



the  
**EDUCATION**  
ISSUE

OCTOBER

2016



## FIRST WORD

"It wasn't so bad. The guards were nice to me because I used to help them when I practiced law in Sittwe."

I sipped the tea he served me and nibbled on a stale cookie. My eyes caught his from the rim of my plastic cup and I asked, "What's next?"

He answered with a mischievous smile, "I think it's time to organize the teachers and start the schools again."

U Kyaw Hla Aung's answer was shocking. He had just served 2 years in prison and his 'crime' was associating with foreigners who supported 'illegal' schools. The foreigners who supported him were Partners Relief & Development, and the schools were started by him because of his conviction that, "people are dying from malnutrition, violence, and illness; but even worse than that, our children are a lost generation if they do not get an education. With no schools we will eventually cease to exist."

His passion for education, even if it means being incarcerated again, makes sense to me. Education is one of the longest-lasting casualties of war, forcing thousands of children to lose years of schooling they will

never get back. As we send our own children back to school this fall, we thought it fitting to devote this edition to our work in education, the impact it is making and the compelling stories we are hearing from the children we serve. For these kids, education is a game-changer.

When Jesus told us to love our neighbors as ourselves, He meant it, and the things I expect for my children are the same things I want other children to have. If we believe education is essential for our own children who admittedly do not live in conflict and oppression, how much more essential is it for our smallest neighbors who do?

Your partnership with us means that tens of thousands of children are in school today despite the war and conflict they are steeped in daily. I am deeply grateful for this as are the families affected by our unified efforts. This magazine is a testimony to the lives you are changing because of your support. Thank you.

For the children,

**STEVE GUMAER**

**CEO, Partners Relief & Development**

# DYING to LEARN



*Education is a basic human right, enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention*

**109.2 MILLION CHILDREN** of primary and lower secondary school age - typically between six and 15 years - live in conflict areas. Of these children, nearly **ONE IN FOUR** are missing out on their education



**Children** made up an astonishing **51%** of the world's refugees in 2015

## MYANMAR

According to the UNDP Education Index in 2013, Myanmar is amongst the **LEAST EDUCATED COUNTRIES** in the world at **0.37** out of 1. Myanmar is **0.28** points lower than the world median (0.65)

MYANMAR'S AVERAGE CHILD ONLY ATTENDS SCHOOL FOR

**4 YEARS**

(WORLDWIDE AVERAGE IS 8.6 YEARS)



Total population:

**53.9 million**

Number of refugees:

**512,466**

Internally displaced people:

**644,000**

## MIDDLE EAST

**Turkey** hosts **2.5 million** refugees from Syria, more than any other country worldwide

**Lebanon** hosts approx. **1.1 million** Syrians; around **one in five** people in the country is a refugee

**6.5 million** are displaced within **Syria**; half of those affected are **children**.

**Jordan:** **635,324** Syrian refugees

**Iraq**, where **3.4 million** people are already internally displaced, hosts **245,022** refugees from Syria

THE UNHCR ESTIMATES THAT **less than 40%** of Syrian refugee children, are enrolled in **FORMAL EDUCATION**



CLAIRE GIBBONS

# Education in Conflict

**LAST YEAR,** I had the opportunity to visit internally displaced people camps in Kachin State where active conflict remains between the Myanmar Army and the Kachin. My prevailing memory from this trip was of a small library in one of the camps that had only two bookcases. One bookcase had a few shelves of Burmese literature and non-fiction reference books; the other had a single shelf of books in English.

The remaining shelves were stark and empty. Through an interpreter the teenage librarian told me: "I've read all the Burmese ones already, but I don't speak English so I haven't read those ones."

Despite what I saw as inadequate education facilities, the children of this camp are actually some of the fortunate ones in Myanmar as schooling is available for them and they have access to a meager supply of books and learning resources.

A recent report from UNICEF highlighted that almost one in four children aged between 6 and 15 living in conflict areas globally are missing out on their education.

Around the world, that comes to a staggering 24 million children out of school in crisis zones across 22 countries with ongoing conflicts.

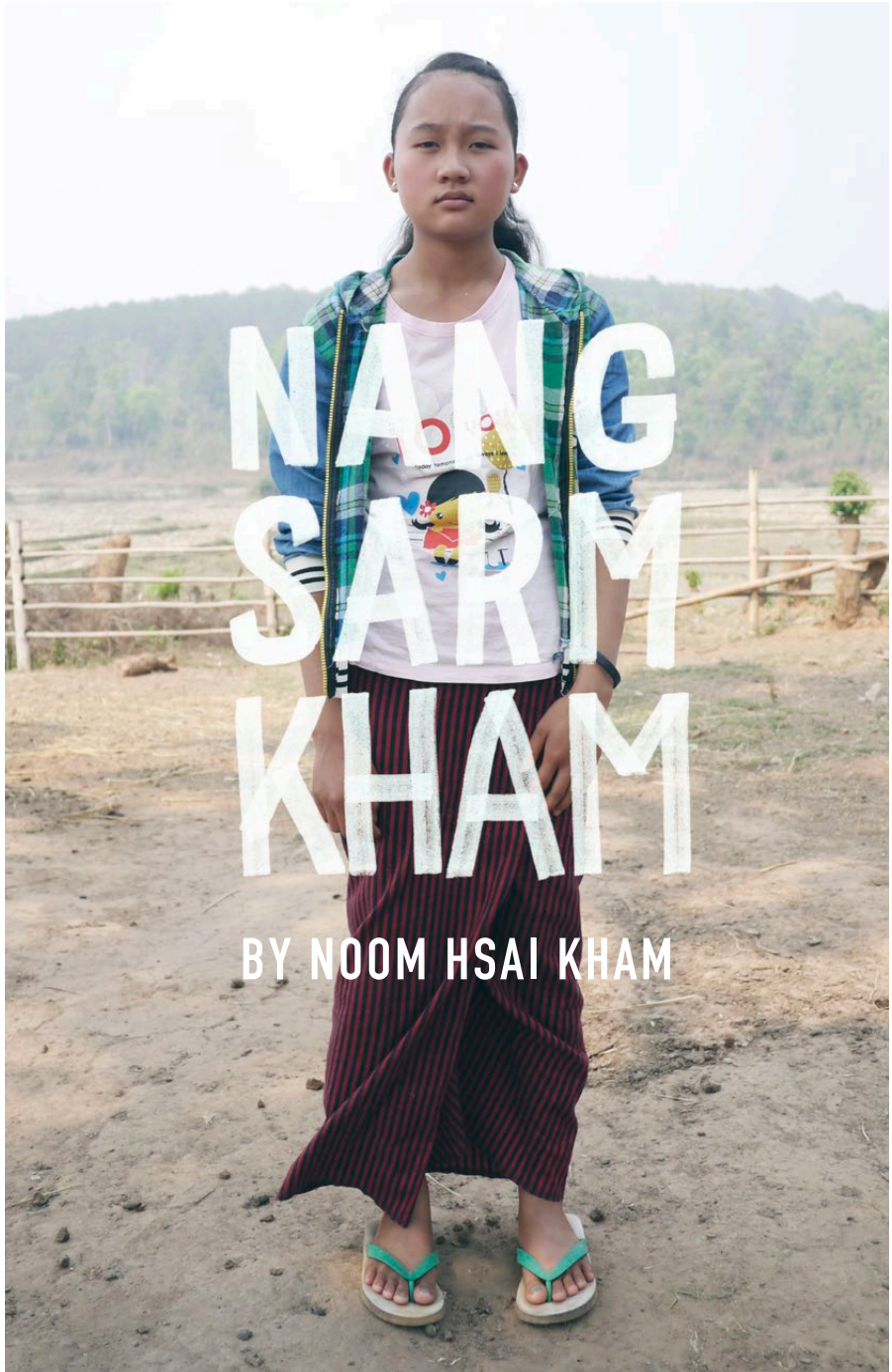
Education in a conflict zone is difficult. It is a struggle to recruit and retain teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills to teach when the average number of years of schooling is only four years for those aged over 25 in Myanmar and only 50% of the current high-school aged population are enrolled at a school. Even in conflict zones, everything costs something, and paying teachers, maintaining school buildings and supplying pens and pencils often take a back seat for a family when staying alive and fed are the priority. In remote areas electricity supply is inconsistent with candlelight regularly used to complete homework after daily errands are completed. There can be years of missed classes from displacement or times without teachers, gaps in learning because of health concerns, and children needing to work to provide income for their families. All of these further exacerbate access to school. Tragically, children who are not in school are also at an increased

danger of abuse, exploitation and recruitment into armed groups.

Despite these challenges, time and time again Partners has seen communities willing to go great lengths to keep their children in school. We are committed to partnering with them to build more community-run sustainable solutions to break through the financial challenges that keep children out of school.

Why? Because the benefits of education in these times of conflict are numerous. When displacement and violence prevail, education is vital as it equips children with the knowledge and skills they need to rebuild their communities once the conflict is over.

School provides children with the structure and stability they need to cope with the trauma they experience, as well as often physically protecting children from trauma and physical danger around them. Education keeps displaced communities one step further away from human traffickers by giving options for income and by equipping them to make wise decisions to protect their families. Schools are important so children can learn about preventable diseases, nutrition and hygiene. The daily routine normalizes children's lives, and improves psychosocial wellbeing. As they continue to learn, they are given a hope for the future and space to learn new skills and values, such as peace, tolerance, conflict resolution, democracy, human rights, environmental conservation and disaster risk reduction.



# NANG SARM KHAM

BY NOOM HSAI KHAM

### **When I first met Nang Sarm Kham**

I noticed that she was very quiet and shy, but I could tell she was also very intelligent. She told me that she wanted to help those in her village by studying to be a teacher and returning to teach the children in her village.

Nang Sarm Kham is from Bar Mint village in Southern Shan State. It's a small village of 180 people, and they have a small primary school, but classes don't go past grade 5. When she finished grade 5 her family sent her to stay with a relative in a nearby village so that she could continue her schooling. She finished grade 6 in the nearby village then went to school in Murg Kurng, a small city up to 2 hours drive from her village. Her room and board with a family in Murg Kurng cost her family around \$400 USD per year, in addition to other school and living costs. This added up to around \$1,000 USD per year. Her family simply could not afford this.

Nang Sarm Kham is the youngest of 3 children. Her family have a small farm and grow tea, but it's not always profitable, and in 2015 bad weather meant that the crop was very poor and they struggled to break even.

In 2013 Partners met with the village leaders and helped them form a committee, which set up a small business giving loans to people in the community at low interest rates. Partners provided start up capital of \$1,750 USD, and from May 2014 - May 2015 this project made \$340 USD profit. The committee decided that the best way to use these funds was to provide a \$270 USD scholarship to Nang Sarm Kham so that she could

attend grade 9 in Murg Kurng. The rest of the profit went to support two Shan language teachers. While her family still had to contribute to her schooling, it meant it was now possible for her to continue her education.

Since the start of the Sustainable Schools program we have been able to help 35 communities in Shan State set up small businesses to provide a sustainable way for rural communities to support schools and education in their villages. The profits generated by these community run businesses have gone towards school buildings, teachers salaries, school supplies and scholarships. Most of these communities have been able to pay for an extra teacher because of the profits made from the community business. It also brings communities together and helps show them that through working together they can help bring positive change to their communities.

For Nang Sarm Kham this has made a world of difference. Without the support generated from the community business, she would have had to drop out of school to work with her parents on the tea farm or in the shop and never get the opportunity to further her education and give herself options for the future. Nang Sarm Kham is now 14 years old and is in grade 10. She hopes to be the first person from her community to finish school. She wants to go on to train as a teacher so that she can help others in her community achieve their dream of getting an education. Because of this program Nang Sarm Kham has something that many others in rural Shan State don't have...hope for a brighter future.



# Sustainable Schools

Partners Sustainable Schools Program provides one-off grants to help impoverished communities initiate sustainable development projects that generate income to support teachers and schools for their children. Partners works closely with the communities to start these sustainable community-run businesses that have the sole purpose of funding schools and paying teacher salaries.



**PROVIDES START-UP CAPITAL EQUIVALENT TO ONE CHILD'S POSITION IN A SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL.**



**PROVIDES START-UP CAPITAL EQUIVALENT TO A FULL CLASS IN A SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL.**



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Meet with community

1



2

Develop business plan



3

Provide start-up capital



4

Project monitored



Profit generated

5



School Funded by Surplus!

6





# Green Hills

Yim Gay Pho

**"LER MUH LAH" MEANS GREEN HILLS,** and this is truly what you are met by when traveling to this village, along the long Tee Mu Pwah river, sitting on a bamboo boat. It is only recently that people have started traveling along this river again. It has been desolate and abandoned ever since the Burmese army cleared the area, over twenty years ago. They came in, killed, burned and forced the people to leave everything they knew and flee to safety elsewhere. Even though it seems tranquil and quiet now, the area holds a sorrowful history, and the wounds are still raw among the people that still call this place home.

In 2012, when the first ceasefire agreement was signed between the Burmese army and the ethnic armed forces, and when the long road to peace began, people started to feel safe enough to return.

But what they returned to was not much. There was dirt and there was jungle. They had to start from scratch. But this is their home and after being internally displaced for over twenty years, home is still home.

For a village to flourish again, you need a community that is invested in building a new future for themselves. In 2013, I visited Toe The Tah village in Ler Muh Lah for the first time. Because of its remote location, I was the first person who was not from this area to ever come to this village. After speaking to the local leaders about their dreams for the village, Partners decided to help the community fund sustainable activities to be able to fund the local school and support their children's education. With our help, the village has grown and the community's interest in education along with it.



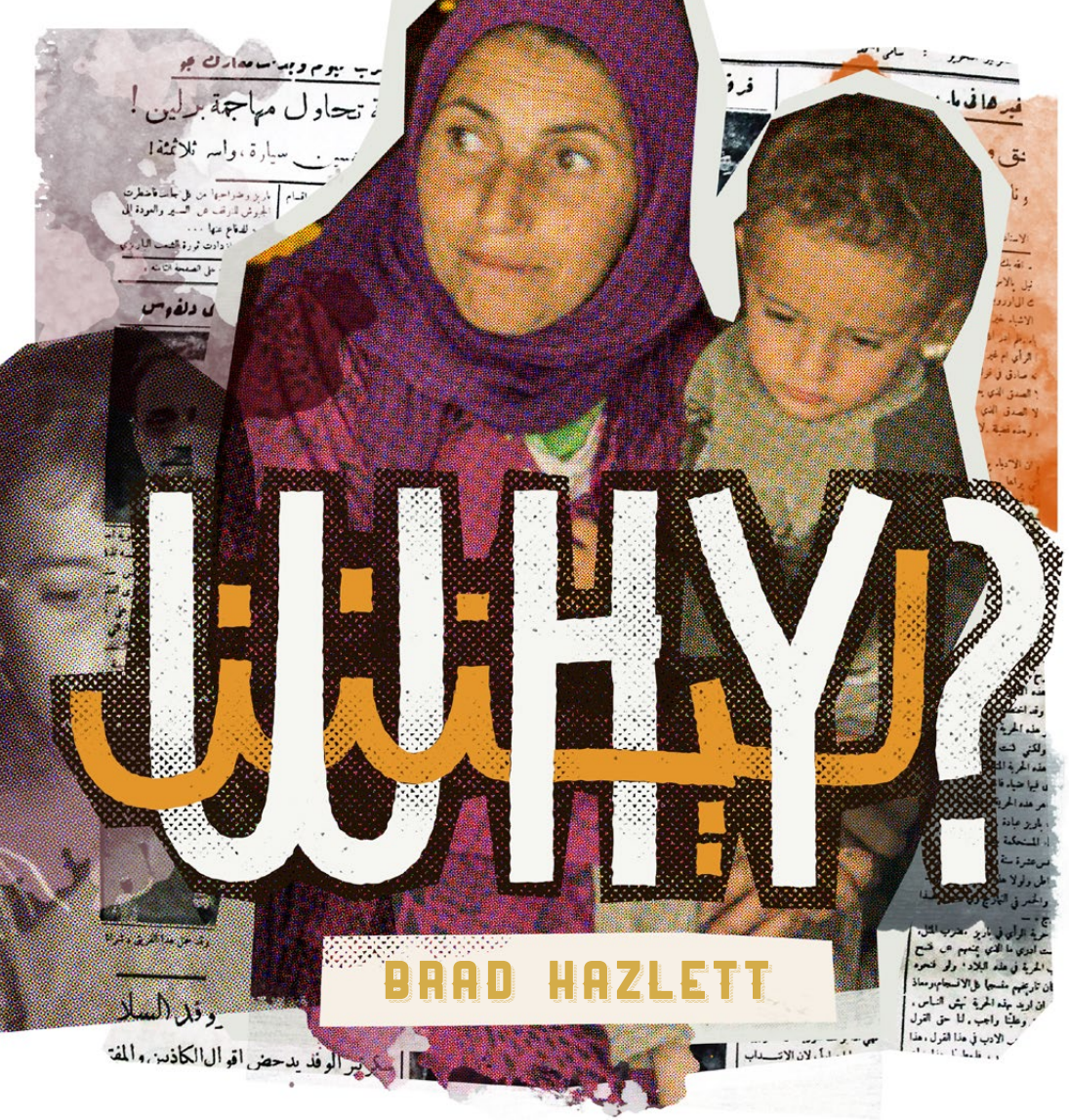
Sustainable activities, such as organic farming of vegetables and animal husbandry, are crucial in a remote area like this. They grow their own food and generate income by selling produce at larger villages, reached by boat.

As a part of our investment in sustainable education in Ler Muh Lah, Partners also provides support for two dormitories, connected to the school. This is where the majority of the students stay during the school year, since many of them live deep in the jungle and the school in Ler Muh Lah village is their only opportunity of getting an education.

The vision behind all our SAFE (Sustainable Agriculture for Education) projects is that the communities will eventually become self-sustained and be able to provide opportunities in their home environment for their

children to learn, grow and develop by attending school in a safe place. This is their home and they are actively a part of restoring the hope that seemed long gone, and the freedom that was taken from them is being reclaimed.

The same vision is also implemented in our Early Childhood Education programs. In many areas, early childhood education is not thought of as equally important, but through the community's cooperation and investment in sustainable activities, they are able to run fully functioning early childhood learning centers. It is no truer than anywhere else in the world; but the key to a stronger, freer, fuller future for the people of Myanmar is to educate children and to teach them about their importance. Because as Frederick Douglas once said "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."



Recently someone asked me, “Why Partners?” They had heard of our activity in the Middle East and were questioning our intention to begin helping the Syrian refugees.

My mind was immediately filled with statistics and numbers which highlight the scope of the Syrian crisis. Like, the fact that there are 5 million Syrian refugees seeking help in the countries

neighboring Syria. Or, that more than 11 million people have been killed or forced to flee their homes. Or, that there are 6.6 million displaced people still living in Syria. Or, that close to 3 million children are out of school and at risk of becoming a “lost generation”. Any of these statistics would certainly answer the question of why Partners would get involved.

I thought next of Partners' vision of free, full lives for children affected by conflict and oppression. Surely this must be reason enough for Partners' involvement. Furthermore, we have 20 years of experience providing emergency relief in the war ravaged ethnic areas of Myanmar. We have proven methods of medical assistance. We have experience in providing education to children in hard to reach places. We've always operated by our unique mandate to go where there is little or no other assistance and with the Syrian crisis now becoming the worst humanitarian crisis of our time, then certainly this should provide a suitable answer to the question of why we would get involved.

As I thought of the reasons for Partner's involvement in the Middle East, I found myself slipping slowly into doubt. The complications and hurdles against initiating an operation in the Middle East began to flood my mind and I began to more fully understand why the question was asked. After all, Syria is a long way from our current base of operations. Beginning something new so far away would certainly be complicated. Our staff are already stretched trying to meet the needs in Myanmar, and undeniably, the financial implications would be severe. All of these would suffice to counter any valid reasons for Partners to establish a new program so far away. Or, would they?

As I wrestled with my response, I remembered the 23-year-old young woman I met on a recent visit to the Kurdish area of northern Iraq who had been sold six times to six different ISIS fighters during almost a year of captivity. She told her story of

unspeakable atrocities. Along with all she had endured personally, she also witnessed other prisoners murdered by beheading and being set on fire. After almost one year of the unimaginable, she was able to escape. For this ISIS survivor, we weren't able to erase the past but we did what we could to help with her current needs.

I also thought of the 11-year-old boy who had been set on fire by ISIS fighters after trying to defend his mother and sisters. He survived with severe scarring on his legs, but he needs urgent medical care and still remains one of the millions of children at risk of being part of the "lost generation" without education.

It's these two survivors and the many thousands like them who are not already receiving international aid and are left beyond the reach of any assistance who compel us to action. We can respond to the urgent needs while using our proven methods of sustainable development to provide for the ongoing needs of medical care and education. We are available, we are willing, and with the help of our donor community we will have the resources to respond. Ignoring the call and continuing on with just our work in Myanmar would be far easier, but ignoring the call would be to ignore our mandate of helping the poor and oppressed who are outside the reach of any other help. The question of "Why Partners?" is a valid question to be asked, but after seeing the severe desperation, after witnessing the overwhelming pain and suffering, and after listening to the stories of unimaginable abuse, we choose to ask instead – "How can we not?"

## HELLOS & GOODBYES



### SAW MIN TUN

Saw Min Tun is 27 years old and is joining the Health and Community Support Care Department. He is an active member of our partner church, Light of Love Church, in Mae Sot. He will be helping with logistics and translation for our projects and especially for the Patient Care Program. He can speak Karen, Burmese, and Thai. His pastimes are studying English, filling up on Mohinga, and spending time with his lovely wife Nana Htoo.



### CRAIG GARRISON

Craig made us all feel good about ourselves. Of course, he had other responsibilities as well, such as being the HR guy, the administrator, the editor, the teacher, the pastor, the development analyst, and, quite often, the office clown who made us laugh. After all these years of serving with us, Craig and his wife, Kara, have moved back to the US where their four kids are currently studying. It is sad for us to see Craig go, and the office feels very quiet without him, but we wish him and his family all the best on their new adventure, with thoughts and prayers from all the rest of his family at Partners!



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 A higher purpose.*

**FREE, FULL LIVES FOR  
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