

Project Update

January – June 2024

Myanmar Education Program



Students at a Community College, run with Jesuit support, learn livelihood skills including how to apply for employment with their newly learned technical trade



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Program Context & Overview

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.

Many millions of people are suffering from severe poverty and disadvantage, with little money for everyday basics let alone to fund their children's education.

Educational enrolment rates across the country declined by more than 12% between 2017 and 2023. 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. Yet, few private schools continue to operate in the current crisis and many international NGOs have left.

Myanmar's current regime has declared mandatory military service for men aged 18 to 35 and women between 18 to 27 years of age to serve a minimum of two years in the military, extendable up to five years. Some students ceased attending classes as reports surfaced of forced recruitments and night raids by military personnel to enlist young people. Concerned parents worried about their children's safety attending school. The new law led to youth hiding, leaving the country or joining the armed resistance.

Since then, temporary exemptions from conscription have been enacted for people who are studying. Efforts are being made by institutions to keep young people engaged in learning even during periods when course breaks are usually held.

The education system is proving vital to not only preparing the young people of Myanmar for a time when peace is brokered or they are able to find employment locally or internationally – but also as a means to immediate security.

Through the Myanmar education program, **Jesuit Mission (JM) is working with Myanmar Jesuit Region (MJR) and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) 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 the following education initiatives:

- **Myanmar Leadership Institute (MLI)** based in Yangon targets postgraduate students and professionals offering leadership diploma and certificate courses to form competent and compassionate leaders, committed to serve the common good.
- **St Aloysius Gonzaga Institute (SAG)** based in Taunggyi, Shan State offers courses in English language, teacher training, social work, and leadership skills.
- **Campion Institute** in Yangon offers English language courses for young people aged 16 and older from all over Myanmar and maintains low fees to serve poorer students.

- **Community Colleges** reach marginalised young people who have dropped out from formal education for a variety of reasons, or whose education level is insufficient to gain employment. The community college provides employable skills (technical training) and employment opportunities and offers a safe place to study and network.

The following report covers the period January to June 2024 and provides an update for each education institution on how your contribution and the support of Jesuit Mission is making a difference for young people in Myanmar.

Project Highlights and Impacts

- Jesuit education institutions are **continuing to bring high quality education in a range of needed courses and skill areas for the future of Myanmar.**
- Overall, **2,799+ students have benefited from your support** for the 2024 academic year.
- 291 students accessed courses at Myanmar Leadership Institute
- **MLI graduates are highly sought** for roles across government, business and education sectors
- **1300+ students are enrolled at St Aloysius Gonzaga Institute (SAG)** training to be future teachers, social workers and leaders in their employment field
- **SAG has helped over 250 disadvantaged students to access education with Jesuit Mission funded scholarships** in the past five years including another 40 scholarships in 2024.
- Over the past five years, **more than 4,200 students have benefited from education at the Campion Institute** including 370 scholarship recipients.
- **Over 600 young people are enrolled in vocational skills training courses at the Community Colleges** while teachers, families of students, employers and local communities also benefit.

What has your support helped to achieve?

In 2024, the funding provided by Jesuit Mission for the Myanmar Education Program with your generous support has assisted the following number of students:

	Total students	Male	Female
MLI	332	41	291
SAG – total students	1,303	n/a	n/a
SAG – JM scholarships	40	30	10
Campion Institute	524	203	321
Community Colleges	600+	n/a	n/a
Total	2,799+		

Myanmar Leadership Institute (MLI)

Aimed at the education and formation of post graduate students and professionals, MLI is offering a diverse range of courses including at Diploma level, in Leadership (Pastoral and Business), Relationship Management, Creative Writing and Graphic Design, Teacher Training, Ministry and Synodality, as well as specialised workshops that promote formation in Catholic social teaching, learning facilitation, team building, peace/conflict resolution and women's empowerment.

During 2024 to date, 291 individuals have benefited from courses, including 14 final year students in the Diploma of Leadership programs. These students are expected to make significant and positive contributions across government, business, education, and social services, while embodying the core values of justice, integrity, and service instilled by MLI.

A student in the Diploma of Leadership Development, **Nan Thida**, who has moved to Yangon from a farming family living in a heavy conflict zone, said of the MLI course:

"The diploma in leadership was an eye-opener for me. Not only did I learn powerful self-management techniques, but I also discovered a whole new way to connect with colleagues. It felt like taking my best teaching skills - clear communication, fostering collaboration - and applying them to inspire everyone around her.

Before I got involved in the program I was struggle with self-awareness, weakness in communicating with others. After graduation, the program assisted me to improve self-awareness, communication skills and relationships."

The course has helped her develop skills that are useful for a range of employment roles and to face the challenges of daily life in Myanmar with greater resilience and confidence. Nan Thida hopes she can help lift her family from poverty in the future.

St Aloysius Gonzaga Institute (SAG)

In 2024, **over 1,300 students are benefiting from the Diploma-level courses** at SAG Institute in English language, teacher training, social work, and leadership skills. 140 new students joined the Diploma and Preparatory courses this academic year.

Youth receive training as teachers and provide outreach placements to surrounding schools that benefit hundreds of local children with English classes.

SAG is the only national institute taking in students from across the nation - with preference for students from marginal rural areas and villages, and ethnic minorities.

Over the past five years, SAG has awarded scholarships to over 250 students with Jesuit Mission funding. Graduates from the academic year 2023-2024 have found teaching jobs in schools around Taunggyi and Yangon.

Since the new girls' hostel opened in February 2024 offering more space for female students to attend, **SAG has been able to increase the numbers of scholarship students supported by Jesuit Mission to 40** of which 30 are female students.

One such scholarship student is **Thinzar, 20 years**, who is training to be a teacher.

Thinzar is from a disadvantaged family living in an area of Shan State heavily attacked by the military. She was only able to join the course at SAG with scholarship assistance as her family cannot afford her education.

"Before getting involved in this program, my life was so complicated and I found no escape from my situation. The military coups and political instability prevented my dreams to become a teacher. There was a lack of financial support from my family.

Since receiving the scholarship, my life has changed a lot. I volunteered at a church in Shan State in 2022, teaching basic English to students in need. However, there were times I could not answer their questions as a teacher with no experience. I was not confident to continue my teaching there. I realised that I must study again to be a good teacher. Then I got the opportunity to study at SAG.

After studying here, I want to become an educator so that I will be able to serve in the community that needs my help. The courses provide valuable opportunities for an individual's holistic development, especially for those who are from poor backgrounds. The programs at SAG help us to get a better life."



Campion Institute

Based in Yangon, 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 through which the students progress. Students also participate in an Outreach program to teach English to children during the summer break.

Campion grants scholarships to disadvantaged students with potential and motivation to excel in their studies, **with more than 370 scholarships granted in the past five years. In 2024, 105 students have received scholarships**, ensuring their education journey could continue despite their own and family's financial challenges.

Over the past five years, **the Campion English Institute has transformed the lives of over 4,200 students in Yangon and the surrounding areas. In 2024, the Institute is serving 524 students, slightly below targeted 600 students.**

Until 2024, there has been consistent growth in new enrolments, with a remarkable 20% increase in 2023 compared to 2022. The implementation of the conscription law in early 2024 led to 51 students dropping attendance, with many returning to their hometowns and villages, and a few going abroad.

Graduates are in high demand for their strong English language skills.

Thiha, 20 years, is a scholarship student in Advanced Level English. He is from a farming community, one of three children of a widowed mother. He is incredibly motivated to excel in his studies as he sees the importance of English for future job opportunities including the chance to work internationally and provide for his family. His elder sister is a religious sister and his younger brother is studying computer science.

Thiha started at Campion Institute with support from his widowed mother however once his younger brother wanted to study as well, she could not afford for them both to continue their studies. Thiha secured a scholarship that enabled him to keep upgrading his education.

"I was very stressed about financial problems before taking part in the program. If I did not receive a scholarship, I would have the challenge of paying to support my studies that I really need to get good employment opportunities.



This program has benefited all the human society and has generated a lot of successful students. The program is helpful for students who have financial problems, so they can focus on their learning without any stress for money.

I am very grateful for this scholarship program which creates a pathway of successful lives for students and generate many talented students."

Myanmar Network of Community Colleges

The Jesuits in Myanmar have established a secretariat called the Myanmar Network of Community Colleges (MNCC) to support **the establishment of Community Colleges** – in partnership with other religious and educational organisations – **that address the gap in education for young people who are unskilled and otherwise lack access to education due to ethnicity or economic situation.** In Myanmar, where some

ethnic groups are systematically denied access to education, the colleges prioritise access for young people aged 17-25 years from the peripheries.

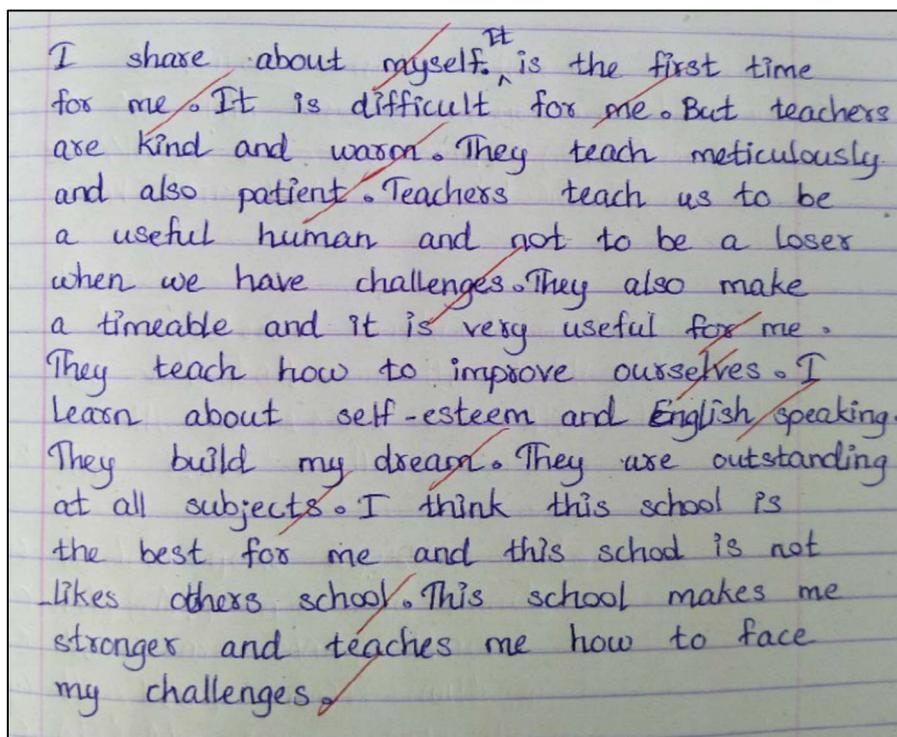
Community Colleges help these youth to gain skills and employment. Teachers are skilled in working with students who have suffered loss or trauma or who face extreme poverty. Students attend a one-year course, five days per week.

Colleges are run by local congregations or community organisations; are situated in poor communities and require relatively few resources. Local leaders and businesses welcome the colleges in their communities and many young graduates find employment following internships.

In 2024, there are 16 colleges in eight different regions of Myanmar serving over 600 students and four more colleges are planned to open this year - one in Mandalay, two in Kalay, and one in Myaungdaga on the outskirts of Yangon, if the security situation allows. Each college has 35-45 students with two or three teachers.

All Colleges offer English, Basic Computer Skills, Accounting and Life Skills for a period of one year, five days per week. Colleges also offer vocational courses depending on local needs, such as tailoring, car mechanics, catering, hairdressing, and beauty services. Students also learn Life-Skills, Livelihood Skills, and complete four weeks internship with a local company and prepare for employment through mock interviews and CV writing.

A community college student's testimonial in English praises the holistic approach to learning and building the students' confidence:



The MNCC supports the establishment of new community colleges by training teachers in community college methodology and providing a curriculum suited to local employment with relevant study materials. The network provides introductions for start-up funding and regular training programs to orient staff on course content and methodology. Workshops are organised regularly for those wishing to start new colleges.

A complementary program has also been started by the Catholic teacher training institute, *Pyinya Sanyae Institute of Education (PSIE)*, for a two-year course (including teaching placements) to prepare teachers for new community colleges.

The Community College education model has proven highly successful in the current situation in Myanmar. The colleges offer an alternative to young people at real risk of being caught up in conflict, addiction or exploitation.

Hear the Student voices from the Community Colleges:



"Community College has taught me for life, not just for the exams. The teachers give us special attention and care and teach us to concentrate on our future. A special thanks to all involved in the Community College."

"I thank God and my teachers for giving me a chance to join St. Charles Borromeo Community College. Since taking part in the program, I have become more confident and assertive. I have learned that there always will be ups and downs in life and now I know how to handle the good times and the bad. I feel very lucky to have studied here."



"This year I graduated from Charles Borromeo College. I am grateful to my teachers and all involved in the college. 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."

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



Emergency Education and Outreach for children and young people

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, Jesuit Mission is supporting Jesuit organisations in Myanmar **to provide emergency education to over 8,000 children who have fled with their families to remote, jungle areas and camps of displaced people after attacks by the military on their homes.** The project is operating in states of Kachin, Kayah and Southern Shan that are most affected by military attacks on ethnic minorities.

In 2024 to date, 8022 boys and girls have accessed education through the project. The project team are also training teachers in the local area and recruiting parents and other community members to assist with learning activities. Parents are also being supported to improve their parenting skills and understanding of the importance of education and their children's protection and wellbeing.

Without the emergency education supported by Jesuit Mission through this project, the children would be unable to continue their learning and maintain the standards they have reached before the conflict hit their homes.

Challenges

- Forced military conscription has added to the risks faced by young people aged 18-35 when moving to and from schooling. A temporary exemption from conscription for students is enabling more youth to enrol, however there remains fear and uncertainty. Schools are adjusting hours to enable students to travel at safer times.
- Young people in conflict-affected areas are unable to continue their education and are fleeing to the relative safety of Yangon where Jesuit institutions are providing security for these students to enrol in school. Scholarship support is helping disadvantaged students from these areas.
- Enrolments will continue to be impacted by the current conflict, particularly for Community Colleges in some of the most impacted areas of the country. The Jesuits are committed to providing education opportunities that enable students to continue learning even between periods of intense conflict.

Conclusion

During 2024 to date, your support has provided youth in Myanmar with access to quality education that is relevant to their current lives in finding a profession and offering security in a highly insecure context. The education initiatives also provide hope and formation for the younger generation as they plan for their future including their role in rebuilding the nation.

We are very appreciative of your continued commitment to the young people of Myanmar. Thank you.