No Longer Alone: Irene’s Story

“I can’t imagine being in another country without any family, with no one caring where I am, “said Sue Smith, “I can’t imagine being that alone in the world.” Smith is Director of LUCHA Ministries, a ministry among Latinos in the greater Fredericksburg area.

Seventy-eight-year-old Irene was alone. The small Peruvian grandmother with a face full of sun-warmed wrinkles and a voice that lilts like music was beloved by all who met her, but she had nowhere to go and no one to care for her besides other members of the homeless community at the shelter and the employees of a Latino grocery store who helped her during the day.

LUCHA and the Latino immigrant network on Facebook did extensive research and discovered more about Irene’s situation. They learned that she came to the United States many years ago, trafficked and brought here by a family who hired her as a nanny and then took away her documents—forcing her to work for them. Once their children were older and not in need of a nanny, they discarded Irene and she was forced to live on the streets. Although multiple Latino families took her in, she developed dementia and began running away because she didn’t understand where she was or what was happening to her.

As a result of their research and work, LUCHA and the network were able to track down Irene’s family in Peru. They visited DC and worked with the consulate of Peru to secure the necessary materials to reunite Irene with her family, which they believed to be the best course of action in securing her ongoing care. “It’s a hard situation,”
said Smith, “but I believe being with her family is what's best for her.” Micah Ecumenical Ministries organized their Fredericksburg partner churches to raise funds to buy her ticket.

As she was wheeled down the runway, Irene turned and waved to the Smiths and the Peruvian ambassador with both hands, smiling the entire way to the plane.