



60 Years and Holding

George and Inge Woodcock founded the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society in 1962. Even with no exposure from TV, and no real-time reporting, internet, social media or cell phones, they managed to tell enough people about the plight of the Tibetans that their small charity flourished. Their relentless fundraising, their eloquent message to their friends in the university and artistic worlds in Vancouver and the exotic story of the young Dalai Lama's escape to India bore fruit in the shape of an amazingly successful small NGO, based in Vancouver. An active branch soon opened in Victoria under the late Don Edwards who had worked in India and was as fascinated with the Dalai Lama and concerned about the fate of the Tibetans as the Woodcocks were.

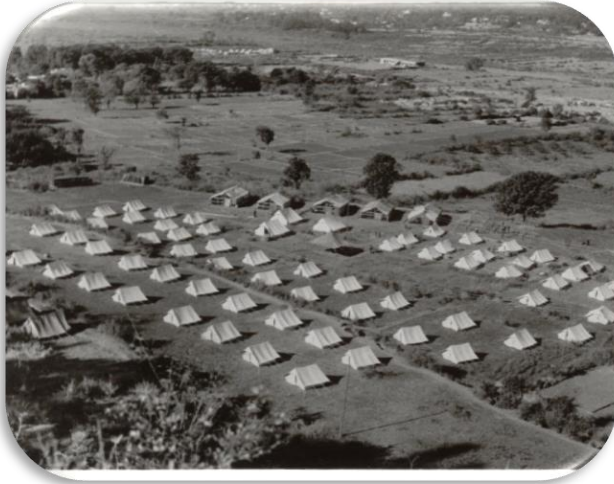


In the beginning TRAS aimed to sponsor some of the thousands of young Tibetan children who had fled to India and to provide desperately needed basic relief for them - clothing, medical help and simple schooling. Over the years the Woodcocks and in particular John Conway, the volunteer secretary, realised that 'development' rather than 'relief' was the way forward if the Tibetans were to build up viable communities in India and Nepal.

Child sponsorship has remained a key element of TRAS' help, but during the ten years John Conway led the board of directors, much larger projects were undertaken, helping to establish Tibetan settlements in southern India as well as in the north.



60 Years and Holding (cont'd)



Dekyiling Tibetan Settlement – same view then and now

Agriculture, forestry, construction, sanitation, drinking water, dairy farming, health care and vocational training were all supported by TRAS, with the work being done by the Tibetan government in exile and by local NGOs. Large grants were sought from the BC Fund for Agricultural Aid and the Canadian International Development Agency, and until CIDA changed its policy to helping only projects over \$100,000, no application from TRAS was ever turned down.

Other changes over the years include the decisions to help Indian and Nepalese villagers near the Tibetan settlements, to concentrate our work in the Himalayan region and to change the name of the Society to Trans-Himalayan Aid Society (keeping the same acronym of TRAS at the request of our partners in India - it had become well known). After CIDA funding dried up a further decision was made to zero in on the most important part of our work - education and health care for children and youth. The Dalai Lama himself had said 'The children are our future'.

Sadly, the one place we have not been able to help for several years now is Tibet itself. Having funded a day care centre, a health post, traditional medical training courses, an English school and a kindergarten in Lhasa, an old people's home and sewing training for nuns, TRAS was about to fund training in pediatric cataract surgery when the Chinese government put a stop to all foreign aid to Tibet.



Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten

Our members and donors are the most dedicated people imaginable. Many of the people whom the Woodcocks inspired are still with the Society. People who admire the Dalai Lama, or who have travelled in India, hiked in Nepal, or been lucky enough to visit Tibet, reach out to TRAS and continue to support the projects in the remote regions of the Himalaya. The Society remains a grass-roots, volunteer-run NGO, with only a very part-time office manager, Joanne McLeod. We have completed over 340 projects and are about to start five new projects as well as continuing the multi-year educational projects for Tibetan, Indian and Nepalese children, the sponsorship program and the Scholarship Fund.

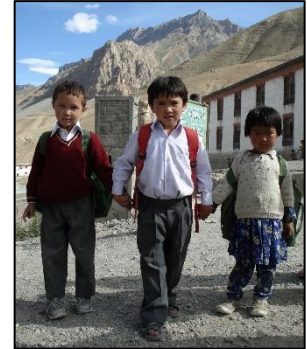
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Sad news

TRAS is sad to announce that long time TRAS supporter Robert Walker died recently. Bob was a practicing Buddhist, a doctor and devoted to helping others. He and his wife Jan sponsored children through TRAS and his family has set up the **Bob Walker Memorial Fund** at TRAS to honour his memory.

To read more about Bob or to make a donation please go to the TRAS website at www.tras.ca

Thank you for sticking with TRAS and with the children in those far off villages, many without reliable sources of electricity, education or health care, many a day's walk or more away from the nearest road and all of them determined to improve life in their communities. At 60 years young, TRAS is determined to keep supporting their efforts to help themselves.



So, a celebration to mark the 60th anniversary?



Unfortunately, with the recent arrival of still more variants of Covid-19 we decided that holding any kind of indoor event would be foolhardy - so a dinner or festivities indoors are on hold. We will be hosting a picnic, though, on **Sunday, June 5, from 11am-2pm in Hinge Park** in the Olympic Village in Vancouver and hope to see some of you there. It will be so good to visit in person! Light refreshments - samosas and chai – will be provided (and you might want to bring your own folding chair).

Paid parking is available at Cook St and 1st Ave.

This will be weather-dependent, so do register with Joanne at 604-224-5133 or info@tras.ca so that we can let you know if we have to cancel.

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We have hopes of doing another lecture series as well. Perhaps via Zoom, perhaps in the fall in person. We'll send you details of what's possible. In the meantime, we planned to send you an essay written by TRAS director Megha Shakya on the history of education in Nepal, its frailties and failures - and yet the successes where groups of citizens have taken things into their own hands. We have just been waiting to receive an update on the latest government moves from the IDEA project, and finally it has arrived, so the essay will be sent out very soon.

The lack of electricity in so many of the Himalayan communities limits our partners' ability to do Zoom talks - such a shame, as we did appreciate 'meeting' the Voice of Children staff and two of the young people they had supported, but we'll see what we can do to link with other partners.

Are all payments to TRAS equal?

No, they are not! If you want to get the best bang for your buck when you make your donation to TRAS, you might wish to ponder the following to see which method benefits TRAS the most:



1. Make an e-transfer (no cost to TRAS) to info@tras.ca.
2. Write a cheque and mail it to the office (no cost to TRAS).
3. Phone the office to make a credit card payment (Credit card company charges a small fee).
4. Make a credit card payment via Canada Helps (Both credit card company and Canada Helps charge small fees).
5. TRAS is registered with Benevity. A payroll deduction plan, Benevity matches your donation less a small fee.
6. TRAS is also registered with the Charitable Impact Foundation in Vancouver. Depending on your set up with the Foundation, TRAS may or may not be charged a small fee.

But regardless, please choose whichever method works best for you! And thank you!

What did TRAS accomplish last year?

The TRAS fiscal year ended March 31 with all current projects in good shape. Here's the latest news on the four multi-year educational projects.

Voice of Children is almost back to normal, with education centres, computer classes, teenaged girls clubs (and the special new components of reusable sanitary napkin making and driving lessons), women's meetings and a variety of extracurricular events up and running. The staff is helping well over 300 children on a daily basis (at \$100 per child per year) and hopefully all of them are able to attend regular school again after the many school closures. VOC's efforts have been invaluable for keeping the children involved in learning during the pandemic.

READI Nepal reached a milestone in April, when the last nine children in the hostel took their school leaving exams. If the past few years are any indication, the READI students will score very high. They have exciting plans to go on to technical schools in neighbouring districts.



Day 1 at the READI hostel - now they are going to technical schools!

Of the 30 students who lived in the hostel and were nurtured by READI, 10 are studying Grades 11 and 12 in a school near their villages, nine have just graduated, four are already working (one accountant, one health worker, two in tea shops) and seven are in technical schools elsewhere: two studying agriculture, and one each doing forestry, dental science, general science, civil engineering and tourism.

This is the fantastic result of 12 years of dedication by a handful of local Humla residents to the idea that even the poorest child can achieve success when given a chance. They also proved that children from different castes and religions can live amicably together. They proved that small income generating schemes for parents and some primary health training can bring long term benefits to entire families.

The hostel has now closed and the READI group is concentrating on the new school they are building outside the capital, Simikot. They will be in touch with TRAS by the end of the year to share their plans, be it taking in students one year at a time or starting technical training courses (there are currently none in Humla). Whatever they decide is best for their remote mountain community, it will be an exciting venture, based on sound experience! We hope to be able to help in some small way.



READI's school nears completion

2021 TRAS accomplishments (cont'd)

The **CTA nurses training** continues to be really popular. TRAS supports eight Tibetan students at a time, for a three-year nursing course in first class Indian hospitals. We will receive a report in August, once this year's results are in and a new batch selected.

The Innovative Development Education Academy (IDEA)

midwifery course in Pokhara, Nepal, is in a state of flux. Although IDEA has been doing an exemplary job training midwives in a country that desperately needs them, the government has pulled the rug from under their feet and discontinued all 18-month midwifery trainings except in institutes running their own 100 bed hospital (IDEA had always had the students work in local hospitals - a satisfactory arrangement). Over the years IDEA has trained 1,000 midwives and now must change course.



Midwife trainees bathe a baby

With their 25 years of experience and success, IDEA is being innovative indeed and has proposed alternative ways of getting help to the rural women who need it the most. They plan to run 3-month intensive courses for 'Skilled Birth Attendants'. They are hoping to pioneer a Mother and Child Health (MCH) project in Gorkha. Two of their already-trained midwife/nurses will set up a clinic in a high school, to deal with the health of the schoolchildren and the mothers from surrounding villages. A third scheme would operate a mobile MCH on the road to Mustang, along which are no health facilities at all. TRAS is impressed with these ideas and is looking into offering some support.



Several one-time projects were completed: the Munsel-ling School rocket stoves are all installed; a computer was purchased for Dikyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre; the pandemic health projects are completed; as are all but one of the **Ray Yee Memorial Fund projects** for the Tibetan schools in Arunachal Pradesh. Between the three elementary schools there, a staff room has been repaired and new furniture bought, aging staff toilets have been replaced, child-friendly furniture for school library and science lab bought, Tibetan musical instruments acquired, a clean water system installed, and a supplementary diet for the children at two schools for three months (which made a noticeable improvement in health and concentration) delivered (along with a request for similar help for the third school) (see photos at the top of pages 1 and 8). And at the 12 high schools further south in India, to which these children eventually go, a wide variety of sports equipment was joyfully received.

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, September 14, 2022 at 7pm
TRAS | 1183 Melville Street | Vancouver, BC

Please join us for the 60th TRAS AGM!

Depending on pandemic restrictions at that time, the meeting will either be held in person at the TRAS office or by Zoom. If members who live outside Vancouver are interested, the AGM may still be available via Zoom. Please ensure that Joanne has your email address so that last minute details may be sent to you.

604-224-5133 | info@tras.ca

And what new projects are in the works at present?

The TRAS board has recently approved five new projects - three educational and two health-related. Two are requests from our friends at Munsel-ling School in the Spiti Valley and the Voice of Children team in Almora and Nainital. The other three are from two Tibetan NGOs we have not worked with before. Manjushri Education is a new Tibetan NGO run by former staff of the Department of Education. The second is the Kunphen Rehabilitation Centre. We have been trying to support it for a few years now, but just as things were organized, Covid-19 hit. Now they are ready to start their workshops again. The three education projects are already funded. **Please help TRAS pay for the two health-related projects.**

Voice of Children Remote Libraries: VOC has requested more libraries. The first 20 small village libraries created a few years ago have been highly successful, and even more remote villages have been requesting the same benefit. Hundreds of children enjoy the experience of borrowing and reading books, their parents are using the libraries too and they have become meeting places in the villages. Some of the original libraries amalgamated, leaving 12 thriving, but requesting more books and periodicals and for the well-worn floor matting to be replaced. Dr. Yosef Wosk, lover of libraries, supported the original libraries and now the Yosef Wosk Family Foundation (YWFF) is kindly supplying fresh matting and new books for those 12 and the start-up money to open five new libraries around Nainital and five around Almora. (Cost: \$8,922)



Proudly borrowing books

Manjushri Education Library: a group of staff members from the Tibetan Department of Education was distressed at the lack of a children's library in Dharamsala, where well over 2,000 Himalayan children live. They have created the Manjushri Education Project, rented a small room and opened a library with a couple of hundred books as a start. They have requested 900 more, half in English, half in Tibetan. The Yosef Wosk Family Foundation will fund this purchase. (Cost: \$5,000)

Manjushri Education Alphabet Blocks: this same group wants to help preserve the Tibetan language by allowing children to use it in play from an early age. They are creating a set of wooden blocks each with a Tibetan letter and word on it. The designs are so artistic and enticing! TRAS agreed to make a donation towards the overall cost of production and distribution to all Tibetan pre-schools and libraries in India and Nepal and to Tibetan families worldwide. The YWFF has kindly agreed to fund this donation. (Cost: \$5,000)



Munsel-ling School Passive Solar Heating for Junior Girls' Dormitory:

the School has found that the best way to keep the children warm and healthy is by providing the smoke-free, fuel-efficient rocket stoves (project completed last year) and adding an extra wall of windows facing south. This creates enormous warmth during the day to the entire building and gives the 80 junior girls a space for sitting during the day without any expenditure on fuel. The school used to use plastic sheeting, but it tore, blew away and was much less effective. TRAS agreed to pay for this addition to the overall heating system and the school raced ahead to get the construction started as soon as the road opened for supplies and labourers to get to Spiti. (Funds needed: \$18,436)

Kunphen Rehabilitation Centre: for several years now there has been a serious and growing problem with alcohol and drug abuse in the Dharamsala region, sadly affecting many Tibetan youths. This treatment centre was established with the blessing of the Dalai Lama and is run by a Tibetan who recovered from his addiction and is spending his life helping others. It has had a good success rate in helping young people recover and return to fulfilling lives. Now the Centre wants also to concentrate on prevention through workshops for high school students, young people, teachers and parents. They have planned 4 workshops for later this year. TRAS has agreed to fund them. (Funds needed: \$5,738)

Scholarship Report

by Lynn Beck, TRAS Director

"Despite all the problems in the world, it is refreshing to see that young people still have hopes and aspirations for a better life. All three of the scholarship winners have worked very hard, under unbelievably difficult conditions, to qualify for higher education. We are pleased that TRAS has been able to find them and help them achieve their goals. Please thank everyone associated with the Scholarship Fund for their continued efforts. Stories like these make it all worthwhile."

This is the response from one of our regular donors supporting the Scholarship Fund when she learned of the histories of the latest batch of students selected by Voice of Children.

Each of the three selected for the current university year, like those selected in previous years, has been through difficult times.

Soni's father left the family to search for work and was not heard of again. Her mother, working hard at several jobs including cattle rearing, to keep her family going, died after falling from a tree while collecting fodder. Soni was left penniless to look after her young brother and aging grandparents. Her admiration for her mother's efforts had made her work hard at school as well as in the home and fields, and she was devastated by her mother's death. This scholarship for a BA degree is a lifeline for her.



Gagan's father died of Covid-19 and his mother, trying to work hard to keep the family together, developed heart problems. His older brother started working as a day labourer but that was not sufficient to feed them, and they survived on what neighbours and relatives could spare. Gagan was about to give up on education when he heard about these scholarships and was fortunate enough to receive one. He is studying for a BSc.



Kriti's father was shopkeeper, but that job disappeared during the pandemic, leaving the family destitute. She is a particularly bright student with the dream of becoming a professor. Thanks to the scholarship, she has been able to accept a place in a BA English Honours course.



Thank you to our donors for helping to make their dreams come true!

TRAS

Supporting health and education for children and youth in the Himalayas



The supplementary diet: one helping of meat and one egg per week and a few fresh veggies and fruit. A meager diet indeed without these extras.

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

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- Please send event information and newsletters by e-mail
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Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!

