

TRAS's mission

First of all, thank you for your generous support of health and education for children and young people in Nepal, northern India, and Tibet! TRAS exists because there are people in Vancouver (and elsewhere in Canada) who want to help people in the Himalayas. Our approach is to work with local partners who can identify the needs of people in the region, plan projects to meet those needs, and carry them out. Our role is to evaluate project proposals, based on our experience with past projects, and to raise funds from our members to support these projects.

Activities in the Himalayas

TRAS members are currently sponsoring the education of 110 individual children in the region, from kindergarten up to Grade 12: 70 girls and 40 boys. We always have children needing sponsorship, so if you know of anyone who would like to sponsor a child's education, please let us know (info@tras.ca). The sponsorship amount is \$440 per year (a little over a dollar a day).

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. Post-secondary education allows students to receive training so that they can become teachers, nurses, and doctors. If you'd like to support post-secondary students, but on a one-time basis rather than as an ongoing commitment, please consider making a donation to the TRAS Scholarship Fund.

Last year TRAS sent \$46,000 for children's sponsorships, and another \$10,000 from the TRAS Scholarship Fund.

Daphne Hales, our Projects Director, is travelling and couldn't be here today, but I'll present her projects report later on. Our major projects over the last year include:

- The CTA Nurses Training project. This is a project to train students from Tibetan settlements in India, who then return to work in their settlements. Our partner on this project is the Central Tibetan Administration in India. (\$6,500)
- The Voice of Children project, which is improving education for children in the districts of Nainital and Almora, in the northern Indian province of Uttarakhand Pradesh. (\$25,500)
- Updating the library at Munsel-ling School in the Spiti Valley of India: both bookshelves and books. (\$8,900 last year, plus \$8,900 this year)
- The SFSS Toilet Rebuilding project, which rebuilt 200 toilets in a settlement in Dolakha, one of the districts in Nepal which was worst hit by the 2015 earthquakes. (\$20,900)
- The READI Nepal project, which is educating thirty children from Humla, the poorest district in Nepal. (\$21,000)

The Spiti library project and the SFSS toilet rebuilding project are both fully funded, but the CTA Nurses Training project, the Voice of Children project, and the READI Nepal project are all ongoing, and of course we're raising funds for them. If you'd like to make a donation to one of these projects, please let Joanne know.

Rebuilding Nepal after the 2015 earthquakes

Sara Shneiderman, a professor in the Department of Anthropology at UBC, is leading a collaborative study - with researchers from Nepal, Denmark, and elsewhere - of the challenges facing Nepal as it attempts to rebuild following the 2015 earthquakes. This is complicated by the fact that Nepal is still attempting to re-establish political stability, following the end of the civil war in 2006. The aim is both analysis (understanding the effects of the earthquakes and the difficulties involved in reconstruction), and policy impact (how to do things better).

TRAS will be one of the community partners in the study. Basically, we're part of the audience for the study's findings. Are there particular needs that we can help with? Are there obstacles to reconstruction that we need to keep in mind? What works and what doesn't? And of course we'd like to disseminate this information to our members.

Background information from the study:

The earthquakes in April and May 2015 killed 9,000 people and destroyed over 600,000 homes.

Even though the civil war had ended in 2006, the major parties had been unable to agree on a constitution, due to conflict over federalism. It wasn't until September 2015 that the constitution was finalized, partly due to pressure from international donors. By this time, the forces pushing for inclusion of marginalized populations, which was greatest immediately after the signing of the peace accord in 2006, had weakened.

The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) was established in December 2015. It hired 3,000 domestic civil engineers in January 2016, dispatching them to the affected districts to assess damage claims and oversee reconstruction according to a newly introduced building code. Yet to date, villagers have received at maximum 50,000 Nepali rupees (CAD 625) per household from the government, about a tenth of what even the most basic village home costs, and relatively few homes have been built.

I attended a start-up workshop at UBC on Friday. The research presentations by the Nepali researchers who have worked for the NRA were particularly interesting. One particular issue is that the civil engineers are trying to convince villagers to rebuild their homes using new designs (apparently originating at the World Bank), but their leverage is limited. For example, what would convince you that you need to rebuild using 12"x12" posts, instead of 9"x9" posts?

In Vancouver

Events last year:

- November - social dinner at Gurkha Kitchen, sold out. A very enjoyable evening, thank you to everyone who came!

- April - talk by Mark Turin on Thangmi people of Dolakha, Nepal, at the Unitarian Church. Mark, like Sara, is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at UBC (Mark and Sara are married). The talk was fascinating: Mark's both very accomplished and an excellent storyteller. Mark already spoke Nepali fluently, but the Thangmi language (in the Tibeto-Burman language family) has no script and had never been studied before. He basically spent 10 years living with the Thangmi people and learning their language.

We'll likely hold similar events this year: another social dinner in the winter (either November or February), and a talk by Sara on the 2015 earthquakes and post-earthquake reconstruction.

Draft bylaws

We've posted a copy of the draft constitution and by-laws, along with an overview of the changes, at tras.ca/societies-act.

The BC government has replaced the 1977 Society Act which governs non-profits in BC with a new Societies Act, effective November 28, 2016. We have until November 2018 to transition to the new Act. Basically, this means that we need to file an electronic copy of our constitution and by-laws with the provincial government, and our constitution and by-laws need to comply with the new Act.

The constitution must only set out the name and purposes of the society, and the purposes must be word-for-word the same as in our existing constitution.

We've revised our bylaws to comply with the new Act. There aren't any substantive changes.

Summary:

- Because the rising cost of postage is making it more expensive to send out mailings (like our newsletter), while it's basically free to send emails, we'd like to distinguish between *members* and *supporters*. Members pay annual dues, receive mailings, and can vote at general meetings. Supporters are more of an informal category: they're people who support TRAS and receive our emails, but are not members.
- Under the new Act, TRAS is required to maintain a register of voting members, with contact information (email or mailing address). To protect the privacy of our donors, access to the register will be restricted. If a donor would like to remain completely anonymous, they can be a supporter rather than a member, because supporters are not required to be in the register of members.
- Directors must be voting members.
- Directors can be removed by board resolution.
- 2/3 threshold for special resolutions to pass.
- Notice of the annual general meeting may be by email as well as postal mail, or by posting a notice on the TRAS website at least 21 days before the meeting.

Our plan is to ratify the draft by-laws at our next AGM, in September 2018.

Organization

One of our three patrons, John Conway, has sadly passed away. John was involved with TRAS from the very beginning, when George and Inge Woodcock returned from India in 1962 and told him about the plight of the Tibetan refugees. When George had to step down due to ill health, after 10 years, John served as President. In the early years, TRAS had focused on child sponsorship. It was John who realized that the Tibetans needed development as well. Under his leadership, TRAS supported development of Tibetan settlements, training centres, and health centres. In recent years, he continued to serve as a Patron of TRAS and to attend TRAS events.

Cynthia Bunbury and Marina Guy have both had to step down from the board, due to time commitments – thank you both! Cynthia joined the board in 2015, but she’s been involved with TRAS for many years before that, working with her students at Sutherland Secondary in North Van to raise funds for TRAS, and she’s planning to continue in the future. Marina has served on the board since 2010: as our Events Coordinator, she organized many events for TRAS, got us onto social media, and helped improve our marketing. We’ll miss her energy and enthusiasm!

We’ll be recruiting more board members – so if you know anyone who you think would make a good board member, please talk to Abby. Our usual process is that we would ask people to give us their resume, and come to a board meeting, to make sure it’ll be a good fit.

Thank you to Joanne MacLeod, who’s now been our Office Manager for the last three years!

Thank you to our volunteers, especially to our regular volunteers who mail out our newsletter, to Beck Lamb (who does the desktop publishing), and to Maria Rubinchik (who maintains our website and Facebook page).

Finally, thank you to our volunteer Board of Directors. I really enjoy working with all of you. As an institution, TRAS exists because of its donors – but the institution also couldn’t exist without the directors who are willing to carry the responsibility of making it run.

- Frank Beck
- Lynn Beck
- Abby Fitch
- Daphne Hales
- Videsh Kapoor
- Megha Shakya
- Sanjeev Singh
- Russil Wvong
- Kevin Yuen

Best regards,

Russil Wvong