



## President's Message

With COVID-19, the heatwave and wildfires in the summer, and now the flooding and mudslides, it's been a difficult year in BC and other parts of Canada. I hope you and your family are staying safe.

Thank you for your generous support over the last year. India and Nepal were hit hard by the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thanks to your donations, TRAS's partners were able to provide food and supplies to needy families who were facing hunger and suffering as a result of lost income. Again thanks to your prompt donations, TRAS was able to supply essential emergency medical supplies to Tibetan settlements in Nepal and India.

At the same time, our partners in both countries doggedly continued as many of their longer-term education programs as possible when lockdowns eased. There is more information about their efforts on behalf of the local villagers inside, but I'd like to ask for your support for two of our partners in particular, Voice of Children and READI Nepal.



**Voice of Children** works in rural villages in the Almora and Nainital districts in the foothills of the Himalayas. Voice of Children's staff and volunteers have done an amazing job of organizing relief for families during the pandemic, and they've been reopening their Education Support Centres as soon as it was allowed. These centres cannot substitute for schools, but they help to encourage and support children with their education, and this is more critical than ever with the disruptions to schooling. If it meant meeting in smaller groups than usual, and outside, if it meant doing as much by internet as possible, they did what it took to keep education alive for the children (see page 5).

**We need to raise \$37,386 for Voice of Children – that's \$125 per child for the year.**

*(continued on page 2)*

## President's Message (cont'd)

**READI Nepal** supports the education of underprivileged children in Humla, one of the poorest districts in Nepal. It operates a hostel in Simikot, the district capital, where the children live and attend a well-regarded government school. During the initial COVID-19 lockdown, the hostel was closed, but READI continued to support the children and their families, providing them with COVID-19 supplies and helping needy families with food. Later the hostel was reopened and the children were able to return, with READI supplying them with healthy food and with quality education despite the disruption of the pandemic.

**We need to raise \$16,830 for READI Nepal.**

From all of us at TRAS, we hope you and your family have a safe and happy holiday season. Thank you again for all your support!

### In Memoriam: Remembering Joan Ford



Joan Ford, who over many years was a TRAS director, President, Sponsorship Secretary and latterly Patron, passed away peacefully in Vancouver in October. Joan's was always the voice of wisdom and reason at our sometimes-heated board meetings, and her understanding of and love for the Himalayan people were an enormous asset to TRAS. Joan emigrated from England to Canada as a doctor in the 1940s and was thrown into rural life 'feet first' in Bella Coola. Stints in Dominica followed, but her loves of medicine, hiking and nature really came together the day Sir Edmund Hillary said to her "Just take a pair of runners and a stethoscope" – and without more ado Joan set off to be a locum for six weeks in a tiny Hillary clinic in Nepal's mountains. She did that six times, growing to love and appreciate the people, both Nepali and Tibetan, and worked hard to help them. Joining the TRAS Board she shared her deep knowledge of the region with us and was able to oversee many projects there. By a strange twist of

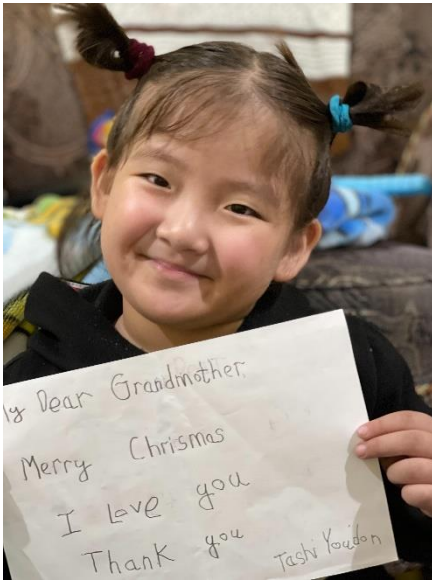
fate, having just returned from working in W. Nepal, Dr. Lynn Beck looked after Dr. Ford's practice in Burnaby during one of Joan's Hillary locums. Given their mutual respect for the peoples of the Himalaya, Joan invited Lynn to join the board of TRAS. The circle was closed later when Drs. Lynn and Frank Beck worked as locums in the Hillary hospital after Joan had retired. "It was a hard act to follow and took two of us!" Frank and Lynn Beck are still on the board of TRAS and greatly cherish the many opportunities their long association with Joan gave them. Joan's life was captured in the film 'She makes Mountain Calls' and she was fittingly honoured with the Order of Canada. We miss her, our fellow TRAS supporter and our friend.

## The Rocket Stoves Work!

This just in from Lama Tashi at Munsel-ling School in Spiti: the 68 rocket stoves are all installed and the students have been back in school since September. The classrooms and dorms are warm, he says; the stoves take less fuel – and are SMOKELESS!! So good for the health of the children and the environment.



## The Face of Sponsorship



If you'd like a smile like this to light up your life, contact Joanne at the TRAS office ([info@tras.ca](mailto:info@tras.ca) or 604-224-5133) to offer to sponsor a child. This particular little girl is already sponsored. However, the need for sponsors is great, so do contact Joanne to discuss sponsoring a child. The cost is \$40 a month.

Meanwhile, here's the encouraging story of one of the children sponsored by TRAS members:

Kalsang was born to a peasant family in a remote village in Tibet. The Khampas are known for their bravery and also their love towards the environment. As the family had such a low income, they were unable to send their children to school so Kalsang remained at home to take care of her younger brother and sister. She did many household chores and her main objective was to minimize the workload of her mother. Through some friends who had children studying in India, her father learned about the Tibetan Children's Villages which were providing education and shelter to newly arrived



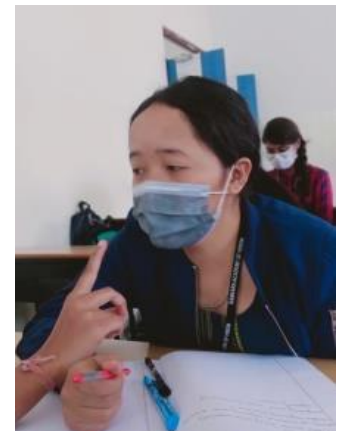
Tibetan children. Her parents made the hard decision to send her to India.

In 2011 her father took her to Dram, along with another local girl as a companion. There he paid a handful of Chinese Yuan to a Nepali porter for a safe crossing of the tense border. The girls and their porter walked through the High Mountain to remain safe from border police. After four long days of hardship, they finally reached the Reception Centre in Nepal, where they were sent to a local hospital for a medical checkup. After a month Kalsang and her friend were sent to India.

In 2012, Kalsang and her friend were admitted to the Tibetan Children's Village School in Suja (TCV). Her bio from TCV indicated that she is kind and very respectful towards her elders. Her hobby was playing basketball with her friends.

Through the TRAS sponsorship program, a couple on Vancouver Island sponsored Kalsang from 2013 until her graduation in 2020. Upon graduation Kalsang enrolled in the Sankara College of Optometry, Bangalore and received a scholarship from TCV, helping her pay for her first-year tuition. Through TRAS, her sponsors are generously covering her second year. She wrote the following to her sponsor:

*Tashi Delek, how are you doing? Hope everything is great. Since the age of 13 I was raised by the TCV, Suja with your unconditional love and support. I was provided with a well facilitated education. Last year I graduated from high school and your support made that happen. After graduation I chose optometry at the Sankara Optometry College to live up to my passion. I was one of the privileged ones to be selected for the entrance exam and interview. Even though the college fees were more than I could afford, I tried every means to get the full amount, applying for various scholarships, seeking help from some individuals and many more. At last I was able to manage my first year fee. My second year starts October 2021 which is an extra burden for me but your presence bloomed my path and I'm thankful for that. Your generosity encourages me as I am one step closer to my dream and I will always be grateful for that. Your kindness will inspire other youth to work harder as it is possible to achieve their dreams. Thank you infinitely for brightening my life, I will be forever grateful for your love and support. Take care and I will always be praying for your healthy life.*



# TRAS Scholarship Fund 2021

by Lynn Beck

The TRAS Scholarship students in Northern India have had to be very resilient during this pandemic. In their words:

**“Talking about 2020, it was a great mess”**  
**“The world is going through chaos due to Coronavirus”**

TRAS is presently supporting 20 Scholarship students through our three local partners in N. India. Each student receives \$1,000CN per year for three years to help fund their post-secondary education.

**The Voice of Children** has nine students (see the May 2021 TRAS newsletter [www.tras.ca/news](http://www.tras.ca/news)). **The Rinchen Zangpo Society**, Spiti, currently has six students being supported by the Scholarship Fund. For example, Pasang Dolma is in her third year of medical school and can luckily start clinical work as she is double vaccinated.



One of the two new candidates selected this year, Tenzin Butith, has a very compelling background. She lost both her parents due to COVID-19 within one week of each other.

In her words: **“During this pandemic I lost both my parents. They were my life. They supported me in every situation, in every way they could. I want to pursue nursing as my career and during this tough time I strongly need financial support.”**

TRAS is very pleased that we can financially support Tenzin during this difficult time to become a nurse. It is an inspirational choice during this terrible pandemic. She has already been accepted and has started her nursing program.

After a break during the pandemic, we are pleased to announce that **Dekyiling Tibetan Charitable Society** has chosen two new students this year. Both are studying at the same nursing college in Dehradun.

Kunga Choeyang started her nursing studies last year in the middle of the pandemic and has entered her second year of nursing. Tenzin Yangkyi started in first year nursing this October.

We have also heard from the three students who were studying throughout the pandemic. Luckily they were able to continue their studies online, are well and are starting their third year attending regular classes.

It is a testament to the hard work and courage of frontline workers throughout the world during this dreadful pandemic that three out of four new Scholarship students have been inspired to choose nursing as their future profession.

**Thank you** to our **donors** for giving TRAS the funding necessary to give our bright scholarship students the chance to excel and improve the conditions of their families and their wider community.

**Please** give generously so TRAS can continue to support these deserving students.

## 2020-2021 projects: All going well, thanks to our hard-working local partners

The emergency and special projects have been fully funded, thanks to our donors:

Snow Lion PPE, Nepal; CTA Department of Health COVID Emergency Response; Ray Yee Memorial Fund educational projects; IDEA Midwifery training (on hold)

**Now we need to fund the ongoing educational projects and the stoves for chilly Munsel-ling School:**

CTA Nurses – scholarships for eight Tibetan trainee nurses	\$6,270
Voice of Children Education Project	\$37,386
READI Nepal Education Initiative	\$16,830
Munsel-ling School rocket stoves	\$20,420

# The Voice of Children Education Projects During COVID-19: How did they cope?

Report by Nilima Bhatt

Staff member of Aman, one of the two NGOs conducting the Voice of Children Education Project

The coronavirus and a lockdown aimed at stopping its spread last year saw millions of people thrown out of jobs in the cities and towns and forced back to their villages. Uttarakhand was no exception to that. Historically people from the hills had been going to cities all across the country in search of jobs to make a living. Lockdown impacted everyone and not one aspect of human life remained untouched by the pandemic. People living in rural areas were the hardest hit. They lost jobs, struggled to feed their family and were forced into further debt and abject poverty. Children were also impacted.

In Uttarakhand, during COVID-19, schools were closed from March 2020 to July 2021. From August 2021 schools reopened in phases, initially for children attending grade 6 and above followed by reopening of Elementary Schools in the middle of September 2021.

The closure of schools had a direct bearing on the wellbeing of the children. We found this way more in the remote villages of Almora and Nainital district. As the Voice of Children project area lacks the basic necessities and infrastructures, it was challenging to keep children involved in education. Efforts were made by the government to provide education online through virtual means. However, this was not very successful in the rural and remote areas. Following were the key barriers:

- non-availability of smart phones and electronic gadgets to attend online classes
- unstable network connectivity to support extensive internet use
- cash crunch to recharge phones

At early stages during COVID-19 pandemic, followed by nationwide lockdown, we were able to assess that closure of the schools was not helping children in any way. As the closure of schools led to a break from the routine, children were first pulled more into household work and were supporting their parents in agricultural and allied activities. Hence, we decided to look for alternative ways to support learning and education for the children in the field area.

During the pandemic, **the education centers** run by Voice of Children became a nodal point to support children's education. These centers are located in the villages and run by local volunteers. We followed COVID-19 protocol at all times while children were at the centers. Hand washing was mandatory, masks were provided to the children and social distancing was practiced. This was not easy, but we had the support of the children and parents. We followed the directions of district administration and there were times when we had to stop all the activities at education centers.





The education centers provided remedial education to children and helped them remain connected with the course curriculum. We do not see the education centers as an alternative to school education. We do not have qualified teachers and the resources which a school has. We had been working in the past to ensure that every child goes to school. During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic our centers kept children connected to their books, their learning and most important with their friends. Books, stationeries, board games and additional learning resources were made available which created further interest amongst children to be at the education centers.

We also identified young men and women in the villages who had access to smartphones. We sought their assistance in supporting the education of local children. We provided funds to buy internet time for their phones and in return they supported children in their neighborhood and got them connected to online classes run by the school board. The volunteers were also connected with the local school teachers via phone and other means to ensure that a community based online and offline model of education would work and be sustained for children in remote villages of Uttarakhand. We made a good start. A lot more needs to be done in this area.

The volunteers, with support of staff, also organized some fun activities and local level competitions to support creativity amongst children. Water colors, crayons, chart papers, drums, musical instruments were made available. Children were allowed to take some of the stuff home and work on their ideas. These tools gave children options, voice, and choice in order to enable them to be creative. Later the volunteers helped them share their work on social media. Education centers value creativity, we celebrate and reward them.

During the pandemic, in the project area, we were directly connected with 330 children in 11 villages of Almora and Nainital supporting their educational goals by keeping the education centers open and accessible. The centers were also open to children of migrants as they returned to their villages. Our education centers also provided information on the pandemic and created awareness among children and adults on prevention of COVID-19.

### Case studies

I am **Leela Bisht**, a resident of Dangikhola village. I work as an Asha (community health worker). During the pandemic Voice of Children sought my help and I became a volunteer. I agreed to support the education centers and assisted in teaching and supporting children living near Pathura village. When the pandemic hit, I was very much worried about the education of children in my family and children in general.

I decided to do something and had several conversations with the parents of the children about their education and how they can be supported. I offered parents to send their children to my home so that I can assist them in their studies. Initially 17 children came forward. I arranged for them to come in groups. I taught 8 younger children in the morning while the older ones attended in the evening. It was challenging initially. I have no training in teaching, but children needed space and someone to guide them to read and write. Keeping them connected to books was important for me. I have access to a smart phone and this came in handy. Voice of Children assisted me to provide education to children of my village.

**Sangeeta** is from Rankhila village. She is in college completing a Bachelor of Arts. During lockdown, in coordination with the local education center, Sangeeta taught children who are in Elementary School. With support from Voice of Children she made books and stationery available. Residents of Rankhila village are very poor and lack basic facilities. Very few have access to any gadgets. She offered her phone to ensure that teachers can stay connected with the children of their school.



**Kalyan Mankoti** is a teacher by profession. He also volunteers at Voice of Children project. During the pandemic the project team had several conversations with Kalyan and others to discuss the need for an offline model of education. It was agreed to develop a worksheet for the children. Kalyan developed one for children attending his school. Later this worksheet was sent to the volunteers running the Education Centers. The worksheets were completed by the volunteers and sent back to the teachers at the school for review. This assisted in keeping the children of his school connected with education. Later with a few changes this model was extended to other Education Centers run by Voice of Children and was successful.

**The latest update from Voice of Children** is the good news that their new programs for teenaged girls have started up – 161 girls have been taught to sew handmade reusable sanitary pads and are passing the skill on to others, and 10 have already taken the driving course for 'scooties' and cars, to help them to get work!



## A new lecture series for our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022?

Well, not exactly, because who knows when we will feel comfortable gathering together to listen to interesting talks given by experts on matters close to our hearts.

So instead we will send out, by email, a series of essays to enlighten us during long winter evenings. Each will take around five to 10 minutes to read, and will give you some background into why we support the projects we do and what the local situation is at present in the regions where our partners work.

We will start in early January with an essay on the history of education in Nepal by TRAS Director Megha Shakya. It is a tale of elitism, mismanagement and neglect for the majority of youngsters. Amid this chaos TRAS has found a handful of dedicated local educators determined to help their people – and at present is supporting school children through READI Nepal and midwifery students through the institute, IDEA. But IDEA has been knocked sideways by the latest government decree: to teach midwifery, an institute has to run its own 100 bed hospital, instead of the students doing their practicums in well regarded local hospitals. So our agreement to train 10 rural students is on hold while things get sorted out. The four students we supported for their 18-month training recently sat their much delayed final exams and are awaiting the results. They have been volunteering in their villages where they are much appreciated.

For future essays we have some ideas, and if you have a desire to learn more about a particular topic, do let us know.



# TRAS

Supporting health and education for children and youth in the Himalayas



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- Sponsorship \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for (name of child/youth) \_\_\_\_\_
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**Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!**

