

Musthang Report December 2003

The Musthang Project is focused on re-invigorating local culture in an area of obvious cultural significance given the continuing lack of freedom within Tibet. After nearly two years discussion local people decided that their children's study and use of their own Tibetan language may well be central to the region's cultural survival. Working with local village committees we have placed young Tibetan teachers in four villages plus the Traditional Medical School and two nunneries. And, indeed, in their quiet way these young Tibetan teachers seem to be doing more toward stabilizing Mustang's traditional Tibetan culture than anything else at this time.

The photos of the children here speak for themselves. Before our teachers arrived the children in these remote village schools had no opportunity to study their own language nor listen to a lesson that considered their own fascinating culture. Today they have this opportunity. Parents' pride in their children's studies of Tibetan is cheering.

Musthangwas' perception of themselves and their own unique place in the world has changed positively over these last few years. On my arrival in 1999, the children told me, 'You will have to speak to us in Nepali, we do not speak Tibetan.' To their delighted surprise I refused and the project began. Today the children proudly speak in their own language and study their own script. They are starting to get the idea that indeed they do have a history and they need not apologize for not being Hindu Nepali. It is exciting!

We would like not only to continue but to expand the number of villages with Tibetan teachers in their schools. Expanding the program certainly will strengthen the communities and their nunneries and also importantly strengthen the teachers for they do work quite alone at the moment.

Each teacher is paid \$100 a month for twelve months a year plus medical expenses and one pair of hiking boots, as well as air fare and travel expenses to and from Jomsom, the Mustang district capital from which they begin walking to their assigned villages.





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