



## A SPITI SUMMER

*“Stunning”; “Really rewarding”; “Warm welcoming people”;  
“The way the school is run is impressive”; “The kids even laughed during blood tests!”; “They were warm and receptive – our efforts were appreciated”;  
“We felt we could make a difference”;  
“Even a bar of soap can have a massive impact”.  
“Was it worthwhile? Absolutely!”*

These are just a few of the comments made by the hardworking UBC medical students who went to Munsel-Ling School in the Spiti Valley, northern India this summer to continue the health initiative which was started last year. Three small teams went this year, in June, July and August. The first



Chris helps a little one swallow her iron pill

team concentrated on screening all the children, then treatments were started; the July team did a ‘hodge podge’, and the August team worked on education—all part of the huge overall effort to improve the health of the children at the school and elsewhere in the community.

‘Community’ is the important word. The UBC Global Health Initiative, (GHI), was started by the students themselves, assisted with a grant from UBC and mentored by TRAS director Dr. Videsh Kapoor. They were determined to incorporate the entire community into their health plan, partly so that the benefits could be felt by many, but also so that everyone shared in the work and the successes. The education component helped to ensure that the benefits will continue long after the teams left.

The students had many meetings with the Principal and with the Lama who is the guiding light of the school. The students found them “real vision-

aries, who worked well with us, giving us gentle redirection when necessary, but also open to suggestions”. The house mothers and the two health workers were involved in much of the work. Senior students acted as interpreters and also as mentors for the younger children. The government hospital nurse was



The June group with government nurse, two senior student helpers and Joan Cockell

involved. The teams also went out into other villages to screen children, where they collaborated with a visiting NGO, Medical Checks for Children. They checked out greenhouse designs, water availability, the vaccination status of children, talking to the government health workers, nurses and the public health officer.

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What was the medical side like? First they made friends with the children—sitting in on classes, and playing games with them so that the children would open up and be comfortable with the teams. They worked at fitting in with the school curriculum, so that their work would not interrupt the children's education. They found that this was 'not fancy medicine – but simple hands-on primary care' to solve the most basic of problems and to improve general health. They



The health worker checks the children.

screened each of the 380 children, entering the results in the children's health booklets. These were created by last year's team and had been kept up during the past year by the health workers. Now the teams have taught them how to do heart, lung, blood and eye tests, how to look for a general sense of good health, and what to do when there are problems.

They found lice, bed bug bites, worms, scabies, eye problems, anemia and a huge number of holes in teeth. These nasty problems were rampant. "It was shocking to find a child WITHOUT bites!" Treatments were started, with the health workers helping so that they know how to carry on.



Toothbrush racks for everyone

Two major practical problems were discovered and fixed (these future doctors are pretty good handymen and women!): the children were constantly losing their the toothbrushes (given to them last summer), and they were not washing their hands after toileting or before eating. Solution: the team worked with the school carpenter to build toothbrush



Handwashing is fun!

racks in each of the bathhouses. The kids were delighted and even more excited about the second solution. The team devised a way to divert water into a pipe which they perforated along its length. They dug a narrow drainage ditch—and presto—there was a hand washing station! Some of the children used it 6 times in a row! This is a temporary solution which TRAS is hoping to improve on next year.

One team went to visit a successful greenhouse in another village, taking the school handyman to measure and learn from it. The students are paying for the 1<sup>st</sup> greenhouse to be built at the school, and if this is successful, TRAS hopes to continue the project. Vegetables are impossible to come by in the long winter, when Spiti is cut off from the outside world, and the outdoor growing season is very short. The large, low greenhouse, facing the strong Spiti sun, should extend the growing season enormously, providing better nutrition for the students. When the team visited other villages, they found the children underweight and malnourished, so the school is thinking along the right lines for its students.



Examining a successful greenhouse



As for their overall impression of the Munsel-Ling School, the teams feel that the community of the Spiti Valley is extremely lucky that the Rinchen Zangpo Buddhist Society decided 12 years ago that improving education was paramount. They found the school functional but extremely basic—old fashioned desks, benches and chalk boards. The school system, too, is old fashioned (rote learning is the norm), but the staff is dedicated and the children are hard working and determined. They take responsibility for succeeding, unlike many children in Canada. The hostels for the boarders are “borderline—they could use more house mothers to cope with the work. The beds are not in good condition, and bed bugs and lice are rampant. More laundry needs to be done, and regularly, but for that they need more help and water.”

### **THE BOTTOM LINE?**

The TRAS-funded health care centre is functioning well, and is used also by the visiting government nurses for regular vaccinations and by the public health officer. Hand washing and toothbrushing will make a big difference in disease prevention, as would clean bedding. Iron therapy is in place to fight anemia, with the student class reps engaged in its delivery. The health workers are better trained to continue good health practices and treatments. Health education will become part of the curriculum next year. An enhanced relationship has been established with the school and the community.

**The UBC students have funded the training and salaries for the two healthworkers, the medications for the dispensary and the construction of the pilot greenhouse. TRAS hopes to work on the water delivery project, to ensure a constant clean supply; on further greenhouse construction and on clean bedding for the boarders. With the enthusiasm of the school and the financial help of our TRAS members, better health WILL become a reality at Munsel-Ling School!**

*Thank you to UBC students Chris Wallis, Diala El-Zamar and Noah Alexander and Dr. Videsh Kapoor for sharing their experiences.*

## A SPITI SUMMER (Part 2)

Another visitor to the Spiti Valley this summer was TRAS member Joan Cockell. She and her husband Doug helped to fund the construction and furnishing of the health care centre at Munsel-Ling School, and Joan was delighted to see it up and running.



Joan and her sponsored child take stock of each other

She enjoyed meeting the children she sponsors – such a joy! Then she went on to the even more remote Pin Valley at the far end of Spiti, to teach English to the young nuns at the Dechen Choling Nunnery. TRAS, through the generosity of Joan and Doug, and with the leadership of the Jamyang Foundation, is building an assembly hall and classrooms there, to facilitate the education of the nuns, and through them, in time, the girls and women of the local village.



Gardening on rock

The nuns are extremely hardworking, looking after themselves in a harsh, unforgiving environment, working on the construction site, and trying to garden on what looks like bare rock. This all on top of their religious studies.



The nearly completed assembly hall

Joan reports that the assembly hall is 2/3 finished, with the ground floor complete and the second floor nearly done. Three days before she left, the electricians arrived to hook up the first lights at the nunnery – Joan experienced electricity for one hour!



Eureka! Light!

Joan took with her copies of the health booklet created by Cynthia Hunt in Ladakh to teach women about their own bodies and how to care for themselves. Women's health has long been at the bottom of everyone's priority list in India. The booklets, written in Tibetan which the nuns understand, were avidly studied. This, we hope, is the first step in more health education for the nuns and the women and girls in the community.

## SPONSORSHIP REPORT

As the young people in your family return to school and university, there are many children in the Trans Himalayan region desperately craving an education with little or no financial means to obtain one. Below we have featured some children from Spiti, however we also have many case histories of Tibetan refugee children who have recently escaped into India. Regular sponsorship is \$400/yr and College sponsorship between \$680 -\$1200/yr depending on the course they are enrolled in. To provide someone with an education is one of the greatest gifts that can be given. So much for so little. Please help these young people achieve goals.

Contact the TRAS office for more details, or use the enclosed slip.

**Thinley Wangmo, 8,** is one of three children from parents who have little land and whose only income is from a part time job. Her parents are keen that their children should be educated and therefore are requesting help to enable them to attend Munsel-Ling School.

**Nawang Chettso** was born in Kaza and is currently in Class 2 at Munsel-Ling. 8-years-old, she is the middle child of a family of three whose parents have little income and want their children to receive an education.

**Tenzin Zangpo's** family has no regular income, their only source of finance being a little that his mother earns helping out. He is 11 years old and likes to study but his family needs financial help for him to be able to attend Munsel-Ling School.

**Tenzin Changchuk, 12,** comes from a family of five. He is in Class 3 and a good student. His family has little income and requires financial help for him to attend Munsel-Ling School.

**Kesang Norzong, 19,** is the youngest of a family of 7, who has studied at Munsel-Ling School since 1994. She is currently in her first year of a BA program with dreams of a career in computer technology, however with her father's income of only \$160.00 a month her family is unable to help her. (BA - 3 yr course. Sponsorship \$680/yr).

**Dorje Namgyhal Bodh,** is in his second year of a BA program. He has received all his education through the Rinchen Zangpo Society and would like to become a teacher. Currently he is struggling to make ends meet and has little financial support from his parents as they have four other children and little income. (BA - 3yr course. Sponsorship \$680/yr).

THE BOOKS ARE ON THEIR WAY!



We are excited and grateful to collaborate this year with Libraries Across Borders. This organization, part of the BC Library Association, works through Canadian NGOs to fund library development in developing countries. TRAS applied for a grant to supply extra books to the children of the Choepheling Tibetan Settlement in Miao, India, and was thrilled to receive \$4,000 for this purpose.

Choepheling Tibetan Settlement is one of the 'forgotten' settlements in the sensitive border region near Myanmar and China. It is difficult-to-impossible to visit this region, and consequently it's been a case of 'out of sight out of mind' for the Tibetan refugees there. Agriculture is limited, there are no jobs, the people are very poor; the boys tend to join the Indian Army, and the girls just stay home. Many of the adults are illiterate and cannot help their children with schoolwork. But there is an elementary school, run by the Central Tibetan Administration, with good staff, and the hope is that extra books will stimulate the children's interest and enjoyment in reading and learning. If they do well with their studies, they are able to go to the senior Tibetan schools in other settlements, and would then be able to take vocational training courses.

If a variety of good reading material, dictionaries, fables, Tibetan stories etc, can stimulate these kids, then that's a great beginning on the road to self sufficiency!

We heartily thank Libraries Across Borders, and also the Tibetan Department of Education in Dharamsala which is arranging for the purchase and shipping of the Tibetan and English books.

## FUNDS NEEDED FOR THE BUDDHA ACADEMY INFIRMARY



If you have read about the health program at Munsel Ling School in this issue, you will realise how very important decent health care is for the wellbeing of the children cared for in boarding schools. Buddha Academy, with its 500 needy students, has an excellent little infirmary with a full time nurse and several beds. All the students are screened there, vaccinated, and minor problems are dealt with. It's a busy place every day. The Academy also pays for the care of children who have to be taken to hospital.

The annual bill for all this is a mere \$7,000. For the past several years Ian and Sandy Penn have very kindly donated \$3,600 towards this amount. Now their efforts are directed fully to the vocational training project at the Academy, and TRAS is wondering if another person to whom medical care means a lot would like to take over from Dr. Penn and continue this support?

If you are interested in learning more, please contact the office. Thank you!

## TRAS HOLDS ITS 46TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

It's hard to believe the Society is 46-years-old! Most of the Tibetan settlements are well established and doing fine on their own, but there are still pockets of real poverty and need. Vocational training will probably need support for another generation, and several of our members still like to support the elderly Tibetans in India. Then there are our Indian and Nepalese partners whom we want to continue to support. So there is still work to be done!

The following is a brief summary of the AGM. The Minutes and the audited financial statement will be available in the office.

About 40 TRAS directors and members met at Langara College on Wednesday, June 11 at 7pm. Russil Wvong, President, welcomed everyone, particularly Tenzin Lhalungpa, whose father Lobsang had recently died. George and Inge Woodcock met the Lhalungpa family in New Delhi in 1962, a meeting which led to the founding of TRAS. Patron Dorothea Leach paid tribute to Lobsang and his untiring efforts in the academic world on behalf of the Tibetans.

Treasurer Rob Asbeek-Brusse read the unaudited financial statement and pointed out that the audited version would soon be available in the office.

Daphne Hales gave the Projects Report, noting that \$97,807 went to projects in the year, compared with \$61,721 the previous year. (A full list of projects will appear in the December newsletter.) She thanked all donors, and particularly mentioned the wonderful cooperation TRAS has enjoyed from other agencies in the past year: the UBC Global Health Initiative, the Nepal Library Foundation, Libraries across Borders, the Langara Rotaract Club, and Argyle and Sutherland Secondary Schools in North Vancouver.

Marion Tipple gave the Sponsorship report:

### **TRAS members are sponsoring 270 children in India & Nepal**

The current slate of Directors stood again for election and was voted in, with the exception of retiring Directors Heather Hamilton-Wright and Samaya Ryane, who were heartily thanked for their work, and both kindly said they will continue to volunteer for TRAS!

### **WE NEED MORE PEOPLE ON THE BOARD AND BEHIND THE SCENES**

If you've been a TRAS member for a while and are interested in becoming more directly involved in TRAS, we're looking for new directors and helpers. You should be:

- familiar with TRAS and how it works
- able to commit time and energy
- able to attend meetings in Vancouver
- able to communicate well, both verbally and in writing

In particular, we're looking for people to help out with

- coordinating volunteers for events
- organizing handicraft sales
- writing the newsletter
- maintaining the website
- fundraising
- creating displays and archives

If you're interested in learning more, please e-mail us at [tras@portal.ca](mailto:tras@portal.ca). and include your CV.

## COMING EVENTS



Noah and Matt keep the kids laughing

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2008**

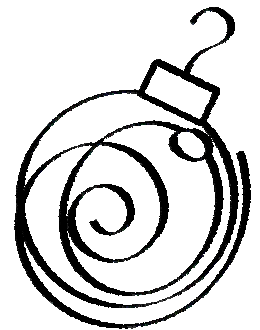
### **A SPITI SUMMER – grass roots medicine for kids in the Himalayas—UBC Global Health Initiative revisits Community Health in the Indian Himalayas.**

Come and enjoy their lively and fascinating take on helping to improve the health of the Munsel-Ling School children, amid the towering peaks and harsh landscape of the beautiful Spiti Valley in northern India.

6 – 8pm at LANGARA COLLEGE,  
Room B201, 100 West 49th Ave., Vancouver, BC

Follow the signs from the main entrance, or from the south parking lot.

### **Christmas Shopping at THE INTER-NATION MARKET**



Vendors will be selling products from around the world. The TRAS table will feature Indian scarves, Nepali dhaka scarves and tablecloth sets, Himalayan angora toques and gloves, Kullu Valley shawls, cards by Marion Tipple and the Tibetan Children's Village, and tough-wearing, attractive cotton and wool shoulder bags from Dekyiling Tibetan Centre.

**Saturday, November 1, 2008 10am – 5pm**  
**Sunday, November 2, 2008, 10am – 4pm**

At HERITAGE HALL,  
3102 Main St., Vancouver, BC

# TRAS

Supporting health  
and education for  
children and youth  
in the Himalayas

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## Patrons

Joan Ford  
Dorothea Leach

## Board of Directors

President	Russil Wvong
Vice President	Jennifer Hales
Treasurer	Rob Asbeek-Brusse
Projects	Daphne Hales
Sponsorship	Marion Tipple

## Directors

Frank Beck, Lynne Beck,  
Ajeet Gorkhali, Videsh Kapoor

**Administrator** Heather O'Hagan  
**Victoria Rep** Georgina Henderson

## HOW TO DONATE TO TRAS



If you would like to support TRAS' work, you can use the enclosed donation form OR go to the TRAS website [www.tras.ca](http://www.tras.ca) and click on **How to Donate**. This will lead you to the Donate Now through CanadaHelps.org site. You can also phone Heather at the office (after Oct 14) at 604-224-5133 and give her your VISA or MasterCard number, OR mail a cheque or money order to TRAS, #720, 999 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5Z 1K5.

If you wish to sponsor a child, you may use any of the above methods, OR send 4 quarterly post-dated cheques.

## TRAS STREAMLINES THE PROJECT APPLICATION PROCESS



This year we are updating the process in the following way:

The project application form is now available on the TRAS website, and can be submitted at any time of the year.

There are two deadlines when the applications will be reviewed by the TRAS Board of Directors (September 15 and

January 15), at which time projects which do not fit the TRAS mandate will be weeded out, and those that fit the mandate and appear to have the capacity to follow through to a successful conclusion will be accepted for a final review. The results will be known by the end of November (for the September group) and March (for the January group). Acceptance of new projects will, of course, depend on available funding or our ability to raise the necessary funds!

At the Board meeting on September 17, this process started, and several applications were reviewed. More information is being sought to make sure we have the full details for those which we may be able to help. A full list of our current and new projects will be published in the December newsletter, along with the amounts of funds we need to raise.

## NEW CHEQUES NEEDED FROM SEPTEMBER 2008!



Please remember – from September 2008 you **MUST** use the new format of cheques, with a printed date box at the top right hand corner.

If you still have outstanding post-dated cheques at the TRAS office for your December payment, and know you wrote the date by hand, please contact Heather about it after October 14.