



COVID-19 hits India and Nepal even harder

The second wave and its variants hit India swiftly over the past two months and TRAS is once again sending emergency funds to India.

In the first wave, the instant lockdown in India had a devastating effect on the millions of migrant workers. We heard how hard hit the villages in our Voice of Children project region were – day labourers losing their jobs, families near starvation and the migrant workers struggling home, exhausted, hungry and needing to be kept quarantined. You rose to the plea for help and TRAS was able to send \$20,000 overall to support the Voice of Children staff in their incredible efforts to get food and sanitation supplies to hundreds of villagers.

This time the Tibetan communities have suffered too. They had done well with their preparations to ward off the first wave, but this time the virus was everywhere, and the small Tibetan clinics and health posts were overwhelmed. The Tibetan Department of Health in Dharamsala has designated two hospitals in the hardest hit areas (Delhi and Dehra Dun) to be COVID hospitals for the most severe cases, and 8 of the clinics are set up to handle the moderate cases. Again we are answering their plea, this time for oxygen concentrators and for medical supplies for the clinics. TRAS sent \$10,000 right away and again you have responded to the call for funds. Nearly \$4,000 has come in so far from our donors – thank you! Go to the How to Donate page on the website if you would like to add your help.



If more help is needed in India, we will respond if we can.



In Nepal, the situation is just as devastating, with new cases rising from 200 a day in April to 9,000 a day by late May. In December TRAS donors helped the Tibetan community prepare for the worst by funding their request for \$14,000 for PPE. The first payment of \$7,000 TRAS sent for PPE has ensured that the Tibetan clinics were well stocked with PPE before this shocking second wave. As prices for locally stocked PPE had decreased, TRAS approved the request from the Snow Lion Foundation (which administers the Tibetan clinics, schools and old people's home in Nepal) to use the remaining funds on disinfectants for their institutions. The situation must be so much worse now. We are waiting to hear from their health team again to see how best to help them with the second promised \$7,000.

Rocket Stoves for Munsel-ling School

By Kate McInnes

Some good news for a change! And no, these stoves are not blasting off into space- they are firmly anchored to the floors at the Munsel-ling School in Spiti. Kate, who recently joined the Board of Directors, has done the research for TRAS in response to a plea from Lama Tashi, the founder of Munsel-ling School, and here is her report:

For more than 20 years, TRAS has supported the 500 students and staff at Munsel-ling School, located in the Spiti Valley region of northern India. Residents of Spiti Valley experience harsh winter conditions — with temperatures often plunging to -30°C and below — which results in annual road closures between neighbouring towns for up to eight months of the year. The remoteness of Munsel-ling School means that self-sufficiency is of the utmost importance.

This year, TRAS is fundraising to support the purchase and installation of 68 rocket stoves, which will replace all of the iron stoves at Munsel-ling School. These rocket stoves were designed specially for use in the Himalayas and are made locally in Himachel Pradesh and installed by a merchant from the nearby town of Kaza. The iron stoves will be sold for recycling.

The need to fund these rocket stoves is twofold. First, the rocket stoves will decrease the amount of smoke within the school, which will have a positive influence on the respiratory health of students, staff, and volunteers. Second, the rocket stoves are more efficient than their iron counterparts, which means that fewer resources, like wood and cow dung, need to be expended in order to heat the classrooms, dormitories, and staff quarters at Munsel-ling School.

Health

Wood smoke pollution has been shown to increase the risk of respiratory disorders and genetic defects in children. In mountain deserts like the Spiti Valley, communities often burn cow dung because wood is a scarce resource. This also affects lung health, as up to 25% of the arsenic found within cow dung can be absorbed into human respiratory tracks when it is burned. All of this may increase susceptibility to serious respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19.

The rocket stoves that TRAS is fundraising for are 90% smokeless. As a rocket stove uses 50% less materials to produce the same amount of heat, less cow dung needs to be used to fuel Munsel-ling School during the frigid winter months. This means healthier lungs and happier kids.

Sustainability

Spiti Valley is located in a mountain desert with little forest cover and sparse vegetation. As a result, the region is not conducive to lumber production or cattle raising, meaning that firewood is expensive and cow dung is hard to come by.

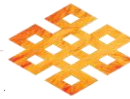
The rocket stoves consume 50% less wood as well as less cow dung than the iron stoves, while producing the same amount of heat. Because the rocket stoves contain a secondary combustion chamber, less energy and heat are lost, making it a far more efficient alternative. The replacement of these stoves therefore promotes both environmental sustainability and economic efficiency.



Rocket Stoves (cont'd)

TRAS decided this was a sensible and necessary upgrade at the school. As the local supplier of stoves was able to procure them immediately, TRAS sent the first payment. Those stoves have already been installed, and we have sent the rest of the funds so that the school is fully equipped. This program will have long term benefits, improving the health of both the humans and the surrounding environment. Please consider helping to pay for it.

Total donations needed: \$20,322 for 68 stoves installed and ready for use



Zoom Meeting with Voice of Children

TRAS held its first ever Zoom meeting with a partner on March 3. Over 30 TRAS members attended to learn about Voice of Children's impactful work, and it was such a pleasure to see our partners in person! We met Raghu Tewari and Nilima Bhatt from the NGO *Aman* in Almora and Kanchan Bhandari from *Vimarsh* in Nainital. Raghu, Kanchan and Nilima all hold Masters degrees in Social Work and have devoted years to improving the lives of children in the region. Also joining in was one of their volunteers, Kalyan Mankoti, who translates for them. Kalyan is an award winning teacher. Nilima presented an excellent slide show which she had prepared of their work.



Nilima's opening slide



Raghu and Kanchan (top right) and Nilima (bottom left) chat with Jen Hales and Sanjeev Singh in Vancouver

We were also really pleased to meet Bhuwan, who went through the VOC programs as a school child, then volunteered his help and now runs his own computer business! And we were delighted to meet Harshita, one of the current TRAS scholarship recipients, who spoke so well about what the program means to her. The VOC staff also talked about the impact the TRAS Scholarship Fund has had on their community. After the main presentation, the VOC staff answered questions, making the situation in the villages where they work come alive for us. We are so grateful to the VOC team for the enormous amount of work it meant at their end pulling this presentation together, and we hope they found it as useful as we did.

The full video can be seen on the TRAS website www.tras.ca

We hope to 'meet' other partners via Zoom once the pandemic is over.

We recently received the disturbing news that some members of each of the two agencies, including Raghu and Kanchan themselves, had come down with the virus. Thankfully they have recovered and we send them our good wishes.

In Memoriam | Remembering Ray Yee

The Tibetan community in Vancouver and its many friends were shocked and saddened in March by the sudden, untimely death of Ray Yee. Ray and his wife Janet had been moved by the plight of the Tibetans they met in Tibet in the 1990s and on their return to Vancouver Ray joined the Canada Tibet Committee (CTC). He worked tirelessly in support of the Tibetan cause, and locally he helped to spearhead the resettlement of Tibetans from Arunachal Pradesh (AP) to BC in the past few years. As well as doing a huge amount of the administrative work and the grunt work of finding homes, furniture, classes and jobs for them, he and Janet were part of a Group of Five sponsoring one of the Tibetans from AP.



Here we are at Vancouver Airport in December, 2012, greeting her with a proud Ray, like a father figure to the Tibetan community, on the right of the photo. In a moving tribute to Ray, here are some of the words spoken by his Tibetan and Canadian friends at CTC:

There was a sense of compassion, humanity and altruism in all his expressions and work. He will be a constant inspiration to me. His memory will encourage me to always put humanity and compassion first.

I was grateful to have worked alongside him. He was an example of what it is to serve from a place of compassion, justice and peace.

As a Tibetan, it was extremely inspiring to me to see someone like Ray who was committed and who dedicated a tremendous amount of time and effort to fight for the Tibetan cause. We will not forget his tireless work for Tibet.

He left a very meaningful impact on me. We will remember him as our friend. He will be greatly missed.

Janet has kindly suggested that the donations which poured in in honour of Ray should be handled by TRAS to help the Tibetan children in Arunachal Pradesh who did not have the chance to come to Canada. TRAS is honoured to do this and we are working with the Sambhota Tibetan Schools in AP to choose worthwhile projects. Of course, everything is at a standstill right now, but one thing is for sure: as well as larger projects, as many schools as possible will be provided with much needed soccer balls in memory of Ray, an ardent soccer fan.



Sponsorship Report

With COVID 19 and its variants raging in India leading to lockdowns and school closures, we haven't received any new requests for sponsors. This is not to say they are not needed! If you are interested in sponsoring a child in north India, please look at the TRAS website under Sponsorship (www.tras.ca) or phone Joanne MacLeod at the TRAS office (604-224-5133).

In case you are wondering how the children are, we have been in contact with all our partners and although in some of the Tibetan settlements the virus has hit the adults, the children all were fine when we last heard. May it remain that way! You can read some of their replies on the TRAS website (www.tras.ca)

Spiti is luckily so remote and the village authorities so diligent, the virus has not hit Munsel-ling School or the tiny villages it serves. The school is ready for the children as soon as they are allowed back.

READI Nepal: Exam success and all's well

We have recently received the annual report from Raj Hamal, Chairman of READI Nepal. What a year they have had, facing the pandemic, school closures, power cuts 23 hours a day, limited internet connection, terrible forest fires – which were finally put out at the end of April by very unusual late snowfalls.

Although the school was closed off and on, READI continued to monitor the children and provide food to needy families when the children were at home for a few months. They also provided COVID kits – masks, gloves, sanitizer, etc. and taught the families good health practices. Raj says it feels good that they have been able to keep them all safe and sound so far, but they continue to take extra precautionary measures to keep everyone from the READI family safe from infection.



Last year saw 5 students complete their final Grade 10 exams (SEE) and this April a further 6 graduated. No national examinations were able to be held this year, so the teachers marked the students on their overall accomplishments. The READI students, as usual, did very well indeed and all are keen to further their education. One of the initial goals of READI was to produce a more educated group of young people in the district of Humla, to become the future leaders, and except for being held back by the pandemic, this goal is on target. Two of last years' graduates are studying at technical colleges (engineering and agriculture) and the other 3 are continuing at secondary schools to pass Grades 11 and 12. The 6 graduates this year are also now studying at a Grades 11 and 12 school near their villages.

READI is building a new school a few miles outside Simikot, the tiny capital, funded by the Japanese Embassy in Kathmandu. COVID has slowed things down and it is not ready, so the current hostel has been rented for one more year for the remaining 9 students. The staff of three has been reduced to two (warden and cook/cleaner/guard). Their salaries, the rent and utility costs have not increased, although food and clothing costs have. In spite of the café being closed all year, READI has honoured the 10% reduction in the amount of support from TRAS. We have agreed to send \$15,300 for the year to

support the nine students resident in the hostel, their schooling and day to day needs, as well as support for the 21 who have moved on and the income generation trainings for their parents. One piece of satisfactory news is that all the wooden structures in the new school are being built by the parents trained as carpenters under the READI income generation plan.



TRAS Scholarship Fund Report

By Lynn Beck

In spite of all the problems this year, the Voice of Children team has been able to select three good candidates for the TRAS Scholarship Fund (TSF). The three students all received excellent marks in school and have been accepted to useful courses.

Siya Bisht

Siya is the eldest of three girls in a family dependent on the daily labour their father is able to find. She passed her Grade 12 exams with very good grades and has been accepted to a well-recognized college of nursing. She is so grateful to be able to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse.



Chitra

Chitra's family is on the verge of poverty. The seven family members depend on the father's sporadic daily wages and Chitra's mother has many medical issues. Chitra is very bright and the village head recommended her to Voice of Children. She was selected for an interview by the VOC committee and is now studying office management at the government Polytechnic College in Nainital. She is so thankful that she is able to complete her education.



Harshita Joshi

Harshita Joshi has had a traumatic childhood: her father died when she was young and her brilliant brother committed suicide in 2019 due to the economic crisis. Harshita is equally brilliant and completed Grade 12 in the science stream at a Jawahar Novodaya Vidyalaya residential school (one of a series set up for the talented rural poor populations who cannot afford the fees of other schools). She applied for a VOC scholarship and is honoured to have been awarded one. She is pursuing a BSc in Physics, Chemistry and Math at university in Almora. She is a great reader and her interests are wide ranging, including social issues.



All three are being funded by donors to the TSF who were moved by the girls' stories. It is uplifting to see people being so generous during this dreadful pandemic. There are now 20 students in the TSF program and we wish them all well.

Social Media

If, by chance, you read every line of our newsletter, you might have noticed in the December 2020 issue on the back page that the position of Social Media person was vacant. Happily it is now filled, by our new director, Kate McInnes. Kate has been posting information about TRAS on a regular basis and we are receiving more 'likes' than ever before! If you are on Facebook, do look at the posts and help spread the word about TRAS and our work!

Kate is very busy studying for her bar exams at present, so we will catch up with her in the fall to learn more about her and what inspired her to help TRAS.



What is the Board up to?

A member's main point of contact with TRAS is usually Joanne MacLeod, our warm hearted, helpful office manager, but behind the scenes is the volunteer board of directors, all up to something! We hold monthly meetings (currently via Zoom) and all have an equal voice in our collaborative decision making as well as individual responsibilities.

Russil, as President, oversees everything, and looks after sponsorships with Joanne's help. **Kevin** – Treasurer – makes sure your donations are invested safely and are available when needed. **Lynn and Frank** administer the TRAS Scholarship Fund. **Abby** would be organizing events – when we are allowed to hold any. **Megha** is our contact person for the projects in Nepal (READI and IDEA), as **Sanjeev** is for the Voice of Children projects and **Videsh** is for the Munseling-ling School. **Raheesa and Kate** are welcome newcomers to the board: Raheesa is in charge of the Snow Lion Foundation PPE project and Kate is our social media expert and writes for the website and newsletter. The two of them, with **Jen**, are thinking of ways to acknowledge our 60th anniversary next year and Jen set up and ran the Zoom meeting with VOC and hopes to turn this into a series with many of our partners. **Daphne** is the projects' director, looks after the Tibetan projects and is the newsletter editor.

Any thoughts, concerns or suggestions? Write to us!

TRAS 59th Annual General Meeting



The 59th annual general meeting of the Trans-Himalayan Aid Society will be held in Vancouver on Wednesday, September 8, at 7pm. Depending on the pandemic health regulations at the time, this meeting will either be held in person at the office at 1183 Melville St., Vancouver, or via Zoom. It is possible that even if it is held in person, a Zoom link could be set up for out of town members who might be interested.

More details will be sent by email nearer the time, so do make sure our office has your current email address. Phone Joanne at 604-224-5133 or email her at info@tras.ca.

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 me information on Planned Giving

☐ attached is my cheque # _____ for \$ _____ (all cheques payable to TRAS)

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Please allocate to:

- ☐ Sponsorship \$ _____ for (name of child/youth) _____
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Mail to: TRAS, 1183 Melville Street, Vancouver BC V6E 2X5
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Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!

