



Looking back, looking forward

Dear TRAS members and supporters

TRAS held its 62nd Annual General Meeting on September 4, looking back over the year from April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 – and the view was pretty good! The meeting was held via Zoom, with President Russil Wvong presiding. The reports below give a picture of the work accomplished over that year with our partners in India and Nepal and of the state of the Society. At 62 years of age, TRAS is still holding its own, small but vital, thanks to the support and generosity of its faithful members and donors.

And now we look forward to more of the same – Tibetan nurses, Nepali midwives, education overhauls in Indian villages and Tibetan schools and to a new venture in an even more remote corner of the Himalayas, Zanskar.

Administratively, we say goodbye to a busy director, and celebrate Joanne MacLeod's 10 years on the job as office manager. We say hello to new ways of financial reporting and – we trust – new friends with whom to continue this journey of hope for the children of the Himalayan region. We are sorry that Raheesa Jina is leaving the TRAS board. Now doing her residency in family medicine, she is probably entering the busiest stage of her training. We thank her for her help on the board and wish her well.

Joanne MacLeod is staying, thank goodness! 10 years with TRAS and she's still the cheerful, friendly voice that greets all members and potential sponsors, and for that we are sincerely grateful. Her job is 'part time' but Joanne adds many hours of her own time to thinking up new ideas. "Let's have a dinner", says Joanne — and it happens! (see page 5).



Joanne (centre) with TRAS directors (left to right) Russil Wvong, Lynn Beck, Frank Beck, Kevin Yuen and (kneeling) Abby Fitch

President's Report:

Annual General Meeting | September 4, 2024

Russil welcomed everyone to the Zoom meeting. He said, "Once again, I'm really grateful for your ongoing support for the health and education of children and young people in Nepal, northern India and Tibet. TRAS exists because there are people, here in Vancouver and elsewhere in Canada, who want to help children in the Himalayas. Instead of sending people overseas to do the work, we work with local non-profits in the region, who know what the most important needs are on the ground." Now that Covid is mostly behind us, Russil said we will make a concerted effort to hold more in-person events, like the lunch in Victoria in May and the social dinner in June in Vancouver. We'll also aim to participate in more events hosted by other groups, such as the upcoming Himalaya Fest in Victoria. Russil thanked Raheesa and Joanne, the Board of Directors, our volunteers and in particular our donors, without whose support the Society could not exist. The list of returning Directors is on Page 8, and Russil invited anyone interested in helping TRAS to contact him.



The Financial Annual Report | 2023-2024

Our 2024 fiscal year financial statements to March 31, 2024 were presented in a new way to be compliant with upcoming changes to generally accepted accounting principles.

Contributions made towards specific programs, such as projects and scholarships, as requested by donors, are only recognized as revenue when those contributions are disbursed. Until then, they are categorized as deferred contributions.

Programs that TRAS has decided it would like to fund in the future are now labelled under internally restricted funds, and can be funded from future donations or presently available assets.

Unrestricted funds are assets that have not been allocated to any future programs, and can be used to support TRAS expenses.

There will no longer be a presentation of restricted funds from prior years, where they were a combination of donations towards specified programs and TRAS-elected amounts to future programs.

While our overall assets (cash and securities) are lower at 376K compared to 2023 at 401K, TRAS is still in a good position to support initiatives planned for at the end of fiscal 2024.

In 2024, you will notice that internally restricted funds show the projects and scholarships that have continued from prior years and the amounts TRAS will be disbursing over the next three plus years. These total 110K for projects and 119K for scholarships, of which 48K will be for the next two years of funding by our four partners (the first year of this funding was sent in the summer of 2024). The remaining 71K will be for the support of future students selected by our current scholarship partners.

The unrestricted funds in 2024 were 102K compared to 75K in 2023. This means that 2023 had more commitments that were funded in 2024, and the balance of commitments was a bit lower in 2024.

In 2024, donations received were about 118K compared to 123K in 2023 (not presented in the financials due to the new presentation).

The financial statement will be published on the TRAS website as soon as the new changes have been incorporated.

Kevin Yuen, Treasurer

TRAS Projects Annual Report | 2023-2024

This was a satisfactory year for TRAS projects in several ways, in spite of some concern over our finances. The Society has been feeling the effects of years of lack of support from CIDA and the subsequent dipping into our savings — but thanks to our donors, we have been able to help our partners in India and Nepal in a meaningful way. In 2022/23 we allocated \$99,000 to projects; we sent \$82,000 in 2023/24.

After several years when emergency health work and Covid-related projects were a priority, this year our partners returned to more regular work on educational projects.

Our two health education projects are going well

TRAS continued to support the CTA nurses training for eight Tibetan students in India. Five young women graduated during the year and five new students started this three-year course in various Indian teaching hospitals.

In Nepal, after the IDEA academy ran a successful pilot project for the Skilled Birth Attendant training, TRAS approved a four-year project to support the training of 15 students each year. In February 2024, the first 15 students successfully completed the intensive three-month course and are all working in rural health clinics and posts.

On the educational front in schools, TRAS completed two outstandingly successful projects and approved seven new efforts.

The two successful projects were the Voice of Children projects run by Aman and Vimarsh (local Indian NGOs in the Almora and Nainital regions of northern India). Over a ten-year period, these two small NGOs accomplished enormous change. Starting with the mission to encourage all children to go to school, they now have self-sustaining programs with no school dropouts, busy computer classes, university scholarship recipients, and lowered rates of child labour and marriage. Support for women, for female health, for baby and child immunization, job training for young women and general community welfare are all now taken for granted. Their small libraries are flourishing. The two NGOs feel confident that the 11 villages in the program will carry on these programs with minimal oversight.



The 7 new projects

- Building on the Voice of Children success, Aman and Vimarsh have started working in 9 even more remote villages which asked for help, and TRAS agreed to fund an initial two-year project called **Hope for Children** in each of the two regions. From November 2023 to March 2024 an astonishing amount has been accomplished and TRAS is hoping to be able to fund these two projects beyond the initial two years.
- **Munsel-ling School**, supported by TRAS since 1996, asked for help with flooring for the examination hall (a government requirement for accredited schools). Until this year, the students taking their all-important Grades 10 and 12 examinations sat on the ground, bitterly cold in winter. For the students' sake, the school requested funds to install a wooden floor. TRAS approved this project, agreeing to the more expensive hardwood option on the understanding that no project would be approved in 2024/25.
- Thanks to two generous supporters, TRAS was also able to increase the number of books in the **Munsel-ling School library**.

(continued on page 4)

The 7 new projects (cont'd)

- **Jamyang Ling School**, Zanskar, is hoping to rebuild its small, dark, dilapidated classrooms and TRAS has agreed to allocate \$5,000 to this project. It is jointly run with the Tibetan Children's Education Foundation in Montana, US. Zanskar is in Ladakh, a remote, high-altitude semi desert in the heart of the towering Himalaya mountains; the people and their culture are Tibetan.



No ventilation and poor light in crumbling classrooms

- **The Tibetan Homes Foundation** in Mussoorie, north India, was one of the first two Tibetan children's homes opened in India and has been supported by TRAS since 1962. Currently TRAS has agreed to allocate donations from Tibetans in Alberta to a food supplement program at the THF.
- **The Ray Yee Memorial Fund** supported a small project at each of the three Tibetan schools in Arunachal Pradesh (augmenting diet, school maintenance and staff quarters).



Comfy mattresses for the teacher and family

TRAS answered one emergency request from the Tibetan Department of Home (Dharamsala) after devastating floods damaged at least four Tibetan settlements in Himachal Pradesh. TRAS sent \$5,000 to build a retaining wall along a river, to protect the Tibetan settlement there.

Daphne Hales, Projects Director to March 31, 2024

The TRAS Scholarship Fund: Annual Report | 2023-2024

The TRAS Scholarship Fund has been very successful. It was started in 2013 with two students as a pilot program with Rinchen Zangpo Munsel-ling School in Spiti. 57 students have now graduated from post secondary institutions as nurses, teachers, pharmacists, engineers among many other professions and 23 students are currently receiving scholarships.

NGOs currently in our Scholarship program:

- **AMAN** in Almora
- **VIMARSH** in Nainital
- **Dekyiling Handicraft Center** in Dekyiling
- **Rinchen Zangpo Munsel-ling School** in Spiti

Three of the four NGOs have selected new candidates this year. Out of the six new candidates, four are entering nursing, one is pursuing a BSc in biology and one a mechanical engineering degree.

The Dekyiling Tibetan Centre was unable to select new candidates as they had a change of managers over the past year.

Eight students graduated this year, and the results were outstanding. For example:



Soni M. from AMAN has finished her BSc, is pursuing a Masters in sociology, aspiring to a career in the government sector. During her studies she also managed the community library in Almora transforming it into a vibrant learning hub.

Kriti K. (photo left) from VIMARSH graduated with an Honours English degree with a mark of 97.4%. She has secured a job earning 20,000 rupees per month. Household income for labourers in her district is often 1,000-1,500 R per month. This is a good example of upward mobility through education. She is saving for her Master's program and plans to go on to a PhD and hopes to become a University Professor!

Kesang T. from Munsel-ling School has graduated with a BSc and is enrolled in a 2-year Teachers Training program with a goal of becoming a much-needed science teacher.

Tenzin B., also from Munsel-ling School, who lost both her parents to Covid, has just completed her Bachelor of Nursing. She is studying for her competitive exams to continue further in nursing.

As you can see, these students have acquired skills and a vocation that will give them the resiliency to thrive in uncertain times. This will help to sustain their families and communities.

Lynn Beck, Scholarship Director



Other 2024 Events

The **TRAS summer dinner** in June at the Momo Hut in Vancouver was a great chance for directors and members to mingle, chat and dine on wonderful Tibetan and Nepali food! It was a noisy, cheerful gathering and we are already looking forward to another such event early next year!

The **Tibetan Festival** held in August at the Shipyards in North Vancouver was another lively event. Megha Shakya and Joanne MacLeod took TRAS pamphlets and books and connected with the Tibetan Cultural Society of BC President and members. We hope to do more next year!

The Sponsorship Annual Report | 2023-2024



Sponsorship enables Tibetan children in India to receive a quality education and to learn more about their Tibetan culture and language.

The sponsorship program began in May 1964 with 13 sponsors. Today we have 73 sponsors supporting 119 children. Over the years our sponsors have helped over 815 children graduate, with many of them going on to post-secondary studies.

In 2023-24 12 children moved on: ten successfully graduated from school, one was selected for free education and one did not return to school as her father had passed away and her mother wanted her at home. *(photo: Children at the Tibetan Children's Village Suja)*

School reports, letters and cards were forwarded to many sponsors during the year. Many sponsors send cards and letters, and they have been warmly received by the children who love to hear from their sponsors.

Sponsorship disbursements are sent to the schools and settlements twice a year and we thank everyone who paid for the 2024 year. Sponsorship renewal letters will go out in December via email for 2025.

We would like to give as many Tibetan children as we can a chance to grow up healthy and with enough education to improve their lives and those of their families and communities.

Please contact us at info@tras.ca or call 604-224-5133
if you would like to sponsor a child.

Joanne MacLeod, Sponsorship Manager

A first!

... the inaugural Himalaya Fest in Victoria on Saturday, October 5, from 11am to 4pm. Don't miss this lively day in Centennial Square, Victoria! People from several Himalayan countries will take part, showcasing dancing, crafts, food and music. The Tibetan Cultural Society of Vancouver Island will be there!

www.tcsovi.com/himalaya-fest



Books, books and more books!



Thanks to Dr. Yosef Wosk and his determination to spread the joy of reading and learning far and wide, TRAS is helping hundreds of children with a supply of new books! The Yosef Wosk Family Foundation has given TRAS \$19,000 to provide a much-needed supply of new books to 6 Tibetan schools in India. The schools are in Chauntra (2), Suja, Tenzingang, Miao and Tezu. This gift has also enabled AMAN and VIMARSH to create a new village library in seven of the nine villages in the Hope for Children project regions (the other two have already been supplied with a library last year). We are hoping soon to open a library in Dolakha — the village in Nepal which was devastated in the 2015 earthquake and where TRAS members helped to replace all the toilets. And most exciting of all, we are helping a new school in distant Zaskar build its first library.

Several years ago, directors Lynn and Frank Beck trekked in Zaskar. Director Sanjeev Singh has visited there too. They all describe this area as stunning, a high desert surrounded by towering Himalayan peaks, but not an easy place to get to or to live in. Through the Tibetan Children's Education Foundation (TCEF) in Montana, we learned about this region, in Ladakh, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama has encouraged us to work: he says it is the last place where Tibetan culture survives in a pure form. With TCEF, TRAS is helping to rebuild classrooms at the Jamyang Ling School, and now, thanks to Dr. Wosk, we are able to help another remote school, the Rainbow School, furnishing their new library. Here is a report from the principal:

"We are reaching out on behalf of the Rainbow School in Nerok, Zaskar, located amidst the breathtaking Himalayan region of Ladakh, known as 'Little Tibet', 3,500 meters above sea level. Zaskar's population is around 20,000.

Established in 2019, our school stands as a beacon of hope in a landscape characterized by a dry and harsh climate, with surface access closed for four or five months each year due to heavy snowfall and challenging mountain passes.

Rainbow School faced an unforeseen challenge when the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic reached our high-altitude village. The school had to close for two years. Undeterred by this, our dedicated and passionate staff rallied together and initiated a remarkable program. With permission from the local authorities, adhering strictly to Covid-19 protocols, we ventured into the villages, assembling in open fields and community halls. We assigned homework, checked progress weekly and engaged with our students to ensure their education remained a priority.

From a humble start with 20 children, today we are proud to report an enrolment of 130 students, aged 6 to 13 years."

The school takes day students from surrounding villages, adding one grade a year until the school reaches Grade 8. The school building was supported by a Swiss non-profit. Now the school is literally preparing a small library room as you read this, and TRAS (thanks to Dr. Wosk's gift) is paying for child-friendly tables and chairs, wood flooring and paneling up to 4ft (all built by local artisans) — and, of course, the books!



The Zaskar schools, starting from scratch with local determination and vision and a little help from abroad, remind us so much of the early days of Munselling School in the Spiti Valley — which now teaches over 500 students, is accredited to Grade 12 and whose graduates are working wonders in their community. We are so excited to be part of this vision in Zaskar!

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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Tony Phillips

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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 E: info@tras.ca W: tras.ca

Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!

