Worcester Refugee Assistance Project

Volunteer Handbook
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1. Why are there refugees from Burma?
COA Thailand

Burmese Cultural Profile

A Tool for Settlement Workers

Typical Scene in a Burmese Refugee Camp in Thailand
Photo Credit: Odile Minichette / ECHO

Prepared by UKCO
IOM Bangkok
April 2005
Burma

There are nearly 50 million people living in Burma\(^1\), a country richly endowed with resources; oil and gas, gemstones and huge areas of fertile land. Once called “the rice bowl of Asia”, Burma is now ranked as one of the world’s ten poorest countries. Due to government policies, nearly half of the population is living below the poverty line, and some two million Burmese have fled persecution for neighbouring countries; a further 600,000 to one million are displaced within the country.

Ethnic Diversity

There are some 135 different ethnic groups in Burma. These are normally broken down into nine main groups: the majority ethnic Burmans, and eight minority groups. These include: Karen, Mon, Shan, Chin, Rohingya, Arakhan, Kachin, and Karenni. Minority groups will not normally identify themselves as being Burmese, they generally hold a strong identity of their own ethnic group.

Recent History

The country of Burma was formed only in the 19th century, as a colony of the British Empire. Previously independent groups were forced together into an unnatural union. When the British departed in 1948 civil war broke out as each group sought to stake its claim. In 1962, the military took power and hold it to this day. The defining feature of Burmese military rule has been disastrous economic policies and human rights abuses on a massive scale. Any demonstrations against government rule have been brutally suppressed and brutal campaigns of ethnic oppression, through executions, torture, forced labour, and forced relocation, are ongoing. This picture, however, is too simplistic; it is not one majority group oppressing the minorities; many minority groups are also traditional enemies. Going deeper still, each ethnic group also has, within its own membership, disparate factions. People working with Burmese populations should be aware of the current and historical relations amongst the various groups and not assume that all would be happy to live together just because they come from the same country.

Refugee Life in Thailand

Thailand has not signed the UN Convention on Refugees of 1951; as such, there are, officially, no refugees and no refugee camps. Instead, the terms used have been “Persons of Concern” (POC) and “temporary shelters”. These so-called “temporary shelters” have been used for housing POCs from Burma since the 1980s. Currently,

\(^1\) Since 1989, the military authorities in Burma have promoted the name Myanmar as the name of their state. This name, however, is not universally accepted.
there are 9 along the Burmese border, housing some 150,000 POCs. The camps are located very near the border, where security is often an issue; Burmese troops have, on occasion, crossed the border and attacked the camps. In the camps, the necessities of life - food, shelter, sanitation, health care, and basic education - are provided for by aid agencies. Facilities are very basic; housing is in bamboo shacks and electricity is available only on occasion, through the use of generators. Freedom is not one of the provisions offered by the aid agencies; camps are surrounded by barbed wire fences and refugees are not allowed to leave.

**Cultural and Social Background**

Physical attributes, language, history, clothing, food, dances and other traditions differentiate the various ethnic groups within Burma. It would not be appropriate to assume similarities amongst the groups; a Karen and a Burman, for example, may not see themselves as having anything in common. At the same time, however, many values and beliefs are the same: there may be greater similarities between a Burman Christian and a Karen Christian than between a Burman Christian and a Burman Buddhist. The below is a brief description of some cultural features that are common to most Burmese ethnic groups.

**Family**

The traditional Burmese family includes grandparents, aunts and uncles, and even relatives as distant as 7th cousins. Close friends can also be considered as part of the family. It is common for Burmese to introduce someone as their 'younger brother' when there is, in fact, no family connection at all. Children will live with their parents until they marry but will listen to the advice of their parents and obey them all their lives. Beating ones children is widely practiced and socially accepted; it is considered necessary in the training of a child.

**Marriage**

Marriage is a strongly respected institution, though the emphasis upon the wedding ceremony is minor. Cohabitation and pre-marital sex is forbidden, though secret liaisons do occur. When illicit sexual activity is discovered, it is usually the girl that is given the blame and suffers the consequences. Arranged marriages are still practiced to some degree but couples unhappily paired can withdraw from the arrangement. Interracial marriages do occur and are generally accepted, though not all to an equal degree.

**Gender roles**

"A well-behaved Burmese woman should be modest and discreet, dress neatly, and not talk or laugh loudly. In fact, she shouldn't talk too much at all, especially in the
presence of a man. A woman must walk slowly and elegantly, like an elephant!” So says tradition, at any rate. Tradition also says that the man is the head of the family and earns the money while the woman takes care of household duties. Extreme need in recent years, however, has also made the woman an income earner, but without relieving her of her role as cleaner, cook, and child minder. Buddhist practices reinforce women’s subordinate status in the society; only men can be ordained as monks, the highest status in a Buddhist society. Women may become nuns but nuns do not enjoy the revered status bestowed upon monks.

Religion
Eighty-five percent of the Burmese population is Buddhist, four percent, mostly Karen and Chin, are Christians. Buddhism teaches patience and tolerance; life should be led with internal peace and tranquility. Buddhism believes in a close relationship between cause and effect; good deeds will result in rewards, bad deeds in punishment. It is important to make merit in order to attain happiness in future rebirths. One of the chief ways of making merit is to make offerings to monks. Animistic beliefs, superstitions, and astrology have a strong foothold in Buddhist thought.

Health
Due to the severely inadequate medical system in Burma, many Burmese rely on home remedies. In rural areas, traditional beliefs normally still prevail, with malicious spirits being blamed for an illness, and a shaman sought for treatment. Western medicines are known to refugees who have living in camps.

Housing
Refugees will be used to living in bamboo houses with no running water or electricity. Cooking is done on open fires in an area adjacent to the house. Toilets are simple holes in the ground, some distance from the dwelling.

Education
Education is highly valued by all Burmese. The standard of education in Burma, however, is so low that the refugee schools in Thailand are considered of better quality and parents are happy when their children can attend these. Teaching methodology is strongly teacher-centered and memorization and repeating in chorus is the standard approach. Students may have studied English for many years, yet never have had to produce anything orally, so their reading and grammar skills may be more highly developed than their speaking. Students who question or challenge the teacher are considered disrespectful. Children are taught to stand up when speaking in class and to cross their arms over their chest when speaking, as a sign of respect. Teachers are very highly respected and will be called “Teacher” rather than by his /
her name. Anyone wiser and of a higher position may be also be referred to as “Teacher”.

Showing respect
Burmese society is strongly hierarchical and a core value is the respect shown to monks and to elders. Monkhood is a step removed from ordinary life, to the degree that in some SE Asian languages, one uses a different vocabulary when referring to monks or the teachings of the Buddha. Elders are viewed as an essential source of wisdom for the younger generations and young people are expected to listen and obey and not to offer opinions. Children are expected to care for their parents when they grow old; it is considered a great humiliation to neglect this responsibility. Refugees from Burma will likely be shocked by the treatment of old people in Canada and the lack of respect shown by Canadian young people.

Names
Burmese do not have family names. To identify each other, they must refer to their father’s name and place of origin. Burman names will normally indicate the day of birth of the child. A name like “Zaw Min” reflects that he was born on a Tuesday, since for people who were born on Tuesday, it is customary to find sounds like “sa” or “za” in their names. Astrology may also have a decisive influence on the name to be given as may some other feature of the birth date, for example, someone born on a rainy day may be named “Rain”. Among the Karen, it is usual that the parents pick one name each from the father and mother and put them together in some way. For all ethnicities, it is the practice to prefix the name with an honorific, such as “Auntie”, or “Grandmother” or “Little sister”. It is considered rude to say a name without such prefixes, though foreigners are exempt by reason of being ignorant.

Body language
• The head holds special honour and must not be touched; likewise, the feet hold the lowest place, and should not point at anyone or otherwise be out in the open; when the person is seated (on the floor), the feet should be politely tucked in under the body.
• Shaking hands is not usual but when it is done, the right hand is supported by the left, as a sign of special respect.
• When handing something to someone, Burmese will do so with both hands as a sign of respect. Nothing will ever be passed with the left hand as this is the hand used to clean oneself after a visit to the toilet (water, not paper, is used).
• Men and women will rarely touch each other in public or show any sign of public affection. It is however common to see men showing friendly affection towards each other; holding
hands or resting their hand on their friend's knee.
- When calling someone with the hand, the palm faces down. An upward facing palm is for calling small children and dogs. Calling with the index finger is insulting and often an invitation to a fight.
- Picking one's nose is perfectly ordinary; blowing one's nose into a tissue or worse, a handkerchief, is considered repulsive.

Time
Burmese are not the slaves to time that most Westerners are. While many will, in fact, arrive 'on time', most are used to living on 'Burmese Standard Time'.

Food
Most Burmese people eat rice every meal. Bread is consumed mostly in urban areas and then only at a breakfast or teatime. Cakes and cookies are for very special occasions only.

The Burmans
The Burmans are the major ethnic group of Burma, those after whom the country was named. They are typically characterized as a humble people who dress modestly. The stereotype is that the Burmans like to live a relaxed lifestyle and enjoy fun. Work and play are treated in the same way; both should be fun. Foreigners often comment that Burmese are always happy and smile a lot. While, in fact, smiles are common, they often hold a different meaning than the Western smile; an Asian smile may mean anything from happiness to embarrassment, despair, or even anger.

The Karen
According to some sources, the Karen people are descendants of the Mongols, and were among the first groups to settle in the area that is now called Burma. They possess a very strong ethnic identity. Within the Karen there are some twenty sub-groups and two mutually unintelligible languages: Sgaw and Pwo. About 40% of Karen are Christians; a Karen legend of old spoke of a lost book and a white brother who would come to restore the book. White missionaries were seen to be the brother and the Bible the book. This brotherhood has made the Karen an ally of the British during colonial days, an act that has served to exacerbate the mutual mistrust between the Burman and the Karen. The Karen number between 4 and 8 million, mostly living near the Thai border, and constitute 7% of the population in Burma. They are now a hunted and persecuted people, forever on guard against marauding Burmese troops who rape, burn, and force old and young into building roads and acting as porters for army troops. The stereotyped Karen is simple, honest, hospitable, kind, and peace loving.
2. Who is WRAP?
Empowering Burmese refugees toward sustainable self-reliance

Mission Statement

Worcester Refugee Assistance Project is a network of individuals committed to assisting local refugees from Burma achieve sustainable self-reliance through mentoring, advocacy and providing material support as needed. Our primary goal is to assist our friends from Burma in attaining economic independence, establishing a true community and learning how to access services. We are an independent non-profit organization that works to complement and augment the efforts of other organizations and individuals assisting resettled refugees.

Officers

Executive Director: Meredith Walsh
Secretary: Lesa McWalters
Treasurer: Nang Hlaing Maung

Board members

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Michael Forhan
Jillian Lindblad
Dan MacConnell
Hay Reh
Susan Rodgers
Courtney Temple
Meme Tran
Noraishah Yusuf
Worcester Refugee Assistance Project

WHAT WE DO

Organizational development

Family and Individual Support

Advocacy

Community Building
A day of celebration
Refugees from Myanmar re-launch their lives in city
'I FEEL EVERYBODY HAS FREEDOM'

Refugee Poe Meh, 70, of Worcester, watches Sunday as children play during a welcome party for Myanmar refugees at Blessed Sacrament Church in Worcester. (T&G Staff Photos / PAUL KAPTEYN)

By Priyanka Dayal TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

"They are literally people from the jungle, they have never seen an airplane ... and now they're thrown in the heart of the world."

-- MYRA DAHGAYPAW, SPEAKING OF MYANMAR REFUGEES
WORCESTER — San Hmung has never seen snow. He's working on his English. Yesterday, he learned his First Amendment rights.

These are things for which his life in Myanmar didn't prepare him.

He, his wife and their three young children are among the roughly 150 people who left Myanmar (formerly Burma) sometime during the last year and a half and moved to Worcester, to start a new life in a free country. This is the foundation of Worcester's small but growing Burmese population.

“We cannot live there,” Mr. Hmung said of his native country. “We are not free there. It's very dangerous.”

In the United States, he said, “I feel everybody has freedom. Everything, we can say, we can do. We can talk about anything.”

Of course, the family is still adjusting to its new life. The kids attend Chandler Magnet School, Mr. Hmung has found a job at a local restaurant and his wife is taking English classes.

Yesterday, a day that Mr. Hmung said he has long been waiting for, his family joined scores of others at a welcome party for Burmese refugees at Blessed Sacrament Church. The event included food, music, games and donated clothing and household goods for the refugees. Guided by teenagers from local church groups, young Burmese children blew bubbles and kicked a soccer ball outside the church.

It was a day for celebration, everyone agreed, but Myra Dahgaypaw knows these people face many challenges. Some have been in the country for only a few weeks. Most don't know English, or their rights, or anything about American culture.

“They are literally people from the jungle, they have never seen an airplane ... and now they're thrown in the heart of the world,” she said in an interview.

Ms. Dahgaypaw is familiar with what they're feeling, because she also came to the United States to escape the oppressive military government in Myanmar. She was displaced for years, then lived in a refugee camp in Thailand for years. Still, she had opportunities. She learned English and was able to travel before moving to this country.

“But I had to struggle,” she said. “If I had to struggle that much, how much will they have to struggle?”

Ms. Dahgaypaw works for Karen American Communities Foundation, a support group for the Karen people (an ethnic group) of Burma who move to the United States. She came from New York City to speak to the refugees in Worcester yesterday.

Myanmar, the Asian country that borders Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand, has been under military rule since 1962. Its government has been widely criticized for human rights violations.

Before they can come to the United States, Burmese people must be recognized as refugees by the United Nations.

Michael Forhan went to Myanmar in 1994 in search of business opportunities. He saw “a fabulous country with really special people,” and established two companies there. But he realized his presence wasn't helping the political situation in Myanmar, so he left. Later, he started Burma Border Projects, a nonprofit group that supports schools and orphanages and helps provide therapy for traumatized refugees on the Myanmar-Thailand border.
Tens of thousands of Burmese live in refugee camps, and more than 1 million live in Thailand illegally as migrant workers, where they live in adverse conditions without proper medical care, according to the Burma Border Projects Web site.

While Mr. Forhan was helping Burmese people in their home country, “all of a sudden, the Burmese people started coming to Worcester,” he said. About 150 are here now, and more are coming, he said. The numbers of refugees from Iraq and Bhutan are also increasing, he said.

Mr. Forhan and others have started the Worcester Resettlement Project, which works to help refugees adjust to their new lives in the United States. Within the next six to 12 months, the group is hoping to find storage space, office space and a truck to carry supplies.

The group sponsored yesterday’s welcome party, which was attended by Burmese people from different ethnic groups, and organized by people from the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Buddhist faiths. “We are all Americans today,” Mr. Forhan told the crowd. His words were translated into two languages spoken in Myanmar.

While winter won’t be easy for the new Worcester residents, who are used to a tropical climate, they got some help yesterday.

For his bar mitzvah project, 13-year-old Noah Magid of Worcester collected more than 100 sets of winter gear — coats, gloves, hats — which were donated to the Burmese refugees.

“Find some winter clothes to wear,” Mr. Forhan told them. “You have no idea how uncomfortable winter here can be.”

Contact Priyanka Dayal by e-mail at pdayal@telegram.com.
3. List of volunteer tasks
Volunteers are always needed. Every effort makes a difference. Here's what you can do to help.

- Computer repairs and installation
- Fundraising
- Grant-writing
- Bike repairs
- Organizing office space!!!
- Transportation - van driver, delivery person, or just giving rides
- Driver's education, both written and driving skills
- Elementary school liaison
- High school liaison
- Clothes organizer
- Furniture repair
- Database for donors
- Database for refugee directory
- Household supplies organizer
- Health record forms for refugee families to keep track of health records
- Website development
- Youth activities - sports, peer mentoring, etc.
4. Mentor job description
Volunteer title*: Mentor/Cultural Exchange Partner  
Organization: Worcester Refugee Assistance Project  
Purpose: To befriend and orient refugees from Burma, to help them navigate the social service system, and to learn about each other's culture through weekly visits  
Area of focus: refugee assistance, refugee health, cultural exchange  
Languages: Burmese, Karen, Karenni, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Thai

WRAP mission statement:
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Mentoring program description:
Have you ever traveled to or lived in another country? If yes, you know what it is like to be in an unfamiliar place. New food, languages, people, sites, and transportation can be confusing. Maybe someone helped you while you were traveling or living abroad? If yes, you understand what a difference it makes to have a local person interpret the culture and assist with local skills such as walking in the snow or bundling up in the cold weather.

WRAP offers a chance for ordinary citizens to do something extraordinary.

By volunteering to assist newly arrived refugee families you will not only help someone who truly needs it, but you will experience an entirely new culture.

The mentoring program aims to promote peace through understanding cultures other than one's own. WRAP will provide support to volunteers as they form relationships with refugee families.

Responsibilities:
- Conduct weekly home visits at least 6 times over the course of 3 months
- Complete checklist to assess home safety, material needs, health promotion, and activities of daily living
- Assist with social services such as WIC, MassHealth, Food Stamps, Fuel Assistance
- Introduce to community resources such as grocery stores, pharmacies, libraries, etc.
- Invite to participate in community events in Worcester
- Listen and provide support
- Contact WRAP member weekly to follow up on activities
- Attend monthly volunteer meetings to share experiences with other volunteers
- Complete evaluation survey at the end of the commitment

*Adapted from Refugee Mentoring Program, International Institute of Minnesota
5. Home visit checklist
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<th><strong>Home safety</strong></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1 Heating</td>
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<td>2 Water</td>
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<td>3 Poison control (incl. lead)</td>
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<td>4 Phone</td>
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<td>5 Fire safety</td>
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<td>6 Vector control (incl. rats)</td>
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<td>7 Keys</td>
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<td>8 Other:</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Material needs</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>9 Hygiene products</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Cleaning supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Clothes/coats/blankets</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Appliances</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 Furniture/equipment</td>
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<td>14 Other:</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Health promotion</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>15 Personal hygiene</td>
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<td>16 Oral hygiene</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 Diet/nutrition/diabetes prevention/WIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Family planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 Appropriate clothing</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 How to read a thermometer</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 How to read a prescription, follow directions, and get prescriptions filled</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Communication with health care providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 Explain MassHealth cards and DPH requests</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 How to keep family health records/blue books</td>
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<td>25 Respond to public school nurse re: immunizations</td>
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<td>26 Other:</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Activities of daily living</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>27 Sort and read mail</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 How to take the bus</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Did you accompany the family anywhere? If so, where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Carry ID at all times and keep list on fridge/wall</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 Calendar for time management</td>
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<tr>
<td>32 Other:</td>
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</tbody>
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Please include other comments about refugee needs on the back of this page.

*Updated May 12, 2010*
6. Home visit guidelines
Home Safety

- Emergency 911
- Living/accommodation:
  - Does the heating work? If not, contact landlord.
  - Does the water work properly? Check toilet, shower, sinks. If not, contact landlord.
  - Do they have a working phone?
  - Do they know how to use the phone?
  - Do they know how to pay the bills? Are they too high?

- Fire safety
  - Are there functioning smoke detectors? CO detectors?
  - Check outlets for frayed cords
  - Are there items placed on top of furnaces/heaters?
  - Is there a path for escape during fire?
  - Do they know how to operate stove properly?
  - Phone numbers to contact for fire should be on wall/fridge

- Poison and vector control
  - Is there risk for lead poisoning? Check for cracked paint, especially if house is built before 1978, or if there are children < age 6. May need to contact landlord.
  - Are cleaning supplies kept in a safe place away from children?
  - Check for mice/rats
  - Is trash stored and removed properly? May need to explain the yellow bag system.
  - Explain dangers of CO poisoning from car exhaust

- Keys
  - Do they have enough copies for the family members?
  - Discuss importance of locking doors
  - May need to take family to make copies of key
Material Needs

- Appliances
  - Stove: how to use, check the pilot and light the pilot
  - Refrigerator: make sure temperature is set correctly
  - Washer/dryer: if one is in the home, verify proper use

- Furniture
  - Tables/chairs: are there enough chairs for household members
  - Beds: enough beds for household members/ proper bedding: blankets, sheets, pillows
  - Dressers: enough storage space
  - Living room: clean functional furniture/proper lighting

- Kitchen needs
  - Plate, cups, silverware, pots, pans – enough for household size
  - Food storage – properly stored/ enough food for household size
  - Rice maker?
  - Garbage disposed of properly

- Clothing
  - Proper size clothing, shoes
  - Appropriate clothing for weather – coats, hats, gloves, boots
  - Underwear – children must wear underwear to school

- Toiletries
  - Diapers, feminine pads, toilet paper – items not covered under food stamps
  - Toothbrush, toothpaste, hair brush
  - Deodorant, soap, shampoo
  - Towels, washcloths

- Cleaning supplies
  - Bathroom cleaner/ kitchen cleaner/ sponges/ toilet brush/paper towels
  - Laundry detergent/ dishwashing liquid
  - Trash bags – Worcester yellow bags must be used if there is not a dumpster

- Other
  - Decorative items – curtains, throw rugs, mirrors
  - Toys and books for children
  - Tools – hammer, nails, screwdriver, pliers
  - Hand cream, chap stick, band aids
Health Promotion

- Infection control
  - Sneeze/cough etiquette into elbows/sleeves
  - Proper hand washing and hand sanitizer

- Personal hygiene
  - Explain the routines of hygiene in this country – bathing, brushing teeth, socks, underwear, deodorant, trim finger/toe nails, moisturizer
  - Toilet paper – how to use and flush
  - Wiping front to back for females
  - Wash hands after toileting
  - Different soap for dishes, body, hands, and laundry
  - Laundry should be washed and dried to prevent molding
  - Do the women in the house need feminine hygiene products?
  - Proper disposal of diapers and feminine hygiene products

- Oral hygiene
  - Explain that the mouth is a window into the rest of the body
  - Do not share tooth brushes or share cups/spoons – lots of bacteria in mouth
  - Focus on dental care for children – why do we care about “baby teeth”?
  - Encourage to make appointments

- Nutrition
  - Diabetes prevention – what is diabetes and how to prevent
  - General nutrition – provide handouts to teach about balanced diet, what NOT to eat
  - Food assistance: how to use WIC checks, EBT cards, food banks
  - Connection between high blood pressure and nutrition?
  - Proper nutrition during pregnancy
  - Look in fridge/freezer to see what foods they are eating – some Asian foods may be new to volunteers; don’t judge before researching the nutrition content!
  - Explain how to store foods without gathering flies and mold

- Basic family planning and safe sex
  - Do they want to prevent a pregnancy (temporarily or permanently)? Explain options
  - Teach how to obtain contraception – condoms at the store, pills at the PCP, etc.
  - Provide handouts on birth spacing and why family planning is important for women's bodies and for health of the baby and older children
  - Explain transmission of STIs and the purpose of dual methods of protection – condoms are the only method to protect from pregnancy and STIs
  - For women, annual pap smears and mammograms, self-breast exam handout

- Tobacco use in the home
  - Explain dangers of smoking and effects on children and family
  - Provide handouts and connect to smoking cessation program (QuitWorks) if they are interested

- Alcohol use in the home
  - Discuss how much alcohol is consumed in the home.
  - Explain the dangers of alcohol and the effects on children and family.
  - Differentiate between having one beer verses getting drunk.

- Mental health
- Note any signs of abuse or trauma?
- Note signs of depression or other emotional health issue
- If you suspect sign of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse or any mental health concern, contact WRDP for possible referrals

○ Clothing
  - Do they have enough clothes for cold weather?
  - Do they have enough socks and underwear so they don’t have to re-wear?
  - Do they have appropriate shoes for winter?

○ How to read a thermometer
  - If the family has a thermometer, teach how to use and ask them to demonstrate
  - Explain what to do for elevated temperatures, and which require medical attention

○ How to read prescription labels, follow directions, and get prescriptions filled
  - What meds are they taking? Including vitamins, home remedies, herbal teas, and Western pharmacological drugs.
  - Discuss reasons for taking meds – important to learn their perception of why they are taking meds; may need to explain the reason the provider prescribed it (if different from their perception)
  - Explain the importance of compliance – taking meds as prescribed (ie complete full course of Abx)
  - Do not share meds – prescriptions are only intended for the person whose name is on the label
  - How to get prescriptions filled and refilled – where to go and how to pay

○ Medical appointments
  - Explain importance of being ON TIME to medical appointments, arriving 15 min before
  - Explain difference between well visits and sick visits
  - May need to communicate with health care professionals on behalf of the family

○ MassHealth
  - Help families understand communication with MassHealth and request of information for the MA DPH

○ How to keep appropriate family health records – blue books for vaccines
  - This may require a folder, a sheet of paper, a chart – something for the family to follow in remembering to take meds, document vaccines, and remember appointments

○ Immunizations
  - Explain importance of vaccines in this country – may be excluded from school
  - Assist families in responding to requests from public school nurses
  - Do they have a blue book for vaccines?
  - Check and see if immunizations are up-to-date and teach how to follow-up

○ For other health issues such as GI/abdominal, cardiopulmonary, or neurological issues, follow up with public health nurse Deb Vescera
Activities of daily living

- Assist family with communication
  - Clearly and correctly spell every name on mailbox
  - Differentiate between junk mail and important mail, especially that which requires a response
  - Follow up with notices about refugee health assessments, MassHealth, DPH, etc.
  - Communication with teachers about school-related issues
  - How to read utility bills
  - How to read info about food stamps and fuel assistance (handouts)

- How to take the bus (or possibly arrange transportation to and from appointments)
  - How to read bus schedules (handouts)
  - How to navigate the bus system, e.g. bus passes, kids fares

- Identification
  - Refugee ID, I-9, green cards, Mass ID, social security card – correct name spelling!
  - Importance of keeping identification with you at all times (name, address, phone number, DOB, SS#, contact person, date of arrival)
    - If they don't have a card, provide card to keep in wallet

- Contact information
  - Keep a list of important contact names and numbers on the wall/fridge

- Calendars – time management for appointments
  - Help families learn how to use them, check them, update them, etc.

- Transportation etiquette
  - Laws about seat belts and car seats, especially for children – why do we have these laws? Not just because the police will stop you
  - Not okay to have so many people in a car – must have one seat belt for every passenger
  - Timing – when people are giving you a ride, need to be ready and on time

- Neighbor/landlords/police
  - How to communicate with neighbors or landlords when there is a problem
  - Police as a function of public safety

- Banking needs
  - How to navigate the banking system, e.g. ATMs, checking vs. savings

- Pets
  - How we treat pets in this country (animal cruelty laws)
  - Pet food, cat litter, etc

- Homework and school attendance
  - Encourage parents to work with children on homework
  - Call the school, or send a note with child the day before, if your child will miss school due to appointment

- Laundry
  - Where and how to do laundry – complete drying is necessary to prevent mold
Links and resources

Cultural Orientation Research Center: www.culturalorientation.net
Center for Applied Linguistics: www.cal.org
Global health: www.globalhealth.gov

Burma Border Projects: www.burmborderprojects.org
Mae Tao Clinic: www.maetaoclinic.org
Irrawaddy Journal: www.irrawaddy.org
US Campaign for Burma: www.uscampaignforburma.org

Local resources in Massachusetts: www.mass211help.org
WIC at Family Health Center: http://www.fhcw.org/wic.htm