
Trans - Himalayan Aid Society

Winter Newsletter

December 2001

GOING IT ALONE?



As President Marion Tipple says in her letter to you, the world is a different place since September. New needs have surfaced which could not have been imagined last summer.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) had already warned us that its direction might be changing, to a pattern of funding bilateral programs and larger projects. A final decision on the fate of the smaller ngos such as TRAS is not known yet, but the events of September 11 and the past two months have brought yet another change. Most aid funds will be going to Afghanistan, leaving little to be divided amongst the rest of the needy in the world.

CIDA has informed us that probably only 20% of the proposed projects will be funded in the coming year. There is no question of sending in extra project proposals at the end of CIDA's fiscal year, as we have always done in the past. Another blow is that CIDA will now only consider project proposals that are worth more than \$75,000. (The previous minimum was \$35,000). So times are tough.

What is TRAS to do? We know,

from 40 years of experience, that small grassroots projects can have a huge effect on a poor community, to the point where it can become almost self-sustaining. We have proved this time and again with our work with Tibetan refugees in India and Nepal. The Tibetan settlements throughout the region are safe, stable environments, with good education, adequate health services and suitable agriculture for sustainability. And this is in no small way thanks to the Canadians who contributed through TRAS and similar ngos to the Tibetan projects.

TRAS' work for the main part is now geared towards helping the poorest of the poor in the trans-Himalayan region. India and Nepal, developing countries themselves, whose meagre resources can barely sustain their own people, have been wonderfully generous to the Tibetan refugees. Since the mid 80s, TRAS has tried to help these host countries in return. We have had much success with integrated rural development, health, forestry, education and vocational training. But we haven't finished yet! There is more to be done to reach that critical mass of

success in each village or school or valley to ensure self sufficiency and sustainability. We don't want to leave the job half done and abandon our partners when projects are nearing completion.

So, we are applying to CIDA for funding for two larger projects, both just over \$75,000, but we won't know until February whether we have been successful in securing matching funds from CIDA. And for the rest, we will have to go it alone, with your continued help. If you can help us fundraise, through your own efforts, through events you could organize, through charitable foundations or trusts you may know about, please contact us - and together let's keep the grassroots projects going!

The two projects sent to CIDA are: Phase 3 of the vocational training at the Buddha Academy, which is doing such good work. Read about it on Page 2.

Phase 3 of the Kullu Valley Health and Sanitation Project. This is an enlarged version of the Kullu Valley Toilets. Phase 2 was a huge success with 381 toilets being built in 38 villages (the project called for 250 toilets to be built in 20 villages). Villagers are now begging for toilets, they are prepared to contribute to the costs and all the labour, and in the villages with the greatest percentage of toilets, people are starting to build their own

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Vocational Training Project

for Youth at Buddha Memorial Children's Home

By Abby Fitch

Many TRAS members are sponsors of orphans and other destitute children at Buddha Memorial Children's Home and Academy in Kathmandu, Nepal. For the last five years, TRAS has also been supporting this institution in offering trades training to its older students, and to other needy youth in the area. The academy has chosen the trades carefully to ensure that the students will graduate with skills which are in demand in the local economy.

Buddha Memorial Children's Home and Academy has gradually been expanding its vocational training program available to its older students. TRAS supported a small tailoring training project in 1997-1998, and over the same time period TRAS contributed funds to build the tailoring and carpentry workshops, and to initiate the vocational training program. In 1999 TRAS received a 2:1 matching grant from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to run a two-year project for larger classes in tailoring, carpentry and electrician skills.

This project has recently been completed, with good results. In each of the three trades components, the school increased the number of students who received training over the numbers that they had planned. For the tailoring class, sometimes this was because students who entered the training with good academic backgrounds felt that after one year of training, they had learned enough to start working. In a few cases, young women dropped out to get married. In both of these cases, new students were recruited to take the places of departing girls in the classroom. Conversely, those students who had not been able to attend school for long enough before the training required the full two years to build their math skills for the theory portion of the training.

Mr. Dorje Namgyal Lama, the school principal, reports that of the twenty-five girls who received tailoring training, eleven are working as tailors and two are working as tailoring teachers in Kathmandu. The school has lost touch with the remaining twelve, in part due to the difficulties of commu-

nication in Nepal. School staff however are sure that many of those girls are working as tailors in villages.

In the carpentry class, during the first year of the project, two additional students joined the class of six from among the older boys attending the school. After one year of training, two of the original students left the training and got carpentry jobs. The remainder are still attending Buddha Academy, both the vocational training program and the secondary program, part-time. They wish to continue their education and training for one more year before graduation.

Buddha Academy has included the electrician training in the secondary school curriculum. A number of boys attending the school expressed interest in receiving this training, and an additional seven were admitted to the original class of five.

A few examples will illustrate the success of this and previous vocational training projects at this institution. One graduate from an earlier carpentry project at Buddha Academy has started his own carpentry workshop and his business is doing well. He has offered to take Buddha Academy trainees during their school holidays to apprentice under him and receive a stipend.

Another former graduate is currently an assistant instructor at Buddha Academy. He had originally been an orphan beggar at a nearby temple; he received basic schooling and carpentry training at this institution, to which he is now contributing back his skills.

The students in the vocational training programs contribute substantially to the improvement and upkeep of Buddha Memorial Children's Home and Academy through the products of their training. A new building on school property housing an auditorium, library and offices was fitted with doors and windows by the carpentry



students, and electrical work was done by the electrician students. The tailoring class sews school uniforms for the children as well as beautiful costumes for the Nepali and Tibetan dance program, in which the children learn to preserve their cultural heritage.

Looking at the larger picture, there is a shortage of skilled workers in Nepal. Much of the skilled trades work in the country is done by Indian workers, who perform valuable work but take their wages back to India with them. Mr. Namgyal writes that currently there are few, not to speak of affordable, opportunities for young people to receive trades training in Nepal. The vocational training project at Buddha Academy contributes to filling this gap in job training for youth. Graduates of the vocational training project at Buddha Academy working in their trades contribute their skills to the material well-being of their communities. Moreover, unlike foreign workers, their income stays in the community.

Buddha Academy has been visited

by four groups of Canadian secondary students on educational programs in Nepal. Two of these groups were the TRAS Himalayan Education Program for Young Canadians in 1998 and 2000; upon their return to Canada, these students and their leaders have made numerous slideshow presentations to various groups of Canadians, including talking about their visit to the Buddha Academy and its vocational training project. Another group was from Churchill Secondary in Vancouver, led by Brian Sheffield, who joined the TRAS board of directors after co-leading the 2000 TRAS trip. The fourth group was from a Coquitlam secondary school which heard about TRAS from one of our members, contacted us and visited Buddha Academy, while they were on an educational trip to Nepal.

TRAS has recently submitted to CIDA a proposal to renew this vocational training project for slightly larger classes, and for three years. While there will be tremendous competition for CIDA funds this year, we are

hopeful that our proposal will be approved and that this excellent institution can continue to benefit from the support of TRAS members and the Canadian public.

EVENTS PAST AND FUTURE

The Tibetan evening held at the Vancouver Planetarium on November 2, 2001, was a success in many ways - nearly 180 people in the audience, a profit of nearly \$1000 for TRAS projects in Lhasa, a lively talk by President Marion Tipple, whose magnificent photography was enjoyed by most of the audience, inspite of the vagaries of the professional technical support! Next time, we'll bring our own equipment! Thanks to our members and friends who attended. Quite a few Tibetan crafts were sold, so we will be ordering more for the coming year.

Marion Tipple will present a slide show and talk entitled "TIBET - 2001" in Victoria, BC, on February 7, 2002. This event is being organized with the support of the TRAS Victoria Branch, and we encourage members to attend and bring their friends. Time and location will be posted on our website (www.tras.ca) or phone the TRAS office for more details at 604-224-5133.

Several organizations which help the Tibetan cause are planning a large Tibetfest in Vancouver in late February, 2002. Watch our website or contact the office for details in the new year.

TRAS will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2002! Watch the website for details of upcoming events.

Sponsorship Report by Joan Ford

Tenzin Dalha

Amar Singh Khataya

Sonam Yangchen

Birdos Tamang

The year seems to have flown by, and recent events have made us all aware that we are all world neighbours. Helping children to get a fair start in their lives is a priority. The sponsorship program is one way an individual can do just that.

I would like to thank all our sponsors for their help during the past year.

Your help and interest is very much appreciated by TRAS. It is that time of the year when you will have received a letter from me to ask you to continue support in 2002.

For those of you who would like to open your hearts to another child, or

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Didi's old people

Didi's brother, the Rinpoche, is back in Canada along with those who accompanied him to Tibet in August, and the reports and photos have arrived! Didi, you will remember, accompanied her brother to Tibet last year, and while her brother made arrangements for the building of the health centre, Didi was saddened by the plight of 20 old ladies in a home in Zadoh, the small town near Didi's family land.

Two of the western women who went with the Rinpoche have sent us reports of their visit to this home. Lana Weber writes: "I had the chance to visit a group home where the enclosed photos were taken. This series of living spaces was dedicated to elderly women, most of whom, from what I could understand, did not have extended families to take care of them in their old age. The home was tucked away through a series of mud-strewn alleyways and corridors. It has an open centre courtyard with rooms in an L-shaped format. The ones I could see inside of had a basic packed

dirt floor and a small clay stove for heating and cooking." Lana handed over the money collected in the West for this project to a Tibetan lady, Mrs. Karnon, who was to oversee the purchases of basics "to make them comfortable in their old age".

Michele Davidson was with Lana when she made the presentation, and sends this report: "The location is in a filthy area near the river, which serves as the town's garbage dump. The short drive in to the residence was extremely muddy and bumpy. This little stretch of dirt track would make for treacherous walking for a young person, never mind a senior. It was also extremely dirty with much litter and garbage and many foraging dogs.

When we arrived at the collection of ramshackle dwellings where these seniors live, I must say I was shocked. The residences are very simple, as are many residences in Zadoh, but there was minimal protection from the elements other than basic walls. In some cases the windows had no glass.

The people were happy to have visi-



Mrs. Karnon

tors. Although quite raggedy in appearance, they eagerly gathered for a group photo. I found this visit to be quite an emotional experience for me. While I realize that living conditions in many areas of the world are nowhere near as comfortable as my own, I was greatly disturbed by the situation of these elder citizens of Zadoh.

Their poverty assigns them to the least desirable area in this community. They are living surrounded by garbage. They live without heat. They live without enough food. They live without even moderately clean or substantial clothing. They live without consistent medical attention, and certainly for those suffering from mental disturbance, there was no support specific to their needs. They need all the basics.

Before I sign off, I'd like to share with you a bright moment from this visit. These people keep a pet cat. The cat has a cute collar of cloth. One of the women picked up the little creature with such gentleness and cradled it in her arms during our visit. The others often reached out to pet and stroke it.

Seeing their kindness to the cat and the obvious desire to nurture it, even in the midst of such despair, made my eyes well up. I was inspired to see that love survives in spite of tremendous physical challenge."

Didi has supplied some extra facts. Lana is right that most of these ladies have no family. One or two do, but they are so poor they cannot take care of the old ladies, and in fact leave their children with granny while they work. Lana commented on the chil-



Didi's old people

dren who gathered around. A couple were grandchildren, but most were local kids who had never seen a "white" person before! These ladies are of the generation which suffered terribly during the Cultural Revolution and often witnessed horrific tragedies to their families. No wonder they are mentally and emotionally scarred. The Chinese-built home, although basic in the extreme, is quite well built. The walls and roof are sound, and do not leak. The garbage dump at least provides cardboard and plastic - to burn in their little stoves for a meagre heat, to cover the broken windows and to insulate the floor. The concept of a group home is foreign to the Tibetans, who under normal circumstances would have looked after their elderly relatives, but the local Tibetan community is doing what it can. The community provides each lady with the equivalent of \$60 a year, and local housewives bring their leftover food to the home.

Mrs. Karnon's parents and parents-in-law had all been orphans who were looked after by Didi's grandfather before the Chinese invasion. They had grown up under his care, looking after his family's animals. These people are incredibly loyal to the family of their old lord, whom they revered. It is a lovely karma that Mrs. Karnon is now able, through Didi, to help others in need, just as her parents were helped by Didi's grandfather. Ironically, the Chinese gave good educational opportunities to children like Mrs. Karnon and her husband, because they had been so "oppressed" by the local lord, whereas Didi's cousins, being aristocrats, were denied an education.

Mrs. Karnon is the head of the local Tibetan women's organization. She has told Didi that with the funds from TRAS donors she has been able to purchase a mattress for each of the

20 old ladies, 6 beds and was in the process of getting blankets for each person. The money didn't stretch as far as 20 beds, but the mattresses and blankets will provide needed warmth this winter. Once again, grateful thanks to those who contributed to this project.

GOING ALONE, continued from page 1 without SHARE's help! The villages are cleaner, disease rates are down. In this new proposal 400 toilets will be built, to bring the percentage up in every village in the valley; immunizations will be given to 4,800 children, basic health education will be given to key women in each village, and toilets and health clinics will be provided in two permanent shanty towns which house migrant Nepali and Tibetan workers.

Many of our smaller projects on hand are vocational training schemes, which benefit not only the individual but also families and communities. All good stuff! **So even if we have to GO IT ALONE, we won't give up!**

SPONSORSHIP, continued from page 3 become a sponsor for the first time, I am inserting four case histories in this newsletter, but I have many more in my files. Sponsorship is \$300 per annum, payable annually or quarterly, and you are also asked to pay the TRAS membership fee of \$20 to cover the cost of the newsletter and administration of the sponsorships. The \$300 goes directly to the local agency to disburse for the child. A tax deductible receipt will be issued.

We have finally received the long-awaited histories of children in the Spiti School and hope to be able to help them soon.

TENZIN DALHA: This 9 year old boy lives near the Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre in Dehra Dun, northern India. His family came origi-

nally from Lhokha Province in southern Tibet, fleeing first to Bhutan and then in 1982 to India. His father is handicapped and cannot do any hard work. His mother works on a hand loom at the Centre, earning a small wage. He has 1 brother and 2 sisters. He is healthy and is in Class 3 at the school. The family is very poor and would appreciate very much any help.

BIRDOS TAMANG: This 12 year old boy belongs to a very poor family. He had two elder sisters and 1 younger brother. The family lives in eastern Nepal. Birdos' father is often sick and cannot do much work. His mother works in the fields for other people. They have no other means of earning, so it is impossible to send their children to school. Seeing their poor condition, one of the village headmen had pity on them and brought Birdos down to Kathmandu and requested help. He has been admitted to the Buddha Memorial School, which believes his case to be genuine. He seems clever and is eager to go to school. He will be in Grade 3.

AMAR SINGH KHATAYA: This 8 year old boy comes from a very poor family. He has 1 elder brother and 1 elder sister. They go to a village school, but his parents cannot afford to send Amar. Their only income is from work in other people's fields. Amar would love to go to school, therefore he was brought to the Buddha Memorial School in Kathmandu, which has agreed to accept him. The School needs a sponsor for him.

SONAM YANGCHEN: This 7 year old girl is very lovely and sweet. She comes from Hurling village, very close to the Tibetan border. Her parents are farmers and want to give her a good education, but without help it will be impossible. She is in Class 1 at the Spiti School in northern India, which is looking for a sponsor for her.

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

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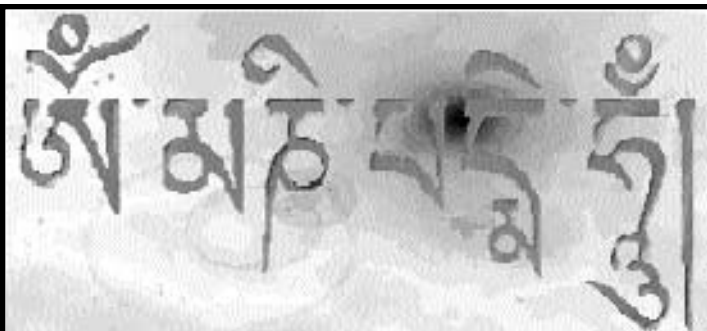
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Om Mani Padme Hum
Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus



Trans - Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)

Yearly Membership donation (\$20) \$20
 Possible Additional Donations:
 Annual Donation of \$300 for the "Child Development and Education Project"
 at a residential school or in a settlement
 Donation to the Old People's Fund, which supports a "Self-Help Project"
 for the elderly and infirm
 Donation to the general fund or other specific area of your choice
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