

Decade of Humanitarian Settlement in South Australia

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A Case Study of the
Burmese Community
2007 - 2017





Partners

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Foreword

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Foreword

Most new communities of refugee background justifiably mark the celebration of their first decade as an auspicious and proud occasion. It is that moment in time, the turning point, for which they have worked so hard establishing themselves, learning English, becoming employed, connecting with others in their community and truly feeling that they belong in their broader community and in Australia, their new home.

During this project, and subsequent to it, the small and growing Karen and Karenni communities in Mt Gambier have, through their hard work, made a considerable impact on the Limestone Coast. In their quest to belong they can now boast families from interstate joining them, their young people gaining apprenticeships and traineeships, several successful business ventures, many women's social enterprise projects and sustainable employment across aged care, childcare, horticulture, vini-culture and small manufacturing businesses.

In Adelaide the Chin Burmese community keeps growing and provides a model for successful settlement. Their impact has been immense in terms of their collective work to build a physical space for themselves on Australian soil and to share this space with the broader South Australian community. They have been pro-active in ensuring their young people's education and recreation and in taking on jobs in the agricultural, food and service industries. Their young people are represented through numerous leadership positions in this state.

To see and hear the Burmese Chin Youth Choir of over 80 young Burmese is truly breathtaking and an affirmation that Australia's multicultural future is now a reality.

This case study provides the reader with a small snippet of the achievements of these communities of Burmese background who have contributed so much to our South Australian life in their first decade in this country.

Eugenia Tsoulis OAM
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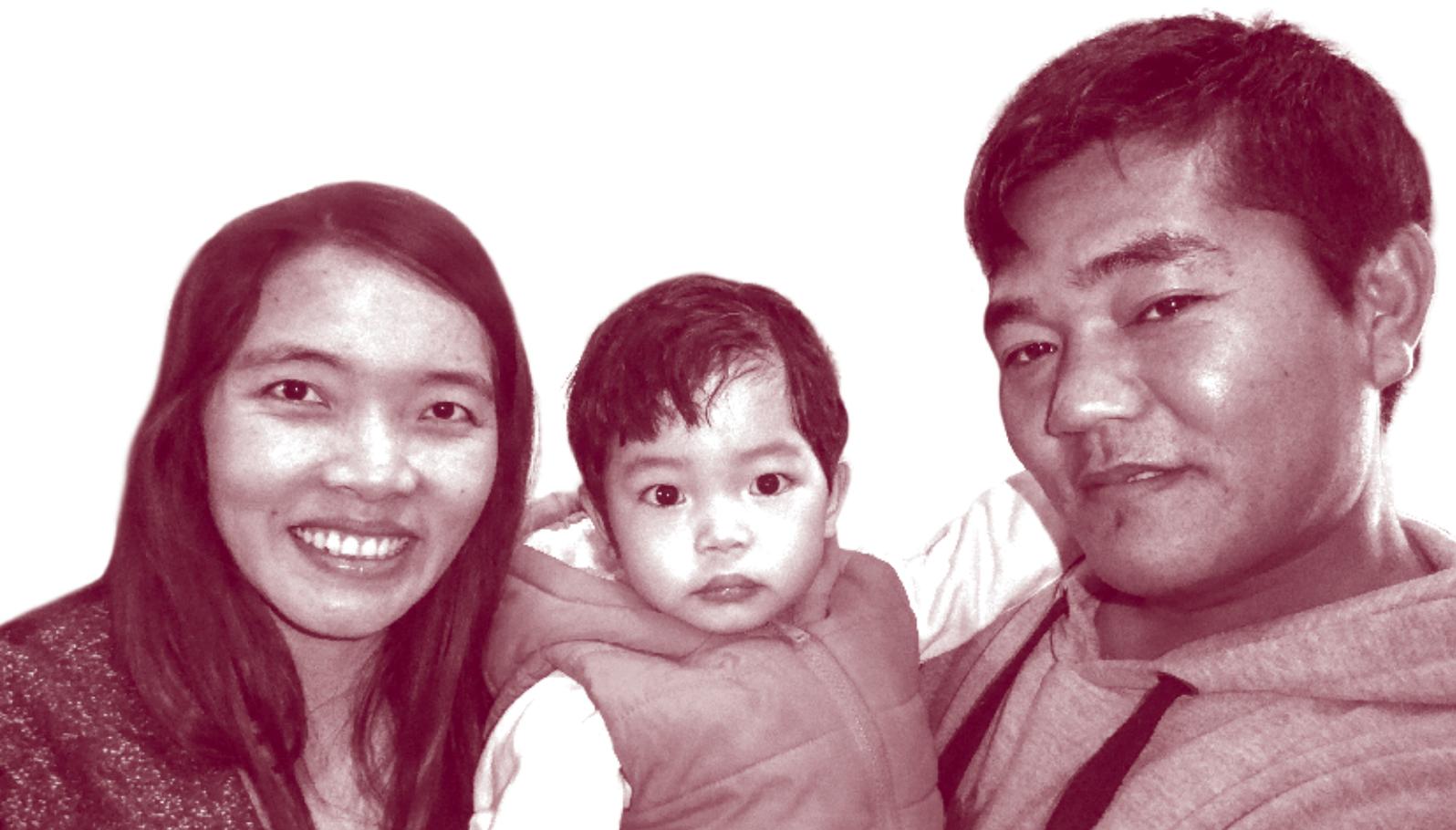


1. Introduction and background

The aim of this report is to celebrate the journey of the Burmese community in South Australia over the past ten years. By examining where the Burmese community members have come from, and their successes and challenges in settlement in South Australia over the past decade, we can better understand the long journey of settlement for all migrants.

The report begins with a brief history of the Burmese community and their settlement in Australia over the past decade, particularly in South Australia. It moves on in Section 3 to present background information on the Burmese population in South Australia using data from three Australian censuses. This section focuses on Burmese migrants' demographic data, with some employment-related data also included. Section 4 presents primary data from a small survey of Burmese migrants living in South Australia. The survey, conducted by the AMRC at the end of 2016 and beginning of 2017, provides important insights into

These insights are enhanced in the next section of this report by short case studies undertaken in 2017 and written or described by the Chin community in Adelaide and the Karen, Karreni communities in Mount Gambier. The case studies allowed migrants to tell their own stories and are a source of rich and sobering information about Burmese migrants' experiences as refugees; fleeing their homes, living in camps and arriving in a new country. The case studies highlight not just the hardships and challenges this group has faced, but the opportunities they have embraced and their aspirations.







2. History of Burmese Community in Australia

Burma (also known as Myanmar) is in South-East Asia on the Bay of Bengal. It shares borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. It also has coastal borders along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Myanmar is a resource-rich country that is situated in a region of strong economic growth, bordering India, China and Thailand.

Burma was briefly occupied by Japan during World War II (1942-45). In 1948, the country achieved independence from Britain, but the following decade saw clashes between the Burmese Government and minority political and ethnic groups.

Although Myanmar's economy has grown steadily over the past few years it remains one of the poorest countries in South-East Asia, particularly in rural areas. Poor economic policy and decades of isolation has meant that one-third of the population lives in poverty. Political and economic instability compelled many Anglo-Burmese to leave Burma, including 3,500 who

settled in Australia. The Government was overthrown in a coup d'état on 2 March 1962 and was subsequently under military leadership. Between 1965 and 1972, a further 2,500 Anglo-Burmese settled in Australia.

Since 2011, Australia has increased its aid programme to Myanmar – and its bilateral engagement more generally – in the interests of supporting growth and stability in the region. Australia also provides humanitarian assistance to Myanmar through its Humanitarian Programme, the stream of entry for most Myanmar nationals in Australia.

3. Key characteristics of the Burma-born population in South Australia

This section uses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing to outline key demographic and employment-related characteristics of the Burmese in South Australia.



3.1 Burma-born migrants in South Australia

Table 1 shows the total number of Burma-born in each Australian State and Territory at the last three Australian Censuses. Although the greatest total number of Burma-born live in New South Wales and Victoria, the intercensal gain between 2006 and 2016 was by far the greatest in South Australia, then Tasmania. In fact, the number of Burmese living in South Australia increased tenfold from 144 in 2006 to 1,575 in 2016 highlighting the need for this report.

Table 1: Australia: Burma-born by State of residence, 2006, 2011, 2016

	2006	2011	2016	Intercensal change 2006-2016 (n)	Intercensal gain
NSW	3,734	5,159	7,124	3,390	90.8
VIC	1,792	5,607	10,971	9,179	512.2
QLD	733	1,897	3,176	2,443	333.3
SA	144	723	1,575	1,431	993.8
WA	5,563	7,455	8,707	3,144	56.5
TAS	35	251	292	257	734.3
NT	66	188	201	135	204.5
ACT	307	474	611	304	99.0
Other	0	3	5	5	-
TOTAL	14,380	23,768	34,678	20,298	141.2

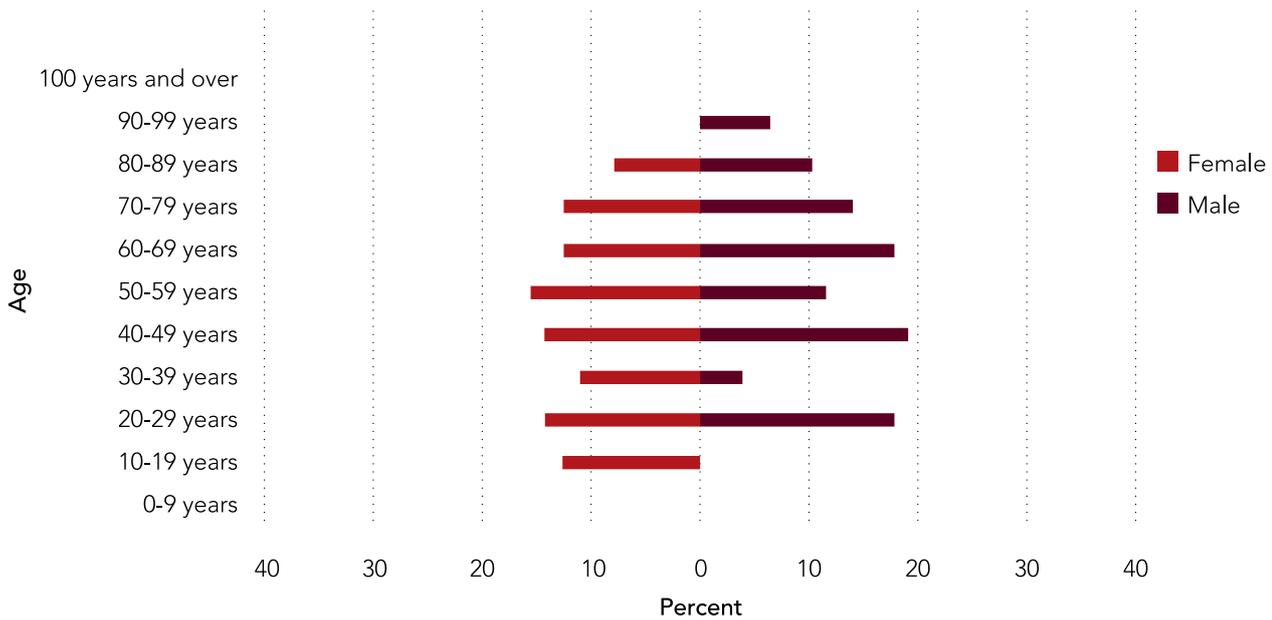
Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2006, 2011 and 2016

3.2 Age and sex

In 2016, the Burma-born population in South Australia had a relatively even distribution by gender, with only a slightly smaller proportion of females (48.9 %) compared to males (51.9 %). This differs to the broader South Australian population, where there a slightly more females (50.7 %) than males (49.3 %).

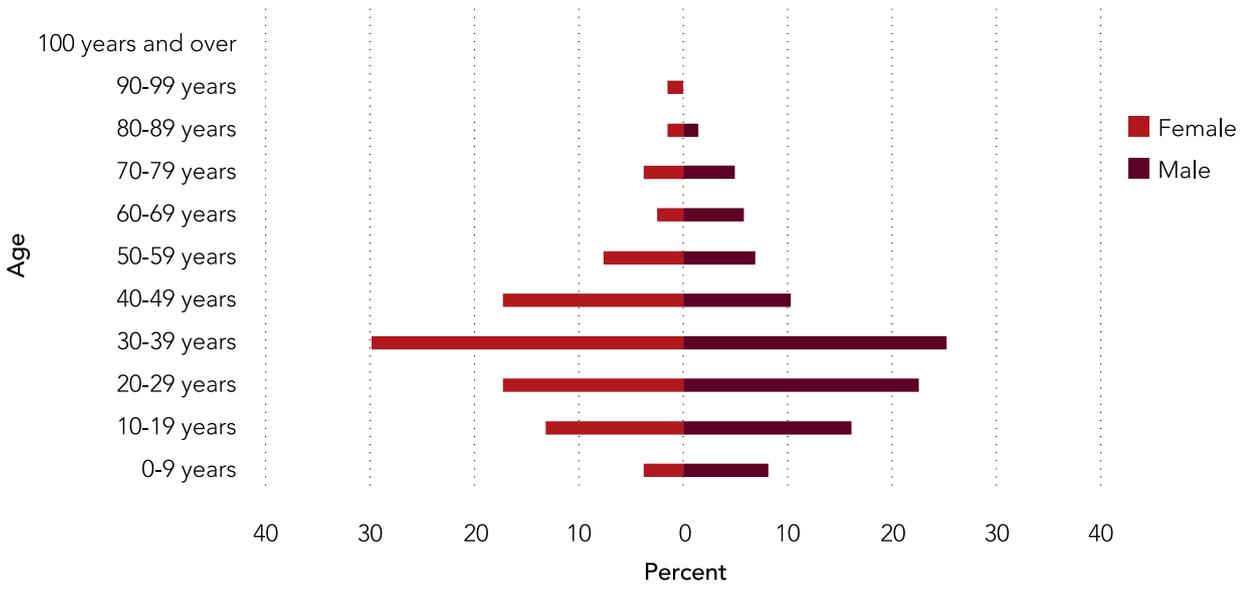
The age-sex structure of the Burma-born in South Australia in 2006, 2011 and 2016 is shown in Figure 1, 2 and 3. A dramatic shift between these census periods is clear. Overall, the 2006 data shows a migrant population that is more evenly distributed across the age range than more recent censuses, although there were no Burma-born females under the age of 20 recorded as living in South Australia in 2006. Later censuses in 2011 and the most recent census in 2016 show a generally 'younger' Burmese population in South Australia with around 86 percent of the population aged under 50 years.

Figure 1: South Australia: Burma-born, age and sex, 2006



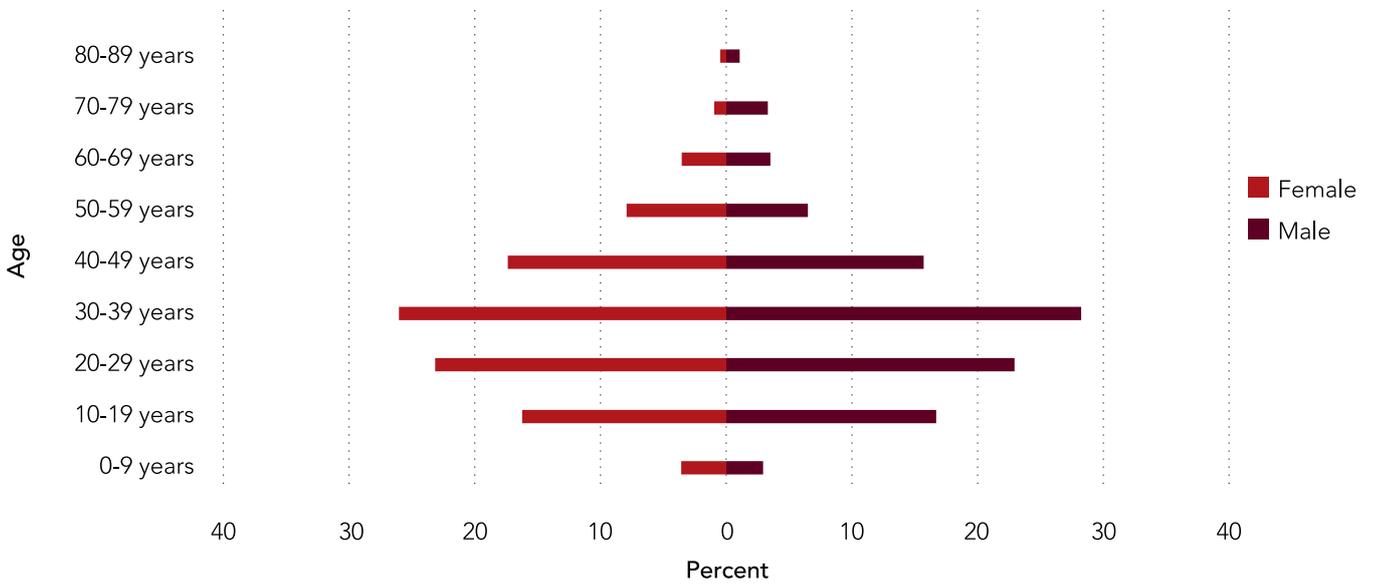
Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2006

Figure 2: South Australia: Burma-born, age and sex, 2011



Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2011

Figure 3: South Australia: Burma-born, age and sex, 2016



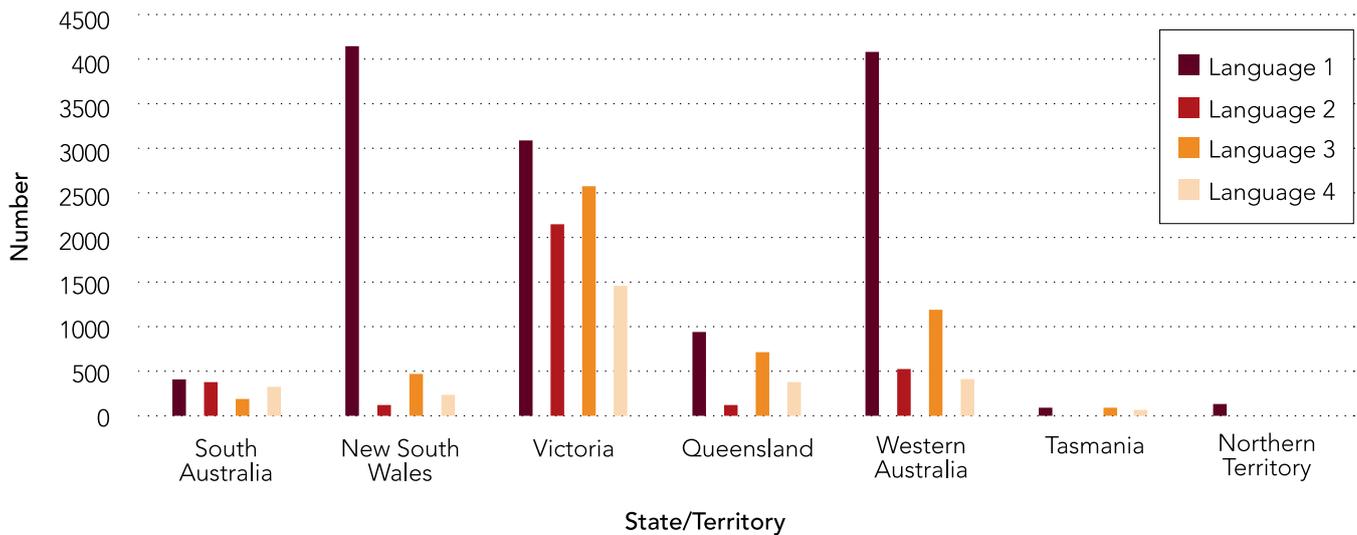
Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2016

3.3 Languages spoken at home

Figure 4 shows the four top languages spoken at home by Burmese migrants in Australia. While the majority speak the Burmese language, many also speak other Burmese-related languages at home. The Burmese population in South Australia is the most evenly split across the four languages, with between

300-400 people speaking Burmese, Chin Haka and Burmese and other related languages. In New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia Burmese is clearly the predominant language of the top four.

Figure 4: Australia: Burma-born, top four languages spoken at home by State of residence, 2016



Source: ABS Census, Cultural Diversity Census Report, 2016

*Includes Burmese and related languages 'not further defined' (nfd) and 'not elsewhere classified' (nec).

Table 2 shows proficiency in spoken English among the Burma-born living in South Australia. The proportion who speak English well has decreased in more recent censuses, reflecting the large number of recent arrivals who are still in the process of learning English. In the most recent 2016 Census, just over one quarter of Burma-born people spoke English not well or not at all.

Table 2: South Australia: Burma-born, proficiency in spoken English, 2006, 2011, 2016

Speaks English only or English well		
Year	n	%
2006	130	91.5
2011	343	48.0
2016	712	73.8
Speaks English not well or not at all		
2006	12	8.5
2011	372	52.0
2016	253	26.1

Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2006, 2011 & 2016

3.4 Australian citizenship status

In 2006, 72.7 percent of Burma-born living in South Australia had Australian citizenship while in 2011 only 21.9 percent of the Burmese in South Australia had become Australian citizens (Table 3). This decline in conferrals reflects the large number of arrivals between census periods, many of whom would be new arrivals not yet eligible or without the resources to apply for Australian citizenship. It is noteworthy that the proportion of Burma-born who were Australian citizens at the 2016 Census had increased again slightly to 32.1 percent.

Figure 4 shows the four top languages spoken at home by Burmese migrants in Australia. While the majority speak the Burmese language, many also speak other Burmese-related languages at home. The Burmese population in South Australia is the most evenly split across the four languages, with between 300-400 people speaking Burmese, Chin Haka and Burmese and other related languages. In New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia Burmese is clearly the predominant language of the top four.

Table 3: South Australia: Burma-born Australian citizenship status, 2006, 2011, 2016

	2006		2011		2016	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Australian	104	72.7	158	21.9	506	32.1
Not Australian	39	27.3	529	73.2	1,048	66.5
Not stated	0	0.0	36	5.0	24	1.4
TOTAL	143	100	723	100	1,575	100

Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2006, 2011 and 2016



3.5 Labor force status

Between 2006 and 2011, the proportion of Burmese people in South Australia who were employed in full-time work remained the same, though the absolute number of employed persons increased by nearly 100 people (Table 4). By the 2016 Census the number of employed Burmese people increased to 308, though the proportion of employed went up only slightly. Rather, a higher proportion were employed part-time in 2016 (11.7 %), compared to 2006 (6.8 %). The number and proportion of unemployed people looking for both full-time and part-time work has increased since 2006.

Table 4: South Australia: Burma-born, labour force status, 2006, 2011, 2016

	2006		2011		2016	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Employed, worked full time	24	17.0	123	17.0	308	19.5
Employed, worked part time	16	11.3	49	6.8	185	11.7
Employed, away from work	8	5.7	19	2.6	7	0.4
Unemployed, looking for full time work	6	4.3	39	5.4	102	6.5
Unemployed, looking for part time work	5	3.5	4	0.6	44	2.8
Not in labour force	82	58.2	380	52.6	737	46.6
Not stated or not applicable	0	0.0	109	15.1	197	12.5
TOTAL	141	100	723	100	1580	100

Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2006, 2011 and 2016

3.6 Occupation

Employment is vital to successful integration and settlement for new migrants; therefore, it is important to explore any difficulties in finding not just any employment but suitable and/or desirable employment. In 2011, half of the Burma-born migrants worked as Laborers or Technicians and trade workers (50.5 %), while one quarter (25.6 %) were employed as Managers or Professionals (Table 5). In 2016, the share of Managers and Professionals decreased (16.0 %), while Labourers (53.5 %), Sales workers (4.1 %) and Machinery operators and drivers (4.7 %) all increased. Only a small number of employed Burmese people nominated an occupation in 2006, so the data should be treated with caution, though, interestingly, most of them were Professionals (41.5 %).

Table 5: South Australia: Burma-born, occupation, 2006, 2011, 2016

	2006		2011		2016	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Managers	3	7.3	11	5.9	16	3.1
Professionals	17	41.5	37	19.7	66	12.9
Technicians and trade workers	4	9.8	12	6.4	42	8.2
Community and Personal Service Workers	5	12.2	21	11.2	49	9.6
Clerical and Administrative workers	3	7.3	8	4.3	8	1.6
Sales workers	0	0.0	3	1.6	21	4.1
Machinery operators and drivers	0	0.0	4	2.1	24	4.7
Labourers	6	14.6	83	44.1	274	53.5
Other*	3	7.3	9	4.8	12	2.3
TOTAL	41	100	188	100	512	100

Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2006, 2011 and 2016

*Other includes inadequately described and not stated

3.7 Student population

Education is one of the strategic priorities of Australia. Analysing the trend of education among the Burma-born migrants to South Australia we see, in absolute terms, the number of Burma-born studying either full-time or part-time has increased dramatically from 2006 to 2011 (Table 6). By the most recent 2016 Census the number of both full-time and part-time student increased, though as a share of the overall population they fell as the proportion of non-attenders jumped up. This likely corresponds with the increase in employed persons among the Burmese population in South Australia.

Table 6: South Australia: Burma-born student status, 2006, 2011, 2016

	2006		2011		2016	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not attending	112	77.8	397	54.9	965	61.3
Full-time student	26	18.1	252	34.9	512	32.5
Part-time student	3	2.1	43	5.9	85	5.4
Not stated	3	2.1	31	4.3	21	1.0
TOTAL	144	100	723	100	1,575	100

Source: ABS Census, Place of usual residence, 2006, 2011 and 2016



4. Burmese Settlement in SA Pilot Survey - summary data

This section presents primary data from 40 survey questionnaires administered by the AMRC to Burmese migrants living in the Adelaide metropolitan area (n=30) and Mount Gambier (n=10) between December 2016/ January 2017. The pilot survey results provide a snapshot of the characteristics and experiences of a small group of Burmese migrants living in South Australia.



4.1 Age of Survey Participants

The ages of participants in the survey are shown in Table 7. On the whole, the survey participants were young, with half aged under 30. The youngest participant was aged 17 years and the oldest aged 69. In the survey population there was a higher proportion of female respondents (57.5 %), compared to males (42.5 %).

Table 7: Age, survey population

Years	n	%
< 20	5	12.5
20 - 24	10	25
25 - 29	5	12.5
30 - 34	6	15
35 - 39	4	10
40 - 44	1	2.5
45 - 54	5	12.5
55+	4	10
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

4.2 Marital Status & Family Composition

The impact of Burmese migration to South Australia is not just from the primary migrants but is also dependent on the size and composition of the families of these migrants. Each new migrant becomes part of their local community; attending schools and universities, using services and contributing through employment. Table 8 shows that 40 percent of survey respondents were married at the time of participating in the survey, while 40 percent were single, and the rest were divorced, separated or widowed. Almost 45 percent of Burmese participants had at least one child under the age of 18, seven respondents had at least one child aged 18 or over.

Table 8: Marital status, survey population

Marital Status	n	%
Never married	16	40.0
Married/de facto	16	40.0
Separated/divorced	6	15.0
Widowed	2	5.0
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

Most of the survey respondents (65 %) had close family members still living outside of Australia including parents, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, and in-laws. Two respondents had spouses living outside Australia. This distress caused by separation from close family members who remain overseas has implications on mental health and settlement outcomes. It is important that services and family reunification policies are put in place to enable successful settlement outcomes for families.

4.3 Ethnicity

75 percent of survey respondents identified with the Chin ethnic group, while 20 percent identified with the Karen ethnic group. The Karen community is mainly settled in the Mount Gambier region, while the Chin ethnic group are settled in the Adelaide metropolitan area. Two respondents did not nominate an ethnic group they identify with.

4.4 Length of Residence in Australia

Respondents to the survey had on average been living in Australia for five and a half years, with the length of residence of respondents ranging from just one year (n=4) to living in Australia for 10 or more years (n=7). Table 9 shows just under half of all respondents have been living in Australia for less than five years.

Table 9: Length of residence in Australia, survey population

	n	%
Up to 5 years	17	42.5
5 years or more	23	57.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

4.5 Country of residence before migrating to Australia

Most Burmese migrants who participated in the pilot survey had been living in Burma/Myanmar or Malaysia before moving to Australia (Table 10), and 65 percent remained citizens of Burma/Myanmar.

Table 10: Country of residence before migrating, survey population

	n	%
Myanmar	19	47.5
Malaysia	12	30.0
Thailand	7	17.5
India	2	5.0
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

All except for two survey respondents came to Australia on a refugee visa, either a 200 visa (Refugee visa) (n=29), 202 visa (Global Special Humanitarian visa) (n=7) or 204 visa (women at risk) (n=1). One respondent did not know what visa they were on when they arrived in Australia and the other came to Australia on a prospective spouse visa. Nine respondents were still on the visas they had arrived in Australia on. The remaining respondents had transitioned to permanent status, with 37.5 percent having become Australian citizens. Of the respondents who were not yet Australian citizens, 92 percent said they plan to apply for Australian citizenship in the future.

4.6 Country survey respondents consider 'home'

For migrant settlement to be most successful for the migrant and the community in which they settle, ideally migrants should stay in the area for the long term. It has been noted that the process of settlement takes time and resources. A useful way to gauge migrant's attachment to an area is to consider where they think of as 'home'. Table 11 shows more than half the respondents felt Australia to be their home (60%), followed by Burma (27.5%). However, five people consider both Burma and Australia 'home'.

Table 11: Thoughts on 'home', survey population

	n	%
Australia	24	60.0
Burma	11	27.5
Burma and Australia	5	12.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

4.7 Preferred language and English language proficiency

English language ability is a key factor in successful settlement. Table 12 shows that 40 percent of those surveyed both speak and understand English well, while a further 22.5 percent both speak and understand English a little. The most vulnerable group identified here are the 20 percent who can neither speak nor understand English. The ability to speak and understand English is influenced by the length of time migrants are in Australia with 74 percent of those who have lived in Australia for at least five years speaking/understanding at least some English, compared to 47 percent of those who have lived in Australia for less than five years.

Table 12: Ability to speak and understand English, survey population

	n	%
Both: speaks and understands well	16	40.0
Both: speaks and understands a little	9	22.5
Cannot speak nor understand	8	20.0
Cannot speak but understands a little	6	15.0
Cannot speak but understands well	1	2.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

Although these data show a relatively high proportion of survey respondents speak English well or a little bit, it is interesting to note their preference for speaking other languages, shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Preferred language, survey population

	n	%
Chin (Hakha)	19	47.5
Karen	9	22.5
Chin	5	12.5
English and Chin Hakha	4	10.0
Chin (Falam)	2	5.0
English	1	2.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

4.8 Self-rated health status

Overall the health of survey participants was good with 90 percent rating their own health as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent' (Table 14). All except one participants reported their health is the same or better than one year ago. One third of respondents said their health is better now than one year ago (35%), the rest said it was about the same as one year ago (62.5%).

Table 14: Self-rated health status, survey population

Health Status	n	%
Excellent	14	35.0
Very good	12	30.0
Good	10	25.0
Fair	3	7.5
Poor	1	2.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

4.9 Employment and job satisfaction

The workplace is an important place of interaction where people from different backgrounds interact with each other. The role of employment in developing language skills, enabling integration, and fostering social and support networks outside of birthplace groups should not be under-estimated. Just under half of all respondents surveyed were employed in some capacity, on either a full-time, part-time or casual basis (Table 15).

Employment status is affected by age, length of residency and life stage (e.g. whether they are child rearing). Full and part time employment status was much higher among those who had been living in Australia for five years or more, with a larger proportion of respondents aged 25 and over employed full-time compared to their younger counterparts. This is to be expected as younger people tend to be engaged in education and possibly only able to work part-time, if at all.

Table 15: Employment status, survey population

	n	%
Full time	11	27.5
Part time	3	7.5
Casual	4	10.0
Unemployed - looking for work	10	25.0
Not in labour force	12	30.0
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

Two thirds of respondents with a job were satisfied with the amount of work that they are doing, while the remainder would like more work. Most unemployed respondents (67%) also said they would like work, highlighting a degree of underemployment in the Burmese community in South Australia and an untapped potential workforce. Importantly, of those who are currently employed, 78 percent said their work matches their qualifications and experience.

Most survey respondents who were employed worked in blue-collar jobs, for example, factory hands, meat processing, agricultural work, cleaners or retail workers. One participant was a settlement officer with the Migrant Resource Centre, another an interpreter and two worked in the community sector.

When asked how they rate their financial situation, most respondents said they were 'going ok' or 'going well', with 30 percent reporting that they are 'just managing'. Table 16 shows that the response to this question varies by employment status, with just 16.7 percent of employed participants stating they are 'just managing' compared to 40.9 percent of participants who are not employed.

Table 16: Financial status, survey population

	Employed		Not Employed	
	n	%	n	%
Just managing	3	16.7	9	40.9
Going ok	13	72.2	9	40.9
Going well	2	11.1	4	18.2
TOTAL	18	100	22	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

4.10 Housing

More than two thirds of survey respondents were renting their accommodation (70%), while 8 respondents do own their own home (Table 17). Respondents in the 'other' category were living in a home owned by other family members. All but one respondent was satisfied with their accommodation arrangements.

Table 17: Housing status, survey population

	n	%
Renting	28	70.0
Own house	8	20.0
Other	4	10.0
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

4.11 Services used in the Past 6 Months

Table 18 shows the services used in the past six months by the survey participants. It is evident from the survey responses that the most frequently used services by this group are the Migrant Resource Centre and Centrelink, which were used by more than half of all respondents. The services respondents used differed according to length of residence in Australia. A higher proportion of newer arrivals tended to use employment services, migrant resource centres and health services. A higher proportion of respondents who had been living in Australia for five years or more used other services, namely church, community or workplace services, TAFE, libraries and schools. However, length of residency in Australia made no difference to the use of Centrelink services in this survey.

Table 18: Services used in the past six months, survey population (multiple response)

	n	%
Australian Migrant Resource Centre	27	67.5
Centrelink	24	60.0
TAFE/Educational training institutions	19	47.5
Health services	19	47.5
Employment services	17	42.5
Library	15	37.5
Schools	8	20.0
'Other' services (church, community, workplace)	5	12.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey

4.12 Life in Australia

Respondents were asked if they agree or disagree with a range of statements about their life experiences in Australia and their responses are shown in Table 19 where statements with a high response rate are shown in bold text. Overall, respondents seemed to feel positive about life in Australia, although a high proportion miss their origin country (87.5%). Most respondents agree that life in Australia is what they expected it to be (87.5%) and the majority are happy in the area where they live (95%) and feel the facilities/services in the area are good (95%). The majority

of respondents also felt accepted in the wider community with just 12.5 percent feeling like an outsider and fewer reporting that their family is unhappy (5%).

In addition, 90 percent of the respondents to this survey felt the people in the local area where they live have been friendly towards them and over 80 percent feel the local community supports their cultural practices.

Table 19: Financial status, survey population

	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not applicable (%)	Total (%)
Life in Australia is what I expected	87.5	10	2.5	100
I miss the country that I come from	87.5	2.5	10.0	100
Facilities/services in the area that I live are good	95.0	5	0.0	100
No suitable employment for myself/my family	20.0	55	25.0	100
Friends/family live too far away	50.0	42.5	7.5	100
I like the area where I live	95.0	2.5	2.5	100
My family is unhappy	5.0	82.5	12.5	100
I feel like an outsider	12.5	77.5	10.0	100
TOTAL	18	100	22	100

Source: AMRC Pilot Survey



4.13 Open responses about settlement in Australia

At the end of the survey, the participants had the opportunity to comment on any of their successes or challenges settling into life in Australia. Several people mentioned that the language barrier was high and caused them much difficulty initially but, with time and practice, this improved and made life in Australia a lot easier.

For example, the following comment came from a female aged 22: "First I had to learn English and the system; it was hard. After gaining English skills, I made many friends and am more confident. Getting a part time job was hard but luckily I was assisted by AMRC with my resume and linked with retail shops, where I have been working while studying full time at University."

Another female participant, aged 45, also noted the importance of the Australian Migrant Resource Centre, in particular, as important for accessing services: "Lack of language and help accessing services without help from AMRC is difficult."

It is clear from several comments that ties and affection for their origin country are still strong while at the same time they accept that Australia holds many opportunities for them and this is their home. For example this statement from a male, aged 28: "Australia is a lot different than where I came from, but as time goes on, it has gotten better here and now I feel like Australia is my second home. I feel safe and comfortable about living in Australia. I am still learning English every day and I miss my home back in Thailand."

Others stated simply that: "Life in Australia is better than [where I came from]." And this statement from an 18 years old female sums up the sentiments expressed by many: "Living in Australia gives me opportunities and challenges."





5. Case Studies

While census and survey data provide an important overview of a population, it is the stories and in-depth, personal views that enrich the picture of settlement and place-making for any population group. The following case studies have been prepared from interviews with staff of the Australian Migrant Resource Centre. They reflect the often-troubled journey to Australia and celebrate some of the settlement stories from the Burmese community in South Australia. Some relate to individuals and some relate to community groups.



5.1 Ray Min, Mount Gambier by Anelia Blackie

With fear and uncertainty for what the future would hold, Ray Min held his toddler tight on his lap in the plane as it descended to land in Mount Gambier on a chilly day of June 6, 2007. Next to him was his wife, Pa Lae Sein, who trusted him unconditionally to provide the family with a better future. Both parents hoped their new life in Australia would be worlds apart from the persecution they suffered for many years at the hands of the Burmese for the sake of their children – Htoo Eh Main Min, almost four, and two-year-old Diamond Htoo Min.

“I was terrified. I thought if something happened to this plane, we would all be gone,” Ray said, “everything was uncertain – is someone going to pick us up from the airport? What will happen to us?”

With them on the flight were Thoo Lay Paw Eh and her family – Ray and Thoo were to be the two pioneer refugee families to arrive from Burma to settle in Mount Gambier. The Australian Migrant Resource Centre Manager, Heather Muirhead, who received them at the airport and took them to a rental two-bedroom unit she had secured prior to their arrival, welcomed the families. “The unit was so different from the bamboo houses we were used to. It was like a five star hotel,” Ray said, “It was the first time we had running hot water and we had to learn how to use the electric stove...we practiced cooking on it and many times we set off the smoke alarm.”

“In the first few weeks we were scared to walk on the streets. When we were living in Thailand in the refugee camp, we had no right to go into the city. If the Thai police saw us, they would lock us up....It took us a few months to realise we were safe.”

One of the biggest barriers for Ray and his wife to overcome was learning the English language. “We have no plurals and no past tense in Karen,” he said, “We don’t say ‘yesterday I came’. We say ‘yesterday I come,’ so tenses and pronunciation were the most difficult for us to learn. When I arrived, I was keen to become a nurse in Australia because I worked as a paramedic in a refugee camp, but I soon realised my English was not good enough and I became a little depressed for a while.”

Ray was born in a small village in the Karen state in Burma in 1972 where he grew up with ethnic groups fighting to gain control over each other. His father was a Karen soldier who fought hard for the independence and survival of his people, but it meant his family had to move from place to place. “Around 1978, the fighting was so bad that it became too dangerous for me, my sister and my mum to be with my dad, so we had to flee and leave dad behind,” Ray said. “We fled across the border into Thailand and lived as refugees in a small village near the border.” But their relief to get away from the brutality of the



Burmese soldiers was short-lived as they were attacked again in Thailand.

Ray and his family were taken to the Umpiem Mai Refugee Camp where they lived for 23 years before the Australian Government granted them a visa on humanitarian grounds to permanently settle in Mount Gambier. It was in the refugee camp that he met his wife and their first two children were born. It was also in the camp that Ray studied to become a paramedic and worked alongside visiting volunteer doctors, administering medicine and treating patients for illnesses such as malaria and skin diseases. He also helped with the delivery of babies. “For about the first two years in Australia, I thought I’d be able to become a nurse and work in hospitals again,” he said. “But when I realised it would never happen, I worked on a pig farm where I sometimes thought I was going to throw up because I couldn’t stomach the smell. Then I tried twice to work on dairy farms, but my body ached all over. I got very tired and realised I would not be able to do this work long-term.”

After studying English at TAFE, Ray returned to study aged care while his wife was earning money by running a day care centre from home. “It took me about four years to get my career started, and it was very hard to do the aged care course with my limited English” he said. But Ray’s persistence paid off and not only did he learn to drive a car for the first time in his life, but he also gained employment as a carer at Boandik Lodge aged care facility where he still works now. Until recently, he was also working as an interpreter in Mount Gambier.

In 2010, Joshua Min was born and six years later the family was blessed with the birth of Aria Min.

Now owning their own home, Ray realises they have come a long way to fulfil their dreams of having a good education, an income and their own property. “Before I came here, I knew nothing about Australia except that it had a high standard of living and peace – that’s what we came here for, the peace,” Ray said... “Coming to Australia was the best thing that ever happened to us. We’ve got freedom and we have the same rights as everyone else.”



5.2 Simon Sangkual Cinzah by Alma Ramcilovic

In 1996, Simon Cinzah courageously made the decision to leave his home country, Burma. Crossing the border into Malaysia, Simon spent the next 10 years residing in the country. "There was a lot of discrimination, religious persecutions and no freedom at all, so I decided to leave," he said. "It was really difficult in Malaysia because I didn't have proper documentation such as a passport, so I was an illegal resident there. This was very dangerous because at any time, the police could've arrested me."

For the next few years, Simon worked at a construction site at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. "There was no beds at the site, so I had to live in the jungle or in a tent. The living conditions in the jungle were terrible," he said. After completing the construction site, he moved to the city of Johor Bahru with friends, working in an electrical construction company for a year, before moving back to Kuala Lumpur to work at the international airport for another two years.

When a new construction project presented itself, Simon was back on the move, this time travelling to Kota Bharu, situated between the border of Thailand and Malaysia. "It was a complex project because the building was huge, it had 35 levels and I was there for about a year and a half," he said. "From there, I went to the small town of Nilai, where I worked in the Dumex factory which produced milk powder, and imported and exported goods. I then worked on two university projects across the space of two years, which required both technical and electrical work to be done. I had to set up a PA system, layer the wiring and cables, and do the termination."

In 2004 January, Simon returned to Kuala Lumpur where he was asked to join the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "The UNHCR wanted me to coordinate and liaise with members from the human right organisation, the Chin Refugee Committee. This was the only refugee organisation at that time," he said. The turning point in Simon's life occurred when the Immigration Department in Kuala Lumpur advised him to apply for a visa on humanitarian grounds.

"The department offered me the choice of three destinations in Australia including Adelaide, Tasmania and Sydney. They

informed me that I could settle in one of the places and then change after a year. Sydney was my initial choice, but after thinking about it more deeply, I wanted to settle in Adelaide," he said.

Simon journeyed to Adelaide in September 2006, under the Humanitarian Settlement Services Program (HSS) at the Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC), along with seven other Burmese individuals. "I was received at the airport by my case worker and provided with accommodation, given a property induction and was assisted with essential registrations with a bank, Centrelink, Medicare and

Tax File Number," he said. "I was also given an orientation of the local area I was living in and an orientation of the city as well. This included how to catch public transport and how to get to the AMRC, which was back then known as the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia and located on King William Street."

After less than two weeks, Simon registered as a volunteer with the AMRC where he provided new arrivals with the same support he received. "After learning how to catch public transport to the city, I wanted to volunteer and assist others who had a similar experience to me. I wanted to help them adjust and become independent in navigating their new environment," he said. "I also wanted to gain valuable work experience and develop my skills."

During the same time, Simon was also engaged in casual farming work in Lobethal to earn a living. He only commenced studying the English language in 2007 November, when he enrolled at TAFE SA on Currie Street. "I studied there for two months and then stopped because I was asked to work at the AMRC by the Chief Executive Officer, Ms Eugenia Tsoulis," he said. "Although I was hesitant to agree because I wasn't overly confident in my English language skills, Eugenia offered me the opportunity to study English at the AMRC office. I decided to take the opportunity and started working two days a week, while learning English at the office when I wasn't working. Shortly after, my position was upgraded to full-time and I've been a Case Manager for the HSS program ever since."

Simon recalls, being accepted in the local Adelaide community, especially by members of an Australian church. "They would regularly speak to us and visit us. But it was challenging when I went to a health clinic or TAFE because people weren't sure how to communicate with me," he said. After a month of arriving, the Department of Immigration in Adelaide asked Simon to form a Burmese Chin community group. "The department wanted to establish a way to contact us. Our community back then was called the Adelaide Chin Christian Fellowship and there was only 40 of us. We would meet once a week, every Sunday. This is how the Burmese Chin community in Adelaide was initially established," he said.

Three months following his arrival, Simon's partner joined him in Adelaide from Malaysia.



5.3 Hae Moo, Mount Gambier by Anelia Blackie

The ear-deafening explosion came unexpectedly, knocking the 13-year-old Hae Moo off his feet and tossing him into the sky before his limp body landed hard on the forest floor. From a short distance, his friend threw aside the mushrooms and bamboo shoots the two of them had been collecting for their evening meal and ran towards Hae Moo. The landmine left him in an awful state – he was covered in soil, his clothes were ripped and blood was gushing from his right leg. The boy panicked and screamed for help, but no one came.

“My friend lifted me onto his shoulder and carried me for about three hours to the nearest people who took me to hospital,” Hae Moo said, “I drifted in and out of consciousness the whole time and I was very thirsty from all the blood I had lost. There was no attack from the Burmese soldiers on that day. I stepped on a landmine they had planted there earlier. That’s what they do – they drive us out of our villages, destroy our homes and crops and then put landmines all around our villages so we get killed if we try to go back home.”

Born in the Karenni state of Burma, Hae Moo grew up living in fear of persecution by the Burmese. His life was always in danger, even after he moved to another village to work on his uncle’s farm at the age of 12. But after living with his uncle for only a year, Karen soldiers warned them of approaching Burmese attackers and the villagers fled into the forest. With their village destroyed by the Burmese, they had nowhere to go and remained in the forest where nature provided them with some food and shelter.

Searching for food on that fateful day changed Hae Moo’s life forever when he happened to step on a landmine planted by Burmese soldiers. “I was in hospital in Thailand for about two months,” Hae Moo said, “I had two operations – the first was to amputate my leg above the ankle and the second was to put it off under the knee.” When the time came for him to be discharged, Hae Moo’s uncle came to pick him up. “We had no safe place to go to, so for the next two years my uncle and I stayed in the forest in Thailand,” he said, “we made a shelter with bamboo and we planted vegetables to eat. Sometimes we caught fish in the river and we had no meat. I was very skinny. I

lived like that with one leg. I used a crutch the hospital gave me and when it broke, I made a new one from bamboo.”

Every now and then, some caring Thai people visited Hae Moo and his uncle in the forest with parcels of medicine and food, and it was during one of these visits that they had heard about living in a refugee camp. “I was about 15 when we went to live in the Mae Surin camp in Thailand with thousands of other people,” he said, “I was in the camp for about a month when I found my mother there. She hugged me and cried. My dad wasn’t there – I never saw him again.”

It was 15 years later, at the age of 30, when Hae Moo met his beautiful wife Naw Ba, who gave him two sons, Mo Du Say and Roster Say. But sadly, Naw Ba fell ill with a kidney disease and passed away in the camp when the boys were 15 and 12 years old. A year later in 2013, the father and his two sons came under threat when the worst fire in the history of Thailand’s refugee camps broke out and killed 38 people. The blaze injured at least 100, destroyed over 400 houses and displaced about 2,300 people. “The boys went to school on the day of the fire and just got home after finishing a test when we saw the thick smoke and flames,” he said, “Luckily it didn’t spread to our part of the camp but it was terrible. A lot of people died.”

Hae Moo and his sons were one of several families from the camp given the chance to apply for humanitarian visas to come to Australia. On the 23rd of October 2013, the three landed in Mount Gambier where they resettled. “I had to learn to use electricity and cook on a stove. If I didn’t, we would go hungry,” he said. “The most difficult part has been to learn English and I sometimes miss my country. When you live in a refugee camp you can just walk to a friend’s house and eat butternut with them. Here in Australia, if you can’t speak English, you can’t visit your neighbours.”

Despite the challenges of adapting to a new country, Hae Moo has been learning to drive and obtained his driver’s license so he can travel to work. “I wish I could get a full-time job, but until then, I am happy doing seasonal work,” he said. “I want my children to work hard in school and one day find good jobs so that they don’t have to work in the rain and sun like me.”

5.4 Mercy Ngun Ceu

In 2005, at the age of 11, my family and I arrived in Victoria from Malaysia as humanitarian entrants. We were among the first Burmese family groups to arrive. I wasn't quite sure what to expect when coming to Australia, as my positive perception about the country was shaped by movies. As new arrivals, the Migrant Information Centre (MIC) in Victoria supported us with the settlement process in better understanding Australian life, as well as accessing opportunities and services. The MIC assisted my family to secure temporary accommodation, and we resided in the central city for three months. After this, we were able to independently source accommodation in the eastern suburbs.

Although this wasn't a multicultural area, there was an Australian family who made us feel accepted and welcomed. They looked after us, provided us with free tutoring sessions and assistance with enrolments. They treated us as though we were members of their own family. I still keep in regular contact with them and I am extremely grateful for everything they have done for us. We resided in the eastern suburbs until we were able to purchase a new house.

I was enrolled straight into mainstream schooling because my English language proficiency was of a good standard, due to the English and Christian boarding school I attended in Burma. In contrast to the education system in Australia, Burma wasn't as developed when I was a student there, as we didn't have access to textbooks or computers, and subjects such as chemistry or arts weren't available.

I moved to Adelaide in 2013, as I wanted to explore new opportunities, which would allow me to flourish, following in the footsteps of my father, who was a leader within the Burmese Chin community in Melbourne. Since the move, I have also become a

community leader and as part of my work, I have participated in translating and filming of the 'Dementia Awareness Documentary' conducted in Chin Hakha dialect, which is available to be viewed on DVD. My transcription was edited by my uncle F. Lai Len, an incredibly talented and educated person residing in Melbourne.

My journey with the Australian Migrant Resource Centre began in 2013, when I assumed the role of board member to represent the Burmese Community in South Australia. This was an honourable experience for me, and an achievement that I am immensely proud of. When I learnt of an opening for a casual part-time position at the AMRC, my decision to apply was driven by my own personal experience as a refugee as well as from the encouragement I received from community members and my deep-seeded passion to assist those in need. From the age of 12, I started accompanying my relatives and community friends to their appointments, and acted as an interpreter and translator on their behalf. I am able to understand the challenges and issues encountered by new arrivals, which makes it easier for me to connect and work with people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

I soon was given an opportunity to be a full-time Settlement Officer, where I now service new arrivals who have been exited and referred from the AMRC Humanitarian Settlement Services program and other related programs from different agencies. I provide case management to recipients of the Migration Proposal Pilot program and work closely with clients from the Community Proposal Pilot program, assisting them with resettlement and referrals to required services. My favourite aspect of the job is being able to have positive impact on people's lives.





5.5 Lian Bil

I arrived in Australia with my wife and three children from Burma in mid-2015. The case manager, we were assigned to, was Simon Cinzah from the Australian Migrant Resource Centre. Through Simon's assistance, we were able to successfully resettle in Australia and became comfortable in living in a new country. We also received emergency relief support from the AMRC with paying our electricity bills because we struggled managing our first few bills. We are extremely grateful to the AMRC for linking us to Centrelink and services in the health area.

Within a year and a half of arriving in Australia, we were incredibly happy and proud to have purchased our very first house in Ingle Farm with our own money, as prior to this, we were residing in a small cottage in Hmaikhah village, Burma, which I had inherited from my parents. We discovered our house online and it immediately captured our attention. Initially, we didn't really intend to buy a house straightaway, but after seeing it, we didn't want to lose it. We attended the open inspection held the next day and found that the price wasn't too high, which was perfect for us because that's what we could afford at that stage. During our encounters with the real estate agent, our niece assisted with interpreting.

We received a great deal of support from friends and family members during the process of buying this house. Given that we couldn't speak or understand any English, we relied on them to provide us with the best advice, based on their house buying experience. We are really lucky to have located a house in close proximity of our family and friends.

5.6 Roy Peng Nawl

I was living in Malaysia for six years as a refugee before I arrived in Victoria on my own in 2006 through the Humanitarian Settlement Program. I was 28-years-old when I arrived. My partner was already living in Victoria three months prior to my arrival. The AMES organisation supported me to access services such as Centrelink and the bank, and also assisted me to enroll in AMEP. It was quite difficult to source accommodation and it took me about three months to locate housing for us. The most challenging aspect of my settlement in Australia was the language barrier and not having a great number of community members for support.

Within a year of studying English, I completed my Certificate III in English in Victoria. After that, I obtained an Advanced Diploma of Electrical Engineering in 2009 from the Victorian University. My past employment as an electrician motivated me to pursue this field of study because I was interested to learn more about this area. We decided to move to Adelaide in 2011 because the cost of living in Victoria was extremely expensive, especially the rent. I continued my studies at the University of South Australia and completed a Bachelor of Civil Engineering.

I have been helping new arrivals in my community since I arrived in Australia, as I was one of the very few people who could speak some English. I have worked with the Australian Refugee Association since 2012 as a bicultural worker and I was a former board member on the Australian Migrant Resource Centre for a year representing the Burmese Chin community in SA.





5.7 Van Bawi Tinhlawng

I was born in Burma and arrived in Australia from Malaysia in 2008 at the age of 24. I arrived with four other individuals under the Australian Government's resettlement program. I was received by the Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC) at the airport. They provided me with settlement services such as essential registrations. I was accommodated by Anglicare SA, in a one-bedroom unit located in the suburb of Burnside, which was quite expensive due to the area. However, through the assistance of a friend, I was linked with a private property owner and able to rent a single bedroom unit for a lower expense in Woodville Gardens. During that time, most of my community were unaware of how to secure private accommodation and could not afford to access the internet to search for one online. The most challenging aspect of my settlement process was the initial cultural shock, which I overcame by forming friendships, and learning about the Australian culture and customs through my participation in the Adelaide community.

I engaged in learning the English language at TAFE SA at Certificate IV level, while volunteering with the AMRC. My responsibility as a volunteer included assisting new arrivals from my community by interpreting at their appointments with service providers such as Centrelink, job networks and Service SA. I progressed into a full-time position at the AMRC as a Case Coordinator in the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Service program. Currently, my role is to provide support to clients on Bridging Visas while they await the resolution of their immigration status.

I was incredibly thrilled to have the opportunity to access quality education in Australia and complete a Bachelor of International Studies at the University of Adelaide. My decision to pursue this degree pathway was driven by my interest to gain greater knowledge on global issues such as international developments, managing conflicts and peace, as well as broader security issues. I have also gained a Diploma of Community Services Work (RPL) from TAFE SA. I am immensely proud to work in an organisation that services asylum seekers and refugees.



5.8 Wah Ree Paw, Mount Gambier by Anelia Blackie

When Karenni girl Wah Ree Paw closes her eyes to dream about the future, she visualises herself somewhere in Burma helping orphaned children and the poor. She has never lived in Burma because before she was born in 1998, her parents had to flee their country to seek safety in a refugee camp in Thailand. But her desire to help her people keeps drawing her back there. Wah Ree was born in the Mae Surin refugee camp which houses over 2,800 refugees from Burma. She lived with her father Ku Maung Pei, her mother Ah Say and her sister Toe Bar Say in a bamboo house on high stilts to protect their belongings from flooding in the rainy season. "We all slept together on a bamboo floor in one bedroom," she said, "the bamboo was cut lengthways in half and flattened for the floors and our walls were made from woven bamboo and leaves. We had a kitchen area with dried mud on the floor for cooking and on top of the mud we had three stones to balance our pots. We used to cut branches off the trees to make a fire under the pots and lit it with matches."

Once a month, the Red Cross would bring food rations to families, which included rice, beans, fish paste and oil. "The food rations weren't enough to last a month, so we planted vegetables and fruit in our backyard to eat," she said, "we grew food like sweet potato, papaya, bananas, mangoes, pineapple and lemons, depending on the season. We didn't really have meat because it was expensive to buy, so we had chickens and pigs in the backyard that we slaughtered for food."

Although it was a constant challenge for families in the camp not to go hungry, it was the strong sense of community she grew up with that is still vivid in Wah Ree's memory. "We always helped each other," she said, "if neighbours didn't have food to eat, they could come over anytime and ask for vegetables from our backyard. They did not have to pay or give anything in return. We had a lot of fun activities for the youth and adults in the camp with competitions where the winner was given a prize. We did a lot of things together as a community in the camp." Children from around the camp attended school every day, whereby different ages shared the same classroom and were educated by qualified teachers.

Despite her happy childhood memories, the children were constantly reminded by their parents not to wander outside the camp where they could be attacked by soldiers. "People sometimes went outside the camp to look for food like mushrooms and bamboo shoots and then the soldiers would kill them," she said. "Often the soldiers would place explosives on the bodies and landmines around them so that when their families pick them up to take them away for burial, there would be an explosion and they would get killed too. This happened to a neighbour and I was very upset for days. Mum used to say 'don't think too much, it will make your mind sick'."

Growing up in the camp, Wah Ree was unaware of better living conditions elsewhere in the world. "I didn't even know Australia existed," she said. "The first time I heard about it was when we were told we could apply for a visa and it's a better place for education and health."

When the news came for Wah Ree's family that their visa had been approved after they passed their medical checks, they got ready for the long trip on a bus to Bangkok. "Mum dressed up nicely and smeared Thanaka all over her face because they told us they were going to take passport photos," Wah Ree said, explaining it as a yellow paste made from the Thanaka tree and used by women to enhance their beauty. "But when we got there for the photos, they told her to wash it off. She was so embarrassed."

Wah Ree was 12 years old when she arrived with her family in Mount Gambier on the 15th of December 2010. "We were really scared," she said, "there were so many roads and cars and we were scared we were going to get lost. We didn't understand any English so when a boy in school said something to me, I just smiled. Afterwards when someone explained that he told me I didn't belong here and to go back to my country, I cried and felt very sad. I was new and the first words someone said to me were hurtful."

Despite a rocky start, Wah Ree is happy to be in Mount Gambier. She has successfully completed Year 12 and plans to follow in her mother's footsteps by becoming a teacher. She also works as volunteer interpreter at the Migrant Resource Centre. "I want to go to Burma to teach," she said. "I have learnt a lot from living in Australia and I can take that knowledge back there to help orphans and poor people."

Noodle Sushi Bar



5.9 Saw Khain and Saw Myo, Mount Gambier

by Anelia Blackie

To work nine hours a day and six days a week is easy for Saw Khain and Saw Myo compared to what they are used to. The two Karen refugees own and manage the Noodle Sushi Bar in Mount Gambier where they employ three part-time staff members to help serve a variety of Asian dishes. "We used to work around 13 hours a day every day of the week with only two days per month off," Say Myo said.

The pair met for the first time in Mount Gambier, but ironically followed similar paths from their home country of Burma to seek freedom in Malaysia, before finally finding their third and final home in Mount Gambier. Escaping the constant persecution of the Burmese soldiers in the Karen state in Burma, both were in their mid-twenties when they fled through Thailand to Malaysia. "We didn't want to live in refugee camps, so we went to Malaysia knowing we could find work there and earn some money," Saw Myo said, "I found a job in a restaurant where I learnt how to cook step-by-step. There was no limit to the amount of hours they let us work per day and in return, we got paid very little money, and were given meals and shared accommodation. I lived like that for three and a half years."

Although registered as refugees while living in Malaysia, they were not entitled to any support from the government. Both Saw Myo and Saw Khain were informed by the UNHCR that

they could apply for humanitarian visas to another country, but had no say in which country they wanted to settle. "After I applied for my visa, the UNHCR told me I would be taken to Australia and they gave me one week of training," Saw Myo said, "they told us that the money we will get from Centrelink in the beginning will just be enough to survive and that's to help us settle in. But I will need to find a job if I wanted to save money."

Because Saw Myo - whose parents died when he was very young - had only an aunt who lived in Mount Gambier, the Australian Government granted him a visa to settle in the South Australian regional city. He arrived in Australia on the 16th of February 2012, just a few months short of a year before Saw Khain arrived with his wife Naw Eh Hsae and their son Saw Eh Tasoh Tha on his second birthday on the 30th of May 2013. By then, Saw Myo had already been working hard towards gaining experience to run his own business in Mount Gambier by completing Certificate II and III in Hospitality at TAFE. He also worked at various restaurants in the city, first part-time and then later full-time.

Wanting the independence of owning a business, the pair tried to secure a loan to purchase the Noodle Sushi Bar, but because they did not own property, the banks declined their application. "When we couldn't get a loan from the bank, a friend offered to borrow us the money with no interest," Saw Khain said, "we really wanted to own a business. It's good for us and it's good for our children." In June 2016, Saw Myo and Saw Khain became the owners of the Noodle Sushi Bar in Mount Gambier's main street.

"It was hard to learn English at first," Saw Khain said, "when I lived in Burma, I spoke Karen and Burmese, then I went to Malaysia and had to learn Malaysian and because I worked in a Chinese restaurant, I had to learn Chinese. So, English is the fifth language that I am learning and I find the pronunciation and grammar to be very difficult." For Saw Myo, who speaks Karen, Burmese and Malaysian, English was the fourth language he had to master.

"We are very happy in Mount Gambier," Saw Khain said, "our Karen community has always been very supportive and helped us to settle in. When I arrived, I only had \$200 and my wife and I were very surprised when the government gave us furniture, a fridge and television in our rental property. They provided us with enough to help us make a start, but after that, it was up to us to make a good future for ourselves. And the opportunities are there to do it."

Now that Saw Myo and Saw Khain have reached their goal of owning a business, they are ready for their next milestone. "We are now saving hard so we can buy our own homes," they said, "hopefully, we can do it in five years or so."



5.10 Mang Cinzah

I am a Chin national from Burma, who arrived in Australia at the age of 15. I arrived with my parents and siblings from a refugee camp in Malaysia under the Humanitarian Program at the end of 2008. My family and I were received at the airport by a case worker and Burmese volunteer from the Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC), who accommodated us in the Northern Area. After three months we managed to relocate to a suitable house for our family in the Kilkenny area, where we still currently reside.

Needing extra assistance with the English language, I was enrolled in the New Arrivals Program (NAP) at the Adelaide Secondary School of English. I was accepted in the local community and conducted speeches about my story and my community at school and religious organisations. After completing NAP, I enrolled in a mainstream school and gained my SACE. Currently, I am studying a Social Work and Social Planning degree at Flinders University. I found the most challenging aspect of my settlement in Australia to be learning about the new culture, as well as studying in a different language and adapting to the change in study style.

As a participant of the Youth Leadership Program at the AMRC, I was able to take part in the Youth Parliament coordinated by YMCA, which aims to support us to learn skills in public speaking, research, parliamentary debate and protocol, and develop social networks with other members. Last year, I was selected to represent the AMRC with other young people from different ethnic backgrounds at the Settlement Council of Australia's International Conference in Melbourne. This opportunity allowed me to form national and international networks with other representatives. I have also received encouragement and support from my senior mentors at church, where I am now serving as the youth secretary.

5.11 Esther Hniang

I was 19-years-old when I arrived in Australia with my family in May 2013 from Malaysia. We arrived through the humanitarian entrance program in Melbourne and were welcomed by AMES, who provided us with temporary housing for three months. During this period, we searched for long-term accommodation. Although my English was limited upon arrival, the organisation provided us with basic information by organising an orientation session.

The local community we resided in was friendly and we felt accepted, so our first settlement experience in Australia was a good chapter in our lives. After two years of residing in Melbourne, my family and I decided to move to Adelaide in 2015. I was introduced to the Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC) by my community leaders. The AMRC gave me the opportunity to volunteer and represent the Burmese community. I was able to positively represent my community through my participation in the Song of Journey Concert in 2016, organised by the AMRC.

My volunteering role allowed me to partake in various activities including the Youth Parliament Camp in 2016. This experience assisted me to further develop and improve my confidence and public speaking skills. As a youth leader in my community, I have actively participated in planning events such as the Chin National Day and the opening of the Burmese Chin facility in December 2016, as well as organising a youth music team, whereby we perform on a weekly basis at the community church and on special occasions.

I have always been strongly passionate about studying business, so when I arrived in Australia, I immediately wanted to pursue this pathway. I commenced my Certificate IV in Marketing and continued until I completed my Diploma of Marketing in 2014. Following my graduation, I gained employment in the admin/reception area. Currently, I am undertaking a degree in Business at the University of South Australia.

Through my volunteering experience, I have also been able to obtain casual employment at the AMRC and contribute back to my community by assisting new arrivals of Burmese background with their settlement process.





5.12 Burmese Chin Youth Choir by Alma Ramcilovic

Starting with just 20 members, the Chin youth choir has grown tremendously since its establishment in 2011. Now functioning with more than 90 members, Adelaide Chin Christian Church Pastor, Cung Hnin, shares how the choir's formation was an avenue to guide young people.

"In Australia, it appears that everyone is free to do as they choose; individualism is the feature of the Australian society," he said... "So, if we left our young people as individuals in Australia, there was no way that we could counsel them and guide them to become a contributing citizen, community member and church member. As a newly migrated community, we needed to create an environment where young people could regularly come, support one and another, and function as a group."

Although choir may be viewed as an outdated form of music by some, Pastor Cung credits the platform as being an effective way to bring young people together, given the passion Chin people have for singing and music. "The best way to give our young people such a platform where they could regularly meet and participate was through choir," he said.

In the past four years, the choir has made over 20 public appearances at the annual Refugee Week events hosted by the Australian Migrant Resource Centre, conferences facilitated by churches, church openings, and special functions organised for children and by Rotary Club. The choir also regularly performs during church service on Sundays, with their performance vastly improving in previous years.

With an increase of young people, Pastor Cung also notes that it is difficult to keep them in the choir.

"They think the choir would be fine even without them participating because we have more numbers now," he said, "More of our young people have jobs and other commitments, but we are committed to encouraging them to continue participating in the choir."

5.13 Adelaide Chin Christian Church by Alma Ramcilovic

With 40 members forming the Adelaide Chin Christian Fellowship in 2006, but nowhere to worship except at home, the fellowship approached Baptist Junior SA in Unley. "After meeting with the CEO and discussing our situation, they were kind enough to provide us with a space to worship," fellowship member Simon Cinzah said. After five months, Baptist Junior SA issued the community group with a list of churches and their location. "We decided to pursue Salisbury Baptist Church in Brahma Lodge, as it was the closest in proximity to where most of our community members were residing," Simon explained.

With a rise in the number of Burmese Chin people migrating to Adelaide, the Church community rapidly spiked to 400 people, but with only 200 seats available at the Salisbury Church, the search for a new community facility commenced. "There was an insufficient space, limited car parks and no room for other services to be implemented such as child care," he said. Through regular contributions made by members during church service on Sundays and Christmas celebrations, the community managed to raise \$300,000 to go towards sourcing a new facility.

"In 2013, we submitted an application for land through the Salisbury City Council. We needed to prepare design plans of what the facility would look like," he said. With the application being unsuccessful, the community continued its search until landing upon a facility located on Shillabeer Road, Elizabeth Park. Deciding to purchase the church in September 2016 with financial support from Baptist Junior SA.

The Burmese Chin Community of Adelaide hosted a grand opening two months later in December. "The opening of the facility demonstrated how much we have improved as a community and how united we are, and how hard we have worked towards achieving this long-term vision of having our own place of worship," community member Mercy Ngun Ceu said. The ceremony was attended by 1,000 people, including leaders of various churches; Baptist Junior SA and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Honourable Zoe Bettison; Member of Parliament SA, the Honourable Tung Ngo, MLC; the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Migrant Resource Centre, Eugenia Tsoulis OAM; and the Settlement Manager for the Middle Eastern Communities Council of SA, Mr Hussain Razaiat. Reverend Doctor Stephen Hre Kio especially attended the event from United States to unveil the Dedication Stone.

Along with a performance from the Chin Youth Choir and a traditional Chin dance, speeches were delivered by elders who contributed to the establishment of the community in Adelaide, including Mr Peter Bual Kung and Chairperson of the Burmese Community in SA, Simon Cinzah.

"The event also highlighted the successful 10-year milestone of settlement for Burmese people in South Australia through the AMRC Humanitarian Settlement Services program," community leader Van Bawi Tinhlawng said. Church Pastor Cung Hnin, who ran the program on the opening day, explained the importance of the new space. "Christianity is part of our identity, so we needed this space to be able to come together and to encourage, counsel and support each other," he said.

Currently, the facility is undergoing renovation, including painting and installation of a new air conditioner system. Three full-time pastors have been employed at the church, with one part-time member performing housekeeping duties.



5.14 Lucy Kyi by Alma Ramcilovic

Anyone who has had the pleasure of getting to know Ms Lucy Kyi and hearing about her remarkable story would say that she is endearing, radiant, and a true symbol of inspiration, perseverance and hope. Her story begins when she was born in the same place as her parents and grandmother – Myanmar. Due to the war, Lucy's family was forced to flee to the refugee camp NuPoe, located North of Thailand. But tragedy hit when her parents passed away, leaving only her grandmother and sibling.

The trio arrived at the camp in 1997, residing there for 10 years. "We lived in bamboo huts in a jungle/bush environment. We lived in fear because we would hear gunshots every night." Given that the family was one of the first to arrive at the camp, they were provided with an opportunity to apply for a humanitarian visa with assistance from the UNHCR. "When my grandmother was applying for a visa, it didn't really matter what city or town we wanted to live in, we just wanted a place to feel safe."

Granted a humanitarian visa, Lucy and her family arrived in Australia on the 30th of March 2007. This was a difficult time for the trio, as family members stayed behind. "My uncle, aunty and their children stayed behind and arrived later in the refugee camp. Because they arrived later, they didn't have that same opportunity/priority to apply for a humanitarian visa. In 2016, my uncle and aunty's son passed away in a car accident in the refugee camp. My uncle has suffered a stroke and my aunty is also not doing the best at the moment, as she is battling with depression. They have a five-year-old daughter as well. This has been a really difficult for our family, especially my grandmother who is highly stressed."

When the family arrived in Australia, they received assistance from the Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC). "Our assigned case manager was Ibrahim Jabateh and he was of African background. We had weekly appointments with him and attended local orientation sessions. We were registered with Centrelink, the bank, Medicare, and a GP clinic for health checkups, and enrolled in school. We couldn't speak a word of English or Burmese, only Karen, so we weren't able to communicate with a Burmese speaking volunteer. We were provided with housing from Anglicare for six months. We met someone who spoke Burmese in the community and they assisted us to find long-term housing for three years. The language barrier was one of the most challenging aspects of our settlement in Australia."

Lucy has also become an active member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. "I stumbled upon the church when I lost my way to school, as I got off one stop earlier. I was trying to obtain directions, but I couldn't really understand them and they couldn't really understand me. They provided me with some booklets and information, which I could briefly understand, as my English was improving. Since becoming a member, I have assisted with volunteering projects, activities and building youth leadership. Becoming part of this community has allowed me to open up, form new friendships and have a sense of belonging."

One of the achievements Lucy is most proud of includes completing high school at Prescott College and taking on numerous volunteering projects in Thailand, Myanmar and Philippines advertised through her church community, which prompted her to pursue a nursing degree. "I never thought I would be able to complete high school, especially because I didn't attend school while I was in the refugee camp. The church advertised the projects in their news bulletin. "I wanted to involve myself, be independent and help my people, so I decided to speak to one of the church elders to find out a little bit more about the project and the cost involved."

Lucy describes her volunteering experience in Thailand in 2012 as "unforgettable, encouraging, rewarding and simply amazing." This was her first time travelling back alone to participate in the Big Build project. "I didn't realise that there would be over 100 students from Australia and New Zealand coming together to contribute in building houses for communities who had lost them. We were divided into smaller teams and each team had a different responsibility to carry out in each village. There was a town close to Burma where the Karen people lived, which was just across the river. I was part of the medical team, which comprised of student dentists and volunteers performing eye tests for locals. I also interpreted for Karen and Burmese families. In the future, I would definitely like to participate in another project." In recognition of her efforts, Lucy was nominated for the Fair Go category of the Pride of Australia and awarded as a Finalist.

To cover the costs of an airfare ticket and accommodation associated with the project, Lucy was involved in a number of fundraising initiatives, including a concert night organised and advertised by her church, which raised over \$3,000. She also received a generous donation from the AMRC of \$1,000, with staff also contributing to a money collection tin.

She has completed a Diploma of Nursing at TAFESA and has continued to study a Bachelor of Nursing at the University of South Australia, undertaking numerous work placements in hospitals and correctional services. "I look forward to completing my nursing degree to work in the SA Health system and assist those in need." She has volunteered with Alzheimer's Australia SA to create a DVD in the Karen language in 2014, which was presented at a number of multicultural events and forums. She also participated in two AMRC Youth Parliament projects of YMCA auspiced by the Office for Youth. Lucy started volunteering at the AMRC from 2008 to 2012, when she was offered an employment opportunity with the organisation. She currently works at the AMRC every Wednesday and has been granted private housing this year to be reunited with her grandmother and younger brother after living independently.



6. Conclusion

This report highlights the growth and successful settlement of the Burmese community in South Australia, who have entered through the Humanitarian Settlement Program and relied on the assistance of organisations such as the Australian Migrant Resource Centre. In particular, the case studies presented here emphasize just how far many of these community members have come, from troubled beginnings, to be valued members of their families, workplaces, and community groups in South Australia.



7. References

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