

The Burmese Refugee Project

Through a participatory model of community development, the Project helps over 100 Shan Burmese refugees in Thailand gain access to education, health, and legal services.

Highlights

What we've accomplished in Thailand:

- 37 children placed in school
- Infectious disease eradication in communities
- Our children took 4 out of the top 5 academic slots at a local school
- A 4th-grader won a national essay prize of \$120, or 3 months' of his parents' income
- In a community where fewer than 33% of fathers and 2% of mothers can read, all BRP children read at grade level
- Malnutrition rates have plummeted

Our cost structure:

- **All donations are tax deductible**
- **No administrative overhead**
- **Low operational costs (\$2700 a year)**

How to help

We need \$30,000 to build an endowment. Donors who contribute \$1,000 or more will receive **official recognition** in our newsletter, **thank-you letters and photographs** from the BRP children, and **you will create a world of difference.**

Checks can be made to:

Burmese Relief Center-USA
Peter and Celina's Project
228 East 13th Street, Suite 4
New York, NY 10003

For more information, please contact us:

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<http://www.pceo.org/BRP.htm>



Our community

The Shan are an ethnic group currently persecuted by the national government in Burma (Myanmar). There, the Burmese government has banned their language from all public institutions, burned many of their villages, pitted them against other ethnic minorities, and captured many

as forced labor for the national army.

Our community, a group of Burmese Shan refugees in northwestern Thailand, previously had no access to clean water, sanitation, medical services, or education. Many of these basic needs have been met at very little cost by simply setting up a participatory framework that the community can use. For instance, by identifying the need for latrines, the community can build them using existing human capital. Some costs, however, cannot be met with mean earnings of \$24 a month. Help is needed to purchase supplies like school uniforms, for counseling to help community members address psycho-social needs, and to provide coping mechanisms and emergency health care.

What we do

The Burmese Refugee Project (BRP) is simple, extremely inexpensive, and efficient.

We facilitate community mobilization and provide small grants to defray some, but not all, of the community development costs. Community members also help to set agenda and contribute labor to the projects, instilling a sense of participation and ownership.



1) Education

In Burma, Shan children typically receive primary education in “jungle schools,” which are essentially huts that may be disassembled or abandoned in the event of military attack. We initially recreated this model, relying upon volunteer teachers, to provide basic literacy in Thai. We also taught the basic math and writing skills older children would need to enter public schools.



Our children are allowed into Thai schools provided that they pay minimal tuition (this is required at some public schools) and purchase uniforms and books. Therefore, the current focus of our education initiative is to match Shan community contributions dollar for dollar for school uniforms and books, and to purchase uniforms in bulk from supply stores in the nearest city. Each BRP child is provided with two uniforms, one pair of shoes, and one athletic outfit. Two uniforms are required to prevent the children from being ostracized by Thai children for wearing dirty clothes.

We also continue to provide tutoring to children already enrolled in school, and help newcomers learn Thai. We must be doing a good job; our students are taking all of the top spots in local schools.

2) Community Development

Most of the Burmese Shan refugees are marginalized in every way: economically, linguistically, and culturally. We provide a safe space for them to learn about their rights, to share their feelings and stories about their migration experiences, and to pool resources for the community needs.

3) Sanitation and health

Most BRP families live around waterways that are generally used both for the removal of human waste and for drinking water. We supply porcelain toilets, cement, and holding tanks for communities and supervise the construction of latrines. Each community is required to supply materials necessary to maintain privacy, to provide the labor required to construct the latrines, and to pay monthly fees for government waste removal services.

Approximately half of all Shan children and adults suffer from chronic minor ailments, and approximately 3% require lifesaving medical treatment that they cannot afford. Few Shan still have teeth by age 20. We provide grants for emergency trips to the hospital, deworming medications, vitamin A, and vaccines to every member of the Shan communities we serve.

We also provide basic health education to the community. We construct our lessons based solely on their questions and needs. For example, we have counseled families about prenatal care, malaria, chronic back pain, and depression, and spoken to interested households about family planning.

Meet two BRP children: Nuan and Sompong

Although Nuan did not witness war directly, she still suffered from the anti-minority policies in Burma. Her family was poor enough so that, at age 5, Nuan spent every day burning wood pieces into charcoal to sell. Nuan’s mother died when she was very young, and her father lives with his new wife in a different city, providing no financial support. Nuan lives with her older sister, Yuan, and Yuan’s boyfriend, in a small hut.



With the BRP’s help, Nuan has been able to build a new life for herself. She relishes the opportunity to attend school, and she has come to trust some adults, such as the BRP staff. Nuan is now a healthy and outgoing, but still incredibly appreciative, 12-year-old.

Sompong has already achieved what would have seemed impossible without the BRP. He is 13 years old and goes to public school with two of his best friends from the BRP community, Woot and Mong. After attending the Project’s informal school for two years, Sompong went to a ‘real’ school in



2002. Although he was originally placed in the 1st grade, he immediately went on to skip a few grades and get straight As. He lives with his mother in a one-room thatch-roof hut. In his spare time, Sompong helps his mother with her job in the market, performs chores like fetching drinking water, and plays soccer or table tennis with his friends.