

KAREN COMMUNITY PLAN



**IMPROVING SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITIES
FOR KAREN PEOPLE IN HINDMARSH**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF KEY PARTNERS

This plan would not be possible without the cooperation and support of our key partners. Council wishes to express sincere thanks to Commonwealth Government of Australia Department of Social Services, State Government of Victoria Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victorian Multicultural Commission, Business Nhill, John and Marg Millington, Luv-A-Duck, Nhill College, Nhill Neighbourhood House, West Wimmera Health Service and Wimmera Uniting Care.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
1.1 Multiculturalism in Australia	4
1.2 Council's Vision	5
1.3 Objective	5
2. Our Community Profile	7
2.1 Hindmarsh Demographics	7
2.2 History of the Karen People	8
3. Consultation Process	10
3.1 Youth	10
3.2 Adults	10
4. Karen Community Profiles	12
5. Karen Community Action Plan	16



*I finally have a safe
place to call home,
I know I will never
have to move again*

FOREWORD



CHIN TAN
**CHAIR OF VICTORIAN
MULTICULTURAL
COMMISSION**

The Karen Community Action Plan signifies so much that is positive in the Hindmarsh Shire Council and in our proudly multicultural state. The Karen Community is an exemplary chapter in Victoria's rich multicultural story.

Victoria has offered refuge and new opportunities to many people from around the world including the Karen people. The Karen people have embraced their Australian life wholeheartedly – this is living proof of how multiculturalism is our way of life in Victoria and a way of life we are proud of.



ROB GERSCH
**MAYOR OF
HINDMARSH SHIRE
COUNCIL**

Diversity is something to be celebrated.

Nhill is a friendly, safe and happy place to live. We are an inclusive and welcoming community, with one of the highest rates of volunteering in Australia.

Having lived in Nhill all my life, I have been fortunate enough to witness the joy the Karen community have brought to Nhill. By sharing their stories and celebration during the Karen New Year, we gain insight into the Karen traditions and customs.

The Karen people's presence in Nhill is delivering much needed growth for the region and helping stabilise infrastructure, businesses and services that benefit the whole community. The growing Karen population, their direct contribution to the workforce, the local economy and the cultural landscape is a wonderful asset for Nhill and the Hindmarsh Shire.

The Karen people have brought their dynamic culture and traditions with them on their journey to Australia – by upholding and sharing these cultural traditions, multiculturalism will thrive and the whole Victorian community will be strengthened.

Witnessing the simple pleasure our Karen residents take in living in safety, working, attending school and raising children puts a lot of things in perspective, as many survived brutal persecution in Burma and harsh conditions in refugee camps on the Thai border.

The Karen community has made a tremendous contribution to Nhill's economy, taking steps toward arresting our declining population, allowing key businesses to expand, and stimulating the local property market.

I consider Hindmarsh Shire lucky to have such a kind, caring and generous group of refugees call Hindmarsh home.

The Karen Community Action Plan is a valuable tool to guide the community, government and service providers to best assist the Karen people in their new and different life. I commend Hindmarsh Shire Council for their commitment to providing the best services and support to the Karen people in their new home, while valuing their culture and what it contributes to multiculturalism in Victoria.

The Karen people's settlement in Nhill is a wonderful refugee success story. I look forward to following the progress and outcomes of the Karen Community Action Plan and am confident that the community will achieve many great things.

Why the plan is needed:

- The humanitarian aspects of providing the Karens with a place to live where they are safe and can prosper.
- To support Karen's settling in Nhill, ensuring they integrate and reach their full potential in our community and ensuring they are not isolated.
- Attract more Karens to Nhill to repair population loss and strengthen our economy. All service providers, both public and private will see a decreased capacity in services as a result to population decline.
- Plan supports goals Council Plan.

INTRODUCTION

MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

Australia is taking great steps toward becoming a truly multicultural society and embracing its diversity.

The foundation of modern policy dates back to 1979, when Malcolm Fraser's government recognised principles recommended by the Galbally Report. This report recognised multiculturalism as a critical element in the future development of federal policy, and developed the following principles:

- A. all members of our society must have equal opportunity to achieve their full potential and must have equal access to programs and services;
- B. every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and welcome other cultures;

- C. needs of migrants should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community but special services and programs are necessary at present to ensure equality of access and provision; and
- D. services and programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with clients, and self-help should be encouraged as much as possible with a view to helping migrants to become self-reliant quickly.

In the 1990s, many local government authorities developed formal multicultural policies and action plans following these principles. These policies and plans are measured and reviewed regularly.





More recently, the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 formally recognised the cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity of Victorian communities, establishing the Victorian Multicultural Commission as a statutory authority to advise the government on these matters.

Other key documents valuing Victoria's rich cultural diversity include the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2011, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 and the Charter of Human Rights And Responsibilities Act 2006.

COUNCIL'S VISION

The Karen Community Action Plan 2014 is part of the Hindmarsh Shire Council Plan 2013-2017.

It contributes to Council's vision of developing "a caring, active community enhanced by its liveability, environment and economy".

It also supports many of the objectives set out in Council's mission:

- To provide accessible services to enable the community to be healthy, active and engaged.

- To provide public buildings, roads and services essential to support the community.
- To protect and enhance our natural environment.
- To foster a growing and diversified local economy where economic growth is encouraged and supported.
- To realise the excellence in our people, processes and systems.

The key aim of the Karen Community Action Plan 2014 is to progress these objectives, encouraging an inclusive and empowered community.

The Plan focuses on three themes:

1. Access. Empowering new migrants by providing support and linking them with the services they need to settle into and integrate with the community.
2. Involvement. Increasing social cohesion by celebrating Karen culture and the diversity of our community, actively breaking down language barriers and encouraging exchange of ideas.
3. Consultation. Engaging the community and encouraging leadership with an open consultation process between Council and the community.

OBJECTIVE

This plan acknowledges the Karen community's importance in Nhill's cultural diversity, and the role they play in strengthening our local economy. It identifies key areas for improvement, change and growth. Critically, it represents Council's continuing commitment to assisting the Karen community transition from life in refugee camps to making their home in Nhill. In delivering the actions in this plan, Council will continue to seek input from the Karen community in the future.

🌀 We moved to Nhill for a safe and peaceful life, but have stayed for the **country hospitality and friendly people**

REE HTA SAY





OUR COMMUNITY PROFILE

HINDMARSH AT A GLANCE

2011 Census Data

Towns: Nhill, Dimboola, Jeparit, Rainbow

Area: 7,527 km²

Population: 5,798



HINDMARSH DEMOGRAPHICS

Hindmarsh Shire Council is home to 5,798 people. Nhill is the largest town, with a population of 2,278. According to census data, Nhill's population has declined by 272 people, almost 11%, since 2006. The median age is 46 years, and most people report they are Christian, own their home outright, and work in agriculture. Hindmarsh is a caring and compassionate community, with a volunteering rate 20% higher than the national average. It has a very low population density, with just 0.8 people per square kilometre.

88% of Nhill's population were born in Australia, and English is the only language spoken in the homes of 92% of residents. At the 2011 census, 27 different nationalities were present in Hindmarsh, making up approximately 11% of the population. At that time, Nhill was home to 34 Karen people.

However, by 2014, the number of Karen people calling Nhill home reached 180, a growth of approximately 529% in just three years. Karen people now make up approximately 8% of Nhill's population.

The arrival of Karen people to Nhill brought significant benefits to the community. According to Hindmarsh Shire Council data, population decline is having a significant negative impact on the local community, affecting business, funding for education and health services, and Council's ability to provide infrastructure. The Karen community's rapid growth is helping stop this decline, providing potential long-term benefits for the community.

Despite Council's optimism for the future, language remains one of the most significant barriers restricting Karen people's participation in the wider Nhill community.

2278

PEOPLE LIVE IN NHILL

34

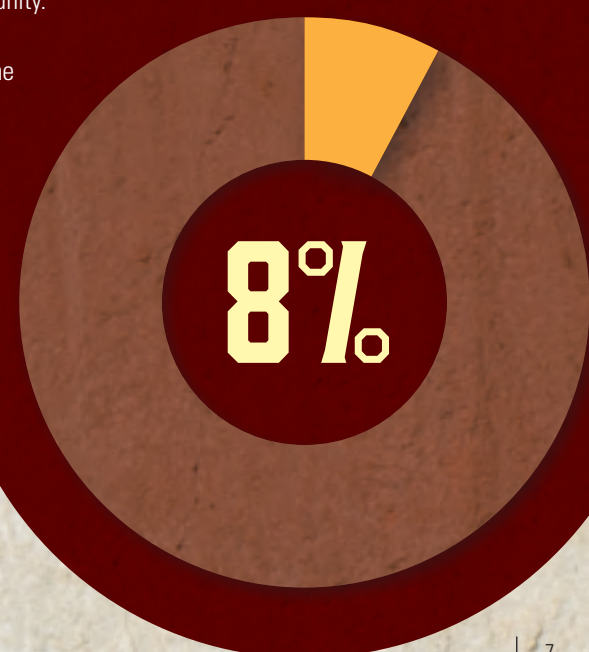
NUMBER OF KAREN LIVING IN NHILL IN 2011

180

NUMBER OF KAREN LIVING IN NHILL IN 2014

529%

GROWTH OF NHILL'S KAREN POPULATION IN JUST THREE YEARS



8%

KAREN PEOPLE MAKE UP APPROXIMATELY 8% OF NHILL'S POPULATION

The Karen settlement in Nhill has been a wonderful humanitarian story, providing the Karens with a peaceful new home

TONY DOYLE, HINDMARSH SHIRE COUNCIL CEO

HISTORY OF THE KAREN PEOPLE

The Karen people are an ethnic group from Burma (Republic of the Union of Myanmar). Traditionally, many are subsistence farmers, living in small villages in mountainous regions. Karen people are culturally and linguistically diverse, and commonly practice several religions, including Animism, Buddhism and Christianity.

Traditionally a monarchy, Burma was colonised by Britain in the 19th century. After regaining independence in 1948, civil war broke out between the government and the minority ethnic groups. When the military took power in 1962, they established a brutal regime of persecution, forcing many to flee Burma and seek refuge in Thailand.¹

Presently, approximately 140,000² Karen live in refugee camps on the Thai/Burma border, administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Refugees in these camps can apply to the Australian Embassy in Bangkok to be resettled in Australia.

So far, about 50,000³ Karen refugees have been resettled in Europe, America, Canada, and Australia.

The first Karen refugees arrived in Australia about 18 years ago. There is now a large Karen population in the western suburbs of Melbourne. However, for many it is difficult to find work.

The first Karen people visited Nhill on January 21 2010, returning to start work at Luv-A-Duck just two weeks later.

In 2014, approximately 180 Karen refugees call Nhill home.

BURMA AT A GLANCE

Capital: Naypyidaw

Area: 676,578 km²

Population: 61,120,000

JANUARY 2010:

First Karen people to visit Nhill

FEBRUARY 2010:

First Karen people move to Nhill

FEBRUARY 2010:

First five Karen people commence work at Luv-A-Duck

FEBRUARY 2010:

First Karen enrolment at Nhill College

MARCH 2010:

First Harmony Day celebration

JUNE 2010:

Tha Kar is the first Karen employed outside Luv-A-Duck

2010:

First Karen enrol in English classes with Nhill Neighbourhood House



SEPTEMBER 2010:

Ku Po Mya is the first Karen to buy a home in Nhill

JANUARY 2011:

First Karen New Year Celebrations

NOVEMBER 2011:

More than 70 Karen living in Nhill

NOVEMBER 2011:

Three or four Karen people bought their own houses

NOVEMBER 2011:

Toh Mae Pa is the first business registered by Karen community members in Hindmarsh Shire

JANUARY 2012:

Ah Nee Nwe is the first Karen baby born in the Wimmera

FEBRUARY 2012:

Karen workforce at Luv-A-Duck exceeds 50

APRIL 2012:

First Karen members join Nhill Sporting Club

AUGUST 2012:

Hal Loo is the first Karen to start an apprenticeship

DECEMBER 2013:

First Karen students complete VCAL at Nhill College

JANUARY 2014:

Nine families have bought their own houses

FEBRUARY 2014:

Karen enrolments at Nhill College exceed 20



CONSULTATION PROCESS



In developing this plan, Council consulted with many members of Nhill's Karen community. This section includes a brief analysis of the feedback collected throughout that process.

YOUTH

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Hairdresser, businessman, farmer, game developer, IT professional, mechanic, builder, superhero, police officer, artist

Why did you move to Nhill?

Dad got a job at Luv-A-Duck (overwhelming response)

Will you stay in Nhill after school?

If there's work, we'll stay

If you won Tattslotto, what would you buy?

The supermarket, computer games, a house, a cinema, iPad/iPhone, kung fu lessons, travel to Thailand and USA to visit family

What Karen traditions do you like?

Dancing, girls like the clothes

What Karen traditions don't you like?

Houses in camps, Burmese history, and boys don't like the clothes

ADULTS

What challenges do you face in Nhill?

Often, work and other commitments prevent attendance at English and citizenship classes, which has a negative effect on integration. When people come up to say hello in the supermarket or in the street, some Karen feel shy because they can't speak in English.

Females at home feel isolated. Most moved to Nhill for a better life for their children. Many women don't have drivers' licenses and can't travel when their husbands are at work, for example, going to Centrelink to report

What changes would you like in Nhill?

Opportunities for employment growth, like starting small businesses or an orchard or community farm growing mushrooms, broccoli, cherries or flowers

If you won Tattslotto, what would you buy?

Businesses so there is more work for Karens, build houses, set up a community farm with cattle, sheep and pigs, and get a full-time interpreter

What does the Nhill community need?

A settlement officer, and translation of basic information from real estate agents, businesses, Council, health services and schools



My husband and I feel lucky to be able to raise our future children in Nhill, where they have equal rights, opportunities and freedom

PLAWTAPŌE GANEMY KUNDO



KAREN COMMUNITY PROFILES

Settlement of Karen people in Nhill also benefits the Nhill community. The Karen people are stopping Nhill's declining population, increasing the workforce and making a valuable contribution to the local economy. This section profiles three Karen community members working in Nhill.

HAL LOO – HALFWAY MOTORS

"To fix the car is my dream job. Because it's my future, it's important to get qualified. Sometimes my apprenticeship is hard, sometimes it's easy. Sometimes the English is hard, but it's my dream and I'm very happy here"

– **Hal Loo, apprentice mechanic**

"We're very lucky to have Hal here working with us. He smiles all the time, his happiness rubs off on everyone. He's conscientious and clever, and happy to do anything. No job's too much for him. We enjoy his company very much"

– **Kim Moyle, Halfway Motors**







LAY LAY – LUV-A-DUCK

“To work is good. Working with the ducks gives many good jobs to Karen, for the ones at Luv-A-Duck and for the ones like me in the growing sheds. I like to live in Nhill because I can buy a house for my family and we can be safe”

– Lay Lay, contractor

“The Karen people are cheerful and hard-working folk who form an integral part of our workforce. Indeed some of them are now taking leadership roles at our Nhill plant. We are very grateful to have them as a part of our team and look forward to working with them for many years to come”

– Ron Jenkins, Luv-A-Duck

MAY HEI – WEST WIMMERA HEALTH SERVICE

“I thought it would be nice to be able to help my Karen people who are with little English if I work in Nhill Hospital. I know half of the Karen people that come to live in Nhill, and because there is also a job opportunity for me, it’s a good place to start building up my nursing skills”

- May Hei, registered nurse

“From the moment I met May I knew that this young lady would be a leader in her profession and also for the Karen community. Her demeanour and quiet confidence displayed a genuine belief in herself and a commitment to succeed. She is a tremendous asset to this health service”

- John Smith, West Wimmera Health Service



KAREN COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN



OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME	OUTPUT
INCREASED ACCESS	Economic and community development strategies and work plan	Lead: Economic Development Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council (HSC)	31/7/14	Completion of a Community Development Plan, in operation at an organisational level
	Provide settlement assistance to help manage the services the Karen community requires and encourage leadership in the community	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House	30/9/14 (subject to funding)	Appointment of a settlement support worker, weekly report at Community Development team meeting
	Empower the community by coordinating support activities; representing the community's needs to other levels of government and key stakeholders; building relationships with local employers and encouraging cadetships for Karen youth	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Wimmera Development Association, Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Department of Social Services, Centrelink	31/10/14 (subject to funding)	Appointment of multicultural liaison officer, weekly report at Community Development team meeting



*The most satisfaction you can receive from helping others is **seeing the smile on their faces and knowing you helped put it there***

JOHN MILLINGTON

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME	OUTPUT
	Facilitate translation of essential information and development of online fact sheets, such as health, education, buying and renting homes, local laws	<p>Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC</p> <p>Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House, West Wimmera Health Service, Business Nhill, Nhill College</p>	30/10/14	Creation of two brochures in Karen language
	Facilitate a series of seminars and information sessions to inform the Karen community about services, rights, and responsibilities, such as health, education, buying and renting homes, local laws	<p>Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC</p> <p>Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House, West Wimmera Health Service, Business Nhill, Nhill College</p>	30/6/15	Completion of four seminars
	Develop partnerships with government agencies to provide more accessible services to new arrivals in Nhill, including greater understanding of the availability and use of interpreter services	<p>Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC</p> <p>Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House</p>	19/12/14	Completion of training sessions for Karen people and service providers about working with interpreters and cultural awareness

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME	OUTPUT
INCREASED INVOLVEMENT	Liaise with local businesses and service providers to identify employment opportunities for Karen people, and work with job training providers to ensure Karen people are appropriately trained and suitable for employment opportunities	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Business Nhill, Nhill Neighbourhood House	30/6/14	Successful employment of five local Karen community members by local businesses
	Introduce further education and training opportunities in Nhill and the surrounding region to Karen community members by local providers	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House will support this initiative in conjunction with other providers as required, Volunteering Western Victoria	19/12/14	Information sessions held with at least 20 Karen residents attending
	Grow the Nhill Community Garden, to increase social cohesion between new and existing residents and help target social isolation in the community	Lead: West Wimmera Health Service Support: Community and Economic Development, HSC	30/6/15	Increase involvement at the garden by 10% and create at least two new garden beds
	Establish Karen New Year and Harmony Day as annual events to celebrate Karen culture and the diversity in the community	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House, Nhill College	Annually in January and March	Organise annual events
	Hold community sporting events to bring members of the community together in an arena where language is not such a barrier	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Nhill Sporting Club, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly	30/6/15	Organise annual sporting event
	Organise a state or nation-wide Karen community gathering to engage the broader community and encourage people to exchange ideas	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House	31/12/15	Organise event
	Commence an education program for local Nhill residents to learn Karen language	Lead: Nhill Neighbourhood House Support: Community and Economic Development, HSC	30/6/15	Education sessions held to teach Karen language

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME	OUTPUT
	Facilitate casual, social events that celebrate and share other cultures in the community	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House	31/3/15	Two events held
	Ensure the Economic Development Strategy explores the opportunities arising from emerging demographics	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Business Nhill	31/3/15	Economic Development Strategy completed.
INCREASED CONSULTATION	Organise bi-annual workshops to allow the community to interact and share information; encourage consultation with Council and include the Karen community in any relevant decision-making; and explore different ways to consolidate knowledge about services, facilities, activities and events	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House	31/12/14	Organise six-monthly workshops
	Publication of a simple quarterly newsletter in Karen put together by key community service providers	Lead: Multi-cultural Liaison Officer Support: Karen Advisory Committee	30/9/14	Publication of quarterly newsletter
	Publication of page on Council website in Karen	Lead: Corporate Services, HSC Support: Karen Advisory Committee	31/3/15	Addition of Karen language page
	Establish Karen steering committee including Karen people, Council staff and community stakeholders to review this plan annually and report on progress made and propose changes to further the objectives of this plan	Lead: Community and Economic Development, HSC Support: Nhill Neighbourhood House, Wimmera Development Association, West Wimmera Health Service, Nhill College, Business Nhill	31/10/14	Steering committee established, quarterly meetings held thereafter

ENDNOTES

- ¹ <http://worldrelieffortworth.org/burma-myanmar-karen-cultural-profile>
http://australiankarenfoundation.org.au/karen_people_18.html
- ² <http://worldrelieffortworth.org/burma-myanmar-karen-cultural-profile>
http://www.karen.org.au/karen_people.htm
- ³ http://www.karen.org.au/karen_people.htm
<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=4a49dcdd9&query=myanmar>



*One of my favourite hobbies is fishing. Nhill, Jeparit and Dimboola have wonderful fishing spots where **I can safely take my family and teach my children the art of fishing***

KAW DOH HTOO

Hindmarsh Shire Council

Telephone: (03) 5391 4444

Email: info@hindmarsh.vic.gov.au

www.hindmarsh.vic.gov.au

