



Join us for an evening of celebration,
friendship and entertainment!

You are cordially invited to the
50th Anniversary Gala Dinner
of the
Trans-Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)
To be held on
Saturday, November 3, 2012
At 6:30pm
(Doors open at 6:00pm)
At the
Riverside Banquet Hall
14500 River Road, Richmond, BC

Featuring Himalayan music & dance by local performers, a delicious Indian meal, door prizes, & a keynote address by **Dr Tsering Shakya**, Canada Research Chair in Religion and Contemporary Society in Asia, Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia.

Read about this world-renowned scholar
www.iar.ubc.ca/aboutus/iarfacultystaff/faculty/tseringshakya.aspx



~ 1962 ~

Himalayan handicrafts from TRAS
partners will be available for
purchase.

\$50 per ticket
(\$35 students/low income)
\$25 for children under 10

Book your tickets from
the TRAS office:
info@tras.ca or 604-224-5133



~ 2012 ~

We look forward to celebrating with you!

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In May, TRAS hosted a fabulous Nepalese dinner at one of our favourite restaurants: Café Kathmandu. The evening was sold out, the food was wonderful, the atmosphere was lively – and the icing on the cake was the incredible music performed for us by a trio of Vancouver musicians, who volunteered their talent to entertain us. Lisa Chase, Barb Metcalfe and Robert Moloney performed original works by Lisa as well as many favourites, and we thank them sincerely for their lovely entertainment. Proceeds from the evening went to the READI Nepal education project.

And still to come in 2012...

September 1 – 28 : Trans-Himalaya : Tibet, Nepal, India

Marion Tipple's photographic exhibition at the Moat Gallery in the downtown branch of the Vancouver Public Library. Free. The photos depict the glorious Himalayan scenery and were taken over a period of 16 years on Marion's many treks in that remote and dramatic region.



SAFF CANADA
SOUTH ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL

October 31 – November 4 : South Asian Film Festival

In and around Vancouver, BC. This is a first and promises to be an exciting addition to Vancouver's tradition of wonderful film festivals. TRAS is a partner in this venture. Check out our websites for full details. <http://tras.ca/south-asian-film-festival/> and www.saffcanada.org

November 3 : TRAS GALA DINNER (see front page)

Maureen's Stories: A Guest in Our House

TRAS Director Maureen Minden has put together a beautifully written selection of her memories of working in rural Nepal as a public health nurse. This is a charming book, full of joy, sorrow, irony – we learn about the beauty of the country, the friendliness of the people, the horror of some of the old ways and the inappropriate behaviour of some of the westerners.

Maureen's family and friends have paid for the printing, so that all proceeds will go to the READI Nepal educational project! \$12 plus postage from the TRAS office (info@tras.ca or (604) 224 5133). Thank you, Maureen!

John Lomax

TRAS is sad to announce the passing of John Lomax, the Society's first Treasurer. In the early days, George Woodcock cajoled many UBC people into helping TRAS, and in spite of being Chief Accountant for the entire University, John made time to watch over the Society's finances for many years.

Notes from the Field:

A visit to Voice of Children by Jennifer Hales

At the AGM in June, President Jennifer Hales gave an inspiring presentation on her visit to several TRAS projects this spring. We highlight her notes on the **Voice of Children** project in this issue, and you will find her comments on the **Tibetan Children's Village School, Suja**, which takes in newcomers from Tibet, in the sponsorship report on Page 7. In the December issue, we will continue bringing you her Notes on our other Tibetan projects and our Nepalese projects. We will also publish a list of the project requests she received, which the Board will be discussing in the next two months.

Voice of Children (Aman and Vimarsh)

March 22-26, 2012

Aman and **Vimarsh**, two NGOs in the Almora and Nainital Districts of Uttarakhand state, have joined together to form the group, **"Voice of Children" (VoC)**. Aman's headquarters is in Almora, and Vimarsh is based in Nainital. They are doing great work. I was very impressed. I visited several of the TRAS-supported village projects, walking miles to some of the more remote mountain villages. The projects I saw are replicated in most of the 9 villages, and the libraries in 20 villages.

~ Aman ~



- ❖ Founded in 1999 by Raghu Tewari, a former lawyer
- ❖ To work towards an egalitarian society, committed to working directly with local community
- ❖ People-centred development
- ❖ TRAS projects in 5 villages (Patura, Naukuta, Dangikhol, Rankhila and Shree Nagar)

~ Vimarsh ~



- ❖ Founded in 1999 by three social workers, including Kanchan (who was formerly with CHIRAG)
- ❖ The word Vimarsh means "discussion"
- ❖ Mainly focuses on:
- ❖ women's rights (e.g. violence against women, women's literacy, discrimination against women, female foeticide)
- ❖ children's rights (since 2001)
- ❖ TRAS projects are in 4 villages (Khalar, Janauli, Garhkheth, Pharika)

Libraries

I visited libraries in 3 villages. Libraries are being used and are worthwhile. Aman and Vimarsh are trying to build the reading habits of villagers. This will take time. Some need for libraries, but not enough now. Kanchan believes that if TRAS years, then more villagers will see the will be more motivated to support them

In each library there is a registry where signed out. The shelves are simple minimal number of books, but this is a big change. Members receive books are recorded. The librarians young and middle aged women. This



villagers are realizing the benefit of for them to be self-sustaining right can fund the libraries for 2-3 more benefit of and need for libraries and financially themselves.

the librarian records books that are and have (from my perspective) a considering they had nothing before, a card on which their signed-out gain respect. Many of them are is a nice added benefit.

Bridge Course for “Drop-Out” Youth

I visited the ‘centre’ (a small rented building) where Aman runs a program to prepare youth who have dropped out of school for various reasons – long distance between home and school, having to work to make money for family – to return to school.



About 15 of the current 30 youth came to meet me, aged between 13 and 22. Two were boys, the rest girls. I am really, really impressed with this. Aman has trained two local young women from villages to teach the youth. I was told that the confidence and self-esteem of these two young women have greatly increased since running this program.

- ❖ They meet 2 hours each morning, and most of the mothers sit in the background and watch, so I imagine if any of them are illiterate, they are also learning.
- ❖ The two teachers I met are amazing young women aged 18 or 19. One is doing her BA via an online course from the village and wants to be a police officer. The other wants to be a teacher. They were motivated, confident, self-assured, talented and clearly respected by the villagers. A very worthwhile project.



Balwadi (Early Childhood Education Centres) for children aged 2.5-5 years



Bal Sangthan (Children’s Group)

- ❖ I visited children’s groups in 2 villages. They meet approximately 1X/month in a village building. The children themselves elect the officers of each group, so they are learning a little about democracy. They run the meetings, with the help of a VoC staff (e.g. the young woman who runs the Bridge Course for “drop out” youth also helps run the Children’s groups in a few villages).
- ❖ They educate children about health, hygiene, nutrition, children’s rights, girls’ rights, environmental issues. They sing songs and play games, and run outings. In all villages, there was a total of 57 meetings this year.



- ❖ I visited Balwadis in two villages, both with no road access, requiring a 3-4-hour hike in.
- ❖ I was extremely impressed with the Balwadis.
- ❖ Village teenage girls who have finished high school have been trained to run them.
- ❖ 4-year-old children are already writing the alphabet and counting in both English and Hindi. They will be well prepared for primary school. And they have fun – lots of songs and games while they learn.

- ❖ The president of one of the groups (a boy about 16 years old; in 10th standard) said he has learned the importance of girls going to school and tells all the men in his life that girls must go to school. He also said he wants to work for Aman in the future. This project seems really worthwhile.

Mahila Sangthan (Women's Groups)



- ❖ I visited women's groups in 5 villages. Each was filled with dynamic, vocal women. The groups give them a chance to voice their concerns and desires and to be listened to. Some of the groups are managing to make their way into village meetings (usually run by men) and express their views. So it seems the women's groups are starting to give the women a political voice in some villages.
- ❖ Women work really hard from a young age, carrying heavy rocks on their heads, working in the fields, looking after animals, carrying fodder, carrying firewood, working on construction sites, looking after children, carrying water. You see women working physically far more than you see men working. Men plough the fields, but women do most everything else. This takes a huge toll on their bodies. It's no wonder that many of them by the time they are in their 50s and 60s are bent over and have back, hip, neck, joint and other problems. Women tend also to be less educated than men, though this appears to be changing for the younger generation.
- ❖ I asked each group of women what their **main concerns** were. Their responses depended on their own village context, but in every case three important issues were their **children's education and health, employment for youth** and **women's health**.
- ❖ Women's groups seem to be very worthwhile.

Adolescent Girls' Groups

- ❖ I met members of adolescent girls groups in 2 villages, but did not have time to ask them questions. These two groups are run by the same young women who run the Balwadis. The girls learn about adolescent girls' health, sexual health, hygiene, and girls' rights.



- ❖ Clearly very worthwhile. And the young women who run them are amazing role models for younger teenage girls.



There were projects I didn't see, but they sound just as impressive. The VoC report states that 80 children attended the 4 'education centres' for 2 hours each school day. Marks in annual exams improved and school attendance increased. 67 other children are in special tuition classes. 30 of the poorest are given funds for fees and school supplies and uniforms. A children's newspaper, a children's fair and advocating for their right to education round out this year's projects.

For an in-depth survey of the local dynamics and problems faced by the villagers, see Jennifer's essay, soon to be posted under Projects, www.tras.ca

Ups and Downs

No sooner have we have told you the 'bad' news – that new sponsorship fees will increase from January 1 (see Spring 2012 newsletter), than we can also report on the 'good' news!

The TRAS Board has decided to remove the annual membership fee of \$20.00. From now on, your donation, whatever its size, will automatically make you a member of the Society for one year. This certainly makes things easier from an accounting point of view – and we sincerely hope it won't decrease the size of your donations! You will notice the change most clearly if you fill out the donation slip from the newsletter. If you wish to sponsor a child (or renew your sponsorship), there is no need to add \$20 to the amount.

Special thanks to...

All our donors who have helped us reach our fundraising goals in this anniversary year!

Mike and Joanne Polay for suggesting their family and friends give donations to TRAS in lieu of wedding gifts. Their generosity will help fund a new project in health care for Voice of Children villages. Congratulations to the couple on their recent marriage and our thanks for their thoughtfulness.

Sutherland Secondary School, for doing better than ever in their fundraising efforts for the Buddha Academy vocational training in Kathmandu! Their innovative ideas are helping their brother students across the world, while they themselves learn valuable lessons in compassion and responsibility.

Dr. Yosef Wosk for his generous donation which is enabling Voice of Children to open small libraries in 20 hill villages where none has existed before. Dr. Wosk says that this is a project near to his heart. He is well known for his work supporting libraries here and abroad, and we are delighted to have his help in bringing literacy to a region which has suffered neglect for far too long.

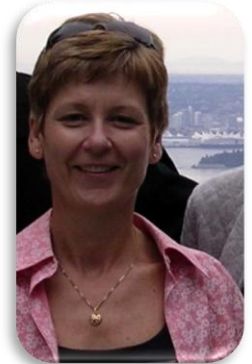
All our volunteers without whom we cannot do the work we do.

Volunteer Corner

We are delighted that two new keen, talented volunteers have joined the TRAS family! We welcome **Christy Costello** and **Jody Corothers**.

Christy writes: "I'm a volunteer with the TRAS Communications Committee. I work as a technical editor and publications specialist (science, medicine), so I'm putting those skills to use by helping the Committee plan and develop the organization's public communications."

I chose to volunteer for TRAS because I had been looking for a volunteer opportunity with an established organization that supports the health and education of youth and children. TRAS fits those initial criteria, and when I looked into the organization further, I realized its philosophy of assistance is an approach that I support. But most importantly, I have always felt a deep connection with Nepal and Tibet. In the 1980s, I travelled to Kathmandu as a tourist and my visit, although it was brief, touched me in many ways. I was a naïve 20-year-old and had never travelled outside of Canada, so I was completely overwhelmed by the poverty I saw in Nepal and northern India. Recently, I read *Little Princes*, by Conor Grennan, and once again was touched by the challenges that many Nepali and Tibetan people experience to this day. I am fortunate to live in a peaceful country, and although my family was not rich, we were also never poor, and I could access the education I needed to improve myself. I am hoping that by volunteering with TRAS I can help another young person find the way to improve her life as well."



Watch for **Jody's** story in December.

Tibet Fest – a day of festivities, with a cause

For the third year Tsengdok Monastery and the Tibetan Cultural Society of BC have collaborated to produce a wonderful day of **colour, culture and concern**. The Hall at Van Dusen Gardens was packed all day on August 18, as a large crowd enjoyed the vibrant colour and ritual of Tibetan monks, dancers and musicians. Stalls of Tibetan goods were a feast for the eye, and the Tibetan food drew a huge crowd. TRAS did a roaring trade in our Himalayan partners' handicrafts, and we met many old friends and made new contacts. Altogether a wonderful event. **And the concern? The funds raised will help with the Tibetan Resettlement Project – the Canadian Government's offer to bring 1,000 Tibetans to settle in Canada over the next 5 years.**

They will be selected from the isolated and poor settlements in Arunachal Pradesh, where 8,000 Tibetans eke out a meagre living, and their children were starved of education (until taken to distant boarding schools). 7,000 have entered the lottery for selection. Only 1,000 may come – and here's the catch – THEY CAN ONLY COME TO CANADA IF CANADIANS ARE PREPARED TO HELP THEM FOR THE FIRST YEAR. If we don't extend a hand, they can't come – that's the bottom line.

How can YOU help? Join a 'group of 5', or send a donation if you don't live near a centre where the Tibetans will be living. To learn more and to donate, contact Project Tibet Society at www.tibet.ca/projecttibetsociety or www.tcsfbc.org

Sponsorship Report

by Russil Wvong

We have received urgent requests from the **Tibetan Children's Village School (TCV) Suja** for sponsors for some of the older students. When Jennifer Hales visited in the spring, this school was celebrating its 25th anniversary of helping specifically the youngsters fleeing from Tibet and desperate for an education. The school houses over 1700 students, half of them girls, and 90% come straight from Tibet. They used to receive 400 youngsters a year until the 2008 Olympics – now those who manage to make the journey number around 200 a year. All are poor; many have never been to school. TCV has created an Opportunity Class (OC), so that the teenagers can start from scratch. They work hard and advance rapidly. They are motivated and know the importance of education. Many do up to 10 years' worth of schooling in four years. Their desire for education is so great, the sponsorship secretary Lobsang Tenzin says he has seen them studying at 4am outside under street lights.



We have 13 new requests. Here's a sampling.

Two boys aged 17 – both started in the OC, one now in Grade 6, doing well in English and Science. An only child, he is shy and has nowhere to go for vacation time – a friend writing from Canada would mean so much to him. The other boy had some schooling in Tibet and was determined to get more. His parents reluctantly borrowed funds, and it is paying off – he is bright and in Grade 8 already. A gifted performer with a superb voice, he wishes to become an actor.

Two girls – one aged 16, looked after her younger siblings and all the housework and never went to school. Her parents made the tough decision to send her to India for a blessing from the Dalai Lama and an education. After a lonely journey over the mountains, she is in the OC. She loves playing basketball and writes short essays about Tibet. She is very kind to older people. **The other girl, aged 18**, is one of three children. Their parents, a source of inspiration and courage, determined their children should have the chance for the Dalai Lama's blessing and an education. After a lonely, hungry week in the mountains, suffering minor frostbite, they reached safety. This girl has already made many friends.

A photo and personal history will be sent to the sponsor.

Contact Russil at sponsorship@tras.ca or call 604-224-5133 for more details.

Cost: \$440/year.

TRAS

Supporting health and education for children and youth in the Himalayas

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Beck Lamb

Whether you wish to support a Tibetan nursing student, help Nepalese or Indian children go to school, sponsor a child or maintain village libraries, it's easy through CanadaHelps.

Visit the TRAS website at www.tras.ca for details.

TRAS reaches its 50th Annual General Meeting

Business meetings are often dull affairs, but the TRAS directors and members who gathered at the lovely Tsengdok Monastery on June 6 were in a celebratory mood.

President Jennifer Hales welcomed everyone, and paid special tribute to George and Inge Woodcock, founders of TRAS 50 years ago, and to all who have worked for and donated to the Society over the years. She read out a letter received from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, thanking TRAS for 50 years of service to the Tibetan people. It was fitting that on this occasion, John Conway, a founding member and ex-president of the Society, accepted TRAS' invitation to become a Patron of the Society. The news all seemed to be good: an increase in funding going to projects; an increase in the number of children sponsored; audited financial statements available and showing TRAS to be in good health to cover its onward current commitments. It was due to valiant efforts by treasurer Kevin Yuen, auditor Cal Tompkins and office manager Armila Shakya that the financial statements were audited and ready for the AGM. They are available from the office (info@tras.ca or 604-224-5133).

Russil Wvong, Sponsorship Secretary, reported that 217 children and youth are sponsored.

Cheryl Sullivan, Fundraising Chair, congratulated the members on meeting our 50th anniversary goal of an extra \$50,000 raised for projects.

Daphne Hales, Projects Director, explained her brief report would be augmented by Jennifer's presentation about her recent trip to many of our projects. \$126,662 went to 19 projects.

Nominations: The current directors were all re-elected, with the exception of Shirley Howdle and Kasandra Bonn, who sadly have left the Board. We thank them heartily – Shirley for her work on projects, and Kasandra for her administrative and accounting skills as secretary and behind-the-scenes worker.

Sutherland Secondary School Student Leadership

Council was represented by students Laurie Bridge and Derrick Gravener, along with teacher Cynthia Bunbury. TRAS presented the students with a certificate of appreciation for their fundraising efforts and they in turn presented TRAS with over \$4,000!

Catherine Douglas's UBC Community Service

Learning initiative was recognised for its work in preparing a video about TRAS and the Istanbul Principles and for conducting many interviews. Commenting on the Istanbul Principles, student Evan Anderson said, "One of the most impressive characteristics of TRAS' work is that while the Istanbul Principles of civil society organizations were dictated in 2010, TRAS has been following them since 1962!"

Jennifer's slide show presentation on her recent trip to many projects was fascinating, colourful, heart-warming – and an excellent guide to the work of TRAS and the dedicated partners we work with in India and Nepal.

Handicraft sales and tasty food rounded out a lively evening.

*Note: since the AGM, the TRAS Board has welcomed a new director – **Balraj Dhillon** – watch for his bio in December.*