



New Projects

In Canada the leaves may be falling and nature slowing down, but at TRAS things are lively with two new projects and a new connection with a Tibetan settlement! September brought news of vital repairs to school buildings in north India, a new midwifery training project in Nepal and a new group of Tibetan children needing sponsors. September also saw the 57th Annual General Meeting of the Society and the creation of an illustrated catalogue of the handicrafts and treasures TRAS has for sale. Read on!

Climate change in the Himalayan foothills?

The climate definitely seems to be changing in the Spiti Valley, and our long-time partner Munsel-Ling School has been suffering. Last September, the usually dry, desert-like conditions turned into monsoons, with days of drenching rain.

The traditional Tibetan-style buildings have flat mud roofs, which withstand the long freezing winters and even the snow pack, which melts gradually in the spring. But mud roofs haven't a hope against the deluges of rain suffered last year, and multiple leaks have caused a lot of damage in the school buildings.

The School asked local engineers for advice (others have suffered this problem of late) and turned to TRAS for financial help. We have agreed to pay for the roof repairs, which are now well under way before the potential heavy rains come this year.



Applying a layer of mud on top of polyethylene sheeting

The roof repairs are interesting – first the top layer of mud is scraped off, then heavy-duty polyethylene sheeting is laid over the whole structure, and a new layer of mud is applied, followed by a layer of gravel. Channels and slopes are cut into the layer to direct the water off the roof. Materials and labourers have been brought in from Manali while the road is open, and everything should be complete by month end. Now we just need to raise the funds to pay for this.

\$14,300 is what's needed.



Maternal Health Care in Nepal

A shocking statistic: *Although there has been great improvement in recent years, Nepal continues to have one of the highest maternal death rates in the Asia Pacific region, with 279 women dying per 100,000 live births, according to recent UN data.*

The Nepalese Ministry of Health 2017 report shows that the great majority of women in urban settings, and particularly the wealthier and better educated, have their babies in proper facilities with attending professionals, and they receive ante natal care. Sadly, things are still much worse in the rural regions of the country and this is where the **Innovative Development Education Academy (IDEA)** comes in.

For more than 20 years, the **Innovative Development Education Academy (IDEA)** in Pokhara, Nepal, has been running an 18 month midwifery education/training course for girls and women from remote areas of Nepal which will help to save lives of mothers and children in those areas.

This year TRAS has partnered with IDEA and will assist underprivileged students in paying for their Midwifery course.



Graduates of the midwifery course

The Academy is well established and well regarded. Many young women from cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara receive training there, paying their own way – but inevitably they look for work in urban settings. So IDEA looks for international support to pay for the young women from rural areas to get this vital training. These graduates do return to their own villages and do sterling work in helping to save the lives of mothers and babies. The training is good – recognised by the Government of Nepal – and the students receive practical training in a hospital setting and then are mentored in their own region. Knowledgeable in the local customs, they are more attuned to the needs and fears of the local pregnant women and are more able to help them than outsiders could. TRAS feels this is a very worthwhile project and we are looking forward to receiving the details of 'our' first students.

TRAS' goal is to raise \$6,300
for the first TRAS/IDEA
Midwifery Training Project.

Will you help?

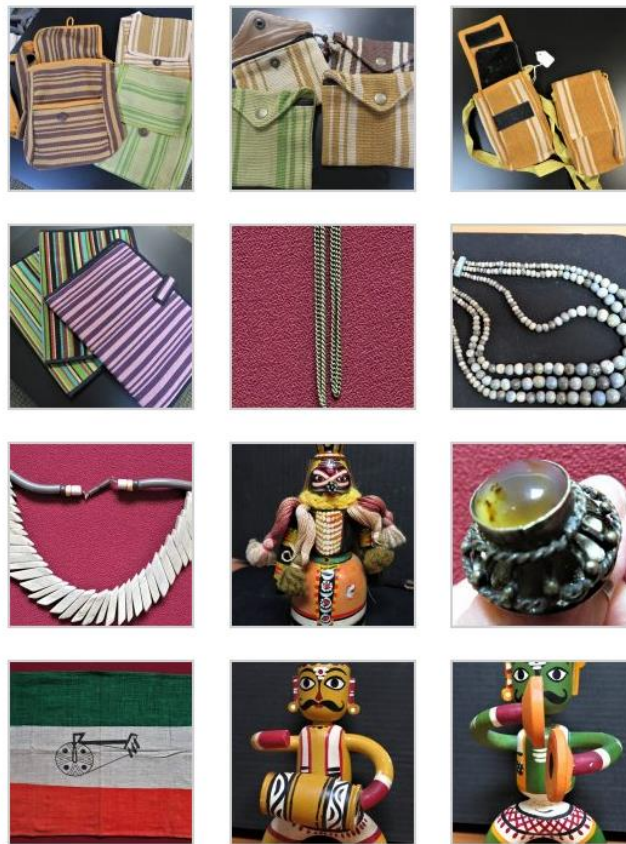


Community mobilization – a midwife showing her kit to village women

The TRAS Treasure Chest

The TRAS Treasure Chest has lovely handwoven shawls, bags and hats from two of our partners (Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre and Manushi in Manali). It also still has some of the artifacts from Tibet and India generously donated to TRAS by long-time members. All proceeds go towards the TRAS projects.

We also have two very special items – bead necklaces hand crafted by none other than our founder Inge Woodcock, who, as well as being a force to be reckoned with when it came to fundraising for the Tibetan orphans, was an excellent potter. Do examine the illustrated catalogue on the TRAS website (www.tras.ca), under “Handicrafts”, and get in touch with Joanne at the office who awaits your orders! She is happy to have you visit the office or will mail the items you purchase. 604-224-5133 or info@tras.ca.



Illustrated handicraft catalog on the TRAS website

Member in Metro Vancouver



We are looking for a TRAS member in Metro Vancouver who would be willing to let TRAS hold a pre-Christmas sale of the handicrafts and treasures at their home! Each time we have done this, it has been a success. Not only does it raise more funds for TRAS projects, but it introduces TRAS to a new audience.

Please contact Joanne if you would be willing to help in this way: 604-224-5133 or info@tras.ca We'll do the work and advertise the event to TRAS members: you provide the venue and invite your friends and neighbours.

Sponsorship Report: Chauntra Tibetan Settlement

TRAS is pleased to be able to offer help to yet another Tibetan settlement in north India to support its children in need. The Chauntra Tibetan Settlement has been known to TRAS for years – our members paid for the weaving hall there in the 1980s, where the refugees produce magnificent carpets. We remember that the late Barry Leach, one of TRAS' first directors, and ever practical, suggested building the foundations strong enough to hold a second storey in case more room was needed. Sure enough, it soon became clear that the settlement needed a multi-purpose meeting hall and it was built atop the weaving hall.

Pema Youdon, with whom TRAS worked when she was the manager of the Tibetan Women's Centre in Dehra Dun, was recently transferred to Chauntra by the Central Tibetan Administration to manage this settlement and she has written to TRAS to ask if our members could sponsor a few of the neediest children. TRAS is happy to do this, with YOUR help. Would you like to befriend one of these children? **Contact Joanne at the TRAS office (604-224-5133 or info@tras.ca.)** (The Chauntra Tibetan Settlement is separate from the Tibetan Children's Village Lower Chauntra School, where TRAS members also sponsor children.)

Four children are needing sponsorship at the Chauntra Tibetan Settlement, Himachal Pradesh, India. The annual sponsorship amount is \$480.

Rigzin
Dorjee

DOB January 16, 2013

Rigzin attends the Sambhota Tibetan School in Chauntra as a day scholar in the summer and stays in the boarding school in the winter. His family is facing many financial difficulties. Rigzin's mother is basically the sole income generator for the family of 7.



DOB May 19, 2010

Tenzin attends the Sambhota Tibetan School in Chauntra. Parents both work for 4 months of the year selling sweaters and shawls. The little money his parents earn selling sweaters and shawls are not enough to give Tenzin and his sister an education. He also has his grandmother living with them.

Tenzin
Gelek

Karma
Choephel

DOB September 17, 2011

Karma attends and boards at the Sambhota Tibetan School in Chauntra. There are 8 members in his family. His mother is the sole income generator of the family, working as a caretaker in the TCV hotel in Gopalpur.



DOB September 7, 2007

Tenzin attends and boards at the Sambhota Tibetan School in Chauntra. Her father left the family two years ago and her mother struggles to provide for her two children. Tenzin amazes her teachers as she is a bright student who does very well in her studies.

Tenzin
Choezom

Is Sponsorship Worth It?

TRAS is blessed with warm-hearted, generous donors, many of whom have sponsored Himalayan children over the years. Sometimes not much is known about a child, and letters are infrequent, so a donor may not really know what the impact sponsorship from someone far away has on a child.

Recently we have been in touch with the family of Jessie Kaye of Ontario – she has been a supporter of TRAS for years and has sponsored many children. Jessie is in her 90s, and her son Matthew has written to tell TRAS about her involvement. Not only has she initiated wonderful fundraising efforts, but she has enjoyed being a sponsor – and a letter just received from a young woman Jessie sponsored for years is proof that sponsorship does have an enormously good impact on a child.



Jessie's daughter Leslie promoting "Loonies for a Loo"

Here are extracts from the letters (the full letters will be posted on the TRAS website), but first we must tell you about Jessie's toilet campaign.

She had written to the TRAS office in 1998 to see if there were a project her church could take on, and the reply was toilets. "TOILETS??" asked Jessie – how would her rather conservative church take to that? She and her daughter designed a large poster of a Canadian outhouse, cut it into 85 jigsaw pieces and 'sold' them for \$1 each at a church event. She hoped they would be lucky enough to raise funds for one toilet. Well, Jessie raised enough funds for 19 toilets! Not only that but she inspired a doctor who had worked in India to give a slide show about her work. She and later her son visited Dekyiling Tibetan settlement and became sponsors themselves. Her son got his high school involved too – and thus Jessie's enthusiasm spread!

Raising Money for Cows and Toilets

Life has a way of delivering the information one needs, exactly when one is ready to act on it. It was in 1965 that Jessie first became involved with the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society. One night Jessie was reading a book to one of her children (Jessie has always had a passion for reading) which was the story of a Dervla Murphy cycling from Europe to India (*Full Tilt: Ireland to India With a Bicycle*).

In her second book (*Tibetan Foothold*), Murphy mentioned the plight of the Tibetans and how many Canadians were trying to help. By sheer coincidence Don realized that he had played squash with the uncle of a girl mentioned in this book. Then, a couple of days later Jessie saw a notice in the paper announcing a big tea in Vancouver to raise money for Tibetan refugees. For \$2, she joined the society and began an association that has lasted over 50 years.

Over that time, Jessie with Don as an able assistant has raised money for cows and toilets, but maybe not toilets for cows! Together they adopted children and grandmothers. As one of her natural children, it is with tears in my eyes that I read a letter from one of my "adopted" sisters who is now a nurse. Her words of appreciation and love for my mother show that one person can change another person's world for the better. But Jessie would just think it was only a natural thing to do...

Written by Matthew Haigh Kaye, Jessie's youngest son
Oshawa, Ontario
August 29, 2019

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Always Remember Your Roots

I am Kalsang Choedon, daughter of Mr. Jangchup Dorjee who worked as a stock keeper at the centre and Mrs. Tsering Dolma. I would like to say thank you very much to TRAS and specially Mrs. Jessie Kaye for their unconditional support to me during the tender years of my education. She helped me throughout my education and I am grateful for everything that enabled me to stand up on my feet and support my family.

She supported me and my family from 2000-2014. After I completed my secondary education, I enrolled at Manipal College of Nursing, Manipal, to pursue my graduate course (B.Sc. Nursing) for about 4 years. I completed my tertiary education with degree in 2014 with good marks. After that, I got selected for many campus interviews for job applications. Eventually, I worked as a staff nurse in one of the most reputable hospitals, Apollo Hospital in Delhi, for duration of two years. Then, I moved back to my hometown and worked there in Max Hospital and have been working since.

Someone once said, "Always remember your roots, they are the foundation of your life and the wings of your future." My present achievement is unattainable if Jessie Kaye hadn't come to my life at that time. She is the root that upheld me throughout my life. As I came to know, she is now 92 years old and still supporting the needy children in their life. I was startled at the time and then felt proud to be engaged with such an exceptional woman at one time of my life. She is the epitome of perseverance in my life to look up to and be her in future if I'm capable and get such opportunity. What I've become is completely credited to my family especially Mrs. Jessie Kaye who had relentlessly helped me and my education. She was and still is part of my family forever.

Yours sincerely
Kalsang Choedon
26 August 2019

Kalsang Choedon (pictured right)



Update on Voice of Children

This amazing project has just sent in the report for the past six months. Voice of Children (VOC) is run by two local charities, Aman and Vimarsh, whose tiny staff and dedicated volunteers are improving the lives of hundreds of children and families in 12 remote villages beyond Nainital and Almora in north India. We have mentioned in previous newsletters their success in holding tutoring and catch up classes, computer trainings, health camps for teenaged girls, children's group meetings, fairs, newspaper, enrichment outings, village libraries, and more. These activities continue apace. But always there is something new. As circumstances change and new opportunities arise, VOC grasps them with both hands.

- In their most recent report, VOC observes that the dropout rate for students in grades 1 to 8 has been reduced to zero!
- VOC runs five village-based Education Centres for children aged 5 to 14, helping 186 children with both subject knowledge (Hindi, science, math, English, and geography) and life skills (reading and writing habits, hygiene, creative activities and games).
- VOC also has Tuition Centres operating in five other villages and helping 125 children, focusing on teaching subjects that are directly relevant to the students: general knowledge, health, environment, gender discrimination and laws.
- In remote villages, where it's difficult to keep teacher posts filled, students in grades 9 through 12 are often weak in math, science, and English, leading them to fail and then drop out. VOC has provided coaching on these specific subjects to 52 students in grades 9 through 12, through Coaching Centres.
- VOC runs a Women's Counselling and Resource Centre, providing support for women's well-being and combating abuse and violence against women. VOC has been increasing community awareness of government programs, including pensions for seniors, widows, and the disabled, as well as labour registration (required to receive benefits for labourers). To help with income generation, VOC has been distributing low-cost farming equipment and seeds to village women, and running training programs for greenhouse farming (for off-season vegetable production), fish farming, and mushroom production. 40 women have received sewing machines under a program run by the Labour Department.
- To help keep children in school and reduce the dropout rate, 55 children belonging to poor families are supported through a Children's Fellowship program, providing them with school bags, notebooks, syllabus books, and shoes.
- VOC holds monthly meetings with parents, to help parents support their children's education; with children's groups, to teach children about personal hygiene, gender discrimination, the right to education, and environmental issues; and with women's groups, discussing violence against women, menstrual hygiene, local self-government, and government programs.

57th TRAS Annual General Meeting

The 57th Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on Wednesday, September 18, 2019.

President's Report (by Russil Wvong)

Activities in the Himalayas

TRAS members are currently sponsoring the education of 127 individual children (79 girls and 48 boys) in the region, from kindergarten up to Grade 12. We currently have about 30 children needing sponsorship. The sponsorship amount is \$480 per year.

The TRAS Scholarship Fund, established through the generosity of two anonymous donors, supports post-secondary students at \$1000/year for up to three years, through Munsel-Ling School in Spiti Valley, the Dekyiling Tibetan settlement, and the Voice of Children project, both in northern India. The fund is now supporting the education of 16 students.

Last year TRAS sent \$46,500 for children's sponsorships, and another \$16,000 from the TRAS Scholarship Fund.

Our major projects over the last year include:

- The CTA Nurses Training project in India. (\$7,000)
- The Voice of Children project, which is improving education for children in remote villages in the districts of Nainatal and Almora, in the northern Indian province of Uttarakhand Pradesh. (\$27,500)
- The READI Nepal project, which is educating thirty children from Humla, the poorest district in Nepal. (\$24,800)
- The Munsel-ling Laundry project, building basic laundry facilities for the children to wash their clothes. Previously the children were using a gray-water pond to wash clothes, causing tension with villagers who also used the pond for irrigation. The project funded a large storage tank (making better use of the water from a surface spring), two outdoor laundry stations for girls and for boys (for privacy), and a soak pit to strain out soap and grime before the water reaches the village fields. (completed, \$17,700)

Local Activities

Local events over the last year:

- November 2018 – a social dinner at Gurkha Kitchen, which was a lot of fun!
- May 2019 – lunch at Tibetan Kitchen in Victoria. This was a great opportunity to connect with TRAS members on Vancouver Island.

Raheesa Jina has joined the TRAS board – welcome! She's completed a B.Sc. in Integrated Science at UBC, is working on a Master of Management degree at the UBC business school, and recently volunteered at Chitwan Medical College in Nepal.

Following the business part of the meeting, Megha Shakya gave a slide presentation on READI Nepal, and Sanjeev Singh gave a presentation on the Voice of Children project. Both presentations were fascinating, even for those of us who are familiar with the projects.



READI hostel dormitory



School in Simikot that the READI students attend

Slide from Megha's presentation on READI Nepal



Slide from Sanjeev's presentation on Voice of Children

As always, an enormous thank you to Joanne MacLeod, our Office Manager for the past five years; to our amazing volunteers; and to you, our donors! None of the work that TRAS does in the Himalayas would be possible without your support!

TRAS

Supporting health and education for
children and youth in the Himalayas



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YES! I want to help children and youth living in the Himalayas

Name: _____

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- ☐ Please send event information and newsletters by e-mail
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