

## LAOTIAN COMMUNITY IN NORTH TEXAS

### QUICK OBSERVATIONS

Country/region of origin	Laos
Population	3,300
Population (Census 2000)	4672
Main reasons for migration	Fleeing war, political oppression and political instability
Years in this regions	10-40 years
Primary areas of residence	Dallas, Fort Worth, Garland, Richardson, Saginaw
General level of education	
Employment	Manufacturing, housekeeping, clerical/office, restaurant, industrial work
Principal religions	Buddhism (predominantly), some Mormons (younger generations)
Languages	Lao, English
Media (newspaper or radio)	
Community newsletter	
Cultural organizations	

Although Laotians have been in North Texas for about four decades now, one of their greatest migration periods to the region was in the late 60s and during the 70s as a result of the second Indo China conflict. The U.S./Vietnam War destabilized the region, and the hostile regime of Pathet Lao took over. Many people who opposed the communists were sent to “reeducation camps”. Thousands of families fled from Laos to the United States, many of them directly arriving in North Texas.

From 1979 to 1981, 105,000 Lao were admitted to the U.S. and by 1990 about 150,000 Lao, not including Hmong, had immigrated. One third of those have settled in California. Today, about 11500 Laotians reside in Saginaw, 1000 in Garland, 800 in Dallas and Richardson and lesser numbers in other regions. Most immigrants from this community are ethnically Lao and come from the Lowlands, but the community does include a significant percentage of ethnic Hmong, traditional mountain people who had been hired by the U.S. to fight the communist regimes.

An important characteristic of Laotians is that they generally do not maintain close contact with other immigrants from their community. Although there are organizations that bring some of them together, most of them do not belong to any of these, and some are not very comfortable working with others from their region of origin.

Laotian leaders point out English proficiency and cultural-correct health care as the community’s greatest needs. Most of these New Americans can communicate effectively in English but many of them do not attain a fluent level of proficiency. Among their many contributions (despite that people initially came with little education) is that students from this community are eager learners that do well and have a high graduation rate of around 95%. Their teachers report these kinds of students as a teacher’s dream. The sense of responsibility and the importance placed on academic success contributes greatly to building an efficient and well-prepared work force.

### OTHER SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Age distribution	Evenly distributed
Percentage of men and women	45% men and 55% women
Ties to Native Country	Many, have close relatives there and send money back regularly
Frequency of travel to Native Country	Every 2-5 years
Estimate of undocumented	Less than 5%

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Material Source: DFW International  
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### **OUTREACH STRATEGIES**

Youth events and activities

Be a friend

Be interested in them, their culture, food and history

Offer ESL classes

Feel free to talk about spirituality and faith

Conversation gatherings to practice English

### **HOW DO YOU OPEN THE DOOR TO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FAITH?**

Share your everyday relationship with God...answered prayers, Scriptures that comfort

Ask about how needs are met through their faith...loneliness, courage, direction

Offer to pray for their needs

Give books/videos that tell a faith story

Discover their interests and find Christians in that field to share their story

Look for Bible stories or principles that teach a value they respect.

Understand the teachings of Buddhism