



FALL NEWSLETTER ~ OCTOBER 2010

Learning from our donors

As we start up a busy fall season of satisfactory reports from the field, new projects approved and fundraising efforts undertaken, with much financial and volunteer support from our donors, TRAS has discovered that our donors have yet another gift to share, in the form of words we can all take to heart.

An example of the type of messages we have received arrived recently from an anonymous donor: "Throughout my travels in the Himalayas I saw a beautiful light inside so many children I met. I hope this donation can help those children in their growth into adulthood." What a lovely reminder of why we are all here, as members of TRAS, doing our best to help as many children as possible.



Late flash



We heard today (September 24) about disastrous flooding and landslides in the area where the **Voice of Children** project is. 150 dead, many homes destroyed, 20 villages around Almora alone totally ruined. Crops and topsoil have been completely washed away. The villagers are desperate. TRAS is sending emergency funds to our two partner NGOs, Aman and Vimarsh, who are doing valiant work getting relief supplies to the villagers. Contact the TRAS office if you would like to make a donation to help with this work.

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Satisfactory Reports from Two Recent Projects

It is interesting to look back over the progress of TRAS' work. In 1962 all the efforts were directed towards saving the lives of the Tibetan refugee children and then starting to give them an education. Shortly after that, it was more the setting up of the larger Tibetan settlements, which today are so successful and self-sufficient. Later still, TRAS helped with integrated rural development schemes for groups of Indian and Nepalese villages – also a success. And today our focus is again on basic education and health care, this time for Tibetan, Indian and Nepali children and youth in remote areas of the Himalayas - for without health they cannot learn, and without learning, there is little hope for a better future.

The projects which have worked the best incorporate both education and health care. **Buddha Academy is a shining example of a first-rate education along with excellent health care for the children.** Hundreds of lives have been saved by this school taking in desperate children. Through the TRAS sponsorship, vocational training and infirmary support programs, hundreds of children are able to do well and leave school with the hope of a brighter future. **(TRAS has just undertaken to support the infirmary for a further three years.)**

Munsel-Ling School in the Spiti Valley is another great example of a first-rate education being offered to children who have few educational opportunities. After 14 years, the school has just been accredited as a full high school, through to Grade 12 – an incredible accomplishment, which speaks volumes about the dedication of the founder, the Principal and the staff. However, it is only more recently that they realised the importance of health care for the 400 children at the school. TRAS has taken a leading role in helping them with this, but there are many hurdles still to overcome.



Now we are working with two new partners, one in India and one in Nepal. In each instance, education is their dream for the children in impoverished distant mountain villages with little infrastructure and support. The two NGOs (Aman and Vimarsh) running the **Voice of Children project in India** are fully aware also of the importance of good health, and welcomed this past summer a team of three medical students from the University of British Columbia. **READI Nepal in far-off Humla** is just 6 months into the first educational program for the poorest of the children. So far, health has not been tackled, but health concerns are bound to follow.

TRAS now has a wealth of experience in supporting both education and health initiatives. We look to you, our members, for your continued support to give these children a chance. As W. K. Kellogg said, *"One of the most beneficial services that could be bestowed upon civilization is to make the lives of children happier, healthier and more promising for their adult years."* You will find more about these two projects on the following pages.

A Tribute

from Georgina Henderson, TRAS Victoria Branch

Over the summer, TRAS Victoria lost a valued member, Martin Sweney. Thanks to his efforts over the years, many Tibetan carpets were imported from the Tibetan Women's Centre in Dharamsala, and thousands of dollars were raised and sent back to India to support the Tibetan old-people's home in Mundgod. His humility and concern for others were evident in all that he did: how he spent his time and money, how he studied and voiced his opinions, and how he set an example for his friends and neighbours.

A memorial for Martin was held at his home in August, which celebrated his 80 years of life, and brought together a wide circle of the people he knew. TRAS Victoria member Fiona Odgren spoke of how much the group owed to Martin and how grateful we were to him.

Besides TRAS, Martin generously supported many other charities, reflecting his concern for the world and its people. At the memorial, his niece, Anne Mathers, read out a typewritten recipe card she had found in his house:

"The Dalai Lama is a shining inspiration for the world and for peace and compassion.
May peace prevail in the heart of humanity. May ALL be kind toward each other."

These were his values and his hopes. We will miss him.

READI Nepal

We are delighted to report that 'so far so good' is the story in distant, remote Humla! Here is the first report from this small but dedicated local NGO:

"April 27, 2010, marks the historic date for READI Nepal, which encouraged local youth in Humla to kick off its Pilot Education project in Humla. A bilateral agreement between TRAS Canada and READI Nepal was signed on that very day to support Humli underprivileged children. The primary focus was in providing quality education.

With the generous support of TRAS Canada, READI is implementing inclusive quality education in Humla district by supporting 20 children of Humla regardless of caste, gender and ethnic group who are deprived of education due to poverty and backwardness.

Hostel Set Up and operation: *The rented house in Simikot has a nice kitchen garden with enough open space for the children to play and enjoy with greenery.*



10 sets of desk and benches comfortable for children are bought. 20 single beds are made as per the number of children. In most hostels, double decker beds are observed but we at READI feel that children should be kept in a single decker bed for the better safety and comfort. Tables and chairs are bought, required quantity of kitchen utensils (cookers, plates, spoons, bowls etc) are purchased with some matching funds from READI's internal sources.

All the kids are placed in the hostel, and social cohesion is quite impressive. Dalit children are enjoying with Brahmins, Thakuris and Lamas. They eat at the same table; their parents have no objection at all and are happy to observe the harmony. Also the cook himself comes from the Brahmin community, and is serving Lamas, Dalits and Chhetri children.

Human Resources: *One helper is recruited for taking care of the children, washing and feeding them. Another part-time staff is hired to support in cooking and washing. READI is trying its best to explore for a couple who can devote themselves to the welfare of children staying in the hostel.*



Father and child are both nervous on the first day

Selection of beneficiary students and parents: *20 students with 50% girls are selected from 5 Village Development Committees (VDCs). A selection process was transparent with formation of selection team from DEO (District Education Office), READI, local teachers from the respective VDCs. The age of the group is between 6 and 8 years and all of them have very weak economic background.*

Enrollment in the private school: *As the comparative quality of education is a bit nicer than in the government school, READI board committee decided to enroll all 20 children in the private school. Himali Model Boarding School is the only privately-run education institution in Humla that also holds legal entity registered with DEO Humla. A special agreement was done with this private school to enroll and care for their quality education. Likewise two sets of school dress were prepared. School uniform is mandatory in private school.*



Helpers/cook training: *READI's helper participated in 12 days' training on cooking and accommodation management. He was trained to cook food using local materials i.e. buckwheat, millet, potato, red rice etc. Now the helper is able to prepare nice local cuisine with improved skills focusing on hygiene and taste. Besides this, the helper was trained in housekeeping and accommodation management.*

Teachers training at Rato Bangala School: Two teachers from READI's program VDCs, who were newly recruited by the private school, were sent to Rato Bangala School Teacher Training program in Kathmandu. The training was for two months. According to those teachers, training went quite well and it has been the life-changing experience. They are quite confident and motivated to apply the teaching learning tools and methods in Humla district. Additional coaching service for hostel children during morning and evening time will be planned after they return back to the district.



TRAS has paid for 82% of the first year's expenses, with READI Nepal contributing 18%.

Challenges and Issues: READI is committed to realising the quality results as per the plan. However due to remoteness and inaccessibility we are struggling with the following challenges/issues:

- Extreme climate (coldness starts from Sept till March), need to support more extra warm clothes for the children
- Washing clothes and bathing during winter may be another complication. Due to freezing temperature, need of hot water bathing facility for children may be required."

What next? TRAS is pleased with this first report, and at the September board meeting, voted to ask READI Nepal for a two-year plan to continue their good work.

TRAS is also happy to have facilitated the creation of the very first library in the whole of Humla District! It will be housed in the private school, and training will be given to the two teachers to run it. We thank the **Nepal Library Foundation** for their grant to purchase a wonderful selection of Nepali and English books.

Voice of Children

A truly excellent report arrived from the two NGOs (AMAN and VIMARSH) running this project. It is augmented by the report of the three UBC medical students who worked there this summer. What V of C achieved with the \$5,000 TRAS sent is amazing. It is clear they have useful experience in setting up educational help and in helping local groups advocate for their rights. Health care is a new issue to them, but they are realising its importance. UBC student Chelsea Patrick wrote:

"We were very impressed with the two NGOs. Both groups have great rapport with their communities; there was obvious trust and engagement with the people. They acknowledge that that they don't have a lot of expertise in health, as their focus has been mostly social issues (women's rights etc.) but that they would like to have it as a strong part of their agenda. In fact, we were overwhelmed by their desire to learn practical health skills!

They responded very well to our two health teachings (basic girl's health and also maternal health) and had lots of questions that indicated a good understanding of the concepts but a definite need and desire for further detailed knowledge." TRAS is looking into this.

Here is a summary of the report from Voice of Children: "These villages are economically weak and located in remote areas. People lack basic health and hygiene care, clean drinking water, nutritional food, education and proper livelihood. In these villages there are no immunizations, no professional help with births, no registration of births.

The daily work profile of the women and adolescent girls is very tough. Their lives include heavy work of cultivation, fuel and fodder collection, fetching water, feeding and grazing the cattle, and other household work. This heavy workload has affected their health. Women have no time to look after themselves and their children. Children suffer from anaemia, malnutrition, underweight, diarrhoea, toothache, stomach pain and skin related symptoms and disease. Many children are forced to drop out of school through illness, distance to schools and fees.



Mothers and children waiting in the TRAS school for health screening

The identified villages are some of the remotest mountain villages of Nainital and Almora District in Northern India. The main market is situated 30kms away. For transporting essential goods people use mules and horses or have to carry the load on their head. Traditional agriculture and labour are the main occupation here. Majority of the families are poor.



An unplanned women's health screening: they insisted, and the need is so great for information

The TRAS project so far: AMAN and VIMARSH started to work in five villages since 2009. In the period we see the following impact in the villages:

Health

- The health problems of the women and children are identified. We have involved 400 children and 300 women in health check-ups.
- Organized awareness camps on the issues of hygiene and health care for women and teenaged girls.
- The women and community groups pressured the health workers for their regular visit in these villages.
- Vaccination has started in Khalar and Jaunali village and regularised in Patura, Rarkhila and Nakuta Village.
- Birth registration has started in the Kahlar and Jaunali villages.
- Women and children health and education issues raised in local self-governance meetings.
- Distributed medicines.
- Creating strategy to reduce water-borne diseases.

Education

- In Habalbag block 15 children have re-joined the schools. In the Patura and Rarkhila villages the percentage of graduating children has increased. During this period the rate of drop out was reduced.
- Ran bridging course to help school drop-outs.
- Started 2 early childhood education centres.
- Gave 20 children scholarships to help them return to school.
- Gave remedial tuition in 2 education centres.



The TRAS-funded pre-school education centre

TRAS has received and approved a detailed proposal for the next two years - \$14,000 for the coming year – to continue and improve this project and to expand it into 3 other remote villages. We have also received an interesting proposal to start a circulating library system for the villages – a first in an area where books and reading are practically unknown. We hope to fund 5 village libraries to begin with, at \$1,100 per library.

New Project Approved

In the April Newsletter, you can read about the interesting visit TRAS had from Karma Chungdak, Director of the Sambhota Tibetan Schools in and around Dharamsala. One of his wishes is to have traditional Tibetan stories printed in the simpler of the Tibetan scripts, so that young children may easily read them. The beautiful, flowing, more complex script which looks so artistic is, in fact, very difficult for children to read.

In order to encourage the habit of reading and to preserve the traditional stories, Karma Chungdak has sent a proposal to TRAS to publish 20 stories, with 1,000 copies of each being printed in Umed, the simple script.

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The books will cost \$730 per 1,000 copies. TRAS approved the project and will pay for the first 5 books to be printed using the generous gift of Dr Michael Futrell, a long-time friend of TRAS who died last year.

The books will carry his name, in honour of his many years of support for the Tibetans, and particularly for their efforts to preserve their language and culture. Libraries Across Borders, which helped TRAS by supplying the funding for two Tibetan school libraries in north-eastern India, is once again planning to help by fundraising for this project. **To have one of the stories published in honour of a particular person or occasion would be a lovely gift, and the books would carry a dedication (although you might only be able to read the name in English, the rest being in Tibetan!).**

A New Director... and a New Volunteer



TRAS is delighted to welcome **Marina Guy** to the Board. Marina says she is thrilled to join the TRAS Board of Directors and take on the role of Event Coordinator. She was drawn to join TRAS because she was so impressed with the many amazing projects this organization supports and the dynamic board, volunteers and donors. Since joining the board in April, Marina has enjoyed helping with the redesign of the TRAS website. A public relations specialist by trade, Marina is excited to use her skills in event coordination to organize TRAS' events including the annual Nepali film festival. We are grateful for the expertise and enthusiasm Marina brings to TRAS.



We are so lucky that **Kasandra Bonn** retired! We are now trying to keep her busier than ever. Kasandra told us, "I was introduced to TRAS several years ago by Heather O'Hagan, my long-time good friend. I volunteered at several Nepali Film Festivals, helping with handicraft sales. Having retired in September 2009, I was looking for a volunteer position that would be useful, positive and interesting. TRAS has filled the bill. I have long had an interest in Asia and have visited Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Bali and China. I'm very interested in the work TRAS does and look forward to making myself useful in helping with the important work of TRAS". Kasandra's accounting and managerial skills have already proved invaluable to TRAS. Thank you, Kasandra!

48th AGM: June 9, 2010

23 members and 8 guests gathered at Langara College for the TRAS 48th Annual General Meeting. Jennifer Hales, President, welcomed everyone and talked about '**continuity and change**'.

"There has been an unusual number of changes to the board, office staff and volunteers in one year: a new President, a new Treasurer, 3 different office managers, three new board members, and two new volunteer positions". And yet, "TRAS, in the midst of all these changes, has continued to implement its mandate to support the health and education of children and youth in the Himalayas.

So this takes us to the theme of continuity. I have been so impressed by the way the TRAS directors, office staff and volunteers have worked hard to continue – and expand - the work TRAS does to support its partners in India, Nepal and Tibet." Jennifer thanked everyone who contributed to TRAS this year.

Kevin Yuen, Treasurer, gave a detailed overview of TRAS's financial status, and said that the net assets are a good indication as to the viability of TRAS and are a reflection of the support from donors. TRAS is in good shape to continue its current and near future activities. The audited financial statements would be available in the TRAS office in September.

A motion to appoint Tompkins, Wozny, Miller & Co., Chartered Accountants, as TRAS' auditors for year ending March 31, 2011, was carried. Particular thanks were expressed to Cal Tompkins for his help.

Daphne Hales gave an overview of current projects. The sad news was the closure of the Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten after many years of educating hundreds of poor Tibetan children. The other long-term projects continue to flourish, and TRAS has been able to help new projects in isolated parts of northern India and north-western Nepal. Roughly \$90,000 was sent to projects in the year.

In Sponsorship Director Marion Tipple's absence, Russil Wvong presented the sponsorship report. Russil briefly explained TRAS's sponsorship program, and gave the following statistics for the 2009-2010 year: 250 students were sponsored, including 25 post-secondary students, by 137 sponsors.

The following board of directors was accepted unanimously.

Joan Ford (Patron), Dorothea Leach (Patron), Frank Beck, Lynn Beck, Marina Guy, Daphne Hales, Jennifer Hales (President), Shirley Howdle, Videsh Kapoor, Cheryl Sullivan, Marion Tipple, Russil Wvong, Kevin Yuen.

The meeting was followed by a magnificent slide show by Brian Sheffield, who spent three weeks last spring hiking through the glorious natural beauties of the Manaslu region.

Sponsorship Report

In a world beset by crises, we continue to attempt to provide some stability for the children who suffer the most during these times. They are the future and, without a secure home, nourishment and education, have little to look forward to. Helping these children assists in building a better world. Your support is greatly appreciated. We are highlighting one graduate student from Munsel-Ling School, Spiti, Northern India, and 6 children from Buddha Academy in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Dakpa Tenzin

23 year old, 3rd year Veterinary Student from Spiti. Dakpa, educated at Munsel-Ling School, was previously sponsored by TRAS, but unfortunately his sponsor could not continue. He is an excellent student who will become the first Vet from his native Spiti when he graduates. He plans to return following graduation to help his people. This young man is very deserving of our support. Please help him. He has two years of study to complete and is getting very good marks so far. (\$1200/yr).

Yungdung Baije

Yungdung was brought to Buddha Academy from the remote western province of Dolpa where life is very difficult in this mountainous region. Her father has been missing for two years and her mother, now alone, has four children to support. Yungdung is currently in the Nursery Class at Buddha Academy and desperately needs help. (\$400/yr).

Denish Lama

7 year-old boy, who loves reading, from village close to Kathmandu. His migrant worker parents are poor, earning very little and could not afford to continue sending him to school, so asked Buddha Academy to help. In turn TRAS is asking for your support. (\$400/yr).

Sabina Lama

Sixth in a family of seven children, Sabina was accepted into Class IV at Buddha Academy. Her parents, forced to move from their broken down shack in their village, now live with their children in one room in Bhaktapur, trying to support the family. They do not have money to educate their children and need your help. (\$400/yr).

Yogesh Maktan

Yogesh's family migrated to Kathmandu to look for work. Irregular classes were held in the school in their village and his parents, keen to have him educated, brought him to Buddha Academy. He was accepted into Class II and needs a sponsor. (\$400/yr).

Pasang Phuti Sherpa

Born in the small, remote village of Jiri, 11 year old Pasang is the youngest in her family and the first child to attend school. Her parents and three elder siblings are illiterate. They are keen that she receives an education. Currently she is studying in Class IV at Buddha Academy. (\$400/yr).

Shyam Lal Lama

Shyam's father died a year ago. He is the youngest of four brothers, brought to Buddha Academy in a malnourished state and was taken into the Nursery Class. Any support would be welcome. (\$400/yr).

TRAS

**Supporting health
and education for
children and youth in
the Himalayas**

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Shirley Howdle, Videsh Kapoor, Cheryl
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TRAS Victoria Branch Rep

Georgina Henderson

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Armila Shakya

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Heartfelt Thanks!

TRAS expresses its heartfelt thanks for the incredibly generous bequest which was received recently from the estate of Evalon Alderking. Mrs Alderking was a TRAS member for many years, sponsoring several children throughout their school years. Her gift will enable TRAS to support many more projects to improve the lives of Himalayan children and youth.

Handicrafts Galore: Glad Tidings!

TRAS is participating in the 38th Annual 'Christmas at Hycroft' (Mirror Room, 2nd floor).

TRAS is very excited to be a part of one of Vancouver's favourite holiday craft fairs 'Christmas at Hycroft'. This year's theme is *Winter Wonderland*. We've ordered new items and new colours plus our perennial favourites – lots of them. Our friends from SEVA Canada will be in the room next door.



**Thursday November 18
to
Sunday November 21**

**(Thurs/Fri 10am-9pm)
(Sat/Sun 10am-6pm)**

Tickets

Adults \$10

Children (5-11yrs) \$5 (under 5yrs FREE)

Valet Parking Available

1489 McRae Avenue, Vancouver BC V6H 1V1
604-731-4661 www.christmasathycroft.ca

TRAS needs volunteers to sell handicrafts and spread the word about our wonderful TRAS projects and partners. If you can help, please contact the TRAS office at 604-224-5133.