

‘Peace and prosperity’

CBF field personnel minister among Karen refugees resettling in United States

Mu Kaw grew up in a remote village among the jungles of Burma. He remembers never leaving home after dusk for fear of tigers or other jungle predators.

As civil war spread throughout Burma, Mu Kaw was forced from his home along with thousands of other ethnic minorities. His only hope to escape the persecution and violence was a camp for Karen refugees in neighboring Thailand.

Though he had no formal education and very little means, Mu Kaw eventually decided to accept an offer from the U.S. State Department to relocate to America, hoping that his children might have a better future.

“When they put the papers in front of me to sign, I couldn’t even write my own name,” he said. “I just made my mark and put my life into the hands of God.”

Among the first people that Mu Kaw met when he arrived in Louisville, Ky., were [Steve Clark and Annette Ellard](#), who were

commissioned as field personnel by CBF in 2006 to minister among Karen refugees from Burma. Clark and Ellard, along with members of Crescent Hill Baptist Church where they are members, have been welcoming a growing group of Karen refugees ever since.

“Every person who we work with has suffered tremendous injustice, loss and helplessness,” said Ellard. “They have taken a huge risk to resettle on the other side of the world. They can’t speak English, find



Mu Kaw, standing, escaped civil war in his home country of Burma to resettle in the United States.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEVE CLARK & ANNETTE ELLARD

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Day-to-day ministry for Clark and Ellard, who are self-funded personnel, is focused on what they call “crisis management,” ranging from medical emergencies to providing documents for social services to simple apartment maintenance issues.

“Anything that takes away fear brings a certain amount of peace,” Clark said. “Whenever a refugee faces a crisis, there is a great amount of anxiety and fear. Just being available to help alleviate that stress brings peace to the family and the community.”

Last summer, Clark and Ellard visited Mu Kaw to celebrate the blessing of his family’s new house in South Dakota.

“It was awesome to be a part of the celebration and to know that this family has come such a long way from the violence and fear of Burma,” Ellard said.

Peace begins with prayer

In the fall of 2010, worship at Crescent Hill was about to begin when a teenage boy grabbed Ellard’s arm and said to her, “I need your help.”

Chee Low explained that he had missed more than 90 days of school the previous year, and was being encouraged to “find another path.”

“He was the last person who would ever admit that he needed help,” Ellard said. “But when he realized that his family — including two disabled parents and five siblings — really were depending on him, he knew he had to change.”

“If I don’t have a high school diploma, I will never have anything,” Chee Low said. “I want to learn and I want to change, and now they won’t let me come to school.”

Ellard prayed with Chee Low, and then spent eight weeks fighting to ensure that his rights as a student were recognized. It worked — and soon Clark and Ellard received a letter from one of his teachers.

“It said that she saw a change in Chee Low, that he was a completely different kid,” Ellard said. “When she asked him what had changed, his answer was, ‘Jesus.’”

Unfortunately, Chee Low still won’t graduate before he ages out of the school system. Based on his age, Chee Low was placed in the ninth grade when he arrived, despite the fact that he could barely speak English and had no more than a second grade level of education.

“Chee Low has changed me — he has taught me the importance of prayer,” Ellard said. “He doesn’t get out of my car unless I pray with him, and I know that it’s not the exact words that I’m saying — because many of them he doesn’t understand — it’s the calling of God into that situation into his life that he knows is changing things. I



Chee Low, center, hosted a worship service at his house to celebrate his birthday.

think praying is a bigger part of peacemaking than anything else.”

Determined not to give up, Clark and Ellard are piloting a small project high school this fall specifically for students like Chee Low. The school, to be named Hope Academy, will start with volunteer teachers and no more than 10 students.

“It doesn’t take any more to dream big than it does to dream small,” Clark said. “So we’re dreaming big and working for those big things that will make a real impact. We want to help these young men to see that God has plans for them, to give them hope and a future. They can have peace and prosperity here. They will find what they are looking for in life if they seek God with all their hearts.”

By contributing writer Lelia King

LEARN Are you interested in ministering among refugees in your community? Would you like to become involved with ministry to the Karen people? Contact CBF staff member Chris Boltin at engage@thefellowship.info or (800) 352-8741 to learn about resources and specific opportunities to serve.

Learn more about the ministry of Clark and Ellard at www.thefellowship.info/clarkellard.