



# Mae Sot Education Project

## Newsletter

### Spring 2021

<https://maesot.ubishops.ca>

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

#### Planning for the future - Our 2021 volunteers speak



Sara Watson



Camila Garzon Orjuela



Claire Keddy

MSEP is fortunate to have in our midst three amazing young women who are willing to go through all the preparation the project requires without having a definite assurance that they will be able to go to Mae Sot. We are extremely grateful to them for this act of faith. We are also excited to have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from their energy, intelligence, powers of reflection and life experiences. Sara is a student of Neuro-psychology at Bishop's, and Claire will graduate from Bishop's this spring with a degree in Sociology. Camila is in the last months of the nursing program at Champlain. Each brings different talents to the project, but as you can see from what they have written below, all share aspirations and a commitment to values in keeping with MSEP's mission.

#### From Claire

*Given the ever-shifting and unprecedented times we are living in due to the coronavirus, it may seem an odd time to be thinking about life overseas, let alone travelling. My participation with MSEP has to do with a desire for cultural immersion and volunteering which provides an opportunity to both teach and learn. Beyond that, I am committed to the project and its vision of a more just, socially responsible world where peoples of all cultures and identities can connect and grow together. The project is, for me, a way to expand my horizons at present and in the future as a global citizen. I am humbled to be able to use my privilege and passion to contribute to work that is needed now more than ever in supporting marginalized and vulnerable populations. Whether at home or abroad, MSEP is a platform to connect with open-minded, like-minded, diverse individuals. In this age of simultaneous hyper-connectedness and isolation, meaningful and impactful connection and cross-cultural awareness is so needed.*

#### From Sara

*From a young age, I've been fascinated by global issues and had a deep appreciation for the cultural diversity of our world. The cultural context of volunteering in Mae Sot Thailand certainly appeals to me especially as I learn more about Myanmar's people, history and diverse cultures. Furthermore, I've always wanted to live a life in which I can have a positive impact in the*

world, to use the advantages I've had to help others who may not have had it as easy. I believe that education is one of the best ways to accomplish this goal.

Since the declaration of a global pandemic a year ago, I've experienced many changes to the "normal" I always took for granted. However, the opportunity to reflect on what brings true meaning to my life has led me to see that undertaking something beyond my studies will help guide me towards future goals in life. With the current global pandemic having exacerbated many pre-existing issues and injustices faced by many around the world, now feels like the right time for me to undertake a project that could help make some positive change. I am also thrilled to be involved in this amazing project and feel very privileged to be able to work alongside other great volunteers and committee members.

#### From Camila

My name is Camila Garzon. I was born in Colombia and at the age of 10, came to Canada with my family. This is my tenth year living in this beautiful country, and I understand the difficulties and challenges of learning a new language as I have had to learn two since coming here.

This year is my last year in the nursing program at Champlain college. I took this career path because I want to help people, but more importantly, people in other territories or countries who don't have the same resources and possibilities that we have. It's also for this reason that I chose this project. I know it is a bit different from my career path, but we can help people in so many different ways. So, I will give my best and try to help the children in Mae Sot to expand their horizons and improve their lives by learning a new language. They may live with many difficulties and inequalities, but they also have the right to have a good education. This project will be a wonderful and fulfilling experience for me, the children and the rest of the team. I'm really happy to be participating in it.

## Planning for the future - What about the situation in Mae Sot?

### For our partners: first covid and now a coup!

*Young BMWEC staff members express their solidarity with compatriots in Myanmar*

When considering Myanmar/Burma, it does sometimes seem that the more things change, the more they stay the same. In recent years governments, international NGOs and even the UNHCR have prepared for the possibility that Myanmar people in the refugee camps and towns along the border would soon be able to return to their home country. Today, in March 2021, in the wake of last month's coup, that possibility seems distant at best.

Our partners worry about loved ones at risk while at the same time expressing their support for the resistance to the military government that has developed in the last weeks. As the border remains closed due to Covid, the opportunities for migrant people in Mae Sot to help or to give any meaningful support (or refuge) to those on the other side has been thwarted. Meanwhile, Covid has made it difficult for them to earn livelihoods. School closures have left migrant children footloose and often unsupervised as parents seek work, and sometimes the children are also having to work. Thus the project of migrant education has suffered.



In spite of this reality, we have been deeply moved by migrant educators' determination to get through this time, by their persistence and their faith in the future. They have created a network of organizations that have collaborated to build a program of home-based learning activities that has run for the last six months. They have held teacher training workshops to build knowledge and capacity to meet children's and families' needs during the pandemic, and they have also looked to the future, developing plans to bring migrant education more in line with ASEAN standards. While the coup has undermined their ability to proceed with these plans, it has not stopped them from working hard to accomplish what they can.

Our partners have asked educational institutions and people wherever to support their efforts – not only financially but with their expertise. In the coming academic year (which normally begins in June in Thailand), we hope to be able to be part of this project, and we welcome others in our community who would like to share this journey with us.



## The Thai Government response to the coup along the border

The following information comes from contacts in Mae Sot involved in political civil society organizations who wish to remain anonymous.

Because of Covid-19, the border between Myanmar and Thailand was already controlled very strictly by the Thai security guards before the coup. Official border crossings have been closed even to commerce at times. Now, the situation has worsened especially for friends from civil society organizations in Myanmar who want to come to Thailand because they are under threat by the military regime. While some people are managing to sneak across the porous border, either for work or for political reasons, many have been arrested in Thailand. Others have been pushed back across the border.

Perhaps to cope with the new situation, the Thai National Security Force has set up seven camps to receive Myanmar refugees, in particular in four townships, including the Mae Sot area, in Tak province. Currently, these camps are empty, no doubt because of the strict border policies. A recent report by Human Rights Watch calls on the Thai government to respect the international principle of nonrefoulement: "Thai authorities should stop pushing back people who are fleeing

Myanmar," said [Bill Frelick](#), refugee and migrant rights director at Human Rights Watch. 'The Thai government should immediately allow all asylum seekers fleeing the violent crackdown in Myanmar access to desperately needed protection.'

(<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/10/thailand-stop-border-pushbacks-provide-protection>).

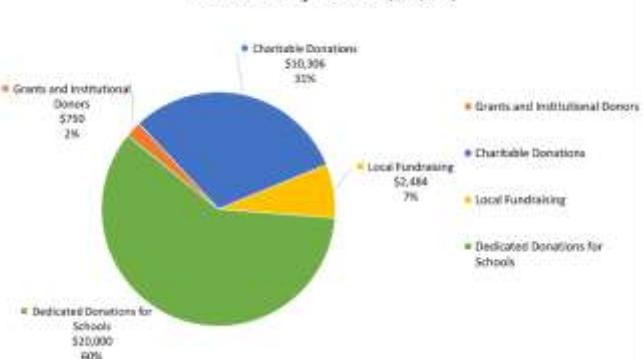
Finally, the Democratic Voice of Burma has also reported that recently, there have been some protests against the Myanmar military regime in Bangkok organized by Myanmar people. In response the Thai migration authorities have issued a statement threatening those who participate in protests with revocation of their visas and deportation. However, in Mae Sot, the relationship between authorities and the migrant community seems stable and less confrontational. It is clear from all our communication with friends in Mae Sot that people in the migrant community strongly support the resistance to the illegitimate military take-over of their country and remain hopeful that democracy, such as it has been under Aung San Suu Kyi, can be restored in spite of the severity of the military's actions.

## Our Finances in 2020

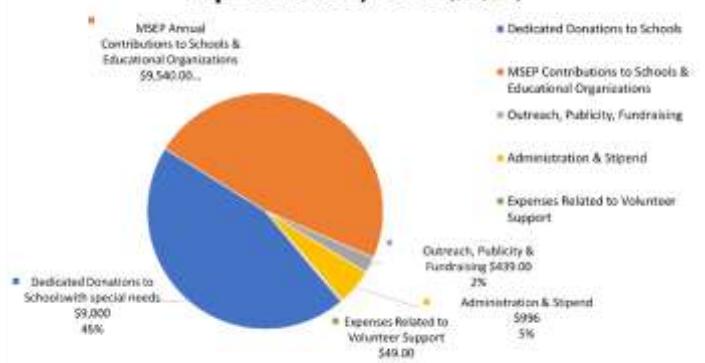
As we all know, 2020 was no ordinary year. Like so much in our community, MSEP activities came to a standstill. After our raffle, fundraising opportunities became impossible (which meant no Thai-Burmese Dinner!). In spite of this problem, our revenues for the year show that our community was generous. The charts below are skewed a bit because both show a large donation that is dedicated to a school with particular needs. This donation aside, we received more than \$10,000 in donations from people in our community and beyond.

On the expenditures side, we were prevented by Covid-related problems from making full use of our assets: Volunteers could not travel. Thus our expenditures for volunteer support were reduced almost to zero. In addition, migrant learning centres in Mae Sot were forced to close their campuses to students. We continued to make our normal donations to our partners to help them pay their on-going expenses (rent, electricity, etc.); however, one school had to close completely. In addition, we could not make full use of the dedicated donation, since the school in question was not receiving students and did not have the same needs. It is for this reason, our expenditures have been less than our revenues – a most remarkable situation for us actually. Finally, we did make a number of special donations for Covid-related needs (sanitation equipment, transportation for teachers doing home-based learning activities, etc.) and were very glad to be able to give some support to our partners. We look forward to schools reopening and resumption of volunteer assistance before the end of 2021!

**Revenue, 2020 (\$33,540)**



**Expenditures, 2020 (\$20,024)**



**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 2020 through January 2021

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 many others who have faithfully supported our fundraisers. **Thank you all!**

### We wish to thank these organizations & institutions

Bishop's University  
Champlain College – Lennoxville  
SECCl (Champlain Teachers Union)  
St Mark's Chapel

### and these businesses

Boucherie Les Vraies Richesses  
Ça Beigne  
Chanchai  
Restaurant Thailandais  
Clarke et fils, Ltee.  
Doolittle's Coop  
Familiprix – Lennoxville  
Galerie Jeannine Blais  
Maison de Cinema  
Manoir Hovey  
Microbrasserie Le Siboire

Provigo – Lennoxville  
Restaurant Le Shalimar  
Restaurant Persepolis  
Restaurant Rima  
Saveurs et Gourmandises  
Tri-Knit-T  
Uplands Cultural and Heritage Centre  
Visite sous terre Capelton  
Mines

### and these individuals

Daniel Camirand  
Caroline Chabot Chartier  
Gordon Craig  
Gerald Cutting  
Melanie Cutting  
Marie Dagenais  
Dinah Duffield  
Lucinda Doheny  
Lewis & Catherine Evans  
Antoine Fortin-Veilleux  
Carol Harris  
Rodger & Meryle  
Karen Allatt  
Stephen Allatt  
Loïc Arguin-Mercier  
Pamela Bertram  
Carinne Bevan  
Ross M. Bishop  
Helen & Stephen Black  
James & Helena Brodie  
Peter Bulow

Peter & Carolyn Jones  
Joanne Kingsley  
Maryse Lafleche  
Sheila MacLean & Brian Talbot  
Fiona Macleod  
Jean Manore  
Lissa McRae & Bill Robson  
Dugal Monk  
Graham Moodie  
Denis & Angela Petitclerc  
Emily Prangley Desormeaux  
Robert & Mary Purkey  
Susan L. Renaud  
Garry & Marjorie Retzleff  
Marianne Rodrigue  
Martyn Sadler  
Mary Sweeny  
Beverly Taber  
Johanne Thomson-Sweeny

## 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).