

## Burmese refugees achieving success in Cranbrook, Kimberley



By Cranbrook Daily Townsman  
Published: **July 05, 2013 08:00 AM**  
Updated: **July 05, 2013 08:438 AM**

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It has long been the belief among the volunteers with the East Kootenay Friends of Burma that settling refugees into small towns can be a more

rewarding experience for all involved. Certainly that has proved to be the case in Kimberley and Cranbrook.

Without the anonymity and sheer numbers of large urban centres, refugee families get to know their sponsors, and their community, in a personal way.

A case in point is the family of Karen refugees from Burma, which EKFOB began bringing into Kimberley five years ago.

The Paw family settled in Kimberley, stepping into Western civilization after spending most of their lives in a refugee camp on the Thai Burmese border. It began with one young couple and their daughter and gradually over the years, EKFOB has been able to bring in more of the extended family — parents, grandparents, in-laws, cousins.

For Friends of Burma volunteers, settling a family is not just a case of finding them a home, it is a commitment to help the family deal with their change in circumstances over a long period of time.

"Settlement and integration work by EKFOB volunteers continues for years after refugees arrive and covers an amazingly broad range of activities — from participating in local community events like the Wasa parade, to learning to ski and skate, to practicing with prosthetics, attending doctors appointments, swim and kayak days at Wasa Lake and even road trips to encourage other rural communities to follow Kimberley's lead and sponsor refugees," said FOB's Shauna Jimenez.

It is the commitment of longtime volunteers that makes the difference, Jimenez believes, and hopes that the many success stories will help EKFOB as they apply for federal funding for their on-going settlement and integration work with the refugees they bring to the East Kootenay area.

In Cranbrook as well, longtime volunteer Barb Ryeburn said EKFOB-sponsored refugees are also achieving success.

"Htay Win, a Karen refugee who arrived with his elderly parents last July, just successfully passed his learner's driving test," she said. "He works full time as a custodian for Zaw Naing, the first refugee sponsored by EKFOB.

"Adem Idris, an Eritrean refugee who arrived in February 2011, just successfully completed the one-year engineering diploma at the COTR. He was accepted into the second year of the environmental engineering program at UNBC in Prince George. He is currently working in construction in Calgary to save money for his studies.

"Amaren Solomon Dawit has been working for a local pet food manufacturer and is eagerly awaiting the arrival of his brother, who is in a refugee camp in Ethiopia and whom EKFOB has applied to sponsor."

The success of these people is due to their hard work and dedication and the support of EK Friends of Burma volunteers, Ryeburn says.

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