



# Who is my neighbor?

*Stories of social ministry in action*

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**In answer to the question “And who is my neighbor?” in Luke 10:25, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, an outcast traveler who stops along the road to give assistance and sustenance to a victim of violence. Every day, the staff of Lutheran Community Services Northwest reach out, reflecting the compassionate face of God, in service to our neighbors and our communities. Here is the story of one of the thousands of lives touched each year through our ministry.**

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## Meet our neighbor, **Sara\***

### *Growing Up and Leaving Violence Behind*

Sara\* had been a prisoner for years. When she ran away from her abusive childhood home at 14, it seemed like heaven to be taken care of by 22-year-old Sam. She gladly accepted his invitation of marriage when she became pregnant, thinking she was on her way to the happy life she had dreamed of.

For Sam, marriage was the consummation of a sale – Sara was now his property. He did not allow her to go out of the house without him, making it clear that if she left while he was gone, he would punish her severely. That threat became more real as Sam began to get violent. He kept Sara in a childish state, with her children as her playmates, and he thought that the children were unaware of his abuse of their mother.

But the children did know about the abuse. First they saw the results, then they heard episodes, and, finally, they saw the violence. The son, bright but small and frail, tried to intervene and got hit across the room.

It was an alarm bell for Sara. Unable to take care of herself, she had to take care of her children.

Calling a domestic violence help line, Sara found out what to do. She made a safety plan, gathered up her possessions, few as they were, and took her children to a women’s shelter. At the shelter, Sara and her children felt like the world had opened up. Thanks to LCS play groups at the shelter, the children discovered that the world valued them as much as their mother did. Through counseling, Sara found herself free to be a grown woman, to express her feelings about what had happened to her, and to be responsible.

Sara grew up 10 years in her 100 days at the shelter, but kept her commitment to her children as her first priority. Her second priority became a commitment to herself, to love herself as she had loved her children, and to nurture herself as she nurtured them, growing to be healthy and free, together.

**\*Client names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.**

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*LCS’ Domestic Violence Family Services works with individuals and families in shelters, schools, and congregations in Pierce County, Washington, providing supportive counseling and education to reduce the social and psychological damage of domestic violence.*

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**“Who is my neighbor?” presents the many faces of social outreach ministry, as carried out by our agency in communities across the Northwest.**

For more information about the programs of Lutheran Community Services Northwest, and to learn how you can help support our ministry, contact your nearest LCS office or visit our web site at [www.lcsnw.org](http://www.lcsnw.org)

