

## The People Behind the Numbers

TRAS held its 61st Annual General Meeting on Wednesday, September 20, via Zoom. **Numbers** played a large part in the procedure and you will find them briefly listed throughout this report. What is probably more interesting are the real live **people** behind those numbers, and in this issue we will introduce you to some of them. Why? Because they are the reason we, the TRAS volunteer board of directors, and you, our members and donors, keep on supporting TRAS after all these years.



### The TRAS Scholarship Fund

**The numbers:** The annual report states that TRAS spent \$20,000 on post-secondary scholarships during the year April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023 for 20 students. And since then, a further \$24,000 has been allocated to 24 students for the current year.

**The people:** Our partners, who each select two students a year to receive a three-year scholarship, are Munsel-ling School in Spiti, the Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre near Dehradun, and the two Voice of Children (VOC) NGOs, Vimarsh in Nainital and AMAN in Almora.

Let's look at three students recently selected by the Voice of Children (VOC) NGOs.



Growing up, **Bharti** witnessed domestic violence within her family, which affected her, her mother and her sister. Frustrated with the situation, Bharti made the brave decision to move from her family's village to the city.

With the responsibility of her family weighing heavily on her shoulders, Bharti took charge of her life after completing her Grade 12 exams. She started working at a newspaper and became actively involved in social activities aimed at preventing violence against women and teenagers. Bharti completed her graduation in the Arts stream; but due to a lack of financial resources, she was unable to pursue further studies despite her desire to travel and continue her education in Journalism.

However, Bharti didn't give up on her dreams. She applied for a VOC Scholarship, considering the critical situation of her family. In 2022, she was awarded the scholarship, providing financial assistance for her Post Graduate Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication at Soban Singh Jeena University.

(continued on Page 2)

## The TRAS Scholarship Fund (cont'd)

Understandably, the traumatic experiences of extreme domestic violence that Bharti endured from childhood have taken a toll on her mental health. The scholarship money helps in that it covers not only her course fees and books but also her medical expenses. Bharti is prioritizing her well-being alongside her education. Bharti's journey exemplifies her strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Despite challenges, she continues to pursue her education and contribute to the betterment of society through her involvement in social activities. It is hoped that with the support she receives, Bharti can overcome her obstacles and build a brighter future for herself and her family.

**Anvesha** is from a village in Nainital district. From a young age, she showed exceptional academic abilities, however her parents were unable to afford her education because of their weak economic condition. So her uncle took the initiative to bring her to Haldwani City to study.

Sadly, in 2021, Anvesha's uncle passed away from a Covid infection. This placed a heavy burden on Anvesha's aunt, who was unable to pay for Anvesha's upbringing and education along with those of her own two children. As a result, Anvesha had no choice but to return to her village.

Despite the challenges she faced, Anvesha was determined to continue her education. She aspired to pursue a BSc in Agriculture, but the high course fees posed a significant obstacle for her family. In 2022, Anvesha applied for and was awarded a scholarship offered under the VOC Scholarship project. She then gained admission to Kumoun University Nainital for a BSc in Agriculture.



Anvesha expresses deep gratitude towards the VOC Scholarship project for granting her this opportunity. The sudden loss of her uncle and the resulting impact on her family's circumstances had put her under considerable mental stress. However, the scholarship has provided her with a new direction in life and she is making good progress in her studies.



**Alka** comes from a village in Nainital district where her parents work in agriculture to support Alka and her younger brother.

From a young age, Alka excelled in her studies and dreamed of pursuing a GNM (General Nursing and Midwifery) course. Despite her enthusiasm, she couldn't gather the courage to discuss her aspirations with her family. Alongside her studies, Alka was involved with a Voice of Children group. During a group meeting, a VOC facilitator learned about Alka's situation and told her about the VOC Scholarship project.

Delighted by this information, Alka applied for a scholarship and was subsequently selected. Alka was thrilled to be chosen and expresses her gratitude for the opportunity.

She believes that this scholarship has provided a new direction for a girl from a poor family to fulfill her dreams, and she aspires to help other girls in similar circumstances in the future. Now Alka is pursuing her GNM course at Nancy Convent Education & Social Society in Jyolikot.

**The TRAS Scholarship Fund depends on our donors' generosity.**

To read the biographies of more scholarship recipients, please go to the [TRAS website](https://tras.ca/scholarships/): Scholarships (tras.ca/scholarships/)



## The Education and Health Projects

**The numbers:** TRAS spent \$93,000 on seven projects in the last fiscal year. Since then, three new projects have been approved by TRAS and the funds are being sent.

**The people:** Let's look at who needed our help and why.

The **Voice of Children** team in the villages around Nainital and Almora in north India upgraded the 12 tiny libraries with new floor matting and a supply of new books and opened 10 even more remote libraries, providing them with books and basic furniture. All 22 libraries are in full swing.

**Munsel-Ling School** solar passive wall for the Girls' Dormitory Block was approved last year and completed during the current year. Augmenting the rocket stoves heating the dormitory block at night, a wall of large windows heated by the sun creates a warm space 8 feet wide and 80 feet long where the girls can study during breaks, eat, dry their laundry and keep warm in the freezing winter.



The **Manjushri** library in Dharamsala, which caters to all Himalayan children in the region, now has 900 more children's books, with 400 in Tibetan. Colourful, wooden Tibetan alphabet blocks have been produced and distributed to Tibetan pre-schools, kindergartens and primary schools. Sets are also available at cost for parents in India and the diaspora.

**The Central Tibetan Administration** (CTA) Nurses Training is a steady success, with eight student nurses at various stages in their 3-year program paid for each year by TRAS. We have just heard that one of the new batch of students comes from the Tibetan settlement, Kollegal, south India, and two come from distant Choglamsar settlement, Ladakh!



VOC computer class

The multi-layered **Voice of Children Education** project, run by a small staff and many volunteers out of tiny offices in Nainital and Almora, continues to amaze us, with its dedication and vigorous, innovative work in many villages in the foothills of the Himalaya on behalf of 365 children and teenagers.

**IDEA**, the training institute in Pokhara, Nepal, ran a pilot project for its proposed Skilled Birth Attendant training last summer. TRAS paid for 15 midwives to take this advanced accelerated course. This was successfully completed and all 15 are employed in their rural communities. We hope this will lead to this useful course being run once a year.

(continued on next page)

## In 2023 we've added three new projects:

1. In July severe flooding followed the heavy monsoons in Himachal Pradesh (HP) and damaged several Tibetan settlements, washing away retaining walls and houses. Luckily there was no loss of life, but the damage was devastating. TRAS immediately sent \$5,000 to help pay for repairs and the strengthening of retaining walls. Donations towards this ongoing work would be welcome.

*(Some good news: TRAS recently paid for the sturdy roofs which now cover the traditional mud roofs on the Munsel-ling School (HP) buildings and in spite of the heavy rains, they did not leak! And the School was able to play host to 300 tourists stranded by the floods.)*



*Heavy damage caused to the road and households in Bonshi Tibetan settlement in Himachal*



2. New books were requested for the excellent Dr. Wosk Library at Munsel-ling School now that the school population has grown even larger. Funds from the Yosef Wosk Family Foundation, along with donations from a member who knows the school well, have covered the costs of more textbooks, novels, books of general interest and a dictionary and an encyclopaedia on each table.
3. A second request came from Munsel-ling School, more expensive but very necessary. It's a feather in Munsel-ling School's cap that it has been accredited up to Grade 12. The Indian government requires that schools holding high school examinations have a separate examination hall. Until this summer, Munsel-Ling students have written their exams sitting on the bare ground or on roofs exposed to the bitter winter cold.

*Photo left: students take their exams on the roof of their classrooms even during the Winter*

Not ideal! To satisfy the government requirement, Munsel-Ling School recently added a second storey to the existing cultural hall to create an examination hall. The floor, however, was still the cultural hall's original mud roof, and the School asked TRAS to pay for new flooring. There were three choices: concrete (too cold and too heavy), cheap wood planks (would rot quickly and be prey to insect infestation) and teak flooring (expensive, but long lasting and rot resistant). TRAS decided to go with the longer-lasting choice and approved the budget of \$19,250 to cover the 80ft by 40ft hall with teak planks.

The students will be happy for years to come! Recently their teachers asked over 40 Grade 10 students what their aspirations are, and these children are aiming high. Thanks to Munsel-ling and TRAS, many will succeed. Some of the careers they listed: army, doctor, engineer, artist, pilot, wildlife photographer, scientist, entrepreneur and vet!

Tanzin wrote: "I belong to a tribal area. I am 18 and I have completed my Grade 12 exams at Munsel-ling School started by Lama Tashi for students of the tribal area. The School has now started a coaching course and it has inspired me to become a doctor because medical resources are negligible in the tribal areas. And if people do get to hospital they face challenges with lack of communication. I will be able to become a bridge for the tribal people and be able to serve them."



An indoor space for winter exams will surely make a difference for Tanzin. At \$6/square foot, the cost doesn't sound impossible – can you help by paying for a few square feet?

*(Photo above: the original mud roof needs covering to make a solid floor)*



## The TRAS Sponsorship Program

**The numbers:** TRAS members currently sponsor 114 Tibetan children in the northern Himalayan region (72 girls and 42 boys). In addition, in 2023, the sponsorship of 13 children came to an end: nine children graduated, two left school (one became a monk and one entered the Army to support his family), and two received free placements at their schools. We thank TRAS sponsors for their support and commitment. Over the years TRAS members like you have helped support over 785 children.

**The people:** Let's look at some of the settlements and the children who need our help.



*Snack time at TCV Suja*



*Putting on their shoes at Munsel-ling School*

The children live in a variety of situations. The **Tibetan Homes Foundation (THF)** and the **Tibetan Children's Villages (TCV)** were set up in the 1960s at the request of the Dalai Lama to look after the many children whose parents had either died on the arduous journey to India or had stayed in Tibet while sending their children on that long trek to give them a better chance. Nowadays the THF and TCV take in the neediest children from the Tibetan settlements in India and Nepal. The **Tibetan Women's Centre** in Rajpur, the **Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre** and **Chauntra Settlement** were set up as weaving centres in the 1960s to keep alive Tibetan crafts and to house and employ the hundreds of refugees pouring in from Tibet since the 1960s and from Bhutan in the 1980s. Today, alongside the weaving, most other regular sources of income, such as "petty business" and selling sweaters all over India in the colder months, are precarious. It is also sadly common for one or both parents to have TB and be unable to work. TRAS helps out by sponsoring the children of the families with the greatest financial needs. And in the distant Spiti Valley, the **Munsel-ling School** was founded by a Tibetan monk determined to give the local tribal children the education which the government did not provide.

The Himalayan region is both spectacularly beautiful and, at the same time, one of the poorest regions in the world. Sponsorship gives children a chance to receive an education, learn the Tibetan culture and language, and improve their lives and those of their families and communities.

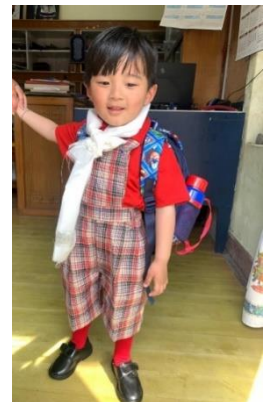
### Would you like to give a child an opportunity for a better life?

Sponsorship costs between \$240/year/child (at the Tibetan Women's Centre, Rajpur) and \$480/year/child (at the other institutions).

### Meet two of the 15 children waiting for sponsors:

Three-year-old Tenzin is in Tender Step Kindergarten, at the Tibetan Women's Centre, Rajpur. He is the only child in the family. His grandmother worked in the carpet section and was able to help support the family until she had to leave due to weak eyesight. His mother has no job, and his father does winter petty business. He is a very charming and active little boy, fond of colouring pictures and singing. The family's only source of income is from his father's winter petty business which can be hindered by the monsoon season. Sponsorship of Tenzin will greatly help the family and keep him in school.

*(continued on next page)*





Little four-year old Ogen Choeki lives in the Chauntra Tibetan Settlement. There are four members in his family. Their main source of income is from the sale of winter sweaters. Their business is seasonal and primarily dependent on the weather. It is difficult for this family to afford their children's education. Ogen is currently at the Tibetan Children's Village School in Chauntra and the family urgently needs support to provide clothing and schooling for Ogen.

If you would like to sponsor Tenzin for \$20/month or Ogen for \$40/month, please e-mail or call us at [info@tras.ca](mailto:info@tras.ca) or 604-224-5133 with your contact information.

To learn about other children waiting to be sponsored, please contact us.

## Additional AGM News

The full reports on Finances, Sponsorship, Scholarship Fund and Projects can be found on the [TRAS website](https://tras.ca/news/) (tras.ca/news/).



Talking via Zoom, President Russil Wvong thanked the members and donors who continue to support TRAS and asked Frank Beck to read the Nominations report. Russil has kindly agreed to continue in the role as our very competent President. Others re-elected are Treasurer: Kevin Yuen and Directors: Frank Beck, Lynn Beck, Abby Fitch, Daphne Hales, Jennifer Hales, Raheesa Jina, Videsh Kapoor, Megha Shakya and Sanjeev Singh. Kate McInnes stepped down (see below).

Russil paid tribute to our hardworking, competent and friendly Office Manager, Joanne MacLeod.

We also thank volunteers Beck Lamb (newsletter design) and Maria Rubinchik (website).

Overseeing the entire crew are our Patrons, Dorothea Leach and Tony Phillips, both of whose longtime association with and dedication to TRAS have led and nurtured the Society for many years. Their understanding of the issues, their compassion and friendship for the people and their wise decisions have sustained the work of TRAS since the beginning.

## Bon Voyage to Kate McInnes

Kate has been an enthusiastic and helpful member of the TRAS board of directors for two years, after a stint as a volunteer. Her research and writing skills were invaluable. We would love her to have stayed longer – but Oxford University called and we can hardly blame Kate for taking the opportunity to study international law there for her Master's degree. Congratulations, Kate, and we wish you all the best. We will welcome you back, if and when you have time again for TRAS.

Kate was also our Social Media expert – would someone like to take on this role for TRAS?





## In Memoriam



Some people just are the backbone of whatever organization they become involved in, and luckily for TRAS, Georgina Henderson was one such person. She was a longtime member of the Victoria branch of TRAS which flourished for decades, raising funds for the elderly Tibetans at one of the very first Tibetan settlements, at Mundgod in south India, and for its hospital. Georgina and her crew ordered the beautiful Tibetan carpets directly from one of the Tibetan weaving settlements and thanks to a great sales pitch these carpets grace many a Victoria home. Georgina was also a dab hand at arranging the gigantic garage sales the Victoria TRAS group put on every year until, she told me, they all got too old to lug stuff around anymore. Any time we had an event in Vancouver, Georgina would load up her car with carpets and bring them over to add colour to the occasion and funds to the cause. We truly miss her vibrant presence and unstinting hard work and send our condolences to her family.



## Reflecting on the Dalai Lama and Democracy in Exile

Although mention of this was not made at the AGM, September 2nd was Tibetan Democracy Day. One of the people who played a pivotal role in introducing the concept of democracy to Tibetans in exile is His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Much has been written about the incredible good His Holiness has done, not only for Tibetan people, but also by example for all of us who have been moved by his wisdom, kindness and practicality. His Holiness' grasp of the benefits of a democratic society is also impressive. A recent article by Karma Tensum, Executive Director of the Tibetan Children's Education Foundation in Montana, describes the way the Tibetan democratic government in exile developed, and the integral role of His Holiness.

Karma Tensum has kindly allowed TRAS to reprint his article on Tibetan democracy in exile on the [TRAS website](https://tras.ca/news/) ([tras.ca/news/](https://tras.ca/news/)).



*His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

# 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



## Patrons

Dorothea Leach  
Tony Phillips

## Board of Directors

President — Russil Wvong  
Treasurer — Kevin Yuen

## Directors

Frank Beck, Lynn Beck, Abby Fitch,  
Daphne Hales, Jennifer Hales,  
Raheesa Jina, Videsh Kapoor,  
Megha Shakya, Sanjeev Singh

## Office Manager

Joanne MacLeod

## Newsletter Editor

Daphne Hales

## Newsletter Design

Beck Lamb

## Website

Maria Rubinchik

## Social Media

open

**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

☐ 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!**

