

WINTER NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2026

Trans-Himalayan Aid Society

President's Report

by Russil Wvong

As we approach the end of 2026, I'd like to thank you for being part of TRAS! The Himalayan region – and northern India, Nepal, and Tibet – is a part of the world that's very beautiful, but also poor and underserved, due to its remote location. For the last 65 years, the Trans-Himalayan Aid Society has existed as a way for people in Vancouver, and elsewhere in BC and Canada, to help support the health and education of children and young people in the Himalayas. They're the future of the region.

We take a grassroots approach, working with trusted local partners. We don't send people from Canada to do the work. Our partners know what the most critical needs are, and how to address them over the long term.

In the Almora and Nainital districts of Uttarakhand in northern India, in the foothills of the Himalayas, we're supporting a project run by two Indian partners, AMAN and Vimarsh, called **Hope for Children**. The project provides crucial assistance to about 800 children in nine remote villages, which are mired in severe poverty, and where there's a notable absence of adequate educational facilities. The project provides Education Support Centres to give children regular academic help, as well as opportunities for play and for creative activities, to build their confidence and creativity. Better literacy, health awareness and skills training for youth unlock doors to higher education, employment, and improved quality of life for marginalized sections of society. Empowering women, children, and adolescent girls reduces domestic violence against women, child labour, and child marriage. Read on Page 4 what one girl has accomplished with the confidence she gained from Hope for Children.



TRAS has committed to provide funding of $61,868 to Hope for Children, over two years (about $77 per child). If you'd like to donate towards this project, please call Joanne at the TRAS office, at 604-224-5133, or you can donate online through tras.ca/donate.

Thank you again for all your help! I hope you enjoy the holiday season with your family and friends. Best wishes for 2027!

A Heartwarming Response

TRAS is so grateful for your quick response to our request for funds to aid the victims of the tragic flood in Nepal. You donated over $6,000 which have been sent to the Snow Lion Foundation, the Tibetan organization which looks after the welfare of Tibetans and other Himalayan people in Nepal, to help towards the school fees of the 92 children who lost their parents and their homes.
The students are at the SLF school in Kathmandu, where staff and local Tibetans are consoling and supporting them.



Join Us for Dinner!

Shake off the winter blues – and no doubt the raindrops – in Vancouver and join TRAS directors for a fabulous Indian/Tibetan dinner.

Wednesday, January 20, 2027

Akbar's Restaurant
1905 W. Broadway (between Burrard and Arbutus) | Vancouver

$40 person | Doors open at 6.30pm | Dinner at 7.00pm

Expect good food, interesting conversation, and lots of treasures to buy!

SAVE THE DATE!

More details will come by email (so make sure Joanne at the TRAS office has your email address!).

'TIS THE SEASON!

…… when you might need a few gifts to give your family and friends – or just something cozy or unusual for yourself!

Come shop at TRAS for warm shawls and toques, attractive jewelry and ornaments, and bags galore! All handmade by Tibetan and Nepali crafts people.

Look at the Handicraft section of the TRAS website or visit the office (check with Joanne first about opening hours).



All proceeds go to the TRAS projects.

Contact Joanne at info@tras.ca or 604-224-5133

Another Year

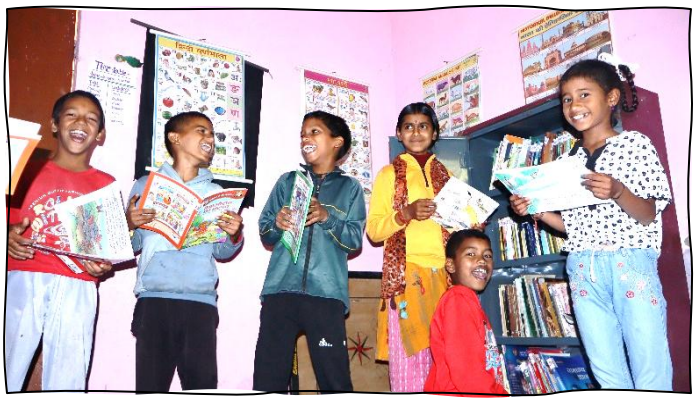
The world is in turmoil on many fronts, but far away in Himalayan villages children are going to school regularly, reading books and eating well. Young people are acing exams and training as nurses, scientists and technologists. Mothers and newborns are more likely to survive. And school buildings are improved. **AND ALL BECAUSE OF YOU**, our stalwart members who keep on giving! Here's a quick overview of the projects TRAS did this year and will be continuing to support in 2027, with your help!

Children Are Going to School

In the nine remote villages Russil talks about, children are indeed going to school, with many going regularly for the first time, thanks to the Hope for Children Education Centres. Through various projects and sponsorships In the Spiti Valley over 500 children attend the excellent Munsel-ling School and its satellite village schools where 30 years ago there was no education. In the Tibetan settlements in Dekyiling, Chauntra, Rajpur and Suja TRAS sponsors children learning their own language and culture as well as Hindi and English.



They Are Reading Books



Yes, they are reading, with far-reaching results. Thanks to the Wosk Family Foundation, those 9 villages in north India, plus four in Nepal, plus one Tibetan settlement, plus two schools in Ladakh all have more books this year.

In the nine Indian villages, volunteers run the little libraries and this year asked the children and community members what reading material they needed and wanted. A youngster in each village compiled the list of a wide variety of needs and everyone has benefitted.

In the four Nepali schools, three schools augmented their supply of books and the fourth created a useful library for the baccalaureate program leading to university entrance – with more girls enrolled than boys. This in a region where poverty-stricken families have sold their daughters into menial work in rich families' homes.



The library used for the baccalaureate program

The Tibetan settlement in Clement Town has created 'nooks' in their classrooms where children can become absorbed in reading. The school embraces children from other Himalayan peoples as well as Tibetan, with typical Buddhist kindliness.

In Ladakh the Rainbow School principal, on the rarely undertaken two-day trip from the high mountains to New Delhi, ordered lots of books – serious ones for the older students and story books, including a complete set of Tintin books, for the younger children.

He says the kids were thrilled with Tintin – especially Tintin in Tibet! These Ladakhi children found their scenery, their dress, their customs in the story – the first time they had seen themselves mirrored in a book! Three cheers for Tintin!!

(continued on Page 4)

Another Year (cont'd)

The Jamyang-Ling School, also in the high mountains of Ladakh, is now furnishing the library in their rebuilt school after years of worrying more about sagging beams, rotten walls and roofs than a good supply of books. The books will open the eyes of the children and widen their vision of the world and its opportunities.

Books will wing their way to more schools in 2027.

They Are Eating Well

Thanks to the Ray Yee Memorial Fund and other supporters, supplements to their diet were supplied to the three Tibetan schools in Arunachal Pradesh run by the Sambhota Tibetan Schools Society (STSS). The schools report that the children are indeed eating well. Many nutritious vegetables and fruits, along with protein from chicken and eggs, have been added regularly to the usual diet of rice and lentils. The schools all report healthier kids, less illness and greater attention to schoolwork. TRAS hopes to continue this healthy project in 2027.



Young People Are Acing Exams

The TRAS Scholarship Fund is supporting 21 university students at present through this Fund – and the students are all doing well. They come from the Hope for Children villages, Dekyiling Tibetan Settlement and Munselling School in Spiti Valley. They are the latest of the 84 students TRAS has supported, after rigorous local interviews, for their higher education, and at present most are studying in the health, social work and science fields. An example of the cumulative effect of Hope for Children's good schooling combined with all round confidence and skill building is Rashmi Kandpal, a member of Vimarsh's Youth Organisation. "It has given me the opportunity to understand gender discrimination, violence against women, and the impact these issues have on the lives of women and girls. These experiences have inspired me to work towards bringing positive change in society.



Through my association with Vimarsh, I got the opportunity to work as a Paralegal Volunteer, and this gave me the confidence to take initiatives in support of people's rights." Rashmi helped 300 villagers obtain their identification cards, conducted awareness activities and helped many access government welfare schemes and appropriate support. She is now pursuing a Master of Social Work degree and looking forward to making a meaningful contribution towards promoting dignity, equality and justice for women.

(continued on Page 5)

Another Year (cont'd)

Young People Are Training As Nurses



TRAS is sponsoring eight Tibetan nursing students a year. They are studying for a three-year Bachelor of General Nursing and Midwifery at some of the best colleges in India. Of the eight students sponsored in 2026, four have successfully graduated and four new students have been selected – they come from Tibetan settlements in Karnataka, Odisha and Nepal. Three have been accepted to the prestigious St. John's College of Nursing in Bengaluru and the fourth student is studying at Jamia Hamdard University in New Delhi.

Mothers and Newborns Are More Likely to Survive Childbirth

Thanks to IDEA, an academy in Pokhara, Nepal, a Skilled Birth Attendant (SBA) training course is making a real difference to mortality rates for pregnant women and their babies in rural areas of Nepal. Once suffering one of the highest childbirth mortality rates in the world, Nepal is improving the situation. IDEA, working with the Ministry of Health, provides a three-month intensive advanced midwifery training for 15 health workers each year. TRAS has supported the training of 75 SBAs so far and hopes to continue these trainings in 2027. Mr. Ramesh Devkota, the founder and director of IDEA, spoke to TRAS members via Zoom in October (see Page 7 for more).

School Buildings Are Improved

Finally the Jamyang Ling School in faraway Zanskar, Ladahk, is habitable again!
Climate change brought torrential rains to this mountainous desert region formerly known for its freezing, snowy winters followed by parched, dry summers. An earthquake was the final straw. The traditional Tibetan buildings with their mud walls and roofs are no match for today's weather and the school had been condemned. TRAS partnered with the Tibetan Children's Education Foundation of Montana and made a small contribution towards rebuilding the school, with steel posts and cement to support the wooden beams and walls and a metal roof to protect it. TRAS also provided funds for a library and a supply of books.



(continued on Page 6)

Another Year (cont'd)

In the Spiti Valley, Munsel-ling School is upgrading its solar water heating system, using the months of sunshine to heat water for bathing the children and taking the chill off the buildings. As well as keeping the children clean and warm – and healthy – this system also saves on expensive fuel costs. The water tanks are installed and the system will soon be up and running. TRAS paid half the cost, with funds from the UBC Global Health Initiative.



So, what's the cost of all this good work in 2027?

TRAS has committed to fund the following projects so far in 2027. Now we need to raise the funds!

- **Hope for Children (AMAN):** $16,400 multifaceted trainings in five villages
- **Hope for Children (Vimarsh):** $14,600 multifaceted trainings in four villages
- **Libraries:** $15,000 for furnishings and books in 11 villages
- **STSS Supplementary Diet:** $6,200 at three Tibetan schools in AP
- **The Scholarship Fund:** $24,000 for 24 university students
- **CTA Nurses Training:** $7,000 for eight student nurses
- **IDEA SBA Training:** $18,000 for 15 skilled birth attendants

Please continue to support these projects with your usual generosity. Thank you!

Sponsorship Report

by Joanne MacLeod

TRAS has several children at the **Tibetan Children's Village in Lower Chauntra** who are waiting for a sponsor. These children all come from very poor families from the rural communities in the Kullu Valley, Rivalsar, and the Tawang district of Arunchal Pradesh, India. Their parents are very happy to have their children admitted to a Tibetan boarding school with full board and keep, as well as schooling.

An annual sponsorship of $504 will give children at the TCV the opportunity to receive a quality education and learn the Tibetan language and customs as well as Hindi and English.

We also have four children at the **Tibetan Women's Center, Rajpur,** who will be starting school next year and are seeking sponsorship.

One little girl, **Namduk**, born September 1, 2023, is expected to begin her educational journey at a Montessori school located near her home in Rajpur in the coming academic year. This will be an important new beginning in her young life, providing her with opportunities to learn, grow, and develop her abilities.



Her family needs financial assistance to support her early education. She comes from a family of two children. Her grandparents also live in the home. Her parents earn their livelihood through a small seasonal business, and their financial situation remains uncertain throughout the year. This makes it difficult for them to meet the educational expenses of their children.

Your support would make a meaningful difference to these children and give them the opportunity to begin their education with confidence while providing much needed relief to their families.

Annual sponsorship for children at the Tibetan Women's Center is $252.

Please contact Joanne (604-224-5133) if you would like to sponsor a child.

Mr Devkota Came to Canada … via Zoom

As promised, Mr. Ramesh Devkota, the founder and director of IDEA in Nepal, joined us in Canada via Zoom. This genial, compassionate gentleman explained that he was born after the death of his father, leaving his mother to struggle on her own. She spent her life helping pregnant women and, in her honour, Ramesh has devoted his life to advocating for midwife training and presence in the rural areas of Nepal. For 25 years IDEA ran full midwifery trainings successfully. After the government of the day shut down all programs which did not have their own hospital facilities, Ramesh worked with the Ministry of Health to set up a Skilled Birth Attendant training, a three-month intensive training for those already working or volunteering in the health sector. TRAS had funded one batch of midwives and agreed to fund this new SBA program. Seventy-five women have now been successfully trained and are posted to clinics and health posts in rural Gurkha district. The results are excellent –mortality rates are down and newborn babies are thriving. Mr. Devkota introduced a short video of one of the SBA trainees who expressed her gratitude for the training.





There are still problems – the hilly terrain and lack of proper roads mean delayed access to help, cultural habits still impede women from proper care, and now the Ministry seems to be curtailing the three-month training down to a two-month one. Mr. Devkota gave us a detailed picture, and we thank him for this. TRAS will continue to work with him on the best solution for continuing this vital program.

Shortly after the Zoom talk, TRAS member Carole Nakonechny was able to meet Mr. Devkota in person in Pokhara and will visit one of the health posts. Her report will be in the next newsletter.

(Mr. Ramesh Devkota is on the left in this photo)

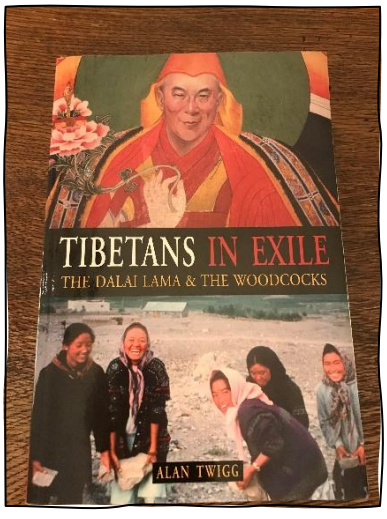
A MUST READ!

by Shelley Guardia

Tibetans in Exile: The Dalai Lama & the Woodcocks

"And so there, in the Delhi radio station, Ingeborg knocked. Behind that door they met scholar-turned-broadcaster Lobsang Lhalungpa, who introduced them to his wife Dekyi. The friendship of these four people started a chain of events that led the Woodcocks to form the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society."
(now known as TRAS)

Get lost in this riveting story, authored by Alan Twigg, about the origins of TRAS in 1962. Follow the Woodcocks and others from Canada to the impoverished corners of India!



This book is available at all Metro Vancouver libraries, as well as several online bookstores.

Better yet, pick up your own copy from the TRAS office for $25!
Pick up some more as gifts.

TRAS

Supporting health and education for children and youth in the Himalayas

1183 Melville Street | Vancouver BC | V6E 2X5
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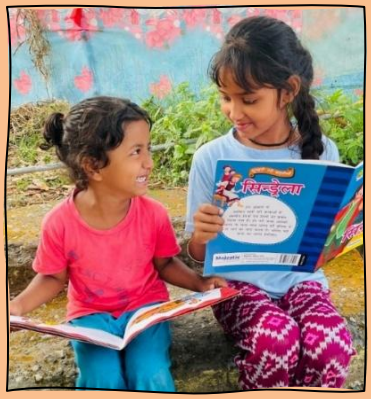

Canada Post prices are pretty high, at $2 per newsletter. Would you be willing to read your newsletter by email instead (and get to see it in colour!)?

If so, please let Joanne know. Thank you!

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☐ Please send event information and newsletters by e-mail
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Please allocate to:

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