



50 years – Looking Back, Looking Forward

TRAS' wonderful year of celebration is drawing to a close, and we extend a hearty THANK YOU to all who helped and to all who came to the many events to celebrate with us and to learn about so many things: the history of Tibet, how to make Tibetan momos, the healing power of singing bowl therapy, the behind-the-scenes life of Sherpas on Everest, the vibrant music scene in Vancouver, delicious Nepali food, to name just a few. And we ended with a fantastic **Gala Event** on November 3. The room was packed, the Indian food was superb, the entertainers were delightful, and the speeches were excellent. Jennifer Hales, our President, gave a fascinating overview of the history of TRAS, from the Woodcocks' first encounter with the Tibetans in 1961 to the work our current partners are doing today. The photos she displayed on the two huge screens seemed to bring the people we work with right into the room with us. Our display board was covered with lovely letters and cards of congratulations from our partners. And to round the evening off, our guest speaker, Tsering Shakya, Canada Research Chair in Religion and Contemporary Society in Asia, Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia, charmed us with his personal story. He was, he said, "probably one of those snotty-nosed little kids" the Woodcocks first saw, and thanks to TRAS's support of the Tibetan Homes Foundation where he was a student, he was able to complete his education and eventually become a UBC professor. He thanked TRAS for having faith in unknown children a world away and for giving them opportunities they would never otherwise have had.



Nepali dancer Angelica Shakya

So we looked back at the history and the many successes of TRAS, but we must also look forward – shall we continue the work? We ask you to turn the page and read on. When our project work reaches a TIPPING POINT, it takes on a life of its own. When our sponsorship program helps a child with no future become a self-sufficient member of society, the RIPPLE EFFECT is huge. We believe it is worth continuing. Will you walk with us, as we move forward?

TRAS Gala Photos (next page, clockwise from top left)

- Jawani Bhangra Team
- President Jen socialises with the guests, congratulating one on her wonderful door prize
- Tsengdok Monastery Rimpoche gave the blessing
- Silent auction for print of Kalsang Dawa's Medicine Buddha drew some fierce bidding
- Tibetan Youth Musical Ensemble
- (centre) Tsering Shakya



"I found it heart-warming to learn of TRAS successes. To hear the story of a boy, who was one of the early beneficiaries of a TRAS-sponsored education, who is now a UBC professor, is truly inspiring. And the confirmation of TRAS' impact was told by the professor himself". Guest Lois Yonash.



The Tipping Point (Part 1)

by Ren Madan

Ren Madan, the founder of the Indian NGO SHARE, a TRAS partner since 1993, writes of his experiences of working with the village people in the hills above the town of Manali in the foothills of the Himalayas. Ren shows that when organizations listen to the aspirations of the villagers, their efforts can flourish to the point where the work takes on a life of its own and that is **THE TIPPING POINT**.

"We voluntary agencies in low-income countries working on development issues are often prone to decide for beneficiaries what is good for them, even what their urgent needs are. At times we even push for implementation of our pet hobbyhorses.

This approach, more often than not, fails or has limited success and then the benefits diminish when aid stops or the activist leaves. Yes, some of such aid is indeed vital for the personal and economic well-being of beneficiaries. But this aid is not always perceived as such by them, as their priority is survival.

I would like to highlight a few examples where SHARE's development perceptions did not match those of the beneficiaries:

- We are all so keen to save the planet and protect the health and environment of the poor. We at SHARE tried to introduce garbage pits, composting and recycling but with very limited success, as at that stage the worries of villagers lay elsewhere.
- We tried to form women's groups and village committees for improving their village environment and its infrastructure, again with very limited success as we did not involve the menfolk adequately. They were quite happy to let their women get further burdened. And at that stage the women's interests lay in their immediate family needs.
- We planned rosters for mothers to help in our pre-school centers on a rotation base, as is often done in a developed country. This was a non-starter. Guess why? The mothers' schedules were governed by other compelling needs. We overlooked that women were hard pressed for time and were not in a position to organize their own time.

If we look at the evolution of Europe, North America or Japan, today's concerns and actions were absent just a century ago. People look at wider or global issues only once their immediate individual or family concerns are met.

OUR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

Our successful programs have been where we gave help and aid that addressed their aspirations and immediate concerns. Once we took the programs to beyond the 'Tipping Point' the projects moved on rapidly on their own momentum. Some examples:

1. Pre-school day care centers (Balwadis)

We set them up in 30 villages with a teacher, a helper and a mid-day high protein meal. Our program, after a slow start gathered momentum and was very successful because it freed the over-burdened mothers who had to fetch water, wood and fodder, and work in the fields, besides attending to household chores and small children. Suddenly they found they had time to earn a little income.

2. Rural Sanitation

We had run a pilot project of setting up Pour Flush Toilets following the United Nation's suggested design to see the response of villagers, demonstrate models of such toilets, and modify designs and beneficiary concerns to meet local conditions.



One of a thousand toilets built by SHARE. There are now 20,000 toilets.

Women were very interested, but we concentrated on the menfolk as they held the purse strings and decision making power. Together with TRAS we prepared a 3-phase plan in which the beneficiary was required to pay half the cost of a toilet in the form of materials and labor. Many warned us that the program would flop because of the high beneficiary contribution, but having gauged the response and requests, we stood our ground. The first phase progressed slowly as our staff had to come to grips with ground realities and overcome hostile reactions of local building contractors and naysayers. We also learnt to decentralize operations because of the hilly terrain and spread-out villages. The progress in 2nd and 3rd phases was rapid; villagers came by their own means and collected materials kept for them. We also reduced our 50% share so that we could cover more families than originally planned.

Once the 'Tipping Point' is crossed the program tends to be self-actuating. As an example, a village had just 3 toilets, we helped build 30; today all 80 families of the village have toilets. We met our overall target of over 1000 families. The self-actuation process has now covered more than 20,000 families of our operating area. 95% of the total families are now covered by sanitation.

3. Environment Protection

Our major plank was to help banish plastic bags. We motivated school children, and held clean-up campaigns in Manali and the surrounding villages. TRAS helped with a small project in the memory of their Director Barry Leach to principally work with school children on eco clubs.

These clubs made cloth provision and shopping bags from left over cloth and jute. These bags were distributed at a subsidized rate to a large number of people. At the same time we advocated that the State ban plastic bags. **Today, all locals and villagers bring their own bags for shopping**, as was done some 30 years earlier. Unfortunately tourists from the plains demand plastic bags and are still oblivious to the harm they do. Here again it was necessary to prepare the ground, have substitutes, and have awareness campaigns on the harmful impact of plastics. There were many cases of cows eating plastics with dire consequences. In this project TRAS trusted our judgment as an equal partner and we together planned the approach. The project moved rapidly once the population caught on and found it important in spite of some inconveniences.



Cloth bags replace plastic

4. Immunization of children

We again created an interest and awareness for preventive community health. We worked in schools, both private and state, on the benefits of Immunization. We covered all the schools of our operating area with immunization against the Hepatitis B virus. Our Health Project Staff, who are running a prevention program, did this work.

5. Community Health

TRAS came to our aid for the program to cover 200 families for a monthly home visit to each family to help them in hygiene, nutrition, family planning, personal hygiene and a host of other issues. The support of TRAS gave a tremendous boost to the SHARE staff and enhanced their stature in the eyes of the program families. **Today, we have 1,200 families who pay an annual fee** and 90% of them renew their subscriptions.



Family health plan visit

CONCLUSIONS

We have learnt a great deal in the 24 years that we have worked in the Upper Kullu Valley of the Western Himalayas of India. Having failed in our efforts to begin with, we succeeded when:

- We prepared the ground in advance through village campaigns, pilot projects and asking the villagers about their needs and concerns.
- We divided the program into phases. The 1st phase was generally slow; both the staff and the villagers had to understand what it was all about, we had to remove some of the impediments, modify some operational details, and give time for others to see actual performance and results.
- We covered enough ground that the **TIPPING POINT** was reached, and the projects continued almost entirely without us.

THE TIPPING POINT THEORY WILL ENSURE A SELF-ACTUATION SUCCESS OF PROGRAMS IF WE PREPARE WELL AND PAY HEED TO OUR BENEFICIARIES' CONCERNS AND NEEDS".

The Tipping Point (Part 2)

Voice of Children's "Balwadis"

Even though Voice of Children is a newer project, already the tipping point has been reached in a couple of areas of work. We recently heard that funding of the four Balwadis (early childhood education centres) described in the September issue has been taken over by the local government, so Voice of Children no longer needs our help. What happened? The village women, seeing how important the Balwadis are for their children, got together and petitioned the government to live up to the promise of the *Indian Right to Education Act*. They were successful, and now the government is paying for the Balwadis. Voice of Children and TRAS can now open new Balwadis in other villages. **The Tipping Point was reached.**



The Three Tenors

At the end of September, thanks to the generosity of Vancouver's Dr. Yosef Wosk, Voice of Children opened new libraries in 14 villages. Here's the story of how one came about, told by Raghu Tewari, Voice of Children's founder.

"Mohan Chandra Joshi, 65, lives in the village of Nakuta. He has shown keen interest in the books. He has taken the books from [the neighbouring village's] library. After reading them, he organized children's meetings in his village, told them the stories and got them discussing the issues. He is doing this on a regular basis. This year he demanded a library in his own village. We have opened a new library in his village. He provided the space for the library in his own house and is also helping in running the library. **This is the community feeling which will support us in transferring the library to the community**". They are well on their way to the Tipping Point!

The Ripple Effect: How sponsorship spreads the good

Tsering Shakya, renowned scholar and UBC professor said it all when he thanked TRAS for having faith in unknown children and helping them achieve in spite of everything being against them. What he did NOT mention is the tremendous effect his teachings and work have had on so many people – in other words, the **ripple effect** of sponsorship.

Time and time again, we hear from our sponsors or from the children themselves great stories of personal achievement. Teachers, nurses, artists, principals, lawyers, tailors, carpenters – all are self-sufficient, supporting their families. And all this helps the wider community – thanks to the opportunity which came with sponsorship. Here is a sampling of the success stories, and a few case histories of kids hoping TRAS members will sponsor them.

The late **Dorje Namgyal** was sponsored by a TRAS member who paid for his care and schooling at the Tibetan Homes Foundation (THF) in Mussoorie in the 1960s. He went on to be THF's sponsorship secretary for many years, before moving to Nepal to become the Principal of the tiny Buddha Memorial Home in Kathmandu in 1992. 20 years later the Buddha Academy (as it is now called) houses 500 children and gives them an excellent education and start in life. Dorje has 'paid back' by helping literally thousands of needy children.

Tsetan Chonjore, well-loved Tibetan teacher, who founded the Tibetan Youth Musical Ensemble in Surrey, BC, to help them learn about their own magnificent culture, and who now teaches Tibetan at the University of Virginia, was sponsored through school and college by a TRAS member. To this day, he calls her 'mum' and credits her with helping him to make something wonderful of his life and impart his knowledge to others.

Tenzin Youdong wanted desperately to become a nurse and to help her family, but there was no money. Thanks to a TRAS sponsor, she is now a staff nurse at the prestigious St. John's Hospital in Bangalore; independent herself, her career allows her to help others.

Whether a child goes on to great success in a career, or returns home able to read and write, their future, and the future of their communities are stronger, thanks to being sponsored through TRAS.

Young children at Munsel-Ling School, Spiti, India need your help.

There are four 6-year olds, 2 girls and 2 boys, the children of poor villagers who work as labourers and are hard pressed to feed their children, let alone educate them. Often one or both parents are ill. One of the two girls is a semi-orphan whose mother is illiterate, and determined that her little daughter should be educated. Graduates from this school are now at universities and colleges learning skills to bring back to their valley. TRAS asks you to help so that the little ones have a chance to achieve the same goal.



Munsel-Ling School, Spiti



Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre, Dehra Dun, India, takes in families arriving from Tibet.

Each has a difficult story to tell. One 7-year old girl's mother works in the handicraft centre, but her father, a construction worker, rarely finds work. A 14-year old girl and her younger sister live with their grandmother while their father works as a cook's helper hundreds of miles away. The two boys, of 7 and 4, both have mothers working in the handicraft centre, but the mother of the 7-year old is very ill. His father works as a cook's helper in the Centre. The father of the 4 year old is looking after his elderly, ill mother-in-law and doing the housework.

All these parents are desperate for their children to receive an education, but cannot pay for it without a sponsor's help.

Older Tibetan students have a special need. They have come over the Himalayas, on foot and frightened, but so determined to get an education. Many hope to return to Tibet to help their countrymen by teaching. The Tibetan Children's Village in Bir/Suja, north India, has set up a special 'Opportunity Class' for these older teenagers, some who have probably never been to school before. They are determined – they cover 10 years of curriculum in 4, and are often spotted under the street lights studying early in the morning. Their grit and determination demand our awe – they are worth supporting!

The RIPPLE EFFECT these children will create in the future could be tremendous!
Will you be the one to throw the pebble in the pond and get the ripple started?

If you would like to put your faith in a child's future, please e-mail Russil Wvong, TRAS Sponsorship Director sponsorship@tras.ca or phone the office 604-224-5133. \$400 a year will make a difference to a child and a community! Please remember that from January 1, 2013, new sponsorships will cost \$440.

HHDL's Letter

In a personal letter of congratulations to TRAS, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has thanked TRAS for 50 years of service to the Tibetan people:

"I am happy to learn that the Trans-Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS) will be celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Since the Society was founded in 1962, it has given significant support to Tibetan refugees...and has extended its resources to assisting people throughout the Himalayan region in India, Nepal and Tibet. I would like to express my appreciation of the good work TRAS has done over the last 50 years with my prayers for their continued success in the future."

TRAS Loses A Special Friend

TRAS was saddened to learn in September of the passing of **Dorje Namgyal**, Principal of the esteemed Buddha Academy in Kathmandu, with whom TRAS has worked on long-term projects and sponsorship programs for 20 years. Dorje was himself sponsored by a TRAS member as a youth. Over the years of communicating with Dorje-la, we at TRAS developed a strong and trusting partnership and friendship with him. We have been honoured to be a part of his work improving the lives of so many destitute children in Nepal. We will greatly miss him.

Many of us had the wonderful opportunity to meet Dorje-la and be touched and inspired by his kindness, vision, commitment, humility, and absolute dedication to the children in his care. May these qualities of his continue to inspire others to follow in his footsteps as they too strive to make the world a better place.

Reports From The Field

Recently we have heard from READI Nepal, Munsel-Ling School and Voice of Children.

READI Nepal has augmented the education project with health and income generation workshops for the families of the children.

"All 20 parents participated in a workshop on entrepreneurship development. 4 were supported by linking them with skill training in apple farming and processing, small teashop operation and carpentry. Now 5 of the families are earning from their own enterprising activities. A regular counseling service and follow-up has been initiated to help them sharpen their skills in book keeping and skill development."

On the health front, "READI organized two 1-day workshops for the parents on communicable and water-borne diseases. They are encouraged to keep their house and surroundings clean and tidy to prevent diseases. They were also briefed on accessing health facilities from the nearest health centre, as they often feel hesitant to use government services. Likewise, READI has started inviting a doctor from Simikot Hospital on a bi-monthly basis to check our students and recommend appropriate measures. A first aid kit has been supplied to the hostel."

Munsel-Ling School has sent in the final report about the science labs TRAS paid for. They have also sent the final report on the solar water heating system. It was an enormous undertaking, with a special platform built above the school to house the huge water tanks, and well insulated pipes laid to all the dormitory shower buildings and to the kitchen and staff quarters.

Lama Tashi writes:

"I hope you are well. Here at Munsel-Ling school everything is going perfectly. Today I am writing to update you about the solar water heating system and science laboratory projects. I am very pleased to report that now both projects have been completed. Today the installation of solar water heating system is fully done. In fact I have taken bath of hot water and I am very happy that it is providing adequate hot water for bathing. And the construction of the Science lab is also completed, in fact we have already shifted all instruments and things. It is spacious and well equipped. Once again thank you, TRAS, for this kind generosity."

Voice of Children has sent a report about the opening of the final 14 remote village libraries and also about the effects felt already from the first 6 libraries which opened last year. Raghu Tewari writes:

"For the opening of each new library, we organized a Library Opening Event with many community members. It was good connecting all these people to the libraries.



Library Opening Event in Bajun Village

Impact of the 6 libraries opened last year: they have become very popular, not only among the children but also youth and elders. They are a common place of gathering for discussion on village development and other activities. We have started to collect used books and magazines from friends. We have seen the following impact on the children:

- Writing and reading skills have increased, along with knowledge and confidence.
- Children using the libraries win prizes in school competition of debate, painting, writing, and general knowledge.
- The library use also plays an important role in regularizing attendance at school.
- In two villages, the local school teachers take books from the libraries to teach their children. In this process, the reading and writing of the children is increasing.
- The Voice of Children Education Centre teachers are using the books as reference material.
- In some villages we have started Library Users Groups. They meet once a month and the children share their readings.



Her first book

We like the idea of these 'mini book clubs'! Do YOU belong to a book club?

Maybe you'd like to 'adopt' a village library to help maintain it. Annual maintenance cost is \$244.

TRAS

**Supporting health
and education for
children and
youth in the
Himalayas**

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Directors' News

TRAS welcomes new director, Balraj Dhillon. Bal has volunteered at many TRAS events and we are delighted that he has now joined the Board. Bal's interest in TRAS began in 2007 when he visited many of the projects in north India via a university study program. 5 years later he joins us on the board after having completed his teaching degree - which required him to teach ESL in a school for Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala, India. Bal brings to the board his experience working directly in the Indian and Tibetan education systems, and is passionate about the education and health initiatives that TRAS supports.



Unfortunately, we say goodbye to director Camille Narayan. We thank her so much for her contribution to the Board, and are very glad she remains a staunch supporter of TRAS.

TRAS Projects April 1, 2012 – March 31, 2013

**TRAS has approved the following ongoing and new projects for the current year.
Generous funding has already come in, but we need more to reach our target.**

TIBET

Lhasa Institute of Eye Care: paediatric cataract surgery training and some surgeries. \$8,000 (already funded)

NEPAL

Buddha Academy Infirmary maintenance: \$3,600 p.a. (already funded)
Buddha Academy Vocational Training: \$14,877 p.a. (\$4,000 raised so far)
READI Nepal Humla Education Project: \$17,256 p.a. (\$3,400 raised so far)

INDIA

Tibetan Government-in-Exile Department of Education:

- Nurses training: \$4,840 p.a.
- Tuting Adult Literacy: awaiting new request
- Kailash Bodh School (NEW PROJECT: support for isolated Tibetan school): \$4,999

Tibetan government-in-Exile Department of Health:

- Ngoenga Residential School for disabled Tibetan children (NEW PROJECT: water purification system): \$3,960 (already funded)

Little Flowers Creche: \$2,750 p.a.

Dekyiling Handicraft Centre Creche: \$2,247 p.a.

SHARE Vocational Training: \$3,593

Voice of Children Education Projects: \$20,713 p.a.

Voice of Children 14 new libraries: \$13,500 (already funded)

Voice of Children Library maintenance (NEW PROJECT: for the 6 established libraries): \$1,464

Munsel-Ling School Science lab 2nd payment: \$4,070

Dechen Choling Nunnery Education and Health project: \$5,000 (already funded)

Sikkim School Nutrition Program (NEW PROJECT: hot school lunches at Lama Paljor's school): \$2,946

Total 2012/13 project costs: \$113,815

Already raised: \$41,833

Total still needed for 2012/13: \$71,982