



Congratulations, Lama Tashi, on receiving India's National Children Welfare Award!



Lama Tashi is the Buddhist monk from the Ki Monastery in the remote Spiti Valley of northern India who, in the early 1990s, decided that the children of the Spiti Valley deserved to be given the chance to receive an education. He founded the Rinchen Zangpo Society for Spiti Development and opened the Munsel-Ling School in a high-altitude desert valley and offered an education to the children from the eight far-flung villages of the valley. Somehow he heard of TRAS and asked us for help. TRAS paid for the first six teachers to be given training and for the first six house mothers to be trained to look after the young children, so that they could board at

the school. The school was officially opened by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1996. A future president of TRAS, Marion Tipple, was trekking in those mountains at the time and was impressed. She writes:

"Spiti, lying on the border of India and Tibet, was until 1993 totally isolated. It was hidden behind the 'Inner Line', a no-man's land between the super powers where only Indian Border Police were allowed. The valley was populated by eight small villages and several Buddhist Monasteries, as it once had belonged to the Tibetan kingdom of Guge. In 1996, I was one of the first foreigners to visit, attending a Kalachakra ceremony given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to celebrate the 1000th birthday of Spiti's Tabo monastery. As our group drove north through the valley after the ceremony, we came across 'The School', named Munsel-Ling (from Darkness into Light) by the Dalai Lama two days earlier. A long white building in the middle of the desert landscape. Curious, we entered and were greeted by the young lama Tashi Namgyal from nearby Ki Monastery who had been instrumental in its construction. Lama Tashi proudly showed us around and introduced us to the students: 75 children, in two kindergarten classes and one Class 1, boarding with local families. He shared his dreams of developing the school, one year at a time and building accommodation for his young charges, to provide education for the children of Spiti whose parents, subsistence farmers, were illiterate. Back home in Vancouver, to my surprise I discovered TRAS was supporting House Mother training and immediately joined the board.

Fast forward to 2019. The school is now a virtual village, with four offshoots and over 600 students from kindergarten to Grade 12. The scruffy urchins I first met are now eloquent, educated young people who are helping to develop their community. Lama Tashi has realized his dream through much hard work and resilience. The people of Spiti are no longer considered unworthy of education. TRAS has been there from the beginning, assisting him financially with many projects over the years. TRAS sponsors have provided funds to train the first doctor, the first vet, engineers,

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Congratulations, Lama Tashi! (cont'd)

teachers, nurses etc. The need continues and currently, I am proud to be sponsoring my third young person through medical school. These children are bright, intelligent and thirst for knowledge; they deserve to be supported in every way possible. It is wonderful to see Lama Tashi honoured for his efforts, which he relentlessly pursues even today. Congratulations to Lama Tashi."

Lama Tashi's vision and dedication were recognised by the Government of India in January, when he received the National Children Welfare Award from the President of India and met Mr. Modi.

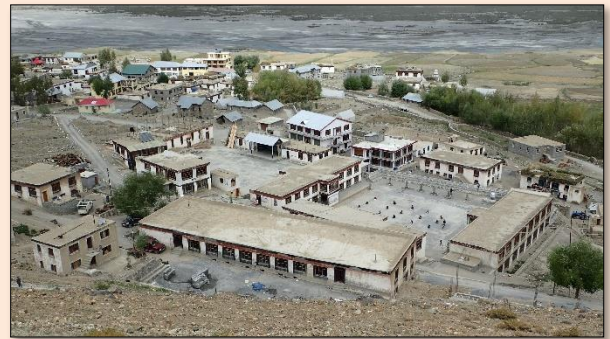


Lama Tashi and Mr. Modi, Prime Minister of India

In honour of this wonderful tribute, TRAS dedicates this edition of the newsletter to Lama Tashi and Munsel-Ling School. Read on!

Highlights from Our Partnership with Munsel-Ling School

- 6 teachers trained in 1995
- 6 house mothers trained in 1996
- Simple greenhouses built against the walls of the dorms, adding warmth as well as nutrition
- First library constructed
- Computer room and science lab constructed
- Agricultural compound created with large greenhouses and surrounding wall
- Water tanks, toilets and hand washing stations constructed
- Health Centre constructed
- Desks replaced in many classrooms
- Beds and bedding replaced for over 300 children (thanks to TRAS working with Sleeping Children Around the World)
- Large library and learning centre built (thanks to TRAS friend Dr. Yosef Wosk)
- Health projects supported by Global Health Initiatives, University of British Columbia, founded by TRAS Director Dr. Videsh Kapoor, with several projects paid for by TRAS
- Laundry facilities built, along with water storage tank and piping
- Many children sponsored by TRAS members over the past 23 years
- Several school graduates have received their university training thanks to individual sponsors and also to the TRAS Scholarship Fund which has given a 3-year scholarship to two students a year since 2013.



Overview of Munsel-Ling School

A huge thank you to all our members who have donated to these projects!

A Visit to Munsel-Ling School

by Alastair Foreman

A year ago I'd never heard of the Spiti Valley in northern India. For the similarly uninitiated, it is wedged between two major tourist regions: the Garhwal Himalaya to the south and the Ladakh ranges to the north. Despite being so close to these areas however, Spiti is a really difficult place to get to. There is no airport and only one unsealed road in and out. Snow closes the road from November to May and it is challenging and at times impassable the rest of the year. It is quite the worst road I have ever been on. Not surprising then that Spiti has remained remote and isolated from the modern world for so long.

We knew of the Munsel-Ling school from a friend who sponsors a student there. Battling extremely limited internet connectivity in Kaza, I found the school's page on Facebook and was able to get a message out about a possible visit. Lama Tashi replied right away and let us know we were welcome the next day.



The road to Spiti



Lama Tashi and friends

We arrived at Munsel-Ling school not knowing quite what to expect. There is a small building for "Admin", and there we found Lama Tashi and his team waiting for us, extremely welcoming and brimming with enthusiasm. His English is excellent and he has a modest, humble presence that belies his stature in the Buddhist community. It was immediately clear that we were going to be treated as honoured guests, with tea and refreshments, a full lunch and student performances. It was amazing.

We started with a tour of the main campus, which is much larger than I expected. The classrooms are small, with about 25 students per class. Teachers are local Spitians as well as some Indians from outside. Everyone speaks English and the quality of education is evident. In fact several graduates from Munsel-Ling have gone on to university in India and, significantly, some have returned to Spiti as doctors and other professionals to serve their community. It is inspirational and it highlights the impact of this remarkable school on Spiti.

Most students at Munsel-Ling live at the school for much of the year, and we visited some of their boarding houses and rooms. Accommodation is basic, dorm style, with outside toilets. The kitchens and dining rooms were also interesting. Feeding so many students is a major undertaking and there are huge pots for cooking. The diet appears to be as nutritious as possible.

There is a special area on campus for the very young children (4-6 years old) with play areas, small classrooms, full-time staff and separate dining rooms. The teachers we saw were incredibly hands-on and caring, doing everything they could to help the little ones get through the day without parents. It was both heartening and heart-breaking to witness the lengths to which some families will go to ensure the best possible futures for their children.

The library and computer rooms are a central part of the school. The library / learning centre in particular is lovely, with many books, local art, and comfortable chairs. It relies on donations and we were told that new books, especially classroom sets, are always welcome. (*This is the library complex funded by Dr. Yosef Wosk and other TRAS members*)



The youngest children

A Visit to Munsel-Ling School (cont'd)



More future doctors?

We visited the medical centre next where concrete efforts to improve student health, nutrition and dental hygiene were evident. This is facilitated in part through an ongoing collaboration with the University of British Columbia Global Health Initiative. They keep detailed student health records, and an analysis of the school's meal program was underway to determine if any changes needed to be made. We were impressed.

The new TRAS-funded laundry facility, although basic, is clean and efficient and great for students to learn self-sufficiency. Lama Tashi is full of plans for future projects and new schools, hostels and other programs are already underway in other parts of Spiti.

We left Munsel-Ling with great enthusiasm for Lama Tashi and his organisation and amazement at his ability to leverage the resources and goodwill around him. He has had a profound impact on Spiti and we can only assume there is much to come.

For the full articles by Marion and Alastair, plus more photos, please visit the TRAS website www.tras.ca.

TRAS is coming to Victoria!

Join us for the TRAS Spring Lunch in Victoria!

TRAS Directors will be at the Tibetan Kitchen Café in Victoria on

Saturday, May 25, 2019

to welcome our friends on Vancouver Island and to spend time with you.
Do join us for a delicious lunch in this colourful venue and catch up on TRAS news.



Doors open at 11.45am, lunch at 12.15pm.

Tibetan Kitchen Café
680 Broughton Street, Victoria, BC

Tickets: \$25
Payment by Visa, Mastercard,
bank e-transfer or cheque.

Please phone or email Joanne at the TRAS
office to reserve your place by May 16.
604-224-5133 or info@tras.ca
(please do not contact the restaurant direct)

We will bring samples of the TRAS handicrafts for sale.

**One happy fact: the restaurant is run by Kelsang Choden,
who came to Canada through the Tibetan Resettlement Project,
and was sponsored by several TRAS members!**

Munsel-Ling School Successes

by Videsh Kapoor

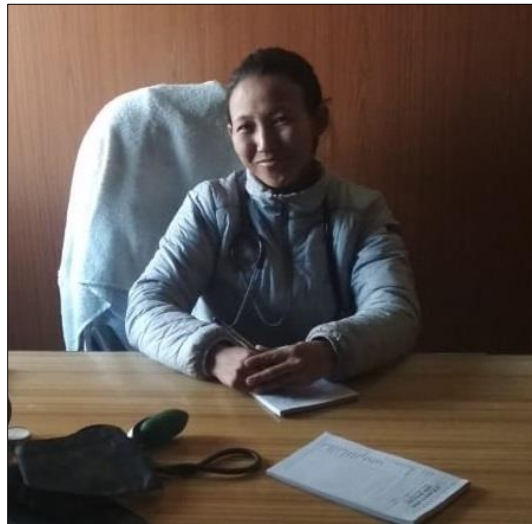
TRAS director Videsh Kapoor recently visited India and met with Munsel-Ling staff.

"I met with Chhering Dorje (former principal of Munsel-Ling, who now provides oversight for three of the schools run by the Rinchen Zangpo Society) and Thukten Yeshay (Lama Tashi's secretary) yesterday. Lama Tashi was unable to travel out of Spiti due to the heavy snowfall.

A few updates about some of the young people who were sponsored by TRAS members for their school years at Munsel-Ling or at the sister school in Dharamshala:



Dr Chhuldim



Dr Angmo



Children walking to Munsel-Ling School this winter

Four of the TRAS-sponsored graduates are now doctors working at Kaza Hospital (8km from Munsel-Ling) – three boys and one girl.

The community has already seen big advantages from having 'locally grown' doctors working in their community. These doctors don't hesitate to do home visits when it requires them to hike into nearby villages, especially when a patient is unable to travel or walk to Kaza, which may take three to four hours. Elderly patients who don't speak English or Hindi are able to communicate with them in the local dialect of Bhoti.

While I was in India, I received a message from Munsel-Ling about an incident that highlights the heroism and willingness of one of the home-grown doctors sponsored by TRAS, Dr. Jampa Kalzang.

"An elderly man had fallen seriously ill in the village of Kakti as reported by local youth. In order to assist the patient, a rescue team comprising of nine members, led by Dr. Jampa Kalzang, went to visit him. Unfortunately, all members of the rescue team came under the direct influence of an avalanche and were swept downstream about 100 meters while ascending a cliff to reach Kakti village. They were all rescued, though Dr. Jampa Kalzang received a minor head injury and had to receive three stitches. The patient in question was safely brought to the health centre in Kaza where Dr. Jampa Kalzang works."



Dr. Jampa Kalzang

Another four students are currently in medical school. There are three nurses working in Kaza Hospital who were also sponsored by TRAS. Several former students are now engineers and Chhering Dorje was proud to tell me that a TRAS sponsored child is the first ever person from Spiti to become an officer in the Indian Army."

Munsel-Ling School Successes (cont'd)

Videsh was told about two sisters, Chhering Palmo and Pasang Dolma, both Munsel-Ling graduates who are currently in their first year of medical school. Just before they found out that they were accepted to medical school, their father died of brain cancer. With their father's passing, they can no longer afford to fund the rest of their 4-year training. Dr. Marion Tipple immediately offered to fund the training for one girl, and the other is applying to the TRAS Scholarship Fund in the hopes that she will be accepted. Please contact Joanne at the TRAS office (604-224-5133) or email info@tras.ca for more information on the TRAS Scholarship Fund.

It is clear that the Spiti community is reaping the benefits of the education provided by Lama Tashi's schools – TRAS can celebrate the part it continues to play in this success! We send hearty congratulations to Lama Tashi!

Sponsorship Opportunities

Although this newsletter highlights Munsel-Ling School, there are needy children in other neglected pockets of India where TRAS offers support through sponsorships. We are introducing you to three children in northern India, two from the Tibetan Women's Centre in Rajpur and one from the Tibetan Children's Village in the Chauntra Tibetan Settlement who has been brought from his village in distant Arunachal Pradesh in order to get an education. We hope your hearts will go out to these little ones.

Please contact Joanne at the TRAS office (604-224-5133) for more information.

**Tenzin
Kunzey**

DOB 10/06/2016 | Tibetan Women's Centre, Raipur

Tenzin's mother and father are both undergoing medical treatments. Her father is in the Special Frontier Force (Tibetan army) and is suffering from tuberculosis and is hospitalized in the military hospital. Her mother is suffering from depression after the death of Tenzin's grandmother and is presently under medical care. Tenzin is currently in day care and needs a sponsor to support her education. \$240 per year.



DOB 06/09/2016 | Tibetan Women's Centre, Raipur

Tenzin's mother is a nurse at a nearby hospital and they are living with his grandmother who has been working at the centre since 1970. His father passed away after a prolonged illness before his birth. His family's income is insufficient to cover all their daily needs and he has no support for his education. He is currently in day care. \$240 per year.

**Tenzin
Passang**

**Jambey
Thupten**

DOB 07/02/2009 | Tibetan Children's Village, Lower Chauntra

Jambey's family settled in Tawang Village, North East India. The village is remote and underdeveloped. Farming is the main occupation. His father is working in an office and his mother is working as a peon in the little village school. Income of the family is very little and they can't afford to pay for the education of their children. Jambey has a younger brother in Kindergarten. Jambey has been sent to the TCV in Lower Chauntra so he can learn to speak and understand Tibetan and receive an education. \$480 per year.



A Heart as Big as the World She Has Travelled

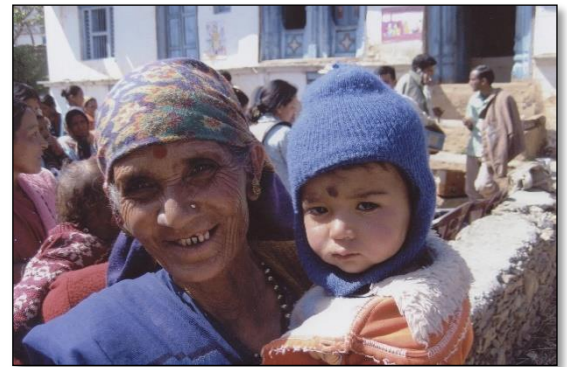
Margaret Ayer is 94 years young – to hear her talk on the phone you would think she was decades younger. Her interest in the world and in particular her compassion for the desperately poor she has encountered during her travels are undiminished, and have just resulted in **an incredibly generous gift of \$50,000 to TRAS from the Margaret and Ed Ayer Family Charitable Fund.**

Margaret and her late husband Ed grew up in Ontario, and when they were younger they built a small hotel in northern Ontario, near Thunder Bay, on the highway heading west. It was a very successful venture, always packed in the summers (and I would hazard a guess its success was in large part because of the warm welcome the Ayers would extend to all and sundry travelling that route).

So on retirement did they collapse onto lawn chairs in the garden? Oh no! They signed up with Executive Services Overseas to volunteer their knowledge of the small hotel business and shared their expertise in small hotel management with people in 26 countries ranging from Africa to Central America to India, Burma and finally Kazakhstan! Their assignments were usually for one month, though they spent three months in India, working in three locations. The last was in Manali, in the Himalayan foothills (where TRAS supported the local NGO SHARE for many years, improving the health of the villagers in the scattered mountain villages). One day Margaret remembers they took a taxi to the 'border' – it was a 'rough ride' she said with a laugh, never to be forgotten, as they climbed up and up into the mountains. Her heart went out to the desperately poor people they met around Manali and to the many refugees. She befriended an elderly Tibetan monk who had "nothing – literally nothing".

At one point in their lives she and Ed had lived in Lindsay, Ontario, and a Tibetan family there had become her close friends. She knew they were sending any money they could spare to their family in Tibet and she was happy to help them. Then she learned about TRAS and has been a regular donor to TRAS ever since.

Now that she is in the position of being able to help a little, as she put it, she decided to send this donation to TRAS, to use where it is needed most. In the past, she has given to the TRAS project *Voice of Children* and also expressed an interest in helping the elderly women.



***Voice of Children** supports children in 12 villages. The results benefit the whole community.*

We discussed where her donation could help, and she is happy for the money to go to the **Voice of Children**. Its programs cover so much that leads to improved living standards for the whole community. Voice of Children is run by two small local NGOs with a tiny staff and many local volunteers. They work in 12 villages: they encourage families to keep their children in school, they help with tuition classes, computer classes, school supplies, village libraries, a children's newspaper, educational outings and more. They also hold regular well-attended meetings for teenaged girls and for women, and run women's groups, helping them improve their lives. These meetings lead to improved health care, campaigns to overcome violence against women, vocational training, pension schemes, and more. Of course all these programs help the children, but the good results filter through to whole families, to the older generation and eventually to the entire community.

There are so many good results overall when a small dedicated group has the financial support it needs to plan long term initiatives to overcome the barriers. With support from Margaret, TRAS is now in the happy position to guarantee funding for the Voice of Children project for the next two years.

Thank you, Margaret, for following your heart's desire to help hundreds of people in the Himalayas improve their lives!

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

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Please allocate to:

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