



Smart Kids Initiative (SKI) and Zero TB Kids (ZTB)

Progress Report and Plans for 2024

ZERO TB



EDUCATION: SMART KIDS INITIATIVE (SKI)

Recent Progress

To overcome the tremendous hardships and setbacks brought on by the pandemic to the education and wellbeing for children in the Tibetan Children Village (TCV) schools, we developed Smart Kids Initiative in 2021 through a formal collaboration between TCV Head Office in Dharamsala and Johns Hopkins University. SKI is a person-centric program focused on the **overall well-being of children**.



- In 2022-23, in a first, **digital learning resources** consisting of more than 30 computers and internet facilities were provided to the girls' and boys' hostels right at their dormitories.
- Additionally, 10 computers and internet facilities were provided to the **subject teachers**.
- We have also supported internet facilities for the first time to **pilot classes** for subjects of science, math, and language for several grades that we look to extend further for this year.
- Subscription to **learning programs** were provided for children.
- Social media access including Facebook and Instagram are blocked.
- **Docking stations** for the computers have been developed in the girls' and boys' hostels.



Plans for 2024

- Include the homes (dormitories) of the **younger children** at grade 5 and above by installing at least 5 desktop computers per dormitory with internet facilities for a total of 10 homes.
- Support one dedicated personnel who could help the home mothers and the children **learn to use** the digital facilities including the basics of internet, search tools, Google tools, and Microsoft.
- Create **Khan Academy accounts** for each child and help them navigate the grade wise resources available on the various subjects, particularly mathematics.
- Develop children's **digital skills** including typing, internet browsing and search skills, Microsoft, and Google tools.



- TCV Selaqui is a model branch of TCV in Dehradun where distinguished students are enrolled through a competitive process. We will support 100 students at the school to enroll in an advanced 2-week **summer training program** via a camp at the [Regional Science Center](#) in Dehradun, where they are taught about creative science, artificial intelligence, internet of things, robotics, coding, electronics, etc., depending upon the children's interest and background.
- Create a **learning environment** inside the homes with inspirational models, posters, bookshelves, and other facilities.
- I have scheduled discussions with the **leadership** of TCV schools.

HEALTH: ZERO TB IN KIDS & FAMILY (ZTB)

Recent Progress

Since the initiation of Zero TB in Kids in 2017 with the blessing and support of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we have conducted TB screening for **more than 20,000** schoolchildren and staff members, and monks and nuns in schools, monasteries, and nunneries in India.



- Over the past seven years, **we have achieved 80% reduction in TB cases** in the Tibetan boarding schools in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. It is heartening to hear the school staff and nurses themselves say *"after Zero TB project came to the schools, TB went down a lot."*
- ZTB detects both active and latent TB infection and then **provides TB preventive therapy** for several thousand children. In the process, TB transmission has been greatly cut.
- We procured an artificial intelligence (AI) enabled ultraportable **point-of-care digital X-ray** that allowed us to perform chest X-rays right at the schools. In the past, children would need to be taken outside the school for X-rays, to labs in the town. This technology has been a game changer for us, just like the GeneXpert technology that we continue to use.



- In 2021, we developed **Zero TB in Kids & Family** to additionally include adult household contacts and family members. As a part of this, we have screened more than 3,000 Tibetans and Tibetan origin children and staff for TB in schools, monasteries, and nunneries, detecting a very high rate of active TB of 650/100,000 children (global rate: <150/100,000 children). We provided preventive treatment to several hundred children and adults. At Delek Hospital in Dharamsala, 200 household contacts have been screened for latent and active TB and then offered TB preventive treatment using a short-course preventive treatment regimen.
- From the pilot initiative in Nepal, we found that **mental health** is a major public health issue for children and adults in the institutes, and also that children and adults with mental health problems including depression and anxiety have higher risk of TB, and people with TB have higher risk of mental health problems.



Plans for 2024

- Develop a **child centric health program** by integrating TB services with that of chronic lung disease including asthma, as well as mental health for adolescent children. To this end, we plan to add mobile spirometers to our ZTB screening tools to diagnose not just TB but also lung diseases. For mental health, we will screen for mental health during our Zero TB screening camps and provide counselling, linking to care those who need it.
- Continue ZTB screening for schools, monasteries, and nunneries in **Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand** using the AI-enabled digital x-ray.
- The large majority of the Tibetan population resides in the state of **Karnataka in South India**. We plan to screen the schools and monasteries in South India for tuberculosis and lung health.



We are deeply grateful for your unwavering support for the last many years that has helped us to not only sustain but to impactfully scale up our work. Allow me to express my deepest gratitude and thanks for your generosity and support on behalf of the Tibetan population.

GALLERY

- As a part of the person centric program, we are currently developing an implementation plan to carry out screening for *helicobacter pylori* infection in the monasteries and schools in the Dharamsala area, providing treatment for those with infection. *H. pylori* infection is the **major cause of stomach cancer**, which is the leading cause of death for Tibetans in exile and in Tibet. Particularly through a cohort study, we seek to understand the etiopathogenesis of gastric cancer among Tibetans.
- We will continue our Zero TB in Kids & Family program in Nepal, screening for Tibetan as well as Himalayan schools in Kathmandu valley. We have sought formal support and collaboration from the Ministry of Health of Lumbini province to eventually **scale up our work in Lumbini** province, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.
- I am pleased to inform you I have been approved by Johns Hopkins to recruit **Research Program Coordinator** (RC Sadoff) at Johns Hopkins. This will greatly help me in managing our Children's Health and Education projects over time. Sadoff is a public health graduate of Harvard and Columbia with excellent knowledge and background in global health global health diplomacy. Importantly, Sadoff is passionate about our work in the Tibetan refugee population. Sadoff, who initially joined our team as Research Assistant, distinguished with excellent contributions to the project as a Research Assistant.
- We are currently **developing several manuscripts** based on our Zero TB work in India and Nepal. We are confident about being able to publish several impactful papers this year so that our work could inspire other communities affected by tuberculosis. I look forward to keeping you posted as we make progress.



