



RAMSEY COUNTY

Karen Culture Presentation

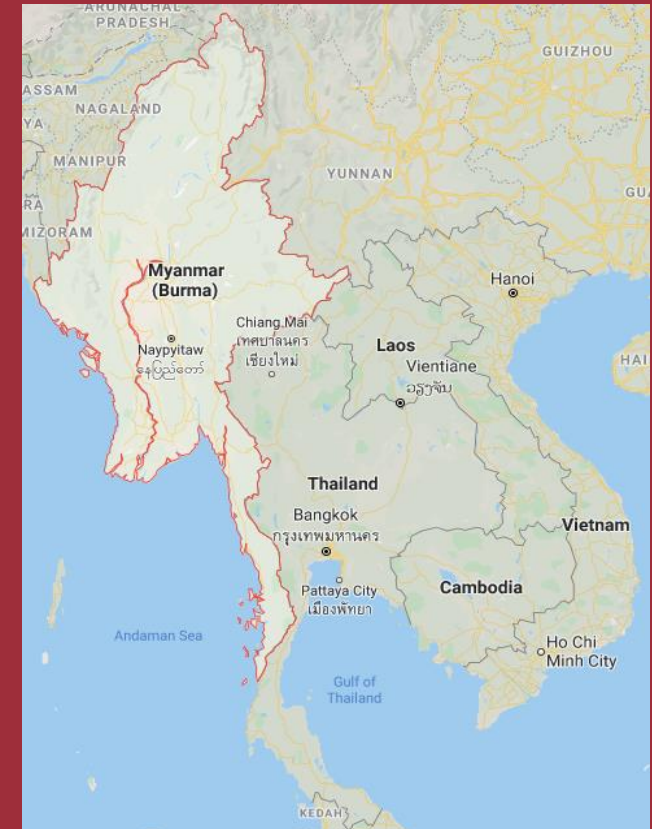
Ahmay Ya

BSW, MSW

**(Child Protection- Ongoing Case
Management)**

Where do the Karen people come from?

- The Karen people come from the Country of Myanmar formerly known as Burma.
- It is estimated there are between 7-9 million Karen people in Myanmar.
- The Karen people are very diverse with different ethnic subgroups and languages.



History of the Karen People

- It is believed that the Karen were one of the first groups of people to settle in Burma more than two thousand years ago. Unfortunately, there are very few written records of the Karen.
- Over one thousand years ago the Burmans began migrating to Burma started to rule the country.
- The British occupied Burma and destroyed the Burman monarchy between 1824 and 1885. Following the conclusion of World War II, the British granted independence to Burma 1947.
- It was hoped that an independent Burma would promote equality between the populations. The Burmese leaders seized power after the British left.



Brief History of Burma following WW2

- There were massacres of the Karen people which lead to the Karen starting their “Revolution” on January 31, 1949.
- During the 1950’s Burma had a shaky democracy. This democracy fell to a Military Dictatorship in 1962 when the Burmese Army took power in a coup d’etat. The Military ruled in one way or another until 2011.
- In May of 1990, the government held free elections for the first time in approximately 30 years. The National League for Democracy (NLD) lead by Aung San Suu Kyi won 392 out of the 492 seats in this election.



Serie I. - Birmania - 15. Tipi cariani bilmo (uomini)



Brief History of Burma following WW2

- The Military refused to relinquish power and continued to rule the nation as the State Law and Order Restoration Council until 1997. In 1997 the SLORC changed their name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and ruled until March 2011 when the military junta was dissolved.
- The push toward Democracy has continued and on April 1, 2012 the NLD won 43 of 45 available seats in the government.
- General elections were held on November 8, 2015 and on March 15, 2016 Htin Kyaw was elected as the country's first non-military president since 1962. In March 2018, Htin Kyaw resigned as president and National League for Democracy candidate Win Myint was elected to succeed him.



Why did the Karen come to the USA?

- The Karen have come to this country due to the political situation in Myanmar and former military dictatorship.
- The Karen have been engaged in a civil war with the ethnic Burmese since the late 1940's.
- Many Karen were forced to live in refugee camps due to the destruction of their homes.
- The Karen have started the process of relocation and since 2005 have settled across America and other countries.



Why did the Karen come to Minnesota?

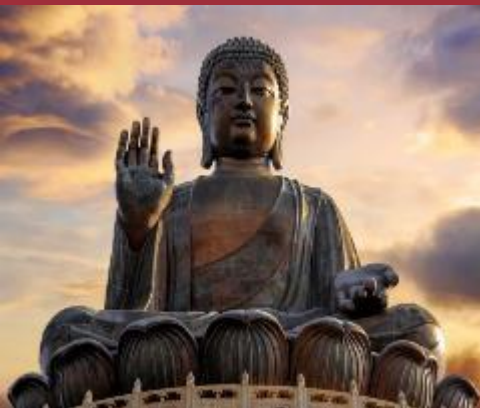
- The Karen settled in Minnesota due to our open policy on receiving refugees.
- The VOLAG (Voluntary Agency) Resettlement agency promoted Minnesota as a destination for the refugees.
- Once the Karen started to settle in Minnesota other Karen refugees followed suit to keep their community and relations.
- Currently there are estimated to be over 17,000 Karen people living in the Minnesota.



Spirituality of the Karen

Most of the Karen people will practice one of three types of religion:

- **Buddhism**
- **Christianity**
- **Animism**
- Most Karen in the U.S. are Evangelical Christians
- A small percentage are Buddhists and Animists
- Many avoid discussion about religion because it is something that they could disagree on
- People can get tired and argue and become sick of religion
- Priest Generate income from wedding ceremony



Buddhist



Animist



Christianity



Karen Culture

- Karen people are very polite and respectful.
- Being direct is considered rude.
- For Karen people, self-expression that promotes community values and cultural identity is more important than communication that promotes individual opinions or needs.
- It is impolite to point at someone or to call to them by gesturing to them with a hand or finger.



Important things to remember.

- Body language is very important
- Eye contact – Direct eye contact should be avoided
- Smiling is encouraged
- Greeting: Hand shaking is not appropriate, bow lower than the other person's head at standing height
- Karen are different from Hmong People



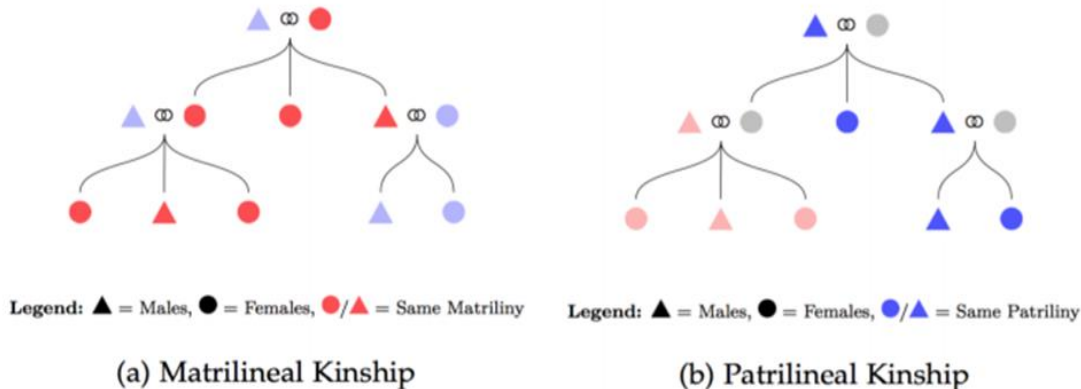
Karen Davitt is a half Australian /half Karen ethnic from Burma. She is an Australian actress, who has an extensive career in film television and theatre spanning 20 years and is known for her performance as Zoe Hamilton in Blue Heelers from 1995–1998. Karen also plays double bass with Melbourne band All Day Fritz



Karen Home Life

- The Karen people are a matriarchal society.
- It is common for young married couples to live with the wife's family for a short length of time.
- Men and women share the responsibility of raising children.
- Women typically are placed in charge of the family's finances and will control the household assets.

Figure 1: Diagrams of kinship systems (source: Lowes (2018a))



Learn to Speak Karen

- <https://www.drumpublications.org/speak/speakkaren1.php>

Good morning.	ghaw luh a ghăy	ဂီၤလၢအဂ့ၤ.
Good afternoon.	nee luh a ghăy	နီၤလၢအဂ့ၤ.
Good evening.	ha luh a ghăy	ဟါလၢအဂ့ၤ.
How are you?	na ôh hsòo ôh klay ah	နအိၣ်ဆူၣ်အိၣ်ဗျၢၤ.
I'm fine. And you?	ya ôh hsòo ôh klay, neh màw	ယအိၣ်ဆူၣ်အိၣ်ဗျၢ, နဲမီၣ်.
Where are you from?	na heh hpeh lèh	နဟဲးမဲလဲၣ်.
I'm from <u>Karen State</u> .	ya heh luh <u>ga nyaw qaw</u>	ယဟဲးလၢကညီကီၢ်.
Where are you going?	na ga lèh hpeh lèh	နကလဲၤမဲလဲၣ်.
I'm going for a walk.	ya ga lèh hă ləh gweh	ယကလဲၤၤဟးလီၣ်ကွဲး.
Thank you very much.	tə blu dòh mã	တၢ်ဘျုးအိၣ်မး.
Good night.	nă luh ah ghăy	နၤလၢအဂ့ၤ.
Have you eaten yet?	na àw mǎy wêe lee ahh	နအိၣ်မ့ၤၤဝံၤလဲၣ်.
Not yet.	ya àw mǎy ta wêe di bà	ယအိၣ်မ့ၤၤတဝံၤဒးတၣ်.
Yes, I have eaten. (rice)	ya àw mǎy wêe lee	ယအိၣ်မ့ၤၤဝံၤလဲၣ်.
What did you have?	na àw mǎy pà dǎw tə ma nū lèh	နအိၣ်မ့ၤၤပၣ်ဒီးတၢ်မုၢ်လဲၣ်.
I had <u>chicken curry</u> .	ya àw mǎy à dǎw <u>hsaw nyà qa tho</u>	ယအိၣ်မ့ၤၤပၣ်ဒီးဆီညၣ်ကယု.
How was it?	na àw mǎy wêe sǎy ahh	နအိၣ်မ့ၤၤဝံၤနီၣ်ဗျၢ.
Delicious.	ya àw mǎy wêe dǎh mã lăw	ယအိၣ်မ့ၤၤဝံၤနီၣ်ဗျၢလီၤ.
Drink water.	aw htee	အီၣ်ထံ.
Eat rice.	àw mǎy	အီၣ်မ့ၤ.
Take a rest.	ôh bwêe ôh thah	အိၣ်ဘျးအိၣ်ယါ.

Karen Language and Introductions

- There has been a great deal of evolution in the Karen written language over the centuries.
- When greeting one another, people will say, Kaw Leh Ah Gay (Good morning), Ni Leh Ah Gay (Good Afternoon), Ha Leh Ah Gay (Good evening) and Na Leh Ah Gay (Good Night) rather than shake hands or bow.
- Another common greeting is to ask someone if they have eaten rice, N'aw May Wele Ha. This is the equivalent to asking someone, "Have you eaten recently?"



Karen Music and Traditional Clothing

- The Karen love music.
- The Karen will accompany chanting by playing traditional instruments.
- The Karen will make their own clothing and fabric.



Traditional Karen Clothing



Important Historical Figures for the Karen

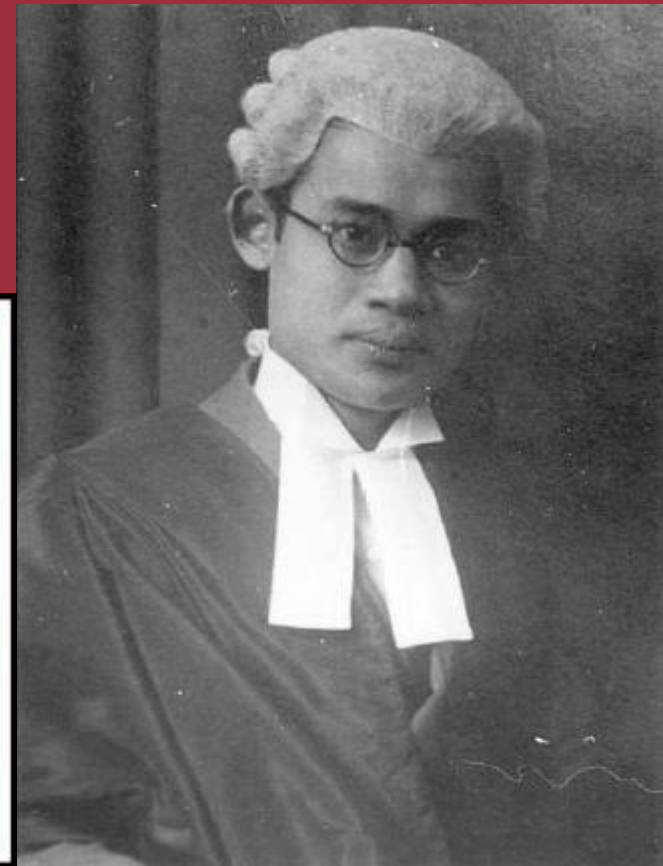
Saw Ba U Kyi (Born 1905)

1st President of the Karen National Union, earned his J.D Law, certified by the English Bar in England.

Held office from 1945–1950 after World-War II

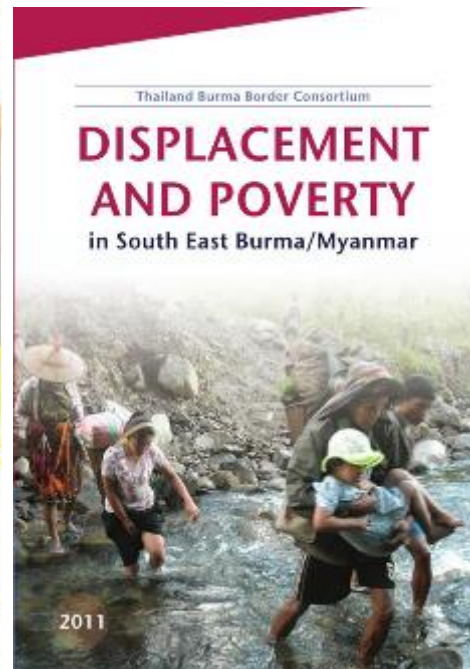
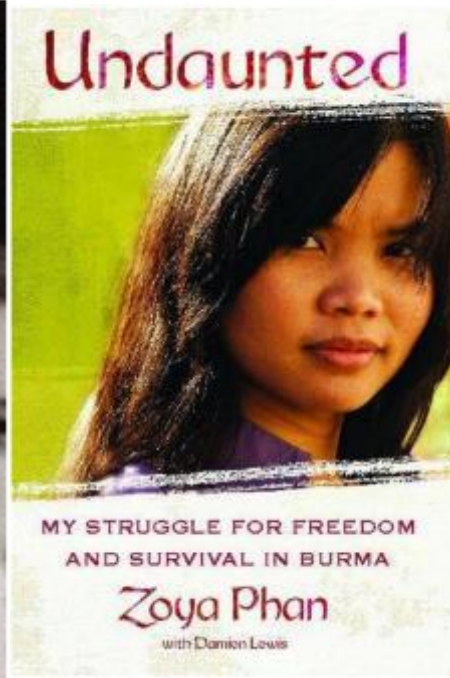
Four Principles

1. Surrender is out of the question
2. The recognition of the Karen State must be completed.
3. We shall retain our arms.
4. We shall decide our own political destiny.



Karen Educational Resources

There are written and film resources to allow greater insight into the plight of the Karen.



Karen Holidays

- The Karen have several holidays
 - Martyrs day
 - Karen New Year
 - Karen Wrists Tying Ceremony

Proclamation

WHEREAS, Karen families began arriving in Minnesota in the early 2000s as political refugees seeking asylum from the oppressive rule of the Burmese Military Dictatorship, and today Ramsey County is home to one of the largest Karen communities in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Karen New Year, which was first officially recognized in 1938 (formally the 2677 year on the Karen calendar), is celebrated on the First Day of Pyathoe on the Lunar calendar, typically occurring at end of December or beginning of January; and

WHEREAS, The Karen New Year marks the end of harvest of one rice crop and the beginning of the next rice crop, and also marks the building of new homes; and

WHEREAS, The Karen New Year is the most recognized holiday in the Karen community, which includes the Karen Don dances, Karen bamboo dances, singing and plenty of feasting; and

WHEREAS, The Karen New Year helps to preserve Karen culture, traditions, relationships and trust among community members, it enables Karen people to feel pride in their heritage, and it creates an opportunity for Ramsey County communities to learn about and enjoy the Karen culture; Now, Therefore, Be It

PROCLAIMED, The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners declares January 13, 2021 as Karen New Year Day in Ramsey County; and Be It Further

PROCLAIMED, The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners encourages communities to celebrate the Karen New Year by learning about Karen history, committing to cultivating improved cultural understanding, developing relationships, and supporting our Karen neighbors in Ramsey County and beyond.

Toni Carter

Toni Carter, Board Chair, District 4

Mary Jo McGuire

Mary Jo McGuire, Commissioner, District 2

Rafael E. Ortega

Rafael E. Ortega, Commissioner, District 5

Victoria Reinhardt

Victoria Reinhardt, Commissioner, District 7

Nicole Fierthelm

Nicole Fierthelm, Commissioner, District 1

Trista MatasCastillo

Trista MatasCastillo, Commissioner, District 3

Jim McDonough

Jim McDonough, Commissioner, District 6

Ryan T. O'Connor

Ryan T. O'Connor, County Manager



STATE of MINNESOTA

Proclamation

WHEREAS: The Karen community has resettled in the great state of Minnesota starting in the early 2000s, with an estimated 17,000 Karens currently residing in Minnesota; and

WHEREAS: The Karen New Year was first officially recognized in 1938, the 2677th year according to the Karen Calendar; and

WHEREAS: The Karen New Year is celebrated on the first day of the month of Pyathoe in the Karen calendar; and

WHEREAS: The Karen New Year marks the end of the harvest of one rice crop and the beginning of the next rice crop; and

WHEREAS: The Karen New Year is designed to preserve Karen culture and traditions and build relationships and trust among community members and other communities; and

WHEREAS: The Karen community has built a better life for themselves and strengthened their bonds together as Minnesotans; and

WHEREAS: The Karen New Year allows the Karen people to feel pride in their heritage and to create an opportunities for other residents to learn about and enjoy the Karen culture.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, TIM WALZ, Governor of Minnesota, do hereby proclaim Wednesday, January 13, 2021, as:

KAREN NEW YEAR DAY

in the State of Minnesota.



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Minnesota to be affixed at the State Capitol this 23rd day of December.

Tim Walz

GOVERNOR

10 best practices for professional working with Karen clients

1. Introduce yourself, politely, if possible, in the Karen language
2. Show Empathy
3. Be honest
4. Build trust
5. Demonstrate integrity
6. Assist the as best you can
7. Always follow up
8. Always have a Karen interpreter
9. The Karen may withhold from non-Karen speakers
10. Be gentle, genuine, and explain clearly until you are certain they understand you.



Barriers to Mental Health Treatment

- Concerns about mental health (mental health: Ta Plu)
- Discomfort with culture changes
- Language barriers exist as many Karen do not read or write in English or Karen
- There are Stigmas based on religious views on Mental Health issues
- Self-care does not heal trauma

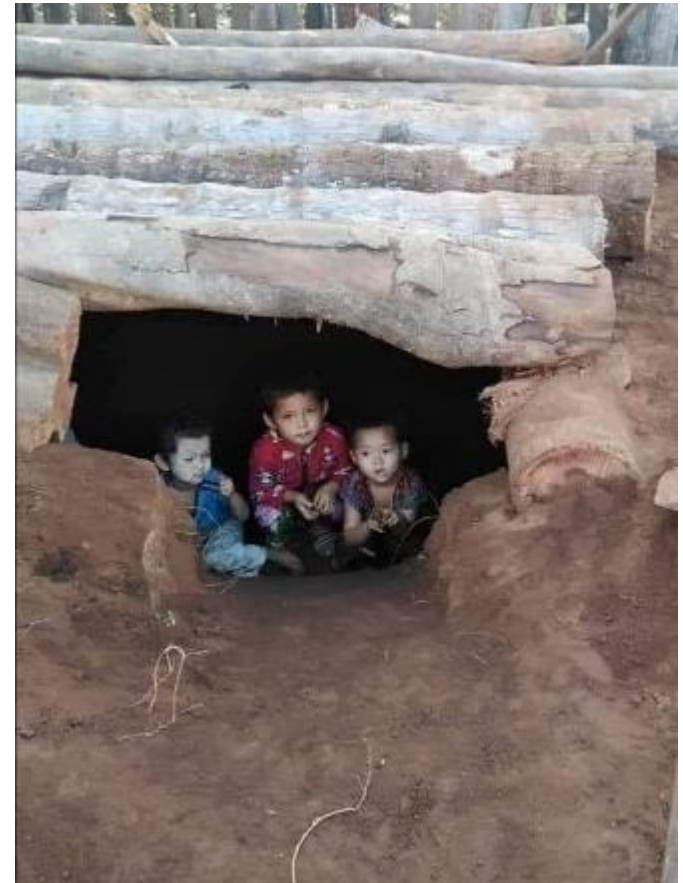
Cultural Perspective on Health Care

- Many Karen hold traditional beliefs about health and illness and will take traditional or homemade remedies for their common illnesses.
- Karen people who lived in refugee camps are more familiar with western medicine, and they tend to believe that western medicine can cure anything.
- There is a feeling that if a person isn't sick now, they don't need insurance.
- Older generations are more accepting of doctors, medicine, and treatment because it is expected they would become weaker and ill with age.



Current needs and struggles

- Basic Needs Support – Food, Clothing, Shelter
- Education
- Employment
- Transportation support
- Criminal justice/legal advocacy/Immigration
- Substance Abuse Survives
- Childcare, Budgeting, Access to Health care



Child Protection Services in the Karen Community

- Karen people are not used to the American Child Protection Process
- They will seek support from:
 - Priests, Monk, Friends, Family & Community Leaders
- They are very trusting but may not understand the process of having their child(ren) removed from the home.
- They do not understand how to navigate the court system and can have difficulties engaging in services due to lack of fluency in the language.
- There can be a lack of engagement in the services due to the overwhelming nature of the child protection process.
- Karen parents can lose trust in the process due to confidentiality.
 - In the Karen culture if you do not provide sources for your information, information is considered untrue and they do not believe you.



Phases of Refugee Adjustment

1. Arrival – “I’m thrilled to be here”
2. Reality – Culture Shock
3. Recovery – Growing sense of self determination and control
4. Balance – “I have a place in this country”



Refugee Struggles

- Many adult refugees will experience some form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- There may be both internal and external symptoms of their anxiety.
- It may be difficult for refugees to leave the trauma of their former lives behind them.



What Karen Refugees have Lost

- Homeland
- Loved ones
- Culture



What Karen Refugees have Lost

- Dreams for their future
- Identity
- Status / Occupation



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA PERMANENT RESIDENT

SPECIMEN TEST V 01 JAN 1920

Surname
SPECIMEN

Given Name
TEST V

USCIS#
000-000-001

Category
RE8

Country of Birth
Utopia

Date of Birth
01 JAN 1920

Sex
F

Card Expires:
08/21/07

Resident Since:
08/21/07

Test V: Specimen

Social Services: Immigration /Citizenship
Refugees status are United State Government Approved Status

I-485 Adjustment of Status Form (Green Card/Legal Permanent Resident)

N-400 Application for Naturalization (Citizenship)

N-600 Certificate of Citizenship (for individuals under 18 once their parents have become U.S. citizens)

I-90 Replacement of Green Card

I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition

I-102 Replacement of I-94

I-765 Employment Authorization Document

I-131 Travel Document

I- 94 Status
One Year after arriving
in the United States
Green Card /
Permanent resident
Five Years Later
Naturalization /
Citizenship





Thank You!



*A county of excellence working with
you to enhance our quality of life.*

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