



Karen Organization of Minnesota

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A Newsletter from the Karen Organization of MN

Mission: “To enhance the quality of life for Karen and other refugees from Burma in Minnesota”

Vision: (1) Assist refugees to settle, integrate and become increasingly self-sufficient; (2) Foster cultural knowledge and understanding; and (3) Strengthen organizational capacity and effectiveness to meet the needs of the community.

Winter 2010

A Note from the Director’s Chair

As the Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM) continues to grow to meet the needs of our community, our need for support to cover the organization’s costs grows with it. We are appreciative and grateful to all who have helped get us where we are today. With economics as they are today, Karen and other Burmese refugees need individuals and families like you to continue supporting them so they can become self-sufficient, contributing members of the greater Minnesota community. The rich culture Karen bring, and their determination to do whatever it takes to support their family, is something we can all learn from. Their value of supporting one other and working together to serve the needs of the greater community is strong and irreplaceable. Celebrated as people who work hard even in the midst of adversity, they never give up!

In that same spirit, I am excited to see KOM soar to the next level. Funding secured thus far has provided very tangible support. But this is just the beginning. There is much more to be done. With supporters like you, we are helping to make many dreams come true for these resilient Karen and Burmese refugees. Again, ta blut doe mah (thank you very much)!

Chong B. Vang,
Executive Director, KOM cvang@mnkaren.org 651.788.7593 ext.306

GAINING STABILITY IN THE LAND OF DREAMS

Mae La Oo Refugee Camp has been home to many Karen before coming to Minnesota. Jasmine, lived in the Thai camp 5 years before resettling in St. Paul. Often Jasmine would *dream* of living in the US so her children could receive the best education and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Though her son and daughter are only 6 and 4, she already has high hopes they will become strong leaders in their community someday.



Jasmine and her family at home in Minnesota

On June 28, 2010 representatives from KOM picked up Jasmine and her family from the airport. *Dynamic determination* has been their anthem each day since. **Financial stability, learning English,** and finding **gainful employment** are a few of Jasmine’s top struggles, which are similar to every Karen and Burmese family arriving into Minnesota. Health has been a unique barrier to their struggle for employment and stability. Jasmine’s husband has suffered from chronic illness for 4 years, causing immense physical and emotional pain, and requiring special daily care, including many doctor’s appointments. Jasmine herself struggles with back and leg pain, caused from a childhood bone fracture that healed incorrectly. Currently, Jasmine holds off on a doctor’s recommended operation fearing her family will not be taken care of during her surgery and recovery.

Rising above these challenges, Jasmine attended KOM’s Bus Training and Mass Orientation. There she learned about responsibilities of refugee families and how to navigate available resources for future sustainability. Jasmine stood out from the crowd as an exceptional student because of her fearless actions. She learned, took action, then encouraged her fellow Karen to do the same. Despite her physical handicaps and countless family doctor appointments, Jasmine has never missed an appointment—walking or taking the bus to all of them. **Her courage has encouraged countless others** to be brave, follow in her footsteps and work hard for self-sufficiency to navigate their strange, but welcoming, new home—Minnesota.

Ever having her family’s future in mind, she has never stopped *dreaming*, as she did in Thailand, that someday her entire family will be able to attend school, learn English, learn to drive, obtain gainful employment and reach their full potentials.

Learn ways **YOU** can help refugee families, like Jasmine’s, thrive in their new home of Minnesota on the back of this newsletter. Please contact our office **today**—a family is waiting for you.

