

Alta Alonzi Update from Thailand

The Mission Committee is pleased to share with the congregation another update from Alta Alonzi as she continues her mission outreach work in Chiang Mai, Thailand with BEAM, an organization in Thailand helping Myanmar refugees earn their GED. Generous donations to mission from Oak Grove members enabled us to provide \$3000 which will cover Alta's medical and transportation expenses. Alta has been busy with many activities as you can read in her report that follows.

"Since I last wrote, I have been busy here in Chiang Mai, Thailand learning the ropes at BEAM, teaching my students, and participating in cultural events. I am so happy to be here teaching my students while at the same time learning so much from them. Thank you again for making this experience possible for me with your support!

It has been very personally fulfilling to see my students improve in just the span of a few months. All of them have greatly improved on their reading and writing skills. One of my students was so excited when he got 14/16 right on a homework assignment – previously, he was getting less than half correct. We are just finishing our essay-writing unit now. While my students are still working on grammar structures and text analysis, they are writing better than many of my past high school peers! They are definitely well on track to pass the GED and be accepted to University.



My students Chit Chit, Esoh, Thee, David, and Cris take me to their Burmese/Karen church

My students are also teaching me a lot about themselves as well. My students have different cultural backgrounds like Burmese, Karen, Kachin, and Shan. Some come from refugee camps, mountain villages, and cities like Yangon. Still, they share many commonalities. They love events like birthdays, Halloween and Loy Krathong. They love to dance to anything from traditional Karen music to techno remixes to “Gangnam Style.”

Another thing I have learned is that many of my students are Christian; they commute over an hour every Sunday to attend their Burmese-language church. I was happy when they invited me to attend service with them one Sunday. The music was beautiful and I even got to hear “What a Friend We have in Jesus” sung in Burmese!

Beyond teaching, I have also worked on other events for BEAM. Earlier this month, we held a three-day Youth Leadership Conference for 72 Burmese, Thai, and Thai ethnic youth to bring diverse groups together and engage them in community development issues. In small groups, students designed community impact projects addressing issues such as early marriage, recycling, endangered languages, school bullying, and others. Ultimately, we picked one group with a project idea of taking waste plastics and recycling them into furniture and supplies for schools in need. This group will receive funding and mentorship to make this project actually happen!

Besides the Higher Education Program, of which I am a part, BEAM also runs Vocational Training programs. Our vocation students in tailoring, hairdressing, and baking all graduated this month plus more students in our Thai language and Non-Formal Education programs. These students all worked very hard, and I am excited to see what they accomplish in the near future!

I am learning about Thai culture as well. While Americans celebrated Thanksgiving, Thais were busy with Loy Krathong, or the Lantern Festival. This holiday is famous for beautiful paper lanterns released into the sky and krathong or small banana-leaf ‘boats’ released into the river. Our Thai staff taught us how to make the krathong, and we all went to release the krathong and lanterns together. It was a beautiful night!

I hope I have been able to share just a little bit of how awesome BEAM and my students are. I feel I have already learned so much, so I cannot wait to learn even more in my remaining seven months. I am sure time will just fly by! Thank you for your continued support and interest in my activities, and I look forward to sharing even more with you soon!”

All the best,
Alta Alonzi