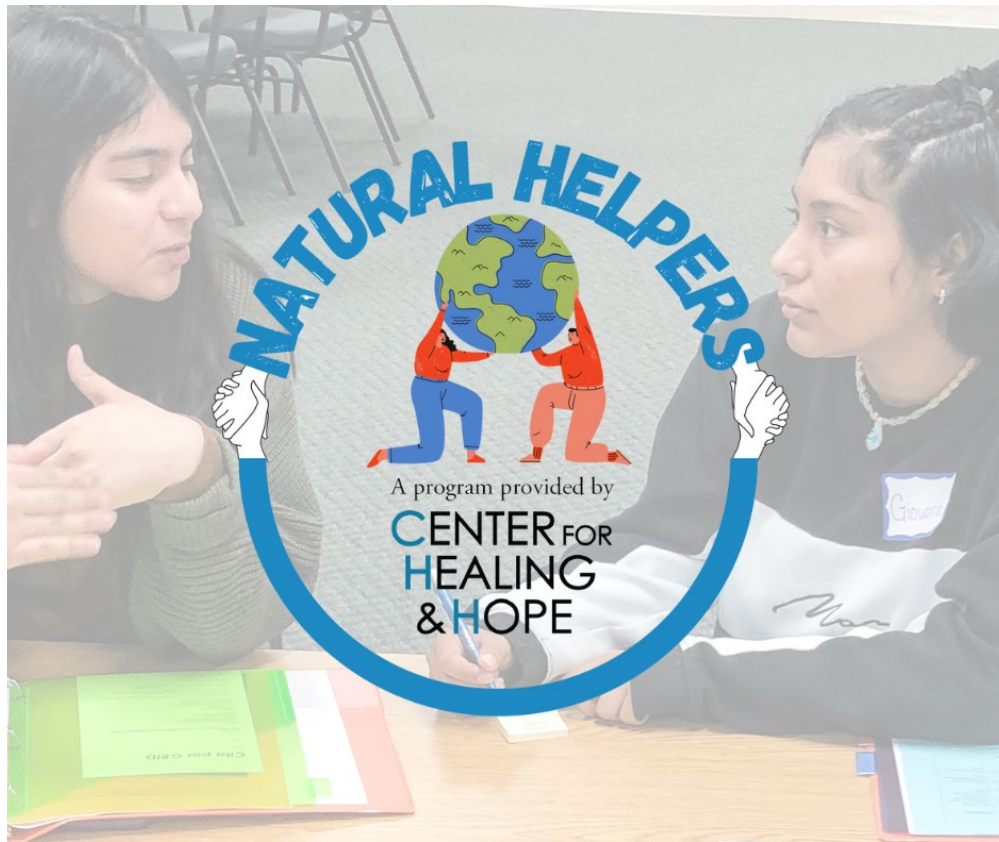
Natural Helpers from Center for Healing and Hope are neighbors in the community who relieve this ache and help new immigrants find places to belong. Two Natural Helpers agreed to have their names shared in this story

of hope. I must admit that at first, I only saw the limitations, ‘the Inn is full.’ But like the Innkeeper who offered the stable as a place of rest, the Natural Helpers helped me to see the many ways to open the door so that people can experience belonging.



Center for Healing & Hope is a safe and trusted space where immigrants can receive important orientation to community resources in their native language and know they will be heard and cared for.

Until Izaete Nafziger moved away from Brazil, she always imagined herself living where her ancestors had lived. Izaete recalls that arriving in Elkhart County 18 years ago, she felt out of place. Now she dedicates her life to helping others find their place here. When I don't have the resources at my disposal to alleviate the burden of overdue bills, and every door I knock on seems to be closed, Izaete offers immigrants genuine community where love overcomes isolation. She offers people a place to belong. There may not be room in the Inn, but Izaete approaches limitations with creativity and resourcefulness.



Maria Largotta, a native to Ecuador, likewise packed and unpacked boxes in Canada and New York before moving to Elkhart County over twenty years ago. Having navigated these moves alone, Maria knows both the informal customs of those who have recently arrived and the formal conventions of the helping agencies. She fills an important gap that often separates the two groups. Maria naturally helps out in the neighborhood. I rely on her to accompany people to local food banks, clothing closets, and government agencies. Tonight, she surprised me by bringing a new community member to CHH to apply for their Goshen Resident Identification (GRID) card; a municipal ID program open to all residents of Goshen that shows we belong.



Maria (sitting to Jane's right) helps with GRID registration.

Izaete and Maria offer the kind of hope that's not just a simple sentiment but includes a set of practices connected to this longing for restoration, this aspiration to open the door so that newly arrived immigrants can find a place to belong.

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