

The Year (2021/2022) in Review

In 2006, Barbara, George & Tanya Maryniak founded Project HANDS (PH) with one premise: to empower those who, by chance of birth, have less fortunate lives than our own. It was an ambitious venture, fueled by their optimistic vision that the world could be a better place, and their commitment to do their part. I'm proud to say that PH has fulfilled that pledge many times over.

As I reflect on the past year, I'm mindful of volunteers who made time in their busy schedules, left their families behind, and traveled to Thailand at their own expense; donors who gave from the heart; the board of directors that charted the course for helping underserved communities; and our invaluable partners at Mae Tao Clinic, Mae La Refugee Camp and International Rescue Committee.

I'm also mindful of one very special individual who must remain anonymous because of her ties to the Myanmar pro-democracy movement. Her selfless dedication, relentless perseverance, tireless efforts, love for the Myanmar people and indispensable network of countrywide volunteers, enabled us to support work that truly matters. She always stepped up, driven by an immutable sense of humanity and civic responsibility, when the easy, safe choice would have been to shy away.

We were all in this together, and each and every one played a vital role in making our vision a reality.

Although we continued to grapple with challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Myanmar coup, we managed to find opportunities.

As Vivian Greene famously said, "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain."

PH has always been a resilient, adaptable organization, where new ideas are formed, tested, improved and evolved. This year pushed the limits of our resilience, but we rose to the occasion. We were undaunted in the face of unprecedented challenges, and in true PH form, we didn't sit back idly waiting for the storm to pass. We simply danced in the rain.

Meeting the moment wasn't easy or straightforward, but meeting the moment is, after all, what we do best.

The Physician Incentive Program (PIP) provided financial support for 4 physicians in remotest Myanmar, who render medical attention to our target demographic. These extraordinary individuals have made the courageous choice to live and work in extreme circumstances of war, putting themselves at great personal risk to uphold their duty and obligation as physicians. Our support helps to address the stark inequities in access to medical care in rural Burmese communities rendered most vulnerable by the pandemic and the coup. This past year, PIP physicians treated 5375 patients, bringing the total to date to 6,575. The average cost was \$1.82 CAD per patient. I can't think of a better return on investment. Through these heroic doctors, PIP funding also sponsored paramedic training on an ongoing basis, which is essential in a country in the throes of an armed struggle for democracy.

To further affirm our commitment to the doctors, their patients, and the communities that they serve, we added two new participants to the program.

When the pandemic forced us to put the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) on hold in early 2020, no one imagined how long the hiatus would last, but we never lost sight of our goal to prevent cervical cancer. In November we were finally able to move forward and launch WHI at Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot, Thailand. We chose that region because of the predominance of displaced refugees from Myanmar who have fled their country to escape war and oppression. The women are at high risk for cervical cancer, due to the prevalence of the HPV virus and lack of screening programs. In fact, the WHI program is the first of its kind in the region, and it was the first cervical cancer testing for more than 90% of women who attended the clinic.

During that outreach we screened 696 women and administered 45 thermal ablation treatments to women with pre-cancer cervical dysplasia. We also trained 7 doctors, nurses and midwives, who were as eager to learn as we were to teach.

Of even greater importance, we established essential partnerships. In 2023 we will collaborate with our new partners to introduce this life-saving initiative to the most vulnerable women in refugee camps.

Our achievements during the past year were possible because of our belief that more voices, more minds, more hearts are better than one. We found strength in our differences and common ground in our mutual regard for the human condition. Our collective ideas, actions and generosity propelled us forward. We drew inspiration from our shared purpose, and faced challenges as one, for the good of all.

In this, our 16th year, PH endures as an organization for people who dare to believe that the world can be a better place. This is where we continue to come together, as we have since 2006, to shape and pursue the vision of that better place.