



# Mae Sot Education Project

## Newsletter

### December 2020

<https://maesot.ubishops.ca>

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

## Our message to our community

From all of us at the Mae Sot Education Project: Thank you for caring. May you stay well, connected to those you love and engaged in the project of creating a better world - especially during this season.

### MSEP Volunteering Next Year?

Earlier this year, we indicated that we were choosing to be optimistic about the possibility of sending volunteers to Mae Sot in 2021-22. While the pandemic is currently very daunting, we *are* planning, knowing that if we do not plan now, we will not be able to seize opportunities for volunteers if/when they do arise. We held three Zoom meetings for interested students during November as well as a Facebook event and are receiving applications through January 11th. We will then do our interview and selection process, again on Zoom. We hope to have a team and to begin preparation in February. Everyone understands that if Covid does not permit travel to Thailand, because of Thai or Canadian government travel constraints, it will not happen until the situation improves sufficiently. For now, we are pleased that students have shown interest in imagining life beyond Covid!

**VOLUNTEER**  
**THE MAE SOT EDUCATION PROJECT**  
For BU and Champlain students who care about international development and the right to education  
NOW ACCEPTING APPLICANTS TO VOLUNTEER IN THAILAND FOR SUMMER AND FALL 2021!  
Application deadline: January 11th, 2021  
Contact us!  
[maesoteducationproject@gmail.com](mailto:maesoteducationproject@gmail.com)  
[www.maesot.ubishops.ca](http://www.maesot.ubishops.ca)  
@maesoteducation  
@maesoteducationproject

## In Mae Sot, our partners struggle on amidst school closures.

Our partners in Mae Sot have had a rough year to say the least. First, we are extremely sad to share the news that Hsa Mu Htaw Learning Centre, our original project partner, has had to shut down. Its headmistress, Daw Htet Htet Aung, was stranded in Myanmar when the border between Thailand and Myanmar closed and has not been able to return to tend the school grounds during the spring, summer and fall when all migrant learning centres were forced to close (temporarily) because of Covid. In addition, the donor organization that was paying the rent found the situation untenable and withdrew its support.

Daw Htet Htet Aung has devoted many years of her life to creating a rich learning environment for migrant children in



Daw Htet Htet Aung and 2019 volunteer Mari Ann in better days

Mae Sot. From the beginning, we were drawn to working with her because of the atmosphere of civility she created at her school, the good manners and care for others that she instilled in the children. It remains to be seen whether she will be able to restart this school project in the wake of Covid.



Learning Centre home schooling during Covid times

Our other partners have managed to continue their home-based learning activities through the fall. At one point in early October, it appeared that migrant schools might be able to re-open. Thai schools had opened during the summer. However, small Covid outbreaks in the Burmese market in Mae Sot and in one of the refugee camps in the region caused the Thai authorities to withdraw permission for re-openings. The situation in Tak Province is gradually returning to normal, but migrant learning centres still must have permission from local village/section leaders and medics from village/section clinics in order to open.

Along with teaching children in a wide variety of locales under difficult conditions, migrant educators have used this time to hold workshops on curriculum development and explore ways of mimicking Myanmar education initiatives, one of which is the use of TV or social media to broadcast lessons so that children can potentially study at home – where access and conditions permit.

In addition the Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC), in collaboration with other education organizations, has used the time to create a taskforce to review the BMWEC's Child Protection guidelines. The Migrant Learning Centre for Child Protection Taskforce (MLCCPT) held a workshop in November to prepare a team to do assessments in schools in order to determine how to make the guidelines more effective.

In October, BMWEC also held an Organizational Development Workshop with one of its donors in order to create a new 10-year plan for migrant education. The new vision will strive to put migrant standard education on a par with ASEAN standard education. BMWEC needs support and guidance from different education organizations and is thus inviting anyone who wants to take part in this journey to share their visions and strategies with current donors and partner organizations.

A final note from the border: One organization that has managed to stay active in supporting teacher training in Mae Sot during this time is *Teacher Focus Myanmar*. *Teacher Focus* is also working to enroll children in Royal Thai Schools, as much as possible and in that vein has its own fundraiser going this month. While we are, of course, eager to have our community support MSEP, we also feel that support for this work is important. More information about it can be found on the project's web site at <https://www.teacherfocusmyanmar.org/>.



## What about MSEP's efforts to stay engaged?

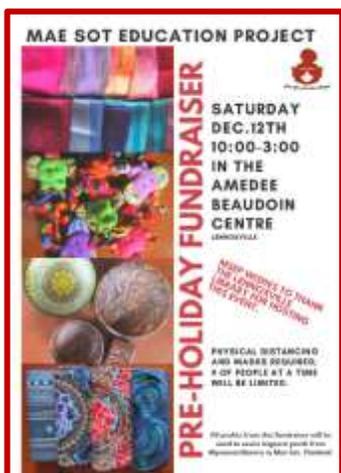


MSEP Project Committee Members at our December meeting

and meeting once a week with their groups. We hope in the coming months to launch a pen pal project with another group of students. However, at present, our partners find it difficult to manage more than the basics they deliver during their home visits. Finally, we are continuing to provide some financial support for special needs that schools have during this time. Transportation to help teachers reach children for home schooling has been a particular challenge. We are truly happy to be able to offer solidarity and support from afar – even if only in small ways.

The fall has been a quiet time for MSEP, of necessity. However, we have continued to Zoom with a group of students at BHSOH, one of our long-time partner schools in Mae Sot. Most recently, we have benefited from the expertise of Lee Sullivan Lapp and Susan Renaud who have each taken on a small group of students to work on their English-speaking skills. The project is especially challenging for students who have only mobile phones with which to connect. We are extremely grateful to Lee and Susan for their willingness to devote their time and energy (and considerable EFL skills) to planning lessons

## The fundraiser that didn't happen!



Raising funds during a pandemic presents a serious challenge. As you can see from the poster here, we had hoped to be able to offer people in our community some meaningful holiday gifts from our selection of goods from Thailand. We could not. However, *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*. You may also donate by cheque through the Bishop's 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.**

### *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 \$167,000 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 (2017 volunteer), Graham Moodie, Dania Paradis-Bouffard (2017 volunteer), Mary Purkey, Garry Retzleff, Barbara Rowell (2005 volunteer) and Calila Tardif (2016 volunteer).