



COVID-19

Who would have thought a year ago – when we were chugging along supporting education projects, scholarship students, Nepali midwives-in-training, laundry and toilet-building projects – that we would spend 2020 getting emergency supplies to rural families at risk of starvation and helping village students access their university and midwifery classes via the internet! The entire world has shifted and TRAS with it.

Our President, Russil Wvong, greets you with this message...

As we approach the end of 2020, we're still in the middle of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic - in BC, we're being asked not to socialize for at least four weeks - but with promising news about effective vaccines, it looks like the end may be in sight. I hope you and your family are staying safe!



COVID-19 has hit India and Nepal hard. On behalf of the TRAS board, I want to express our gratitude to you who donated to the Voice of Children emergency relief project. With no work in the cities, migrant workers who usually rely on day labour have returned to their home villages. In the rural and remote villages around Nainital and Almora (in Uttarakhand State in northern India) where Voice of Children works, there are many households suffering from inadequate food and at risk of severe hunger. Thanks to generous donations from you, our TRAS members, Voice of Children was able to purchase staple foods and basic sanitation supplies and deliver them to the poorest households in the area.

PPE for Tibetan Health Workers in Nepal – Urgent Need!

Now comes an urgent appeal from the Department of Health of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala. For six months, until the end of September, the CTA was able to fund all the COVID-19 related expenses of the Tibetan clinics, health posts and hospitals in India and Nepal, but that funding ran out at the end of September. The Department of Health urgently requests all the friends of Tibet to help in the struggle to keep the virus at bay in the many settlements. So far, they have done a superb job of training staff and teaching the residents to follow good practices. Now they need protective equipment, testing capabilities and medical supplies to continue keeping their population safe. 1,043 Tibetans in India and Nepal have caught the virus and, sadly, 23 have died. If they let down their guard, and the virus takes hold in the settlements, it would be a disaster. The Department of Health has issued an excellent plan of quarantine, containment, testing, tracing and treatment – but it will only happen with funding. Out of the request for \$140,000 to cover costs for one year, **TRAS has offered to pay the \$14,000** needed to purchase a year's worth of personal protective equipment (PPE) for all the staff and helpers in the 12 clinics and health posts in Nepal.

\$40 will provide PPE to all clinics for one day

\$280 will provide PPE for one week

\$1,200 will provide PPE for a month



The program will be overseen for the Department of Health by the Snow Lion Foundation (SLF) in Nepal, which administers 12 Tibetan schools, 12 health posts and a seniors' home. TRAS has had a good relationship with the SLF for many years, helping with several of its projects.

A New Request from Voice of Children



New school supplies for studying at a VOC Education Centre

Besides the emergency relief efforts, the work of Voice of Children (VOC) continues. Even without the pandemic, there are many barriers to education and health services for children and especially girls living in these isolated villages, and with the pandemic, the situation has become even more difficult. It is not just that the seven-month-long school closures have interrupted children's education: their contact with their peers (their ability to play and to socialize) is restricted or non-existent. They are confused, frustrated, and anxious. The good news is that Voice of Children has made sure that their Education Support Centres remain open, so that children can access support and services, including hygiene and sanitation supplies for girls, while setting up a rotation system to ensure that social distancing can be maintained. Sadly, the stress of the pandemic has led to more domestic violence and child abuse, and to instances of child labour. Young mothers are giving birth in less than ideal circumstances at home and alone. The VOC centres are a haven of calm, continuity and problem-solving in these trying times, and although since the harvest, food shortages are not so bad, there are still many small problems which the VOC staff notice and could quickly solve given a bit of cash. They hesitated to ask, but we trust them to do a super job. TRAS has promised an **emergency fund of \$5,000** to VOC to be used at the team's discretion for items not covered in the larger Education project, be it to charge a cell phone for an isolated family, feed a hungry child, support a young mother, or buy disinfectants and cleaning supplies, face masks and gloves for the Education and Computer Centres.

Please donate generously as we urgently need to send out the first \$7,000 to help the frontline workers in Nepal stay safe and be able to do their important job, and \$5,000 to Voice of Children for the most urgent needs.

Now it is over to you, our friends in Canada, to reach out, if you can, to our friends in India and Nepal in their time of need.

Thank you again for all your generosity and support. Wishing you and your loved ones a happy and safe holiday season.

Russil

Note: The three girls in the photo at the top of Page 1 were photographed in happier times when they could be together with friends, at one of the VOC Education Centres.

Good news among the bad

Time and again it has been proven that education and health care are the firm foundation for a community's success. True, we are currently concentrating on the pandemic, but in the long run the education programs and the health trainings are what will nurture and benefit the Himalayan people and communities we care about. So the regular TRAS projects, scholarships and sponsorships continue.

Here's the projects update – there are silver linings in evidence!

Tibetan nurses' training: TRAS supports eight students each year. We were expecting five new students to join the three already in training, but the pandemic slowed everything down. We have just heard the great news that all five have been accepted at India's excellent hospitals for a three-year general nursing and midwifery course. They are starting later than usual and will be doing many courses online – and may have to wait months for their practical training. But at least they are on their way! The girls hail from the Tibetan settlements of Mundgod (2), Dhondenling, Dekyiling and Darjeeling, and all received excellent marks in their Grade 12 exams at Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) schools. **The cost for the eight students for 2020-2021 is \$5,740.**



CTA Nursing Students

L → R: Tenzin Changchup Bhutia, Tenzin Dhasel, Ngawang Tsedzom, Tenzin Jigmey, Tenzin Sangmo

Voice of Children Education Project: TRAS has approved another three-year extension to this project to be delivered by the wonderful staff at the two local NGOs with whom TRAS has partnered – Aman in Almora and Vimarsh in Nainital. Every year these remarkable people, making up the Voice of Children team, see what the needs of their rural communities are and tailor the programs to meet those needs. **The 11 Education Centres** Russil has referred to offer catch-up classes and extra tuition – and these days are a safe place to gather and relax, to calm worries and fears. Schools have been closed for seven months and counting (Grades 10 and 12 opened on November 4 so that students can take the important provincial school exams), so the informal classes at the education centres have been vital in keeping up English, Math, and Science for the older students, and reading and writing for the younger ones. Art and games are always included.



Keeping up their studies



Learning to read

The 4 computer centres are doing really well and this year two of them will offer extra information services. These two centres will help villagers to access computers, the internet and government services they may not have been aware of.



Bhuwan

Good news – one of their early students, Bhuwan, is now successfully running his own electronic business! Read his inspiring story in the full VOC report on the TRAS website (www.tras.ca).

A new **Counselling and Resource Centre** will open in each of the two areas. Domestic violence and child abuse will be addressed, with a counsellor at each location. Domestic violence is on the rise, and girls suffer the most. There has also been an increase in child labour when work is available. The fragile successes in getting families to allow their girls to go to school, teaching mothers to read and write, letting girls grow into adults before marrying are being sorely tried, and the Voice of Children teams are doing their best to save the advances they had made. Regular visits with the parents are an important part of this.

The pandemic highlights the fact that most of the teenaged girls do not have access to sanitary pads, using dirty old rags, as their mothers and grandmothers do. New classes will teach girls how to make homemade reusable pads. They will then be tasked with helping their female relatives and friends to make them too, and they will all be taught good menstrual hygiene.

Another new venture is driving lessons! The driving lessons will be a boost for the girls, giving them self-confidence and a training which will lead in the long run to job opportunities and independence. Yes, Indian scooters and cars belch pollution and it will be a while yet before they have electric vehicles – but it's a start.

Monthly meetings for women, youth and children will concentrate on community awareness and good health.

The fun stuff will continue! The hugely popular children's fairs, the out trips to see a wider world, celebrations on national and world days (all under strict pandemic guidelines), and new school supplies for those who need them will all continue.

Through all these VOC programs hundreds of children will benefit, as will the families. **Cost for one year: \$38,500** (just over \$100 per child, plus all the extra benefits to the communities). Read the full report on the TRAS website (www.tras.ca).

READI Nepal: We are waiting for more details, but we *did* hear that the five Grade 10 students passed their all-important Secondary Education Exam last April and the even better news that two of them have been offered scholarships for diploma studies! One student will be walking for 5 days to reach the Karnali Technical School in Jumla for a diploma in civil engineering. The other will take a three-year diploma course in mid-level agriculture. The remaining three students will continue with Grades 11 and 12 while looking at job opportunities. **A wonderful result for the first class of students to go through the TRAS/READI program!**

Once the full report has been received, it will be posted on the TRAS website. Meanwhile the schools in Humla reopened on November 4, as did the READI hostel for the 15 students from Grades 8 to 10. Sadly the café has been closed all year – zero tourists, Raj reports – but they hope to re-open it next spring. It had become a reliable source of income for the hostel.

Late flash: all schools have been closed again because of serious outbreaks in other schools and hostels (not ours) in Humla District. Things are not good, and they receive so little help in this, the poorest, most remote district of Nepal.

Cost for one year: \$18,700 (for the hostel, schooling for 15 students, outreach to the students now back with their families, and income generation schemes for parents)



The first class, 10 years ago – now they are taking diploma courses!

IDEA midwifery training: We told you earlier this year that the 40 students, including the four supported by TRAS funds, had been sent home from the academy in Pokhara, with kits to help people in their home villages, while studying as much as possible online. This raised the question: how would they be able to study online? Well, they each had to purchase an iPad or a smart phone, internet service and data, often having to go to the nearest place which actually had an internet connection. The cost for each student for the past seven months has been around \$600; so TRAS has offered to pay \$2,400 for the four students we are supporting. This class was meant to graduate last August and be working by now, but it looks as if their final exams and graduation will be delayed at least until next spring.

The next batch of 40 students is being selected five months later than usual, but it is worth the wait to do this well-respected course, and there is the real possibility of a worthwhile job at graduation. TRAS expects to support all 10 rural students this time. The cost for this training will be paid for by a generous donation from a TRAS member who feels strongly that a good beginning to life will stand children in good stead.

Munsel-ling School flush toilets: As we mentioned in September, this project is on hold until next spring, when hopefully workers will be able to enter the valley again. The strict local lockdown has been a boon, as the virus has not spread to Spiti. **The second payment for the toilets will be \$4,360.**



Voice of Children Emergency Response

project: Over the summer, from May to September, as the plight of the villagers worsened, TRAS sent three payments of \$5,000 each to alleviate some of the problems. The complete lockdown from April meant that all daily labour around the villages and all petty selling stopped immediately. For those who depend on daily wages to survive this was a terrible blow. Added to that calamity was the return to their families of tired, hungry migrant workers from the cities where they had been working. With no government help, the villagers had to arrange quarantine quarters, food and cleaning supplies. Thank goodness for the Voice of Children teams who delivered emergency rations and supplies to 248 families, 400 teenaged girls and women, and 90 toddlers and babies. They were indeed the silver linings in the dark cloud cast by the virus.

Annual 24-hour Fast

No talks, no dinners, no fun – but there was a fast!

The pandemic and its rules around social distancing have meant that TRAS, for the first year ever, has had no lectures or slide shows, no fall dinner – no gatherings of any kind (except board meetings by Zoom). We miss you – and plan to meet as soon as it is safe to do so.

But, thanks to teacher Wendy Matsubuchi at Sutherland Secondary School in North Vancouver, the annual 24-hour Fast happened last week! For years the School has run a well-attended 24-hour fast, with the students staying in the Library overnight with one small bowl of rice, while listening to talks given by TRAS and the Nepal Library Foundation, the two charities for which the students raise funds, then sleeping (or chatting) the night away. This year was different – the students stayed at home overnight, watching a slide show prepared by TRAS about the Voice of Children emergency relief efforts. They learned that the Indian government did supply some relief – 5kg of rice and \$9 per family per month – that's $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of rice and 30 cents per family per day. The students' one bowl of rice probably took on new meaning. And they fundraised for TRAS! Fewer than usual took part, but we salute their efforts and thank them wholeheartedly for thinking of others, particularly when their own lives are so difficult at present.

The short slide show is on the TRAS website <https://tras.ca/urgent/voc-covid-photos> if you would like to see it.



Other things that didn't happen this year

Because of the pandemic, many of us have not been able to travel as we might have hoped. While this has been hard for us, the impact on those who depend on tourism has, in many places, been devastating. If you had planned to visit India or Nepal this year, your cancelled trip would have removed the benefits of your stay from the local economy. But life goes on regardless, and a helping hand in the form of a donation to TRAS will ease it for some of the children and youth whom our projects help.



While on the subject of donations...

Another thing to bear in mind as we approach December 31 is whether your tax situation might be helped by giving securities to a charity. With no capital gains levied on such gifts, and a tax break as well, this is a wonderful way to help charities you like and to reset your stock portfolio, should a large capital gain have accrued on some of your stocks. We would be delighted to talk with you about such a donation, or please ask your financial adviser.



Help for the Tibetan, Indian and Nepali children in the foothills of the Himalayas

Here's what TRAS hopes to send in 2021.



Hand sanitizer is the norm for these children

TRAS Scholarship Fund	\$19,000
CTA Department of Health COVID-19 appeal	\$14,000
Voice of Children emergency fund	\$5,000
CTA Nurses Training	\$5,740
Voice of Children Education	\$38,500
READI Nepal Education	\$18,700
IDEA Midwifery	<i>already funded</i>
Munsel-ling toilets final payment	\$4,360
Sponsorship program	<i>self-supporting</i>

Sponsorship Report

by Joanne MacLeod

TRAS members are helping 132 children by paying for a good education along with nourishing food and good care. The 16 children who need sponsors are all listed on the TRAS website (www.tras.ca under Sponsorship – Facts about Sponsorship). Here are four from that list who would love to have a sponsor in their lives and whose families would be so grateful!

Sponsorship of a child costs \$440 a year and makes a world of difference!

Call (604-224-5133) or email (info@tras.ca) Joanne in the TRAS office if you would like to learn more.

Kunga

Kunga is 15 years old. His father works as a cook's helper at the Dekyiling Handicraft Centre's day care. His mother is a weaver at the centre. He also has a younger brother. The income from their work at the Handicraft Centre is very meager and so Kunga needs a sponsor to help him to continue school. Kunga has been sponsored since 2013 but the sponsors had to discontinue at the end of 2019. TRAS is seeking someone who can take over his sponsorship until his graduation in 2024.



12-year-old Tenzin came from Lossar. She has two brothers and two sisters and is the youngest of the family. Her father is a driver and her mother is a housewife. Her family is in need of a sponsor so Tenzin can receive a good education. She has been sponsored since 2016; however her sponsor has passed away. TRAS is seeking a new sponsor to help Tenzin finish her education.

Tenzin

Chewang

Chewang is 14 years old and was born to a poor peasant family in Tungri. The local people make a living from raising animals and agriculture. Winter is very harsh with heavy snow falls. The nunneries in the area help the local villagers in their daily lives. There are three children in the family and the parents are unable to provide for their education. Chewang was very happy to be admitted to the TCV School. His best subject is Tibetan and he wants to become a Tibetan teacher. He likes reading and drawing.



17-year-old Kunga is presently in Class VIII and boarding at the Tibetan Homes School in Mussoorie. The family has very little income and are finding it hard to afford school expenses. They are long time workers at the Dekyiling Handicraft Centre and earn very little as weavers. As workers at the Centre, they are able to apply for assistance through the sponsorship program. Sponsorship of Kunga would be a great relief to his family.

Kunga

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: _____

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- 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:

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Thank you for your generous support to TRAS!

