



WINTER NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2023

## A Message from The President

**Thank you** to all our TRAS members for your steadfast support. In an uncertain world, our mission remains the same: to improve the health and education of children and youth in the Himalayas in Nepal and India by sponsoring their education, providing post-secondary scholarships, and funding health and education projects in their communities.

As we approach the holiday season, I'd like to ask you to consider donating to TRAS.

Through the **TRAS Scholarship Fund**, established ten years ago by a generous donation from two anonymous TRAS members, many bright students are able to study at the post-secondary level. Our Himalayan partners select eligible students and manage the scholarships. Each student receives \$1,000 per year for three years to support their education in fields such as teaching, nursing, and the sciences. This helps not only the students, but also their families and their communities.

In addition, the newsletter describes the different **Projects** that TRAS supports, and our **Child Sponsorship Program** (see pages 3 and 5, respectively).

Since 1962, TRAS has existed because people in Vancouver and elsewhere in Canada and the U.S. want to help children in the Himalayas. With your help, we'll continue to do this into the future.

From all of us at TRAS, we hope you and your family have a safe and happy holiday season.

Best wishes for 2024!

~ Russil Wvong, President



*Children prepare to work for World Environment Day.  
Their sign says: "Guarding Environment brings Prosperity!"*

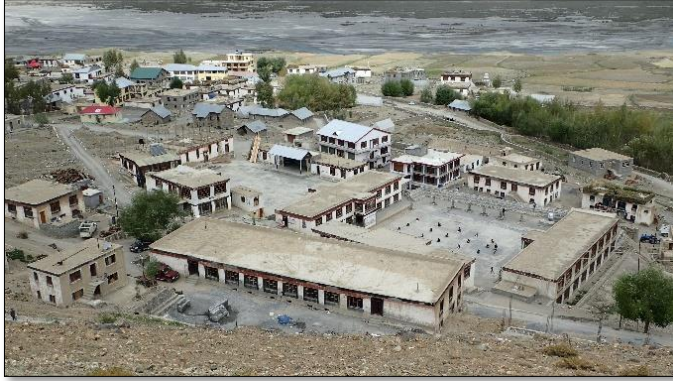
### Time to shop for holiday gifts?

Look no further than the warm woollen shawls and scarves woven by local women in Manali. Or browse the extensive collection of authentic trinkets from the Himalayas. Go to [tras.ca/handicrafts](https://tras.ca/handicrafts), then contact Joanne at the office 604-224-5133 or email [info@tras.ca](mailto:info@tras.ca). Free delivery within the Vancouver area, otherwise we'll mail your purchases to you.



## The TRAS Scholarship Fund | by Lynn Beck

The TRAS Scholarship Fund (TSF) is celebrating **10 years of success!** The TSF has increased the number of students being supported from 20 last year to 24 this year which is our maximum capacity. This means we need to raise funds to support these bright young students! The current selection of eight new students this year is truly inspiring. Seven are entering the fields of science and nursing, and one is studying journalism.



In this newsletter we are highlighting one of our four partner NGOs in the TSF program: the **Rinchen Zangpo Society for Spiti Development**, which has been a participant in the TSF program since the Fund began. The Society runs **Munsel-ling School**.

Each of the two students selected for a scholarship each year is awarded \$1,000 per annum for three years. Between 2013 and 2023, fifteen Munsel-ling School students received scholarships and graduated with degrees. The list of their accomplishments is impressive. Four students graduated with BAs and five with BScs. Many are continuing their studies to achieve a 2-year teaching degree, after which they

will return to the Spiti Valley as valuable teachers. One student has graduated with a medical degree, continuing on to become a doctor. Another graduated with a degree in Public Administration and one with a Masters in Anthropology! To achieve all this, TRAS has sent a total of \$60,000 from 2013 to 2023 to Spiti.

**The two students** selected this year by the Rinchen Society for Spiti Development are Ringzin Dolma and Tanzin Chhukit, and TRAS is now raising funds to pay for their scholarships.

**Ringzin** is starting her studies in a BSc program. Both her parents work on the roads as seasonal labourers. Her family does not possess any land. Ringzin is very good at her studies and after graduating from Munsel-ling School, Spiti, she passed her +2 from the government school with 81%. Coming from a very poor background her dream of a college education would not be possible without the support of TRAS.



**Tanzin** has started in a BSc medical program. Her parents are tenants from a lower caste and have no regular job. Tanzin completed her high school education from JVN School for disadvantaged families. With two siblings also going to school the family had no means to support a college education for Tanzin.

It is truly commendable that these young women from such humble backgrounds are striving to succeed in the sciences. Please support our bright, motivated students to fulfill their dreams of a college education.

### DONATE to the TSF DECEMBER DRIVE!

\$250 pays for three months for one student

\$500 for six months

\$1,000 for a full year of college

\$3,000 will help Ringzin or Tanzin to graduate with a BSc!

**Any amount helps! Thank you.**



## 350 and Counting...

That's the number of projects TRAS has funded in the past 61 years. Over the decades, TRAS has supported Tibetan, Indian and Nepali communities, funding a wide variety of projects. Some have been completed in a few months, building a clinic or weaving hall, or opening a small library. Other projects have responded quickly to emergency situations such as collapsing walls, marauding elephants or the pandemic. And others have taken much longer to complete, incrementally over years improving an entire settlement or village. The long-lasting results of our funding stem from grassroots work by local, dedicated organizations run by talented people with whom TRAS has been proud and honoured to partner. One such project has been the Voice of Children (VOC) Education Project.

### Celebrating a Truly Successful Story

The **Voice of Children project** is becoming self-sufficient. For 10 years TRAS has been supporting the Voice of Children (VOC) Education project in 11 villages in the mountains around Nainital and Almora in northern India. These villages were mired in poverty with little employment future for children beyond day labour at menial jobs or moving miles away to cities for equally low paying jobs.

The VOC project, run by two NGOs (*Aman* in Almora and *Vimarsh* in Nainital), started with the objective of getting the children to school. It grew to encompass a wide variety of programs to benefit particularly girls, mothers, and other women. The combination of after-school education and tuition centres and a program to supply school supplies to needy children led not only to zero school dropouts in the villages but to a change of attitude. Parents now value education and there is less child labour. There are fewer child marriages. Early childhood programs were taken over by the government and VOC moved on to computer training which has become a significant milestone in the project. Success stories abound.



*Computer Center*



*Knowledge brings better health and safety*

Healthcare has been equally important, with all babies now immunized, children vaccinated, and teenaged girls learning to take care of their bodies at health camps.

These and other enlightened programs have resulted over the years in increased awareness and social action on issues such as health, sanitation, education, and women's rights. VOC interventions have also assisted in developing community leaders who are now part of local self-governance bodies. The project played a crucial role in bringing about these changes and fostering community engagement, empowerment and awareness on the critical social issues affecting their lives.

There has been a decrease in violence against women in these villages. Women have been encouraged to register for useful government programs – leading to the acquisition of tools, seeds, and pensions, and to the women proactively spearheading improvements in village infrastructure.



It hasn't been all work – there are regular children's outings to the wider local world, and annual children's fairs (*photo above: children receive new books at a children's fair*). They celebrate every kind of World Day. Village libraries are very popular and have become meeting places for adults as well as children.

## 350 and Counting... (cont'd)

Volunteerism is well regarded and the VOC teams have many well-trained volunteers in their various programs. This style of program execution has become so accepted that it has taken on a life of its own and become self-sustaining. The 11 villages will continue to benefit from the programs which are now running well. There is a real change for the better in village life. The fact that four students a year are well enough educated to be selected for the TRAS Scholarship Fund is just one example of this change. Now the NGOs Aman and Vimarsh are ready to move on to new initiatives.

TRAS celebrates with the staff and volunteers of Aman and Vimarsh the completion of this very worthwhile 10-year project! It's been an honour to support such impactful work.

And look what's coming next.....

## ..... Hope for Children: A new project from Aman and Vimarsh

After their experience with the VOC villages, the two NGO teams, Aman and Vimarsh, know what works, how to engage the villagers and the children, and how to go about getting things done. They are determined to use their experience and expertise to help more remote villages in the same way and have already consulted the women and the village elders in nine selected villages, who urgently want this project to begin for their 4,000 residents including 1,000 children.



(left to right: Rikhe Village, Bajgal Village, consulting the women)

Raghu Tewari, on behalf of Aman and Vimarsh, writes:

*Currently, our dedication is directed towards empowering the VOC women's groups and the local community as we are in the process of rolling back from the VOC project area. Simultaneously, **we've identified several villages urgently requiring tailored educational and social initiatives to combat sexual abuse and caste-based violence against women and children.***

*In response to these challenges and opportunities, we've drafted the **Hope for Children Proposal** with a twofold mission: streamlining the transition in the VOC area and reinforcing our commitment to delivering quality education and enriched learning prospects for underprivileged children and women in the newly designated villages. This initiative holds a crucial role in promoting social inclusivity and reducing the prevalence of sexual violence and abuse.*

*We kindly request your consideration of the Hope for Children Proposal and hope to receive valuable support for this noble cause.*

TRAS is excited to support **Hope for Children** with its very real chance of building success upon previous success. This is grassroots development at its best. We have agreed to an initial two-year project and are beginning our fundraising efforts to support it.

Many more details will emerge as the programs gear up and we'll be reporting fully on it in the next newsletter. Meanwhile, **we ask our donors to get behind Hope for Children to bring lasting change for the better to nine more villages. It will only happen with your support.**

**The cost of this project for the 1,000 children in nine villages will be \$30,000 a year  
– a mere \$30 per child.**



## Sponsorship Report | by Joanne MacLeod

TRAS members are currently sponsoring 114 children, four of whom will be graduating from school next year. During the past year many of the children sent wonderful letters to their sponsors telling them how great it is to have a sponsor and how they aspire to get good grades to make their sponsors proud.

I would like to thank all of our sponsors for their prompt payments and to say that a reminder for 2024 will be sent early December.

Recently TRAS received 10 new case histories from the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV), Lower Chauntra.

Here are two of the children who have been sent by their parents hundreds of miles from remote villages in Arunachal Pradesh (AP) to the TCV Lower Chauntra School so that they might learn the Tibetan language and culture. The children don't get home often to see their families — just every couple of years — because of the distance and the expense. But they consider it worthwhile for their children to be immersed in a Tibetan community while getting a decent education.

**Pema** is a 10-year-old boy from Muchut Village in the Tawang District of Arunachal Pradesh. He has one younger brother. His father works as a small contractor and his mother is a Science teacher in a small local school. His parents had a strong wish to send Pema to the TCV in Lower Chauntra so that he may learn the Tibetan language and culture in a Tibetan school, which is not possible back in his hometown. Pema is currently in Class V learning all different subjects such as English, Tibetan, Science, Social Studies and Math. All subjects are in Tibetan language. He is good in Math and feels that it is his favourite subject. He wants to become a Computer Engineer. He spends a lot of time reading books in the library and is passionate about football.



**Pemba** is an 11-year-old girl from Thargelling, Arunachal Pradesh. Pemba's parents have a hard life as farmers. Pemba is attending Class V and is learning all different subjects. She is learning the Tibetan language as all of her subjects are taught in the Tibetan language except her English class. She would like to become a scientist. She likes to play catch and run with her best friend Sangyal. She is very happy at TCV.

**Sponsorship for each child is \$480 a year.**

**Please contact Joanne at the TRAS office (604-224-5334)  
or email [info@tras.ca](mailto:info@tras.ca)**

## A Round-Up of Projects in 2023

1. A large number of new books was ordered for the library at **Munsel-ling School**, thanks to kind donors, and the students are enjoying them.
2. The new **VOC libraries** in 10 further villages in the VOC region were stocked and opened, much to the joy of the local children, while the original 12 libraries received new matting and a supply of books and periodicals.
3. The **Manjushri library** in Dharamsala received its final payment and is catering to Tibetan and other Himalayan children both in the library itself and through outreach programs in the local schools.
4. The **Central Tibetan Authority (CTA) Department of Home** asked for urgent help for the Tibetan settlements along the Beas River in Himachal Pradesh where floods had caused much damage. TRAS immediately sent \$4,000 to help build protective retaining walls. A further \$1,000 is promised. A full description and photos are on the TRAS website ([tras.ca](http://tras.ca)) under Latest News.
5. The **CTA nurses' training** continues to attract eager students. As usual, TRAS is funding 8 students at Indian teaching hospitals. Five graduated this year and five more have been selected from Tibetan settlements in Nepal and south India. Some of these girls travelled hundreds of miles from their families for school and now further still for nursing training. They are spunky and determined, and TRAS is thrilled when donors support them.
6. Last year the **IDEA pilot project for the Skilled Birth Attendant training** in Nepal was deemed highly successful and all 15 students returned to their home villages and are working. TRAS agreed to fund one SBA training each year for 15 students for the following four years. The SBA graduates will deal with emergencies in pregnancy and difficult births, saving hundreds of lives.

Delayed by politics and new banking restrictions, **the 2023 SBA training** has only just started. IDEA has selected 15 rural health practitioners who are now undergoing an intensive 3-month course in Pokhara. The Ministry of Health is providing one trainer, with IDEA supplying the other trainers and room and board for the participants. The Ministry of Health certification that graduates will receive will ensure their employment as a vital part of the health system, particularly in remote areas. Donations to the SBA project will be matched by a TRAS donor until December 31!



7. The need for the **Munsel-ling School examination hall floor** was described in our October newsletter. Once TRAS agreed to fund it, the teak flooring was delivered to the Spiti Valley, along with a team of workers, and the school managed to get the floor completed before the road closed for the winter months! Already the students have taken advantage of it and have been sitting for exams in relative comfort and warmth, instead of in the chilly courtyard or on freezing flat roofs (*photos below: before and after*).



## A Round-Up of Projects in 2023 (cont'd)

We are looking for the following amounts still needed for 2023/24. Thank you in advance for your support!

PROJECT	Total Cost	Amount Still Needed for 2023/24
CTA Flood Relief	\$5,000	\$1,000
CTA Tibetan Nurses' Training (\$875/student)	\$6,850	\$6,700
IDEA Skilled Birth Attendant Training (\$1,133/trainee)	\$17,000	\$15,400
Hope for Children – Aman	\$15,000	\$15,000
Hope for Children – Vimarsh	\$15,000	\$15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$58,850</b>	<b>\$53,100</b>

General donations are always welcome to build up TRAS' capacity to support our partners. TRAS will use these funds wisely, allocating them to the greatest need at the time.

## Full Circle: A story to warm your heart | by Khechog

TRAS was recently contacted by a Tibetan Canadian, Khechog, asking if he and his friends could sponsor some children at the Tibetan Homes Foundation (THF) in Mussoorie, north India. TRAS has arranged sponsorships at THF since the early 1960s, and sensing a story, TRAS asked Khechog how he came to hear of TRAS and THF. Here's what he told us:

"I was born in Tibetan Homes Foundation where my parents served as foster parents in Home 13, one of the 25 homes, each holding 25 children, most of them orphans or semi orphans. As a teenager I was transferred to Home 8/18, a large Victorian building which housed two Homes. It had a plaque indicating it was funded by TRAS. One of my cousins at THF had a sponsor in Vancouver through TRAS. He received gifts from his sponsor including a subscription to a BC magazine, and I always looked forward to the photos of beautiful BC scenery.



*Khechog at the back, held by his late father at THF*



*TRAS' very first project in 1963 was the repair of this home and food and clothing for the children. The plaque explains that TRAS donated this home.*

In 1981, my family moved to Alberta and I graduated from high school and then from university with a degree in Electrical Engineering. There are around 25 THF alumni in Calgary, about twice that many in Toronto and a few in BC. This past April, THF organized an event to express gratitude to His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala and I attended. On my return to Canada I decided to help the current students at THF and organized the first fundraising event for THF in Alberta, raising \$10,500 and finding sponsors for 16 students.

One project we decided upon, during our visit to THF, was to improve nutrition for the THF children and we are very grateful that TRAS has agreed to endorse this project and also to look after the sponsorships."

It's wonderful to see the circle completed, as Khechog gives back to help today's children at THF. Thank you, Khechog, for your generous donation and for entrusting TRAS to carry out your wishes.



# 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



**Let's support the kids!**

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ Please send event information and newsletters by e-mail

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### Please allocate to:

- ☐ Sponsorship \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for (name of child/youth) \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Project Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for (name of project) \_\_\_\_\_
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- ☐ General Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for wherever it is needed most

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**Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!**

