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TRAS

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

Winter Newsletter
December 2007

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Russil Wvong

As we approach the end of the year, I'd like to thank all of our members and supporters. You make it possible for TRAS to carry out our mission: supporting the health and education of children and youth in Nepal, northern India, and Tibet.

We have a number of thoughtful donors who are able to commit larger sums to specific projects, and we are truly grateful for their involvement. But, it is the combination of many individual contributions which enables us to keep all the projects going. All of our donors and sponsors are a vital part of TRAS – without you, TRAS would not exist.

It is not always easy for our partners in the Himalayan region to carry out their work, given the many problems they face. The one problem WE can help them overcome is a lack of funds, and with your continued generosity, we shall ensure the projects keep going. Here's a brief summary of the work your donations accomplished in 2007.

HEALTH

NEPAL: At the Buddha Academy in Kathmandu, the **school infirmary** (for 500 students) is funded by a TRAS member, and this year the Langara Rotaract Club funded an **HIV/AIDS education program** at the Academy.

INDIA: The Munsel-Ling School **Healthcare Centre**, in the remote Spiti Valley, was built and opened, fully funded by TRAS members, and a **health program** was set up, thanks to a cooperative effort between TRAS and UBC's Global Health Initiative. The UBC student initiative also funded the building of a traditional Spiti **toilet block** for use in the long winter months, when everything is frozen, and funded the training of a house mother as a health care worker. More projects are envisaged, as funding comes in, to improve the water supply and the children's diet, and to maintain the healthcare centre.

The previous SHARE **immunization program** for all the children in the upper Kullu Valley has resulted in mothers taking their babies to Manali for immunizations on a regular basis, and the 1,000+ **toilets** we helped build con-

tinue to improve the community's health

Combining health and education, TRAS has once again funded **nurses training** for Tibetans in India, with the result that the Tibetan settlements are able to staff their clinics with well-trained young women. In Dekyiling, for instance, a Tibetan settlement in northern India, TRAS pays for the maintenance of the crèche, giving nourishing lunches to the toddlers, while the nurse who runs the clinic there was trained several years ago through the TRAS nurses training project.

EDUCATION

TIBET: The Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten, in the poorer part of Lhasa, gives 60 children a good start through **Kindergarten, and Grades 1 and 2**. TRAS is the only source of income for this school. We are in the final year of the current 3-year project, and will start a new one in 2008.

NEPAL: One hundred and twenty-five of the 500 students at the Buddha Academy in Kathmandu are supported by TRAS sponsors – a huge investment in this worthwhile school for destitute children.

The **vocational training project** (tailoring, carpentry and electrical training) for older students continues to be very successful, preparing them to be independent and self-supporting. We are approaching the final year of the current



Tailoring Training

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three-year project, and our principal donor has once again offered \$5,000 a year for three more years, *if* TRAS can raise a matching \$5,000 each year.

India: The Munsel-Ling School in the Spiti Valley now has 400 students and is bursting at the seams. Again, TRAS **sponsorships** are vitally important to the school. As you will have seen in September's newsletter, the first class of Spiti children has graduated from the Munsel-Ling School and three of them have been accepted respectively to medical, veterinary and engineering colleges. The national exam results for the older children are excellent. This is a tremendous success for a region which was classified as 'backward'. TRAS paid for the training of the first teachers at the school, and has supported projects there ever since.



Tenzin Angmo – the second Spiti girl ever to study medicine.

Our project with the Jamyang Foundation has resulted in more work in the far reaches of the Spiti Valley and also in Zangskar. The young nuns in one monastery have been able to build (literally, doing much of the work themselves) **living quarters and a hall**. The project has purchased **teaching supplies, food and medicines** to improve the education and health of 192 nuns, and they, in turn, will be reaching out to the nearby communities. In the long run, this project will have a large impact, particularly on the women and female children.



Nuns build their own living quarters and a hall

For the Tibetans in exile, TRAS maintains **two daycare centres**. Typical salaries in the Tibetan settlements are in the range of \$75 a month, so a safe, caring environment for the children, allowing both parents to work, literally means food on the family table. Both daycare centres rely on TRAS and we want to keep them going. They prepare the children well for school.

We plan to start a multi-partner **vocational training** project in the coming months with support from CIDA's Voluntary Sector Fund. So, at each end of the education spectrum, TRAS is helping: with support for early childhood education to give children a good start, and then vocational training to help young people become self-supporting.

A full list of TRAS projects and needs is on page 4.

Again, our thanks to you all for joining us in this work. I hope you enjoy your holidays, and best wishes for 2008.



SPOTLIGHT ON SPITI

Spiti has been in the limelight this year! Here are extracts from the interim reports for our three projects.

JAMYANG PROJECT

by Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Location of Project: Spiti and Zangskar (Himalayan border regions of western India). The funds were distributed to 192 nuns at 11 projects in Spiti and Zangskar. The nuns at Dechen Choling are constructing a two-story building that will provide living quarters and a classroom. The 29 nuns are also being provided with books, food supplies, and healthcare. The nuns were able to live together as a community and to establish a systematic study program in Tibetan, English, and Buddhist philosophy. Teachers' salaries are being paid.



Group of smiling nuns

The 163 nuns at Spiti's Yangchen Choling Monastery and at nine monasteries in Zangskar are being provided with books, food supplies, and healthcare.

All the nuns were able to sustain themselves, maintain their health, and continue their education and spiritual practices. Their self-confidence improved as a result of their increasing self-sufficiency. Each monastery also increased its sense of solidarity as a community.



One of the finished new buildings built by nuns

The construction of the new residence hall at Dechen proceeded according to the project schedule and was completed in July 2007. The excavation of lands, laying of the foundation, and initial stages of constructing the assembly hall began in August. The excavation took longer than planned, due to the rocky ground. The nuns worked along with a team of hired labourers to expedite the construction. They hoped to complete the assembly hall before the snows began.

The local communities respect the nuns for working hard to build their community. Most are poor, however, and are unable to support the nuns financially. They support the nuns in other small ways, but unfortunately do not help with construction or supplies. The projects are all having a very favorable effect on female children and women throughout Spiti and Zangskar. The accomplishments of the nuns have led to new perceptions of women and new educational expectations for female children.

MUNSEL-LING SCHOOL PROJECTS

by Venerable Tashi Namgyal

The healthcare centre was made possible by the generosity of TRAS. They came through, too, with extra money when it was needed to complete and fit out the building, enough also for a glassed-in verandah and balcony on the building's southern frontage as a solar passive system, so effective in bringing warmth into a building in a Spiti climate; much brilliant sunshine, but often combined with a cool air temperature and a nagging wind. The basic construction of the building was finished in 2006, just before our long Spiti winter started. Because of the cold, we only could continue in April, when the majority of the work was finished. Finally, the healthcare centre was properly furnished.

This past summer the building was put into use. The ground floor of the building consists of a medical office, a doctor's consulting room, an examination room and a small dispensary. The upper floor consists of a corridor with toilet and bathroom and two bedrooms for ill children. There, they can receive the special attention and care they need. Also, in this way, we separate them from the healthy children, who otherwise might be infected.

The roof and foundation are stronger than in traditional Spiti buildings. In the foundation, we used more cement than usual, and for the roof, we have used iron beams instead of wooden beams.

In a joint initiative between the University of British Columbia's (UBC) outreach programme and our old helpers, TRAS (Trans Himalayan Aid Society, Canada), batches of medical students from UBC, Canada, organized the furnishings and supplies and saw to sick children for three months. The qualified dentist with them pulled teeth, while the students distributed tooth brushes and taught brushing, demonstrating the latest techniques. (Yes, the usual sweets and chemical goo are sold right across the road from the school entrance.) The UBC students also distributed vitamins and iron supplements, after anaemia was identified as a widespread problem amongst Spiti children in general. The UBC students also created for all children at the school (day or live-in)



Health Care Centre

individual booklets containing their health records. Everything is now on file.

The building is also being used by the Spiti coordinator of the RCH (Reproductive Child Health) program. He is giving consults in the centre's office to couples about reproduction and birth control. On the 24th of November, finally the building has officially been inaugurated. This was done by Dr. Shiv Prakash, Block Medical Officer of Spiti. On behalf of the Indian government, he is responsible for the medical policy in whole Spiti valley. Dr. Prakash praised the building and stressed its importance for Rangrik and the school. **In total, about 1200 people benefit from the health centre.** He also emphasized that a proper management is essential for the continuity of the health centre. Finally, the BMO advised our children to keep clean three things: their body, their clothes and their mind.

THE UBC INTIATIVE

also granted funding for some much-needed traditional composting toilets for the hostels. Problems in receiving these funds delayed the start of this building, but we hope to have the basic structure finished before it freezes.

TRAS PROJECTS IN 2007

TIBET

Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten. 60 children. Final year of 3-year project. Sole source of funding for the school. \$8,196 per year.



NEPAL

Buddha Academy, Kathmandu. Infirmary maintenance for school of 500 students. Ongoing to 2010. \$3,600 per year.

Vocational Training. 15 students per year. 3-year project to the end of 2008. \$11,000 per year.

INDIA

TIBETAN PROJECTS

Little Flowers Crèche, Dharamsala. 30 children. Annual maintenance of daycare for Tibetan government-in-exile workers. \$1,650 per year.

Dekyiling Daycare, Dekyiling Tibetan Settlement. 30 children. Final year of 5-year maintenance project for children of weavers. \$2,541 per year.

Central Tibetan Administration Nurses Training. 15 students (some overlapping from previous project). Final year of 3-year or 4-year nursing training at Indian teaching hospitals. \$6,919 per year.

Doeguling Tibetan Settlement, Mundgod – Old People's Medical Support. Although this is no longer a formal project, it is supported by the TRAS Victoria Branch and many of our donors.

INDIAN PROJECTS

At present, our projects in northern India are for Indian citizens who are Tibetan by culture and history: Munsel-Ling School and Spiti Valley; Health care centre for 400 children and surrounding population; Building and furnishing: \$15,900. **Completed.**

Healthcare program to train health worker, and to put in place a primary healthcare program for the children. Traditional Spiti Toilet block built for use in winter months. \$7,700. (UBC Global Health Initiative). **Completed.**

Jamyang Foundation Project, Spiti and Zangskar, northern India. Living quarters, classroom and assembly hall built at one monastery. Health care and education components for 192 young nuns, in preparation for eventual community outreach. \$50,000. **Completed.**

In all, \$94,207 has been distributed to TRAS projects during 2007! Your generosity during the year has paid nearly all of it! We just need \$4,001 for the Nurses Training Project.

The Little Flowers Crèche Parents' Group sent us a special appeal to help them with capital expenditures they had had this year. They have replaced the floor, whitewashed the rooms, bought little beds and blankets for the children. The cost was \$2,068. We have \$388 towards this amount. If we raise more funds than we need for 2007, perhaps we can help them out.

PROJECTS FOR 2008

TRAS has committed to fund the following projects, and we are looking for your help to fulfill our obligations to our partners.



Little Flowers Crèche	\$1,650
Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten	\$8,296
Dekyiling Crèche (of \$2,541, \$1,591 has been raised already)	\$ 950
Buddha Academy Vocational Training \$11,000 (\$7,000 pledged)	\$4,000
Buddha Academy Infirmary \$3,600 (pledged)	
Munsel-Ling School health projects for improving diet and water supply (pledged)	

TRAS is working on plans to fund the following in partnership with Canadian groups:

- a major, multi-partner vocational training project with CIDA. \$100,000 over 3 years. (TRAS portion: \$27,500. \$20,550 already raised)
- books on female health issues for Buddha Academy (with the Nepal Library Foundation)
- books and teaching aids for an orphanage at the Choepheling Tibetan Settlement in Miao (with Libraries across Borders).
- Munsel-Ling School maintenance and upgrading of health program (with the UBC Global Health Initiatives).

SPONSORSHIP REPORT

by Marion Tipple

TCV Suja (Bir) is one of the Tibetan Children's Village Schools. The original Children's Village was started in 1960 as a nursery for orphans and refugee children by Mrs Tsering Dolma, the Dalai Lama's older sister. In the past 46 years it has grown considerably and has schools scattered throughout different Tibetan settlements in India, from Ladakh in the north, to Bylakuppe in the south. Each year, 2,500 to 3,000 children arrive as new refugees, having made a difficult and dangerous journey from their homes across high Himalayan passes to exile in India. Many of the older children have had no formal education.

TCV Suja receives these older children into special classes designed for them, known as Opportunity Classes. Here, they are taught Maths and how to read and write Tibetan and English. After 2 years, their progress is assessed and they either continue in the academic stream or receive vocational training. This is a life-changing opportunity for these children.



Durkmo Gyal, 15 years old, is from Amdo in Tibet. She is the oldest of three children in her family and had received minimal education before her parents decided to use their life savings and send her and her younger sister, with a guide, into exile. She is described as being very responsible and has made good progress with her studies in the basic Opportunity Class. She is very ambitious and wants to become a doctor.



Penpa Tsering, 17 years old, is in Class 8. He was sent into exile by his parents with some businessmen and had a tough journey, being stranded for 10 days on the Himalayan pass they were crossing due to an avalanche. Penpa was one of the few who made it through to Nepal and then to India where he arrived in 1999. Since being at the school, he has worked hard, achieving a good academic standard and is deciding whether to be a dietician or businessman.



Tsering Gyamtso, aged 14 years, arrived with two of his younger sisters into exile early this year. Coming from a nomad family, and one of eight children, he spent his days herding cattle and received no formal education. Since arriving at TCV, he has taken a keen interest in learning and hopes to become a Tibetan teacher.



Yangkar Dolma, aged 15 years, is the 3rd of seven children whose parents sent her into exile with a businessman from her home in Kham, Tibet. Travelling with six other children, it took them over a month to reach safety, enduring many hardships en route. She is currently in the second Opportunity Class and is doing well. She enjoys learning the computer and would like to find employment in a computer-related field.

TRAS

Supporting health and education for children & youth in the Himalayas

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UPCOMING EVENTS

~ Wednesday, January 23, 2008 ~

LECTURE: SACRED LAKES AND HEADWATERS OF ASIA'S RIVER SYSTEMS: PROTECTING TIBET'S WATER RESOURCES

BY TASHI TSERING, PH.D. STUDENT, UBC

Time: 7:30pm (doors 7pm)

Location: Room B201, Langara College,
100 West 49th Ave., Vancouver (at Ontario St.)

Entry: By donation

The Tibetan Plateau serves as the source of many major rivers of Asia. The Indus, Satluj, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Yangtze, Mekong and the Yellow rivers all flow from Tibet into different corners of Asia. While climate change is melting the glaciers that feed these rivers, at a faster pace, the ecological integrity of these rivers is also increasingly compromised through human-induced changes such as dams, water diversion channels, and abstraction for agriculture and urban supply. Development of Tibet's water resources becomes more problematic when water bodies have religious and cultural significance for the local people.

In this talk, intended for a general audience, Tashi will share stories from his experiences working in collaboration with various Tibetan, Chinese and international groups for the protection of Tibet's water resources.

Before joining UBC, Tashi was the Director of the Environment and Development Program of Tibet Justice Center, a Berkeley-based non-profit organization that does legal advocacy for Tibetans. As a Tibet Justice Center representative, Tashi was a key architect responsible for the landmark international environmental resolution (IUCN 2000) for the protection of Tibet's transboundary rivers, negotiated face-to-face with China's representatives. Tashi is the recipient two Rowell Fund for Tibet awards for environmental research and two awards from Global Green Grants for environmental advocacy.

Bio: Tashi Tsering is a UBC Green College Fellow and a Ph.D. student in UBC's Resources Management and Environmental Studies Program and the Contemporary Tibetan Studies Program. He is the editor of Trin-Gyi-Pho-Nya: Tibet's Environment and Development Digest and serves on the steering committee of two environmental NGOs in South Asia, Tesi Environmental Awareness Movement and Brahmaputra-Barak Watch.



Tashi Tsering, PhD

~ Sunday, February 24, 2008 ~

THIRD NEPALI FILM FESTIVAL

The 3rd Nepali Film Festival will take place at Langara College. This successful festival is once again sponsored by TRAS, the Nepal Cultural Society of BC, and Langara College Continuing Studies. TRAS directors Jennifer Hales and Ajeet Gorkhali, with help from the Langara Rotaract Club, are organizing the festival. A mixture of films will be screened: documentaries, stunning scenery and fascinating stories will make for an exciting festival! The Himalayan Market will return. Watch the TRAS website for details in the new year.

BITS 'N' PIECES

Thinking of asking TRAS to mail gifts to your sponsored children? Not a good idea! The cost is extremely high, and international parcels cannot be registered. We only send disbursements twice a year, and these letters must be registered. Another thing to think about: if you send a gift of money through TRAS, then your sponsored child can have the fun of buying what she/he wants or needs – and buying locally helps the local economy! Most things are available in India and Kathmandu – at less than we pay here. Please contact the TRAS office if you have questions about this.

If you would like to make a **donation to TRAS on behalf of a friend or a loved one**, we can send a Himalayan card to the recipient, telling them that you have made a donation in their name and thanking them for the donation. To make sure that we have time to send the card before Christmas, please call the office before December 13.

Please send us **your email address** (if you haven't already), and keep us up to date on any changes to it or your street address.

Apologies to Kesang Wangdu, who is the Handicrafts Manager at the Delying Tibetan Handicraft Centre, not the settlement officer, as we stated in September's newsletter.

HATS OFF

To our many donors, sponsors, and long-time and new supporters like Vivian Hunter, Dr. Michael Futrell, Dr. Ian Penn, Joan Cockell, Doug Eaton, and the BC x 3 Book Club, to name just a few. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the donations we have received from young people again this year, for the Buddha Academy vocational training project. Ian Penn challenged others to match his donation – and Argyle Secondary School, Sutherland Secondary School and the Langara Rotaract Club rose to the occasion!