

Mudita School Thailand

Project Report 2024

As Mudita School continues its journey of growth and transformation, we are thrilled to share the remarkable milestones and achievements that define our recent progress. For the past two and a half years, the Mudita School Thailand has been dedicated to fostering educational excellence and expanding opportunities for all within our community. This project report encapsulates the dynamic advancements that are shaping our future and enriching the lives of those we serve.

Significant Developments

One of the most significant developments is the establishment of our new community center, a two-story building nestled within a lush garden. This center will host our new youth program, offering a wide range of courses such as English classes, computer classes, self-awareness courses, and vocational training. The vocational training extends beyond youth to include villagers and parents of our students, with courses like tailoring, carpentry, and other planned vocational programs. Additionally, the community center will host seminars focused on well-being, holistic health, teacher training, and psychology courses.

Youth Program

Our youth program has gained momentum, engaging around thirty young members from the area. This initiative provides comprehensive training in computer skills, software programming, handicrafts, and English at various levels. The enthusiasm and dedication of these young learners are a testament to the program's success and its positive impact on their futures.

Enrollment Growth

This year, Mudita School has experienced a remarkable surge in enrollment, growing from fifty to ninety students. Our reputation for providing a nurturing and high-quality education has spread throughout the town, resulting in a waiting list of over one hundred fifty students eager to join our community. This influx underscores the growing demand for the unique and supportive environment we offer.

Eco-Farm and Sustainability

In addition to our educational initiatives, we have established a large eco-farm, transforming our school into a vibrant park. This eco-farm, adorned with beautiful flower gardens and abundant vegetable patches, supplies fresh produce to our community daily. It stands as a symbol of sustainability and self-sufficiency, enriching both our diets and our surroundings.

Foundation Registration

Lastly, we are proud to announce that we have submitted our papers for the official registration of the Mudita Foundation as a Thai foundation. This crucial step paves the way for future expansion, including the acquisition of new land and the construction of a large school complex.

With this official recognition, we are poised to unlock numerous possibilities for growth and development.

These highlights reflect our unwavering commitment to fostering a supportive, innovative, and sustainable educational environment. As we look ahead, we are excited about the various opportunities that lie in store for Mudita School and the wider community we serve.

Mudita's Teaching Philosophy

Mudita School stands out among the many schools in Mae Sot for its close-knit community. Our school is more than an educational institution; it is a global learning community where international volunteers, local teachers, and students of all ages live, learn, and work together. This harmonious environment fosters safety, acceptance, and mutual respect among all members. As all our students are refugees from Myanmar who have had traumatic experiences in the past, it is essential to provide a secure home with a nurturing atmosphere.

Holistic Pedagogy:

Our unique teaching approach emphasizes on a holistic school environment and project-based learning methods. Unlike many other schools in the area with large class sizes of up to seventy, we maintain small classes of no more than twenty-five students, each supported by three teachers. This setup ensures weaker students receive the inclusive support they need and creates a remarkable class atmosphere where students from three different grades work and learn together in one classroom.

Project-Based Learning:

Our project-based learning approach focuses on teaching life skills and community service. Students engage in various activities, such as handicrafts, gardening, global citizenship, and Website design. They take on responsibilities and organize life-relevant projects, such as business ventures and family support initiatives. Moreover, we place particular emphasis on environmental care.

Our flower gardens and lush green fields surround the classrooms and create a beautiful and nurturing learning environment, which emphasizes our responsibility for nature and sustainable practices and has earned us the title of a green eco-school.

Current situation in Myanmar:

Since February 2021, Myanmar has experienced widespread conflict following a military coup. This situation has resulted in a severe and escalating humanitarian crisis across the entire country. The conflict has caused extensive displacement, with 2.7 million people forced to flee their homes due to ongoing violence. Many displaced individuals have sought refuge in neighboring countries, particularly Thailand, with Mae Sot emerging as a primary destination for those escaping the turmoil.

In regions close to Mae Sot, such as Kachin State and the Bago region, the impact has been particularly severe. Kachin State has seen 178,000 people displaced, while the Bago region has witnessed 192,000 people forced from their homes. These areas, due to their proximity to the Thai border, have significant numbers of refugee camps, both within Myanmar and across the border in Thailand. The influx of refugees into Mae Sot and surrounding areas highlights the urgent need for increased humanitarian aid, particularly for shelter and basic necessities.

Throughout Myanmar, the conflict has disrupted essential services, including access to medical treatment and education. Central regions and the South-East have been heavily affected by clashes, airstrikes, and shelling, further compounding the humanitarian needs of the displaced populations.

Despite these challenges, there have been some notable efforts to resist the conflict. Ethnic armed groups and the People's Defense Force (PDF) have made some progress in their efforts, providing a glimmer of hope for stability in the future. However, these successes have also led to intensified fighting, resulting in further displacement and humanitarian needs.

The urgent need for humanitarian aid, especially shelter and essential services, underscores the critical situation faced by displaced populations. Sustained international support is crucial to address the growing humanitarian crisis effectively.

Primary School (Grades 1-5)

In the primary school, we have 25 students supported by three teachers—two local teachers and one international volunteer teacher. The presence of volunteer teachers from abroad brings an international perspective and open-minded attitude to our classrooms, enriching the learning experience and providing valuable teacher training for our local staff.

The learning environment in our primary school is designed to be nurturing and family-like. Many of our students come from difficult backgrounds, having experienced the civil war in Myanmar or the loss of family members. It is crucial that they find a safe and secure place at Mudita School where they can relax, play, and enjoy their childhood.

To support their emotional and physical well-being, we incorporate numerous art classes where students can dance, sing, and play, fostering a welcoming and joyful atmosphere. Additionally, we emphasize outdoor activities through community service, such as planting vegetables and caring for the flower garden. These activities help students reconnect with nature and find peace and stability in their surroundings.

Our curriculum blends the traditional Burmese school curriculum with modern educational approaches in subjects like science, mathematics, and especially English. We utilize materials from the Cambridge University curriculum for English and have integrated five different grades into our primary school structure (grades 1 to 5).

When we started two years ago, many students had never attended school before, while others had some experience in the first or second grade. Despite these varied starting points, our intensive and inclusive teaching methods have allowed us to progress quickly. For example, in English, we have advanced to using grade four materials within two years, completing two books per year due to our focused and supportive environment.

The integral teaching approach, where stronger students help weaker ones, fosters a family-like atmosphere and inclusion. This method, combined with our three-teacher model, allows us to provide intensive care and break large classes into smaller groups for more personalized attention. Our use of outside classrooms, surrounded by flower gardens and the eco-farm, provides a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

A significant part of our curriculum is the teaching of ethics through civil education. This subject focuses not only on hard skills but also on soft skills, emphasizing personal development, character building, and the cultivation of good values and attitudes from an early age. This approach is central to Mudita's philosophy, aiming to nurture both the inner qualities of our students and their role in the community.

Middle School (Grades 6-8)

In our middle school, we have 20 students ranging in age from 12 to 14, covering grades six to eight. These classes prepare students for the final years of high school by introducing more demanding subjects as part of a standard middle school curriculum. While students engage in enjoyable activities like project-based learning and international cooperation, they also face progressively challenging academic work.

Our project-based learning integrates multiple subjects into collaborative projects. For example, in biology, students learn about biodiversity and the nutrition cycle in theory and then apply this knowledge practically on our eco-farm.

Students also develop practical skills through handicrafts, such as knitting and basic woodworking. Additionally, they gain essential life skills in computer classes, learning to use Microsoft Office programs, computer programming, and various online applications.

As students progress, their English proficiency improves, allowing many subjects to be taught in English using content from the curriculum of our international partner schools. This alignment facilitates collaborative projects with partner schools in Germany, including regular Zoom classes and cultural exchange activities. These projects emphasize global citizenship and help students make international friends.

One popular activity is cooking classes with our international schools, where students cook German meals and exchange Burmese recipes. These sessions provide a fun way to learn about different cultures and foster communication and understanding.

Our holistic teaching approach blends traditional values and methods, such as handicrafts and eco-farming, with modern education from our international partner schools. This combination ensures a balanced education that engages students physically, emotionally, and intellectually. The integration of traditional and modern education ensures that our students are well-rounded, culturally aware, and equipped for their future endeavors.

High School (Grades 9-10)

In our high school, we have 14 students supported by one specialized teacher for each subject and an assisting international volunteer teacher. Our high school program follows the General Education Development (GED) curriculum, offering an internationally recognized diploma. This opens doors for our students beyond Myanmar and Thailand, allowing them to pursue higher education and career opportunities globally, including in countries like Germany, Australia, and Thailand.

The GED curriculum includes four main subjects: Mathematics, Science, Social Science, and English Language Arts. As an international program, all subjects are taught solely in English. This high standard of education prepares students for the final GED exams, which are conducted at international test centers.

To support this rigorous academic program, we prepare our primary and middle school students to build a strong foundation in general knowledge and English proficiency. By the time they reach high school, they are ready to engage fully in the GED curriculum.

Our international standard facilitates collaboration with partner schools such as the Community School, HPC International School from Heidelberg and PREM School from Chiang Mai. We have regular Zoom classes and use Google Classroom for joint assignments and discussions. This collaboration extends to teaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizing personal, social, and emotional growth alongside academic excellence.

The holistic approach of our partner schools, which focuses on developing strong character and social skills, aligns well with our own philosophy. Together, we create informed and compassionate global citizens who are engaged in community service and charity activities. This shared commitment is reflected in projects like the family support program, where students support refugee families in need.

In addition to core subjects, our high school students participate in community service, taking on leadership roles in designing and maintaining the school's gardens and outdoor sitting areas. They also engage in art classes, creating beautiful wall paintings, pottery, and art installations that enhance the school environment.

Sports and physical activities are integral to our program, with students using the football and volleyball fields for exercise and recreation. Music classes, where students play guitar and sing together, further foster a sense of community and create a vibrant school atmosphere.

Overall, our high school curriculum at Mudita School blends challenging academic preparation with practical life skills, creativity, and community engagement. This comprehensive education equips our students to become successful, compassionate leaders ready to make a positive impact in the world.

Family Support Program

The Family Support Program at Mudita School is a vital initiative that began in 2022. Recognizing the immense need for support among refugee families in Mae Sot, many of whom live in dire conditions, we launched this program to provide critical assistance and create stronger community ties. Mae Sot, a major hub for refugees from Myanmar, is home to thousands of displaced individuals living in rudimentary bamboo huts, facing severe food insecurity, joblessness, and health issues.

The program serves a dual purpose: addressing the urgent needs of refugee families and offering our high school students opportunities for social engagement and charity work. This initiative is a cornerstone of our GED education program, particularly within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) curriculum, and involves collaboration with international partner schools.

The Family Support Program involves several key steps:

1. **Surveys and Data Collection:** Our students design and conduct surveys to gather detailed information about the economic, health, and psychological status of refugee families. They document these conditions through video and photographs to create a comprehensive understanding of each family's situation.
2. **Report and Analysis:** After collecting data, students analyze the surveys and write detailed reports, which are then shared with our partner schools in Germany. This documentation helps our partners understand the needs and challenges faced by the families.
3. **Fundraising and Donations:** Partner schools engage in fundraising activities, such as selling goods at markets or designing products in their classes. The funds raised are sent to Mudita School, and we collaborate via Zoom to decide on the most effective ways to allocate these resources.
4. **Distribution of Aid:** Based on the analysis and discussions, we purchase necessary materials and distribute them to the families. This support can include food packages, medicine, water filters, and solar panels tailored to the specific needs identified in the surveys.
5. **Microfinance Program:** To promote long-term sustainability, we have integrated a microfinance component. Suitable families receive training on business development and are given seed money to start their own businesses. Over six months, they repay the funds while receiving ongoing support and training. This initiative includes ventures like tailoring workshops, tea shops, and grocery stores, with progress closely monitored and additional training provided as needed.

6. **Vocational Training:** We offer vocational training courses, such as a three-month tailoring program, where participants acquire the skills needed to start their own tailoring businesses. This training is aimed at providing practical skills that can lead to economic self-sufficiency.

The cooperation within the Family Support Program started with one partner school but has now expanded to all three partner schools in Germany and Thailand. This expansion allows us to support more families and develop a stronger, more resilient community.

By integrating this program into our curriculum and involving international partners, we aim to create compassionate, globally aware students who actively contribute to improving the lives of those around them. The Family Support Program exemplifies our commitment to holistic education, combining academic success with social responsibility and community service

Youth Program

In response to a significant influx of young Burmese refugees fleeing the civil war in Myanmar, Mudita School has established a comprehensive youth program. The military junta in Myanmar has implemented conscription to draft young people into the army due to the enormous casualties among soldiers. These young individuals are forced to serve in the military, participating in conflicts they wish to avoid. To escape this dire situation, many young people have fled the country, seeking refuge in Thailand.

In Mae Sot, especially in the area around our school, hundreds of young people have settled, building simple shelters and living in cramped conditions. For example, a group of around 25 young individuals live together in a single bamboo hut near our school. These refugees have heard of the good reputation of Mudita School and are seeking education and support, having had to abruptly end their university or high school education.

Recognizing their needs, we have expanded our educational offerings with a new two-story community center. This center provides youth programs, vocational training, and various seminars for the young refugees and their families, aiming to support their educational and personal development.

Program Structure

The youth program runs every afternoon, Monday to Sunday, with each course lasting two hours. The courses include:

1. **Self-Awareness Course**
 - This course focuses on counseling, self-reflection, self-confidence, leadership, and emotional and social growth. It provides a safe space for students to express their feelings and discuss their psychological issues, fostering emotional and social development.
2. **Computer Programming Course**
 - In cooperation with an Australian education group, this course is conducted online via Zoom and supported by local teachers in Mae Sot. Students start with basic programming and progress to more advanced languages like JavaScript and HTML, equipping them with skills for future careers in programming.
3. **Computer Software Course**

- This course teaches participants essential computer skills, including the use of office programs and online applications such as Google Drive and Google Classroom. It provides a foundational understanding of computer software.

4. **English Courses**

- **English for Beginners:** Designed for students with little to no prior English education, this course covers the basics of the English language.
- **English Intermediate:** This course helps more advanced learners improve their grammar, pronunciation, and communication skills.
- **English Chat Class:** In collaboration with the Australian education group, this class focuses on developing speaking skills through engaging and interactive sessions with native speakers, incorporating cultural exchange elements.

5. **Pre-GED Course**

- This course prepares students who aspire to join the GED (General Education Diploma) program but currently lack the necessary qualifications. It covers the four main GED subjects and helps students develop the skills needed for future enrollment in the GED program.

6. **Knitting Course**

- This vocational and handicraft course teaches students how to knit various items such as hats and pullovers. It serves as a form of mental concentration and relaxation, while also providing skills that could be used to create sellable products in the future.

7. **Tailoring Course**

- This comprehensive three-month course, part of the vocational training and family support program, trains students in all aspects of tailoring. They learn to work with sewing machines and design clothing, preparing them to start their own tailoring businesses.

Conclusion

The youth program at Mudita School addresses the urgent educational needs of young Burmese refugees, providing them with valuable skills and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Through a combination of academic courses, vocational training, and emotional support, the program fosters a holistic development approach. This initiative not only supports the refugees in rebuilding their lives but also strengthens our community by creating informed, skilled, and compassionate individuals.

International Volunteer Program

Volunteers from around the world have been an integral part of the Mudita Foundation since its inception. The Mudita Foundation emphasizes cultural exchange and fosters a global mindset among students. We have built a diverse community of local teachers, students, and volunteers from various countries.

Role of Volunteers

Volunteers contribute significantly to the school's operations and enrichment in a variety of ways. They work hands-on with the eco-farm, engage in building and handicraft projects, assist in creating and improving teaching materials, and actively participate in classroom teaching.

Their involvement spans all aspects of the school, utilizing their skills, knowledge, and ideas to enhance the learning environment.

Volunteers with specialized skills, such as photography, music, or teaching, are integrated into our curriculum, enriching the educational offerings. For instance, a photographer might lead a stop-motion video course, while a musician offers guitar lessons. Often specialized teachers with much experience in their field give training to our local teachers. This approach leverages the unique abilities of each volunteer, providing a diverse and enriched learning experience for students. This not only makes volunteers feel valued but also brings specialized expertise into our classrooms, creating a vibrant and dynamic educational atmosphere.

Integration and Impact

Volunteers are provided with accommodation on campus, allowing us to host around 8 to 10 volunteers at a time. Living on campus, they become an integral part of the school community, interacting closely with students and staff. This arrangement fosters a sense of global citizenship among students, as they are exposed to different cultures and experiences, promoting tolerance and understanding.

Community Center

We have just completed the building for the new community center. This two-story building is the largest structure on our school campus. The landlord constructed the building according to our design specifications. The community center hosts four main programs: vocational training, psychology courses, teacher training, and a computer lab. Additionally, it includes a large kitchen and a community garden, making it an ideal venue for youth programs and other activities.

Vocational Training

We have already launched our first vocational training program, which is the tailoring course. This three-month course, part of the family support program, is also open to youth and community members from the village. Currently, we have two sewing machines, with plans to acquire more in the coming months to accommodate additional participants. During the course, participants learn all necessary skills, from design to stitching, using both special and regular sewing machines. They create Myanmar Longyi, shirts, and dresses for men and women, preparing them to start their tailoring workshops after completing the course.

Starting at the end of this year, we will offer a healthy living course, which includes teachings on permaculture and eco-farming. This course will provide theoretical and practical knowledge for maintaining sustainable agriculture. It will also include cooking classes, where participants will learn about nutrition and how to prepare healthy meals, utilizing the large kitchen in the community center. This course aims to benefit refugee families, the youth and our entire school community.

We also plan to offer a carpentry course focusing on building bamboo structures and furniture. Previously, we ran a successful carpentry course at our school in Myanmar for three years. We aim to set up the workshop area and start this course at the beginning of next year.

Another course we plan to start next year is the mushroom farming course. We previously established a successful mushroom farm at our school in Myanmar, which ran successfully for

two years. This course will require a small bamboo hut to create a moist environment suitable for growing mushrooms. We have already contacted experienced mushroom farmers in Mae Sot, who will help us set up the farm and run the course, responding to the high local demand for mushrooms.

Psychology Courses

Last April we have concluded our first psychology course, specially offered for the teachers at Mudita School. These courses are also available to teachers from other schools who work with migrant students with refugee backgrounds. These students often come from traumatic experiences, having faced hardships like losing their homes or family members due to the civil war in Myanmar. The course trains teachers to act as counselors, better attending to the needs of students with traumatic backgrounds.

We also plan to extend these courses to parents, who often suffer from various psychological issues or traumatic experiences. These courses will offer advice and counseling on education, upbringing, and dealing with issues like drug abuse, violence, and neglect. Recognizing these issues are prevalent in Mae Sot, we aim to address them through parenting training and psychological support. We have a psychologist who regularly visits Mae Sot and provides these courses. Additionally, we have reached out to local psychologists who are eager to start offering courses at our new community center, with plans to intensify these offerings by the end of 2024.

Teacher Training

We regularly conduct teacher training with various experts from abroad. Past trainers include Professor Karen from England and her organization, as well as experienced teachers from Germany. The Mudita Foundation has worked with many partner organizations over the years to conduct successful training courses in Myanmar, which we are now continuing in Mae Sot. These courses cover self-awareness, internal growth, teaching techniques, and other essential skills for teachers, aiming to enhance the quality of education for students.

Computer Lab

The community center also houses a computer room with 15 computers. This facility will support not only our students but also the wider community. With this new computer lab, we can offer more efficient and better-equipped computer courses. Volunteers from abroad, including Australia and Germany, as well as our partner schools, will provide instruction. The lab is equipped with high-speed internet and high-quality computers, allowing us to integrate online teaching via Zoom. This setup enables global teachers to offer various courses, including English, computer programming, and more, thereby expanding our educational reach.

Conclusion

Mudita School and the Mudita Foundation have made significant strides in just two years, creating a profound impact on the lives of Burmese refugee children and the broader community in Mae Sot. Through a tailored curriculum, project-based learning, and the integration of international volunteers, we provide students with both academic excellence and essential life skills, fostering a sense of global citizenship.

The rapid growth and success of our programs reflect our commitment to education and community service. Our new Community Center enhances this mission by serving as a hub for engagement and development. As we finalize the Thai foundation and look towards acquiring new land to build a larger educational complex, our vision includes expanding our reach to support more students, community members, and international volunteers.

In summary, Mudita School and the Mudita Foundation are dedicated to creating a nurturing, inclusive, and dynamic educational environment. We strive to build a future where every student is equipped with the tools to succeed, every family has the support they need, and the entire community can grow together in harmony and understanding. With these ambitious plans, we are dedicated to continuing our service to the community, extending our impact, and fostering a harmonious and understanding environment where every individual can thrive.