



BORDER CROSSINGS

A Newsletter of the Brackett Refugee Education Fund (BREF)



Community Schools Program Update



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Saw Bwe Dern and Hee Poe Dern are two small villages in the Karen State, located in south eastern Myanmar, along the border of Thailand. While the villagers grow paddies on plantations, many of the children attend Saw Bwe Dern (K-9) and Hee Poe Dern (K-6) schools. School started the first week of June and the opening ceremony was organized by the school's committees and teachers. They prayed, sang songs and had lunch. After lunch, teachers and parents held a meeting in order to discuss the needs of the school and the students. Between the two schools, there are almost 200 students and 15 teachers in three buildings. Many students attend middle school at Saw Bwe Dern after finishing grade 6 at Hee Poe Dern but there are limited opportunities to study past the 9th grade.

In the past, when things were going well, the villagers could travel to Hpa Pun town to buy food and sell their vegetables to earn some income, but due to the political situation in Myanmar, it's too dangerous for them to travel to town anymore. This year, the situation has become more unsafe.

Since September 2022, the Burmese army has started to transport their food and weapons from Hpa Pun to their army base along the Salween River using roads that are very close to these small villages. The villagers live in fear on a daily basis.

Funding from BREF's donors helps fund more than five schools in this area, and many more across Myanmar, Thailand, India and Bangladesh.

BREF's Scholarship Fund

The Scholarship Program at BREF has faced some challenges over the last two years. For many years, BREF recruited the help of TReps who volunteered their time overseeing the application process and providing support for scholarship students. However, since the pandemic, these volunteers have dwindled and have been unable to travel to Thailand, creating a disconnect with their students. Because of this, BREF has fewer TReps and the amount of students to whom we can offer scholarships has fallen.

The higher education landscape in Thailand has also changed, mostly for the better, with the GED becoming more acceptable for admission and thus, expanding the pool of potential students from refugee backgrounds.

We receive approximately 100 scholarship applications per year. In 2022, we supported 65 university students, down from 87 in 2021. We also provided 44 scholarships to high school students this year and 50 last year. All of our applicants are required to provide progress reports and grades to the TReps that work with them.

We are very pleased with the high graduation rates among BREF's beneficiaries. Last year there were 40 new graduates that earned degrees from universities such as Asia Pacific International University, Chiang Mai University and Chiang Mai Rajabhat.



To be able to continue with our mission of providing scholarships to refugee students, BREF needs to adapt to the current situation. We are developing a comprehensive plan that will:

1 **Expand our TReps to include more local volunteers**

These local TReps will have easier access to up-to-date information about universities and the applicant students.

2 **Redefine our scholarship requirements**

To better fit the needs of the students and make the application process run more smoothly.

3 **Create a community of current students and alumni**

That can act as a support network for new students adjusting to university life.

Early Childhood Education in Northern Myanmar

BREF, with support through Children on the Edge (COTE) and other foundations, continues to provide financial support to the Kachin communities living in camps in northern Myanmar who have been forcibly displaced by war.

Education, play and professional care for young children aged three to six years old is so important to these children as they grow up surrounded by conflict and uncertainty. These 15 learning centers change the lives of hundreds of children, their families, and their communities, in some of the most remote and underserved settlements in the world.



Communications have been particularly challenging as China telecommunications (the only available channel) has imposed many restrictions on SIM cards and internet access. Despite all these challenges, Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers have remained open, critically providing a safe and colorful space for young children in the camps. Further, COTE has even established a new center in Woi Chyai. 303 children graduated from the centers this past academic year, and there are currently 501 children attending the 15 centers.



The Brackett Refugee Education Fund

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The Brackett Refugee Education Fund, established in April 1997, is a small not-for-profit foundation organized to help educate refugees. Currently the Fund is concentrating its efforts on refugees from Burma in India, Thailand and Bangladesh. Our trustees are Russell Brackett (Interim Chair of the Board and Executive Director), Dianne Becker, Brian Brackett, Penelope Brackett, Paulo Flor, Melinda Jackson, Jenny Jones, John Littleton, and Kathy Sabino. The Fund has 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, EIN 16-1523586. It seeks support from friends, family and foundations. In order to make most efficient use of the money it receives, the Fund has adopted the following policies:

- All administrative and communication costs will be supported by the trustees;
- Living and travel expenses of trustees and volunteers, while on business for the Fund, will be donated by themselves;
- The Fund will not sell or give away the names and addresses of any of its contributors;
- Although the Fund is happy to receive contributions at any time, only one fundraising campaign will be made each year;
- The Fund has no paid employees, so administrative and fundraising expenses are very low, typically less than 4% of total expenditures; and
- Because the trustees donate far more than required for administrative purposes, every dollar you donate will go towards helping people receive an education.