
DEVELOPING LEADERS FOR TOMORROW

Youth Mentorship Program



The Karen Organization of Minnesota’s Youth Mentorship Program matches local volunteers with refugee youth in St. Paul schools in one-on-one relationships for a 4-8 month period during an academic year. The goal of this program is to provide refugee youth with someone who can offer friendship, support, and guidance with day-to-day issues as well as in planning for the future. Mentors and their mentees connect at least once a week and meet face to face at least bi-weekly participating in activities that they both enjoy. KOM staff also organize occasional activities to bring all mentors and mentees together.

- **Mentors** are professionals, college students, and other community members from diverse backgrounds. KOM will interview and screen each applicant to make appropriate matches. Mentors are matched with students of the same gender, except in special cases.
- **Mentees** are Karen students from Saint Paul Public Schools who will enjoy and benefit from an individual relationship with a mentor. Mentees elect to fill out applications and are not assigned to the program by parents or guidance counselors. Parents interested in having their child participate in the program should contact KOM or the school program coordinator at their child’s school.

Mentors are a wonderful source of support for refugee youth as they adjust to life in a new culture and explore options for their future education and careers. Mentors can encourage their mentee’s self-confidence and self-esteem. They can help them plan for the future and expose them to higher education opportunities. We hope that this will help college seem less intimidating and more accessible to participating students. Mentors are not tutors, but the pairs can sometimes decide to do schoolwork together. Mentors also benefit from their mentees. They learn how to be reliable and conscientious of others, and are exposed to other cultures and lifestyles.

KOM’s Youth Program

KOM’s youth coordinators are working in two St. Paul Public Schools this year:
Humboldt High School and **Harding High School**.

KOM Youth Coordinators:

Sarmoo Kwee (651-202-3119 – office phone; skwee@mnkaren.org) - Harding High School
Pkwa Htoo (651-202-3115 – office phone; phtoo@mnkaren.org) - Humboldt High School

60 Karen youth who have lived in the U.S. less than 5 years are enrolled in our program this year.

Mentor Responsibilities

We ask that you meet each of these responsibilities. They have been established in order to help you and your mentee have the best possible experience during your participation in the KOM Youth Mentorship Program. It is very important for you to communicate with your mentee on a regular basis. The Youth Coordinators and the Volunteer Coordinator will also be available for any questions or concerns. We are interested in hearing how things are going and want to make sure you are not having any difficulties. Please let us know if there are any additional ways we can help make this a positive experience.

- Attend a youth mentorship group or individual orientation when you first join the program.
- **Have contact with your mentee at least once a week and meet face-to-face at least bi-weekly.**
- Maintain contact with the Youth Coordinator assigned to your mentee and the Volunteer Coordinator as needed.
- If your phone number and/or address changes, notify both your mentee and the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible.
- **If at any time you feel that you can no longer participate in the Youth Mentorship Program, please discuss this with the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible.**
- We strongly recommend that you do not participate in the program if you have any doubt about maintaining the commitment to your mentee for the time period agreed on.

Best Practices for Mentoring Karen Youth

- **Take the time to LISTEN** – to really hear the experiences, hopes and challenges of the mentee you are working with.
- Remember that your mentee who is likely still transitioning to this country **may be dealing with loss** – of their homeland, family or friends.
- Encourage and support your mentee in **maintaining the cultural, religious, and family values of their country of origin** while simultaneously helping them adapt to American culture.
- Support your mentee's **academic success and educational process**, encouraging them to stay in school and seek help when needed.
- **Be flexible and creative** in meeting your mentee and family's needs.
- **Recognize and respond when your mentee exhibits behaviors of concern** that might be indicative of depression, drug use, inability to manage anger and aggression, involvement with anti-social groups such as gangs, or breaking the law.
- Develop activities to help your mentee **reach their goals for the future.**

Mentoring Goals

- Developing English language speaking, reading and writing skills
- Adapting to American culture while maintaining the mentee's own culture
- Developing social and life skills
- Providing emotional support
- Serving as an advocate
- Sharing community resources (such as using public transportation, using a library, etc.)
- Developing college or workforce preparedness skills
- Providing opportunities to relax and have fun! 😊