



WINTER NEWSLETTER

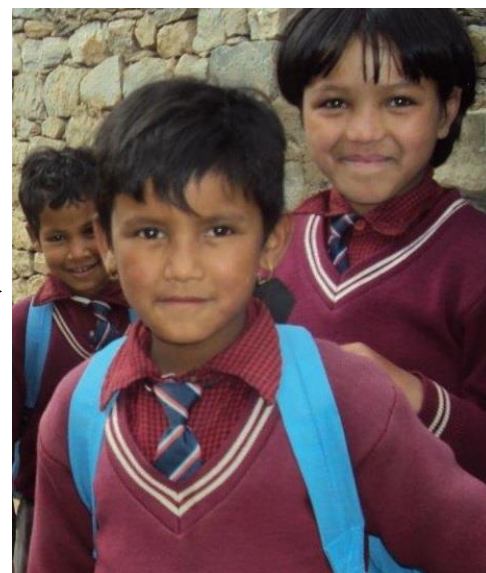
DECEMBER 2014

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Donors, Sponsors and Volunteers,

For the past few years, I have been trying to find a simple, concise way to explain what TRAS does so that people can quickly understand who we are. It is difficult to communicate in just a few sentences all that we do as there are so many aspects to our work. We fund development projects with trusted overseas partners. These projects are aimed at improving the lives of children through health and education initiatives. We also sponsor children who would not otherwise be given any access to education.

But the real story is perhaps better explained by pictures.



Who is TRAS? You and I are TRAS - donors, sponsors and volunteers who believe in making the world a better place to live.

What does TRAS do? We improve the lives of others – giving them hope and opportunity for a brighter future.

How does TRAS do it? By funding projects, sponsoring children, sharing 52 years of development experience with our overseas partners, and bringing awareness to Canadians on the plight of living in the harsh Himalayan environment.

Where do our funds go? To the remote regions of the Himalayas in India and Nepal.

The Directors have recently approved several new and exciting projects as well as the continuation of important ongoing initiatives. You can read about these in this newsletter. We have numerous children needing sponsorship so that they, too, might be given a chance for a better life. Funding is the key to supporting all of this wonderful work. Please help us break the cycle of poverty by making a donation to a project or the Scholarship Fund, or sponsoring a child.

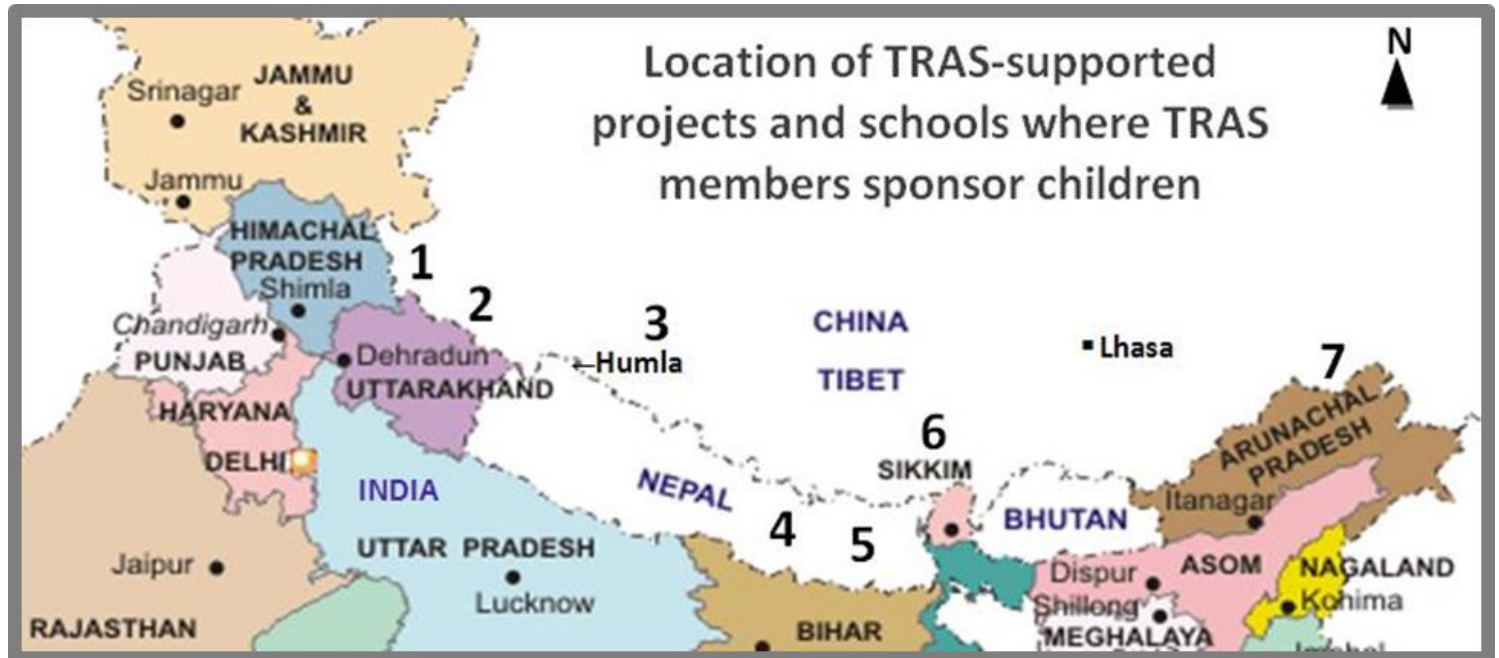
On behalf of the TRAS board, and our overseas partners in India and Nepal, I wish you a safe, enjoyable holiday season and a happy and healthy 2015.

Cheryl Sullivan, TRAS President

WHAT IS TRAS UP TO?

FOUR new, exciting projects, that's what!

Veggies to fight anaemia, desks to keep kids off the cold ground, women becoming insurance agents and mushroom farmers – and a hot cup of coffee in the high Himalaya!



SANGAM COMMUNITY LIBRARY 'WOMEN COMPUTER LITERACY' (Map Above, Location 5)

Nepali women living in the village of Sangam in Udayapur District, eastern Nepal, are poor and their children go hungry. They have never had a chance to find work.

But thanks to a pilot computer course at their local library, 15 women are now computer literate and 3 already have good jobs. Who knew one could train to be an insurance agent, a mushroom farmer or a tailor via the internet!

TRAS is collaborating with

the Nepal Library Foundation in Kathmandu to purchase 11 computers and enlarge this program to train many more women.

When you see this kind of success, how can you NOT help them! \$5,500 will buy 11 computers and necessary components – the Library will provide teachers and maintenance.

Cost of one computer? \$500

Cost of independence for one family? Priceless!



MUNSEL-LING SCHOOL CLASSROOM FURNITURE (Map, Page 2, Location 1)



In the bitter cold of a Spiti winter, in the foothills of the Himalaya, the children are sitting in school all day on the floor. It is difficult to focus on learning when it is cold and uncomfortable.

With your help, the children can have desks. Just \$32 will purchase a solidly built desk with built in bench. Learning will improve!

18 years ago there was no school at all for these children, and life was a perpetual round of poverty.

Enter the local Buddhist Society, whose members believed that the children from the poverty stricken villages deserved an education and that, given a chance, they would shine. TRAS has been supporting the school since its humble beginnings.

The school complex is now the largest 'village' in the Valley and the first graduates are showing astonishing success in several fields. They are returning to serve their community as teachers, nurses, doctor, vet and engineers.

Munsel-ling School is now so successful that more villagers are begging to have their children educated there. The school has built 8 new classrooms this year. The children are currently sitting on the floors – and in the bitter cold of Spiti that is no fun.

The school needs 150 double desks with benches, notice boards and simple supplies. None of the frills of a Canadian classroom – just the basics.

\$32 will furnish one child with a decent desk at which to sit and work.

There is no timber in Spiti Valley – the desks will be built many miles away and transported to Spiti by truck. The passes will be closed now for the long winter months, but the desks can be built over the winter for transport to Spiti as soon as the passes open in the late spring.

Project cost: \$9,625: \$32 per child or \$64 per double desk.

Will YOU pay for one desk – or two - or three?



Every child deserves a desk

IN MEMORIAM

Our hearts go out to the families of the victims of Nepal's worst mountain disaster on October 14. Many Sherpa and Nepali guides were lost, as well as foreign trekkers. We were saddened indeed to learn TRAS member Jan Rooks was among those swept away. There is a moving account of Jan's life in 'The End' page of Maclean's magazine (November 10), telling that she was a gifted pianist and a compassionate nurse. What the account does not mention is that Jan's compassion extended to helping poor children in the Himalaya. She and her husband Grant had sponsored a child at the Buddha Academy in Kathmandu for years, and were planning to visit the school after their hike, along with their friends and fellow TRAS members and sponsors, Stella and Paul. Jan and Grant had also shared their musical talents with TRAS in a wonderful performance in 2007 to raise funds for the Tibetan nurses' training project. Thank you, Jan, for all that you did to make life more bearable for others, through your nursing and through your volunteer work for TRAS. We extend our deepest sympathy to Grant and to Jan's family and friends.

We were also saddened to hear of the passing of long time member Judy Brown. Judy was a student of George Woodcock at UBC and was involved in TRAS from its 1962 beginning. In fact it was her plea over the garden gate for help pricing items for a garage sale that got your editor working for TRAS from 1963. Judy remained a staunch supporter of the Woodcocks' charitable work, more recently helping their Canada India Village Aid charity. She was a good friend and is sorely missed.

MUNSEL-LING SCHOOL AGRICULTURAL COMPOUND (Map, Page 2, Location 1)

Can a child learn well when she has anaemia, diarrhoea and lice?

She needs a better diet, including lots of fresh green veggies – but how to get them in the desert-like conditions of the remote Spiti Valley? And if her school does manage to plant them, how will they nurture and protect the vegetables?

Munsel-ling School has the answer – now TRAS wants to implement it. With YOUR help, these precious vegetables can be grown to provide much needed nutrients for the children.

In this harsh, cold environment, greenhouses are essential for growing the green vegetables needed to help combat anaemia. The 50ft long greenhouses are working well – EXCEPT that they are unprotected. Cows and dogs are causing havoc, the heavy polythene roofs are being torn and a good watering system is non-existent.

Now that the first greenhouses have proven their worth, the school wants to create a secure compound. Needs are:

- a strong 4 foot high wall to keep out marauding animals (and the kids who love to slide down the roofs!)
- properly engineered canals to provide water
- a large cement water storage tank
- a smaller tank in each greenhouse to be filled with snow – it will melt in the comparative warmth of the greenhouse for water during the freezing winter.
- a shed for equipment and compost storage
- a small cottage for the permanent gardener.
- good soil for the summer crops to be grown between the greenhouses.

Once all this has been accomplished more greenhouses can be built to feed the 500 children at the school. But the compound must be secured first. The snow will start soon – there may just be time to start clearing the land and collecting stones to ready the site for the wall construction next spring.

Project cost: \$15,697

With YOUR support, this will happen! The wall will cost \$15 a foot –can you buy a foot – or two – or three?

READI Nepal's 'HUMLA DELIGHTS CAFÉ' (Map, Page 2, Location 3)

At the end of a risky flight or a 10-day hike in, what better than a cup of real coffee in a clean cup!

TRAS is 'breaking new ground' with this exciting project. READI Nepal is a small local non-governmental organization (NGO) in Humla, the far northwest corner of Nepal's mountains. **It is committed to improving the lot of the village children through education.**

So why are we talking about coffee? The villagers cannot pay for coffee, let alone for their kids to go to school, but READI Nepal has an innovative plan to raise funds to pay for the schooling. It's called the **HUMLA DELIGHTS CAFÉ.**

And why a café? Nowhere in Humla can you get a cup of coffee or clean, safe food. Although the population is tiny and poor, many government officials visit the town, and tourists and trekkers are starting to arrive (1500 last year). Humla is at the western end of the Great Himalaya Trail. **READI Nepal sees an opportunity to get in first with a cheerful, clean café, serving decent coffee, tea and baked goods.**

They have created a hostel for 30 children in the tiny capital of Simikot and the children go to a local private school. Through TRAS-supported projects, the children are excelling at school. They are healthy and well fed.

Now this far sighted NGO is encouraging the parents in small **income generation schemes**, so that eventually they can pay for their children's education. **The latest project is the café.**

A building has been rented near the airport. That means right in the centre of town - the airport is simply a strip of land surrounded by town buildings. *One of our directors visited a few years ago and says she would have raced to such a café after that flight! And if the planes aren't flying, you have to walk in for 10 days – there are no roads in these mountains.*

(continued on Page 5)

So here's the plan:

- READI Nepal will have a 'barista' trained in Kathmandu;
- A simple coffee machine and a bread making machine will be purchased.
- The hostel cook will bake bread from local grains both for the hostel and for the café.

Their business plan is well thought out. They realistically expect the café to be open only 8 months of the year, and will start small.

- TRAS will provide \$5,500 to get this venture on its feet.
- **All profits will go towards the hostel costs, thus reducing the amount of TRAS support needed.**

Project cost: \$5,500 Can YOU help? \$574 will buy the coffee machine. \$30 buys a table, \$12 buys a chair.



The airstrip

CURRENT TRAS PROJECTS WHICH YOUR DONATIONS WILL SUPPORT

The numbers refer to the Map

1. HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

- **Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamsala:** Nurses' training for 8 Tibetan girls in Indian teaching hospitals, **\$5,566 (cost/student \$696)**

2. UTTARAKHAND, INDIA

- **Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre, Dehra Dun:** Crèche maintenance and after-school care for weavers' children: **\$1,650**
- **Voice of Children, Almora/Nainital Districts:** Multi-faceted education programs for Indian children in 12 villages **\$25,270.**
- **VOC library maintenance:** 20 remote village libraries. **\$5,280 (\$264/library)**

3. HUMLA DISTRICT, NEPAL

- **READI Nepal, Humla District:** Education and hostel for poor village children from all castes. **\$23,436 (\$781/child)**

4. KATHMANDU, NEPAL

- **Buddha Academy Boarding School:** Vocational training, (carpentry, tailoring and electrical) **\$14,877.** Infirmary maintenance \$3,600p.a.(fully funded)

6. SIKKIM, INDIA

- **Phadamchen Village in Sikkim:** Lunch program for 75 children. **\$4,433. (\$59/child per year)**

7. ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

- **Tuting and other villages:** Tibetan literacy training for 192 illiterate Tibetans **\$1,415 (\$7.37/person to learn to read)**

SPOTLIGHT ON HUMLA

The home of READI Nepal by Megha Shakya, TRAS Board Member

Nepal is unique because of its geography, a compelling culture and being the birthplace of Buddha. **Humla is situated in far north western Nepal, on the roof of the world near the southern Tibetan border**, and remains a forgotten place. The entire country has remained underdeveloped due to centuries of misrule, and the imposition of caste system. In terms of socio-economic indicators, Humla is at the bottom.

The nearest road is a ten days' walk away. The only other access is via a small airplane that lands on the grass runway on the mountain plateau. Because of the mountainous topography, the percentage of land under cultivation is only 1%. The child mortality rate is up to 30%, the percentage of children suffering from malnutrition 40%, and you can imagine what daily life is like there. Humla has remained, to date, a notoriously impoverished district even by the average Nepali standard.



Dor Bahadur Bista, Nepal's ace anthropologist, wrote a book *Fatalism and Development* in 1991 pointing at the caste system as the root cause of the country's underdevelopment. The lower caste people are still subject to exploitation and subjugation.

A New Beginning

In 2010 TRAS was approached by a local NGO from Humla, **READI Nepal**. They described in their proposal, in simple terms, what they wanted to achieve and how. Impressed by their ideas, TRAS supported this project. Four years on, this project has been schooling 30 children, both girls and boys, in a private school, from both high caste and low caste impoverished communities. They have been housed in a hostel and eat in a community setting, sharing the same table.

The project sent two teachers to Kathmandu where they received one of the most advanced child-centered teacher training, in the tradition of the Bank Street College of Education, New York. The two teachers brought this new method of teaching to this remote region. In three years, the project has produced a remarkable record—enabling children to achieve excellent academic results. A local youth was trained as the hostel cook, using local foods as much as possible, instead of the costly imported government rice.



The local government was pleasantly surprised to notice not only this outcome, but also some kind of social transformation in Humla. **The caste barrier has a small crack in it!** Encouraged by this positive development, more communities are now interested to start such projects.

This project has also created a sense of responsibility among the parents. After seeing the positive changes in the children, the parents felt that they should help. Even though they were absolutely poor, they took the initiative and contributed in kind and labor for the sustenance of the hostel. They learned new skills, improved their income generating activities, and earn a

little more so that they can support themselves and their children. Some are growing apple trees (they grow well here, and parents are learning to dry the apples for shipment elsewhere). Two are making furniture. Two are running a wayside tea stall. **And now comes a café!** This enthusiasm has translated into more open social interactions in the communities. They are now talking about the value of good education and treating people even from lower castes as equal. The parents are amazed – and happy – to see the children all getting along well together in the hostel. Could this be the beginning of a beautiful transformation of a society? This is a small example that has given big hope of a better future for the people in this remote region. The project is now considered good to go for replication elsewhere in the country.

Operational challenges for TRAS

Due to physical isolation, lack of local food production and transport, everything costs more there as the goods are either carried by porters or flown in by air. Fortunately, we have access to our project partner via email and telephone. However, electricity availability is poor. A Nepal-made, very affordable inverter, run from a car battery, has now been installed in READI's Humla office to provide a steady supply of electricity for communication purposes. Working in such a remote area has its own challenges. But there is always a solution.

As donors, you are the energy behind such small wonders happening in Humla.

Referring to the map on page 2, you can see where the children live, who are supported by TRAS sponsors.

HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA (Map - 1)

- Munsel-ling School, Spiti Valley (and youth sponsorships in colleges in Shimla, Delhi etc.)
- Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) School, Dharamsala
- Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) School, Suja, Bir

UTTARAKHAND (Map - 2)

- Tibetan Homes Foundation, Mussoorie
- Tibetan Women's Centre, Rajpur
- Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre, Dehra Dun

KATHMANDU, NEPAL (Map - 4)

- Buddha Academy and Boarding School (BABS)

Munsel-ling School in Spiti requests sponsors for village children whose families cannot afford to send them to school. These Kindergarteners may be the next generation of leaders in the Valley – can you help give them a chance? Annual cost is \$440. Please contact Russil Wvong, Sponsorship Director sponsorship@tras.ca to learn more. If you wish to give a sponsorship as a gift, we will send the recipient a card on your behalf. Let us know before December 10.

Kesang Dorje is 5 years old, in Kindergarten. She is from a small village, Poh. She is the daughter of a farmer. Her family's income is very low. They are completely dependent on the land and its cultivation. Sometimes due to heavy snowfall the crops are not able to be grown. So for them it is very difficult to support their children in terms of education.

Sonam is 5 years old, in Kindergarten. He belongs to Kibber village. He is from a very poor family. Both his parents are unemployed, working only as daily wage labourers. The money which is earned by his parents is not sufficient to provide high quality education to him. With your kind support he can fulfil his dream.

Sonam Tashi is 5 years old, in Kindergarten. He is from Chicham village. He belongs to a very poor family. They are marginal farmers. Farming is the only source of income for the family. He is very good in studies. He really needs your kind help in terms of education.

Yangchen Butith is 6 years old, in Kindergarten. She was born in Hansa village. Her father works as a farmer and looks after his family.

TRAS

Supporting health and education for children and youth in the Himalayas

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How you can help us:

Give to your favourite project!

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Donate to the Scholarship Fund!

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Tell your friends about TRAS and
encourage them to get involved!

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HATS OFF TO:

- TRAS director Dr. Videsh Kapoor, Faculty Advisor to the UBC Global Health Initiative, who has been awarded the UBC Global Citizenship award to recognize her research and ongoing commitment to global health education which has improved the health of impoverished populations, inspired students to become engaged and responsible citizens, and strengthened UBC's presence as a globally influential university.
- Sutherland Secondary School Social Justice group, which recently presented TRAS with a cheque for \$3,601 for the Buddha Academy vocational training project
- Indy Sahota, President of A Thousand Metres Above, who, on behalf of TRAS, hosted a film screening at the University of Calgary Foothills Campus to raise funds for the READI project.
- His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Cultural Society of BC and Shenpenn, who all spent Oct 23 raising awareness of, and funds for, the Tibetan Resettlement Project to bring stateless Tibetans from Arunachal Pradesh to Canada – where they will be permanent residents!
- The TCS of BC did a great job of arranging a festive day for 5,000 people at the Thunderbird Arena, UBC. It was well organized, on time and efficient.
- The Dalai Lama explained Tibetan Buddhism before giving an advanced teaching. TRAS members commented "it was inspirational, and so beneficial to me personally"; "No wonder he is revered so much – he can explain the most complex issues in simple words".
- Shenpenn, the talented Tibetan musician, pulled together a concert of amazing talent.

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

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HERE is ☐ my sponsorship donation of \$_____ for (name of child/youth) _____
☐ my donation of \$_____ for project (name of project) _____
☐ my donation of \$_____ for wherever it is needed most

Name _____ Address _____
 Phone _____ E-mail _____

Here is my cheque # _____ for \$ _____ payable to TRAS
 OR Please charge my VISA/MasterCard No. _____ Expiry Date _____

Please send me information on Planned Giving ☐ Yes ☐ No

A tax receipt will be issued for all donations. **Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!**

