



ET-MSEP Volunteer explaining a word game to Burmese children

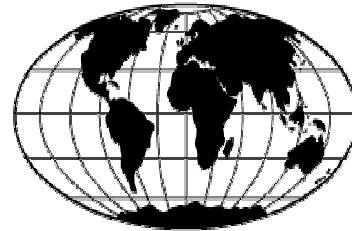
The Eastern Townships – Mae Sot Education Project

A Volunteer Project to assist Burmese refugee and migrant children on the Thai-Burmese border and... to educate Canadians about the plight of people displaced by repression and conflict

Who are we? Why this project?

In recent years, more than a million Burmese people have been forced by economic hardship or political repression in Burma (Myanmar) to relocate to towns and refugee camps in Thailand. The *Eastern Townships – Mae Sot Education Project* is a small project, based in the Eastern Townships region of Québec, Canada, that hopes to support the Burmese people in their struggle to create a new society free from military dictatorship in Burma by contributing to the education of Burmese migrant children in Thailand. It also tries to promote friendship and solidarity between the Burmese, Thais and Canadians

Québec
Canada ↘



↙ Thailand

Burma / Myanmar

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 do we do?

- We send student volunteers from Champlain Regional College 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 these requirements:

- Be aged 18 to 26;
- 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.];

- 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.

Before going to Mae Sot, volunteers prepare themselves 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;
- learning about political and economic conditions in Burma and on the Thai-Burmese border;
- learning about Thai, Burmese and Karen culture.

While in Mae Sot, volunteers will:

- help children and teachers with English and lead activities in schools for Burmese migrant children;
- provide some materials and financial help to partner schools (as much as we are able to raise);
- learn about the cultures in the Mae Sot community and share some of their Canadian culture;
- write articles and send them to Canadian media to inform people in Québec about the situation in Mae Sot.

On return to Canada, volunteers will:

- give talks about their experience to community organizations and schools;
- write articles and give interviews for media.

Project Development and Financing

In 2003 the project created partnerships with three schools for Burmese migrant children in the Mae Sot area. A formal Project Committee was created. It applied for funding to foundations and local organizations and worked with Champlain College - Lennoxville and Bishop's University to recruit volunteers. Today the project has partnerships with six schools including: Hsa Thoo Lei, BHSOH, Hsa Mu Htaw, Say Ta Nar, Hle Bee and Parami. Volunteers have assisted the schools in a variety of ways. They have provided teaching materials and English activity leadership and helped complete funding applications. Through the volunteers, the project has donated money to schools for different needs (a roof, lunches, funding for school outings, etc.). On occasion, the Project Committee has collaborated with other organizations working to help migrant schools. In 2004 we helped one school to obtain a grant from the Canada Fund for Burmese Refugees. As of fall, 2008, the Committee has sent five teams of volunteers (including a total of 20 young Canadians) to Mae Sot. Volunteers are committed to spending six months, from June to December, in Thailand assisting in the migrant schools. They receive ongoing guidance and support from the Project Committee.

The total cost of sending four volunteers, supporting their work in Thailand and contributing classroom materials and financial resources to partner schools (about \$1000 CAD each) is about \$25,000 CAD. Grants from foundations and donations from local organizations and individuals, 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 Mary Purkey at mpurkey@crc-lennox.qc.ca or marypurkey@gmail.com or by telephone at (819) 564-3666, ext. 621 or by mail at Box 67, Champlain College – Lennoxville, Sherbrooke, Québec J1M 2A1, Canada. You may also find information on the Internet at <http://www.ubishops.ca/maesot/index.html>.