



The Mae Sot Education Project

A Youth Volunteer Project to assist Burmese refugee and migrant children on the Thai-Burmese border and...

to inform Canadians about the plight of people displaced by repression and conflict

www.maesot.ubishops.ca



Who are we? Why this project?

In the last decades, more than a million Burmese people have been forced by economic hardship, civil war or political repression in Burma/Myanmar to relocate to towns and refugee camps in Thailand. The *Mae Sot Education Project* (MSEP) is a small project, based in the Eastern Townships region of Québec, Canada. It tries to support the Burmese people in their struggle to create a new, inclusive and democratic society in Burma/Myanmar by contributing to the education of Burmese migrant children in Thailand. One day these youth will hopefully be able to return to their country in security and help to create a brighter future there. MSEP also tries to promote friendship and solidarity between

Québec

Canada ↘



↙ Thailand
Burma/Myanmar

Burmese, Thais and Canadians, to encourage protection of displaced people, and to deepen the global understanding of youth volunteers and other people in the Eastern Townships of Québec as well as in other parts of Canada.

What we do

- As a small, locally based project, we send student volunteers from Champlain College - Lennoxville and Bishop's University [in the Eastern Townships of Québec, Canada] to help in the teaching of English in schools for Burmese migrant children in and around Mae Sot, Thailand by animating English learning activities.
- We provide some financial assistance and classroom materials to partner schools.
- We develop the understanding, leadership and skills of the student volunteers.
- We encourage commitment to international cooperation and human rights in our community in Québec, Canada.
- We try to strengthen the ties of friendship and understanding between Burmese, Thai and Canadian youth.

Volunteer Preparation and Responsibilities

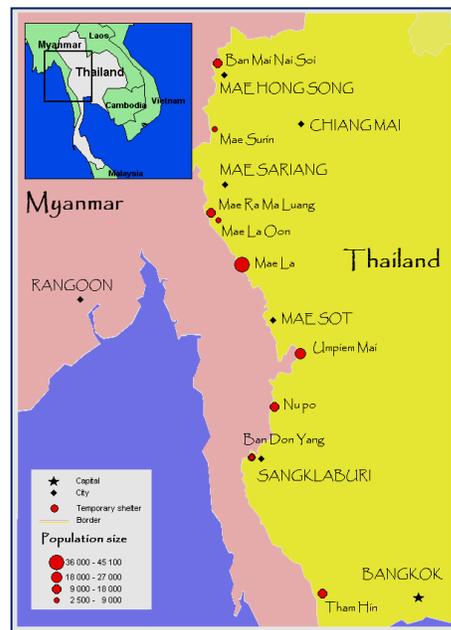
Project volunteers are selected from among students at, or recent graduates of, Champlain College – Lennoxville and Bishop's University in Sherbrooke, Québec, Canada. They must satisfy a number of requirements: They must be aged 18 to 26. They must have good spoken and written English. Because we are based in Québec, some of our volunteers will be native French speakers, but they too must have good English skills. They must be independent, self-reliant and

resourceful, show maturity and good judgment, work well in a team, be adaptable and sensitive to different cultures, care about social justice issues and world affairs, be effective and energetic in working with children, have a desire to learn about the situation in Burma and the problems of displaced people and of the Thai and Burmese communities in Mae Sot. Clearly this project makes big demands on its volunteers!

Before going to Mae Sot, volunteers prepare themselves over a period of four months by taking classes in how to animate activities and lessons for English teaching, learning elementary Thai, raising funds to help pay for their stay in Thailand and to help partner schools, and by learning about political and economic conditions in Burma and on the Thai-Burmese border and about Thai, Burmese and Karen culture.

While in Mae Sot, volunteers help children and teachers with English and lead activities in schools for Burmese migrant children. They respond to needs by providing materials and financial help to partner schools (as much as we are able to raise). They learn about the cultures in the Mae Sot community and share some of their Canadian culture. Finally, they write articles for Canadian media to inform people in Québec about the situation in Mae Sot.

On return to Canada, volunteers must be prepared to give talks about their experience to community organizations and schools and to write articles and give interviews for media.



Map of the nine border refugee camps in Thailand. As of February 2016, about 106,000 people, mostly Karen refugees remain in those camps. Another 12,000 people live in IDP camps in Karen State and a further 1-2 million Burmese exist as illegal migrants or urban refugees in cities and towns like Mae Sot.

Project Development and Financing

In 2003 the *Mae Sot Education Project* was launched. It created partnerships with schools for Burmese migrant children in the Mae Sot area, applied for funding to foundations and local organizations and worked with Champlain College – Lennoxville and Bishop’s University to recruit volunteers. Over the years, it has worked with ten migrant schools. At present the project has partnerships with six migrant schools including: Hsa Thoo Ley, BHSOH, Hsa Mu Htaw, Hle Bee, Parami and Pyo Khin. As of Summer 2016, the Committee has sent 13 teams of volunteers (including a total of 53 students from Bishop’s and Champlain) to Mae Sot. Volunteers are committed to spending six months, from June to December, in Thailand living together and assisting in the schools. They receive on-going guidance and support from the Project Committee. Volunteers have provided teaching materials and English activity leadership, assisted older students in preparation for the GED examination, animated sports and music activities and even planted gardens. Through the volunteers, the project has donated money to schools for a variety of needs (e.g., materials, infrastructure, lunches, funding for school outings, teachers’ work permits). On occasion, the Project Committee has collaborated with other organizations working to help migrant schools.



The total cost of sending four volunteers, supporting their work in Thailand and contributing classroom materials and financial resources to partner schools (\$2000 CAD each) is about \$35,000 CAD. Grants from foundations and donations from local organizations and individuals, in-kind contributions from Bishop’s University and Champlain College – Lennoxville and fundraising by the volunteers all help provide the necessary funding. The project is grateful for all donations, large and small.

For more information

If you would like more information about how to participate in or support this project, contact us at maesoteducationproject@gmail.com. You may also contact Mary Purkey at mpurkey@crc-lennox.qc.ca or marypurkey@gmail.com or by telephone at (819) 346-7278 or by mail at Box 67, Champlain College – Lennoxville, Sherbrooke, Québec J1M 2A1, Canada. You may also find information about or donate to the project on line at www.maesot.ubishops.ca.

