



# Mae Sot Education Project

## Newsletter

### COVID-19 Update, May 2020

<https://maesot.ubishops.ca>

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

## News from Mae Sot: Migrant Learning Centres set to open on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Life goes on (with adaptations and new needs).



BHSOH Learning Centre in COVID-19 times – an empty campus...

and as if COVID is not enough, Parami Learning Centre lost a dormitory and storage building to a cyclone in April

As we all know, it has been hard to plan during this strange time. Yet life will indeed go on, and in Mae Sot, as here in Canada, educators are meeting with government and leaders in the migrant community to plan how to reopen migrant learning centres. Fortunately, there seems to have been no serious outbreak of COVID-19 there, but there are, nonetheless, measures similar to those in Canada in place to protect people. Below are two excerpts from the planning document developed recently by the Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC). They convey both optimism and a sense of urgency regarding increased need for assistance to migrant youth and teachers.

*“For one of Thailand’s most vulnerable populations, migrant children, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has left them feeling scared, confused and uncertain about when their education will continue. A rapid assessment conducted by TeacherFOCUS found many migrant families living on the border have remained in Thailand... This finding was confirmed by the Burmese Migrant Workers’ Education Committee (BMWEC) in their Situational Analysis conducted in 26 Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) in 5 districts of Tak province. BMWEC found that many migrant families living on the border have remained in Thailand and don’t plan to return [to Burma]... Many families have at least one earner currently out of work and require support for essentials, specifically food and hygienic supplies.*

*Teachers and the MLCs require urgent financial support to pay teacher stipends in June as many of the schools’ donors have decreased or withdrawn their commitments as a result of COVID-19. If migrant teachers aren’t financially supported, educational continuity for migrant children will be jeopardized. MLCs are preparing to open on July 1st in line with the current Thai government school policy; however, currently there are no interventions in place to support migrant children or their families at home during this time (May-June). The largest threat reported by MLC headmasters is financial uncertainty. Many MLCs are dependent on financial support from international donors and organizations. Some Headmasters fear they will not be able to provide necessary education because*

*they cannot pay teacher salaries. Some Headmasters shared they might not be able to open their schools at all, putting a lot of migrant children at significant risk.”*

The BMWEC plans to train teachers to make household visits and provide children with learning materials during the month of June but faces certain challenges. As its report says:

*“Migrant children are especially vulnerable during this critical time. In addition to the heightened risk for domestic abuse, the economic hardships placed on migrant families as a result of COVID-19 will increase the likelihood that children enter the workforce. Teachers are respected pillars of their school communities and the more they can be empowered to support children and families, the less risk there is for school dropout. Teachers will be trained to holistically support migrant children and their families through this difficult time. Teachers want to support children during this critical time, but need training and resources to do so safely and effectively.”*

(Excerpts taken from “Educational Continuity for Migrant Children in Tak Province – A Joint Concept Note” published by TeacherFOCUS, the Burmese Migrant Teachers’ Association (BMTA), The Migrant Educational Coordination Center (MECC), the Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HwF), and the Burmese Migrant Workers’ Education Committee)

Recognizing the impacts of COVID-19 on marginalized people all around the world, we at MSEP hope that our community will help us to support this migrant education community by making donations through the Bishop’s University Foundation. Over the years, the migrant education leaders in Mae Sot have become our partners and friends. As recent events have shown, the world is not so big after all. While remaining always cognizant of the needs of people here in Canada who are suffering right now, we hope that you will share our commitment to extend support to these others, beyond our own borders at this challenging time.

**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.**

## What about our Volunteering Plans for this Year?

First a word from volunteer Claire Keddy, writing from Nova Scotia:

*Several months of preparation and even more time spent getting excited to volunteer in Mae Sot, only to be put on hold by COVID! These upcoming months were to be a “bucket list” adventure for me. Unfortunately, the situation has turned into a rollercoaster, full of ups and downs with uncertainty around each corner. When will I be able to safely travel to Mae Sot? What will my summer and fall look like now? How can I continue to make a positive impact on vulnerable populations at home and abroad? I am not alone in my uncertainty - not in Canada and surely not around the world. While I am disappointed, I am privileged to have been chosen to represent MSEP and I am grateful for the experience thus far. I am optimistic about my being able to go on my trip; until then, there are myriad ways to support MSEP and the migrant/refugee community in Mae Sot from afar. I look forward to continued opportunities to learn and teach!*

Is there any likelihood of MSEP sending a volunteer to Mae Sot this year? While Claire has been enthusiastic about going if the possibility exists in late August (for example), the bottom line for any decision made by the Project Committee will be the travel advisories of the Canadian and Thai governments, policies of travel insurance companies and of course the existence of safe travel routes. At present it seems unlikely that all systems would be go at any point this year. However, as it is not really necessary to make a decision at this point, we have chosen to bide our time in doing so. We will keep you posted.

In the meantime, we are planning to send our annual donations to our partners and are thinking about ways to support them from afar. We know that the BMWEC needs assistance with its website development and one or two schools may be in a position to make use of a volunteer teacher electronically. We are trying to think creatively about how to assist them in new ways.

## **MSEP's ANNUAL RAFFLE: We need your help!**

The MSEP annual raffle is still on and this year gives us an opportunity to do a bit of much needed publicity for local businesses, donors to our fundraising efforts. See the list of prizes they have generously donated below. Please support us - and them.

To purchase tickets, contact MSEP Committee members Judy Keenan (819-346-7058 or [jkeenan32@hotmail.com](mailto:jkeenan32@hotmail.com)), Graham Moodie (819-823-8147 or [grahammoodie@sympatico.ca](mailto:grahammoodie@sympatico.ca)), or Mary Purkey (819-346-7278 or [marypurkey@gmail.com](mailto:marypurkey@gmail.com)). We will reserve tickets for you. Payment by cheque or exact change would be appreciated as it would facilitate minimal handling of monies at this time. The drawing will take place in the fall at what we hope will be an outdoor garden event (date to be announced).

**Education  
changes lives.  
Help these kids  
get an education!  
25 Great Prizes to win and a  
Good Cause to Support!**



**Tickets: \$5 each (\$4 for students) or 3 tickets for \$10**

1. Grand prize: A gift certificate for lunch for two from Manoir Hovey
2. A gift of pottery by local artist Lucy Doheny
- 3-4. One lunch buffet and one evening buffet from Restaurant Le Shalimar
- 5-6. Two \$25 gift certificates from microbrasserie Le Siboire
7. \$30 gift certificate from Chanchai Restaurant Thailandais
8. \$25 gift certificate from Restaurant Persepolis
9. \$25 gift certificate from La boulangerie Les Vraies Richesses
10. \$25 gift certificate from Clarke et fils, Ltee.
11. A family pass (2 adults and 2 children) for Visite sous terre Capelton Mines (\$65 value)
12. A carrot cake from Saveurs et Gourmandises
13. \$25 gift certificate from Provigo – Lennoxville
14. A Bishop's sweater from Doolittle's Coop
15. A collection of books on naïve art from Galerie Jeannine Blais 102 rue Mai, North Hatley J0B 2C0
16. \$25 gift certificate from Ça Beigne
- 17-18. Two \$20 gift certificates from Familiprix – Lennoxville
- 19 -20. Two prizes of free movies passes (2 and 3) from Maison de Cinema
- 21-22. Two \$15 gift certificates from Restaurant Rima
23. A Woman's tuque (\$45 value) from Tri-Knit-T
24. "Tea for Two" at / from Uplands Cultural and Heritage Centre
25. \$20 gift certificate from Café Général Conserverie

## MSEP Volunteering Next Year?

Optimism is especially important right now. With that in mind, we want you to know that we do plan to launch volunteer recruitment for 2021 in the fall. As announced in our last newsletter, we will offer both a 3-month volunteer option (which could be either June through August or September through November, 2021) and our traditional 6-month volunteer opportunity (June – December, 2021). We will also ask volunteers to make a modest financial contribution to the overall approximately \$4800 cost of sending them to Mae Sot. While details are still being developed, we expect that contribution to be in the neighbourhood of \$2500. Fundraising will remain an important part of the project work particularly as we are committed to assisting our partners financially.

In addition, we hope to interest some Champlain and Bishop's faculty as well as retired teachers in undertaking

short-term teacher training or teaching stints in Mae Sot, in academic research related to forced migration and education issues, or in other forms of assistance to migrant school partners. For example, this month, we received a specific request for someone to assist the BMWEC in helping to renovate its website. We would be very happy to be able to recruit someone to undertake this task, which could perhaps be done from Canada.

In sum, Canadian youth (and elders!) will continue to desire and benefit from the opportunity to experience other cultures and serve marginalized communities in distant corners of the world. With that in mind, we will think positively and continue to plan, knowing that circumstances either here in Canada or in Southeast Asia may force us to abort our mission.



(Top row: Mary, Calila and Felix, Barbara; Middle row: Judy, Graham, Volunteer Claire; Bottom row: Tyler, Dania, Garry)

**From all of us at  
the Mae Sot  
Education Project,  
a wish: May you  
stay well,  
connected to  
those you love and  
engaged in the  
world.**

### *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), 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).