



Mae Sot Education Project

Newsletter

Spring 2022

<https://maesot.ubishops.ca>

For more information, contact us at maesoteducationproject@gmail.com

MSEP Volunteers prepare for travel!



Sara Watson, a student in Bishop's University Neuroscience program, and Rosemary Tamang, a graduating Champlain Pure and Applied Science student, are both set to go to Mae Sot this summer. For Sara, who signed on with us in 2021, it has been a year and a half of preparing and waiting. For Rosemary, participation marks the beginning of an adventure and the fulfillment of a long-held desire she has had, as a former refugee from Nepal, to give back to a community that is struggling in ways that are all too familiar to her.

In reflecting on her reasons for applying to volunteer with MSEP, Rosemary said: *"I grew up in a refugee camp and understand how difficult our lives were. As children in the camp, we did not have easy access to education. Parents used to give their girls away. Despite their best efforts, some of the girls were denied the opportunity to continue their education. There were so many other issues such as when girls got their period, a shortage of food, the lack of school and hospital, etc. On top of that we had to deal with discrimination from local people. I want to share my knowledge with others, especially the younger generation, and be able to assist them with their problems. I also want to learn from others, to learn about their problems, their way of life and much more. I may be able to help a future generation achieve a better future by bringing their difficulties to the attention of the world."*

And from Sara: *"I joined the MSEP as a volunteer in February 2021, as the world was in the midst of grappling with the global pandemic. With new waves spiking and falling, borders opening and closing and learning centers unable to open in Mae Sot, the past year has been an important lesson in patience, flexibility, and acceptance. Patience in the face of an ongoing waiting game, flexibility given that situations continuously evolve and change, and acceptance that a lot remains out of anyone's control. Despite the uncertainty, I feel an ongoing commitment to the project. Since day one this project has inspired me, both by its goal to make education accessible, and by the deep connections volunteers are able to make with the migrant community in Mae Sot. The pandemic has taught me that life as we know it can change on a dime. Given that reality, I strive to engage in meaningful experiences and learning opportunities whenever I can. This project will certainly be an amazing learning experience, and I look forward to setting foot in the learning centers and engaging face to face with students and partner staff. I am grateful to the ongoing support of the project committee and to Rosemary who I'm excited to be joining later this summer in Mae Sot."*

Do our partners still want us? Here is a recent message from one of them...

“ We really need volunteers for high school students. For our school, English learning is still important and useful. We have many reasons. We have plans to post alumni students' stories for the new generation to encourage and give strength in this difficult time. In those stories all alumni students mention the benefit of Canadian teachers and how blessed they are from learning English with foreign teachers. Let's keep in touch with new volunteers.

In the second semester, we did online learning and school based learning...We did the final exam in the last week of March, and we announced the exam result this week. 78% of students completed this year. Even though our school year finished, we continue our learning with students to protect drop out students' numbers... “



Final exams



Two important photos: An inspiring young student with school head July Moe at an awards ceremony AND an inspiring education leader (on the right): Kalayar Soe was a student at Parami, passed the Myanmar matriculation exam in 2019 and is now a teacher at the school.



“ For our citizens who ran from Myanmar because of the civil war, teachers helped and cooked for their meal for two weeks. We had dry food and materials supported by Help Without Frontiers and a kitchen donated from MSEP. That was so blessed to help our people.



We are planning to reopen the next academic school year in May. We hope at that time all students are vaccinated and ready to follow rules of Thai covid-19 protection and prevention committee. Teachers are trying the best for students as they can. They also send their greetings to your team and hope to continue our hard work together in the future. Thank you so much for your support and help.“

Another vaccination day at Parami!

TeacherFOCUS launches a new Teacher Training Initiative

By Greg Tyrosvoutis
Co-Founder & Director, TeacherFOCUS

www.teacherfocusmyanmar.org

www.facebook.com/teacherfocus

The Problem

Teachers working in migrant learning centers have few options for professionalization and are across the board unaccredited (Tyrosvoutis, 2019). They work in extremely low resource classrooms and are currently doing their best to support online and home-based learning while the impact of the pandemic continues. Migrant teachers are working tirelessly to support children in their community but in doing so have limited options to upgrade their skills. While few scholarship opportunities for migrants exist, migrant teachers' educational backgrounds are largely unrecognized which keeps any university education options out of reach. The challenging context and insufficient salary, combined with the limited options for professionalization means that teacher attrition remains high year-to-year.

Our Solution

Early in 2022 TeacherFOCUS signed a licensing agreement & MOU with Western Sydney University which enables our trainers to deliver the **English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program** to teachers working in migrant learning centers on the Thai-Myanmar border. The program is designed for individuals with English as a second language who are looking to develop their language skills to communicate confidently, express ideas effectively and gain a thorough understanding of the level of language proficiency required to attend university. Each module includes mid-term and final tests in reading, writing and listening, as

MSEP Comment: It would be great if faculty at Canadian universities could partner with TeacherFOCUS on other new initiatives for collaborative research and teacher professionalization. TeacherFOCUS welcomes new partners.

"Teachers can change lives with just the right mix of chalk and challenges"

- Joyce Meyer



well as assessment tasks throughout the program that link specifically to each module. Assessment tasks include writing reports and essays, presenting seminars, responding to academic articles and lectures, and engaging in spoken dialogues. Study skills are also an integral part of the program and are designed to familiarise students with academic study conventions and improve independent learning. TeacherFOCUS will offer the EAP level 1 and 2 (200 hour courses) to migrant teachers beginning in June. We hope this initiative will decrease the teacher attrition rate and help professionalize the migrant teacher workforce by building a bridge to tertiary education opportunities. We also hope to explore opportunities to implement this program with students in the future.

A new location and building for Pyo Khinn Learning Centre!

In Fall, 2021 the leaders at one of our partner schools, Pyo Khinn Learning Centre, learned that they would have to vacate the building which the school had occupied since its creation in 1999. The news was devastating, but their response shows the commitment of the small teaching staff and parents to sustaining the learning community. Immediately, they went to work collecting funds, found a new site and before the year ended, they were on their way to having a new building in a new location, one that is close enough to the original site to enable them to continue to serve their very neighbourhood. MSEP helped by funding the installation of a well.



And finally – a new school, welcoming visitors – and students!

BHSOH Learning Centre looks ahead

The military coup and Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar has had a dramatic impact on education. Many students have not studied for 2 years. They are crossing the border and moving to migrant areas. For this reason BHSOH will accept more students in its dormitory and classes in the coming year. The support that MSEP gives to BHSOH that provides food for students will definitely be helpful.

After two years of managing education through home-based learning and online activities, BHSOH is looking forward to returning to normal classes. In the coming academic year, which begins in June, it will once again offer normal in-person classes. In terms of academic planning, it will prepare new curriculum content and continue to offer Pre-GED (G-11&G-12) classes. Given the situation in Myanmar, it is also focusing on offering Thai Non-Formal Education as a pathway for students to continue education at colleges and universities and find more job opportunities in Thailand.

BHSOH has another new project. It is collaborating with the Education for Friendship Foundation (See <https://educationforfriendship.org/>), and Minmahaw Higher Education Project (a post-ten school with a GED preparation program) to find a new location that can house three schools in one compound. With financial assistance from *Child's Dream*, its primary donor, it hopes to purchase land and move to a new location in 2023.



**So much hard work – study, writing exams....
and finally, graduation!**

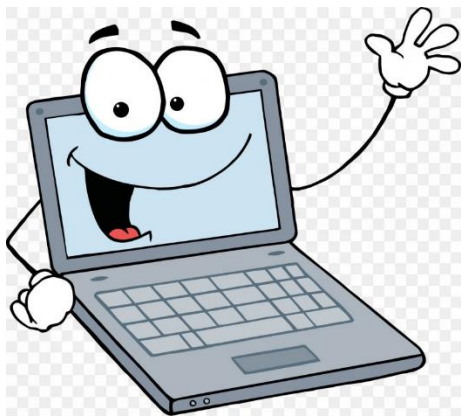


Remember that Thai-Burmese Dinner?

It seems like eons ago that we gathered with members of our community to celebrate our project over Thai and Burmese delicacies. We had hoped to revive what had become our “annual benefit dinner” after a two-year hiatus in this post-Covid season but decided that we should wait until early September – by which time, Covid will no doubt have vanished. Right? Right. **Watch for announcements late in the summer!**



Maung Maung Tin, Burmese artist



Do you have a laptop you are willing to part with? A Mae Sot migrant teacher might be able to use it!

Covid has brought new challenges and new needs to migrant educators in Mae Sot. One of them is laptops, needed by teachers who are trying to expand online education in preparation for future eventualities such as school shut downs. MSEP is looking for a few *fully functional* laptops that could be wiped clean and sent to Mae Sot with our volunteers in June. TeacherFOCUS will ensure that they are distributed to those who need them most. **Please contact us *as soon as possible* if you would like to contribute a laptop: marypurkey@gmail.com.**

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 16 years, MSEP has delivered over \$161,000 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), Judy Keenan, Loic Mercier Arguin (2017 volunteer), 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 the name of the Foundation and MSEP on your cheque.**