

Project Summary

Sustaining Education for Burmese Refugees in Mae Hong Son, Thailand



Education with a heart - teachers and school leaders from the project schools

Country Context

Thailand hosts 91, 337 Myanmar refugees in nine temporary shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border who are mainly of Karen, Karenni and Burmese ethnicity, some who have lived in Thailand since the 1980s after fleeing armed conflict between armed groups and the Myanmar Military.

Under the Royal Thai Government's legal framework, they are not permitted to access institutions such as health and education nor are they allowed to move outside the camps. They therefore rely on non-governmental services for basic needs. (<https://reporting.unhcr.org/thailand-mco-factsheet>)

There are nearly 12,000 Karenni refugees from Myanmar's Kayah State living in the Ban Mai Nai Soi camp and the Ban Mae Surin camp in Mae Hong Son Province, just 3km over the border into Thailand. Most of the residents have fled from armed conflict in Myanmar.

Many are born in the camp and the average stay is 22 years. They cannot leave the camp and outside organisations are not allowed to set up schools inside the camp - so access to education is extremely limited.

About the project

Our local partner, Jesuit Refugee Service Asia Pacific (JRS AP), is running the Sustaining Education for Burmese Refugees project in the camps. The focus is to provide access to quality education by enhancing the capacity of the Karenni Education Department (KnED) to run their schools and formal educational programs in the camps. KnED supports the practical needs of school operations - building teacher capacity through training and improving the curriculum. Education is vital in the Mae Hong Son camp settings. Many refugee children have experienced deep trauma, so the routine and structure of a school environment helps give them a sense of normality.

Key project activities include:

Improved formal education opportunities:

For both students and staff with 2449 students in schools since 2021 and subject specific training sessions for 149 teachers. This process includes distribution of assessments to students and report cards to both camps.

Youth development and opportunities

Youth focused activities include weekly activities to support youths at risk including life skills and Thai language classes as well as support for youth start business including small fund grants to young aspiring business leaders with 8 out of 12 youths earning a profit from the grants provided.

Improved professional capacity of KnED management staff

This includes teachers holding PTA sessions held within the camps with over 800 parents and the delivery important of school supplies such as textbooks to schools.

	People Served			
	Target	Actual	Female	Male
Primary, Middle & High School Students	2,350	2,449	1,223	1,226
Primary, Middle, & High School Teachers	135	219	191	28
Youth at Risk (Out of School)	60	53	21	32
Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp	8,000	7,810	3,892	3,918
Ban Mae Surin Camp Population	1,825	1,977	968	1009

Budget

In 2024 the planned budget for this project is \$122,465 AUD. This would allow Pilgrims100 to fund close to 80% of the total project. The partner budget has been converted from USD with an exchange rate of 0.62.

Hear the stories

Joseph's story

Joseph* was born in Kayah state, Myanmar. He and his family fled the violent conflict in his home village and eventually came to settle in Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp – where he is now serving his community as a Primary School Head Teacher within the camp.

“Our village was burned down, and we fled to the Thailand border for safety. My whole family and I eventually settled in the refugee camp at Ban Mai Nai Soi. I continued my education in the camp and I was hired as a primary school subject teacher. Being a teacher offered many challenges.

My dream is to continue my studies. I wish that my country was peaceful. I want to go back and be a teacher for the rest of my life. I want to help in the development of our country and our people. The situation in my country is not safe to return.

I will continue to realize my dream for our people by teaching with KnED. I cannot imagine our community without a school that provides quality education for our children and future generations. Without education, there will be no progress. Without progress, there is no hope.

Education will lead us to peace and reconciliation. For this, I now attend teacher trainings. I want to teach well in school and build a more peaceful and better world to live in.”



Joseph teaches his students at Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp with a deep determination to contribute to his community through quality education.

Naw Kee Lar Paw's story

Naw Kee Lar Paw is the Head Teacher at the Karenni Education department (KnED) and was born in Thailand fled from their village in Karenni State when fighting between the Karenni ethnic group and the Burmese army. Their final destination was the Ban Mae Surin Refugee Camp in the Northern border of Thailand.

It was in this camp that Naw Kee Lar Paw grew up and received an education from kindergarten to grade 10.

Naw Kee Lar Paw was fortunate enough to continue her studies for a further 5 years at a Baptist School of Theology in Mae La Camp. She returned to Ban Mae Surin Camp to work with KnED as education became her passion.



Before being appointed as the High School Head teacher, Naw Kee Lar Paw worked as a History teacher because as she says “I wanted to share my knowledge, and in a small way, help change the lives of our people.” She goes on to tell us that while she was excited to be appointed Head Teacher she was “worried because I lack experience”. She is deeply grateful to the support that she has received and says that “even in this very difficult place education is brightening the minds” of the children in the refugee camps.