

# **Relationships key to helping immigrants, Baptist workers say**

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FREDERICKSBURG, Va. (ABP)—Every afternoon, Felicitas does something she thought might never happen. She meets the school bus near her Virginia apartment complex to pick up her son, Carlos, as he returns from another day of elementary school.

Carlos has spina bifida, which prevents him from walking. When Felicitas first came to the United States, she spoke little English and had neither a job nor transportation. Her husband had difficulty maintaining a steady job, and Child Protective Services was preparing to take Carlos away from them because of his low weight and poor health.

Then Felicitas met Greg and Sue Smith, who helped connect her with Spanish-speaking doctors and lawyers. They gave her food and encouraged her to start a business in her home. And they worked with the school system to ensure Carlos' needs were met in the classroom.

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The Smiths are co-founders of [LUCHA Ministries](#), an organization in Fredericksburg, Va., created to help Latinos cope with a new life in the United States. “Lucha” means “struggle” in Spanish, but LUCHA also is an acronym for the Spanish equivalent of “Latinos United through Christ in Brotherhood and Support.”

LUCHA exists to empower Latino immigrants to confront situations that are beyond their control, Sue Smith said. “Latinos face many struggles when they come to the United States—struggles with family, with language, with cultural acquisition, with earning enough money to send back home to help their families,” Greg Smith said.

“And, whether it’s helping someone with translation, taking someone to the doctor ... or even by helping non-Latinos understand the Latino culture, we want to communicate the love of God in Jesus Christ and salvation through

him.”

The Smiths, who are volunteer missionaries of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, also work to connect people—like prospective employers—with resources.

LUCHA staffers build relationships with government and social-service agencies, property managers, churches, schools and law-enforcement officers in order to connect Latino immigrants with the community at large.