



Mae Sot Education Project

Newsletter

Spring, 2026

<https://maesoteducation.ca>

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

MSEP begins its 22nd year of partnership with the migrant education community in Mae Sot!

A new team of volunteers prepares to go to Thailand

MSEP has four new volunteers headed for Mae Sot in June. Each brings different interests and skills to share with our partner Learning Centre students. First let's let them introduce themselves (from left to right):



Malika, Rosemarie, Laurie and Julianne

Malika Bédard: *I'm now in my final year of Applied Psychology. Last year, I found I had a passion for humanitarian aid, educational psychology as well as the impact that mental health has on young people's schooling. I decided to go to Mae Sot to pursue my studies in the real world. In Mae Sot, I aim to learn the culture, create meaningful connections, and acquire more knowledge about trauma and its impact on education. Moreover, I hope to contribute meaningfully to the community I will be integrating into. I'm so excited for this adventure! Along with a variety of volunteer experiences working with marginalized youth, Malika has also worked*

at a high school and in a community organization for young autistic individuals and their family members to support their academic and socioemotional learning, experiences that will help shape her contributions.

Rosemarie Bergeron: *I am a third-year student of modern languages at Bishop's. I've always recognized the importance of education, but I never thought that I would be part of such a special journey teaching youth in Thailand. I hope to inspire Burmese refugees to build confidence through learning. Rosemarie has also coached gymnastics for kids for years and while solo backpacking through South America, spent three months in Cusco, Peru, living with a local host family, learning Spanish and volunteer-teaching English to young children.*

Laurie Prefontaine: *I am a second-year student completing an Honours in International Studies and a Minor in Sociology at Bishop's University. As someone hoping to work in international and diplomatic relations, this experience will help me deepen my understanding of cross-cultural collaboration while engaging directly with diverse communities. I hope to support students learning English through fun and interactive activities. I am very eager to participate in this project! As a participant in a model UN, Laurie can help students expand their knowledge of global issues. She also brings long*

experience working in a day camp as a special counselor for children with special needs such as physical / mental disabilities, ASD, ADHD, impulsivity disorder, oppositional disorder, and intellectual disorders.

Julianne Chartier: *I am currently in my last semester at Champlain in the science program. I will be volunteering for 6 months with MSEP, and I am eternally grateful for this incredible opportunity that I have been given. I have always loved travelling, experiencing new cultures and meeting people who have a lifetime full of stories to share. I love reading, playing music, singing, and crafting. I love taking walks and just breathing in the fresh air. I long for new horizons and seeing more of what's out there, which is why I cannot wait to live in Thailand and inspire those in need to never give up on their dreams.* The youngest of our volunteers this year, Julianne brings great enthusiasm. Her passion for music and the arts and her strong science profile will enable her to share knowledge and fun activities with the younger students in two of our partner learning centres.

Three 2025 volunteers share some wisdom gained from their time in Mae Sot

It's all about endurance, resilience and community

By Anabelle Villeneuve, 2025 Volunteer

Looking back, what stands out the most from my six month volunteer experience in Mae Sot is what I learned about resilience, kindness, and the strength of community. Many of the people I met had been through challenges that are almost impossible to imagine, such as having family still in Myanmar, surviving armed conflict, or living away from their homes due to conflict. Yet they smile often and laugh easily. They have a natural ability to make others feel welcome and included.



I'll also vividly remember their resilience. Some students struggle to focus in school or find motivation because their basic needs, such as food, are not always met. One day, during lunch break, one of my students fainted. The headmistress later told me that he had not been eating well. Despite this, he was one of the most curious and engaged students in the class. Even when facing difficulties that many of us never have to think about, he kept showing up with eagerness to learn. Many students have lived in refugee camps or fled from military violence. I met individuals who had been prisoners of war, people who had lost their homes, careers and loved ones. And yet, despite all of this, they continue to attend, to learn, to teach and to care for one another. That resilience and determination are present not only in the students, but in the teachers and the community as well. The Migrant Learning Centers in Mae Sot were created by people who refused to give up on their youth and on education and who are proof of this community's resilience.

Helping students learn English in this context came with challenges. Students' educational backgrounds varied a lot due to their different pasts. In my classes, the gap between the students' level of English was very big. In one grade 7 class, I had a student fluent enough to hold conversations with and talk about many topics. In that same class, another student could barely say, "My name is". It was a challenge for me to organize activities that could be adapted to their different levels of English; it required creativity and adaptability. However, what stood out was the way students supported one another. Stronger students would often help those who were struggling. Whether it was by explaining instructions, translating or guiding them with a question, they were always ready to help when needed. Even on a small scale, a strong sense of community could be felt in the classroom.

One of the moments that stayed with me the most was visiting a small village behind Pyo Khinn Learning Center. Some of the students lived there, and the headmistress, Mai Mar Mar Yi, wanted to show me their reality. The village had no electricity

and no running water, only a single well in the middle of the village. The houses were small, the walls and roofs were built from metal sheets, each house made up of a single room. A few people were drying chilies and cutting fish to sell. We stopped to speak with one student's family. Without hesitation, they invited us into their home. They didn't have much, yet they began preparing tea and roasted nuts for us. The student's grandparents were there, along with two boys of my student's age, who didn't seem to be attending school. What struck me the most was how natural their generosity felt. It didn't feel forced or done out of politeness. They genuinely seemed happy to welcome us into their home and share what little they had. Before leaving, I remember a small boy, about three or four years old, running past us. Mai Mar Mar Yi told me that he was going to ask other villagers for food because his dad was not feeding/taking care of him. I saw that behind smiles, there are sometimes difficult realities.

Throughout my stay in Mae Sot, I was constantly moved by this sense of sharing within the Burmese community. At Hsa Thoo Lei, another Migrant Learning Center, they often organized big celebrations. At the Wrist Tying Ceremony, we tied red and white strings around our wrists as a symbol of unity and protection. There were traditional dances and songs, everyone dressed in traditional clothing and the school offered food to everyone. Every school that I helped at had celebrations and/or gave lunch to everyone. I learned that even small actions like sharing a meal or a tied string, wearing traditional clothes, or even smiling at someone, are important and mean more than we often realize. When hardships are a daily part of life, community becomes their biggest strength.

My time in Mae Sot taught me not to take education for granted and to never underestimate the strength of community. Despite everything they have been through, the people I met continue to share, to smile and to support one another. What I carry with me are not only memories, but a model of resilience that will stay with me for the rest of my life. For me, and I believe for many MSEP Volunteers, this experience was far more than teaching or a cultural exchange. It changed the way I see privilege, kindness and it shaped the kind of person I hope to become. It reminds me to keep showing up, to help where I can and to lead with generosity, even when things are difficult.

Learning from our students – sometimes a devastating experience

By Mary Evans, 2025 volunteer

Recently, I was asked to tell a story from my time in Mae Sot last year. It is very difficult to select only one story from this experience, but here is one that truly marked me. It is about a student who we will call "Lily".

When I arrived at the school on my day, I was terrified. I was introduced to my groups and having 55 students in one class all stand up at the same time to greet you is quite intimidating. I sat to observe how the classes work and stayed very quiet. The students and teachers were speaking in Burmese, and I felt quite out of place. That is when Lily approached me and said, "Teacher, do you feel lonely because you don't understand what we are saying? I can translate for you." Suddenly, I felt a bit more at ease.

Lily is a particularly strong student in every subject, but she also has a very high level of English. She is one of those people who is always involved with the planning of things, and takes on a lot of responsibilities. I started sleeping at the



boarding house every Wednesday evening, and Lily lives there. On my first night there, she set up my bed, a bottom bunk in a room of about 12 girls. When bed time came, she asked me to grab my pillow and blanket and climb up to her bunk. She said to me that despite there being a bed for everyone, the girls usually sleep 2 by 2 because it ensures safety and security. It is one of their sources of comfort. It was an honour that they felt safe around me.

One night, while I was at the boarding house, Lily was preparing for an English exam. She had been asked to write a text about the war in Myanmar. She said, "Teacher, can you please correct my grammatical errors?" Then she left to go help cook our dinner. I sat on the bed ready to read her text. Instead of correcting her errors, I started to tear up. Lily had just handed me a text about her personal experiences with the civil war in Myanmar. Her text included ideas that the government was becoming more and more cruel to its citizens, and that in her town, so many people were killed for

no apparent reason. She described that it was heartbreaking to witness, and that one time, when she was coming home from work with her sister, they saw a soldier nearby. She and her sister quickly ran to hide in somebody's house, and right after going into hiding, they heard a gun shot. The military had killed a man for no reason. Lily described that her town kept getting more and more dangerous due to dynamite explosions. Her family moved to another town in Myanmar, and stayed with a kind stranger.

Lily did not go to school for 3 years, and eventually her parents sent her to stay with her aunt in Thailand. In 2022, she lived in a refugee camp for one month, and during this time she heard that her home in Myanmar had been burnt by the military. What struck me as I read and I still remember, Lily wrote in her text, "I spoke with my mother. I

knew she was devastated, but she did not show it. Instead, she stayed strong, spoke cheerfully and even joked about the situation."

What touches me the most about Lily is that she appears to be "just like any other young woman". She wears her school uniform, she participates in everything, and most importantly she wears a smile on her face and is always eager to learn and be helpful. How can someone who has endured so much hate and hurt still choose to radiate love and kindness? That just about sums up all of the Burmese migrants and refugees whom I had the absolute pleasure of meeting while in Mae Sot, and it is why it is so important for us at MSEP to show this group of people that someone cares for them in return.

The values within us

By Maika Beland, 2024 and 2025 volunteer

On February 9 this year, Anabelle Villeneuve, Mary Evans, and I (all returned volunteers from this past year) had the chance to present our experiences in Mae Sot to the local chapter of Canadian Federation of University Women in Lennoxville. These outreach opportunities are great for keeping our experiences alive and for building bridges among communities. A few days later, Anabelle texted me to say that what I had said at the presentation put into words how many volunteers feel. Here is my reflection on the impact that volunteering in Mae Sot has on returned volunteers.



In the past two years, I have spent a total of eight months in Mae Sot with MSEP. These experiences have not only continually shaped me as a person but have also allowed me to discover myself outside my safety bubble. In Canada, life is relatively easy (not for everyone, but I am lucky enough to be able to say this). I have access to recognized education, a passport, the freedom to travel, family I see every week, and safe job opportunities all around me. It was easy to take these things for granted—until I went to Mae Sot and connected with the Myanmar community. I realized that many of the things I access easily in Canada are only dreams for the youth and adult migrants in Mae Sot. In the learning centres and other non-profit organizations, Myanmar migrants smile and persevere. They come together in times of hardship, and it is inspiring to see their incredible resilience.

Volunteers witness things they have never seen before; it puts many things into perspective. I once had a detailed plan for my academic and professional life: go to university straight from high school, complete a bachelor's degree, continue directly to a master's and then a doctorate, and then secure a stable job. My vision was clear, conventional, and secure. Yet my experiences in Mae Sot helped me discover deeper values within myself that I had not explored during my life in Canada: the importance of community; understanding that to have a village you need to be a villager (and to actually act like one); the importance of human rights worldwide; understanding that silence is compliance; and acknowledging the power of education. These are values I thought I understood, but now I see them as essential—not only for myself but for those with whom I surround myself. Volunteering for the Mae Sot Education Project fosters individual growth and contributes to the greater good of our society. It is important to open our eyes, minds, and hearts

to the communities near and far—something we don't do if we never step outside our comfort zones.

Being a volunteer with this project has changed my life, not as a deviation from societal norms but as a redirection I truly needed. I believe it changes the lives of many volunteers; some, even years after their experience with the project, say they would not be the same person without it.

The values I encountered in Mae Sot: community, responsibility, human rights, the courage to speak out, and

the power of education, have stayed with me. They no longer feel like abstract ideals but practical habits and choices I try to live by. Volunteering didn't provide all the answers, but it redirected me: to be more present, more connected, and more willing to act. Those quiet shifts—small, steady changes in how we show up for others and for ourselves—are what “the values within us” truly means. By carrying these actions forward, we can honour the Myanmar community that taught and showed us the way to feel these values within us.

Views of daily life from the Learning Centres



Planting a garden



Lunchtime



Fun fun!



A Gr 5 student's prize-winning art



A visit from Thai health workers



A rare class outing to a waterfall

Students doing student things!

Karen don dancing!



Burmese friends applying thanaka to volunteer Mary

A teacher planning meeting



Renovations - a painting project



Studying and learning (of course!)

Always reasons to celebrate!



For more information about all our 2026 partners, go to <https://maesoteducation.ca/partners/> on our website.

Fundraising and Outreach Activities



And the winner of our 2025 Holiday Raffle was....Julia Weber!

We know that everyone who graciously – and generously – supported our holiday raffle last year would like to know who won. Julie is a member of our Lennoxville community and the daughter of Janet Weber and Joe Weber, who contributed to MSEP for many years. Janet passed away in 2025 and was highlighted in one of our newsletters last year. It seems most fitting that Julia, who cared for her during her last year of life, should receive this prize.

Thanks to everyone who supported the holiday raffle, which raised over \$7,000.

A most happy announcement: The research project that Bishop’s professor David Webster and several of our volunteers have worked on for the last two years has reached fruition: “Townshippers in Thailand: 20 years of Mae Sot Education Project work with Burmese refugee youth” will be published in the upcoming 51st issue of *The Journal of Eastern Townships Studies* (JETS). Our research team is also hoping to present their findings at the 14th Colloquium on Quebec Studies to be held at Bishop’s University March 27-28. **A special thanks to David for making this project happen!**

Coming in March - OUR ANNUAL SPRING RAFFLE - with a modest ticket price (\$5 or 3 tickets for \$10) and many great prizes! The draw will take place on April 18th at our Thai-Burmese Dinner.

Our new volunteer team and our project committee will be offering “goods from Thailand for donations” this winter and spring: on February 19th in the SUB building on campus and at the University Singers spring concert on April 10th-11th.



Maung Maung Tinn 2025

The Mae Sot Education Project

Still working with Burmese migrant educators and youth after 21 years

invites you to join us for a
Gourmet Thai-Burmese Benefit Dinner
(with cash bar)

With raffle drawing & talks by volunteers

Saturday, April 18th, 6:30 p.m.

The Old Lennoxville Golf Club
19 rue du Golf, Lennoxville

Tickets: \$65

A tax receipt for charitable donation will be given
for \$40.

Our Annual Thai-Burmese Benefit Dinner is on!

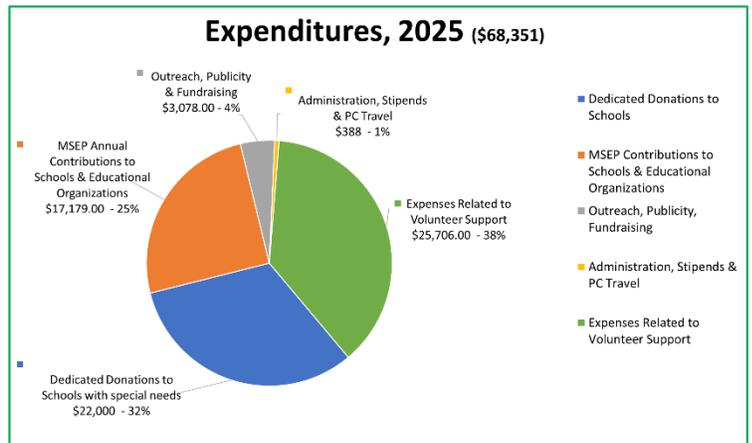
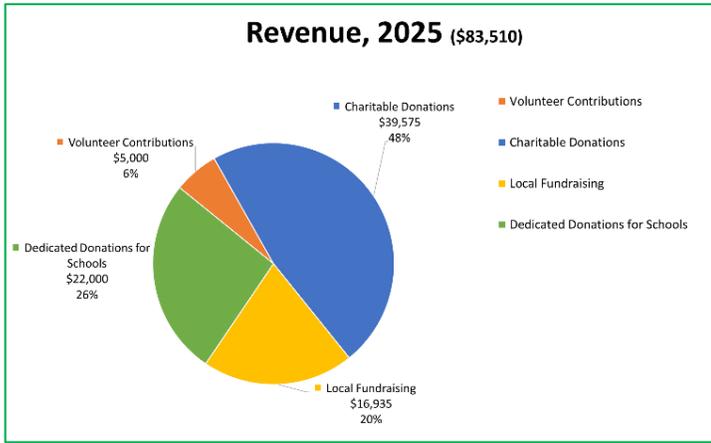
Join us on April 18th at the Old Lennoxville Golf Club

Once again this year, the MSEP kitchen team will be joined by our Burmese friend Mi Sorn in preparing a delicious Thai & Burmese dinner. Like last year, we are limiting seating to 72 so as to make the experience more comfortable for our guests. **Contact Project Committee members if you would like dinner tickets which will go on sale in March. We suggest reserving as soon as possible!**

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://maesoteducation.ca/donate-now>.

Remember to indicate that your donation is for the *Mae Sot Education Project*. Or, donate by cheque through the Bishop’s Foundation and send your cheque to 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**

And now for a look at our finances



2025 was a very good year for MSEP. Our fundraising and the wonderful support of donors in our community enabled us in turn to give more to our partners in Mae Sot and to send five student volunteers, three of whom stayed for 3 months and two of whom stayed for 5 ½-6 months. We are extremely grateful for the generosity our community has shown in helping us to realize our goals especially at a time when international support for refugees and migrants has shrunk considerably. Please contact us if you would like detailed information about our revenues and expenditures. We want especially to thank Mary Sweeny for helping us keep track of our finances and produce our final report.

Donors and Supporters during 2025 - Thank you all!

We wish to thank *everyone* who has helped to make our project a success. 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 so many others who have faithfully and generously supported our fundraisers, including our Holiday Raffle. Please forgive us if we have neglected to name you.

Karen Allatt	Bertrand Collins	Heatherington	Joanne Marosi	Therese Shaheen
Stephen & Barbara Allatt Foundation	Ron Coughlin	Lin Jensen	Isabelle Menard	Stephen & Kathy Stafford
Kim Anderson	Florence Cote	Murray Johnston	Ginette Mercier	Mary Sweeny
Jean-Sebastien Beland	Gordon Craig	Judy Keenan	Dugal Monk	Beverly Taber
Pamela Bertram	Gerald Cutting	Denis Kotsoros	Graham Moodie	Keith Taylor
Carinne Bevan	Melanie Cutting	Julien Lacombe	Michele Murray	Richard Thompson
Vicky Boisse	Marie Dagenais	Julie Leblond	John Oldland	Nisha Toomey
Sonja Boisse	Adrian Downey	Rejean Leblond	Ileana Orleanu	Gilles Villeneuve
Daniella Berenstein	Dinah Duffield	Rejean Leclerc	Angie Petitclerc	Isabelle Villeneuve
Helena Lolley Brodie	Alain Durocher	Jackie Lougheed	Olivier Pommerleau	Janet Watson
James A. Brodie	Lewis Evans	Sheila MacLean	Robert Purkey	Mitch Wolfe
The Champlain Student Association	William Evans	Joanne Macleod	Garry V. Retzleff	
	Jennifer Garfat	Geraldine McGurk	Helene Richard	
	Rodger & Meryle	Dugal Monk	Nancy Robert	

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 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 21 years, MSEP has delivered well over \$200,000 in funding assistance (excluding two substantial grants given through specific donations) and as of June 2025, has sent 73 young 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: Maika Bedard (2024 volunteer), Charles Chevrier (2023 volunteer), Felix Duplessis-Marcotte (2016 volunteer), Mary Evans (2025 volunteer), Judy Keenan, Loic Arguin-Mercier (2017 volunteer), Graham Moodie, Mary Purkey, Angie Petitclerc, Calila Tardif (2016 volunteer).