



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: Serving in a Refugee School **Name:** Teri Marsh
Other Team Members:
Program: Greater Houston Area Program
Trip Dates: 06/20/2011 - 07/02/2011 **Location Visited:** Mae Sot, Thailand
Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 01

Project Summary: I traveled to Mae Sot, Thailand, on the border with Myanmar (Burma,) to volunteer at a school serving Karen refugees. I am a 5th grade language arts teacher.

The army in Myanmar has been conducting a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Karen people for over 20 years. Large numbers have fled into Thailand to escape rape, murder, land mines, and the destruction of villages and crops. Estimates range from 300,000 up to a million people, who are dependent on NGOs (non-government organizations) for food aid, education, and medical care. I volunteered at a school that serves about 160 refugee children in grades PK-4th. The children receive instruction in English, as well as Karen, Burmese and Thai. I traveled with a team of seven other people. We furnished a school library with shelves we purchased in the area, and books we carried in our luggage from home. We painted and furnished a teacher's lounge with seating and storage space for each teacher. I co-led a teacher training session on how to use the new books, and modeled interactive, engaging ways of teaching English. I traveled from classroom to classroom teaching English lessons with the children. We hosted all the Karen teachers at a local restaurant, a rare treat for them, since the teachers are refugees themselves, and live on a very low salary. I was able to interact with teachers and parents and even conduct formal interviews with a translator. I documented my experience with journaling, photographs, and video to use for my persuasive writing unit when I returned home.

Career Impact: *Experienced first-hand the challenge of serving, communicating, and teaching in a different culture and language
*Observed the challenges faced by refugee teachers serving their students in extraordinarily difficult circumstances
*Worked cooperatively as a part of a highly effective team
*Established contact with a Karen refugee community here in Houston *Increased understanding of the challenges faced by refugees seeking to assimilate into U.S. culture in my own city

Classroom/Community Impact:*Enhanced my students' understanding of world geography by sharing my photographs and videos
*Modeled writing persuasively to serve a humanitarian cause for my students
*Greater sensitivity to the needs of English language learners, especially refugees
*Interest on the part of my students in corresponding with and helping refugee students in Thailand
*Class is corresponding with a middle school teacher in China (met on a flight) and exchanging photos and messages

Open Response: *Developing class project to send holiday gift packages to students in Thailand
*Showcasing the persuasive writing of my students in the service of causes of their choice
*Correspondence between my students and students in Thailand and China
*Sharing artifacts, video, and photos from my trip to enhance geography study
*Modeling persuasive writing for students as I share about my experience
*Developing relationship with Karen refugees in an apartment complex near my home

Quote: The joys of teaching and learning are universal, even in extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Photos:



English lessons



Mae La Refugee Camp



Extraordinary beauty, extraordinary suffering



Sophie and me (my Chinese penpal)



Recess



Students



Teacher training



Lunchtime