



## **Canadian-Himalayan Association for Innovation (CHAI) newsletter - Winter 2023**

Hello everyone! We hope this newsletter finds you well. It's been a while since we've reached out and we wanted to update you on CHAI's activities this year. We've been busy! In the spring we put out a call for proposals for time-limited projects that aim to build skills and capabilities of marginalized people in the Himalayan region of India. By June 2023, we had received 4 amazing proposals that we were happy to support, and are excited to share with you. Visit our [website](#) to learn more about CHAI.

### **1. Birding Camp for Youth, Kargyam, Ladakh; The Youth Association of Kargyam. July 7 – 14, 2023.**

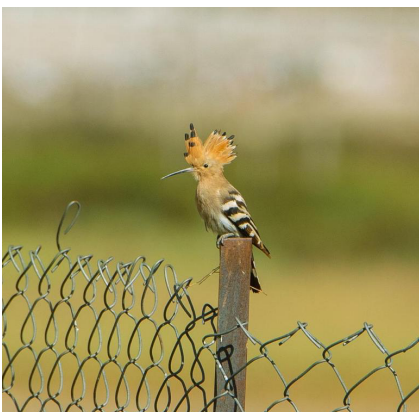
This project connected 43 students and youth from Kargyam with local bird enthusiasts and nature lovers to learn about local birds, habitat conservation, and eco-tourism development. The goals of the program were to establish a network of local youth who are knowledgeable in bird identification and avian biology, and have an overall understanding of the unique, yet fragile, high elevation wetland ecosystem in which they live.

The program offered a combination of indoor workshops and outdoor excursions. One activity, the documentation of local birds and wild animals, resulted in the first ever Kargyam area wildlife brochure. Twenty-two species of birds were identified! Bird watchers come to Kargyam from all over the world to see the famous Black-neck crane, among other rare birds. However, while tourists benefit from the beauty and remoteness of the area, they do not offer anything to the community. Sustainable eco-tourism allows Kargyam citizens, who have a vested interest in maintaining the ecological integrity of their environment, to stay in their villages, which benefits the local economy, promotes a sense of pride in one's home and culture, and has an impact on the preservation of Kargyam's natural heritage.



Learning about local birds and ecology

CHAI was thrilled to fully fund this innovative initiative. Many thanks to the project's staff and volunteers, with special recognition to Padma Rigzin for his leadership.



Common Hoopoe



One of several fieldtrips



Black-necked crane

**2. Inclusion Workshops for Village Health Care Workers, [Samphia Foundation](#) (SF), Kullu, HP. August 2023 – July 2024.**

Samphia (Ability) Foundation (SF) is an NGO that is dedicated to providing key services that eliminate barriers to full integration for children with disabilities in the Himalayas. SF has found that the perception of disability often comes with bias and misunderstanding, particularly in the area of one's capabilities. In an effort to change these negative perceptions and create a path to greater societal acceptance, SF offers "[Inclusion Workshops](#)", in addition to a wide range of [early intervention services](#) and their unique [Therapy on Wheels](#) program. A focus this year for SF is on Inclusion Workshops for village health care workers, such as Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Anganwadi (rural child care centres) child development personnel. It is critical that these health care providers have the skills to identify children who would benefit from early intervention, and that they receive updated information about the latest therapeutic interventions. A total of 24 workshops will have been



provided from August 2023 to April 2024, making this education available to 700 health care workers! The scope of SF disability awareness programs also extends to schools and colleges, religious groups, village festivals, social gatherings, parent groups, and government departments.

CHAI's contribution to this much-needed initiative covers costs such as training resources, travel costs, refreshments, and educational pamphlets. We wish to thank Shruti More, Executive Director of SF and Occupational Therapist, and everyone at the SF for their tireless work to make the Himalayas a more inclusive society.

**3. Tar Village Winter Camp, Tar Youth Association (TYA), Lhundup Dorje, Urgyan Thustop, (TYA); Caitlin Thurrell, Jason Chandler (volunteers). December 22, 2023- January 22, 2024.**

Tar is a community of about twelve households in the western region of Ladakh. Reaching the village requires a 1 1/2 hour walk up a steep canyon from the auto road; its lack of road connectivity makes Tar unique in many ways, and particularly in the richness of its culture and its beautiful, protected mountain environment. Agriculture and other lifeways continue on much as they have for more than two thousand years in this high mountain village, and the ibex, snow leopard, and many other wild beings make their homes here in balanced relationship with the human community.

This year, concerned with the well-being and future of the village, the young people of Tar formed a Youth Association. Winter camps for children and youth, who are home from school during the cold season, have become regular events in many Ladakhi villages. Largely supported by Health Inc., these long-time programs serve as a role model for other villages. Lhundup and Urgyan approached Caitlin Thurrell and



Tar village



Jason Chandler to help with the planning, organization, and volunteer recruitment for the first Tar village winter camp. Caitlin and Jason have been living between Tar and Maine, USA, since 2015.



Ice sledding in winter

The month-long Tar camp will offer morning and afternoon sessions with a combination of games and sports (physical training, skating, and hockey), practical skills (wood carving, preparing wool for weaving, ice rink building, tool making and repair, and food prep), Ladakhi history and culture (folk songs, storytelling, dance, Bhoti reading and writing), and play-based academics (environmental studies, math and English). CHAI's contribution will cover costs for the Ladakhi teachers, volunteer stipends, and for some equipment. Many thanks to Lhundup, Urgyan, Caitlin and Jason for spearheading this inaugural winter camp in Tar. Check out Caitlin and Jason's blog about [living in Ladakh](#).

#### 4. "1000 hours outside" Orienteering & Storytelling. Youth Association-Gya-Meru/Health Inc, Rigzin Mingur December 20 to January 15, 2024.

Just like in Canada, Himalayan children are spending more time with screens and less time discovering the world around them. The "1000 hours outside" program supports Youth Associations in Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh to organize inclusive, joyful play and learning in children's home communities. This year the Youth Association of Gya-Meru in Ladakh is offering an Orienteering and Storytelling outdoor experiential program over a 4-day period during their annual December Winter Camp. Forty participants will learn orienteering (a necessary skill in the Himalayas!) and medicinal plant identification, all taught by local youth. Elders will share their knowledge and skills related to storytelling. Participants will also interview local historians to learn about the area's history. CHAI's contribution to this project will cover the costs of the youth mentors and elders, as well as some equipment.



Gya-Meru Village, Leh District, Ladakh



Fun outside!

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CHAI is committed to supporting grassroots, community-based projects that are developed and delivered by local people or in partnership with local people. **Please join us in this endeavour by making a financial donation if you are able, at [Canada Helps](#).** As many of these projects are small (but have a big impact!), even small donations to CHAI go a long way. You can follow these projects from start to finish on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

CHAI would like to gratefully acknowledge the tireless work of Cynthia Hunt and [Health Inc](#), with whom CHAI members have partnered since 2005.

