

Missionary Care Services

How specialized coaches and counselors supplement church and agency care

God has raised up a number of organizations with various types of much-needed expertise in member care and development of cross-cultural workers. Postings recently arranged a phone call with representatives of three such ministries to find out more about their services. Participating were Sherri Dodd, founder and executive director of [Advance Global Coaching](#) headquartered in Stockbridge, Georgia; Jeanne Jensma, director of counseling at [Alongside](#) located in Richland, Michigan; and Ken Royer, director of pastoral care at [Link Care Center](#) in Fresno, California.

Postings: Let's start by having each of you summarize briefly the services you offer.

Sherri: *Advance Global Coaching* provides professional life coaching for those in missions. Our services are offered via phone, Skype, etc. Our coaches come alongside the missionaries at any stage of their career.

We offer missionaries a free initial session, asking questions to discern where they are. If we hear that the issues require more in-depth counseling, we refer them elsewhere. Coaching may be beneficial to them later on after they have resolved some of their issues. So a church leader could say, "We want you to do a free initial session with *Advance Global Coaching*. Then we'll figure out from there what you may need."

Jeanne: Every month, *Alongside* offers a three-week intensive program consisting of five components: (1) Psychological testing—we like to pinpoint quickly the key issues, and psychological testing is almost like taking a psychological x-ray. (2) Two psycho-educational seminars daily to teach needed information. (3) Daily group counseling. (4) Daily personal counseling—individual, marital, or family, whatever is needed. (5) Community—We have people go through the program together as a cohort because so much growth and health comes by way of community. Each of our counselors is a licensed psychologist who has a minimum of four years' experience on the mission field.



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Ken: At *Link Care*, our primary focus is restoration and personal growth, helping missionaries and pastors who have encountered difficulties in ministry. We provide housing and

counseling in a variable timeframe—from one month to several months as needed. And we work with families as well as individuals and couples. We also provide debriefing and re-entry assistance, and some pre-field orientation on an individual basis upon request.

Postings: So some of you focus on prevention, some on restoration, and some on maximizing missionaries' potential. Let's delve a little deeper to help our readers better understand which program might best help their workers.

Jeanne: When I hear the word, "prevention," I get really excited! I would just love to prevent all kinds of things. But we get so many missionaries who come to us already broken. So at *Alongside*, we focus on restoration, although we also look at pre-field assessment. We say, "We want to help detect broken places, maybe not even yet identified, that will show up under the stresses of cross-cultural ministry. Let's try to bring healing to those places before you go in order to avoid real difficulties once you get there."

But primarily we do the restorative piece: When something has gone wrong, maybe a disaster on the field, that has created brokenness, we count it a great blessing to be able to be restorative.

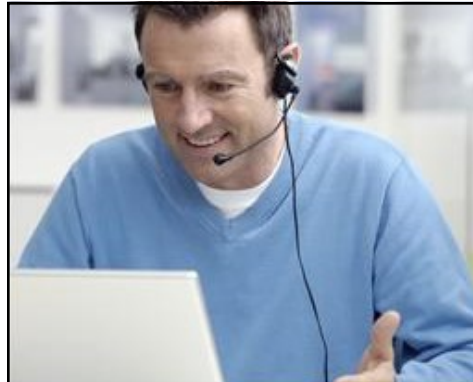
Ken: In a similar way, our work at *Link Care* is primarily restorative but also preventive. For example, I'm thinking of the cross-cultural stresses that occur to marriages. If the couple can be prepared and flexible to adapt to the new environment, he and she will do so much better.

Sherri: Our coaching is primarily for people who are basically well-adjusted, emotionally healthy, and functioning effectively, but who want to grow or make personal changes in their lives. Coaching is primarily about maximizing the missionary's potential and is very much preventative.

I was a career missionary in Europe for twenty-something years, and my heart was just broken when I saw good people damaged in the process of cross-cultural work. So I've brought together a group of coaches—all professionally trained and with cross-cultural ministry experience. They are not psychologists who diagnose disorders; they work with healthy people. But they speak the language of the missionary

and provide a safe, objective place to process whatever they are going through.

Coaching is not so much problem related as it is passion related. We ask, "What has God called you to do and what are the steps to get there?" We love to come alongside people to provide emotional and spiritual support as well as the accountability they need to prevent as many problems as possible.



Postings: Churches may assume the mission agency offers all the counseling or coaching their workers need. Can you help us identify situations where you help fill a gap?

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Sherri: Mission agencies do the best that they can, but even those that have a member care department have limited manpower to provide ongoing, personalized support. Missionaries tend to be stoic and try to tough things out on their own. And that often leads to an accumulation of grief and traumas and unresolved conflicts. I think if we can provide support in the process, then we can keep our missionaries healthier.

Jeanne: Some mission agencies do a *great* job of evaluating the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of their missionaries. Others don't do that quite as well. The church needs to keep its finger on the pulse of its missionaries, be alert to what's going on, and be in communication with the mission about what they are seeing. And if the mission isn't doing such a good job, the church needs to step up to the plate and send someone to visit, then determine next steps: Engage on-site counseling if available, send a counselor to the field, or even bring the missionaries home if necessary.

Ken: We have noticed that many younger dedicated missionaries are carrying a significant amount of greater, or at least different, baggage, perhaps because of the brokenness of the home situation. Therefore, the needs for member care, pastoral care, clinical care are *really* increasing.

Sherri: There is a different dynamic with young people today. My generation sort of stuck things out sometimes by sheer will—a stick-tuitive, never-give-up kind of mentality. We viewed commitment in much longer chunks. Nowadays, it's not that young adults aren't committed, but their understanding of commitment is in much shorter timeframes. And so coming alongside them at key places can help expand their understanding of commitment and help them to last longer.

Postings: How do churches know who needs assistance? What are some of the warning signs that should say to a church, "This worker may need some in-depth help."

Sherri: Well the first thing I want to say is, just ask! So often people assume that everything is fine until there is some huge crisis. Stay in contact with your missionaries, listen to them, ask open-ended questions: "What can we do? How can we come alongside you? What do you need?"

Ken: I would say there are five areas that are general warning signs: (1) Does God seem distant, or you just don't sense His leading like you used to? (2) Has the joy drained out of your marriage? (3) Are you depressed or living in the consequences of previous sinful lifestyles? (4) Do you need a thorough medical evaluation? (5) Do you need further informal or formal study?

Sherri: Ask questions about life balance. Look for things like, "I'm so tired," or "I don't feel like we're getting anywhere," or "Nothing seems to be going right." And don't just quickly say, "Oh, things will get better." Sometimes "I'm so tired" is a cry for help. There are many things that could be going on, and most times people don't jump in there and say, "My life's a wreck!" They usually just hint at things. If you are truly listening, you can pick up on small things, then do some digging and try to figure out what's really going on.

Jeanne. On the other side, occasionally a worker will

appear overly victorious. When there is almost too much victory, there is probably a little denial going on somewhere. For instance, "Haven't received a paycheck in three months, but isn't that great because it's an opportunity to trust the Lord even more!" or "Somebody was shot three doors away, but that's okay because God kept us safe." If it doesn't seem like they have normal responses to major difficulties, these people may need some help.



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Postings: Many churches have a counselor on staff or a counselor they refer people to. How can they tell whether this type of person can help their missionaries or if they really need more specialized help, like the kinds of assistance you offer?

Jeanne: If it looks like a relatively small problem—I'll say a bit arbitrarily, something that could be resolved in five or fewer sessions—then why not try a local counselor who is thoroughly biblical? If it's not being resolved in four or five sessions, then I think it would be really important to see someone who has a thorough understanding of the cross-cultural context.

Ken: If someone is unsure of what assistance is needed, just give us a phone call. At no cost we'll be glad to consult with you. We'll even take it confidentially to our staff for suggestions.

Postings: What about the cost factor? Does insurance cover your charges? Or should the church expect that the agency will pay for this? Or do churches need to think about having a reserve fund or somehow finding a way to cover counseling and/or coaching?

Sherri: Fortunately with *Advance Global Coaching*, we don't have to maintain any facilities, so our basic rate for individual coaching is \$200/month, which includes two, hour-long sessions with the coach plus as much email contact in between as the client desires. We ask the missionaries to invest in their own health and personal growth by paying at least one-quarter of their

fees. Then we help them find a sponsor—it could be their sending agency, their sending church, or a friend or family member who feels like they would like to invest in them. Churches are beginning to see the value of investing in those they send out. It is wise to keep reserve funds in place for this.

Ken: At *Link Care*, people come to fully equipped apartments and receive a full load of counseling. The average cost is between \$5,000 and almost \$9,000 a month depending on family size and the type of counseling needed. Even though this may produce sticker shock for some, our research shows that it is about one-third of the cost of the “open market” for value received. And our return-to-service rate was close to 70 percent last year. To be able to restore a life or a family is really powerful.

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Regarding where the resources come from: Each one who comes represents a miracle of God’s provision. Often health insurance provides partial coverage, or the agency may have a medical fund, or their churches may contribute from a love fund. Friends, ministry partners, or extended family sometimes contribute. Just recently we were blessed with a grant to help with partial scholarships.

Jeanne: Unfortunately any residential program is more expensive than missionaries can afford. And in most cases, their agencies also have difficulty paying for it. At *Alongside*, it costs from \$2,750 for a two-week program for one person to \$5,500 for a three-week program for a couple/family. Besides these fees, we subsidize a thousand dollars per person to provide those services. We also offer need-based scholarships when we have the funds to do so.

I think it’s a great place for the church to step in and say, “We are the ones God charged with sending this

missionary to the field, so we are the ones God charges to take care of this missionary and make sure he can stay on the field.”

In my own church, there is a line item in the budget for missionary care. Distribution of these funds is confidential, but it has been a way that our church has served our missionaries. I would love to see other churches step up in a similar way.

Postings: At the end of the restorative process, do you give the church or agency a thumbs-up or thumbs-down verdict about whether the workers are ready to return to the field?

Ken: Often agencies want us to take responsibility to determine if workers are ready to return. But there is so much about the on-field situation that we don’t know, and it is the agency that is responsible for deploying their missionaries. So what we find most helpful is to give a summary report outlining the presenting concerns, the intervention that was applied, and the results in areas A, B, C. Then we note that our recommendation for continued ministry would include something like, “concentrating on for-

giveness for three main people in their lives, working through broken relationships with X. If they follow these recommendations, we anticipate that there could be continued growth and productivity.”

Postings: Your organizations serve sending churches and agencies in crucial ways. How could we

pray for and with you?

Sherri: When I heard the cost for a family in one of the residential programs for restorative care, it reminded me how important it is that we work as hard as possible on the prevention end of things. Many churches and agencies don’t know we exist. Ask that God would increase our exposure.

Jeanne: Pray that God will continue to provide finances for scholarships. It is heartbreaking when we don’t have the scholarship funds that we need. Also, please pray that God will bring just the right combinations of people. They impact each others’ lives, so having the right people together is crucial but totally God’s doing.



Ken: The challenge most on my heart is recognizing the underlying spiritual warfare battles going on. We don't want to see the evil one succeed in silencing the voice of the missionary. While we want to use all of the tools we have for healing, we call out to God Who is the Wonderful Counselor.

Many other individuals and organizations offer quality counseling and coaching. We hope this glimpse of three quality ministries has been helpful. If you would like to listen to the entire 65-minute roundtable discussion, download the [podcast](#).

Discussion Questions for Churches

1. Do your missionaries perceive you to be a "safe" place to be honest about their struggles? Do you have a person they can talk to confidentially?
2. Do you regularly ask your missionaries the kinds of questions Ken listed on page 3 to help you surface issues before they become crises?
3. Do you have a fund or budget line item earmarked to help missionaries afford coaching or counseling? Do your missionaries know this is available?
4. Do you need to find out more about these types of services or similar options in your area?
5. Should you consider supporting a missionary care organization as part of your commitment to maintaining the health and vitality of all workers?

Discussion Questions for Agencies' Church Connections

1. Do your workers' sending churches appreciate the pressures of cross-cultural life and ministry, and the importance of spiritual/emotional care? How could you expand their grasp of these issues?
2. Do churches understand how the missionary care your agency provides could be supplemented both by their expanded care ministry and, as needed, by organizations such as those highlighted here?
3. Do you challenge churches to maintain a fund or include a budget line item to help missionaries afford coaching or counseling?
4. Are you sufficiently aware of the various types of missionary care services to know where to refer churches?

Interchange Postings

Catalyst's **Postings** e-newsletter is a monthly publication designed for mission agency personnel and local church leaders involved in collaborative global efforts. The practical articles highlight what churches and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

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