

Program Summary

Myanmar Education Program



Students learn tailoring skills at a Jesuit-supported Community College preparing them with skills for future employment.



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Country Context

The military coup of February 2021, coupled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over several years, has thrown the country into chaos. The coup has led to violence, collapse of the economy, destruction of public health and education systems and widespread poverty and hunger. As schools struggled to adjust post-coup, the third wave of COVID hit Myanmar.

The economy is in steep decline and heading towards collapse. As millions face severe poverty, many students are forced to abandon their education due to lack of funds. The education sector which was recovering from decades of neglect is once again suffering, and millions of children and young people are losing precious schooling. Quality and accessible education is key to Myanmar's future especially as more than 50% of Myanmar's population is under the age of 30.

Few private schools continue to operate in the current crisis and many international NGOs have left Myanmar. Myanmar's students lost over 18 months of education during the pandemic forced closures of government schools.

Many young people feel they have been robbed of their future. Since the armed resistance is in many places carried on by young people, the youth are often stopped and questioned, their mobility restricted. If they cannot find work, they stay at home, or in despair turn to addiction, join the resistance, or go abroad. Thousands of young men and women leave Myanmar each week (over 40,000 a month by recent estimates) to try to find work in neighbouring countries.

Project Summary

Through the education program, **Jesuit Mission (JM) is working with Myanmar Jesuit Region (MJR) to transform Myanmar society by giving special attention to the young women and men of Myanmar, by promoting educational initiatives, especially among communities on the margins.**

MJR runs three key education institutions:

- **Myanmar Leadership Institute (MLI)** based in Yangon targets postgraduate students and professionals offering leadership diploma and certificate courses to form competent and compassionate leaders, who can think critically and creatively and committed to serve the common good.
- **St Aloysius Gonzaga Institute (SAG)** based in Taunggyi, Shan State offers English language courses and a solid foundation in teacher training, social work, and leadership skills.
- **Campion Institute** based in Yangon the institute offers English language courses for young people aged 16 and older from all over Myanmar and maintains minimal fees to allow greater access courses.
- **Community Colleges** have been established to reach young people who are poor, who may have dropped out from formal education for a variety of reasons, or whose education has not yet given skills that enable them to gain employment. The community college provides them with both employable skills and employment opportunities and offers a safe place to study, meet with peers and share experiences.

Myanmar Leadership Institute: MLI offers formal diploma and certificate courses in Leadership and Management for postgraduate students and aims to form competent and compassionate leaders, able to think critically and creatively, committed to serve the common good - building capacity in ethical leadership the future of Myanmar. Core programs include Diplomas in Leadership, Peace Leadership, Business computer skills, English language and Teacher Training with some courses offered as online certificate programs in collaboration with Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL). On average, around 180 students undertake study at the MLI each year.

Additionally, MLI hosts workshops on the management and leadership of Community Colleges for religious congregations that wish to establish a college with the support of the Jesuit-established Myanmar Network of Community Colleges (MNCC).

St Aloysius Gonzaga Institute (SAG): SAG is the only national institute taking in students from all over Myanmar. SAG has a preferential option for students from marginal rural areas and villages, mainly from ethnic minorities. SAG courses are designed to address the need for quality education through training youth to become teachers and providing outreach placements to the surrounding schools currently benefiting 300 local children with English classes. SAG also offers a Diploma in Social Work and English language courses.



A student teacher teaches English at a placement in a local school.

Over 900 students are enrolled at SAG with 70+ receiving scholarship support and around 100 students received free housing support. In 2022, SAG welcomed 599 new students and celebrated the graduation of 68 students.

A major building expansion of SAG was completed in October 2022. The additional classrooms, communal areas, and accommodation will cater for 1,000 students.

Campion Institute: offers English Language Diploma Courses, extra-curricular activities and Outreach Programs for youth aged 16 years and over from disadvantaged households. 10-week courses in English are offered at six different levels and students can move from level to level as each one is completed.

Over 800 students access the formal education courses. More than 200 students are provided scholarships by Jesuit Mission for disadvantaged students. Students at the Institute participate in an Outreach program to teach English to children during the summer break.

Community Colleges: Since 2020, the Jesuits in Myanmar established a secretariat called the Myanmar Network of Community Colleges (MNCC) to address the need for education for young people who are unskilled and cannot access education due to ethnicity or economic difficulty. Community Colleges help these youth to gain skills and employment. MNCC facilitators network around the country with congregations to sponsor new Community Colleges. There continues to be great success in establishing this model of education with 11 currently operating and an additional three to four colleges planned in 2023.

Students attend the Community College for a one-year course, 5 days per week. Parents are encouraged to play an active role in their children's learning. The course covers Life-Skills, Livelihood Skills, 4 weeks internship with a local company and preparation for employment including mock interviews and preparing CVs. All colleges offer English, Basic Computer Skills, Accounting and Life Skills. Depending on local needs, colleges also offer vocational courses such as tailoring, car mechanics, cooking and catering, hairdressing, make-up, and beauty.

Community Outreach and Service: Students at the Jesuit institutions are invited to participate in community service and outreach activities that reflect the value of *Magis* - that embodies a spirit of giving; providing service to those in need and being women & men for and with the poor and marginalised. Some examples are teaching English at local schools in disadvantaged communities and helping at homes for orphans and the disabled.

Participants

It is estimated that over 1,800 people will benefit directly as and this number is expected to grow year on year with the success of the Community Colleges and recent expansion of classroom facilities at SAG. 270 students received scholarship support at SAG and Campion Institute.

Budget

The 2024 project funding requested by **Myanmar Education** to Jesuit Mission Australia is **\$243,309**. Therefore 100% of Pilgrims100 funding could be allocated to this project and would contribute close to 41% of the 2024 funding requirements. The partner budget has been converted from USD at 0.62

NOTE

With the ongoing conflict, all the education institutions face adversity from security risks. Students may be detained on their way to and from schooling which can impact their attendance. It is clear however, that the youth are keen to continue their education and on the most part, are able to continue classes. The institutions and colleges have been able to continue operating, drawing on established connections to the community.

As students of the Education Program can testify, the Jesuits are providing an essential service for their present and future:

"I had no ambition. I did not know what I should do for my future. My way was dark, but the Community College is a candle that lights my way brightly."

"I am grateful to my teachers, and all involved. After the pandemic and coup in Myanmar I felt hopeless and depressed, but now I have had a chance to learn English and computing and develop life skills."

Hear the stories

Seng Ra

22-year-old Seng Ra has been studying since 2019 with the support of a Jesuit Mission funded scholarship. She took some time to share with us how the scholarship to SAG has impacted her life.

When I first attended SAG, life was a struggle in many ways. When I was not involved with this program, I didn't have communication skills, social and other English skills. I also didn't have any confidence in myself. And I was afraid of speaking in front of people and I did not have much knowledge.

One of my cousins helped me to get the scholarship, and I got involved with this program. After a few months everything changed for me, and I learned how to communicate more easily with my classmates and teachers. **What I like most about being in this program is that I can live in a safe place. I can eat well, and I can study well. I don't need to worry about anything.**

I started learning new things and on weekends I was able to do the outreach teaching, so I could share my knowledge as much as I can. **I used to spend my daily life using my phone, but now I read books and watch motivational speeches. I am appreciating my daily life and routine.**

The integrated program has helped me to become a good teacher, and I have learned a lot from my experiences in outreach teaching in the Loi Long monastery school and in SAG YLP program. My hope for the future is that can share my knowledge and experiences with my community as much as I can.

My dream is to be a teacher. I want to teach those who are living in IDP camps and those who cannot afford to attend English classes.

This scholarship program supports a lot those people like me who cannot afford for school fees like me.

I think it is so important that this program continues to receive support, because there are many young people like me who are enthusiastic to be educators but cannot afford higher education. **We need a lot of educators who can help teach and support the young people in our communities, and this program gives so many opportunities to those who have a poor background.**



Seng Ra and a classmate enjoy a sunny afternoon with some of their students from the Loi Long Monastery school.