



Circus Play project. Mae Sot. Dec 2022 – Jan 2023.

Report version2

Circus Play project, Mae Sot region, Thailand, Dec 2022 – Jan 2023.

Jules Howarth: Project Manager and lead tutor, website manager, video and photo gatherer/editor.

Fundraiser: Jude Smith

Supported by: Social Circus International. (Which reviewed the project plan and allowed us to use their bank accounts to gather and pay money. They will also review the project report and book-keeping to ensure the project was delivered and book-keeping is accurate)



Background and situation

Circus Play was created from the work and projects of Social Circus Myanmar, as a new company name to work in Thailand and other place, rather than in Myanmar. Access to Myanmar is restricted by the ongoing civil war.

In this project we reached out to one of the largest communities of Myanmar people living in Thailand and close to the border with Myanmar.

We were connected with the local network in Mae Sot by Spark Circus; big thanks to them.

The local Thailand foundation/ngo Help Without Frontiers (HWF) gave us access to Migrant Learning Centres (MLCs) in and around Mae Sot and Pho Pra (50kms south of Mae Sot).

The MLCs are established schools that educate children of 'migrants' from Myanmar. Many have been living in Mae Sot for years, others have arrived in the last 12 months. The majority of families have established themselves in Thailand, but most have to renew their paper/residency annually and many more are living and working without the 'correct' papers. Thai Immigration and Police regularly sweep townships and at this time families have to hide or relocate until the 'sweep' is over.



Thai Immigration and Police also take payments from migrants to 'ignore' the fact that they don't have the 'correct' papers. Numerous families have already been approved for resettlement to other countries as refugees (to US, Canada, other western countries) with the IMO process, but the Thai authorities have been delaying resettlement plans. A lot of people and families are in limbo.

There is a hidden, but evidenced, high level of depression amongst migrants living short and long term in the area. There are frequent attempts of suicide or actual suicides. People are desperate. One day they could be running a shop they have started and been running for months or years, the next they could be sent back to Myanmar and tortured, imprisoned or killed. A large number of families cannot work, cannot send their children to school; they are desperate and in need of support.

Beyond this there are thousands living in camps, not in the towns. Many are traumatised by fleeing bombing and military raids, the murder of friends and family by the military, random theft of property, goods by Myanmar police and military; others have fled because they were involved in the protests that began soon after Feb 1st 2021, the Coup, and have become targets for MI, Police and Army units in Myanmar.

The Thai police taunt Myanmar youngsters as they stop them on their scooters (50cc motorbikes) with the threat that they send them back to General Hlaing. This is a threat like "I'll send you back to Hitler/Mussolini/Franco/Pol Pot/Milosevic/Putin". It's a vicious and credible threat, cruel and intended to be cruel.

"To Thai Police, we are walking ATMs" says one Myanmar friend. Near the end of fiscal year the Thai Police fleece Myanmar people for cash. Doesn't matter the reason they stop them, they just want money.

One MLC I visited for circus class had half the pupils missing, the teacher explained, there was an Immigration sweep of the township so many families have left and gone into hiding.

One friend who had loaned me his second car suddenly needed it back late at night, he had also had to leave town and hide and needed his second car to move other people overnight. He has a house and a business and was still under threat. "If they catch me and send me back across the border, they will kill me" was his genuine and blunt statement.

So whilst Mae Sot is, on the surface, a busy working town with new cafes and restaurants run by Myanmar people opening up and everyone conducting day-to-day life, there is a steady, deadly undercurrent of fear, risk, insecurity, stuck-in-limbo, ever present. Not obvious to passing tourists or visitors: Myanmar people blend in as best they can, work and provide for their children, try to build a future, but that's uncertain, vulnerable and tomorrow they could be back in hell.



Summary

Met lots of new people apart from the schools that we attended: activists, teachers, families – they enjoyed the circus activities and saw its value as fun, play and educational tool.

Delivered workshops/session to 11 MLCs for 5 weeks+ and weekend workshops/sessions at Joy House.

Each session had about 20 students, sometimes more – upto 30 – and sometime a few less. Over the project we estimate that we worked with $20 \times 11 = 220$ students each week, plus 1 or teachers each session. Weekend workshop at Joy House has 20+ children and adults each session.

Made 200 juggling balls and 30 hula hoops.

Jules provided 17 diabolos, 4 flowersticks, 20 plates, 1 kendama. He will be paid for these items to replace his personal stock of props.

Got some props from Spark stores 8 plates, 1 flowerstick, some rings, 1 diabolo

Left all props at Joy House. Informed MLCs/Schools and HWF that equipment can be borrowed to run classes.

Lucky to be in Mae Sot for Joy House opening. Positive synchronicity ☺

HWF came to just one workshop. They had reports, during delivery, from schools during saying the Circus was good and suitable.

All schools liked the work and would have us back. See HWF feedback below.

Left some props with some (5) schools – approx. 1 diabolo, 2 flowersticks, 12 juggling balls, 1 or 2 plates each.

Translated some documents for teachers – diabolo book in Myanmar, some notes for teachers to link circus to other educational topics, some ideas for gathering feedback from students.



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Got many good photos and videos, a selection is available here

<https://circusplay.org/report-circus-play-project-mae-sot-2022-23/>

and please check our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/socialcircusmyanmar> for others.

I'm still working on a final video edit to add to the report and to be used for future fundraising efforts.

Got some nice hand-made drawings from one school

Borrowed a car, loaned at 1000B a week (about £25 a week) and we paid the fuel costs.

Had one assistant – Ko Thar Eh. He helped with translation in workshops, and learned circus skills. He is an expert skateboarder and learned circus from Spark Circus visits. He is not interested in being a 'teacher'. At eighteen years old he is following his own path. He is very likeable and polite and personable, speaks Karen, Thai, Bama. He was sometime very involved and sometimes not so engaged. He helped out a lot and is a friend. His focus is not to become a 'circus trainer' nor a 'teacher'. Lovely young person. We paid him for his time at classes.

Had another new assistant to learn the ropes in the last week only, a very nice chap called Noel, connected with us from Joy House.

We discussed how we can make the project last year through and left equipment at Joy House so they can be accessed by the community and the schools.

Support from Joy House fb <joyhousecenter>

Gave out paper Certificates to students at schools.

Stuck to the budget, more or less

Jules had his my big costs covered – flight, insurance, uk travel, some costs for replacement props. Food and Accommodation was covered. Jules contributed some money.



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Made connection for next project in Phangna – Saya Htoo Chit, director of FED

Lots of video still to process and present

Got in-kind support from friends in BKK - accommodation

Thanks for Serious Fun committee

Could not have done it without Jude Smith

Donations still limited to friends of Jude and Jules, mostly Jude – she won't do it again, too much work



Social Circus Feedback

[Jules adds: Questions asked by Help Without Frontiers to School/Migrant Learning Centres headteachers.]

Received by Jules 12th Feb, 2023.

Note: Activities ended 27th January 2023.]

1. Overall, how happy were you with the activities? (1 to 5 scale)



5 – four responses

4 – five responses

3 – two responses

2 – zero responses

1 – zero responses

2. Would you like to do these activities again in the future? (yes/no)

Yes – eleven responses

No – zero responses

3. What did the children gain from these activities? (multiple choice)

Physical Skills – nine responses

Happiness – eight responses

Language Skills – five responses

4. What would be the best length per workshop?

2 hours – one response

1.5 hours – six responses

1 hour – three responses

45 minutes – one response

5. Were there any challenges with the workshops? Please explain.

Sometimes the activities were too fast/rushed – difficult to learn

When doing activities with mixed ages, sometimes the younger ones couldn't keep up

Not enough time for some activities, would like a longer session

Language barrier was a challenge the first time but improved the other times

6. Do you have any feedback or comments for Jules the facilitator?



Good, patient, kind

Body language helped the children to understand and helped them to get excited about the activities

7. Would you like to continue using the circus equipment? (yes/no)

Yes – ten responses

No – one response

8. Any other comments.

Would like to learn more activities next time.

Would like to invite you back next year.

Would like to involve more students including younger grades.

End of feedback



End of report

Feb 18th 2023. Jules.



Appendix 1.

Financial Report.

Summary

Figures provided are summarised as GBPE and rounded.

Book-keeping details are available to view to anyone. Email request to view information and data to info@circusplay.org

Income from fundraising: £4,005.00

(NZ: £2458; US: £80; EUR: £306; UK: £516; AUD: £144; one-off donation UK: £500)

Expenditure:

Transport (buses, rail, taxis, car hire, scooter hire, fuel) £559.

Accommodation £654.

Food/Subsistence £455.

Materials (printing, t-shirts, bags, suitcases, tools, etc.) £273.

Props/Equipment (juggling balls made locally, hula hoops, etc.) £389.

Communications (sim card, data, phone calls) £16.

Wages to Myanmar or Thai workers £143.

Banking/transaction costs £34 (excluding PayPal initial payment costs).

Project manager's costs (uk and thai travel, flight, insurance, circus props, visa, website) £1,603.

Total: £4,130.00

Balance: -£125.00

Thai Baht in cash in hand: approx. £90

Difference (written off by Jules): approx. £35.



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