



# Karen Society of Nebraska Strategic Plan Report Summary

*April 2022*

Developed in partnership with Ingrid Kirst Consulting

Funded by the Community Health Endowment of Lincoln

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## INTRODUCTION

From September 2021 to January 2022, the leaders of the Karen Society of Nebraska (KSN) - Lincoln office met to discuss their goals and vision for the future. A plan was developed from a survey of community members, interviews with community leaders, and the group's knowledge.

## VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The group chose four things for the future of KSN-Lincoln.

- **Education for All Ages of Karen People:** From Karen language and culture classes for children to English classes for seniors, the community has a strong desire to learn more and thereby help themselves.
- **Community-Owned Office Space:** For many in the community, an independent space is a major goal. They want a larger KSN-owned space for cultural events, classes, and community development.
- **Sustaining Supporters:** To fund these goals, they must reach beyond their community to foundations, government sources, and additional private donors.
- **KSN Careers:** As the organization grows, they want to make sure that working for KSN-Lincoln is a full-time career that provides benefits, professional development, and educational opportunities.

## **STRATEGIC GOALS**

The KSN-Lincoln team chose five strategic goals based on the needs of KSN and the Karen community in Lincoln:

- Permanent community-owned office space in the next 2 years
- Develop a fundraising plan and yearly plan each year
- Strengthen the volunteer committee structure
- Hire 1-2 full-time staff and add 5-6 regular volunteers
- Learn from each other and from outside resources through additional training

## **MISSION AND VALUES OF THE KAREN SOCIETY OF NEBRASKA**

Helping refugees and immigrants from Burma to build and sustain a high quality of life and to achieve self-sufficiency in the state of Nebraska.

KSN does this while focusing on their core values of cooperation and self-sufficiency.

## **HISTORY OF THE KAREN SOCIETY OF NEBRASKA**

The Karen (pronounced Ka-REN) are an ethnic group from the mountainous border regions of Burma and Thailand. Many have been living in refugee camps in Thailand for years before being resettled to Nebraska starting in 2006. Approximately 7,500 Karen live in Nebraska. Of these, about 1,500 live in Lincoln. KSN was founded in 2008.

## **CURRENT STRUCTURE**

The KSN offices is a meeting point where the community comes together. Community members visit the offices to receive help reading and understanding their mail, filling out application forms, setting appointments, finding employment, and completing immigration paperwork. KSN refers clients to employers and agencies as appropriate. KSN is a bridge between the community and local resources.

## **PAST ACHIEVEMENTS**

The KSN-Lincoln office helps approximately 800 people (unduplicated count) per year with a wide variety of social services. During a month, they see 80-100 people, and provide 120-150 total services, as many people come more than once. These social services represent the majority of services provided by KSN-Lincoln.

KSN-Lincoln also helped with the 2020 U.S. Census and translating COVID-19 information for the city. They have a large, successful after school and summer youth program, Karen language classes, and have produced many health educational videos on a wide range of topics. KSN holds many events including a large Karen New Year's Celebration, soccer tournaments and other cultural events that attract hundreds of guests and are important sources of income for KSN.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

In September 2021, five KSN staff and volunteers surveyed 100 Karen adults in the Lincoln community, all of whom have received services from KSN.

Respondents in the KSN Survey were primarily between the ages of 18 and 45, most have children, and most have been in the US for at least five years. About  $\frac{2}{3}$  were women.

### **SCHOOLING**

44% have not attended school. 38% have attended or completed high school.

### **EMPLOYMENT**

For people 18-60, 56% do not work, almost all of the unemployed are women. No one over age 60 is working.

### **SERVICES RECEIVED**

Of those surveyed, more than 80% have received help mail, applications, and translation/interpretation from KSN. 78% have used the transportation service. 84% have attended family and cultural activities from KSN.

### **CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES**

85% - Language / Communication  
91% - Need Interpreter for medical appointments  
32% - Immigratin status  
33% - Lack of employment opportunities  
34% - Housing issues

50% - Access to medical services

## **PRIORITIES FOR KSN-LINCOLN**

50% said a larger office that belongs to KSN is a priority. Other ideas shared were to continue to help the community, daycare, transportation service (especially to Omaha), and Karen language classes for youth.

## **INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

Six board members and four community members were interviewed.

KSN-Lincoln has a strong base of volunteers, both Karen and non-Karen. KSN gets donations from many Karen people as well as from their large events. But KSN-Lincoln doesn't have enough staff hours available for the demand for their services as well as outreach to the community. Staff would like to expand their partnerships with other organizations and attend collaborative meetings, but available funding has limited this.

Additional strengths of KSN include translation and interpretation skills, a very active Facebook page with a large number of followers and educational videos, and experience conducting community surveys.

Three areas that were identified as significant concerns during interviews were mental health, addiction issues, and truancy in the Karen community.

Outside of KSN, numerous opportunities for partnership exist. A wide range were identified in the interviews including with local government, local businesses, higher education (particularly for student volunteers), mental health providers, legal services, and nonprofit organizations.

The Karen Society of Nebraska wishes to thank the Community Health Endowment of Lincoln for funding the survey and strategic plan. Their support was extremely beneficial in completing this process.

The full length report is available at  
<https://ingridkirst.com/wp-content/uploads/Final-KSN-Report.pdf>