



The Mae Sot Education Project

Canadians working for Burmese Migrant Children in Thailand

A Newsletter to our Supporters – Late Summer 2012

Check us out at www.ubishops.ca/maesot.

BHSOH Students get inspiration from a Holocaust Survivor – thanks to Volunteer, Meaghan Moniz

An account of an extraordinary teaching experience by Volunteer Meaghan Moniz

These past couple of months working at Parami and BHSOH schools have been so incredible that there are no words to express them. The highlight of my time so far however, has definitely been working with the Grade 10 class at BHSOH. This class was surprisingly slow to start; the students seemed to lack an interest in learning. However, almost all had expressed enthusiasm in learning about human rights, and so in an attempt to spark their interest, I decided to start reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* with them under the assumption that at their age they had already learned all about the Holocaust. Well, was I ever wrong! Not only had most of them never heard of the Holocaust; they were all completely shocked and amazed to hear that something so terrible had occurred. It seemed that I had unintentionally opened a floodgate to a world of never ending questions, which has led to me teaching about the Holocaust for the past two months in this class. This has been an amazing teaching experience for me so far, and as I am faced with new questions and a new eagerness to learn every time I step foot into class, I think it has been a great learning experience for my students as well.



Projector problems!!

For the past two weeks we have been working up to a particular activity, which in my opinion has resulted in the greatest learning experience yet. I recruited a Holocaust Survivor from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to call us at BHSOH via computer to tell the students her story. My students worked hard to develop and practice presenting questions to ask, as well as to become as educated as possible on the topic.

The call took place this weekend, and it was everything I hoped for my students albeit with a few complications – something I have come to expect here in Mae Sot. First when it came time to set up, the projector would not connect to my computer without electrifying the entire thing! We tried a different laptop but couldn't display the image. Finally, we just decided to use my laptop with no projector; however, the internet was very slow which meant that the people on the other end kept freezing and cutting out. In the end we had to mute the microphone on our end to make it faster, which meant that when it came time for questions my students had to go up to the computer and send their questions via chat. Although the interview did not go as planned, in the end it was an amazing experience nonetheless.

The best part of the call was my students having the chance to ask their questions and hear the Survivor's reply. The questions that my students thought up were so insightful and well put together that I couldn't help feeling like a proud parent watching

their eyes light up as they finally got the answers they had been hoping for. As older students, many of them have very strong opinions and feelings regarding the conflict in Burma, and they were very eager to make a connection with someone who had had an experience with some similarities; therefore many of their questions related to her personal feelings about her experience. Among their questions were: what were her feelings when she was forced to leave her home, family and friends, to escape, and even though so much time has gone by, does she still think about the family and friends that were left behind and lost? These are experiences that the students are very familiar with, and it was very moving to hear the Survivor's responses, and to hear her talking as well with such forgiveness and a desire to spread a message of unity and acceptance of all. Even the many younger students who were listening in and who knew nothing about the Holocaust were able to understand these very important universal messages.

From the comments my students shared with me later, I feel that they really connected with her answers. Watching my students make this connection with the Holocaust Survivor and vice versa was both powerful and amazing to watch. All in all, this amazing teaching experience has caused me to find a deep passion for teaching I never knew I had. I hope that the experience of hearing the Holocaust Survivor talk and hearing her message has made a lasting impact on my students and that I will be able to continue to ignite in them a passion for learning.

Sad news – Remembering our Partner, Say Ta Nar Learning Centre

Among the most difficult challenges that migrant schools face is the need to find rental properties that are appropriate for meeting their objectives and that are available for rent. Say Ta



Nar, one of our first partners, has been a school that touched our hearts in part at least because it was located in the home of Headmaster Pho Cho

How you can help

Contributions to the Mae Sot Education Project are always welcome, and tax receipts for donations will be issued. Donations may be made to either the Champlain College Foundation (*specify Mae Sot Education Project*) or to the Bishop's University Foundation (*specify Mae Sot Education Project*), Box 67, Champlain College, Sherbrooke, Quebec J1M 2A1.

and his wife and fellow teacher Nee Shar. In their small (2 ½ rooms plus a porch) raised teak house, they raised their two children and taught another 70 or so other children. Initially, the student population was smaller. As the numbers grew and the school became noisier, relationships with neighbours deteriorated. Last year, the landlady told Pho Cho that he would have to find another location. Not so easily done, as it turns out.

Moving the school to a location not requiring transportation for the students was a necessity given decreasing funds available from donor organizations. While we were able to pay the rent for the little house, we simply did not have the capacity to help find and fund a new location. In the end, it proved impossible to relocate. In June the Say Ta Nar closed, and the students were parceled out to other migrant schools. With considerable sadness and frustration, Pho Cho and Nee Shar gathered their two children and their belongings and headed for Mae La Refugee Camp to live with family. The loss of this intimate, happy school will be felt by many. Pho Cho and Nee Shar were among the most creative of the educators we have known in Mae Sot, integrating participatory activities, critical thinking tasks and environmental and human rights education into their curriculum. They will no doubt teach at Mae La, and children there will benefit from their enthusiastic and creative approach to their work. However, their absence from their little Mae Sot house will leave a great silence. The neighbours may be happy, but we and the migrant children they served miss the noise.

A Volunteer's Experience of a School Closing... and a New Partner

By Volunteer Gabriella Brault-Fortier

After having taught at Say Ta Nar for only 3 weeks I was faced with the harsh reality that it was closing, I could hardly believe it. Despite my short time there, I already felt part of the family. As I arrived that morning, I found the whole school, crammed into the classroom, listening to Nee Shar, the headmaster's wife, tell the students the news. But first I noticed Pho Cho, the headmaster, just outside the classroom uncharacteristically smoking a cigarette; he smoked it carefully as if it was his first one in years. He had puffy red eyes and once in a while a tear would fall down his cheek as he half listened to his wife and half stared off into the distance. We just sat there in silence. I felt helpless and confused.

Not really knowing why the school had to close was the hardest part of situation. I tried to understand the problem Pho Cho and Nee Shar were facing, thinking it would help me find solutions for them. I felt heartbroken for all the years of hard work they put into their school, making the students feel safe and part of a family every day. I thought about how the students would now have to change schools. I wondered what would happen to the teachers? These questions made the whole situation emotionally overwhelming.

One thing I will miss about teaching at Say Ta Nar were the talks Pho Cho and I had about the situation in Burma. One day he asked me to sit with him while we sipped our coffee. He wanted to explain to me why I was at once lucky and unlucky. I was curious to hear why he thought I was unlucky as I could guess why he thought I was lucky... He started with, "Do you know why you're lucky?" I shifted uncomfortably as I stuttered an embarrassed: "Well I get to travel, I'm in university, I have all the privileges that come with being Canadian..." He nodded in agreement and then said, "As lucky as you are to have traveled here, you will never be able to understand our situation like we do. You can only read about Burma in textbooks or see it in

documentaries." I chirped in, "Or hear stories from you!" He just continued on, "Whereas I have lived it. It gives me a reason to fight for these kids. I understand them and know what they have been through and what is to come." Hearing this made me feel insignificant and question what my role was in all of this. My passion could never compare to Pho Cho's because these were his people and his country that he was fighting for. Although it did make me feel uncomfortable, I think Pho Cho was only trying to make me understand that he wasn't sad solely because of his school closing; it was much bigger than that.

As I have met teachers from Say Ta Nar, Hsa Mu Htaw, Hlee Bee I have learnt that one common reason for being a teacher in Mae Sot is to be a leader for the children of Burma. Hearing this first from Su Su, an English teacher at Hsa Mu Htaw, I immediately thought of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. These teachers strive to make a difference however they can, and they chose to work with the future generation. Another teacher told me that he didn't choose to be a teacher but rather his country demanded that of him. He saw that the children needed good teachers and so he stepped up to the plate. He is one of the most devoted teachers I have met thus far; he spends countless hours preparing for classes, playing and eating with the kids.



Children at work at Moe Ma Ka Learning Centre

Say Ta Nar, is a school by day and the headmaster's house by night. Like Say Ta Nar, it has about 80 students. I couldn't ask for a more welcoming school. Every day I am greeted with a cup of coffee, big smiles and "Hello teacher!" Before starting class, we sing, this week the "hokey-pokey dance", and the students absolutely love it! Sometimes, one student will start singing while doing his work, and the others will join in. They enjoy learning, especially French and Grammar competition games, and are happy to be in school. MMK provides them with a safe environment where they can share and learn without judgment. The headmaster is there when I need him to help me translate some words into Burmese but also knows when to step back in order to not cramp my style. Overall, I am happy to have found this little "treasure in the ocean" – literally since almost every day their street is flooded regardless of how much it has rained. But that, along with riding your bicycle with one hand while holding an umbrella in the other, is just something you get used to here in Mae Sot.

A Happier Story – Hlee Bee School loses a facility and gets a new one

Last year one of our partners, Hlee Bee Learning Centre, went through a crisis when the owner of the property on which the school was situated died. The land passed to members of his family who wanted to reclaim it. A number of school buildings that had been built by donors had to be destroyed. The good news is that the new owners of the property also set aside a new piece of land on which two new buildings, albeit smaller, could be built. This June marked the beginning of classes in the new buildings. They are warehouse-like structures with tin roofs and partial sides,

The closing of Say Ta Nar meant that I had a new challenge: to help the project find a new migrant school. It did not take long. I visited Moe Ma Kha (MMK) on a Friday and started teaching there the next Wednesday. MMK, like

as can be seen in the photo below. Lacking sufficient dividers between classrooms, they offer a challenging (and noisy) teaching



Hle Bee's new building under construction

and learning environment for kids and teachers. The school's situation, like that of Say Ta Nar Learning Centre, illustrates well the vulnerability of the migrant community, particularly because foreigners are not allowed to own property in Thailand.

Meanwhile, the school has many costs to be covered, including, for example:

- the cost of the roofs of the two new buildings
- water and electricity for April and May
- school bus roof
- school car license/registration
- new toilet floor
- gas for lunch cooking
- fix the road with soil for road between the buildings
- cd player repair
- ink for the school printer
- sewing machine materials

In the coming months, we will try to help Hle Bee cover at least some of these costs. Inevitably there will be other needs as well and prioritizing them and finding willing donors are constant challenges for the migrant school community. Donors also may become frustrated by the difficulty of insuring sustainability. However, the reality that the Burmese children are there, needing both protection and education, is one that can hardly be ignored.

More reflections from our volunteers in Mae Sot...

A personal view of Hle Bee...

By Volunteer Michelle Frise

I see the bed and breakfast sign ahead as my point of reference and turn down the unassuming road to my left. From the bustling market street you would never know that tucked back beyond this road is a small migrant, primary school called Hle Bee. But as I pedal my bike further down the small strip, I begin to hear it, the sound of children playing. I arrive at Hle Bee at lunchtime every day, a most fortunate time when I can witness the kids at their happiest. As



Michelle with Hle Bee kids in new building

I ride in, I hear a chorus line of "Hello, teacher!" and quickly get assistance with my bike and bags of teaching supplies. I pass a group of girls playing an inventive game of skip rope. Two girls hold the rope from either side making it a tight straight line, the other girls then take turns jumping over the rope and performing different "stunts" of twists and turns as they jump, a sort of inverted version of the limbo. The girls do not have a real skipping rope, of course, but only a long elastic band, dirty from days of use

and of falling in mud, dirt, and gravel. I walk further down the path and see many students I do not teach, but who run up to me to say hello and shake my hand (a gesture they have learned we perform in Canada, and one which they find endlessly amusing). The boys are playing a game of marbles with a kind of focus we might witness in a North American child playing a video game. By this time, even the worst morning, the worst mood, the worst sickness has been wiped clear from my day, and I have not yet even stepped into my first classroom.

My grade 3 class, the first one of the afternoon, is outside and under a roof made of leaves. There is a blackboard at the front of the class and the students sit on benches at two long tables. Although these students are very young and so have almost no spoken English skills to communicate with me, we are able to connect and socialize so easily. They are a rambunctious group of kids, each with their own story, their own lively personality. If I am lucky, I have come early enough to play cane ball with the boys just outside the grade 3 classroom (where we proceed to kick up red mud all over each other!). The girls and young boys don't usually play but run off to collect flowers to put in my hair. The students tell me when the bell rings (I have yet to hear it myself, perhaps being so caught up in our play). By the time they are seated at their tables with me at the front of the class listening to their chorus song of welcome, I cannot wipe the goofy smile off my face. I feel so honoured to be a part of their world.

When I walk through Hsaw Mu Htaw's gate...

By Volunteer Alexandra Marcotte

For a long time now, I've had the desire to write about my students at Hsa Mu Htaw. I've been wanting to write about the stars in their eyes, the smiles on their faces and the pride they reveal when their teacher says: "Yes! Good job!". It's just that whenever I want to, I get lost in my thoughts...



Alexandra with Hsa Mu Htaw students

I recall the sounds of laughter and joyful children's voices which indicates to me that I am close to the school. I recall the excitement of my students as they see me at the gate and run towards me: Teacher! Teacher!

I remember the first time I walked through that gate; it was on my very first day in Mae Sot when the other volunteers and I visited the project's partner schools. As I walked through the school gate that day, I hardly knew anything about those kids. I didn't know how generous and resourceful they were. I didn't know how energetic and willing they would be in class. But the kids, they knew who we were; they knew we were teachers. They knew we were Mary Purkey's teachers... As if that was all it takes, Daw Htet Htet Aung, the head mistress of Hsa Mu Htaw school welcomed us, and she, who knew nothing about Gabriella and I, said we were like her daughters and that she (as well as the rest of the school) would treat us like so. Daw Htet Htet Aung wants us to feel at home in her school. And it is exactly how I feel each time I cross the school's gate.

Every morning, in the rain or the sun, my students rush to the gate to be the lucky one who will carry my bike and hold my hands and my arms; escorting me to the classroom. As I enter the classroom, many of my younger students give me drawings they have made for me. Some of my students even give me bracelets, rings, and hair clips. Those kids who own barely anything are willing to offer me presents! It makes me really uncomfortable, but

I accept the presents with a big smile; I have to. My older students like to recite what I taught them the day before, to show me, with a smile on their face, that they remember it. I feel really privileged to teach to such wonderful and unique children.

Teaching at Hsa Mu Htaw is a wonderful experience. Daw Htet Htet Aung makes sure that the students are taught discipline and respect. I can see a huge difference in the behaviour of my students at HMH and my student at Hle Bee. I had never really taught before coming to Mae Sot, but I jumped into it with the ease of a child's play. Do not get me wrong, I understand the importance of my role and I take it very seriously. The truth is that I feel really confident in what I am doing and I really enjoy teaching. Besides, I am coming to really like that feeling of pride towards my students, when they come to understand what I am teaching them.

It is only after lunch time, when I've had the chance to taste delicious meals, when I've had a talk with the teachers, and when I've played with my students, that I leave HMH school exactly as I entered it: with my students holding my hands and my arms. I give them all a high-five and I get on my bike. Before I go, I look through the closed gate and watch my students waving their hands and smiling at me: «Good bye teacher!» «See you tomorrow!»

Minmahaw Performs Cinderella

By Volunteer Alexis Chouan

When I first arrived at Minmahaw, I was handed the "Lear class" — 7 students with the lowest level of English in the school. The Minmahaw Post-10 School is an English immersion program for 36 Burmese youths, preparing them for leadership roles in future professional or academic life. With this class, such ambitious goals promised, at the very least, to be challenging. These students were told they could not speak English and therefore, believed they never would. The most urgent need to attend to was their confidence.

For the first month, it was impossible to get a word out of Htet Wai Aung, the student known among Minmahaw teachers as "our lost puppy." Asking the class a question would elicit blank stares from Ngu Wah and Ehree, while Antonio and Myo Sat Aung quickly threw out one of the words written on the board, hoping to get away with a right answer. I needed to find a way to change this fear of failure.

Every week at Minmahaw, one of the classes presents a ten-minute entertainment segment during our school assembly. Though this performance is usually left to the students, I decided to step in when it was Lear's turn. Our recent work had led us to explore



Cinderella and her fairy godmother

class we would be preparing a play for their assembly, *Cinderella* quickly emerged as a class favourite for us to work on. While they were full of creative ideas, getting these students to write a script did not happen without a lot of negotiation and trying to get out of it on their part. I did not yield. Finally, they completed a four-scene rendition of the story and spent a week that went by all too fast rehearsing,

fairly tales through film and text. Though these were engaging cultural references, my students had been sitting in their chairs for far too long. It was time to mix things up.

When I told the class we would be

gathering costumes, rehearsing, working on pronunciation, and rehearsing some more.

On August 10, the Lear students performed their *Cinderella*. Myo Ngel Lay was applauded in her stunning transformation from rags to riches, as the title character. The usually so gentle Kin Thae Aye summoned her dark side to depict a haughty stepmother. As for "lost puppy", he found his voice in a smashing drag performance as the fairy godmother. Am I biased in my appreciation of my students? Of course. But I was not alone in my praise. The student body laughed so loud the actors had to pause their dialogue to be heard. Many expressed interest in seeing the play again. Good thing I caught it all on video.

This play was a breakthrough for my class. Thinking back on my first weeks, those students are not the same as the ones I saw on stage. From one day to the next, it can be hard to see improvement, but with *Cinderella* under our belt, I am thrilled to have another four months with them.



Parami Students raise funds by selling banana muffins made with a very special Eastern Townships recipe taught them by 2011 volunteer Megan Irving last winter.

Migrant Teachers in Mae Sot Nurture their own Dreams

By Volunteer Samantha Silva

When you imagine a high school or elementary school teacher, what do you see? A typical Canadian teacher can be anywhere from 25 years old and older. From what I have seen so far, in the migrant schools, apart some Burmese teachers who have taught for many years, the majority are young teachers, no older than many of the students they teach. Many have come from refugee camps in hopes of improving their English (by teaching English to younger children) and finding a way to go back to school. A few have come directly from a GED (General Education Diploma) program, but what I find most interesting is their own personal stories and what they want to do in the future.

Zaza is one of the many young teachers that I have met in Mae Sot. The first time I talked to her I thought that she was one of the students. She doesn't look any older than 18 or 19. She teaches English to younger children at Parami school and is perfect for the job. Her English is very good, and she has got enough energy for all of her classes and more! Zaza is a new teacher at Parami, and started only a few weeks before I did. She came from Mae La camp, along with a number of other new, young teachers. Once she has enough money, she plans on returning to school to study medicine.

Another young teacher with a very interesting story who I have had the opportunity to meet is Wah Wah Say. He came to Mae La camp from Myanmar in order to receive a job, and better education. By getting an education and a better job, he hopes to be able to support his mother and sister, who still live in Myanmar. He teaches basic English vocabulary to kindergarten and grade 1 students so that he can help the students, along with broadening his own vocabulary. Although he doesn't have the proper schooling to

go to university, he hopes to return to school so that he can eventually attend university in Australia and become a writer.

There are so many young teachers in Mae Sot who hope to be able to continue their studies one day. Although teaching gives these young people the chance to try teaching, for me it raises a question: what will happen to my own students once they finish in the migrant schools? How many of them will be able to continue their studies, and who will come back to the schools as teachers?

Our Project Evaluation is finally completed

Over the last year, two members of our committee, Dr. Sunny Manchu Lau and Mary Purkey, have conducted surveys of partners, donors and past volunteers and interviews with 2011 volunteers in order to assess some of the strengths and weaknesses of our project and identify areas for improvement in the coming years. We are grateful to all who took the time to respond to questionnaires and submit to interviews. It was clear that respondents have a positive view of the project as a whole, but they also had specific suggestions. Based on these suggestions, we know that we want to fine-tune our preparation of volunteers so that they feel more confident and competent when faced with the multitude of challenges in store for them. With the help of our donors, we hope to make it possible for those who would like to stay for nine months (i.e., the full school year) in Mae Sot to do so. We want to take measures to allow for more full and frequent communication with all partners. We also hope to structure our Project Committee and engage committee members so as to insure the sustainability of the project. Finally, we want to engage returned volunteers more fully in outreach here in Canada.

Copies of both the *MSEP Report on Project Evaluation* and the *Evaluation Report on Teaching English-as-a-second-language training of student volunteers* are available on request. Please contact Mary Purkey at marypurkey@gmail.com if you wish to receive either of these documents.

News from Burma

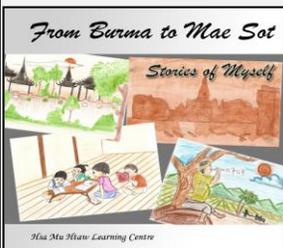
If you have followed developments in Burma over the last year, you will know that in January, several hundred very important political prisoners were released and the Karen in eastern Burma agreed to a cease fire with the army to allow for peace talks to begin. Media censorship also seems to be lifting. Thus for the first time in decades, we can see some signs in new government policies that the oppressive situation in the country may be changing for the better. You may be wondering how these developments affect our project.

Many in the world are eager to see an end to the economic sanctions and political isolation that military dictatorship has effectively created. Both humanitarian aid and development organizations and foreign investors see opportunities in Burma, in some cases out of a desire to help and in some cases for self-serving reasons. However, in a recent live video conference at Carlton University, hosted by Canadian Friends of Burma, democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi reaffirmed that the sanctions and isolation have succeeded in putting pressure on this repressive regime in recent years and that it is too soon to assume that “democracy has broken out”. She, other democracy activists and those leading the struggles of the ethnic peoples of Burma, along with international human rights organizations, have made it clear that the ordinary people of Burma, including those displaced to neighbouring countries, have yet to feel the impact of new government overtures. Indeed, although the government is nominally civilian, the military continues to dominate behind the scenes and more overtly in ethnic regions.

Recognizing the instability of the situation in their country and uncertain of its future, the people displaced from Burma, including our partners in Mae Sot, continue to face insecurity and hardship in Thailand. Thus continued advocacy and support for the Burmese people, both within Burma and along the borders, remain imperative.

FUNDRAISING & OUTREACH

First, our thanks to everyone who participated in our Thai Dinner benefit in April and / or our Auction of Burmese and Canadian art in June. Together, these events made about \$13,000, money that will help us both this and next year. If you missed the art auction and are interested in Burmese art from the border, let one of us know as there may be opportunities to purchase paintings in the coming year.



From Burma to Mae Sot – Stories of Myself

**A unique art project by Burmese
children reaching out to Canadians**

As many of you know, volunteer Anne Marie Laverdure initiated a project last year that resulted in the creation of a delightful and thought-provoking book of art and commentaries by the children of Hsa Mu Htaw Learning Centre. We would like to share this book with school classes, community groups and even leaders and politicians who are interested in learning more about the lives of Burmese migrant youth in Thailand. Please contact us if you are interested in hearing about the issues facing the Burmese people and receiving a copy of this book.

Burma/Myanmar’s Citizenship Laws: A problem demanding a solution

Among the major issues that lie ahead on the Burmese political horizon is the resolution of the situations of stateless people, particularly the Rohingya, a Muslim, ethnically Bengali people who have lived in western Burma at least since the British colonial era. The following paragraphs help to explain the human rights concerns around this issue. The article is reprinted from the International Observatory on Statelessness web site at <http://www.nationalityforall.org/burma-myanmar>. It is our view that the future of Burma depends on all its ethnic peoples joining hands to make a new society, something that cannot happen unless the government revises its citizenship laws so that they include all members of the society.

There are at least three groups of stateless persons originating in Burma, the Rohingya (see also Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Japan); native born but non-indigenous people, such as Indians; as well as children born in Thailand of Burmese parents.

The Rohingya are Muslims who reside in the northern parts of the Rakhine (historically known as Arakan) State, a geographically isolated area in western Burma, bordering Bangladesh. The British annexed the region after an 1824-26 conflict and encouraged migration from India. Since independence in 1948, successive Burmese governments have considered these migration flows as illegal. Claiming that the Rohingya are in fact Bengalis, they have refused to recognize them as citizens. Shortly after General Ne Win and his Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) seized power in 1962, the military government began to dissolve

Rohingya social and political organizations. The 1974 Emergency Immigration Act stripped Burmese nationality from the Rohingya. In 1977, Operation Nagamin (Dragon King) constituted a national effort to register citizens and screen out foreigners prior to a national census.

The resulting military campaign led to widespread killings, rape, and destruction of mosques and religious persecution. By 1978, more than 200,000 Rohingya had fled to Bangladesh. The Burmese authorities claimed that their flight served as proof of the Rohingya's illegal status in Burma.

Under the 1982 Citizenship Law, Rohingya were declared "non-national" or "foreign residents." This law designated three categories of citizens: (1) full citizens, (2) associate citizens, and (3) naturalized citizens. None of the categories applies to the Rohingya as they are not recognized as one of the 135 "national races" by the Myanmar government. More than 700,000 Rohingya in northern Rakhine today are effectively stateless and denied basic human rights.

An unknown number of Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) are stateless, though at least half a million could be affected. Thousands have been living in Burma for over four generations, not belonging to India or Burma. The last official census in Burma held in 1983 reported approximately 428,000 persons of Indian origin in Burma. The current population is estimated to be about 600,000, but according to the Indian government, as many as 2.5 million PIOs could be living in Burma. Only about 2,000 hold Indian passports. Although they have lived in Burma for more than four generations, they lack documentation required by the 1982 Burmese citizenship law and are therefore stateless. They cannot travel outside the country and face low economic status.

The Burmese government refuses to give citizenship to children born outside the country to Burmese parents who left illegally or

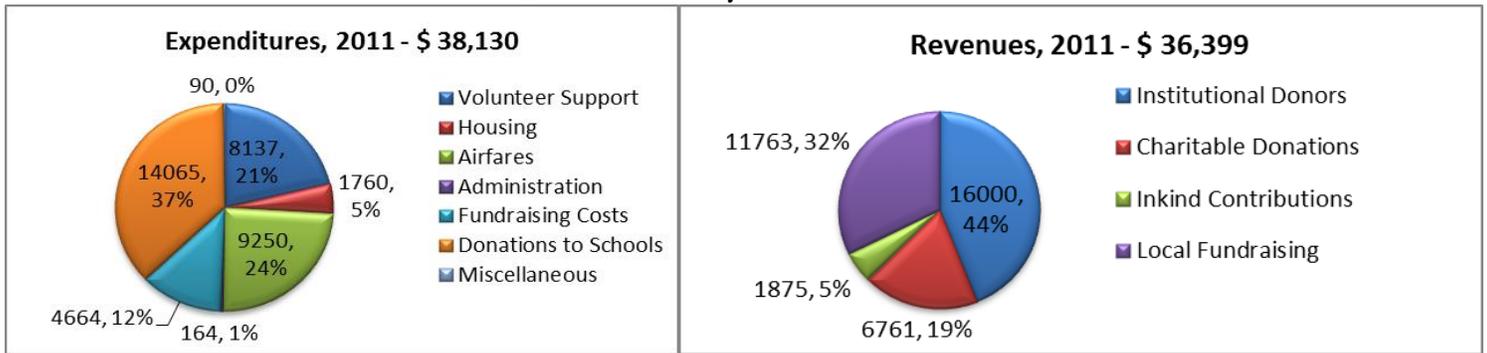
fled persecution. Children born in Thailand of Burmese descent do not have birth certificates and the parents do not have citizenship papers. Neither recognized by the Burmese government nor wanted by the Thai government, many of the roughly two million Burmese migrant workers and 150,000 Burmese refugees are effectively stateless as a result of not having citizenship documentation, and face lives of desperation.

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.

The Project Committee is made up of members of the community, faculty from Bishop's and Champlain, and former youth volunteers with the project. Currently, members are: Avril Aitken, Ron Bishop, Carinne Bevan, Catherine Isely, Sunny Lau, Anabel Pinero, Mary Purkey, Garry Retzleff, and Marjorie Retzleff, as well as former volunteers Barbara Rowell (2005), Emiily Prangley Desormeaux (2009), Megan Irving (2011) and Kathleen Mulawka (2011). Skylar Lepoidevin has left Canada to work for World Education at Umphum Mai Refugee Camp in Thailand.

A look at our finances in 2011



Remembering Say Ta Nar in photos...



Nee Shar and daughter



Volunteers enjoying Nee Shar's amazing cooking



Pho Cho teaching

Happy children in happier times