



Spring 2020

Border Crossings

A Newsletter of the Brackett Refugee Education Fund



Annual Report 2019

by Russell Brackett, Executive Director

As we head into month three of the shutdown due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, we wait to hear how education will be affected. We had several volunteers from the west working in Asia as the crisis was developing, all are now home. Local volunteers report the situation in Thailand is stable. Initial travel restrictions coincided with the end of the school year in March and we expect some delay beyond the beginning of June before schools can reopen safely.

We have been in steady contact with our scholarship students over the past few months and all report they are safe and sheltering. BREF is committed to supporting our students and teachers as they meet the extraordinary needs brought on by this pandemic. We will pay teachers on our regular schedule even though the start of classes may be delayed. We are working with students who rely on BREF funding for living expenses, in addition to tuition, to make those funds available even as requirements for tuition payments may change.



Nursing student Naw Blessing volunteering at Mae Sot school

It was dim by comparison to this year, but 2019 was not without its challenges. Our donations in 2019 totaled \$209,847, down approximately 10%, and the number of donors dropped from 355 to 330. We're working to address this shortfall.

Total income and expenses increased dramatically because we passed through a large directed gift in support of digital education for the Rohingya refugee camp schools in Bangladesh. One result is a video circulated in the camp to explain the precautions to take for the Covid-19 virus. Recently, we forwarded a large directed gift to help the Rohingya during a food crisis due to the pandemic, to be part of next year's annual report.

Expenses exceeded revenue by about \$35,000. The shortfall was made up from our operating fund in which we accumulate

excess revenue, invest, and maintain as a reserve for just such an occasion. While our reserves are adequate and could be relied on to make up future shortfalls, the board has decided to make some modest reduction in program grants to two schools in 2020 in order to bring our expense budget in line with funds recently raised. We are quite confident that both these schools have adequate funding to thrive. A third school, Maw Kwee, founded and entirely funded by BREF for more than 20 years, has closed. The nearby Thai school system accepts students from Maw Kwee village – a solution we have been advocating for years – rendering our Maw Kwee program unnecessary.



Mae La refugee camp students

BREF continues to focus on getting the funds you contribute to the most needy students and teachers in the South Asia region while keeping administrative costs below 3% of expenses. Low administrative costs don't suggest there isn't a lot to do and BREF only succeeds with the sustained energy of many volunteers. In addition to thanking all of our benefactors for continued support, we'd also like to highlight and thank some of our volunteers for their time and energy in making this all work.

Over the last several years we have increased our support for schools operating inside Burma. These schools serve populations of folks who have been uprooted from their ancestral homes and forced into camps or itinerant communities (Internally Displaced People). Myanmar's struggling efforts at primary education are largely absent in these areas and where present, it is inadequate for the people's needs. The operational challenge of identifying the need, then getting money and supplies to that need, is done through a network of volunteer local school committee members, community organizers, and BREF representatives. It's a ton of work by some of the most dedicated folks you'll ever meet, and we are grateful for them all.



School committee members preparing teaching supplies for delivery to IDP Schools

The scholarship program has had an active year. We deployed an online form to replace our paper application which went quite smoothly and I imagine we will be fully online this coming year.



Local Coordinator Gammy (2nd from left), T-Reps Jenny Jones and Josh Hawley with continuing students at Chiang Rai Rajabhat and Mae Fah Luang

Through T-Reps Josh Hawley and Jenny Jones, we are exploring new ways of collaborating with universities to manage scholarships with a pilot program running this year at Chiang Rai Rajabhat.

In Thailand, we gave scholarships to 102 university students and 63 high school students. In India, 47 completed high school, 27 completed university and we gave 51 university scholarships.



Lily Brackett with ALCC students in Mae La refugee camp

Lily Brackett, on a trip to the Thai-Burma border early this year, has been helping us to develop program strategy by interviewing teachers, community organizers, and especially students. Lily has a natural empathy and being close in age to the students really helps her understand and connect with them and their aspirations. Lily is granddaughter of Liz and Tom and daughter of board members Penelope and Ted Brackett.

Over the course of the year, we have developed and adopted policies to protect the children who are the focus of our mission. With the help of our partners at Children on the Edge, we articulated policy and a set of procedural guidelines for BREF volunteers, associates, and teachers working in the field. Over the last two quarters, we have adopted and deployed the policy across the organization. More to come in 2020 but adoption of the child protection policy and adherence to its operational implications has been running very smoothly.

We welcomed Paulo Flor to the Board in October. He has assumed the responsibilities of Treasurer from Liz who remains on the board and after transitioning Treasurer responsibilities, will remain active in Operations. Paulo will actually head the Office of the Treasury which oversees the accounting and transactions for donations and disbursements. In these efforts he is supported by Sue Bauman and Adger Williams. As well, Mark Sommer provides advisory support on investments in the endowment and operating funds.



Paulo Flor, Treasurer



Dianne Becker and Sally Brackett at Brackett Alumni gathering in Mae Sot

A special shout out to board member and road warrior Dianne Becker who made two trips to Asia in 2019. First trip was with Chair Sally Brackett as they visited projects and students at the Thai-Burma border, Kanchanaburi/Sangkhlaburi area and Bangladesh. Then in October, she returned to visit and reassure students of our continued support in the wake of T-Rep Doug Offenhartz' departure, and continues to oversee those students.

These are just a few of the folks who volunteer their time and energy to help see that your generous gifts

get to where they can help the most. Those who work and travel with us get to see and feel firsthand the gratitude that flows in response to your gifts over these many years. We're the lucky ones. Thank you!



Dianne Becker with graduating students

Online English Conversation Classes for Mae La Refugee Camp School

Brian Brackett – grandson of founders Liz and Tom, son of former T-Rep Chris Brackett – organized and piloted an online approach to building skills in conversational English which met with great success.

The students often know how to read and write English, but conversation is difficult and there’s not many people to practice with. Brian is based in Mexico and has been teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) for nine years.



Brian Brackett coordinating from Mexico



English teacher Obed from Nairobi

This year Brian began a distance program in the Mae La refugee camp school, where he coordinated teachers all over the world to have conversations with the students in the camp. He had six teachers that spent an hour or two each week teaching groups of five.

This is an excerpt from teacher Obed in Nairobi, Kenya, in a letter to the school principal at the Mae La refugee camp:

I am eager to report that the student’s confidence in speaking English has increased greatly. Their social expression is awesome. They can now confidently jump into a phone call both audio and video call and speak irrespective of their mistakes and I am so humbled by their great work and dedication towards learning the language.

Summary of Income and Expenses 2019 in US Dollars

Income

Individual Gifts	\$154,507	
Trustee’s Gifts	50,340	
Grants Received	5,000	
Directed Gifts	191,992	
Total Public Support		\$401,839

Investment Income

Income from Endowment	41,650	
Other (dividends, interest & gains)	20,448	
		62,098

Total Income **\$463,937**

Expenses

Grants in Thailand and Burma (Myanmar)	
Univ. & High School Scholarships	\$111,089
Projects Thailand	30,424
IDP Projects Burma	70,549

Grants in India

Univ. Scholarships	18,720
Project Support (KG thru 12)	20,188

Grants in Bangladesh

Elementary Schools	60,000
Digital Education Directed Gift	175,000

Total Grants **\$ 485,970**

Administrative Costs **12,694**

Total Expenses **\$498,664**

Endowment Summary

Balance 12/31/2018	\$595,903
Balance 12/31/2019	\$719,237
Income for 2019 Operations	\$41,650

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 Sally Brackett (Chair), Russell Brackett (Executive Director), Dianne Becker, Elizabeth Brackett, Penelope Brackett (Secretary), Paulo Flor (Treasurer), Melinda Jackson, John Littleton and Mark Sommer. 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.

