



# Mae Sot Education Project

## Welcome to 2020

<https://maesot.ubishops.ca>

For more information, contact us at [maesoteducationproject@gmail.com](mailto:maesoteducationproject@gmail.com)

*From all of us at MSEP, a warm wish for peace in 2020  
& deepest thanks for your continued support.*

### A message regarding our capacity in the coming year

As 2020 begins, we at MSEP want, first and foremost, to thank our community for 16 years of support for our efforts on behalf of education of refugee and migrant youth on the Thailand-Myanmar border. It is really the dedication and hard work of our partners in Mae Sot that have made it possible for these children to learn in safety and dignity and to find pathways to meaningful futures. Our small project here in Canada seeks to support their efforts in whatever way we can, and we continue to work hard to be responsive to their needs.

This year, we face the most serious stumbling block that we have encountered. Regretfully, we did not have many applicants for the project from our campus this year. Thus we have only one volunteer. We are not sure why our recruitment efforts have been less successful than hoped for. We suspect that it has something to do with the depth and duration of the commitment required – both of which are part of what make the project unique and more truly productive for our partners and educational for our volunteers. It may also relate to the many financial and academic demands on students. What we do know is that the young woman we have selected, Bishop's International Studies student Claire Keddy, is very bright, competent and excited to be undertaking this deeply engaging project. As someone who has had prior experience both volunteering abroad and organizing overseas volunteering trips, she brings rare expertise to the project.

In the coming weeks we will consult with our partners about how best to use Claire's talents. Our current plan is to mandate her to spend some time with each of our six partners, to survey their needs, offer some targeted teaching assistance at several schools and help the BMWEC, a Burmese community-based organization that supports migrant schools. She will also help to communicate the migrant education situation in Mae Sot to our community in Canada. While we regret deeply that we will not be able to meet our partners' needs for classroom assistance to the extent we have done in the past, we hope that this approach will keep our project alive both in Mae Sot and on our campus while we try to reach out to potential student volunteers for the next year.

We will continue to provide financial assistance to all six of our school partners this year as in the past. It is the generous response of our community donors over the past year that continues to make this assistance possible.



**Shoes & lunch baskets - evidence of daily life at migrant learning centres in Mae Sot**

## Is our project “worth it”? Evidence from the BRIDGES Report



### The simple answer is YES!

**“In recent years, powerful strides have been made to ensure migrant children from Myanmar receive a government-recognized education either from the Thai or the Myanmar Ministry of Education.”** (*Teacher Focus Myanmar*)

Of approximately 350,000 migrant children living in Thailand, over 200,000 are currently out of school (Ministry of Education and Migrant Working Group, 2018). In November, the Mae Sot-based teacher training organization *Teacher Focus Myanmar* published the *Bridges* research report. It surveyed over 1,700 participants ranging from Tak to Ranong province. Seven organizations supporting education for migrant children participated. The report provides critical insights from the ground on the future of education for migrant children in Thailand. While the report documents and confirms the existence of many serious challenges these children face accessing formal education in Thailand, it

also provides evidence of the huge strides that have been made in the last few years in helping them prepare for and transfer into either Thai or Myanmar education systems. Both governments see the migrant learning centres as playing a critical role in facilitating this process, both through language instruction and through preparing students to test and/or otherwise transition into these systems. There are now choices for migrant families, and while many find these choices daunting and all formal education intimidating, increasingly, they are supporting this process.

We at MSEP believe that our financial and volunteer support helps our school partners provide the language training, learning materials and teachers they need in order to achieve the goals of getting more migrant children into school and more of those who are in migrant learning centres on the path to formal education. See the full report on the Teacher Focus Myanmar web site at <https://www.teacherfocusmyanmar.org/advocacy-resources> for further information.

## Volunteers say thanks!

### From Virginie Lévesque....

*Being in Mae Sot for six months was the most challenging, amazing and unforgettable journey I have ever been part of. I developed amazing relationships with all of my students, who still write to me daily. On December 31<sup>st</sup>, I received many calls from students at noon (which is midnight for them) wishing me happy new year! Being back home, I am so proud of everything that we accomplished and so grateful and glad that I decided to grab this opportunity, and experience something like this.*

### From Mari Ann Burrows...

*I had the amazing opportunity to meet so many beautiful and kind people in Mae Sot. I got the chance to teach and hopefully impact the lives of over 120 students. I made a small family there. My roommates became my sisters; we fought, we laughed and we took care of each other. My fellow teachers became my aunts and uncles and my headmistress at one of my schools became like my grandma. I'm truly grateful to have had this opportunity to go to Mae Sot, Thailand and be immersed not only in the Thai culture but also the Burmese, Karen, Kachin and Mon cultures of my students.*



## Some good memories from the last year



The day Mari Ann made French toast with maple syrup at Hsa Mu Htaw Learning Centre...and everyone ate and ate!



2015-16 volunteer Danielle Leblanc's visit to see old friends at BHSOH



Many days of helping kids learn,



and enjoying their company

receiving their affection,



The clean-up crew at our Thai-Burmese benefit dinner in April







School projects and outings to the waterfall⇒



Volunteers Virginie, Anne-Constance and Mari Ann "at home" in Mae Sot



### *Who we are and what we do*

The *Mae Sot Education Project (MSEP)* is a community project based on the campus of Bishop's University and Champlain College – Lennoxville in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Since 2004, we have provided assistance to six schools for migrant and refugee youth from Burma/Myanmar whose access to education depends on support from the international community. In recent years we have also worked with other schools. Each year we select a group of young people from our campus to go to Mae Sot for six months. While there, they provide practical assistance to teachers and enrichment activities for children in the schools. They learn about the situation of displacement experienced by the Burmese people in Thailand as well as about the challenges for the Thai community in coping with a large population of refugees and migrants. Finally, they share their experience with Canadians. Over the last 15 years, MSEP has delivered over \$160,000 in funding assistance (excluding two substantial grants given through specific donations) and as of June 2019, has sent 64 volunteers to assist the migrant education community in Mae Sot.

The Project Committee is made up of members of the community, former faculty from Bishop's and Champlain, and former youth volunteers with the project. Currently, members are: Felix Duplessis-Marcotte (2016 volunteer), Tyler Gordon (2018 volunteer), Judy Keenan, Graham Moodie, Dania Paradis-Bouffard (2017 volunteer), Mary Purkey, Garry Retzleff, Barbara Rowell (2005 volunteer) and Calila Tardif (2016 volunteer).

**Contributions to the project are always welcome, and tax receipts are issued.** To make a donation electronically, you may do so through the Bishop's University Foundation on our web site at: <https://maesot.ubishops.ca/donate-now/>. Remember to indicate that your donation is for the Mae Sot Education Project. Or, donate by cheque through *either* the Bishop's Foundation or the Champlain College Foundation at our project address: Box 67, Champlain College – Lennoxville, 2580 College St, Sherbrooke, QC J1M 2K3. **Be sure to include both the name of the Foundation and MSEP on your cheque.**