

Guided Thesis:

A Project Proposal for Cultural Training at Valley Outreach

Madeline Joy

Northwest University

23 April 2023

Integrative project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Arts in International Community Development

Table of Contents

Essay One: Contextualization	4
Introduction	4
Importance of Contextualization	4
Contextualization with the Karen	7
Creative and Innovative Contextualization	9
Future Implications	10
Conclusion	12
Works Cited	13
Essay Two: Qualitative Inquiry	15
Introduction	15
Explanation and Importance of Qualitative Inquiry	15
Qualitative Inquiry Types	16
Steps of Qualitative Inquiry	18
Qualitative Inquiry in my Fieldwork and Project	22
Conclusion	25
Works Cited	26
Essay Three: ICD Values	28
Introduction	28
Personal Transformation	28
Social Justice	31
Copowerment	32
Philosophy of Service	35
Conclusion	36
Works Cited	38
A Project Proposal for Cultural Training at Valley Outreach	40
Introduction	40
History of Karen Population	41
Karen Culture	42
Karen Population in Minnesota	44
Fieldwork	45
Project Proposal	47
Scope of Project	51

Conclusion	52
Works Cited	53
Comprehensive Works Cited	56

Essay One: Contextualization

Introduction

The use of contextualization is paramount in community development work. Without contextualization, community development work can not be successful. The job of the community developer is to learn from the community, understand its context, and develop solutions to the issues using resources found within the community. For this to happen, a development worker must spend ample time learning from the community to develop a deep understanding of the contexts that are at play. The use of contextualization, especially in a basic needs organization such as Valley Outreach, is the primary factor in ensuring that the needs of the people they serve are being met. When contextualization is used, it can empower a community to come together and promote self-sufficiency long-term.

As I completed fieldwork at Valley Outreach, I discovered that, while Valley Outreach does practice contextualization in meeting the needs of low-income individuals, they are not applying cultural contextualization to meet the needs of the many different ethnic and racial groups that utilize their services. One such group that Valley Outreach is missing the context for is the Karen. Through this paper, I will discuss the importance of contextualization, contextualization with the Karen, creative and innovative approaches to contextualization, and finally, the future implications of this research on my work.

Importance of Contextualization

Dr. Inslee defined contextualization as “the practice of designing programs and processes with attention to the particular cultural characteristics and inherent resources of a given people, place and time.” Sitting in Seattle, listening to Dr. Inslee's lecture about contextualization was

the first time I can remember finally beginning to grasp what contextualization means. When classes started later that summer, I was given examples of contextualization that made an impact on me. In Hagerman's book *White Kids*, they provided an example of parents bringing their children to soup kitchens to volunteer and interact with black people (231). For many rural white kids, volunteering in places like soup kitchens is their first experience with black people. The context of white people serving soup to impoverished black people promotes an image that black people require services from white people and that they are somehow victims. This context is particularly harmful because it can lead to an imbalance in the way that children think about race (Myers chapter 3). This is why it is incredibly important to learn and practice good contextualization. If contextualization is learned young enough, situations like the above example can be avoided.

Some of my own first experiences with race were in situations where I was providing services to impoverished people, like the above example. Although I had studied bias and had a baseline understanding of context, I believe I carried some of the bias into my first few days of fieldwork. However, I quickly began to uncover those biases and understand the importance of viewing issues through the different lenses. Understanding context helped me realize that the Karen population was struggling within Valley Outreach. I observed many instances of the Karen struggling to communicate with staff and struggling to locate food within the food pantry. When I started my fieldwork, some staff told me about the Karen. Julie, an administrative specialist, told me that "they (the Karen) just do not speak much." Another volunteer in the intake department, Spencer, informed me that Valley Outreach "does not have much success" with the Karen population because "they do not like to speak with us." I kept thinking about the interactions I had with staff and volunteers surrounding the Karen.

While at work, I asked my supervisor, Kristyn, if she had any experience working with the Karen population. Since they are relatively new to the area, I expected her to say no. To my surprise, she immediately called me to tell me about it. Kristyn was excited to talk about the Karen, as she recently had a massive success with one Karen family. She told me she had spent a lot of time over the last few months trying to help a Karen family, and it had always ended in failure. Finally, she got tired of failing them and took a course on Karen culture through a local college. In that class, she learned how to communicate with the Karen, important elements of their culture, and their family structure. After doing that, she called the family again and worked with them in a way that made them comfortable. It wasn't a smooth process, and it took a few weeks longer than average, but it ultimately ended in the family receiving benefits. Kristyn was incredibly proud of the foundation she had created with that family and even shared that it had led to more positive experiences with other Karen families.

Kristyn was successful because she understood the context in which the Karen culture operates. She was able to identify important aspects of the communication preferences, cultural artifacts, and family relationships that allowed her to form a solid and trusting bond. Dwight Conquergood, an ethnographer, writes that getting to know a culture is an important aspect of helping them and earning their trust (222). Kristyn's work to practice good contextualization saved the Karen family from being homeless and has opened doors for her to continue to work with other Karen families in the area. This example is what led me to want to design a cultural training program for Valley Outreach. If they could invest time into understanding the Karen culture and context, they too might be able to make a difference in the lives of the Karen.

Contextualization with the Karen

To successfully work with the Karen, it is imperative to understand the contexts in which they prefer to operate. My experience uncovering my own negative bias and learning of Kristyn's work understanding context led me to dig deeper into understanding contextualization within the Karen community. While having examples of negative and positive contextualization provided a solid foundation for understanding contextualization, using tools like Hofstede's Country Comparison and reading further research was necessary.

Hofstede Insights Country Comparison tool provides an in-depth look into the ways that many countries experience six dimensions of culture. Those dimensions are Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence (Country Comparison). While it is a helpful tool, especially when learning about the United States culture, it does not offer an overview of Myanmar (formerly Burma) culture. Using the Country Comparison tool and outside research performed by Rarick and Nickerson, I was able to determine how the United States and Myanmar compare across Hofstede's dimensions.

Rarick and Nickerson discovered that Myanmar culture is the following: low power distance, very feminine, moderately individualistic, high uncertainty avoidance, and moderate long-term orientation (2). There was no study on the dimension of indulgence in Myanmar. Hofstede labels the United States as having moderate power distance and uncertainty avoidance, low long-term orientation, high masculinity and indulgence, and very high individualism (Country Comparison).

In my fieldwork, I noted the most significant difference in Karen culture was in the individualism category. Paw, a client at Valley Outreach, frequently referred to their family

throughout the interview they performed with me. When I asked them if they were able to find the foods they liked at Valley Outreach, Paw would respond with “my family can” or “my family cannot” rather than “I.” This was a contrast between the white families and the people I interviewed. When they were asked the same question, they always responded with “I.” Htoo, another Valley Outreach client, referred only to their family and community when asked direct questions. The Karen clients seemed to belong to groups and families, while the Americans were very individualistic. Through interviews, the Karen demonstrated to me how important this context was to their lives.

Collectivism plays a prominent role in the context of the Karen. The two Karen clients I interviewed, Paw and Htoo, exemplified this by speaking only in terms of their family. I was also able to learn just how important family is through observations. I made notes about the groupings of people who came in, and my notes show that the Karen were coming in with the same people each time. While most were unwilling or unable to speak with me, I was able to decipher through ClientTrack data that each group of Karen that came in was a separate family unit. Each and every week, they came together as a family unit. This is in stark contrast to white families, who typically only sent one family member each week. Htoo told me that their family does everything together and always has. Family relationships are one of the most important aspects of the Karen, and they greatly influence how they do things (Harper). Understanding this context is crucial to working with them successfully.

Another context that I found essential with the Karen was communication preferences. In their ethnographic study, Power and Pratt highlight the significance of the language barriers that Karen refugees face during and after resettlement (6). I noticed that even with interpreters, the

Karen had difficulty communicating verbally. While some Karen at Valley Outreach know English, most of them know only small phrases and words. This makes the process of resettlement and integration very challenging, especially for an organization like Valley Outreach as they try to meet their needs (Watkins et al.). Green and Lockley found that most Karen preferred communicating with organizations via technology (5). The Karen had an easier time when they could type their questions and fill out their forms via the internet. This allowed them to take their time and go at their own pace (Green and Lockley 6). The preferred context of the Karen for communication is not one that Valley Outreach currently utilizes.

While the contexts of individualism, family, and communication are certainly not all-encompassing, they provide an important starting point for understanding the cultural context of the Karen. Taking the time to pause and reflect on what is needed to effectively work with the Karen can and should involve dedicating time to understand these contexts and more (Friedman 9). Through the continued learning of contexts and community resources, the most effective programs and policies can be designed and implemented.

Creative and Innovative Contextualization

Parker Palmer tells us that if we can't get out of it, get into it (84). Being a development practitioner means being comfortable with being uncomfortable. It also means being able to think on your feet and come up with solutions to problems that involve the community and its resources. Collaboration and innovation between development workers and community members is vital to the success of the development work. Kelley and Kelley use the term "cross-pollination" to describe that work between groups of people can lead to the most innovative ideas (81). Since situations are constantly changing, it is important to be prepared for new

information and new ideas. Development workers must identify those ideas and that information and be able to work with it to create new ideas. They must do this all while being aware of the context of the situation and putting aside their own contexts.

In my fieldwork, I quickly realized that the Karen context was not understood by Valley Outreach. There were no creative approaches being utilized to further their understanding either. I proposed a project to them that would involve a strategic and creative partnership between Valley Outreach and local Karen leaders. The proposed project would involve innovative new communication practices and a training program designed to deepen the staff and volunteers' understanding of the Karen culture and context. Delivering the project to staff and volunteers requires creativity in design and implementation, as it needs to be accessible and understandable to many different people.

Creativity and innovation are often overlooked, but they cannot be in development work. Kristyn's work with the Karen in Washington County is an excellent example of using creative solutions to better a program. She was able to help a Karen family only when she stopped using the resources that the county provided her and took a creative approach to learning. Community development work will often pull workers out of their own context. We must be able to broaden our contexts and look for solutions in places we might not expect. Without innovation and creativity, this would not be possible.

Future Implications

As I look toward the end of my graduate school journey, I am reminded of the lessons I have learned along the way, especially regarding contextualization. When I started the program, I had never used the word contextualization. I had no idea the significance that word would have

for my life and my work. To be fair, I don't think I anticipated the amount of growth I would have in any area, but especially not in understanding program design and implementation.

When I read the curriculum for the program before signing up for classes, I was excited about the idea of doing a project. I thought I would enter a space, identify a problem, and come up with a solution. Through the ICD classes and values, I learned that I was suffering from what could be called a "white savior complex." I learned that I can not "save" a community, and any solutions for any problems must come from within the community (Myers chapter 5). I learned the importance of understanding the context of the people I was working with and allowing them to define and solve their own problems. I learned that much of my work would be supporting communities from the background, and even more importantly, I have learned to take pride in that.

I am not sure where my career will take me, but I know the skills I have learned in the MAICD course will be helpful along the way. In my current work in local government, I have already started using contextualization to understand my clients better. It is easy to get caught up in a pattern when working with many people in the same demographic. It is easy to envision each person having the same circumstances as the last person. Defining and utilizing contextualization has helped me get out of the negative pattern I was in and see each person as a unique individual with different complex circumstances. Using contextualization and viewing issues through different lenses has allowed me to genuinely understand the issues my clients are facing and work with them to come up with solutions.

Using contextualization has led me to advocate for better policies to higher-level government employees. I realized that most of my clients at Washington County prefer

communication via email or text rather than standard communication via mail. It allows for faster processing times and, in turn, leads to quicker access to government benefits. After switching one economic assistance unit to communication via email, we conducted a survey and found that 97% of clients strongly preferred this form of communication. Most clients said that it better suited their lifestyle and was easier for them to navigate.

This success has led me to keep pushing for change across all divisions of economic assistance. Our clients deserve to have their preferences respected and accommodated. Because of this success and the ICD program, I am pursuing a career in policy-making and advocacy within the government. I have seen the problems, experienced and understood the context, and now want to apply it to the work that the county does every day. It is a lofty goal to want to make a change within the government, but I feel more prepared than ever to take action and make a positive change.

Conclusion

Contextualization is a significant and important topic. There are many ways that it can be understood and defined, but ultimately it comes down to designing programs and processes that cater to the cultural characteristics and resources that a community has. I utilized contextualization in the design of my proposed project and in the work I am doing with Washington County, and I hope to continue doing that in the future. The importance of contextualization cannot be overstated, and I hope to inspire others to practice good contextualization in their work.

Works Cited

- *Conquergood, Dwight. "Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp: Performance, Communication, and Culture." E-book. *The Drama Review*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1988.
- "Country Comparison." *Hofstede Insights*, 21 June 2021,
<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/thailand,the-usa/>.
- *Friedman, Thomas L. *Thank You for Being Late*. E-book. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016.
- Green, Geff, and Eleanor Lockley. "Communication Practices of the Karen in Sheffield: Seeking to Navigate Their Three Zones of Displacement." *Taylor & Francis*, 19 Sept. 2012,
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01292986.2012.717095>.
- *Hagerman, Margaret A. *White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America*. E-book. Reprint edition, NYU Press, 1 February 2020.
- Harper, Susan G. "Keystone Characteristics That Support Cultural Resilience in Karen Refugee Parents - Cultural Studies of Science Education." *SpringerLink*, Springer Netherlands, 6 Aug. 2015, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11422-015-9681-9>.
- Htoo. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.
- *Inslee, Forrest. *Leadership and ICD Values*. Northwest University – August 24, 2021.
- Julie. Personal Interview. 13 September 2022.
- *Kelley, Tom and David Kelley. *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*. William Collins, 2014.

*Myers, Bryant L. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. E-book. Orbis Books, 2011.

Paw. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.

*Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Power, David V., and Rebekah J. Pratt. "Karen Refugees from Burma: Focus Group Analysis." *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 30 Nov. 2012, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/17479891211287058/full/html>.

Rarick, Charles A., and Inge Nickerson. "An Exploratory Study of Myanmar Culture Using Hofstede's Value Dimensions." *SSRN*, 30 Mar. 2008, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1114625.

Spencer. Personal Interview 12 September 2022.

Stephens, Kristyn. Personal Interview. 24 August 2022.

Watkins, Paula, et al. *'I'm Telling You ... The Language Barrier Is the Most, the Biggest Challenge': Barriers to Education among Karen Refugee Women in Australia*. Sage Journals, 1 Aug. 2012, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/000494411205600203>.

Essay Two: Qualitative Inquiry

Introduction

According to Brene Brown, stories are just data with a soul (1:08). Stories and facts from observations and interviews with local populations can provide essential information about what a community needs and what resources they have. Such qualitative data is important because it can help researchers step out of their perspective and into a more contextualized and collaborative mindset. Community development workers can use qualitative research methods like ethnographic studies, action research, appreciative inquiry, and more to uncover information that will allow them to aid the community in the best possible way. When researchers talk with people in the field or study the stuff of their lives-their stories, artifacts, and surroundings-they enter their perspectives by partly stepping out of their own (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater 219)

Throughout this essay, I will discuss the importance of qualitative inquiry. Additionally, I will work through different methods of qualitative inquiry and what steps can be a part of effective qualitative inquiry. Finally, I will review how I utilized qualitative inquiry in my fieldwork and project.

Explanation and Importance of Qualitative Inquiry

Merriam and Tisdell explain that qualitative research is learning to see other people's constructions of reality and how they view the world (243). They further explain that "qualitative research is not conducted so that the laws of human behavior can be isolated. Rather, researchers seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it" (Merriam and Tisdell 250). Contextualization is important within qualitative inquiry because practitioners need to metaphorically put themselves in the shoes of those they are studying and working with. It is necessary to set aside their biases to understand the context of those they work with. Without

doing that, the insights gained from qualitative inquiry could be missed. At my fieldwork site, Valley Outreach, the engagement and program coordinators missed a lot of important information because they focused primarily on quantitative data and did not spend time collecting stories and information. A volunteer I worked with, Derek, shared that he felt they did not have the time to focus on stories. Valley Outreach seemed to be “spread too thin” with their many programs to delve into qualitative inquiry (Derek).

Copowerment, described by Inslee as “a dynamic of mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other,” is another important aspect of qualitative inquiry. Community development workers aim to benefit the community. Communities must know that practitioners are not there to “fix” them or solve all of their problems with outside resources. The practitioner aims to empower and copower communities to find solutions to their problems from within the community. To do this, community development workers need to be aware of their biases and ensure they come to communities with the goal of copowerment. While observing Valley Outreach, I noticed the staff emphasized empowerment in their client population. In my observations, I noted that they could easily shift from an empowerment goal to a copowerment goal if they allocated time to listen to their clients’ stories. Doing this would allow them to gain insights and benefits, creating stronger services, and communities for their clients.

Qualitative Inquiry Types

According to Merriam and Tisdell, there are six main types of qualitative inquiry. They are basic qualitative research, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and qualitative case study. Merriam and Tisdell also highlight four paradigms of research: action research, appreciative inquiry, mixed-methods research, and critical. Each type and paradigm is

important and beneficial in its own way. There is no right or wrong type to choose, as researchers will decide based on what will be most beneficial for their research. My fieldwork study, which will be highlighted later in this paper, utilized ethnography, action research, and appreciative inquiry. I will focus on these topics and highlight more information about them below.

Ethnography

Ethnographic research is a qualitative inquiry method and one that was emphasized throughout my fieldwork. It is often used in the social and behavioral science fields because it involves using interviews and observations to collect data on the study subjects. People who practice ethnographic work are there to observe and understand the lives of the people around them (Ethnographic Research). An example of ethnographic research is the work performed by Seth Holmes. In their book, they discuss the lives of migrant workers. Holmes spent years living and working within the community. Their dedication uncovered some of the real issues migrant workers face during their lives. Holmes also revealed many unsafe situations and systemic injustices that the migrants faced. The research that Holmes did was very impactful because he used many different people's voices to illustrate their experiences (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater 63). While I was not able to live and work with my study population, I tried to highlight as many voices as possible to illustrate the need for the proposed project.

Action Research

Action research is a systemic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives (Stringer 1). Action research also seeks to ensure that all relevant stakeholders in the investigation process are included in the project (Stringer 34). Ultimately, action research ensures that development workers work with

the community they serve (Bradley Huang 93). The use of action research involves a cycle of sorts. This cycle is often called “Look, Think, and Act.” This process is collaborative and involves identifying the problem (Look), working with the community to brainstorm solutions (Think), and finally, planning and implementing a solution that all parties have worked to create (Act). This process is ongoing and can encompass many different problems and solutions. Action Research is very focused on identifying the problem and crafting a solution.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry suggests that we look for what works in an organization and then appreciate it (Hammond). Unlike action research, appreciative inquiry has no defined endpoint. Its goal is to help people work together to understand what the community (or organization) is doing right. By understanding what is going right, other processes can be modeled after the successful ones. Hammond provides an example of using appreciative inquiry as follows: “If you get a survey that says 94% of customers are happy with you, interview them and see why they are happy, rather than interviewing the unhappy 6%.” The end result of the process is a series of statements that describe where the community or organization wants to be, based on positive moments that have occurred (Hammond). It is not always easy to focus on what is going right within an organization, but appreciative inquiry suggests that we do just that. By taking time to reflect on experiences, there is an opportunity to focus on what is positive and what is going well.

Steps of Qualitative Inquiry

It is important to note that fieldworkers may take different steps in their qualitative inquiry process. The steps involved can vary based on personal preference, need, and

methodology. The steps listed below are certainly not a comprehensive list but represent some of the most common actions taken in the qualitative inquiry process.

Design

If the overall purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people and communities make sense of their lives and surroundings, then the study design is crucial (Merriam and Tisdell 15). In this phase, the researcher will begin formulating their study goals. In doing this, they will identify their study population and location and plan how they will collect the data. Researchers must remember to keep their plans flexible, as the nature of qualitative research can be ever-changing. They also need to plan to be purposeful with their interviewees and observations and plan for an extended amount of time in the natural setting (Merriam and Tisdell 16). In this phase of a qualitative study, researchers may also want to classify their study as one of the four main types of qualitative inquiry: ethnographic, grounded theory, narrative analysis, or phenomenological. Researchers also may further classify if they want to perform mixed methods research, action research, appreciative inquiry, critical research, or arts-based research (Merriam and Tisdell 43).

Data Collection

Three basic ways to collect data are interviews, observations, and examination of artifacts and documents (Merriam and Tisdell 184). These methods will be discussed more in-depth below.

Interview

Interviews in qualitative research can take many forms. They can be planned or unplanned, formal or informal, individual or group. Interview questions can also take various forms, either open-ended or close-ended. An essential aspect of the interview in qualitative studies is that the researcher is not attempting to extract information. Instead, they find meaning

in a person's stories (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater 221). The use of an interview allows the fieldwork researcher to get more familiar with the lives of the people in the community. It also helps identify problems that should be addressed and resources the community might already have.

Observation

Merriam and Tisdell highlight that observation can be one of the most important aspects of a qualitative study because it allows the researcher to gather firsthand accounts of the study population (161). Performing observations, sometimes simply called “fieldwork,” involves the researcher going to the study site to observe the people or community being studied. The researcher can take an insider or outsider approach to observation, but sometimes will use some of each approach. The inside fieldwork approach would involve joining the study population and participating in their activities. The outsider approach would involve being unknown and withdrawn from the study population. Note-taking is crucial whether a researcher takes an insider or outsider approach. Researchers can take “field notes” to help them recount their experiences. These field notes can be written, verbal, or even video/picture, depending on the needs and preferences of the researcher (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater 63). A combination of all those forms is typically used.

Examination of Documents and Artifacts

Documents and artifacts can be defined to include public records, personal papers or photographs, popular culture documents, visual documents, and physical materials (Merriam and Tisdell 189). While examining artifacts and documents can be incredibly important in a qualitative study, researchers may struggle with this step, as it requires a lot of outside time and research. Documents and artifacts are not typically brought to the study by participants, so

researchers must spend time seeking good sources. Documents can help researchers find new information and meaning in their study population's stories and what they have observed in their fieldwork setting (Jhangiani et al.).

In recent years, online documents and artifacts have gained popularity among researchers, however, they do present a challenge to researchers as people can oftentimes alter their personalities or fabricate stories to fit different personas online. Extra care must be used while reviewing online documents and artifacts. It is also crucial to verify the authenticity of online documents when using them for research purposes (Merriam & Tisdell 177).

Compilation, Analysis, and Report of information

Researchers have often cited compilation and analysis as one of the most daunting parts of any research project (Suter 347). Merriam and Tisdell suggest beginning the analysis phase of the research while still gathering data, as this makes it much more manageable (236). If researchers wait till the end of the study, they will often be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data they are faced with. Developing a system to organize, categorize, and code data is important. Using a method like constant comparative data analysis allows the researcher to find patterns, themes, and categories that will help answer the research questions (Merriam and Tisdell 236). When the data has been analyzed, and the researcher has reviewed the ethics and validity of the information, writing and disseminating the information will be the next step. To do this, the writer will determine their audience, focus on their intended method, and create an outline. After these steps have been completed, significant time will be spent in the writing process before the final report is ready to be disseminated to others (Bos 177).

Qualitative Inquiry in my Fieldwork and Project

For my fieldwork, I spent the summer of 2021 immersing myself in the life and culture of Valley Outreach. I performed almost twenty client interviews, a handful of staff and volunteer interviews, and spent many hours observing the life and flow of clients through the various service areas. Throughout my fieldwork, I used principles of ethnographic research, action research, and appreciative inquiry to guide my focus.

When I began my fieldwork, I wasn't sure how to approach it. I knew that I wanted my study to be ethnographic, but I couldn't entirely immerse myself in the culture of the clients at Valley Outreach due to financial and time constraints. Most days, I could only spend three or four hours there. However, I still tried to maintain the typical components of an ethnographic study, such as observation and interview. I also took detailed and thorough case notes and included as many voices as possible in my journal and proposal.

With those constraints in mind, I turned my attention to Action Research. I liked this approach because it involved finding a solution and working with all the stakeholders. Throughout my fieldwork, I sought out as many stakeholders as possible. I interviewed board members, clients of all races and ethnicities, staff, volunteers, and even community members who were not affiliated with Valley Outreach. These unique perspectives allowed me to narrow the focus for my future research questions. I also used the "Look, Think, and Act" cycle throughout my fieldwork. I observed all the stakeholders, thought about problems and solutions, and then created a project proposal that I believe would significantly change Valley Outreach's service for the Karen population.

The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry inspired me to look for positive experiences in Valley Outreach. Helen, a client at Valley Outreach, talked a lot about the ease of

communication she had with Valley Outreach. She felt they understood her and knew what she needed (Helen). From my observations, I knew the Karen did not have the easy communication that Helen described. However, I realized that Helen was the same race, from the same culture, and spoke the language as the Valley Outreach staff and volunteers. After this realization, I dove further into what makes Helen's communication experience so great. I took a lot of time to appreciate what Valley Outreach does well in communication. I also took time to appreciate what systems they already had in place and how those could potentially be modified to fit the needs of the Karen community.

Interviewing was the aspect of fieldwork that made me the most nervous. After reading about interview techniques and tactics, I felt quite overwhelmed and wondered if I could do a good job while also maintaining the principles of Do No Harm (Wallace 2). However, as I began interviews, I found myself not wanting to stop. In my setting, semi-structured and informal interviews worked best. Approaching clients and asking if they were willing to chat with me about their experience at Valley Outreach produced a lot of positive reactions. Most people were excited to speak with me about Valley Outreach and their experiences. I encountered difficulty with the Karen population, though, and was only able to interview two people. I tried a more formal interview approach, a more structured interview approach, using a translator, not using a translator, and more, but remained mostly unsuccessful. I was fortunate to have great interviews with the two Karen who would speak with me, Htoo and Paw. They shared much about their families, culture, and Htoo even shared that the other Karen were probably just too nervous about speaking with me. They explained that anyone seen as an authority figure could make the Karen quite nervous, and even though I didn't work there, I could be seen as that (Htoo).

Another significant component of my fieldwork was my fieldwork notes. I underestimated how valuable and important this part would be. In the beginning, I was just jotting down things I was observing. However, as I grew more confident, I started writing more and more. I also began connecting ideas and forming questions. My journals are messy from an outside perspective because I have main ideas written in the center of the page and then various thoughts on all sides, but they contain great detail. Every observation has follow-up observations, thoughts, and questions. I also developed a color-coordination system to link ideas from one page to the next.

My fieldwork experience was positive because I leaned heavily on qualitative inquiry methods and ideas. I approached it nervously but excited to use ethnographic principles, action research, and appreciative inquiry. My confidence in interviewing and being present with different cultures increased through this experience. I wrote in my journal, "I feel like a whole new person. My perspective on cultures and food-pantry users has completely changed in just a few short weeks" (Joy). A separate journal entry from August detailed my excitement for using qualitative inquiry methods by stating that I couldn't believe I was learning so much just by appreciating what was good at Valley Outreach.

I anticipate that when the proposed program has been implemented, it will be evaluated through qualitative inquiry methods. Follow-up interviews and observations with all stakeholders will be completed to measure the program's success. While the focus for evaluation will be primarily qualitative, some quantitative data will be used to measure the effectiveness using Valley Outreach's client database.

Conclusion

Qualitative inquiry creates excellent development practitioners because it provides them with the skills and knowledge to step outside of their own perspectives, practice good contextualization and copowerment, and create effective and lasting solutions hand-in-hand with the community. Methods like ethnography, action research, and appreciative inquiry all require development practitioners to work with the community in a collaborative way that fosters the best possible outcomes. In my fieldwork, using qualitative inquiry allowed me to identify an issue previously unknown to Valley Outreach. It also allowed me to propose a collaborative project that will strengthen the community for all involved.

Works Cited

Bos, Jaap. "Research Ethics Step by Step." *SpringerLink*, Springer International Publishing, 1

Jan. 2000, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-48415-6_10.

Bradley Huang, Hillary. *What Is Good Action Research?* 9 Jan. 2015,

[https://actionresearchplus.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Action-Research-2010-](https://actionresearchplus.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Action-Research-2010-Bradbury.pdf)

[Bradbury.pdf](https://actionresearchplus.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Action-Research-2010-Bradbury.pdf).

*Brown, Brene. "The Power of Vulnerability." TED, TEDxHouston, 20:14, June 2010,

www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en

Derek. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.

"Ethnographic Research." *Research*, 2020,

<https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs/ethnographic-research#:~:text=Ethnography>

[%20is%20a%20qualitative%20method,how%20societies%20and%20individuals%20function.](https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs/ethnographic-research#:~:text=Ethnography)

*Hammond, Sue Annis. *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. E-book. 3rd ed., Thin Book Pub.

Co., 2013.

Helen. Personal interview. 28 June 2022.

*Holmes, Seth. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*. Vol. 27.

Univ of California Press, 2013.

Htoo. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.

Jhangiani, Rajiv S., et al. "Observational Research." *Research Methods in Psychology*, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 1 Aug. 2019,

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/psychmethods4e/chapter/observational-research/>.

Joy, Madeline. Fieldwork notes. 19 July 2022.

Joy, Madeline. Fieldwork notes. 9 August 2022.

*Merriam, Sharan B. and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. E-book. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016.

*Stringer, Ernest T. *Action Research*. E-book. Sage Publications, 2014.

*Sunstein, Bonnie Stone and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. *FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research*, 4th edition. E-book. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011.

Suter, W. Newton. *Introduction to Educational Research: A Critical Thinking Approach*. 1 Jan. 2006, https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/43144_12.pdf.

*Wallace, Marshall. From Principles to Practice, a User's Guide to Do No Harm. October 2015, pp. 2-20.

Essay Three: ICD Values

Introduction

The last two years of learning in the International Community Development (ICD) program have had numerous ups and downs. I have uncovered my biases, developed new perspectives, and grown beyond what I thought possible. The personal development I have experienced while learning through the ICD is incomparable to any other time. Through self-reflection, I can better understand my place in the world and how I can support people and communities around me. Throughout this essay, I will discuss my personal transformation, social justice issues, copowerment, and my personal philosophy of service.

Personal Transformation

The ICD program has allowed me to grow from someone who stood on the sidelines into someone who takes action and uses their voice and privilege to advocate and copower others. I grew up in an area with little to no cultural diversity, and I went to school with people who looked just like me. I had very few friends of other races, faiths, or socioeconomic statuses. Despite having wonderful examples of community leaders in my father, a police officer, and my mother, a social worker, I chose to stand on the sidelines of social justice and community issues for most of my life.

Moving to college, I realized how much privilege my whiteness gave me (Hagerman 277). I mentioned that I had stayed on the sidelines for most of my life, and it was at this point that I realized that being able to remain silent on issues was a privilege that many others could not afford. While in college, I was suddenly surrounded by people who did not look like me and did not grow up just like I did. Most of these people had very passionate responses when asked about social justice issues, and I would often stand there with nothing to say. It was incredibly

disorienting and scary. I felt disgusted with myself for being so naive to the world and its problems, and I let that disgust build boundaries between me and others (Beck 89). I knew I needed to make a change, but I didn't know how, so for most of college, I just remained the same. I learned little bits and pieces of social justice but never fully committed myself to it. I felt so far behind others in learning about these issues that I remained ignorant out of embarrassment and shame.

After college, I found myself working in Community Services for the local government. When I first started there, I had told myself it was just short-term, and I would soon begin my "real career." It surprised me when I realized I loved the work I was doing, and I didn't want to leave. This was the turning point for me. Most of my client population was dealing with the social justice issues regarding their race that I had been ignoring all of my life, and I realized that I couldn't be successful in this career field as I was. I believe this was the catalyst for me to dig deeper internally and where the transformation process began.

I joined the ICD program hoping for change, which is precisely what I found. The first few courses taught me about cultural competencies and community development principles. I felt uncomfortable many times in the ICD program, but never more than in the first semester. At this point in my journey, I was in denial about bias and did not want to believe that I was capable of that (Myers 1:04). I still wanted to envision myself as a good person incapable of being biased or harboring negative stereotypes.

I don't remember when I came to terms with the fact that I am flawed and biased, especially regarding social justice issues, but it did happen, and it was the lowest point in my journey. Moving out of a pattern of justified avoidance allowed me to grow and change and begin the most significant part of my transformation (Hagerman 170). I have spent a lot of time

unlearning harmful behaviors and thought patterns. Kuenkel highlights that to get answers with real meaning, we must ask meaningful questions (261). While I think Kuenkel may have meant outside perspectives, I applied it to myself and saw real change. I stopped hiding and started asking myself difficult and meaningful questions designed to get to the root of my problems, and that is where I saw the most growth.

While overall, I would describe the ICD program as uncomfortable and painful, I did experience some successes and high points. My fieldwork started out primarily as observation, but not by choice. I struggled with how to approach people. I spent quite a few weeks feeling anxious and nervous and not getting positive responses from people I approached. I thought I was doing a good job of hiding my nerves, but a Valley Outreach client noticed, gave me words of encouragement, and told me it was ok to feel nervous (Debra). When I learned to apply qualitative inquiry and copowerment techniques like active listening, the whole dynamic changed, and I left my fieldwork feeling overwhelmingly positive. Not all my attempts were successful, but some of the approaches allowed me to get closer to my study population, the Karen, than I had previously been able to.

My transformation journey started before the ICD but would not have been possible without it. It has been uncomfortable and filled with many highs and lows. It has taught me to look within myself and not shy away from tough questions and situations. It has empowered me to become a better leader, as I have taken steps to work through my inner darkness (Palmer 81). This journey will be lifelong, but instead of being scared of change as I was before, I am excited to continue to learn and grow.

Social Justice

Broadly, social justice can mean the equitable distribution of wealth, privileges, and opportunities for all (Jost & Kay 3). The meaning of social justice can vary from person to person and can change over time. My understanding of social justice has completely transformed and developed throughout the ICD program. When I first started the program, I struggled with the term because I heard it used negatively frequently. For example, growing up, I thought everyone had equal access and opportunities. I didn't understand how people could advocate for change when I didn't see the problem. I kept hearing all these loud voices advocating for change that I didn't understand, and it became frustrating. Instead of learning to understand what was being talked about, I treated it with ignorance and ignored it.

I read authors such as Clawson describe social justice as something that can be defined as the practical outworking of loving God and others (21). This definition helped me understand social justice, but I could not completely relate because I am not religious. Moe-Lobeda offered a similar but more appropriate description for me when they stated that social justice and change are developed through resisting evil and building up what is good (242). Reflecting on Clawson and Moe-Lobeda's definitions, I developed my understanding of social justice.

In my transformation section, I discussed the uncomfortable feelings I had through most of the ICD program, and the area of social justice was no different. It was hard to face something headfirst that I had spent so long ignoring and dismissing. However, when I started working in community services, I could no longer ignore it and had to come to terms with what was happening around me and why people advocated so passionately for it. I realized that my clients, who are mostly black, did not have the same access and opportunities that I did and were facing racial subjugation (Pellow 49). I had the same realization when I began my fieldwork too. As

naive as it sounds, I had become so focused on equal rights and opportunities for black people, my work population, that I had forgotten about other races and ethnicities, such as the Karen, my fieldwork population. One of my Karen interviewees, Htoo, had shared that they often felt forgotten. This was one of the lowest points of my fieldwork because I had done exactly what Htoo was afraid of and forgotten the Karen. My work showed me that social justice was important, but my fieldwork and this conversation with Htoo started my passion for social justice.

As I look to the future, I want to show people that it is possible to go from denying social justice issues to being an advocate for them. I am not proud to admit the way I used to feel about the issues, but I am proud that my view on social justice has changed so drastically. I understand how the lack of social justice can affect communities and individuals and have committed myself to be part of the change.

Copowerment

Dr. Inslee defines copowerment as a dynamic of mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other. While copowerment is a uniquely ICD term, I believe that the integration of it is practiced worldwide among various service organizations. Many organizations may not even realize that they are facilitating copowerment, as it can often be called by other names, such as ‘mutual engagement.’ Bryan-Kinns and Hamilton describe mutual engagement as when people creatively ‘spark’ together and enter a state of group flow.

I took the ICD value of copowerment with me into my professional life. I realized something was lacking in my relationships, especially with clients. There were a lot of raised voices and angry clients, and I was beginning to feel burnt out. While doing some evening

reflection after a particularly difficult day at work, I noticed that my relationships with my fieldwork clients were overwhelmingly positive, but my relationships with my work clients were overwhelmingly negative. This sparked the idea that my clients were only engaging with me because they knew they had to in order to receive government assistance and housing grants. The clients did not view me as someone who could help them or make a difference in their lives, but as an obstacle they would have to overcome to meet their end goal. My fieldwork clients liked to talk to me because they knew I was working to better the organization.

I knew that these work relationships I had were unsustainable. Furthermore, I knew I could not continue to work like this, and I felt I was living through a complete breakdown (Lederach 73). However, I noticed that most clients who have been receiving government assistance long-term are burnt out by the system too. They are used to slow processes, unhelpful workers, and endless hoops to jump through. While this was an important realization, I wasn't sure what to do with it. I was, and still am, feeling extremely overwhelmed by the problem and unsure how to move forward. Luckily, my burnout coincided with the beginning of the ICD program. The term copowerment stuck with me for a few weeks before I decided that I wanted to make changes in my professional life and utilize the term to make meaningful changes.

I specifically took time to look for a 'spark' moment that could be the catalyst for the big changes I wanted to see within my client relationships. It came one day as a client broke down to me about the program rules and her frustration with the whole process. Instead of further explaining the process to her as I usually did, I simply said, "I agree with you. This requirement is terrible, and I wish it didn't have to be this way. Can you tell me more about what would work better for you? I can't promise change, but I can promise that I am listening to you, and I care." I modeled this response after one I had heard Kris, a Valley Outreach employee, say to a client

during my fieldwork observations. Those short sentences completely shifted the conversation. Because I admitted that I also thought the process was terrible and hard, she felt comfortable enough to share with me what would work better. I implemented this approach with all my clients, and suddenly, my outlook on work and client relationships shifted. While there is still a lot of frustration, being honest and engaging with my clients allowed us both to benefit from the conversation. My willingness to listen and her willingness to be honest allowed me to propose and implement better solutions and processes for the benefits system. After this point, my work relationships felt more like my fieldwork relationships. I was able to be a source of copowerment for my clients and that would not have been possible without the ICD program.

The conversation with my client began my copowerment journey. While the results of this copowerment may not be immediately evident, they will happen. It takes time for things to change, especially in the government, but I am advocating for change in the community services department, and people are listening. My clients now know I am willing to listen and update them on solutions to their problems. Furthermore, because they are so willing to share with me, I understand their needs better and can identify any unmet needs and direct them to places that might be able to assist them.

Copowerment can be incredibly powerful, and I have seen that firsthand. I want to continue to copower my clients, especially as I move onward and change positions in my work. Additionally, I want to show my coworkers that making lasting changes in our work relationships is possible and that it doesn't have to be a fight every time we pick up the phone. Most importantly, I want to continue advocating for my clients and ensuring they feel copowered. Requiring government assistance can be a low point for many people, and I want

them to understand that I am there to lift them up. Carrying these principles with me will indicate my success in future work.

Philosophy of Service

At the beginning of the ICD program, I thought I had it all figured out. I knew I would learn new things and finish with a new degree, but I was naive. I believed that I would learn how to manage projects and how to go into a community and fix problems. Looking back now, I almost have to laugh at the confidence I thought I had. I thought I knew everything there was to know about the “white savior complex,” which is ironic because, looking back now, I can see that I was a “white savior” at that point in my journey. While that is painful to admit, I take pride in the growth I have gone through to be able to get to this point.

When I think of my philosophy of service and where I want to be, I realize that I still have a lot of growing and learning to do. I have always wanted to do good in the community, but what exactly does that mean? Do I want to be a leader? A developer? A strong voice in the community? At the beginning of the program, I thought the answer to all of the above was yes, but now I am unsure. The fieldwork I did showed me that I couldn't develop something I know nothing about and that being a strong voice in the community is meaningless if what I am saying is unimportant. It also showed me that I couldn't be a leader just by being the loudest voice in the room. Understanding a community's many contexts, complexities, and cultural components is necessary before taking on that role. If a community can be defined as having one or more shared values, who am I to lead or bring about change if I do not have shared values or at least am dedicated to learning their values and dedicating myself to their community (Vogl 34)?

As I look to the future, I am beginning to view all the pain and embarrassment that led me to these conclusions as a gift. There was a lot of discomfort in getting to this point, but now

that I am here, I have realized that I am not growing if I am comfortable (Brown). The idea that I must be uncomfortable to grow, coupled with my newfound appreciation for social justice, has inspired me to continue to stretch the limitations that I had previously set for myself. I am capable of so much more than I imagined I was.

I believe that my philosophy of service will always be evolving as I continue to grow and learn in my career and volunteer work. I take the principles of Do No Harm with me everywhere I go and approach situations with a trauma-informed lens. Most importantly, I treat everyone with love. As a child, I was taught to treat everyone how I wanted to be treated. While it is a simplistic idea, I am working hard to ensure I live by that motto daily.

I detailed in the social justice section of this paper that my understanding of social justice has changed drastically. I started the ICD thinking everyone had the same opportunities, and now I realize that couldn't be further from the truth. This newfound knowledge and the continued development of my philosophy of service have inspired me to reach higher in my career. Instead of shying away from difficult policy discussions, I now actively seek a way to be involved. I currently work directly with clients, and while I will always cherish this time I have had with them, I have begun applying for Planner and Policy positions within my local government. I have learned how to remove my own lens and bias and truly listen to my client's stories, and now I want to apply it to policy decisions. I believe that the ICD has set me up to be a positive change-maker in my community, and I am excited to see where these positions take me.

Conclusion

I expected the ICD program to teach me many skills but did not expect to feel like an entirely different version of myself by the end. My time in the program has allowed me to dig deep within myself to uncover and unlearn bias and has given me a more clear vision of what I

want to do with my life. I have learned and used qualitative inquiry skills, practiced good contextualization, and developed an admiration for the practice of copowerment. Closing this chapter of my life will be difficult, but I feel more ready than ever to navigate the waters of community development.

Works Cited

- *Beck, Richard. *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality*. E-book. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011.
- Brown, Mike. “Comfort Zone: Model or Metaphor?” *SpringerLink*, Springer Singapore, 1 Apr. 2008, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF03401019>.
- Bryan-Kinns, Nick, and Fraser Hamilton. “Identifying Mutual Engagement.” *Taylor & Francis*, 3 Dec. 2009, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01449290903377103?journalCode=tbit20>.
- *Clawson, Julie. *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of our Daily Choices*. E-book. Intervarsity, 2009.
- Debra. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.
- *Hagerman, Margaret A. *White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America*. E-book. Reprint edition, NYU Press, 1 February 2020.
- Htoo. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.
- *Inslee, Forrest. Leadership and ICD Values. Northwest University – August 24, 2021.
- Jost, John, and Aaron Kay. “Social Justice: History, Theory, and Research.” *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, Jan. 2010, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2010-03506-030>.
- Kuenkel, Petra. *The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future*. E-book. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2016

*Lederach, John Paul. *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*. E-book. Good Books, 2003.

*Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia. *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as an Ecological-Economic Vocation*.
E-book. Fortress Press, 2013.

*Myers, Vernā. *How to Overcome Our Biases? Walk Boldly Toward Them* | TED Talk,

https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_

[walk_boldly_toward_them/discussion?referrer=playlist-talks_to_help_you_](https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them/discussion?referrer=playlist-talks_to_help_you_)

[understand_r#t-456253](https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them/discussion?referrer=playlist-talks_to_help_you_understand_r#t-456253).

*Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. E-book. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

*Pellow, David Naguib. *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice*, illus. ed. E-book. MIT Press, 2007.

*Vogl, Charles. *The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016.

A Project Proposal for Cultural Training at Valley Outreach

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, the Karen, an ethnic group from Myanmar (formerly Burma), have begun resettlement around the United States, including Minnesota. Minnesota currently has an open door policy on receiving refugees, so many were sent there by organizations like VOLAG Resettlement Agency or other governmental organizations. It is estimated that there are more than 17,000 Karen currently living in Minnesota. While many organizations have stepped up to help the Karen, researchers have noted that the most significant and challenging factors are communication and positive resettlement experiences (Watkins et al.). Valley Outreach, a basic needs non-profit in Stillwater, Minnesota, has experienced this issue as they begin to deliver services to an increasing number of Karen people. Htoo and Paw, Valley Outreach clients, echoed this sentiment by stating they did not feel comfortable communicating with Valley Outreach because they felt misunderstood.

To successfully assist the Karen population with resettlement and basic needs, Valley Outreach should incorporate a mandatory cultural training program into its staff and volunteer curriculum. Doing so will allow for a deeper understanding of their culture, context, and history which will provide insight for more effective and relevant programs and services. Additionally, the cultural training program should be advised on and taught by Karen community leaders. Allowing Karen people the space to advise on their history, culture, communication, and needs will ensure that staff and volunteers have a better overall understanding. Doing so will allow Valley Outreach an opportunity to meet their needs more effectively. This will create the beginnings of a trusting and competent relationship between Valley Outreach and the Karen while also empowering the Karen within the community.

Throughout this proposal, I will give historical background on the Karen and their culture, provide information on the Karen living in Minnesota, propose a project designed to mitigate the issues the Karen are facing, and discuss the project's scope. I will also use the information I learned from fieldwork observations and interviews to strengthen the case for this program and help give a voice to the Karen.

History of Karen Population

The Karen population is indigenous to Myanmar. They are an ethnic group recognized as some of the region's first inhabitants. There has been conflict in Myanmar for over 70 years, and the Karen have faced ethnic and religious persecution for the entirety of that time. Myanmar first gained its independence from Britain in 1949 and was initially established as a democracy; however, a coup occurred in 1962 that allowed a military junta to take over and keep control. By 1974, new economic policies had been implemented that rapidly deteriorated the Myanmar economy. The citizens suffered for many years, and in 1988, there were massive protests against the government and food shortages. The government killed at least three thousand protestors in response, and many more were displaced (Maizland).

Since the 1980s, there has been near-constant conflict and governmental party changes. While the junta is technically no longer in power, a military government still remains in control and even signed a constitution that states they will stay in control even under a citizen-run government. In 2021, there was another coup that resulted in the death and displacement of thousands of people. In response, there were large-scale protests that again resulted in the deaths of thousands of people (Loong). The National Union Government (NUG) is seeking to combat the military government and bring together ethnic minorities and disparate groups. They also

seek the return of elected government officials and publicly denounce the military government currently in power. Since the coup, the economic situation has continuously deteriorated, and many citizens have fled their homes and country (Maizland).

The Karen are particularly impacted by the violence and economic situation, as they are a small ethnic group within the country, making up just 7% of the total population (Radnofsky). The Myanmar government has allowed ethnic Burmans a privileged position in society. The Karen and other small ethnic groups have been exposed to ethnic cleansing by the government, systemic oppression and discrimination, and violence (Loong). Htoo mentioned this in passing during client engagement interviews. They have only recently resettled in the area and, while speaking to me, mentioned many times how peaceful life has been in the United States. Htoo stated, “So much calm. My family is safe.” Like Htoo, the violence has forced many others to flee their homes and land. There are currently nine refugee camps on the border of Myanmar and Thailand, and it is estimated that over 93,000 people are currently residing in the camps. Of the 93,000, 84% of those people are Karen. Hundreds of thousands more Karen have fled the region and resettled in other countries around the world (Radnofsky).

Karen Culture

The culture of the Karen is a significant factor in learning to understand their needs better. While Valley Outreach has a basic understanding of Karen culture, they have demonstrated a distinct lack of knowledge regarding communication preferences and language, family dynamics, and religion. This lack of knowledge is, in part, what led to the Karen people distancing themselves from Valley Outreach staff and employees. The Karen often wear Thanaka, a clay paste, on their faces. While performing observations, I witnessed a Valley

Outreach volunteer offer to help a Karen woman wipe the “mud” off her face to be “less dirty.” Shortly after, the Karen woman left Valley Outreach, upset, without receiving her groceries. This example highlights a misunderstanding of culture that arguably plays a role in the distance the Karen feel from their communities and other ethnic groups.

The Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM) explains that there are three main Karen languages, each with many dialects. The most popular language is S’gaw, and it is the language that most refugees in Minnesota use. A study performed in 2012 found that recently displaced or resettled Karens preferred communication via technology when speaking with organizations. The preferred forms of technological communication were email, WhatsApp, or text. This was especially true when receiving assistance or benefits from organizations, as it allowed them time to thoroughly read the paperwork and formulate their answers (Green & Lockley). During fieldwork observations, I noticed this to be accurate as the Karen often opt to fill out the necessary paperwork themselves over the phone. When staff or volunteers would ask questions, they would write the information down on their phones and hand the phone to staff. When verbal communication is necessary, the Karen prefer to avoid overly direct forms of communication and respond best to soft tones of voice and gentle lines of questioning (Language & Customs). Throughout my observations, I witnessed staff not utilizing this skill and instead being very direct and blunt with the Karen.

Family dynamics are quite different than those in the United States. The Karen are considered a matriarchal society, and most families live in multi-generational homes. Typically, the husband will move in with the wife and her family upon marriage. Most families usually have four or five children; however, the infant mortality rate in Burma is very high. As Karen families begin to resettle in the United States and other countries, family size has increased

(Family & Relationships). It is common for many Karen to live together in a home or apartment. In the past, Valley Outreach has not understood that and repeatedly questioned Karen about where and how they were living. Htoo, a client I interviewed at Valley Outreach, indicated that this line of questioning makes them uncomfortable.

Religion plays a significant role in the lives of the Karen. It influences who they marry, where they attend school, and whether they will be resettled (Religion). While some Karen have converted to Christianity, the majority of Karen are Animist, Buddhist, or Animist-Buddhist (Keenan). A study in 2020 found that praying together as a family was one of the most significant factors in experiencing successful relocation and resettlement experiences among the Karen (Muruthi et al.). In a separate study, Harper found that religion was one of the most impactful ways that Karen kept their culture alive, especially during relocation and resettlement. During my time at Valley Outreach, I did not see any acknowledgment by the staff of the Karen's religious customs.

Karen Population in Minnesota

The Karen are one of the newer ethnic groups to resettle in Minnesota. Prior to their arrival, there was minimal knowledge of their culture and customs. The Karen have taken steps to establish themselves in the area and developed the Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM) to aid in creating understanding and acceptance. KOM boasts that St. Paul, MN is home to one of the biggest Karen communities in the US (Karen History). While the Karen are primarily located in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) area, there is a new trend of Karen leaving the urban centers for suburban or rural areas. This is due to lower housing costs outside the cities

and better job opportunities found elsewhere (Hirsi). Washington County, home to Valley Outreach, has seen an increase in Karen resettlement numbers.

While many Karen have successfully resettled in Minnesota, there have been challenges. The language barrier between native Minnesotans and resettled Karen has been particularly challenging to overcome, as many Karen cite communication as their biggest challenge (Green & Lockley). They also mention the need for more reliable transportation as making the transition process difficult. Not having adequate transportation makes it difficult to maintain steady employment, get groceries, or seek help at social services organizations (Lytle). Governmental organizations offering services like SNAP, healthcare, or cash assistance have notoriously been difficult to navigate, and the Karen navigating these processes without fluency in English exacerbates the issue. While observing Valley Outreach, I noted many Karen struggling to interpret signs and forms they were asked to fill out. I also noted that they asked many questions of each other about programs such as SNAP and healthcare, as they did not know where to begin in the paperwork process. Despite struggling with the paperwork, they did not seek help from Valley Outreach staff or volunteers and appeared uncomfortable when approached by staff asking if they needed help.

Fieldwork

Between May 2022 and August 2022, I performed fieldwork at Valley Outreach, a nonprofit organization in Stillwater, Minnesota. During that time, I was able to volunteer and make observations in the intake department, food shelf, and clothing services area. I also performed client engagement surveys with numerous clients throughout the final two months of my fieldwork.

The observations I made throughout my time provided much insight into Valley Outreach's services and the client's experiences. Within a few weeks of starting there, I noticed patterns in Karen client's behavior. I also noticed that staff repeatedly commented about not understanding the clients, their culture, or their family dynamics. Notably, I observed that most Karen avoided contact with Valley Outreach staff and volunteers. When they did engage with staff, it was very limited, and the Karen appeared very uncomfortable and gave very short responses. Staff also seemed to be approaching the Karen less frequently than other clients.

On the 28th of June, I began performing client engagement surveys. I approached many clients to gather as much insight as possible. Most clients were willing to talk to me about their experiences, but I also experienced a few clients declining. Of the clients who declined the survey, 94% were Karen. I was only able to complete two interviews with the members of the Karen community. This was disappointing, but it highlights the need for stronger relationships between Valley Outreach and staff. They displayed the same reluctance to talk to me that they showed the other staff and volunteers. Many Karen who refused the survey would refuse eye contact or state that they did not speak English. Others would simply say "no" and walk away. As previously mentioned, they also appeared very nervous when being approached. I offered the use of interpreter phone services and private or public spaces but was always met with the same nervousness and distrust.

Htoo and Paw (both pseudonyms) were the only Karen willing to speak with me at Valley Outreach. The interview with Paw was particularly insightful, as they expressed to me that they felt misunderstood in the community. When asked, they would not immediately elaborate, but later in the interview, they shared that they could not get the things they needed at Valley Outreach (Paw). Htoo stated they were struggling to find a new job and afford the foods

they liked. When I asked if they could find the foods they liked at Valley Outreach, they simply said no and looked away. When I asked them if they had discussed their concerns with Valley Outreach staff, they again said no and that they did not know how (Htoo).

While communicating with Htoo and Paw, I found that there was a profound language barrier. There was no interpreter on-site, and when I offered a phone interpreter, both clients immediately became uncomfortable and declined. I found that they did not want to speak much about their families or culture, and I was not able to have an in-depth conversation with either client on these topics. When I did ask questions about culture, the clients seemed very uncomfortable and shifted in their seats. Paw shared a little about their discomfort by explaining that the community could be rude to the Karen, and they were fearful of what people would say about them. Paw also shared that their family felt uncomfortable with staff because they were worried they were doing something wrong and would get in trouble.

Fear was one of the biggest takeaways from my observations and the two Karen interviews I performed. While other ethnicities and races were almost excited to speak to me about their Valley Outreach experiences and their culture, the Karen seemed fearful and avoided contact with other staff and me if at all possible. If they noticed staff or volunteers near them, they would almost always shy away and avert their eyes.

Project Proposal

The observations I made during my fieldwork showed that Valley Outreach has demonstrated a commitment to bettering the community around them through basic needs services. They have shown that they are able to provide food, clothing, and support services to those in need. Unfortunately, they have also demonstrated that they do not yet fully understand

the needs of the Karen community. The proposed project would form a partnership between the Karen community and Valley Outreach. Through the partnership, Karen community members would have a more positive resettlement experience and a reduced risk of experiencing homelessness and hunger.

The project would involve designing and implementing a cultural training program led and advised on by the Karen people. This program would then be taught to staff and volunteers of Valley Outreach so that they could form connections and understand the needs of the Karen community. This program would be mandatory and involve the cooperation of all staff at Valley Outreach, especially the Volunteer Coordinator, Kenny McCoy. Kenny would be responsible for ensuring that all volunteers complete the training before engaging with the clients. The program director, Megan Stone, would be required to ensure that all staff have completed the training.

Designing the training is critical. It needs to be broad enough to ensure that the people undertaking the training gain knowledge of the Karen people and their culture but narrow enough so as not to overwhelm them. This is why it is vital to work with the Karen community to understand what they would like Valley Outreach to understand about them. This could be done through a partnership with local Karen leaders or with the Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM). Through my fieldwork observations, I have noted that communication and cultural understanding is important to the Karen, but not being addressed by Valley Outreach. While leaving the content of the training program up to the Karen is important, it is also important to note what Valley Outreach staff and volunteers would benefit from. Increased focus on the areas of communication, cultural artifacts and norms, family, and religion would benefit both the Karen and Valley Outreach.

Communication is a key aspect to building trust, and the Karen could create content on how they like to be addressed, what forms of communication work best for them, and ways that Valley Outreach can do better. Because Karen often lack surnames, they could also address how to distinguish family units and help Valley Outreach ensure that the entire family is being cared for. As evidenced by the Thanaka example, there is little knowledge of Karen cultural artifacts. Focusing on this section, especially with items that the Karen wear daily, is important. The artifacts the Karen wear are frequently the first ways that other people recognize them. Understanding what those articles and artifacts mean could play a significant role in lessening the misconceptions about the Karen. While broad, religion plays a very large role in the lives of the Karen and should be included as well. The United States, especially the Twin Cities area, is mostly Christian. People in the area are not as aware of other religions as they could be, and this plays a role in the racism that the Karen face.

Designing the cultural training program will take time, as it is important to build a relationship with the Karen before building a program together. The design of the program is intentionally left broad because building a relationship is the most critical aspect of this project, and it cannot be rushed or forced. Valley Outreach needs to allow the Karen the space to determine the scope and content of the cultural training program so that they feel more empowered and in control. They are fleeing oppression, so finally giving them space and a voice in their lives will be very impactful for them. Because there needs to be time built in for relationship building, the content creation is expected to take a few months.

Once the relationship has been built, and the design has been completed, the board of directors will need to approve it. Only after that will it be ready for implementation among staff and volunteers. While the need for the cultural training program is immediate, it is important not

to rush the process, as the communication needs of the Karen have shown that gentle communication is best in building a relationship with them. A rough estimate of six months from the start of the process to the delivery of the first training program is a realistic timeline for this project.

Staff at Valley Outreach undertake extensive cultural training programs already, but they are very broad. Adding a targeted Karen cultural training program will be an easy addition to their curriculum. As more and more Karen people are moving to the area, it is necessary and an ideal time to add the training. The training will be taught to them by a Karen leader, and refresher courses with new or more in-depth materials will be offered throughout the year. Since the Valley Outreach staff will have time built into their schedules to undergo training, they should attend in-person training with Karen leaders or the KOM. In this format, they can ask questions and receive answers from people who are a part of the culture. This will make them better prepared to work with the Karen.

Volunteers at Valley Outreach undergo minimal training, so the most significant change will be in this department. Virtual cultural training could be offered, so volunteers can complete the training before arriving on-site. The virtual training could either be done live or pre-recorded. Preferably, the training courses would be live so that questions can be answered in real-time. However, I recognize that recruiting and maintaining volunteers can be challenging, and I wouldn't want the addition of a training program to worsen that challenge. This is why I recommend that the training be virtual rather than in-person. It might be an option in the future to bring live cultural training programs to Valley Outreach that even the public could attend, but I feel it is best to start this training program within Valley Outreach before branching outwards.

Funding this program will require additional grant requests. An interpreter service should be on-site at Valley Outreach so that clients can ask questions and get responses. Additionally, the Karen who are involved in the design and implementation of this program should be compensated for their time. They are performing a service to Valley Outreach and should be recognized for that. Jaramillo et al. argue that creative funding sources are necessary at the start of a new program (6). A mixture of grants and donor funding will be ideal in this scenario. While there will not be a lot of funding required once the content has been created, applying for grants that could support an ongoing cultural training program would still be beneficial, as the Karen should be compensated for all the time they spend updating and expanding on the cultural training program.

Scope of Project

While this project will significantly increase the level of services that Karen people receive at Valley Outreach, it will only solve some of the problems. If, despite Valley Outreach's best efforts, the Karen people still do not feel comfortable communicating their needs, nothing will change. Additionally, a cultural training program will not solve any community-wide prejudices against the Karen community. They may be lessened, but unfortunately, it will not be a cure for that. So, while the advantages of undertaking a cultural training program at Valley Outreach are immense, the program cannot remove systemic injustices or racism that the Karen face.

While an increased understanding of Karen needs will undoubtedly improve their quality of life through basic needs services, the issues they face will only partially go away until there are bigger systemic changes in the US, Myanmar, and worldwide. While it is important to be

hopeful about the effects of the proposed projects, it is important to note the shortcomings as well. More funding, less racism, and fewer barriers to benefits are just a few things that need to happen on a larger scale before the Karen can truly feel at home here.

Conclusion

The Karen have suffered through years of conflict and oppression. Once resettled, they should not have to struggle to meet their basic needs. They especially should not have to struggle to meet their basic needs because an organization like Valley Outreach does not understand their culture. By establishing a mandatory cultural training program for all staff and volunteers at Valley Outreach, the Karen community can have their needs met with dignity. This will lead to a more positive resettlement experience and increased community acceptance. It will also promote a long-term partnership between Valley Outreach and the Karen community.

Works Cited

- Falcone, Daniel. "Myanmar and the Karen Conflict: The Longest Civil War You Have Never Heard Of." *The Reiff Center*, 18 Jan. 2016,
<https://reiffcenterblog.cnu.edu/2016/01/myanmar-and-the-karen-conflict-the-longest-civil-war-you-have-never-heard-of/>.
- Green, Geff, and Eleanor Lockley. "Communication Practices of the Karen in Sheffield: Seeking to Navigate Their Three Zones of Displacement." *Taylor & Francis*, 19 Sept. 2012,
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01292986.2012.717095>.
- Harper, Susan G. "Keystone Characteristics That Support Cultural Resilience in Karen Refugee Parents - Cultural Studies of Science Education." *SpringerLink*, Springer Netherlands, 6 Aug. 2015, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11422-015-9681-9>.
- Hirsi, Ibrahim. "Jobs, Housing Lure Karen Refugees to Spread across Minnesota." *US News & World Report*, U.S. News & World Report, 31 Aug. 2019,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200724063942/https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/minnesota/articles/2019-08-31/jobs-housing-lure-karen-refugees-to-spread-across-minnesota?context=amp>.
- "History & Culture." *Karen Organization of Minnesota*, 24 Apr. 2017,
<https://www.mnkaren.org/history-culture/>.
- Htoo. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.
- Jaramillo, Elise, et al. "'Creative Financing': Funding Evidence-Based Interventions in Human Service Systems." *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, U.S. National

Library of Medicine, 1 July 2020,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6816239/>.

“Karen History.” *Karen Organization of Minnesota*, 8 Feb. 2021,

<https://www.mnkaren.org/history-culture/karen-history/>.

Keenan, Paul. “Faith at a Crossroads.” *Burma Library*,

<https://www.burmalibrary.org/docskaren/Karen%20Heritage%20Web/pdf/Faith.pdf>.

“Language & Customs.” *Karen Organization of Minnesota*, 4 Aug. 2020,

<https://www.mnkaren.org/history-culture/karen-culture/communication/>.

Loong, Shona. “The Karen National Union in Post-Coup Myanmar • Stimson Center.” *Stimson Center*, 7 Apr. 2022,

<https://www.stimson.org/2022/the-karen-national-union-in-post-coup-myanmar/>.

Lytle, Kathleen J. *The Resettlement of the Karen in Minnesota*, 1 Jan. 2015,

<https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/171438>.

Maizland, Lindsay. “Myanmar's Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict.”

Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, 31 Jan. 2022,

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule>

-ethnic-conflict-rohingya?gclid=Cj0KCQiAg_KbBhDLARIsANx7

wAzOsAJ7pDoiDddNZ-Qt_-MjjsflZa0mprfaJfq3dMyNe13ipjn2JMaAoi_EALw_wcB.

Muruthi, Bertranna, et al. “*We Pray as a Family*”: *The Role of Religion for Resettled Karen Refugees*, 20 Mar. 2020,

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0192513X20911068>.

Paw. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.

Radnofsky, Louise. “Burmese Rebel Leader Shot Dead.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 14 Feb. 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/14/burma>.

“Religion.” *Karen Organization of Minnesota*, 21 Apr. 2017,

<https://www.mnkaren.org/history-culture/karen-culture/religion/>.

Comprehensive Works Cited

- *Beck, Richard. *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality*. E-book. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011.
- Bos, Jaap. "Research Ethics Step by Step." *SpringerLink*, Springer International Publishing, 1 Jan. 2000, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-48415-6_10.
- Bradley Huang, Hillary. *What Is Good Action Research?* 9 Jan. 2015, <https://actionresearchplus.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Action-Research-2010-Bradbury.pdf>.
- *Brown, Brene. "The Power of Vulnerability." TED, TEDxHouston, 20:14, June 2010, www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en
- Brown, Mike. "Comfort Zone: Model or Metaphor?" *SpringerLink*, Springer Singapore, 1 Apr. 2008, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF03401019>.
- Bryan-Kinns, Nick, and Fraser Hamilton. "Identifying Mutual Engagement." *Taylor & Francis*, 3 Dec. 2009, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01449290903377103?journalCode=tbit20>.
- *Clawson, Julie. *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of our Daily Choices*. E-book. Intervarsity, 2009.
- *Conquergood, Dwight. "Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp: Performance, Communication, and Culture." E-book. *The Drama Review*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1988.

“Country Comparison.” *Hofstede Insights*, 21 June 2021,

<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/thailand,the-usa/>.

Debra. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.

Derek. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.

“Ethnographic Research.” *Research*, 2020,

<https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs/ethnographic-research#:~:text=Ethnography>

%20is%20a%20qualitative%20method,how%20societies%20and%20individuals%20function.

Falcone, Daniel. “Myanmar and the Karen Conflict: The Longest Civil War You Have Never Heard Of.” *The Reiff Center*, 18 Jan. 2016,

<https://reiffcenterblog.cnu.edu/2016/01/myanmar-and-the-karen-conflict-the>

-longest-civil-war-you-have-never-heard-of/.

*Friedman, Thomas L. *Thank You for Being Late*. E-book. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016.

Green, Geff, and Eleanor Lockley. “Communication Practices of the Karen in Sheffield: Seeking to Navigate Their Three Zones of Displacement.” *Taylor & Francis*, 19 Sept. 2012,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01292986.2012.717095>.

*Hagerman, Margaret A. *White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America*. E-book. Reprint edition, NYU Press, 1 February 2020.

*Hammond, Sue Annis. *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. E-book. 3rd ed., Thin Book Pub. Co., 2013.

Harper, Susan G. “Keystone Characteristics That Support Cultural Resilience in Karen Refugee Parents - Cultural Studies of Science Education.” *SpringerLink*, Springer Netherlands, 6 Aug. 2015, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11422-015-9681-9>.

Helen. Personal interview. 28 June 2022.

Hirsi, Ibrahim. “Jobs, Housing Lure Karen Refugees to Spread across Minnesota.” *US News & World Report*, U.S. News & World Report, 31 Aug. 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200724063942/https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/minnesota/articles/2019-08-31/jobs-housing-lure-karen-refugees-to-spread-across-minnesota?context=amp>.

“History & Culture.” *Karen Organization of Minnesota*, 24 Apr. 2017, <https://www.mnkaren.org/history-culture/>.

*Holmes, Seth. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*. Vol. 27. Univ of California Press, 2013.

Htoo. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.

*Inslee, Forrest. Leadership and ICD Values. Northwest University – August 24, 2021.

Jaramillo, Elise, et al. “‘Creative Financing’: Funding Evidence-Based Interventions in Human Service Systems.” *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 1 July 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6816239/>.

Jhangiani, Rajiv S., et al. "Observational Research." *Research Methods in Psychology*, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 1 Aug. 2019,

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/psychmethods4e/chapter/observational-research/>.

Jost, John, and Aaron Kay. "Social Justice: History, Theory, and Research." *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, Jan. 2010,

<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2010-03506-030>.

Joy, Madeline. Fieldwork notes. 19 July 2022.

Joy, Madeline. Fieldwork notes. 9 August 2022.

Julie. Personal Interview. 13 September 2022.

"Karen History." *Karen Organization of Minnesota*, 8 Feb. 2021,

<https://www.mnkaren.org/history-culture/karen-history/>.

Keenan, Paul. "Faith at a Crossroads." *Burma Library*,

<https://www.burmalibrary.org/docskaren/Karen%20Heritage%20Web/pdf/Faith.pdf>.

*Kelley, Tom and David Kelley. *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*. William Collins, 2014.

Kuenkel, Petra. *The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future*. E-book. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2016

"Language & Customs." *Karen Organization of Minnesota*, 4 Aug. 2020,

<https://www.mnkaren.org/history-culture/karen-culture/communication/>.

*Lederach, John Paul. *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*. E-book. Good Books, 2003.

Loong, Shona. "The Karen National Union in Post-Coup Myanmar • Stimson Center." *Stimson Center*, 7 Apr. 2022,

<https://www.stimson.org/2022/the-karen-national-union-in-post-coup-myanmar/>.

Lytle, Kathleen J. *The Resettlement of the Karen in Minnesota*, 1 Jan. 2015,

<https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/171438>.

Maizland, Lindsay. "Myanmar's Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict."

Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, 31 Jan. 2022,

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule>

-ethnic-conflict-rohingya?gclid=Cj0KCQiAg_KbBhDLARIsANx7

wAzOsAJ7pDoiDddNZ-Qt_-MjjsflZa0mprfaJfqt3dMyNe13ipjn2JMaAoi_EALw_wcB.

*Merriam, Sharan B. and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. E-book. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016.

*Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia. *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as an Ecological-Economic Vocation*. E-book. Fortress Press, 2013.

Muruthi, Bertranna, et al. "*We Pray as a Family*": *The Role of Religion for Resettled Karen Refugees*, 20 Mar. 2020,

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0192513X20911068>.

*Myers, Bryant L. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. E-book. Orbis Books, 2011.

*Myers, Vernā. *How to Overcome Our Biases? Walk Boldly Toward Them* | TED Talk,

https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases

walk_boldly_toward_them/discussion?referrer=playlist-talks_to_help_you_understand_r#t-456253.

Paw. Personal Interview. 28 June 2022.

*Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. E-book. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

*Pellow, David Naguib. *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice*, illus. ed. E-book. MIT Press, 2007.

Power, David V., and Rebekah J. Pratt. "Karen Refugees from Burma: Focus Group Analysis." *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 30 Nov. 2012,

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/17479891211287058/full/html>.

Rarick, Charles A., and Inge Nickerson. "An Exploratory Study of Myanmar Culture Using Hofstede's Value Dimensions." *SSRN*, 30 Mar. 2008,

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1114625.

Radnofsky, Louise. "Burmese Rebel Leader Shot Dead." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 14 Feb. 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/14/burma>.

"Religion." *Karen Organization of Minnesota*, 21 Apr. 2017,

<https://www.mnkaren.org/history-culture/karen-culture/religion/>.

Spencer. Personal Interview 12 September 2022.

Stephens, Kristyn. Personal Interview. 24 August 2022.

*Stringer, Ernest T. *Action Research*. E-book. Sage Publications, 2014.

*Sunstein, Bonnie Stone and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. *FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research*, 4th edition. E-book. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011.

Suter, W. Newton. *Introduction to Educational Research: A Critical Thinking Approach*. 1 Jan. 2006, https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/43144_12.pdf.

*Vogl, Charles. *The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016.

Wallace, Marshall. *From Principles to Practice, a User's guide to Do No Harm*. October 2015, pp. 2-20.

Watkins, Paula, et al. 'I'm Telling You ... The Language Barrier Is the Most, the Biggest Challenge': *Barriers to Education among Karen Refugee Women in Australia*. Sage Journals, 1 Aug. 2012, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/000494411205600203>.