FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Family & Relationships

Listen to the Children: Conversations with Immigrant Families: Escuchemos a los niños: Conversaciones con familias inmigrantes

Elizabeth Conde-Franzier
Judson Press
978-0-8170-1661-6
(January 31, 2011)

One of every five children in the United States lives in an immigrant family today, according to The Brookings Institution. These youths face distinctive challenges that aren't often addressed in the highly political, heated immigration debates of late.

As a pastor and immigrant advocate, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier brings a unique voice to the discussion. In this straightforward guidebook, she addresses numerous kinds of difficult issues in the immigrant experience, with a tone of gentle advocacy, warmth, and intelligence.

The fictionalized conversations she creates in her book showcase the common challenges felt by immigrant parents, their children, and caregivers. Adjusting to a move away from a community is always fraught with potential emotional problems, but for immigrant children, that transition is especially hard, since there may be language barriers, education shifts, legal status issues, and separation from a parent.

For example, the author points out that children of migrant laborers often suffer from a lack of attention because no one is home to provide consistent care. As a result, behavioral problems can emerge. She writes, "In the absence of one or both parents, shared values erode, emotional bonds deteriorate, and parental authority is affected."

The book's use of such scenarios helps to give context to other issues as well. For instance, one character describes being in a hospital with her mother, trying to translate information about another child's emergency surgery. "I started to have this fantasy that I belonged to another family that understood English, and I could just be the child," the character says. The situation is used as an example of the role reversals that often happen when language barriers occur, highlighting the frustration of children who have to bear the responsibility for making sure a parent understands.

Beyond helping those who work with immigrants, Conde-Frazier's work will be valued

by her subjects themselves, to gain better insight into the emotional and mental needs of their children around issues like separation, reunification of the family, and emigration from a homeland. Especially useful is the book's bilingual text, with the same information presented in English and Spanish.

Listen to the Children is an excellent and much-needed addition to the literature on immigration, and gives immigrant children a new, clear voice that rises above the usual political and social conversations.

Elizabeth Millard