



Frustrations!

We've been champing at the bit all summer! In our Spring newsletter we invited you to a picnic to celebrate 60 years of support for TRAS – but the rain came down and we had to cancel. We are still cautious about indoor events so it looks as if our celebration will be put off until next year.

Then we told you in May about five newly approved projects only to find that we couldn't yet send funds to four of them.

And having learned of the abrupt cancellation of the midwife training which TRAS supported in Nepal, we decided on a new plan to help improve outcomes for mothers and babies but had to change our payment schedule to fit new rules in Nepal!

Enough grumbling! While we wait for things to progress, let's examine the five new projects in more detail and catch up with our long-established partners.



First, we must explain the delay in India over funds for some of the projects. In 2010 the Indian government updated the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) to ensure that funds from abroad were being used for the benefit of the country. Certification for groups like local NGOs was first obtained in 2011 and had to be renewed every five years. Also, each group now has to open a separate FCRA bank account. There is currently a huge backlog waiting for renewal of certification and an even longer wait for new groups to apply for certification. AMAN, one of the two Indian NGOs running the Voice of Children projects, received renewal a few months ago. Vimarsh awaits final approval. Munsel-ling School finally received their renewal in August. The Tibetan Government in Exile departments were quick off the mark in renewing their certifications. But Manjushri Education and Kunphen Dawa Centre are still waiting to receive their initial certification.

The Five New Projects

by Kate McInnes

Voice of Children Remote Libraries

For 12 years, TRAS has supported Voice of Children, a partnership of two NGOs, Aman and Vimarsh, that operates in the Almora and Nainital regions of northern India. What began as a one-year pilot project funding educational programs in five villages has transformed into a long-standing commitment to improving healthcare and education for children and youth in 11 main villages. TRAS is pleased to support Voice of Children in its most recent initiative **developing small libraries in 10 new villages and improving the quality of 12 existing libraries** by purchasing new books, newspaper and periodical subscriptions, bookshelves and floor matting.

Voice of Children currently operates 12 libraries in remote villages from 2 km to 27 km away from the nearest road. In such rural places, where all family members are expected to perform agricultural labour (especially during the pandemic), childhood education is not always prioritized. Voice of Children has observed that these libraries have played a significant role in the retention of children in schools and in the cultural and social development of these villages.

TRAS expects to see similar positive impacts in 10 more distant villages which have requested libraries. Through these libraries, Voice of Children volunteers will be able to introduce the villagers to other helpful programs. Over 670 households will benefit from these facilities, where children will be able to develop their reading and writing skills and nurture a passion for learning. Each library will be governed by a seven-member committee comprised of local women, youth, children, and social workers, and will open for two hours a day with the support of local volunteers.

TRAS is grateful that this project will be fully funded by the Yosef Wosk Family Foundation once we can send the funds.



Munsel-ling School passive solar wall

For more than 20 years, TRAS has supported the 500 students and staff at Munsel-ling School in the Spiti Valley in northern India. Residents of Spiti Valley experience harsh winter conditions, with temperatures often plunging to -30°C and below. For the students at Munsel-ling, staying warm is a daily challenge for many months of the year.



In mountain deserts like the Spiti Valley, firewood is expensive and hard to come by. Although the smoke-free, fuel-efficient rocket stoves have massively improved the living conditions at Munsel-ling School, the temperatures in the Spiti Valley are so frigid that polythene sheets were laid along the side of each building each year to generate solar heat. Because new sheets needed to be purchased and installed each year, this was not a sustainable solution.

TRAS is fundraising to support **the installation of a passive solar wall** to heat the junior girls' dormitory, which houses around 80 students. This fixture will create an 80x8 ft. buffer zone of stone, concrete, and very large windows, which will heat the interior of the building and provide a bulwark against harsh winter winds. Being a desert, there is little precipitation during the coldest months, but lots of sunshine. When the dormitory was built, the long wall was positioned to face south; the new buffer will act as a conservatory to warm

the actual dormitory building. A similar wall has already been built against the boys' and senior girls' dormitories with great success.

Please consider donating to TRAS to support the health, education, and wellbeing of these children.

Total funding required: \$18,436

Manjushri Education Services Library



As literacy is more strongly correlated with quality lifelong health than either occupation or income,¹ it is alarming that children in Tibetan primary and middle schools in northern India read well below grade level. This is perhaps because Tibetan families lack culturally relevant material: although 82% of Tibetan children are literate, just 26% of Tibetan primary school children are fluent in their mother language. Literacy in these children not only impacts their own educational and career prospects, but it influences the transmission of Tibetan language and culture to future generations.

To combat this pressing issue, Manjushri Education Services (MES), an NGO in Dharamsala, opened a children's library in the nearby village of McLeod Ganj in April 2021. The library has met with astounding success: between July and November 2021, the library attracted almost 1,500 visitors, the majority of whom were girls between the ages of three and 15. In addition to providing educational materials, the library offers monthly and bi-annual literacy

development programs for children. Manjushri also operates a mobile library outreach program, which provides children in daycare and pre-primary schools with the resources they need to acquire these necessary developmental skills.

TRAS is proud to support MES's mission by adding 900 children's books to the Manjushri's Children's Library's current collection, and by financially supporting the production and distribution of 1,000 sets of wooden Tibetan alphabet blocks.

Children's Books

Manjushri Children's Library currently holds over 2,200 books. Just 700 of those books are written in Tibetan, most of which are textbooks or reference books. By funding **the purchase of 500 English and 400 Tibetan books specifically for children** in upper primary grades and in middle schools, children and youth in Dharamsala will have greater exposure to written materials in their mother tongue, which will impact their ability to read and write in Tibetan.

Alphabet Blocks

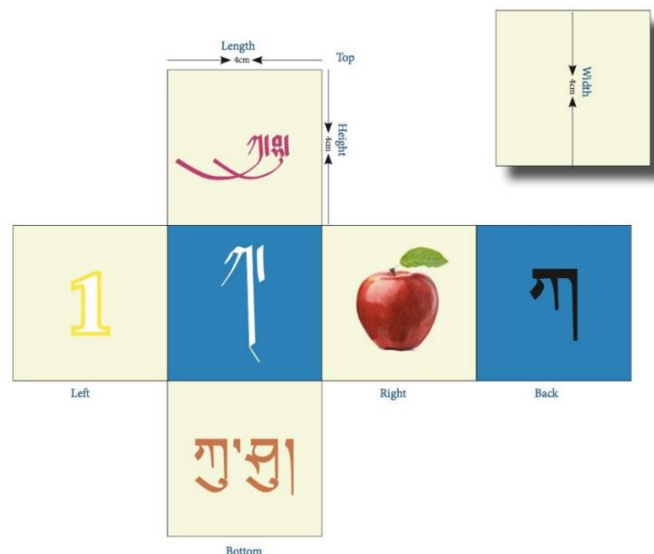
In operating the Manjushri Children's Library and in conducting outreach to daycares and preschools, MES identified a critical lack of high-quality, play-based learning materials in Tibetan. Early childhood learning is critical to brain development. It is therefore fundamental that Tibetan children are exposed to play materials that encourage literacy while being fun and culturally relevant.

With funding from TRAS and other donors, MES will develop **1,000 sets of non-toxic beech wood play blocks**. The six faces of each block will introduce children to Tibetan alphabet characters, numbers, and simple words along with their images. The text will be written in both *Uchen* and *Umey* scripts. The blocks can also be used as a construction toy for children to develop hand-eye coordination and gross and fine motor skills.

The primary beneficiaries of this project are over 7,000 Tibetan infants and children in India and Nepal. This includes an estimated 2,000 babies aged 0 to three years at home or in daycare centers; 1,700 pre-primary children aged four to five enrolled in 51 Tibetan pre-primary schools; and 2,500 early primary grade children aged six to eight studying in 56 Tibetan primary schools.

Two hundred sets of the blocks will be distributed free of cost to these Tibetan daycare centers, pre-primary schools, and primary schools in India and Nepal, as well as to relevant schools and institutions in the Himalayan region. The blocks will be distributed freely to three Tibetan schools in India educating children with disabilities. The rest will be sold to parents and schools at a nominal cost and the income generated will be used to supplement future MES projects. MES will also ship the blocks internationally to cater to the Tibetan diaspora.

(continued on Page 6)



¹ <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/read-speak-sing-promoting-literacy>

Updates on Two Long-Established Projects



Tibetan Nurses Training Project

The selections have just been completed by the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala and three new students are starting their 3-year training in general nursing and midwifery. Two of them come from Bhutan and will be studying far from home: Dorjee Lhamo and Tenzin Chodon will join the Acharya Institute in Bengaluru. Tashi Choedon, from the Old Tibetan Camp in North Delhi, has been selected to study at St. Stephen's Hospital College of Nursing in Delhi. Our five continuing students will all graduate next year, 4 from Bengaluru hospital colleges and one from Dehradun. TRAS has supported eight nursing students each year for 25 years, and has just approved a further three-year extension to this worthwhile project.

Total funding needed for 2022: \$6,453.50

Voice of Children Education Project

12 years of extraordinary dedication to their surrounding mountain villages – and the tiny teams of staff and volunteers continue to work their miracles! The recent 6-monthly report shows that things are back to normal after the worst of the pandemic, but there has been backsliding in family violence and child labour, so the teams are holding extra meetings, visiting the families and holding rallies to encourage school enrolment and safety for girls. Here's a quick list of their main recent activities:

- 11 education centres inspired 351 children to keep studying and excel at school
- two computer centres trained 43 more students
- monthly meetings with guardians and home visits to push for education and health
- counselling and resource centre helps families – 22 old-age pensions obtained, as well as three ration cards for destitute families, pensions for two children with special needs and legal support against cybercrime for a young girl
- an area-wide camp for 500 villagers to learn about free legal help, pensions, access to government schemes and the distribution of medicines, seeds, subsidized farm tools, hearing aids and walking sticks
- 230 women applied for E labour cards
- monthly girls' meetings about health and safety; handmade sanitary pads sewn for themselves, their family females and friends who don't have sewing machines
- monthly meetings for women to help them support their families
- vaccination drive – most women and youngsters fully vaccinated
- 80 underprivileged children helped with school fees and supplies
- driving course completed by 15 young women; next batch to start soon
- income generating scheme for 30 mothers, making juice from local fruit

See the full report on the TRAS website (www.tras.ca) and additional photos on the next page.

Funding needed for 2022: \$37,386

(continued on next page)



Photos above (left to right): a childcare worker who needs to pick up time-sensitive foods and milk for mothers and babies, Pushpa Devi now does her rounds on time, thanks to learning to ride a 'scooty!'; 19-year-old Bhawna excelled in the computer centre – through its help and encouragement she gained admission to a residential vocational training centre and is now able to support herself and her brothers' schooling; girls' success through computer centre

Below: the 11 education centres open daily after school to augment school lessons and encourage students to do their very best



Left: Neha's mother died when she was little and her father moved to the city to find work. She lives with an aunt – she hardly spoke and could not read or write. Now she goes regularly to the nearby Education Centre – she can read and write, has gained confidence and chats with friends. VOC pays for her school books.

Right: monthly women's groups in several locations support the mothers. They soon learn that together they have more power to do good. Radha Devi (inset) regularly attends meetings and helps with group events. The Resource Centre helped her get permanent residency and caste certificates and a ration card to augment the meagre field labour wages earned by her and her husband. Two of their five children receive school supplies from VOC.



Manjushri Education Services Library (cont'd from Page 3)

TRAS will be able to fund these two initiatives with the generous support of the Yosef Wosk Family Foundation.

Kunphen Dawa workshops

India, like most countries in the world, is experiencing a substance use epidemic. According to the National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India, about 2.1% of the country's population (22,600,000 people) regularly use opioids, 2.8% (31,000,000 people) regularly use cannabis, and 5.2% (8,320,000 people) are addicted to alcohol.

Addiction is a particular concern for Tibetans in northern India, but few NGOs are specifically dedicated to treating substance use in this community: the Kunphen Recovery Center in Dharamsala was the first, operating since 2000. With the encouragement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and a grant from his office, Kunphen bought land and in 2018 completed the Centre. Although COVID-19 put a stop to the residential program for the time being, Kunphen continues to treat long-term patients, maintains a drop-in centre for counselling and medical check-ups, provides referrals to other services, and advocates for the rights of those suffering from addiction. Since its inception, Kunphen has supported the successful rehabilitation of 200 Tibetans who suffered from alcohol and drug abuse.

TRAS is raising funds for Kunphen to host a series of 4 one- and two-day workshops combatting substance use and addiction. These workshops will introduce attendees to a feelings-based, therapeutic, and community understanding of addiction that is underpinned by Buddhist philosophy and psychology. Each workshop will be tailored to the needs of a specific group, whether they be families whose members are affected by substance use, school children or college-age youths who may be exposed to drugs and alcohol, or school principals and staff of local Tibetan institutions or non-governmental organizations.

Please consider donating to TRAS to support this initiative.

Total funding required: \$5,738

Sponsorship Report (by Joanne MacLeod)

TRAS members are currently sponsoring 123 children and we have 20 waiting for sponsorship. If you would like to help these two girls at the Tibetan Children's Village School in Lower Chauntra, or would like to learn about others, please contact Joanne at the TRAS office. 604-224-5133 or email info@tras.ca

10-year-old **Tenzin** was born in Ambala. Her family settled in a small Tibetan settlement situated near the Beas River. There is always fear of flooding during the monsoon season. Her father passed away leaving behind two children. Her mother has left the two children with their grandparents. Tenzin's grandparents do petty business selling shoes and readymade walking clothing by going door to door. Tenzin was born without an epiglottis and received plastic surgery at a very young age. She can talk but her speaking is not very clear. There are no Tibetan schools in the area so she has been admitted in the Tibetan Children's Village in Lower Chauntra as a destitute child. She is currently in Class II.



8-year-old **Chhering** was born in Rewalsar, also known as Tso Pema (Lotus Lake) in Tibetan. Rewalsar is a sacred for both Indian and Tibetans and is surrounded by monasteries and Indian temples and attracts many tourists and pilgrims. Her father has a petty business selling readymade clothing. There are two children in the family. As there are no Tibetan schools in the area Chhering has been accepted at the TCV in Lower Chauntra. She is reading in Class II and learning Tibetan and Mathematics.

If you would like to sponsor Tenzin or Chhering for as little as \$40/month, please e-mail us at info@tras.ca with your contact information.

And in other news...

The 60th Annual General Meeting of TRAS was held on September 14 via Zoom. Members from outside Vancouver were able to attend and we were delighted to welcome 16 directors and members. See the TRAS website for the full reports (www.tras.ca). Russil Wvong continues as President with the same board of directors. We thank our two patrons, Dorothea Leach and Tony Phillips, for their ongoing support.

IDEA's Skilled Birth Attendant Training Project

TRAS has agreed to fund this new iteration of IDEA's excellent training in midwifery. The 'old' program was cancelled by the Nepalese Ministry of Health at all institutes without their own 100-bed hospital, and this new training will build on IDEA's 25 years of expertise in the field. IDEA will run a 3-month intensive Skilled Birth Attendant (SBA) training for medical personnel so that they can augment the midwives' work by intervening where difficult deliveries mean mother and baby are at risk. This is a sensible next step, now that the larger number of midwives in the country has started to lower the appalling infant mortality statistics in Nepal. TRAS will fund one course this year, for 15 participants, and if Year 1 is successful, has guaranteed to continue this program for a further four years. Each course will cost \$15,000. A generous donor has already provided some funding for this and we are hoping that others will match his donation. **Would TRAS members match his \$500 per student?**

The final Ray Yee Memorial Fund project is now complete

In previous newsletters we listed the many ways this Fund has helped the Tibetan schoolchildren in Arunachal Pradesh. Now the last and most difficult project is complete, and the senior students at Tezu School are finally back in their classrooms. These were in such poor repair they were uninhabitable. Now the roof no longer leaks; the walls, windows and doors are mended. A wonderful conclusion to a heartfelt honouring of Ray's untiring work for the Tibetan community.

Tezu School before the renovations...



... and after the renovations: a new roof, new doors, new windows and new paint.



TRAS

**Supporting health and education for
children and youth in the Himalayas**

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*Voice of Children
students say “no” to the
recruitment of child
soldiers on worldwide
Red Hand Day*

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Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!

