



University of Utah *Bridging Borders* Workshops

Ban Mai Nai Soi

Workshops Conducted – June 20 – 24, 2016

Summary Report – September 2016

Workshop Facilitators: Jenny Cheng, Kaitlin Kingdon, Barbara Lester, Maran Seng Pan, Pawsay Wah, Htwarreh Win, Aung Zaw

Program Directors - Trinh Mai & Rosemarie Hunter

Workshop Evaluation: Mary Beth Vogel-Ferguson

Report submitted by Rosemarie Hunter, Trinh Mai & Mary Beth Vogel-Ferguson

Workshop Schedule



Day 1: Introductions and Assessment

- Introductions & Community Building Activity
- Assessment of Camp Community Priorities with all partners

Day 2: Communication Skills & Parent Child Interactions

- Parent child interactions/Partnering with Parents
- Functional Analysis for Behavior Change - Parent Skills Training for Caregivers of Children with Developmental Delays

Day 3: Assessment Techniques & Counseling Skills & Mental Health Issues

- Basic Assessments and Counseling Skills
- Eco- Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Assessments (Person in Environment)
- Stabilization Techniques for Acute Mental Health Crises
- School Site Visits – Assessments
- Home Visit – Assessment

Integrative Health Models

- Holistic Approaches to Mental Health and Health
- Models of Integrative Health
- Working with Traditional Healers

Day 4: Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Community Mobilization & Presentation of Yoga Manuals

Day 5: Presentation of Community Mobilization Plans & Graduation



Summary of Workshops

The University of Utah workshops were conducted by a team of 10 facilitators in collaboration with support from the IRC and JRS staff during the week of June 20th, 2016. A 5 –day series of workshops were conducted across 96 participants. Topics included communication skills, educational assessments and working with parents, counseling and assessment skills, issues of mental health, substance abuse, integrated health and traditional healers, as well as, developing team plans for community mobilization.

Overall, the workshops were well received by all groups. Participants were actively engaged; they took notes and enthusiastically participated in all activities. They expressed an appreciation for the variety of learning methods used; including games, role-plays, home visits, school site visits and small group discussions. People identified and demonstrated new concepts and skills learned during and after each presentation.

As part of the Community Assessment on Day 1 and some discussion groups throughout the week, we learned much about the current situation in the community, as well as, what has transpired since our last visit. Workshop participants identified the political situation in Burma and what will happen in the future as a dominant focus across the community. Additionally, participants discussed the challenges with reduced food rations, water shortage and growing issues related to alcoholism as primary challenges. When asked about strengths, participants shared that they felt the education and health care in the camps were strengths. Having the option for children to attend school from early grades through secondary was highly valued. Some participants added that there was a need for more teachers, as there is high turn over and that there are high numbers

of children in each class, making it difficult to teach. Additionally, access to mental health and health care services was important, with the expressed need for additional training. Additional information is on *Community Climate* and *Topics Identified for Future Workshops* can be found under these headings in later sections of this report.

In 2015, during the University of Utah workshops, there were several requests for workshop facilitators to see the participants in action in order to better understand their challenges in their place of work. Also, there were requests for more applied learning opportunities and handouts that highlighted major concepts. As a response to this request, the team increased the applied learning techniques. Workshop facilitators were able to accompany workers on a home visit and also for school site visits. Following the home visits, instructors and students had the opportunity to triage the cases and discuss collaborative strategies. Participants with the Home School and Special Education teams participated in a workshop on individual and group assessments in the classroom setting. Following this training, participants divided into teams and visited different school sites, applying observational assessments from an eco-bio-psycho-social-spiritual framework in the classroom setting.

The Bridge Across Borders: Cultural Liaison

This year the University of Utah team was fortunate to have the assistance of four cultural liaisons who greatly enhanced the way we delivered the training.

Htwarreh Win who previously lived in Ban Mai Nai Soi and resettled in the Utah was extremely valuable as a cultural consultant, educator and language specialist. Because of his command of the Karenni language, Burmese and English, he brought a new dimension to the workshops and allowed for an increase in comprehension of the workshop materials. On several occasions workshop participants and facilitators commented on the challenge with language across the community and reinforced the idea that having workshops translated in Karenni was very helpful to overall learning of many of the workshop participants. Building on historical relationships in the camp, as well as, community and cultural knowledge, Htwarreh was also able to occupy the space of both leader and educator. His stories of resettlement in the United States and sharing how the Karenni community in Utah is doing were of great interest to the workshop participants and created a new space for dialogue and learning.

Pawsay Wah, currently living Salt Lake after resettling from Mae La Camp, is very active with the Karen traditional dance group in Salt Lake City. Pawsay Wah is a leader and group organizer for a committed group of young adults who keep their culture alive and educate the broader community through competitive dance. As a cultural liaison, Pawsay was instrumental in assisting the workshop facilitators in understanding cultural differences, particularly related to differences in age, gender, class, ethnicity and the connection between confidence and Burmese language skills. At the same time, her participation in the program provides the opportunity to take information back to the Salt

Lake City Karen community. News from the border about family members and the situation in Burma is very important to the resettled community. Similar to her peers, PawsayWah was young when she entered the camps and when she was resettled. Serving as a liaison also provides her with time to expand her cultural knowledge.



Aung Zaw, a native of Myanmar, is faculty at St. Aloysius Gonzaga Institute, Taunggyi, Shan State, Myanmar; where he serves as the Lead faculty of the Social Sciences Component of the Integrated Program. He previously worked with Jesuit Refugee Services as an Office Administrator and Community Outreach Worker in the Urban Refugee Program. Aung Zaw's assistance with translations and cultural insights especially with technical concepts of health and mental health was critical to supporting both facilitators and IRC and JRS staff. It was inspiring to see his strong desire to help the Karenni people in the camp and in Burma.

Maran Seng Pan, a recent graduate of St. Aloysius Gonzaga Institute, Taunggyi, Shan State, Myanmar, shared her education experiences with camp participants. Seng Pan recently graduated in the Integrative: Teacher Training program and has been teaching for the past two years with the Jesuit Education Center in Taunggyi, instructing youth in the Peri-Urban program and monastic shelters. Participants were interested in educational opportunities in Burma/Myanmar and how there might be pathways for them to enter higher education in Myanmar. Having Seng Pan available to provide information about her own experiences provided much needed information and also stimulated more questions about how their current training and education in the camps would be viewed if they returned to Myanmar/Burma. We greatly valued her support, particularly with teaching our U.S. team about the broad diversity of Burmese cultures and examples of traditional practice and perspectives from her own Kachin culture.



Participant Feedback on Workshops

Interactive Learning Techniques & Simple Lectures with Handouts - When asked what was helpful about the workshops and how they can be improved, participants identified their appreciation of having interactive learning techniques such as; role plays, games, case examples, working in small groups and pairs. Similarly, providing the content in simple, easy to follow lectures with handouts was very helpful. The group also discussed that they thought it was important that the workshop trainers were interested in learning from the participants and engaged them in exchanging information with each other.

Language – On several occasions, participants discussed the challenges with the language of instruction. The majority of participants in the discussion shared that they preferred that workshops be provided in the Karenni language. While many participants do know some Burmese, there are many different levels of proficiency present across the group. They also shared that it is difficult for them to respond in Burmese. Some felt they did not know the language well enough and lacked confidence in using it.

Year Round Partnership – Participants and workshop facilitators agreed that they would like to find some ways for staying connected during the year. Some participants suggested creating a Facebook page, or email and other social media in order to continue the opportunities for learning.

Multi-level Trainings – Both participants and workshop facilitators commented on the wide range of skill levels across the groups. One suggestion was that we offer multi-level trainings, particularly in the mental health topics. This would allow for an introductory and more advanced levels of skill building to better meet the diverse backgrounds of the participants.



Additional Topics Identified by Participants

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

- In the area of mental health, participants discussed the need for building skills in group counseling and peer support models. As mentioned earlier, participants suggested the mental health and counseling workshops be offered at beginner and advanced levels. Other mental health topics included understanding the differences between psychosis related to schizophrenia and alcoholism. As well as, treatment for severe alcoholism with psychosis and domestic violence. Participants also discussed needing assistance with supporting pregnant women who are experiencing mental health issues. Medics discussed an interest in trainings on assisting patients who are resistant to treatment and non-compliant with taking medications.

Community Response Models

- The participants also requested additional workshop focused on working with the community mobilization and how to respond to community-wide issues. Some examples include: developing a community response to alcoholism; working with the community to develop plans for how to deal with future uncertainty; increase parent participation in their child's education; children not attending school; personal hygiene education with children; and assistance with developing connections and partnerships across groups in order that there could be coordinated community response.

Health Topics

- In the area of health, participants requested trainings on assisting stroke patients and individuals with disabilities, as well as, children with special needs. Additionally, participants asked for trainings on how to work with elderly, or people that have had a stroke or have cerebral palsy with mental health issues. Another area discussed, was the need to go deeper with assessments and counseling skills at the next training. As one participant explained: *we sometimes just know the surface but we need to know the real situation; sometimes people talk about the general situation; we need to make sure when we do the community assessment we need to get the real situation; and to be useful for our future; as our staff participate in the training they get more knowledge and can do more effective work.*

Education

- In the area of education, participants requested that there be a continued focus on how to support parents with being engaged in their child's education and how to motivate adolescents to stay in school. A new area identified this year was an interest in learning about youth leadership programs for adolescents. In addition to these topics, participants in the discussion groups and interviews shared that they thought it would be useful to include teachers in the trainings. Teachers have expressed an interest in wanting more information on motivating youth, classroom management, and engaging parents.

Workshops for CBOs

- During discussion groups we learned of interest across the Karenni Education Department (KnEd) and the Karen Women's Organization (KWO) for having more direct contact with program directors in order to tailor the workshops in ways that match their needs and build the capacity of their staff and membership. Requests were made from the KnEd to have a broader participation of their teachers in the workshop and to include more content on teacher training, cooperative learning, special education, behavior issue with children in the classroom setting and engaging parents in the child's education. For KWO staff, there was much interest in developing staff skills in program evaluation, journalism and case management skills. KWO requested that in the future the team members collaborate with them to support their staff that are working at the Safe House in Myanmar. There is much interest from the Utah program directors and faculty to continue these conversations and include these goals in our plan for 2017.

Community Climate

Uncertainty about the Future

In conversations with IRC and JRS staff, we understand that resettlement is only happening for cases of family reunification and for some health issues; however, the criteria for these cases have narrowed. Below are reflections from workshop participants on Day 1 in the Community Assessment Workshop that describe this sense of uncertainty.

The person in the card (soul card activity) is thinking too much. (Facilitator: Why did you choose this card?) Many people in the camp think too much about resettlement. (Facilitator: Resettlement to America, or Myanmar?) Some people cannot go to Myanmar so they are thinking about where they can go. They are worried about their future.

People wonder about their future of resettlement or back to Myanmar so they have a lot of depression.there are people who go back to Myanmar to see the situation. Some want to go back (to Myanmar) and some want to resettle. Most people want to go to 3rd country to resettle but do not have the documentation to go.

(In the group activity), I raised my hand to go back to Myanmar. I want to go back because I grew up there; I grew up with my culture. But because of the political problem now if we go back, we cannot go. But it doesn't mean I just want to pack my bags and go back, if we have some guaranteed humanitarian support we are ready to go back because we want to go back to your roots, values and culture.

High Stress

Workshop participants and staff say they see an increase in alcohol and other drug abuse, as sometimes happens when individuals experience extended periods of stress and the lack of ability to control their future. Some camp leaders worry that many people have no experience of a world outside the camp. Members of the camp community expressed high anxiety and stress coupled with an increase in depression and substance abuse related to feelings of an unknown future and the lack of control over their own lives. Below are a few examples of how camp resident describes these challenges.

We give education to the community regarding suicide and how to take care of themselves. When people come to the village we can refer people with psychosis to the psychosocial worker so that they can have care. Some people take medication but nothing changes.

Because of the uncertainty we do not have an outlet, because they cannot stay and they cannot go out, so they are drinking a lot. This is causing a lot of problems in the family; like family quarrels, tension and sometimes even suicide. First the husband starts to drink, then the wife. There are suicides because of all the problems this brings. There are about 3 cases discussed in

the group. Situation was usually that husband is drinking a lot, the mother cannot cook to provide food for children because there are not enough rations, children are wandering around hungry.” (Cases of Suicide discussed were all women.)

The workshop facilitator responds to the participant by explaining that it is Normal for people to try and ease their pain in some way and often substance abuse is used when an individual is hurting inside. At the same time, alcohol is a response that over time will make it worse. One of the focuses of the training is to also identify what is working and areas of strength in order to identify solution-focused activities and approaches. When asked, *What is working?* A workshop participant responds with the following.

Visiting their friends, or watch movies to calm down or release stress, or go into the woods to cut bamboo to wood to do something for the house, singing, listen to the video, sports, guitar, play music.

Participants also shared that the decrease in rations and water over the past year has added to the complexity of these challenges resulting in, confusion, depression and negative family interactions. Participants explained that full rations are all cut; also the rations in the school and clinic things have been cut. They further discussed that people are really worried about what will be available in the camp. Examples below

This year we do not have enough water to use, because it has been very dry this year. They struggle because they are scared to return to Burma and it is not safe and so where would they go? They want to go outside the camp to work to help support their children but the Thai government won't let them do that; they are afraid that their children will suffer due to the lack of rations but they cannot do anything to make it better.

Reduction of rations, people are confused, and also in regards to resettlement and repatriation it has caused a lot of anxiety and confusion among the people. Facilitator - What are people doing to respond to this? Going out of the camp to find work. One woman describes going out of camp, cut trees and get caught by the police and prosecuted. Part of the reason we cut trees is because the water is getting scarce. Because we have no water, people are drinking (alcohol) to get drunk. There is no outlet; If we stay in the camp we do not have means to find work, if we go out the police arrest us because the rations are not enough.

Acknowledgements

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