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## September 20th 2024 / Trimester Report I / May - August 2024

Dear friends,

As already said in the last report, life in the «land of daily toil» as Eric always called Myanmar, somehow goes on in spite of all the increasingly dramatic situations – and the disastrous news seems endless. Again, it is impressive to experience Zoe and Lyon’s strong mindset where «giving up is not an option» and to observe their resilience. Their mission to uphold, further develop and strengthen the vision for Light of Love and Lei Thar Gone so clearly defined by Eric many years ago is a worthwhile, yet adventurous undertaking for all of us.

**Before updating you on recent and encouraging developments at Light of Love, here a few relevant articles about current developments and/or events in Myanmar:**

### **Would a Myanmar Resistance Victory Pave Way for New Country or Greater Chaos?**

The seizure of Lashio marked the biggest victory for the Resistance since the launch of Operation 1027 in October last year. Would a Myanmar Resistance victory pave the way to a new democratic country or lead into even greater chaos?

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/would-a-myanmar-resistance-victory-pave-way-for-new-country-or-greater-chaos.html>

### **Conscription Crisis: Myanmar’s Military is Recruiting Young Men at Gunpoint**

Recruitment at gunpoint seems to be the Military’s answer to the resistance experienced when trying to enforce conscription. This terrifying practice is a cause for fear in the entire population. In recent weeks, the military has taken family members as hostages if the young men, listed for conscription, are not home during the midnight break-ins.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/conscription-crisis-myanmars-military-is-recruiting-young-men-at-gunpoint.html>

### **Hyper-Aggressive Monetary Expansion Kicks into Overdrive in Myanmar**

The Central Bank of Myanmar printed an additional 3 trillion kyats in a single week in July, as the junta desperately attempted to contain an increasing liquidity crunch at commercial banks. Gold prices soared while the kyat plunged. In July, gold hit a record high of over 5.8 million kyats per tical (16.33gr) for 24K gold.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/hyper-aggressive-monetary-expansion-kicks-into-overdrive-in-myanmar.html>

### **Good news... LOL School License!**

In the last Trimester Report, we explained the challenges concerning the extension of the school license and the irrational demands that the government was making – from fire certificate to business license... We are happy to report that on June 4<sup>th</sup> Zoe received news from the Chairman of the Magway Private School Association, that the Light of Love license had been extended – not only extended (without fulfilling the above demands) but extended with a license valid for five years! In the entire Magway District, only 19 schools qualified for a five-year extension, all the rest only received a two-year extension! We are so thankful! However, the down side is the price: the extension cost 11'000'000 kyats (approx. \$2'500). Five million was a one-time fee, six million will recur annually. This is 10x more expensive than the previous renewal! The government is free to set the price. Other private schools, that generally operate for profit, can afford this exaggerated increase – they just raise the school fees. Because the quality of education in the government schools is not good, everyone tries to send their children to private schools. Only the poor go to government schools. Families that value education do everything they can to cover private school fees – so again, it's the people that suffer.

### **Construction of the Montessori Pre-School**

Construction of the Pre-School is going according to plan. At this point, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Margrit & Juergen Pumpluen and the Hirtenkinder Foundation in Switzerland. Their continued loyalty and trust encourage us and their generous support allows us to build the pre-school and so ensure future education for generations of underprivileged children in the Dry Zone.

Excavation began during the first week of July and construction material was delivered







Construction progressing....







### **Progress... at the end of August**

The frequent power cuts remain a challenge for the construction workers, because their tools require electric power to operate. Using the generator is not an option as fuel is often not available and besides this, the power produced is insufficient for some of the welder's machines. Construction is therefore frequently delayed.

### **Here, in her own words, Zoe tells about life at LOL during the last few months:**

May was the busiest month and it passed by doing maintenance and preparation, such as - getting the classrooms ready, maintaining the school buses, filling up the stationery stock, ordering school uniforms, and preparing the school compound to welcome the students.

My most important task was scanning student applications. By visiting the families in the villages, I was able to prioritize those who were the least fortunate and therefore in most urgent need of support. Then discussing and accepting new enrollments and fitting the children in the correct, limited size classes. Further creating new files with detailed family history and current circumstances for each new student as reference for future sponsors.

Meetings with teachers were going on for setting the timetables and subject matters. They also needed help and refresher training in how to make assessment plans, keeping records, calculating, and drawing rubrics in a formative way. My thanks to our PSIE-trained teachers for their time and effort in the meetings with the local teachers.

The New School Year started on June 3rd with 162 students (38 newcomers, 32 paying students), 24 teachers (full- and part-time) and 9 staff.

Students' willingness to return to school has a huge positive impact on the school atmosphere. We could see the improvement in students in following the school rules and their leadership skills increased. They put more effort into learning throughout the three-month period (June-August).

For new students, the beginning of the school year was where they struggled the most, adapting to the new teaching style, the rules, the expected discipline, meeting new teachers, making friends and being involved in activities they had never before experienced.

Student activities for the first term are housekeeping, silence reading & book club, student council, MC duty at assembly, board games; Math, English, and general knowledge corners where students can experience learning outside of the classroom, a mini shop run by student council members and the common birthday celebrations.

The teachers also face many challenges and have numerous things to learn. Their task is to become more proficient and so be able to align their teaching with the school's vision — a huge opportunity to develop their professional skills.

### **Highlights for this term:**

- First aid training for middle and high school students from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2:00 hrs. per day, in collaboration with the Township Red Cross team.
- Half-day awareness raising on general health care. In collaboration with Township Public Health care team.

### **Working with the teachers:**



Their knowledge and use of computers is steadily increasing!

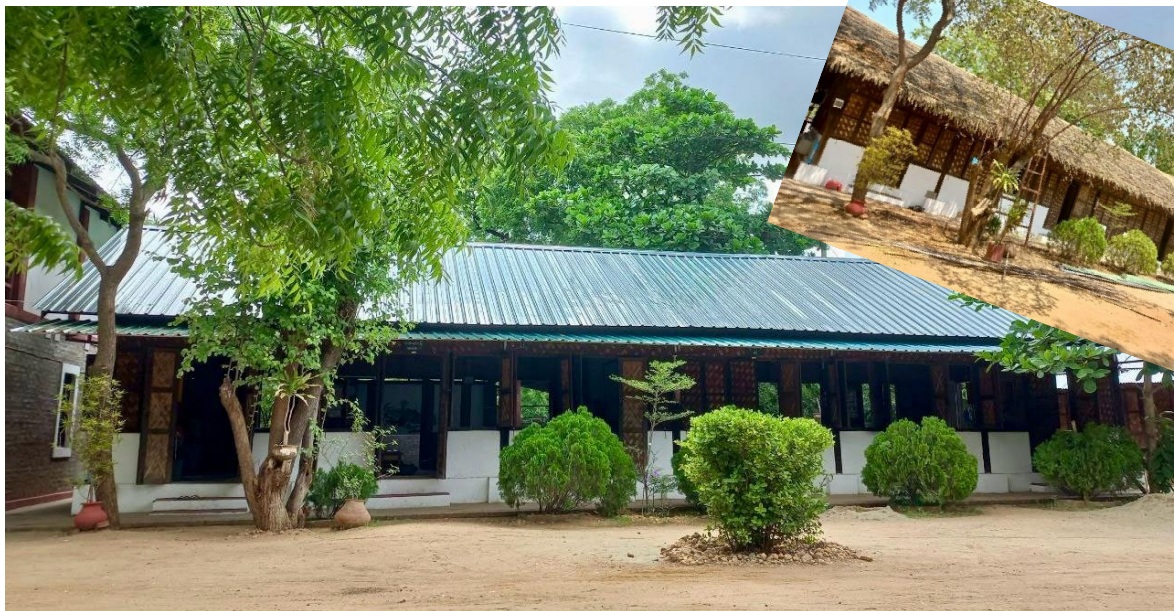
One teacher even sent Zoe the monthly exam questions for her class by mail! A huge success for her and a motivational boost for Zoe!

Congratulations to all of you for your continued efforts to excel!





First aid training, in collaboration with the Yenangyaung Township Red Cross Team



The old kindergarten building received a make-over: the palm-leaf roof was replaced by a zinc roof, steel beams replaced the columns to make the classroom more open, without restricting the view of the blackboard and with more space to play.





### **Listening to government intimidations...**

In August, the government announced, that all teachers had to reapply for their teachers' licenses (a completely unnecessary process, much more complicated than an extension of the licenses). Zoe had to make an extra drive to Magway to collect the necessary forms – no possibility of downloading – for each teacher to fill out. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, LOL had to be closed, because the teachers had to collectively go to Magway to return the forms personally. They were subjected to individual interviews, with questions not related to teaching. It seems the entire effort was officially staged so that the government could check on possible connections to or collaboration with the CDM or the PDF. Zoe had to personally coach the teachers on suitable responses. There were 300 teachers from various schools present and the government presented a recap of all the rules and threatened punishment if these were not kept or if someone was caught teaching without a license. They also announced that there would be surprise visits to check if the rules were being adhered to. Needless to say, the reapplication process isn't free and the fees for the 18 licenses will total 2'700'000 kyats, approx. \$600.

### **On a more cheerful note...**

At the start of the new school year, a school council was formed with 10 students from Middle & High School. Possible candidates were selected by the teachers and the members were chosen by student vote. Their duties depend on their positions, but basically, they listen to the student voice, talk to teachers and are in charge of behaviour.



The council members asked Zoe if they could open and run a snack shop in the school compound. Zoe agreed, but added the idea that the shop should also have an educational effect. The children can buy fruit and snacks and at the same time learn the words on the signs such as: line up, entrance, exit, wait here. And while waiting in line, they are encouraged to speak English; this also when queuing for lunch or waiting to use the toilets. The words are regularly changed, so that the children's vocabulary will increase over time. The shop is running well and making a small profit, council members are learning to take responsibility!

A win-win situation for everyone!



**Birthday Celebrations on or around the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month are always special events:**

In July the chosen menu was noodle soup. The August celebration was an extra special one, because August 25<sup>th</sup> was Eric's birthday. Many of the children and teachers have fond memories of him and even made birthday cards, which were all put up on the wall for all to admire. Zoe's 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class presented a song and other classes offered special activities. Biryani was the special menu and there was ice cream for dessert, as a special treat.





## **Lei Thar Gone Guest House News**

As with LOL, the situation at the Guest House is very challenging – the absence of guests is depressing and makes the ever-present maintenance work, the constantly changing rules & regulations as well as frequent staff challenges, even harder to bear. Besides these challenges, Lyon is involved in many difficult situations concerning property bought by Eric years ago. The matters require contact with government authorities, expensive and dangerous trips to Magway and Yangon and are always time consuming and frustrating. Because of this, he was in Yangon the entire month of May. Lyon is active in the Myanmar Hotel & Tourism Association for Magway Division. And together with the Director, Ko Zaw Lwin Htet, they have developed many thrilling ideas for excursions for tourists – national and international. But unfortunately, these ideas have to be saved for the – hopefully not so distant – future.

**The nature of the terrain is a major challenge because the soils are very susceptible to erosion**



The rooms in the original house of Lei Thar Gone, constructed by Eric many years ago, are very appreciated because of their position, high on a cliff with a beautiful view of the Irrawaddy. Due to the climate change, which brings increased rainfall in a region previously known as the “Dry Zone” this spells trouble. Cyclone Mocha also caused major damage to LTG and LOL in May 2023. School side repairs were carried out last year and now it is urgent to construct a retaining wall that will prevent further erosion and support the cliff on which the house stands.



**About the retaining wall, currently being constructed, Lyon wrote:**

“It is 45 feet long (13.7m) and 45 (13.7m) feet high. Recently, I bought 300 bags of cement and 400 bags of lime. Iron bars I bought approx. 250. Big rocks already 17 truckloads. Construction until mid-October, if workers come daily. Tedious work, rocks have to be carried down one by one, and on some days, nobody comes (conscription fears)





Julian, Lyons son, celebrated his 8<sup>th</sup> birthday on the last weekend of August – on September 1<sup>st</sup>, to be exact 😊 Julian is also a student at Light of Love, attending Grade 2. He is a healthy, happy and care-free boy, who loves the outdoors and frequently needs to be reminded to do his homework. He is very good in English, Burmese – his mother tongue – gives him more headaches – especially the writing:

အသက်ဘယ်လောက်ရှိပြီလဲ? This means “how old are you?” And learning such letters would give me (Therese) more than just a headache 😂



*This report was written by Therese, in collaboration with Zoe & Lyon*