



TRAS Extends its Gratitude

Greetings to all our friends and supporters! The TRAS directors hope you are all well and keeping safe in these uncertain times. We are so grateful for your ongoing support in the form of sponsorships for the most needy children and general donations to our projects. We know many in Canada are going through rough times, and it is heartwarming that you reach out to others in need across the world. In particular we give a huge **thank you** to the many of you who instantly contributed to the Voice of Children emergency relief project on May 5. Of the \$5,000 requested, you sent in \$4,532 within two days. Read the report on Pages 4-6.

Update on the TRAS partners in India and Nepal during the COVID-19 pandemic

We have been in touch with all our project, sponsorship and scholarship partners and are relieved to know they are all well. We have offered help if needed. All the schools – Tibetan, Indian and Nepali – are closed and have sent the children home bar a few who live too far away or who have no family. These children are being carefully looked after in the hostels. All the nursing and midwifery students are back home too. India is now the 7th worst-hit nation by COVID-19 globally. The lockdown has been extended to June 30, with a few gradual relaxations from June 8 as long as state governments approve. On May 31, Nepal imposed another strict lockdown to June 14 after a surge in the number of COVID-19 cases.

Here are a few details:

IDEA, training the village midwives in Pokhara, Nepal, arranged for the girls to travel home, each equipped with kits and information to help educate their villages about coping with the pandemic.

The Tibetan nursing students have all left their training hospitals and colleges and have returned to their Tibetan settlements.

Munsel-ling School in Spiti was able to send all the children home to their isolated villages, which so far are untouched by the pandemic. The Spiti community is held up as a good example – a committee was immediately struck, comprised of head monks and senior villagers, borders were closed and separate accommodation was prepared for all truckers bringing in essential goods. Chhoring Dorje, the Director of Munsel-ling School, says the Valley implemented complete lockdown early on, before Mr. Modi even announced it, and the people are strictly adhering to the rules. The new toilet project is on hold for the moment.

The READI Nepal hostel in Simikot, Humla, is empty, as the children have all returned to their villages. The READI project had a very good year to March 31. Five students will take the national Grade 10 exam at the Balmandir School in Simikot as soon as the school reopens and will continue their Grades 11 and 12 studies in their own village schools, carefully supervised by the READI



Update on the TRAS partners in India and Nepal (READI Nepal cont'd)

team. That brings the number of students who have now returned permanently to their own families to 15. The good news is that these families are doing well with the various income generation schemes and are now able to pay for their children's education. The other 15 children will return to the hostel in Simikot as soon as the lockdown is over and the school has reopened. All the children did very well in their exams and continue to shine in extra-curricular activities. Their 'Little Doctor' training in personal hygiene is particularly useful right now and the students are teaching their families good practices to ward off the virus. The Humla Delights café now contributes considerable funds to the project. Just before the pandemic, the café planned to branch out into beauty treatments for the tourists who demand such a service after returning from circumnavigating Mount Kailash. One of the parents is to study in Kathmandu, but of course this is on hold at present. With the lack of tourists and the uncertainty around going into a small space, the Humla Delights café may not do as well this year.

TRAS has approved funding for the current year of \$18,700.

The **Voice of Children** team has completely changed its focus since the pandemic struck – see Pages 4-6. An excellent report covering the first five months of the current educational project (to the end of March) has arrived and can be read on the TRAS website (www.tras.ca). It shows that, as well as current successes in school exams, health education and help for women, this project has led to long-term societal benefits – zero school drop outs in the 12 villages, no child labour, empowerment of women and lessening of child marriages. More needs to be done – and the VOC team has the vision and the will to tackle it.



Little Doctors



How to wash your hands



Women's Group meeting



VOC Education Centre

All the **sponsorship partners** report that everyone is fine so far.

The **Tibetan Homes Foundation** in Mussoorie is our second oldest partner – our relationship with these children's homes goes back to the early 1960s (as does our relationship with the original Tibetan Children's Village, started by the sister of His Holiness the Dalai Lama). After years of supporting child sponsorships, hostel construction and repair, house mother and cook trainings, vocational training programs and help for the elderly Tibetans who gravitated there, TRAS has one child being sponsored there at present.

(continued on Page 3)

Update on the TRAS partners in India and Nepal (Tibetan Homes Foundation cont'd)

We have just received a report on how they are coping with the lockdown. Out of 1,792 children only 57 remain at the Homes, along with 67 elderly Tibetans and 340 staff. They are not idle! To use the time wisely and create a positive impact, the teaching staff is running an *Online Teaching* program which is going well. The administrative and hostel staffs are running *Socially Productive Works* – they have sewn 3000 face masks, they are knitting up a storm making toques and scarves, they are mending and sewing everything from hostel curtains to prayer flags and some of the men are creating wonderful full head masks for the Tibetan dancers. Parenting talks are being delivered via cell phones and are very popular and successful. The buildings are being constantly sanitized and the car used to buy groceries is regularly washed. The health team checks all the residents. **The worrying note is financial – bank interest rates have been greatly reduced, a devastating move which adversely affects the Homes' income, and donations are drying up. These two problems may plague all the settlements and schools in the longer term.**

Sponsorship Report

By Joanne MacLeod

Tenzin
Gelek

Tenzin lives at the Chauntra Tibetan Settlement. Tenzin is a 10-year boy and lives with five other family members. His parents sell sweaters and shawls in the winter months. Like most transient businesses, they can only sell their goods four months of the year. The earnings from this small petty business are not enough to support the family and so your support is requested so that Tenzin can receive an education.



Rigzin is a seven-year old boy at the Chauntra Tibetan Settlement and is in need of a sponsor. He lives with a family of seven. His mother sells sweaters in the winter and doesn't make enough money to support the family. There are also two uncles living in the home, one is suffering from mental illness and the other is unemployed but helps looking after the elders and children when mother is away at work. This family has so many problems and especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rigzin
Dorjee

Yearly sponsorship is \$480 or \$40 a month. TRAS members currently sponsor children at:

- The Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre
- Tibetan Children's Village Schools in Suja and Lower Chauntra
- The Tibetan Women's Centre in Rajpur
- Rinchen Zangpo Society (Munsel-ling School) in Spiti
- The Tibetan Homes Foundation in Mussoorie

There are 34 other children who are still waiting for a sponsor. Contact us if you are interested in setting up a sponsorship.

604-224-5133 | info@tras.ca

Keeping in Touch

TRAS does like keeping in touch with you – but how? Would you be happy with the e-mailed version of the newsletter (to save postage and paper, and you'd see it in colour!) or do you prefer the paper edition? Please let us know on the enclosed form. Thank you.

Voice of Children COVID-19 Emergency Relief Project

One of the many good features of being a grassroots organization is that TRAS works with local groups in their own communities who know just what's needed most in an emergency and can get on with helping. We in Canada and the groups on the ground in India and Nepal can swiftly change direction to help in whatever way works best. You may remember our response in past years to the earthquakes in Nepal, to flooding in Uttarakhand, to collapsed school walls in Sikkim and Kathmandu.

This time was no different. We immediately asked our partners if they needed help. The schoolchildren and older students were all taken care of, and our usual educational projects came to a halt. But one huge problem immediately became apparent in India (and in Nepal as well, though we were not asked to help). With the sudden, complete lockdown, work immediately stopped. Day workers and casual labourers had nothing to fall back on, and the villagers who had left home to work in large cities no longer had wages to send home. There was a risk of real hardship particularly for these families and also for widows, the physically challenged, the ill and infirm and the elderly, in the Voice of Children project's mountain villages around Nainital and Almora,. The two NGOs we work with, AMAN in Almora and Vimarsh in Nainital, checked 27 villages, the 12 in the TRAS Voice of Children educational project and a further 15 in the surrounding hills, and prepared a list of 200 of the most needy families. Then they asked for permission to leave the lockdown to purchase and deliver a month's worth of dry rations per family (wheat flour, rice flour, two types of pulses, cooking oil, sugar, salt, spices etc) along with soap, disinfectants and sanitary supplies for 400 women and teenaged girls. The local administrations were so grateful for this offer of help. One provided 2 vehicles to transport the parcels as far as possible. The VOC staff negotiated with local shopkeepers and convinced them to give special discounts for this relief work. Volunteers were quickly trained in safety precautions (following the WHO and government advice) and off they went, often walking miles, to reach the mountain villages. It was all incredibly well organised, and within a week, the plan had been thought up, executed and supplies were delivered. Meanwhile back in Canada, having agreed right away to find the necessary \$5,000, we asked you on Giving Tuesday Now to donate – and you came through with the funds!



(continued on Pages 5 and 6)

A couple of stories from the VOC staff:

“Lockdown means no work opportunity which means no food for the daily earners, but timely support with relief material has ameliorated the pathetic conditions of this deprived family. Lachima Devi a homeless widow of three children hails from the marginalized sections of Rarkhila Village in Almora District. Her husband died of cardiac arrest in January 2020. Poverty had forced her two sons to migrate to work to make ends meet for the family. The unfortunate and sad demise of their father made them come back to perform the last rites for their father. This sudden loss of the head of the family has bereaved the family emotionally and financially. Both young men supported their mother for one month. Due to the lockdown their financial situation has gone from bad to worse. They have no work to support their family and all these unforeseen circumstances brought them to the verge of starvation. The timely support provided by TRAS to this destitute family has saved them from hunger”.



“Kiran Devi is a resident of Silani Village in Almora District. She lives with her husband and two kids. Her village is situated at the top of a hill. She has to climb 5 kilometres from the paved road to reach the village. Both husband and wife suffer from tuberculosis. Due to poverty they did not go in a timely fashion to the doctor, and by the time they did visit him it was quite late. The doctor ordered medication, rest and a balanced diet. With the medication they recovered, but their poor financial condition forced them to work (instead of resting) to support their family. The TB has impacted their physical health adversely and they started small and light daily work to support the family. The COVID-19 pandemic has completely marginalised and deprived this family from all sources of wage and income. These unforeseen circumstances made them vulnerable and destitute.

When she received the relief package the tears were rolling down on her cheeks and she sobbingly said “This relief material is a lifesaving relief for my family. For nights I couldn’t sleep with the thought of how I would feed my family”.

Voice of Children COVID-19 Emergency Relief Project (cont'd)

Then came a second massive problem, described by historian and economist Ramchandra Guha: "The unfolding miseries of millions of poor people in the world's largest coronavirus lockdown is the greatest manmade tragedy in India since Partition". The sudden lockdown had left millions of workers stranded in the large cities, not allowed to return home yet without resources. (see www.economist.com/asia/2020/05/23/indias-economy-has-suffered-even-more-than-most). In mid-May the lockdown was eased to allow them to return to their far-flung villages. The Government laid on literally thousands of special trains to take them home, and ordered them into quarantine on arrival. It guaranteed social security – but only if one had the necessary registration papers*. Around 1,200 migrant workers arrived in Nainital by special train and then proceeded to walk home. They were starving, depressed and desperate. No financial help was given to them for the quarantine period.

"The hard reality of the villages", says Raghu of AMAN, "is that houses in the mountains generally have two rooms. They are designed with a single entrance and are used for kitchen, living room and bedroom. They have one toilet per family and a community tap for water. Downstairs they keep livestock. It is not feasible or possible to quarantine someone. The migrant labourers are completely exhausted financially and physically and the mountain villagers are already under financial duress and emotional stress because of losing their local jobs. In some places the community has come forward with bedding to accommodate the returnees for the quarantine period in community centres or schools. But they do not have the resources such as sanitation facility and food supply. Though they must be relieved to have their family members home, it is a double whammy for the communities and for the migrant workers. Again the most destitute are on the verge of starvation".

VOC staff determined that more relief supplies were urgently needed for the villagers and requested additional funds from TRAS. Given the urgency of the request, TRAS responded immediately, sending a further \$5,000. The supplies have already been purchased and delivered. If you can, please help with a donation towards this. Thank you.

*(Note: one of the extra tasks the Voice of Children team has taken upon itself is to ensure every baby is registered with the government administration and it continually pushes all village residents to register themselves. This does lead to some government help and even a pension for some workers.)

In the nick of time!

We had no idea when we gathered on February 26 for the TRAS spring dinner and lively evening at the Gurkha Kitchen restaurant in Vancouver that that would be the last time we would meet face to face! It was a great evening, and we do encourage you to join us once going to a restaurant becomes a normal, carefree thing to do! It was great to meet up with friends old and new. Donations were collected for the **Tibetan nurses in training project** – eight young women are studying at well-regarded Indian teaching hospitals and colleges.



TRAS is in close communication with all our partners in India and Nepal to ascertain if funds will be needed in the short term and during the expected long recovery. We fear that the recovery period for the families our partners support may be difficult and painful. They may need extra help in the months ahead. We will keep you informed.

TRAS in the time of COVID



The office has remained open throughout, with reduced hours. Joanne MacLeod, our part time office manager, was the sole person in the large Vantage Point complex. She has used the time to keep up with our projects and sponsorships, to go through masses of files and generally tidy up everything from mailing lists, to files to be archived, to handicrafts. The Vantage Point offices reopened this week, with staggered hours and many precautions.

Joanne's hours may change, so leave a message and she'll return your call when she can. Meanwhile the TRAS directors continue to meet via Zoom and e-mail, so that we can continue to support our partners.

Joanne very kindly volunteered to stuff and mail this newsletter from home, as we couldn't ask our usual team of volunteers to come to the office. THANKS, JOANNE!

TRAS 58th Annual General Meeting

The 58th Annual General Meeting of the Trans-Himalayan Aid Society will be held on

Wednesday, September 9, 2020 at 7.30pm

The AGM will *not* be held in person, but via Zoom.
We welcome you to join this Zoom meeting.

Please RSVP to info@tras.ca, with your e-mail address, and details will be e-mailed to you nearer the time.



TRAS

Supporting health and education for
children and youth in the Himalayas



1183 Melville Street
Vancouver BC | V6E 2X5

T: 604 224 5133
E: info@tras.ca
W: tras.ca

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The full reports from Voice of Children (education project and the emergency response project) and from the Tibetan Homes Foundation are on the TRAS website (www.tras.ca).

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

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

- ☐ Please send event information and newsletters by e-mail
☐ Please send me information on Planned Giving
☐ Please send me details by e-mail of the Zoom meeting for the TRAS AGM on September 9, 2020

☐ attached is my cheque # _____ for \$ _____ (all cheques payable to TRAS)
☐ charge my VISA/MasterCard No. _____ Expiry Date ____ / ____

Please allocate to:

- ☐ Sponsorship \$ _____ for (name of child/youth) _____
☐ Project Donation \$ _____ for (name of project) _____
☐ TRAS Scholarship Fund \$ _____
☐ General Donation \$ _____ for wherever it is needed most

Mail to: TRAS, 1183 Melville Street, Vancouver BC V6E 2X5
☎ 604 224 5133 Fax: 604 738 4080 E-mail: info@tras.ca Web: tras.ca

Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!

