

BHSOH Learning Center, My Second Home

Final report by Jonas Riegel from Switzerland

I woke up at dawn on a Tuesday morning in my little apartment in rural Thailand. It was already summerly warm when, after a quick breakfast, I went on my ten-minute walk to BHSOH Learning Center. I was nervous. Previously, I had taught in a primary school, but now I would be stuck with 60 teenagers for a year. They would test me, they would challenge me, they would tease me. But there was no going back. Feeling my own heartbeat, I followed our school administrator, who would later become a good friend, to the classroom under a straw roof. Around 30 teenagers were waiting to be taught in summer class. With almost no teaching experience and with no knowledge about the migrant's situation, I started into my year of volunteering at BHSOH.

Now, more than ten months later, I have one week left. Exams are done, on Tuesday is the school closing ceremony. Next Sunday, I am leaving. I wish I could go back and start over again. Now, with all the experience, I could do so much better. I am finally developing a deeper understanding of the situation and the culture, of all the different schools, programs and NGOs. Now I know my students so well that I can handle a class without any problems.

The students of BHSOH Learning Center are refugees and Migrants from Myanmar. Due to the civil war and the continuous fighting between the military and ethnic groups that has been going on for decades in Myanmar, the families of our students have fled the country. They are staying in Thailand illegally, without passport and visa. Thus, they are always at risk of being arrested by the police. Luckily the police is very corrupt, so the migrants can often-times buy themselves out.

The school is technically illegal but it is recognized as a Learning Center by the local government. This gives us some protection as the police cannot arrest our students and teachers at school. On the other hand, we are unable to give our students recognized leaving certificates. Finding a way for our students to continue their studies is the single biggest challenge for migrants in Mae Sot area.

I am leaving. But BHSOH has a place in my heart. Once I have the time and money, I will come back. I am already longing for that moment.



If you are interested in volunteering at BHSOH or at any other Child's Dream school, I am happy to tell you more about my experiences and about the situation here. If you are located in Switzerland or Southern Germany, I might even be able to meet you in person.

Feel free to contact me anytime: jonas.riegel@bluewin.ch

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Swimming during holiday



Goodbye dinner with my Pre-GED class

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My students built a house out of bamboo and mud bricks



Representatives of Asia-Pacific International University (the two gentlemen in the middle) visited us and held a presentation.