



FALL NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2020

First, the Pandemic

We at TRAS hope you are keeping safe and doing as well as can be expected during these surreal times. In North America, floods, fire and toxic smoke have been added to the list of woes many of us are suffering. And how are our friends in India and Nepal? Thankfully we are still hearing good news from most of our partners.

Munsel-ling School in the Spiti Valley tells us that the Valley has been closed off from the rest of India and the virus has been kept out. Informal schooling continues for those they can reach.

READI Nepal in Humla District arranged for the children from the hostel to return home. Only 5 cases have been reported in the entire District to date.

The Tibetan settlements in India where TRAS members sponsor children have dealt swiftly and sensibly to secure the safety of the children and to continue educating those they can reach via the internet.

The Central Tibetan Administration's Department of Education has kept in touch with the TRAS-supported nurses in training and knows they are all safe – though their education is on hold.

The IDEA midwifery course students were also all sent home from their academy in Pokhara, Nepal, and so far all are safe.

The TRAS Scholarship recipients are all well, though with courses online or on hold, their graduation dates will be delayed.

Things are very different for our Voice of Children friends in north India.

The many VOC education components and health workshops in the villages are impossible to run at present and the families are suffering the double whammy of the loss of local daily work and the return of starving, exhausted migrant workers to these villages. The small energetic VOC team reinvented itself to help provide the most destitute villagers with emergency food and hygiene supplies, which our generous donors swiftly paid for in early May (\$5,000). Then, as the villages were overwhelmed by the returning migrant workers later that month, the VOC team also supplied makeshift quarantine centres with vital supplies of food and hygiene products again paid for by TRAS. Recently we have had a further request for help. The government handout of Rs500 per family per month (\$9) and 5kg of rice per month to families below the poverty line goes nowhere and starvation is stalking the most desperate. Once again TRAS quickly responded to a plea from the VOC team, and a third payment of \$5,000 was sent on September 18.



(continued on Page 2)



By the time you read this, the VOC team will have bought the supplies and walked miles to distribute them to those they know need them the most.

If you are able to send a donation to help cover this latest effort, that would be appreciated.



And next, the people

Schools are closed, students scattered, projects on hold (though some learning is going on thanks to online teaching, WhatsApp and informal teaching) so this seems like a good time to introduce you to some of our TRAS family.



We are thrilled to announce that **Dr. Anthony Phillips** has become an **Honorary Patron of TRAS**. Director Lynn Beck introduced Tony to the members at the AGM on September 9 and here is part of her introduction: "I first met Tony when I joined the board of TRAS in 1991. It was the calibre of the people involved in TRAS, including Tony, with their insight into the Himalayan region and its problems that attracted me to TRAS.

Tony had joined TRAS in the late 70s after meeting the Woodcocks. His passion was International Development. He was particularly interested in lifting communities out of poverty through the empowerment of integrated community development projects. With Tony as the Projects Director, TRAS worked with CIDA on many large projects to improve the quality of life in these communities.

Dr. Phillips has had a very busy and accomplished career. He has been an active Professor in the Departments of Psychology and Psychiatry at UBC for 50 years. He has very deservedly been awarded the Order of Canada for his compassion and his accomplishments. (<https://psychiatry.ubc.ca/person/anthony-phillips/>)

It is my pleasure to welcome Dr. Tony Phillips back full circle to TRAS as an Honorary Patron".

Dorothea Leach, our co-Honorary Patron, sends greetings to all her friends at TRAS. Dorothea has been a supporter of TRAS since Day One and she has the photographs from her many trips to India, Nepal and Tibet to prove it! Once the pandemic is over, we plan to visit Dorothea and go through her many photos which make up a visual history of TRAS.

Joanne MacLeod has been our part time office manager now for six years! We can hardly believe the time has whizzed by so fast, and Joanne has made it move smoothly. "What if we did ---" is a constant refrain, from digitizing records, taking over the sponsorship administration, creating a wonderful catalogue of the handicrafts, spreading the word, volunteering to stuff and mail the newsletters during the pandemic, to organizing a lunch in Victoria and dinners in Vancouver. Joanne is the first point of contact for our members, particularly by phone, and her warm, friendly voice is a much-appreciated welcome.



Raheesa Jina joined the Board of Directors last year. She writes:

"As a first year UBC medical student with a passion for global health, I am very excited to be the newest TRAS board member. My interest in global health began during my undergraduate studies, when I spent a summer in Nepal volunteering at Chitwan Medical College, a hospital in the city of Bharatpur. Overall, the trip gave me a better first-hand understanding about global health care, access, and inequality. The experience inspired me to continue seeking to address disparities in education and health care from Canadian soil. Joining TRAS has been an eye opening and meaningful way to achieve this goal. I look forward to getting to know the TRAS family and furthering its mission to continue creating impact for children and youth in the Himalayas". We're happy to have you on board, Raheesa!

André Melrose has been helping TRAS with social media for the past few years. He is leaving us to pursue a Master's degree in international development in Guelph, inspired in part by the Woodcocks and the work of TRAS. We thank him and wish him well. Now we need a replacement! If anyone would enjoy helping to keep TRAS up to date on social media, please contact Joanne at 604-224-5133.

CTA Nurses: Meet two of the young Tibetans who are recipients of the CTA Nurses Training project.

Tenzin Tsomo (2015-18) BGS Academy, Mysore. After completing her course she worked for 6 months in Apollo Hospital, Mysore, and then she served in the Tibetan Community Health Care Centre, Bylakuppe. Now because of COVID-19 she has left her job to look after her mother. She plans to resume her job after all this settles down.



Tenzin Tsomo dressing an old man's leg during her time at the community health care centre



Tenzin Dhawoe (far right) with her classmates during her second-year psychiatric posting

Tenzin Dhawoe (2017-20) St. Martha's Hospital, Bangalore. She is in her third year of training at St. Martha's College of Nursing, Bangalore. Through online classes for 4-5 hours a day, five days a week from April to June, she has finished the theory part. She should have graduated in August 2020 but this is now delayed until the spring of 2021. After completing her course she will either do a BSc nursing or a correspondence course.

In Memoriam

Sadly, we have lost two of our good friends in the past few weeks.

Margaret Johnson, who practiced family law in Vancouver, sponsored many children through TRAS over 25 years. Joanne always enjoyed talking with Margaret, such an obviously compassionate lady. As well as being a constant sponsor of children (Margaret's own children remember her reading their letters with pleasure), Margaret was one of the first to respond when we asked for donations on GivingTuesdayNow in May, to help the VOC villagers, and she had been generous in her support of the Nepali villagers after the terrible earthquakes in 2015.

Jessie Kaye, of Hamilton, Ontario, was a TRAS supporter for years, sponsoring multiple children and enthusiastically "badgering", in her own words, her friends to join in too. Nothing was beyond Jessie – even to encouraging a "staid group of Anglicans" to buy toilets for Indian villages! Do read the article she wrote in the TRAS newsletter dated September 1998, the results in the 'Hats Off to' column in March 1999 and an endorsement of sponsorship in September 2019 (www.tras.ca/newsletters)

We don't know exactly what led these two wonderful women to care so passionately for the children of the Himalayas, though Jessie was intrigued by Dervla Murphy's books, and Margaret had an interest in the books of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but they were both shining examples of the support our members give to TRAS, remaining sponsors and donors for many years and rushing to respond to any emergency. Their dedication has been greatly appreciated, and they will be missed.

TRAS 58th Annual General Meeting

Well, this was a different one! We held it via Zoom on September 9 with 17 people remotely present. The nice thing was that members from out of town were easily able to join us.

President Russil Wvong welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending this meeting in these unsettling times. Following are excerpts from the Directors' reports, adapted for this newsletter. Full reports can be found under "Latest Updates" at www.tras.ca.

President's Report for April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020

by Russil Wvong

"TRAS exists because there are people in Canada who want to help people in the Himalayas. Our approach is grassroots-based: instead of sending people overseas to do the work, we work with local non-profits based in the region, who know the most important needs on the ground. Thank you for your generous support of the health and education programs for children and young people in the Himalayas.

The biggest issue at the end of the past financial year and continuing is the COVID-19 pandemic. Both India and Nepal are trying to balance lifting their lockdown measures with the need to control the spread of the virus. This has greatly affected our partners, and thus the Society's work. One of our partners most significantly affected is Voice of Children, and I'd like to mention the first project of the current year – the Voice of Children Emergency Relief Project (see Page 1). We sent out an appeal in May, and our members responded quickly and generously to support this project - thank you!



There are many people to thank for their support of our partners' work via TRAS:

- ❖ Joanne MacLeod, our hard-working Office Manager.
- ❖ Our volunteers, especially our regular volunteers who mail out our newsletter, Beck Lamb (who does the desktop publishing for the newsletter), and Maria Rubinchik and André Melrose (who help to maintain our website and Facebook page).
- ❖ Our volunteer Board of Directors. As an institution, TRAS couldn't exist without the directors who are willing to carry the responsibility of making it run.
- ❖ And finally, our donors - the work that TRAS supports in the Himalayas happens only because of your support!"

Treasurer's Report

by Kevin Yuen

Donations: The year April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020, saw a sizeable increase in donations with approximately \$229K compared to \$164K in 2019. Specified donations of \$31K went directly to projects, \$11K to scholarships, \$54K to sponsorships, and \$133K went to general funds.

Disbursements: \$78K was distributed to the projects including \$28K to Voice of Children and \$22K to READI Nepal, with \$14K to Munsel-ling roof repairs, \$6K to CTA nurses training and \$5K to IDEA Midwifery. \$18K went to the TRAS Scholarship Fund recipients and \$52K was distributed to sponsorships.

Remaining funds already committed as at March 31, 2020: \$171K

Operating expenses were similar to prior year at \$41K

Auditors: Tompkins Wozny was reappointed auditors for the year 2020-2021

Nominations for 2020-2021

Director Frank Beck put forward the slate of Directors for the year 2020-2021, and this was approved (see list on Page 8). Members wishing to learn more about becoming a director should write to Russil at info@tras.ca.

Projects Report

by Daphne Hales



No school now, just emergency rations

Between April 1, 2019 and the beginning of March, 2020, our partners in India and Nepal continued their good work and the Directors approved the expenditure of just under \$75,000 in total to six projects.

CTA Tibetan nurses training project is a worthwhile way to help not only the individual students but also their families and the Tibetan community as a whole. Four of our eight students graduated recently, and unfortunately one had to end her studies. Five new students will start their three-year general nursing and midwifery course as soon as possible.

Voice of Children project is in the foothills of the Himalayas where two local organizations, Aman and Vimarsh, work to improve life in the villages around Nainital and Almora. After a very successful year, all education projects and health workshops ceased because of the lockdowns in India, and the VOC teams turned their attention to relief efforts. The situation continues to be deeply impacted by the pandemic.

READI Nepal in the remote far northwestern corner of the country reported excellent school results for the children, with 5 about to take their important Grade 10 exams. Income generation schemes and training for the parents continue, but their highly successful café is emptier than usual. The school closed and the children were sent home at the end of their school year in March, and with their Little Doctor kits they were instructed to help their villages with basic hygiene. So far we hear they are all safe, but the project is on hold.

The Rinchen Zangpo Society for Spiti Development, which created the **Munsel-ling School** in the Spiti Valley in 1994, completed the project to repair the roofs and started on a new project to build a block of flush toilets. This is such a necessity for good hygiene that we agreed to pay half (\$9,000) on the condition that the school could raise the other half. The School was able to secure a government grant for this, so once the road was open in the spring, materials and labour arrived and work got started. Unfortunately the project was not completed before the lockdown, and the school has requested a postponement until 2021.

IDEA (Innovative Education Development Academy) in Pokhara, Nepal, has been training professional midwives for many years. TRAS agreed to pay the fees for 4 girls from remote villages for the 18-month course. All was going well when the virus hit, and the students were sent home. Each was given a kit and instructions to use in their village to educate the local people in best practices to combat the virus. The program is on hold.

Our heartfelt thanks to our donors who continue to support TRAS projects.

Sponsorship Report

by Joanne MacLeod

TRAS members are currently sponsoring the education of 130 individual children (83 girls and 47 boys) from kindergarten up to Grade 12. We have 21 children waiting for a sponsor (see Page 7 for more information).

At the beginning of the pandemic, we contacted all the schools. All have been shut down, with most children returning to their homes. We have not heard of any sponsored children getting COVID-19, but the disruption to their education is severe. Some of the schools have been able to run classes online. We went ahead with the June sponsorship disbursement, so that the money will be available to the schools when needed. Some of the schools have been providing a portion of the sponsorship funds directly to families, since with the lockdown the parents are at home with no income to support their children.

TRAS Scholarship Fund (TSF) report

by Lynn Beck

During this difficult time of COVID-19, the studies of our students in the Scholarship Fund have been thrown into disarray. We have heard back from our partners and thankfully all of our students have been able to return to their families and are well.



Tashi Tsomo

Munsel-ling School in the remote Spiti Valley is lucky that the virus has not reached them and they are taking strict precautionary measures. A trial of online teaching to students who had returned to their villages was, however, not successful. Many remote villages are not connected to the internet and parents are ill-equipped to help their children. So Munsel-ling became creative. TSF college graduates and college students who have returned to their villages have been asked to give back and volunteer with the local children. For example, Tashi Tsomo, with a mathematics degree, is teaching in her village of Rangrik.

One of our first students to have graduated from the TSF, Tenzin Angmo, is now a fully qualified teacher at Munsel-ling School. Since in-class teaching is banned, some 'back door' teaching is happening in the hostels, supplemented with online classes. The current six TSF college students from Spiti are studying online, despite occasional internet issues. 2 new TSF candidates have been chosen for 2020-2021.

Voice of Children currently has eight TSF students, with three more candidates being chosen to start their studies this year. One of the students being supported by your donations is Pooja Arya. She is finishing her third year of a bachelor degree in business with her favourite subjects being income tax and accounts! She is ambitious and wants to pursue an MBA at a top university and is already prepping at home. As is the case with all the TSF recipients, her family income is below the poverty line and she would not be pursuing her dreams without your support of the Scholarship Fund.



Pooja and fellow TSF recipients

Dekyiling has three current students, who are pursuing their courses online. They have decided not to select new students for next year.

As to be expected, there is a wide variety in the ability of the colleges to provide online courses and exams, with some easily adapting while others have been temporarily closed or programs delayed. However, students are expected to pay tuition for ongoing courses. The success of the TSF has been its ability to be flexible in meeting the needs of its students. TRAS is prepared to meet this challenge in these difficult times. Please continue to support our wonderful scholarship students during this terrible pandemic. For information, contact Joanne at the office.

The AGM concluded with the usual chance for directors and members to mingle – this time via Zoom!



Sponsorship

Here are four of the 21 children waiting for sponsors.

If you would like to sponsor a child for as little as \$40 a month, please e-mail us at info@tras.ca with your contact information or phone Joanne at 604-224-5133.

Rigzin

Rigzin, an 11-year-old girl, was born in Ladakh. Her father is serving in the Indian army and her mother is a house wife. There are 3 children in the family. She was studying in Lamdon Model School in Ladakh but her parents sent her to the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) in Lower Chauntra to learn the Tibetan language and culture. TCV accepted her and she is reading in class 6. English is her best subject. She likes to read books in her leisure time.



17-year-old Bhuti first started school at the age of 10 in Tsum, where she was born. Tsum is in Nepal on the border of Tibet. It is a remote village situated in the highland. People living in this region are mainly Tibetan. Bhuti is a fun-loving girl and likes to play football. Her favourite colour is green and she loves thukpa (noodles). Both her parents are farmers and have never been to school. A monk in her village helped Bhuti enroll in the TCV School in Suja. She feels very fortunate to get this opportunity and is now in need of a sponsor. She would like to become an engineer.

Bhuti

Pema

8-year-old Pema was born to a very poor family in the Kullu Valley. His parents are labourers and income is very limited. There are four children in the family. His parents are not able to pay for the education of their children and are very happy that he was chosen to attend the TCV in Lower Chauntra. Pema is very happy in his new boarding school and is learning the Tibetan language and culture.



7-year-old Tenzin was born in Shimla. His father does a petty business selling ready-made garments in remote Indian villages. His grandparents also live with the family. With little income from the seasonal business his parents find it difficult to pay for Tenzin's education. He was admitted in the TCV School, Chauntra, and is learning the basics of the Tibetan language and culture. He is a cute little boy and is fond of cars, video games and eating snacks. TCV is seeking a sponsor for him.

Tenzin

TRAS

Supporting health and education for
children and youth in the Himalayas



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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
☐ Please send me details by e-mail of the Zoom meeting for the TRAS AGM on September 9, 2020

☐ 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

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Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!

