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TRAS

Fall Newsletter
September 2007

HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND
YOUTH IN TIBET, NEPAL AND INDIA

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Two TRAS members and several University of British Columbia medical students visited northern India in the past few months and have sent us thoughtful reports about the Tibetan settlements they visited. It is great to receive a fresh outlook on how some of the settlements are doing. TRAS is grateful for their reports, and we are sure you will find them interesting.

TRAS members sponsor children at all four settlements – **Tibetan Women's Centre, Tibetan Homes Foundation, Dekyiling Handicraft Centre** and **Munsel Ling School in Spiti** – so if you have a child in one of these places, or would like to sponsor a child there, read on for an up-to-date description.

Raman Kumar, the young man who arranged for his Hamilton high school to send a donation to TRAS for vocational training last year, visited the first three settlements, and was excited to meet one of the children his family sponsors. Here are his impressions.

The Tibetan Women's Centre

The Tibetan Women's Centre (TWC) is a small Tibetan settlement in the city of Dehra Dun, India. Five hundred Tibetans live in the TWC and eighty-five women work in the handicraft buildings weaving carpets, aprons, and other handicrafts. For several decades the settlement has served as a refuge for widowed Tibetan women, providing them with living quarters and a job. The TWC also serves to preserve the traditions and customs of Tibetan culture.

The TWC is composed of a long paved road with administration buildings, places of prayer, and small red brick houses along either side of it. The area is very well-maintained, with the road kept free of litter and the handicraft production rooms kept neat and tidy.

The Tibetans wear a different style of clothing than the traditional Indian saris and kurtas, instead opting for a mix of Western and Tibetan-style clothes. The people on the settlement speak mainly Tibetan, but also a little bit of Hindi and English. The atmosphere is peaceful and relaxed, and Buddhist chanting can often be heard in the background. The Tibetans get along well with the locals in the area, taught from a young age not to start quarrels outside of the settlement.

The TWC is run by Karma, a Tibetan man who is responsible for seeking out donors and managing the day-to-day operations of the settlement. In order for a family to live there, they must have at least one of their family members making handicrafts. Each family receives 1800 rupees per month (slightly less than fifty Canadian dollars) and although this is a small amount, they are also provided with

and medical care. The children living on the settlement go to boarding school funded in part by TRAS, and a man whose child attends a Mussoorie boarding school reported: "I am happy with the education that my son receives." The children return during the holidays and usually seek to further their education by taking tutoring classes in Dehra Dun. The youngest children are cared for in the crèche, which is staffed by two Tibetan women.

The TWC has an organized system of handicraft production. The women are divided into tailoring or weaving, depending on their skills and interests, and the older women take on the gentler but important task of balling wool. The handicrafts – such as carpets, bags, wall-hangings, and pencil cases – are sold mostly to local Indians, while some sell on the international market.

Although the Tibetan Women's Centre is running along well, Karma pointed out that there are still some problems. Finding and maintaining sources of funding is always a struggle, and there are some buildings in the settlement that need to be demolished, as they are unstable.

Overall the TWC gives the impression of a successful and worthwhile project, allowing impoverished Tibetan women to start a new and sustainable life making handicrafts. The TWC preserves Tibetan culture and at the same allows not only Indians, but people around the world to taste Tibetan culture.

NOTE: TRAS buys all its chair mats and carpets from this Centre – the quality is unfailingly good.

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The Tibetan Homes Foundation



The Tibetan Homes Foundation is a large organization located in a beautiful area of Mussoorie, India, overlooking the Himalayan mountains. It manages the

education of 2400 Tibetan students and includes sections for elder care. Many of the students are from destitute Tibetan families, some of whom have only recently immigrated from Tibet.

The Foundation aims to provide a well-rounded education for the students, offering academic as well as recreational opportunities. There are many classrooms as well as a basketball court on the campus. The students live in dormitories on the campus, separated by gender. They follow a fixed schedule, waking up at a certain time, completing chores, and attending class. This teaches them discipline and hard work, skills required to be effective in the Indian workforce. They also learn how to share their space with others and how to maintain a clean and hygienic living area. The students from more prosperous families are able to pay fees for their education, while some of the more impoverished students are assisted by TRAS supporters. Their fees cover tuition, books, and school supplies.

Although TRAS no longer funds the elder care, it is running along smoothly. However, as the elder care facility receives many elderly from other Tibetan settlements, it is becoming more and more important for an expansion in its capacity some time in the near future. The THF is continuously seeking new funding opportunities, as managing a large organization takes a lot of manpower and many facilities. TRAS support is helping many of its students afford their school fees and look forward to a better life.

Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre

Dekyiling is a large Tibetan settlement in Dehra Dun, India with a population of about 4,000, with 85 women weaving aprons, making incense and creating other handicrafts. Dekyiling has many educational facilities in place for the children in the settlement. The infants are taken care of by two Tibetan women in the crèche, which is sponsored by TRAS. The older children, aged 3 to 5, attend the Sambhota school. It is divided into three stages. When a child passes Stage III, he moves on to the elementary school in Dekyiling. There are a total of twenty-seven children in the crèche and Sambhota school, twenty-four of whom are sponsored by TRAS donors.

A larger elementary school in Dekyiling teaches the students mathematics, reading, writing, and other skills.

The school is currently expanding, with another large building under construction. The school fees for some of these children are taken up by TRAS sponsors.

The Dekyiling settlement is managed by Kesang Wangdu who expressed that it is running well but there are problems. There is no facility for the elderly people who do not have family to take care of them. There is a facility for the elderly in Mussoorie, which TRAS once helped to fund, but often times there is no space available there for more residents. In order to ensure the health and safety of the elderly people in the Dekyiling community, the administration is trying to find the funds to build its own facility to take care of them.

Another problem is that Dekyiling has no general use vehicle in its possession for its population of four thousand. Mr. Wangdu requested that TRAS consider funding such a vehicle, costing an estimated six lakh rupee or sixteen thousand CAD, and that Dekyiling would cover the maintenance costs after the initial purchase. He was also open to the idea of buying a used vehicle for a cheaper amount.

Dekyiling is a settlement that thousands of Tibetans call home. Many of these Tibetans were exiled from Bhutan in the 1980s, and Dekyiling has offered them a refuge since that time. TRAS donations and sponsors help to educate the children in the settlement so that they can pursue a career and find their place in Tibetan or Indian society.

NOTE: As well as funding the creche and sponsoring several children, TRAS buys lovely shoulder bags and organic incense from the centre.

Munsel Ling School

A report by Joan Cockell, a TRAS member and volunteer teacher for Jamyang Foundation in the Spiti/Pin Valleys.



Joan Cockell and school director Lama Tashi Namgyal

I visited the Munsel Ling School in Rangrik village in July. Tsering Lara, my Spiti friend and guide, introduced me to school director Lama Tashi Namgyal, whom he knows from his student days in Dharamsala. Lama Tashi was very proud to show off the student health centre, which is making good progress. It seems to be built very sturdily and will be well used when completed.

I also met three of the UBC medical students who were screening the 400 or so Munsel Ling students who come from all over the Spiti Valley, Ladakh and Kinnaur.

I visited several classes, the cutest of which was the kindergarten, where the children were performing *Found a Peanut* with actions. This was of special interest as I will be sponsoring Lara's daughter, Lobsang, when she starts kindergarten in April 2008. The people of Spiti Valley are very hardworking and needy, and really appreciate TRAS sponsorships.

UBC Global Health Initiative: Spiti Munsel Ling School Health Project

This summer, a group of medical students from UBC traveled to Munsel Ling School, in Rangrik, Spiti Valley, India. Our main goals were to improve the health of the children through dental clinics, health screens and setting up the new health centre, as well as focusing on education of the students, teachers and house mothers.



We felt, as well, for a project to have an impact on the community, it needs to be community led and sustainable. Ven. Tashi Namgyal and Sir Tsering Dorje had already requested help in improving the health of their students. TRAS had responded by sending the money to

build a health centre, thereby giving the school a place not only to do medical check-ups but also a place to house the children when they are ill, thereby helping prevent the spread of disease. This summer, we saw the health centre completed and furnished. We are very excited to have it up and running. There is currently one house mother already trained to be a health worker and the school is planning to train another health care worker starting in September at the Delek hospital.

A main goal of the project was to form a partnership between the school and ourselves. We worked closely with Tsewang, the house mother/health care worker throughout our dental clinic, health screen and education projects. Throughout the



summer, we would teach her skills which she can use throughout the school year to help the children.

Since we knew that the health of the children was a major concern to the school, we also tried to address this issue. Working in conjunction with a Dutch NGO, Medical Checks for Children (MCC), we set up a health screen of all the children, focusing on how they were growing, skin infections, as well as hearing and vision. We also treated some of the common illnesses we saw such as ear infections and skin infections. We treated the entire school for the most common illnesses, those being anemia for which we gave iron supplementation, scabies and lice, as well as intestinal parasites. A schedule was set up with the school to continue the treatments after we left. Lastly, in order to help set up a continuity of health care, we created health booklets for each child. All of their illnesses can be documented in these books, as well as check-ups. That way, it is easy to

see how the children are doing with their health over their years at school.

We did not want to arrive with our “western ways” and leave behind little which could be of benefit when we left. Therefore, we focused our efforts on treating and educating about common childhood illnesses, and how to prevent children from becoming more sick. This was achieved mainly through education programs on basic hygiene, especially focusing on oral hygiene. The community realizes that this is a problem, with many children having lost their toothbrushes or brushing inadequately. As well, it is easy to notice decayed teeth and these teeth often give the children pain, which would bring them to dental clinic for extractions. We, therefore, set up areas in the hostels in which the children could store their toothbrushes in a hygienic manner. As well, we



gave each child a new toothbrush and taught the children about proper tooth brushing. Everyone was very enthusiastic about this, teachers as well as students. Dental clinic was run for a week and many extractions were done during this time.

With our funding we received from UBC, we also funded the construction of a winter toilet block. The current toilet situation is unhygienic to say the least and is likely a major contributor to the high number of students with diarrhea. These toilets will be in the style of a traditional Spitian toilet, which is the style in all of the village houses, and will be in use during the coldest months of the winter when flush toilets are not available. The school has also received funds to build summer toilets, which would comprise of semi-flushing porcelain toilets and sink units.

This is a very brief overview of what we achieved this summer throughout our stay in the Spiti Valley. We are excited to plan our project for next summer as we hope to maintain this partnership with the Munsel Ling school and are contemplating expanding our project to other regions of the valley. We will be putting on a presentation to TRAS in the near future with more details of our project so please stay tuned! If you would like more information, please visit our website at www.ubcspiti.blogspot.com.

~ Alisha Mills, UBC Med Class of 2009

TRAS' 45th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

TRAS held its 45th AGM on June 13, 2007, at Langara College in Vancouver. President Russil Wvong welcomed members and friends, and outlined the year's work:

It was busy! We changed office location twice; we said 'goodbye' to Debbi Salmonsens and welcomed Heather O'Hagan as our office manager. We held several events – 2 lectures, a musical evening, a slide show on Spiti and the second Nepali Film Festival.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we ran a small surplus this year, after having to draw down our capital over the past few years to honour our project commitments. TRAS is trying to reduce the office costs still further, with more work being done by volunteers. Russil said,

One major reason that I became involved with TRAS is that TRAS really shows how a relatively small group of people, working over a long period of time, can make a real difference.

On behalf of the TRAS Board, I'd like to thank:

- our many donors, sponsors and volunteers, who have displayed great generosity and commitment. You are TRAS.
- Langara College Continuing Studies, for providing free space and support for almost all our events.
- Our partners in the field, who do incredible work under very difficult circumstances.

Rob Asbeek Brusse presented the Financial Statements for approval. These are available at the TRAS office.

Heather Hamilton-Wright, Fundraising Chair, reported on a successful year of fundraising for specific projects. Most were fully funded, with the balance covered by a generous offer to complete the year's funding by one couple, new members of TRAS. We plan to continue targeted fundraising in the coming year as well as a full slate of events and more talks in our Speaker's Series.

Daphne Hales, Projects Chair, gave a powerpoint presentation to show the human face of the projects, giving life to the statistics. TRAS sent \$63,000 to projects during the year, including three emergency amounts to Nepal to help those afflicted by the conflict.

In fulfilling its mandate of support for health and education for children and youth in the Himalayan region, TRAS with much regret felt that it could no longer accept new projects from the Carmelite nuns in south India, with whom TRAS worked for so many years, funding vocational training for Indian and Tibetan young people. The other longstanding area of work which ceased was support for the elderly Tibetans at Mundgod and Mussoorie, but as several diehard members continue to send donations for the 'old people', TRAS continues to send on these gifts. Mundgod Settlement is specially grateful for the ongoing support for medical care of the elderly sent by the TRAS Victoria Branch.

A full list of current commitments and new projects which need funding will appear in the next newsletter.

Marion Tipple reported on the continued success of the sponsorship program, with \$80,000 going to the children sponsored by TRAS members this year. She gave a fascinating powerpoint presentation on some of the TCV (Tibetan Children's Village) schools in the Dharamsala area, particularly the TCV Suja School in Bir set up for the youth who struggle in from Tibet, desperate for an education. This busy school, set up for a few hundred, now copes with over 2,000 students. The older children from Munsel Ling School in Spiti attend high school in Dharamsala, staying at the Spiti hostel. Their examination results are remarkably good and many are capable of further training, given financial support.

Elections were held for the Society's directors. Russil continues as President for one year. Members elected to the Board are listed on the back page. Russil thanked retiring directors Kathy Gibler, Peter Roberts and Brian Sheffield.

After the meeting, the audience was treated to a brilliant exhibition of classical Indian dancing by TRAS member Zahra Esmail.

Welcome, Ajeet!



We are happy to welcome **Ajeet Gorkhali** to the TRAS Board of Directors. Originally from Kathmandu, Nepal, Ajeet moved to Canada in 2001. He completed his undergraduate degree at UBC in 2005 and is presently working at TD Canada Trust as a Financial Advisor. Ajeet is also an active member and treasurer of the Langara Rotaract Club, a group of Vancouver youths dedicated to making the world a better place. Last summer, when the Club was looking for a project to support in Nepal, Ajeet contacted TRAS. The Club is now raising \$7000 for Buddha Academy Boarding School's vocational training program.

We are delighted Ajeet will take on the coordination of the 3rd Nepali Film Festival in February 2008.

On joining the TRAS Board, Ajeet says: "I am thrilled that now I am part of TRAS. I am very impressed by the ways in which TRAS members devote their time and resources to so many good causes. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to be on the TRAS Board. I will certainly bring some new ideas, and will be as involved as I can to help TRAS with all of its different projects. In fact, all of us at the Club are excited to have the opportunity to work with and support TRAS."

In turn, TRAS is extremely pleased to have Ajeet on the Board and excited to collaborate further with the Rotaract Club. Welcome, Ajeet!

WARM UP YOUR WINTER EVENINGS WITH WONDERFUL NEPALI FILMS!

2007 Nepali Film Festival Films Available to View

With permission from the filmmakers, TRAS is loaning films to individuals for personal viewing in exchange for a donation to TRAS projects in Nepal. Films are all in DVD format with subtitles.



Films:

Machhendranath (Kesang Tseten)
We Corner People (Kesang Tseten)
Stove, Blouse and Gun (Subina Shrestha)
Daughters of Everest (Sapana Sakya)
Trailblazing (Lisa Hoffe)

Film information: www.tras.ca/filmfest

Audience comments:

Daughters of Everest "Hearing about the individual women's lives and dreams and seeing them train, I felt like cheering!" "An amazingly inspirational story."

Machhendranath "Astonishing!"

Trailblazing: "A positive movie about creating job opportunities for women in a male-oriented society."

In return for a donation to TRAS, you can:

- Watch the films in the comfort of your own home. Invite your friends!
- Organize and hold a mini film festival. We'd be happy to advise and help!

Contact TRAS: 604-224-5133, tras@portal.ca

PLEASE HELP THIS KINDERGARTEN IN TIBET



The Need

The Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten is located in the Barkhor district in old Lhasa, the shrinking traditional heart of the city. The school's 60 students are all Tibetan and come from the surrounding district or are the children of transient Tibetan traders. The school provides kindergarten through grade two education to prepare its students for the public school system. There are two Tibetan teachers who provide basic education in keeping with traditional Buddhist culture. Without the school, most of the children would be unlikely to have access to the education system in Lhasa.

Although every family contributes a small amount of money each month for their children's education, it is not enough to maintain the school. Tsarong Phungyal, the eighty year-old principal who founded the school in 1997 after his release from more than seventeen years in Chinese prison, has appealed to TRAS for financial help.

The Response

Thanks to the generosity of its members, TRAS paid the costs of maintaining the school for the 2006/2007 year.

Financial Need

TRAS has committed to funding the school for the 2007/8 year. Only \$8580 is needed to cover the cost of the building rent, maintenance, electricity, licensing fees, teachers' salaries and educational materials for the 60 students.

How you can help

Individual donations are key to TRAS' ability to fund the Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten. By donating to this project, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have contributed to the education and to the futures of Lhasa's Tibetan children.



Thank you to TRAS members for their donations thus far and to the North Shore book club, BC3, for its recent generous donation of \$1,000 to the Kindergarten! (The Best Canadian British Columbian Book Club members raise funds each year for a school in Zimbabwe. This year they had excess funds and decided to help the TRAS project.) This is a wonderful start to reaching this year's goal.

SUCCESS AT MUNSEL LING SCHOOL!

In March, I had the opportunity to visit some of the first students who have received all of their education at Munsel Ling, starting in 1996 when the school was opened by HH Dalai Lama.

For the last 2 years of their education they attend Indian Schools in the vicinity of Dharamsala and live in the Munsel Ling school hostel nearby in Sidbhari. The gifted ones are sent to Chandrigath. Visiting Sidbhari, I was able to meet with some of the students I had first met when they were in kindergarten and Class 1.

From the "urchins" I first met they have grown into wonderful young adults, now in Class 12, bright, articulate and anxious to get higher education so that they can return to help their native Spiti and those who are following in their footsteps. They freely expressed their gratitude to the TRAS members who have helped in giving them a good education and ability to break out of a cycle of poverty and starvation.

~Marion Tipple, sponsorship chair

THEN (1996)



Class 1 in 1996

Youdon and Tashi in front, Dechen and Sangay behind

NOW (2007)



Youdon is studying science, wants to become a doctor and return to work in Spiti



Tashi, an excellent student was sent to Chandrigath for Grade 11 and 12. He is applying for medical school.



Dechen is studying science and wants to join the army



Sangay is a gifted artist

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

These children from the Spiti Valley in northern India are truly needy. Munsel Ling School has taken them in, to feed and house them and give them an education. We are trying to find sponsors for them. Can you help them look forward to a better life?

Chhimet Yangsom, 6 years old from Kaza. She is the oldest child of her family, has a younger brother at the school and a little sister. Her father cannot afford to educate her and has requested help so that she can go to school.

Mentok Dolma, 6 years old was born in a Kweling, a very small village. Her parents are unemployed and starving and need help so that Mentok has enough to eat and can be educated.

Tenzin Pasang aged 8 years was born in Kibber, one of the highest villages in the world. His family is poor and cannot pay for his education. Tenzin is a good student and likes to dance.

Sonam Rabgey is the son of a 60 year old retired primary teacher who has a meagre pension and cannot afford his school expenses. He is also from Kibber, 8 years old and in Class 1.

TRAS

Supporting health and education for children & youth in the Himalayas

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COMING EVENTS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 7:30pm
UBC Medical Students go to Spiti

UBC medical and dental students present a slide show of their fascinating summer at the Munsel Ling School in the remote Himalayan Spiti Valley. They partnered with TRAS and the school to set up a community health project.

At Langara College Theatre, 100 West 49th Ave (at Ontario), Vancouver. Entry by donation to help the students buy needed bedding for the school. TRAS handicrafts for sale.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

MONDAY, OCTOBER 1, 7pm

Public Talk by Tibet Activists Deported from China for Olympics Protest
Lhadon Tethong, from Victoria, is a Tibetan activist and Executive Director of Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) based in New York City, and Sam Price is an SFT Canada board member from Vancouver. They will speak about their Olympics protests in Beijing this past August on the eve of the one-year countdown to the Beijing 2008 Olympics.

At the Labatt Hall, Room 1700 at SFU Harbour Centre, 515 W. Hastings, Vancouver

Lhadon's blog: www.beijingwideopen.org

Sam Price (sam_price@yahoo.com, cell: 604.782.6742, home: 604.737.1127).

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28

Himalayan Festival

Details TBA – watch the TRAS website www.tras.ca.

TRAS will have a handicraft table of lovely gifts from India and Nepal.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 7:30pm

"The Compassionate Eye"

A Celebration of Seva's Sight Programs in Tibet and Nepal.

At Heritage Hall, 3102 Main Street, Vancouver

Presentation by Seva Canada Society. 604.713.6622, www.seva.ca



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

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Email: tras@portal.ca Web: www.tras.ca

Reg. Charity #130670743

I wish to join TRAS—\$20.

Here is \$400 for a NEW sponsorship (includes membership).

My donation of \$_____ for a project (name of project)_____ general funds \$_____

Name _____ Here is my cheque payable to TRAS \$_____

Address _____ OR please charge my VISA/MC

_____ Card No _____

Phone _____ Expiry _____ Signature _____

Email _____ May we acknowledge your gift in our newsletter? Yes No

Please send me information on Planned Giving: Yes No