

In another of UTCC's events, this BP-er has already won an award trip to Vietnam, and hopefully soon to Taipei, Paris and Sweden.

Funding and finances

The Bridge Program is funded by spontaneous donations from a small number of 'BP friends'.

The program enables BP-ers to build their own portable 'BP office' as well as offering help with Internet access and travel costs.

Program funds are used to cover costs of BP shirts, concluding celebrations and team expenses.

In recent times, visa, part-scholarship, and living expenses have been met for several BP/ACU graduates in degree courses in Thailand.

Completing the cycle

In December 2018, two former BP-ers journeyed to Maera Moo refugee camp, and the Hostel still supported by the Marist Mission Centre.



Using skills from their BP and university training, they offered 'capacity building' in-service to the Hostel leaders and students connecting them more securely not only to continued support but greater confidence in bridging the gaps towards the future of their education.

Young refugees' bridging the gap to tertiary education

In 2011, refugee youth from a remote camp on the Thai-Burma border sought help to further their education.

The Bridge Program is their story.



Pioneer BP-ers, Dingo Keidar and James Brangnu, at St Peter Chanel's Hostel, Maera Moo refugee camp, completing the Bridge Program cycle of empowerment.

March 2019

Beginnings

In 1998, Marist Mission Centre Australia began supporting a small hostel in the remote refugee camp of Maera Moo in the jungles of the Thai-Burma border.

Since then, a generation of Burmese youngsters have had somewhere safe to live – and the beginnings of education.

In 2011, several young men and women from Maera Moo, ‘graduates’ of MMC Hostel, sought help to bridge the gap between their rudimentary camp high-school education and the possibility of tertiary studies.

In the meantime, in 2004, MMC had helped set up Australian Catholic University’s ambitious initiative of an online diploma course on the Thai-Burma border.

‘How can we get into the ACU course?’, the Maera Moo hostellers asked.

The then-director of the ACU program, Prof Duncan MacLaren, responded: *‘We are looking for refugee students with reasonable English, capable of critical thinking and with a willingness to help their people after graduation.’*

The Program

And so the Bridge Program began, a twenty-week online program to prepare for ACU application.

Initially managed by a former MMC director, the Bridge Program continues under the auspices of the Australian Province’s *‘Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation’* committee.

It is now coordinated by one of its outstanding graduates, 24-yr-old Muriel Valles, currently completing studies with Hong Kong’s Institute of Education. *[see below: ‘Ongoing involvement’]*

Since 2011, eight Bridge Programs have attracted applications from more than two hundred young adult Burmese refugees, mainly through word-of-mouth advertising and the growing presence of social media.

BP at work

In addition to the ACU criteria, BP applicants need to have reliable Internet access and commitment to the program with its two assignments fortnightly.



Left: BP’s coordinator, Muriel Valles, at Hong Kong.

Below: Muriel with ACU staff in Sydney, 2017.



Above: Dingo Keidar and James Brangnu, graduates of the Bridge Program and ACU’s diploma course, now enjoying International Business Administration scholarship studies in Bangkok with the support of BP friends.

Right: Dingo Keidar’s award-winning presentation at UTCC.



Ongoing involvement

Some BP-ers opt to assist with continuing work for the program and wear a characteristic black BP shirt when involved with post-BP gatherings and enterprises.

Since 2017, a Bridge Program Coordinating Team (BPCT) has provided not only excellent local leadership and management of the program, but opportunity for further skill development amongst its graduates.

One BP-er recently represented Myanmar in the ASEAN-China ambassador program sponsored by the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, visiting China, Laos and Myanmar.



Above: Black-shirted graduate BP-ers at Maesot, Thailand, available for a range of communication, promotion and social activities.

Below: The Bridge Program's first local coordinating team, Min Min Soe (Thailand), Kyaw Zin (Myanmar) and Muriel Valles (Hong Kong).

Further below: Masthead of the Bridge Program website

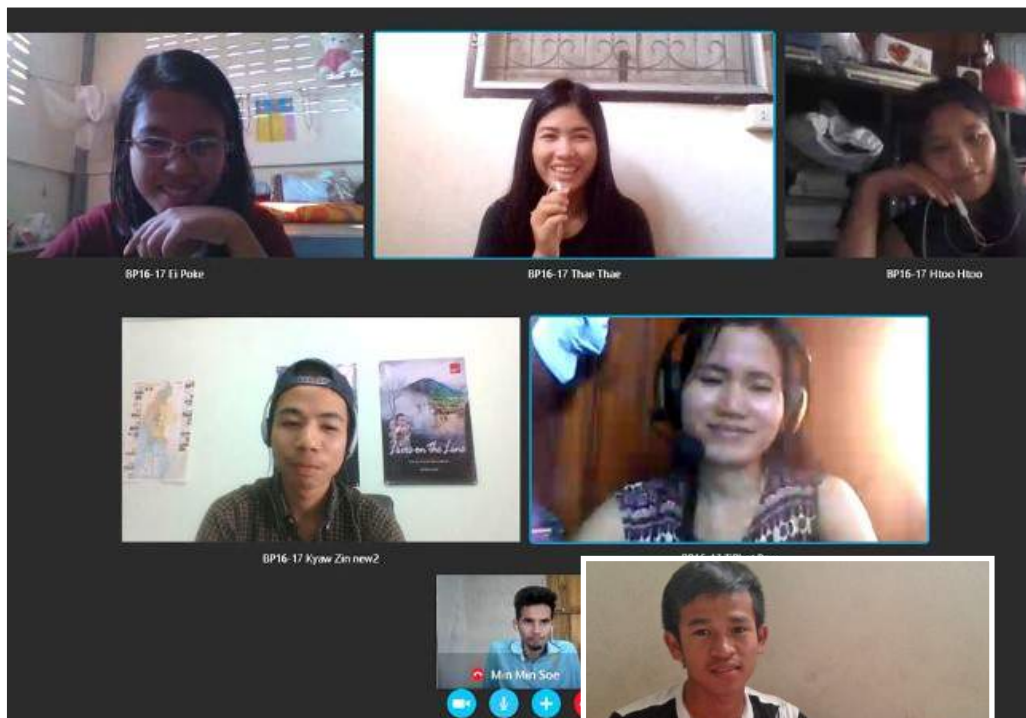


Above: St Peter Chanel's (formerly MMC) Hostel, Maera Moo refugee camp, 2018.

Right: Graduate BP-ers (black shirts) returning to Maera Moo for 'capacity building' in-service (see page 12).

Left: 'My first studying place in the forest', Karen State, Myanmar, pioneer BP-er of 2011.





Skype video conversations are also an important component.

Assignments begin with producing 'good-looking documents' and intelligent emails.

They continue with concise life stories, clarifying priorities and goals, setting up a 'BP office' for themselves, crosswords, quizzes, photography and other topics.

Towards the end of the program, BP-ers do writing and reading assignments simulating ACU test conditions.

As they complete their BP, graduates received a carefully-prepared Letter of Recommendation to ACU (or other enterprises, as requested) as well as a Certificate of Participation.



Above: ACU graduation ceremony, Maesot, Thailand.

Right: Brother (BP12-13) and sister (BP18-19) and mother at ACU graduation, 2015.

Below: First BP-ers to graduate with ACU, Maesot, 2015.



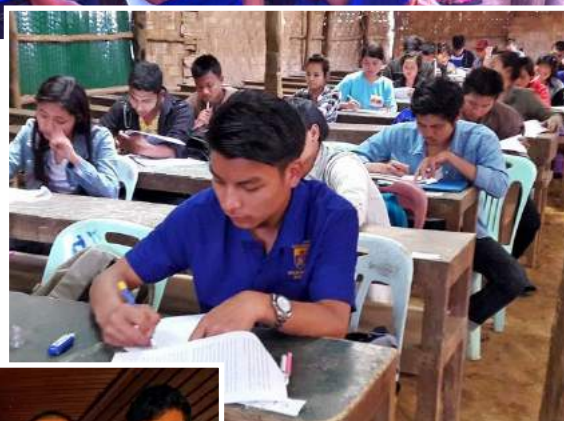
Studies after BP

To date, sixty-six BP-ers have successfully completed the program, wearing their signature royal blue 'BP shirt' to ACU's testing days.

Over thirty BP-ers have been accepted by ACU and graduated with its Diploma in Liberal Studies.

Some of these are now enrolled in, or have already graduated from, degree programs in universities in Bangkok and Hong Kong.

Many of BP's graduates work with ethnic NGOs and community groups providing educational and social help for the people of Myanmar and its refugees.



Above: Testing day at applicants, Mae Pa, Thailand.

Left: BP-ers at the Mae Pa Study Centre with ACU's then-director, Professor Duncan MacLaren.



Top: BP-ers at Maesot, Thailand, 2016, celebrating the end of their program — and their BP shirts.
Above: Pioneer BP-ers at Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border, 2013.
Right: BP-ers at Maesot, 2016.





Some of the Bridge Program's sixty-six graduates, 2011 to 2019