

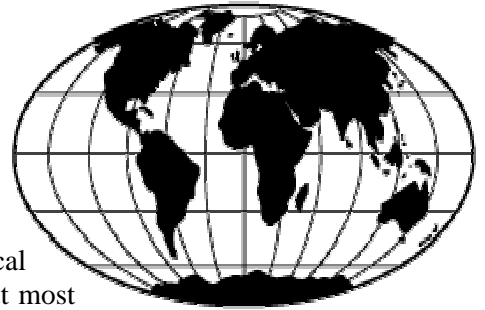
Do you care about social justice and human rights?
Are you energetic, resourceful, adventurous?
Would you like to volunteer to go overseas and work
for a humanitarian project in a foreign land?

Then take a look at this volunteer opportunity
for Champlain and Bishop's students!

The Eastern Townships – Mae Sot Education Project

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

Why This Project?



A year ago this September many of us heard about the “Saffron Revolution”, the demonstrations led by monks in cities throughout Burma [Myanmar], an expression of the desperation of people in this country for a release from military dictatorship. In recent years, more than a million Burmese people have been uprooted and forced either by economic hardship or by the political repression in their country to flee to Thailand. Some are in refugee camps but most work as poorly paid, illegal migrant workers in Thai factories and farms. They yearn for a better life for their kids. This includes education. Indeed, education is a necessary part of the Burmese people’s struggle to build a better society in their homeland, one free from military dictatorship. The desire to support their struggle lies at the heart of *Eastern Townships-Mae Sot Education Project*, initiated in 2003. By contributing to the education of Burmese migrant children in Thailand, through teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) and through rich inter-cultural contact between Burmese people and Canadian youth volunteers, the project is attempting to achieve two aims. First, we seek to support the development of Burmese migrant and refugee communities by enhancing their opportunities for education and linking them to communities here in Canada. At the same time, we hope to deepen the global understanding of Canadian youth volunteers and the broader community here in the Eastern Townships of Quebec as well as in other parts of Canada.

Project Objectives and Activities

Volunteers who participate in this project will go to Mae Sot, Thailand, for a period of six months (from June to December) to work as assistants in schools for displaced Burmese migrant children. **Why 6 months?** For several reasons: First, adapting to the culture and getting to know the Burmese community and culture, and more specifically the kids in the schools, takes time. Second, quite simply, volunteers who stay longer contribute more. Our Burmese friends in Mae Sot deeply value the long-term commitment made. Finally, getting to Thailand is expensive but staying there is very inexpensive. Thus it is cost effective for the project to send volunteers for a longer period. **Is it worth it? YES!** Many students think of their education in purely conventional terms and have difficulty contemplating taking a term off, but some of the best educational experiences happen outside the classroom – out there in the world. College and university students are at a point in life when they are actually free to embrace these experiences. The project looks for students who are both well qualified and ready to seize the moment, to make the world their campus! In addition, however, volunteers can also receive credits at both Bishop’s and Champlain for participation in this project and upon their return to Canada, have the opportunity to share their experiences with fellow students.

Specifically, the project's goals are:

- by providing student volunteers from Champlain Regional College and Bishop's University to assist in teaching ESL in schools for migrant children in and around Mae Sot, to empower Burmese migrants and refugees living on the Thai-Burmese border to improve their quality of life;
- to help these schools by providing qualified ESL teaching assistance, curriculum development, and classroom materials;
- to develop the understanding, leadership, and practical skills of the student volunteers through activities such as receiving ESL-teacher training, learning about the background of the Burmese refugee-migrant situation, and fundraising for and planning the logistics of their overseas travel and work;
- to strengthen the commitment to international cooperation and human rights on our campus and in the broader Eastern Townships community by sharing the efforts, knowledge and results of this project with the community during pre-trip preparations and post-trip educational presentations on campus and at local schools and organizations.



2008-09 Volunteers: Kristyne Houbraken, Valerie Beaulieu-Blanchette, Stephanie Aubin and Dugal Monk

Project Development

In 2003 the project created partnerships with 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 advertise for volunteers. Since then, the Committee has sent five teams of volunteers (a total of 21) to Mae Sot. 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 and participated in school life in a variety of ways. They have provided teaching materials and English activity leadership and helped complete funding applications. They have danced, played soccer and Frisbee and helped kids with their homework. 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. A new team of four volunteers travelled to Mae Sot in June, 2008 and is now busy at work there in our six partner schools. The volunteers have all received ongoing guidance and support from the Project Committee.

Funding

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. Volunteers and Project Committee work together to raise the money needed for this project. Vaccinations, airfare and living expenses come to about \$4500 per volunteer. In addition, the project donates about \$1000 to each of its partner schools. However, *all* of this money is raised through collective fundraising. Thus volunteers do not have to be rich!

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.

How to Apply

For more information, contact Mary Purkey at marypurkey@gmail.com, Derek Heatherington at dheatherington@crc-lennox.qc.ca or by telephone at 564-3666 ext. 629 or Lissa McRae at lmcrae@ubishops.ca or by telephone at (819) 822-9600, ext. 2373. Applications are accepted during October and November. Selection [for departure in June] is done in early January and preparation gets underway immediately thereafter.