



# Mae Sot Education Project

## Fall Newsletter

Nov, 2023

<https://maesoteducation.ca>

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

Again this year: MSEP is holding a very special Holiday Raffle!

### Remember last year's Prize?

This year it is even better. The magical getaway for two at the prestigious Manoir Hovey on the shore of Lake Massawippi in North Hatley, Quebec includes a deluxe room, 4-course fine cuisine dinner, full country breakfast, AND a thermal experience for two at the new luxurious 'Le Spa Manoir Hovey' (a \$1010 value)!



[Note: The offer validity includes Sunday to Friday from November to May; non-valid on statutory holidays, nor on February 14 and 15. Taxes and gratuities are included. Expiration date: May, 2025. See [www.manoirhovey.com](http://www.manoirhovey.com) for more information about this award-winning destination.]

**Tickets: \$25 each**

Are available from all members of the Project Committee. Contact us by email and pay by e-transfer if necessary. If you are unsure who to contact, email Graham Moodie at [grahammoodie@sympatico.ca](mailto:grahammoodie@sympatico.ca). No more than 300 tickets will be sold, and you do not have to be a Townshipper to win!

Once again, give yourself or someone you love a stocking stuffer for the holiday AND support our efforts to help migrant and refugee kids go to school in Mae Sot.

**Drawing and Announcement of Winner:** December 28<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 in the Manoir Hovey's Tap Room Pub. Join us if you can!



## Other Updates

### More opportunities to find holiday gifts and to learn about what we do...

On Saturday, November 25<sup>th</sup> MSEP will participate in the Christmas Market at Grace Village in Huntingville, and again on December 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> we will lay out new goods from Thailand in the lobby of Centennial Theatre on the Bishop's University campus at the evening Christmas concerts given by one of our favorite local choral groups, Bishop's University Singers. We look forward to seeing many of you at these events and appreciate your donations!

We will also have tables aimed at both volunteer recruitment and fundraising set up in the Student Union Building at Bishop's University on November 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. This event will be followed by a recruitment presentation for students on Wednesday November 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM in room 219 in the Library Learning Commons.

**MAE SOT EDUCATION PROJECT**



**TUES.-WED.  
NOV. 7-8  
10:00-3:00  
IN THE BU SUB  
LOBBY**

COME AND TALK TO US TO LEARN ABOUT MSEP'S VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AND TO PICK UP HOLIDAY GIFTS

**OUTREACH & FUNDRAISING**

**YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN MSEP!!**



**MAESOTEDUCATION.CA**  
All profits from this fundraiser will be used to assist migrant youth from Myanmar/Burma in Mae Sot, Thailand.



### And from our volunteers...

### Migrant Learning Centres: Resilience amidst the chaos of displacement

By Amy Marchand-Dion, 2023 Volunteer



Although lacking in resources and conventional academic settings, the migrant learning centers I have had the opportunity to support in the past four months present a world of empowerment, community and joy for students who have known instability more than any child should.

At first glance, the schools' infrastructures hint at compromised learning conditions: Water dripping through handmade leaf roofs and puddling under students' desks and chairs, little space between rows of 6+ desks, whiteboards standing on a chair rather than pinned to the wall, noise piercing through paper-thin walls which separate classrooms. However, the real essence of the migrant learning centers in Mae Sot is not in their walls or roofs, but in the spirit they foster. It is within these spaces that a profound sense of safety is nurtured, often becoming a second home to students seeking normalcy amidst the chaos of displacement. For the students, I have quickly come to realize, the centers are a reliable constant in their lives, and that especially beyond the classroom.

During my time in different schools, I was able to take part in and be a witness of a number of extracurricular activities. A four-day soccer tournament brings together the whole school and community, and echoes with the sounds of respect, teamwork and fun. A school debate offers the opportunity for students of all ages to raise their voices and have their ideas heard. An afternoon singing talent show allows students to support and be supported by their peers when they take the stage. A rainy lunchtime chanting with the rhythm of a guitar. These events are not about perfection nor entertainment; they are about celebrating the spirit of life, resilience and community, as well as reaffirming a child's identity and dreams, beyond the confines of their current circumstances.



*One of Amy's students sings her praises at a farewell ceremony*



Being part of the crowd for these events, it is quite inspiring to see the invaluable sense of belonging such activities instill. These moments shape resilience, build confidence, and create powerful memories. In conditions far from perfect, the learning centers manage to carve out spaces of joy and growth, and they prove that safe spaces, both physically and emotionally, can indeed breed friendships, love and hope for a better tomorrow.

### Resilience on the Football Field...



## Reflections upon coming home

“...knowing what you don't know is much more important than thinking you do know”.

By Charles Chevrier, 2023 Volunteer

A dream. Yeah, that's what it felt like. Was any of it real? The instant the plane had landed in Montreal on my return to Canada, I felt absorbed right back into a life of pressure and stress. I had travelled roughly 13,500 kilometres across the globe just a few days ago, but it felt like I had lived a life completely dissociated from the one here. I had immersed myself in a completely different culture half a world away from home, teaching over 350 students and living with people who don't share a common language with me. It was intense.

In Mae Sot, it took me two months to start feeling at home and developing deep friendships. One of those was with Parami Learning Centre's English teacher—a young, hopeful and joyful man who showed me around Mae Sot and introduced me to his friends. Another one was a teacher friend from the Passport Hotel vocational centre. He also showed me around Mae Sot and its outskirts. I remember that everywhere I travelled with these friends, it felt surreal – the scenery straight out of a movie: the palm trees swaying in the wind, the endless fields with cattle and the abundance of greenery. Sadly, that was a phase that only lasted mere weeks.

Of course, the exploring was amazing, but the real experience happened in the classroom. Talking with my students and hearing their stories, seeing their smiles, and feeling their drive to learn at school will stay with me forever. It was amazing seeing the progress my students made: for the younger students, I could see this progress through the incorporation of their newly learnt vocabulary in their dialogue. For my older students it was their adaptation to my critical thinking-oriented teaching and my open ended questions. Helping these students understand the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a challenge, however. They asked me why these articles didn't exist everywhere indiscriminately—I couldn't answer adequately.

My issues back home feel so small and superficial now. The most important thing I learnt, however: knowing what you don't know is much more important than thinking you do know. The truth is, in going to Mae Sot, I thought I would learn what the migrant people's situation is like, but in reality, I just realized that I know even less than I thought. I still don't know



*Charles chatting with a colleague in Mae Sot*



*Students trying to understand the human rights ideas*

how to answer the question “how was your trip?”. The superficial reply “fun” just doesn’t do justice to the experience I lived. Like I mentioned, it really was just like living another life.

Needless to say, my experience has impacted my perspectives on just about everything ranging from education to international issues and so much more. I still don’t know how to write in a way that will truly reflect my experience. Of course, in hindsight I look to when I started teaching in Mae Sot, and I now think of plenty of ways I could have done better. But I think I tried my best, and I improved along the way. Perhaps it wasn’t achieving a specific goal that fulfilled me best, but rather the journey which I took to try and achieve it.

## 2024 – A year and project to celebrate MSEP’s 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Hard though it may be to believe, 2024 will mark MSEP’s 20<sup>th</sup> year sending volunteers from our community to assist the migrant educators and kids in Mae Sot. In celebration of this moment, Loic Mercier and Sara Watson, both former volunteers and members of our organizing team, are working in close collaboration with and under the guidance of Bishop’s History professor David Webster to create a document that tells the story of the project.

To launch this story-telling project, they are researching developments over time and will be interviewing many key players, including former volunteers, local organizers and



supporters and partners in Mae Sot. The goal is to document some of the project’s aspirations, challenges, accomplishments and impacts over time, to create a record and at the same time to reflect on learnings and possibilities for the future. The archiving/story-telling project is receiving support from Bishop’s University.

Loic and Sara hope to be able to share this project at our benefit dinner in April.

Its broadest, overriding theme will be, quite simply: gratitude for the opportunities that the project has presented, not only for migrant youth in Mae Sot but for our volunteers and our community and also of course, gratitude for the support we have received from so many.

**Looking ahead: Watch for news about our benefit Thai-Burmese Dinner coming in April!**

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

The *Mae Sot Education Project (MSEP)* is a community project based in the Lennoxville borough of 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 the Bishop’s University and Champlain College – Lennoxville 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 19 years, MSEP has delivered over \$200,000 in funding assistance (excluding two substantial grants given through specific donations) and as of June 2023, has sent 67 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: Charles Chevrier (2023 volunteer), Felix Duplessis-Marcotte (2016 volunteer), Judy Keenan, Loic Mercier Arguin (2017 volunteer), Graham Moodie, Mary Purkey, Garry Retzleff, Calila Tardif (2016 volunteer) and Sara Watson (2022 volunteer).