



Refugee Resettlement

Meet the People We Help...

Problem

In 2005, Than and Shu Wah arrived in Pittsburgh with their three young children, all of whom were born in a crowded refugee camp in Thailand near its border with Myanmar, also known as Burma. They are among the hundreds of thousands who have fled gross human rights abuses by the Burmese military junta in one of history's longest-running civil wars. Like Than and Shu Wah, many of the refugees are members of the persecuted Karen ethnic group, who have been fighting for autonomy for decades. Upon arrival in Pittsburgh—a world away from the hardship their children have always known—the couple relied upon Jewish Family & Children's Services to provide for all of their family's basic needs and acculturation into the community and workforce.

Solution

JF&CS greeted Than and Shu Wah and their children upon arrival to the Pittsburgh International Airport and helped them to settle in their furnished apartment. JF&CS set up medical and dental screenings for everyone, along with immunizations so the children could enroll in school. We also helped the family navigate the complicated paperwork necessary to sign up for welfare benefits and to enroll Than and Shu Wah in English language classes. We taught them everything from how to take a bus to how to create and follow a household budget. JF&CS found jobs for Than and Shu Wah and assisted them with their green card applications after they had been in the U.S. for a full year.

Outcome

Than now drives his own to car to his job in the kitchen at a local conference center. Shu Wah works part-time at a nearby family center, providing translation for other Karen refugees and housekeeping services. None of their children spoke English upon arrival, but a year after beginning school, their children are excelling — and one is at the top of his class. "It's very overwhelming when refugees first get here, and they have everything new to learn," says the JF&CS staff. "But it's amazing to see how far they have come in such a short time."