



Mae Sot Education Project

Newsletter

Spring 2023

<https://maesot.ubishops.ca>

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

An Invitation – Meet our Volunteers

Join us for a "4 à 6"
on Sunday, April 23rd

Chat with our Volunteers.

Enjoy Burmese and Thai Munchies,
wine & Asian inspired herbal teas.

Where? The Retzleff home, 39 Church Street
in Lennoxville



In past years (or prior to COVID), it was customary for MSEP to host a Thai-Burmese Benefit Dinner at this time of year. However, having held this event last September, we have decided to wait until April 2024 to hold our next dinner. Meanwhile, we are eager to give our community an opportunity to meet our volunteers, to celebrate the renewal of MSEP activities in Mae Sot and to hear a bit about the difficulties Myanmar youth face today. We hope that you will join us. If you are able to RSVP (with Graham Moodie at 819-823-8147 or grahammoodie@sympatico.ca), that will help us plan. If you cannot RSVP, **come nonetheless!**

Amy Marchand-Dion, returned Volunteer Sara Watson & Charles Chevrier

New volunteers share their thoughts as they anticipate departure

MSEP is preparing two volunteers to go to Thailand this year, one a Bishop's University student, Amy Marchand-Dion, and one a Champlain College – Lennoxville student, Charles Chevrier. Both are hard at work, learning about the countries, the specific situation of the people with whom they will be interacting and ways they can be most effective while there.

Amy looks ahead....

As I contemplated graduating in April with a bachelor's degree in International Studies last fall, I became faced with both the freedom and pressure to decide what the next year of my life would look like. Two ideas came to mind: Pursuing my postgraduate studies in political science, or halting my studies to travel the world. Then suddenly, in the midst of Fall semester, I stumbled upon the Mae Sot Education Project. After attending the information session and doing some research, applying to become a volunteer and member of this community-based project seemed inevitable.

Already, a month or so has gone by since the Project Committee warmly welcomed me into the project, and with every conversation, meeting and research we undertake, I am thrilled to have found an outlet like this project that fulfills me educationally, professionally, as well as personally. The MSEP has opened my eyes to the political, economic, and humanitarian situation in Myanmar, in turn reinforcing my desire to give back what I have been given, by offering support and presence to the students and teachers of Learning Centers in Mae Sot. Not only that, but having the opportunity to travel abroad and immerse myself in a foreign culture and language, as well as to build true connections with locals along with my co-volunteer Charles, is for myself of great personal significance. In this context, I hope, despite my short passage in Mae Sot, to plant a

seed for learning, connecting and sharing in the name of knowledge and education – two powerful tools that can literally change the world.

And from Charles ...

I first heard of MSEP through a teacher at Champlain, who recommended that I take a look at it. I was interested in this initiative since I had heard from others that a similar experience had fundamentally altered their perceptions of society and had given them huge personal growth. I had a general notion of what such an experience would entail when I applied, but as the date of departure approaches, I am becoming more conscious of all that I need to learn to undertake the journey (logistics, “teacher training”, country information, along with the complex cultural challenges that I will face) while simultaneously growing more determined and eager. Undertaking a challenge like this pushes me far outside my comfort zone, but ironically, it is within that very discomfort that I find serenity and hope pertaining to the impact I aim to achieve during my stay. In fact, if there’s one thing I do hope to accomplish, it is not my personal attainment or growth, it is simply to know that I could change the lives of the students I will work with, in ways transcending the classroom.

MSEP Project Development - Planning for the Future

MSEP Sustainability: A New Lease on Life...



A major concern of MSEP in recent years has been our sustainability as a project. Many factors have combined to create new challenges. As well, the Project Committee which oversees MSEP is keenly aware of the need to engage a “second generation” leadership team to guide the project into the future if it is to carry on. While simply ending our activities in Mae Sot would be easier, it would also signify a lost opportunity and failure of responsibility. It is time to find new ways of continuing to support the whole wider project of education for displaced youth from Myanmar *and* to promote greater understanding of displacement among Canadian youth and the larger public.

With all of that in mind, one of our Project Committee members, Bishop’s University student Loic Arguin-Mercier, applied for a B.E.S.T. grant at Bishop’s this winter, in the hope that he could be supported as he learns project coordination and management skills. We are very pleased to announce that he has received funding that will allow him to accompany volunteers to Mae Sot and to connect with our partners there in June. Having already been to Mae Sot as a volunteer (in 2017), he is well equipped to take on this responsibility. Beyond that, over the coming months, he will be learning some of the nuts and bolts of leadership, including financial management, outreach and communication, volunteer preparation and fundraising initiatives as well as skills related to delegation of tasks related to the project’s day-to-day operation. Finally, we hope that, as the year unfolds, Loic will be able to engage in conversations to encourage deeper participation in the project organization by new, young members of our community either as members of the Project Committee or in other supportive roles. If you are interested in learning more about how YOU can get involved, you can contact Loic at loicam1999@gmail.com.

Other Updates: A Fundraiser at “Boomerang” and a new MSEP Website address coming soon!

First, one of our new volunteers, Amy Marchand-Dion has enlisted “Boomerang”, a unique workout studio dedicated to spinning, yoga, and fitness in Sherbrooke (<https://studioboomerang.ca/>), to host a spinning session on Saturday afternoon, April 15th, **with all donations going to MSEP**. Watch for information or contact Amy (amarchand19@ubishops.ca) for details on how to participate.

Second, recently, Bishop’s University informed us that it seemed possibly misleading for MSEP to be lodged within the Bishop’s web domain. MSEP is a *community* project with long and deep ties to both Bishop’s and Champlain. It is rooted in the campus, but has always remained distinct from the institutions with which it has collaborated. Thus in the coming months, MSEP will have a new Web address. We are grateful to Bishop’s for funding this move and especially grateful to Ahmad Hamdan for assisting us in migrating the site. The web site itself will remain unchanged. We will keep you posted on the change when it happens!

MSEP visits partners for the first time since COVID



Meeting with the Hsa Mu Htaw staff – with the school headmistress Daw Htet Htet Aung participating by phone from Myanmar



A lunch meeting with Pyo Khinn staff

Once each year a member of our Project Committee visits our partners in Mae Sot to discuss current needs face to face. In November 2022, Mary Purkey paid visits for the first time since the beginning of COVID. Recently, a second member of our team, Garry Retzleff, also traveled to Mae Sot to visit schools. Talking with partners directly has enabled us to assess some of the important needs – and in particular to hear their pleas for volunteers who can help their students learn English.

Mary observed Sara “at work” with her students. She also saw the new site to which BHSOH Learning Centre (LC) will move [along with the Minmahaw GED LC] in the coming year, looked in on the new preschool program started at Hle Bee LC and toured the new Pyo Khinn school building and grounds. She also attended World Children’s Day festivities at Hsa Thoo Ley LC. The visit to Parami LC included a tour of its extensive gardens and a peek at its Montessori program. In addition, she met with the small staff that is valiantly keeping Hsa Mu Htaw LC alive in the absence of its Headmistress – who attended the meeting by cell phone from Myanmar because travel from her family village there to Mae Sot remains too dangerous.



Hsa Thoo Ley students celebrate International Children’s Day



Meeting with one of our first partners
Tha Zin at Hle Bee

Parami Montessori students analyze
a painting with Mary

In mid February, Garry, accompanied by Burmese artist/friend Maung Maung Tinn and a new member of the MSEP team, Paul Sperisen (pictured below with Garry), also paid friendly visits to each of our partners. In all of his meetings, discussion of possibilities for future engagements by volunteers was high on the agenda, and it was clear that English learning has become a priority as migrants and refugees try to imagine futures outside their increasingly repressive homeland. There is nothing like face-to-face contact to reassure the people with whom we have worked for years of our ongoing commitment.



Garry and Paul touring BHSOH with
Headmaster Naw Naw...



looking in on a class at Pyo Khinn...



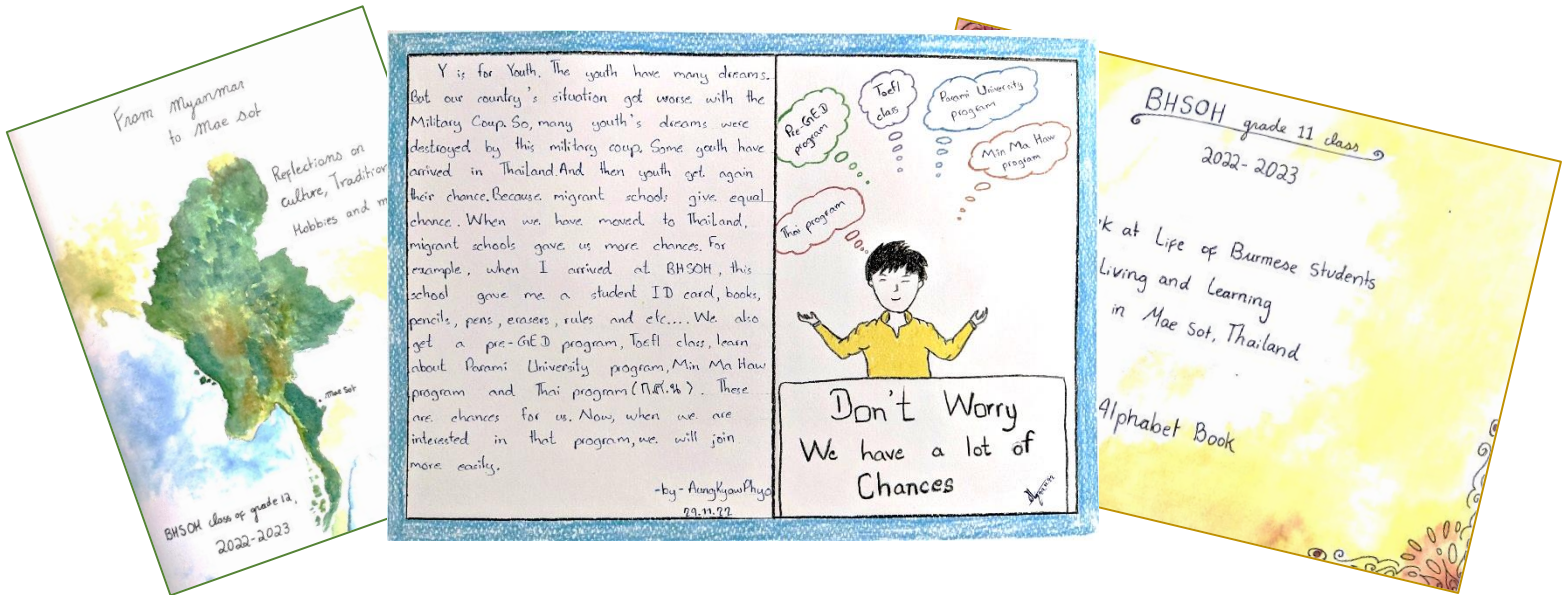
and getting to know the goats at Parami

A Scrapbook of Sara in Mae Sot

From Sara Watson: *While in Mae Sot, I worked with over 200 students. Despite having faced adversity beyond anything I will likely ever experience, the people I connected with inspired me each day with their resilience, drive and ambition. The students I taught were truly amazing and inspiring individuals (despite at times being stubborn or goofy just like any other teenager!), gracing me each day with eagerness to learn, engage and share. Although I was not very experienced, they were patient and understanding, truly shaping my experience into the amazing one it was.*



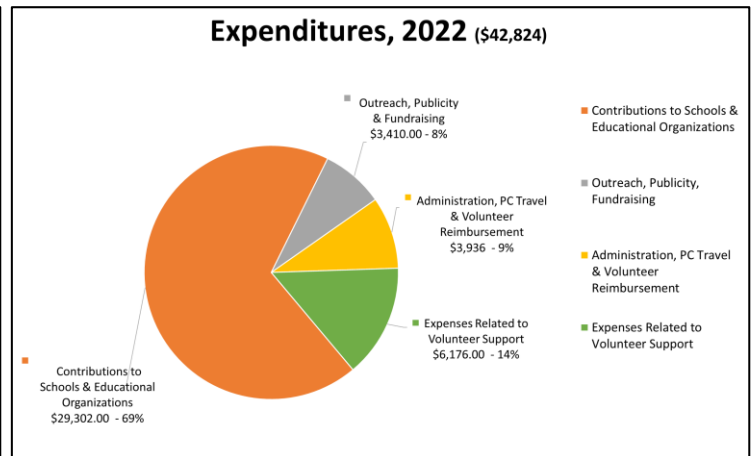
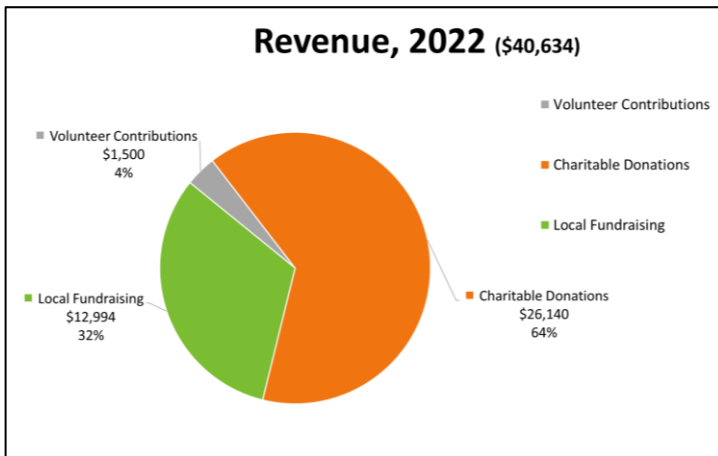
Sara's Book Projects gave students an opportunity to express their views about their lives.



You can read more about Sara's experience in Mae Sot in the March issue of *The Campus* (Bishop's student newspaper) and in the December 28th edition of *The Sherbrooke Record*.

Financial Matters Looking backward and looking forward

Below are two pie charts that provide a picture of our financial situation in the last year. They show that we have received wonderful support from our donor community and also that the bulk of our spending has been in support of our partners in Mae Sot. What the charts do not really show is that our capacity to send volunteers to Thailand for extended periods has been deeply affected by events of the last years. While prior to COVID we had teams of 3-5 students going to Mae Sot, in 2022, we sent only two volunteers, one of whom had to return to Canada immediately for health reasons and the other who was able to stay in Thailand for only three months. The cost was almost the same as sending four volunteers in past years. We expect to send two volunteers in Mae Sot this year, though for what length of time remains a question. Flights to and accommodation in Thailand have become more expensive, making it difficult to estimate costs. It will take another year for us to assess the impact of the changes. However, knowing how important our presence is to our partners, we are actively seeking ways to meet the challenges. In presenting the information below, we want especially to thank Mary Sweeney for doing our accounting on a volunteer basis.



NOTE: Effectively, volunteer contributions were close to \$3200 because one of our volunteers received a grant that covered her airfare and visa expenses. This contribution to the project does not show on our pie chart for revenues; nor do the resulting savings show on our pie chart for expenditures. They were, of course, very important!

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.**

Donors and Supporters from January 2021 through January 2023

We wish to thank *everyone* who has helped to make our project a success. Because we did not publish a list of donors last year, we are including donors for both 2021 and 2022 in our list this year. Donations take many forms. Financial donations, donations of time and energy, raffle prizes, sponsorships, in-kind donations of all sorts have all been deeply appreciated. In addition to those people and organizations noted below are many others who have faithfully supported our fundraisers. **Thank you all!**

We wish to thank these organizations & institutions

Bishop's University
Champlain College –
Lennoxville

Carinne Bevan
Ross M. Bishop
James & Helena Brodie
Peter Bulow
David Chadot & Daniella
Berenstein

Randi Heatherington
Rodger & Meryle
Heatherington [in loving
memory of Joyce Standish,
Carol Standish Sangster &
Evelyne Ruth Suitor]

Russell Pocock & Thérèse
Shaheen
Emily Prangle Desormeaux
Isaac Purkey
Robert & Mary Purkey
Susan L. Renaud

and these businesses

Bekkah's Bakery
Brad's Gourmet
*Pizza*Bistro*
Clarke et fils, Ltee
Ferme Beaulieu
Global Excel Management Inc.
Manoir Hovey
Microbrasserie Le Siboire
Provigo – Lennoxville
Restaurant Le Shalimar
Restaurant Rima
Saveurs et Gourmandises
Serres en Ville
*Uplands Cultural and Heritage
Centre*
Visite sous Terre Capelton

Emiliano Carvalle
Caroline Chabot Chartier
Zoe Constantinides
Ron Coughlan
Gordon Craig
Gerald Cutting
Melanie Cutting
Marie Dagenais
Dinah Duffield & Tim
Doherty

Mary Hill & John Robb
Jennifer Hyndman
Lin C. Jensen
Judy Keenan
Julien Lacombe
Alexandra Lebeau
Danielle Leblanc-Cyr
Real & Suzanne Leclerc
Wade Lynch
Sheila MacLean & Brian
Talbot

Garry Retzleff
Nancy Robert & Don
Warnholtz
Jody Robinson
Mary Lynn Ross
Josee Rourke
Barbara Rowell
Martyn Sadler
Rebecca Schwartz
Jacqueline Scott
Paul Sperisen

and these individuals

Karen Allatt
Stephen Allatt
Loïc Arguin-Mercier
Andrew Bass
Paul Baldwin
Pamela Bertram

Bruce & Wendy Durrant
Jack & Pamela Eby
Michael Eby
Adele Ernstson
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Heather Thomson
Tala Rod
Shirley & Richard Thompson
Marita Vanier & Mike
Durrant
Sandy Ward
Patterson Webster

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 Bishop's University and Champlain College – Lennoxville to go to Mae Sot for three to 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 18 years, MSEP has delivered over \$213,000 in funding assistance (excluding two substantial grants given through specific donations) and as of June 2022, has sent 65 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, Loïc Mercier Arguin (2017 volunteer), Graham Moodie, Dania Paradis-Bouffard (2017 volunteer), Angie Petitclerc, Mary Purkey, Garry Retzleff, and Calila Tardif (2016 volunteer).