



THE TADRA PROJEKT

ORPHAN CHILDREN'S VILLAGES IN TIBET

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NEWSLETTER 2023





DEAR FRIENDS OF TADRA,

Finally it has been possible to make a trip to Tibet again this year. After the frustration of the last few years and the travel restrictions due to the pandemic, Beat Renz and Michael Becker were actually able to visit our Children's Villages in Tibet. We are very happy about it! We have attached a great travel report from both of them and hope that you too will feel something of the Tadra atmosphere again.

We are currently taking care of 286 children in the Children's Village in Golok and 105 in Dawu, as well as 380 young people who now attend schools, colleges or vocational training centres outside Tibet. 41 young people completed their training or studies this year.

We are happy to report that some of our former Tadra children are now employed as teachers in our own Golok Village after completing their studies. We also receive a great deal of help from former children in both of the Villages, either in the form of financial or material donations or in line with their professional skills.

This closes the circle and allows us to look to the future with great hope.

This year, our most urgent problem is the need for extensive renovation work on some of the houses and the elementary school in Golok (see the article in this issue with some current photos by Beat Renz). We thank the sponsors who have spontaneously agreed to cover part of the costs so that we can complete the most urgent aspects of this work early this winter, in the hope that we will receive the necessary funding for all the other renovation projects to be completed in 2024.

This year, we were once again able to take in 26 new children in Golok.

As every year, we take this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for your support and trust that you will continue to stand by us.

The Tadra children repeatedly thank us as they develop mature personalities and are finding their place in their home country thanks to their diligence and eagerness to learn.

We wish you all happy holidays and a healthy new year 2024!

Dr. Youlha Tawo
First Chairperson
Tadra-Projekt e.V.

Dr. Klaus Vedder
Second Chairperson
Tadra-Projekt e.V.

Beat Renz
President, Board of Trustees
Tadra-DEMIGH-Foundation



A LONG AWAITED REUNION

After four years of pandemic, the visa regulations were finally relaxed at the beginning of 2023. Travel remained difficult, but it was at least theoretically possible. Two weeks after the peak of the coronavirus infections in China (40 million per week) in early July, I landed at the new and almost empty international airport of Chengdu. As the only „long-nose“ there I immediately attracted the attention of the officials, and so the first of my numerous „interrogations“ took place.

Only two hours before my departure from Switzerland, the driver who was to take me from Chengdu to Tibet told me that there would be police checks before the town bordering the Tibetan region and that he would therefore not be able to take me there. So I had to repack and make various changes of plan. I quickly booked a flight for myself and my companion Michael from Germany, who was waiting for me in Chengdu, to an airport directly on the roof of the world at an altitude of 4200 metres, in order to bypass this checkpoint,

We were almost alone on this plane too, and immediately after landing we were again called in for a lengthy interrogation. Several times in the past I had been refused entry to this area, so that tension was naturally high. Fortunately, they let us move on this time.

The reception at the first Children's Village in Dawu was, as always, incredibly moving. The children waited patiently in a long line until we were able to greet each and every one of them individually. In addition seeing numerous new faces, I actually no longer recognized many of the older children, so amazing it was how some of them had grown and changed in appearance over the last four years.

This was followed by five wonderful days, which we spent in the midst of the everyday lives of these incredibly lively children. A number of our departed charges, whose studies continue to be supported by Tadra at schools far away, arrived every day. The news that we were in the village spread like wildfire via the social media and many of our „old boys and girls“ travelled from all over to visit us. In the 28 years of Tadra history, some 800 to 900 children have now become independent. They live far and wide, have jobs, some of them are married and even have children of their own. Before the pandemic I knew almost all of the children's names, and in the course of my thirty-six visits they had all found a place in my heart. But then suddenly I was faced with these young adults, some with children in their arms!

I recognized the joy in their beaming faces at seeing me again, but many of them had changed so much over the years that I often had no idea who it was standing in front of me. It was only when they told me their names that it clicked and led to a deep hug and a huge joy.



Thanks to the new technology in the photo archive of my telephone, I was able to find all the pictures from their childhood with one click. Numbering some 60,000 pictures, this often resulted in a virtual album with fifty to a hundred pictures per child. We had long conversations in which we recalled all the little experiences we had had together. They told me about their lives after they left the Village and showed me lots of new pictures. About a hundred former Tadra children came back to the one or the other Village, we had countless wonderful encounters like this.

It was an indescribable joy to see what all the children had become. Being privileged to hold a small place in this large family and this magnificent project filled me with humility, satisfaction and pride. I shed many tears of joy at the reunion and was filled with a deep sense of happiness.

The pain of saying goodbye in Dawu was followed by the joy of reunion in the second Children's Village, Golok, following a day's drive. There, too, the welcome triggered many emotions. Many former Tadra children were already there to organize a big basketball tournament. These happy moments of reunion were repeated over and over. As we shared our memories, I often asked them what other children had become. As the alumni are connected via the social media, they set up video chats with them for me within seconds. So I also had many emotional virtual contacts with the Tadra children who had flown the nest.

Not much has changed in the Tadra Villages themselves. In Golok, after a long interruption due to Covid-19, several new buildings have finally been completed, including the multi-purpose hall, which was co-financed by the Swiss Norzang Foundation. This hall is a blessing for the children. During the almost nine months of the cold season, they can play, dance and party together in the heated hall. The pandemic had made the holding of events such as lectures and stands in Europe impossible, with a corresponding significant drop in income, and the less urgent expenses such as renovations had had to be postponed. At an altitude of over 4000m, the buildings age quickly due to the intense cold. Urgent renovation work is now required on many buildings, a backlog that needs to be cleared as soon as possible. We are asking for everyone's support on this.

On the very long drives I noticed considerable changes. Transportation between Chengdu and Lhasa has been massively improved for the Chinese tourists. To get to both Children's Villages, we covered a total of around 2000 kilometres by road. Until a few years ago, these roads had consisted entirely of dirt tracks. Today, modern roads connecting the rare built-up areas, which have also been heavily developed. But this development conveys a very deceptive picture. As soon as you leave these roads, you are transported back to the Middle Ages, and very soon realize the depths of the poverty in this huge area and how many



The vitality of the Tadra children is an unforgettable experience for every visitor

orphans still need help. Our Village leader showed us pictures of neglected children for whom inclusion in the Tadra project offers the only chance of a decent future. As long as we have the means to do so, we will continue to be available to these children in the future.

The Tadra villages remain an oasis of hope, love and joy for the poorest children in Tibet. My reunion with so many former Tadra residents who are now able to earn their own living has left a deep impression on me. It made me realize how important and meaningful the work for the Tadra project is. Happy and fulfilled, I realize that I have invested this part of my life's energy in the right direction and with meaning.

by Beat Renz

Michael with
Kelsang Choeden



THE MOST EMOTIONAL JOURNEY OF MY LIFE

As an amateur mountaineer, I visited Mount Kailash in Tibet for the first time ten years ago and saw the plight of the Tibetans there. That is what brought me to Tadra, and I have been supporting the project ever since.

This year I had the opportunity to visit the Children's Villages with Beat Renz. Despite the restrictions by China, we had the good fortune to get there safely. When we arrived in Dawu, the children were waiting for us in single file, singing and welcoming me with their wonderful smiles. My heart immediately went out to them. The next morning, little hands nestled in mine. But it's not just two children, but a whole group of children who now continually accompany me. They have never seen me before, yet they want to be close to me and have great trust in me. One has to remember that every one of these children has a heavy past. Beat had told me the life stories of some of them.

When they get up in the morning, the older children help the younger ones to dress and brush their hair. For them, it goes without saying that they help one another. It is one big family. We eat together with the children and every one of them wants me to sit next to them. So I need to make sure I do it fairly and sit somewhere different every time.

There is so much closeness there, the children behave as if we have known each other for a long time. I play with them and get to know their games. They play with simple objects, sticks or stones - with a great skill that I lack. I am impressed by their laughter and gaiety. It is a true marvel to see what these children have become and what a great job Tadra is doing here. A huge thank you also to the house-mothers, whose work with the children is so important. These children can still be happy with little things like balloons.

I developed a particularly close relationship with one teenage girl. On the second day I was there, 15-year-old Kelsang Choeden took my hand in hers. She had lost her parents in the Tibetan highlands when she was very young. Her older siblings had to beg for food, and tied Kelsang Choeden up in a tent for days. Since then she has lived here with Tadra. My heart went out to her when I heard her story, for I understood why she is so desperate for warm human contact.

I had a great experience making momos together with the children, for they all help the house-mothers. First, the dough is rolled out and then shaped into a momo with a meat filling. Trying it myself, I soon realised how skillful the children are.

I will never forget the evenings we spent together. First we danced until the sun went down. I can still hear the Tibetan music in my ears. Afterwards, there is a goodnight ritual where many of the children come up to us to say goodnight. Some of them line up and want to be hugged and be wished a good night with a few personal words. Beat knows most of the children personally thanks to his many trips, and this lovely ritual has become a regular occurrence. By the second evening, I too had been integrated into this routine. The children give me lots of gifts (drawings and handmade flowers), and this brings us even closer together. Here at home I look at the pictures again and again and they are special treasures for me.

After this intense time in Dawu, the day comes when I must say goodbye, and this is very painful for all of us. The children cry and don't want to let us go. That hurts.

We were lucky enough to be able to visit the other Children's Village in Golok next. Here, too, we were warmly welcomed, but the younger children were already on vacation with their families. I was particularly impressed by the fact that so many former children still have a close relationship with Tadra. They appreciate the



Kelsang
Choeden
as a child

help they were given and want to give something back. The great thing is that many of the teachers here are former Tadra children. It's good to see how the circle closes again.

As „guests of honour“, we were able to attend the award and certificate ceremony for the upper school. The children all appeared in traditional Tibetan costume, which of course gave me great pleasure. On this occasion they performed traditional and modern dances.

We were certainly able to give the Tadra children a little warmth during our visit, but I got a lot back from them in return. I have never felt such love, happiness, closeness and heartfulness. The Tadra children will be in my heart forever.

My most grateful thanks to Beat for making it possible for me to go on this trip with him. Perhaps he will take me with him again next year. I long for these children, and they want to see „their Mike“ again.

by Michael Becker



Our co-workers (with Beat) in Dawu now take care of our children only at weekends and during the holidays on account of the obligation for the children to attend boarding school.



I TAKE OFF MY HAT TO THE HOUSE-MOTHERS WITH RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

All over the world, most mothers care for their children through childhood until they can take care of themselves. They don't count the hours of work and remain loving for their little ones all year round. Our house-mothers do just that, but for how many more children (20-40!) and not even their own. What our house-mothers do is simply amazing.

Their working day usually starts before six o'clock in the morning and often isn't finished until after 9 or 10 pm, seven days a week. When the house-mother wakes the children, a whole system gets into gear. The children get up, go to the bathroom, wash and brush their teeth. Then they help each other to make the beds, tidy the room and clean the floor. The girls also help each other with their hair. The house-mother oversees the whole operation and is a loving support, especially for the younger children. It is to her that the children come when they have questions or problems that arise and takes care of a host of details until the children start school.

While the children are at school, they clean the house bathroom, the main entrance, the stairs and the forecourt. In Dawu the Village no longer has its own cook, so the house-mothers do all the cooking and serve all three meals to the children, after which they clean the kitchen and hall.

With so many children, there is always one who is ill, in pain or in need of help. The house-mothers also help with the everyday chores, in the garden, with homework, shopping, the laundry and the distribution of all supplies. They take the little ones in their arms, dry their tears, play and dance with the children and take care of any number of other tasks.

House-mother Sonam Pakyi, who looks after Patrick Girls' House in Dawu, has even brought up two babies who were brought to the Village, raising them in her room as if they were her own children.

The unconditional love of these wonderful house-mothers for the Tadra children truly knows no bounds. They are available to their children right around the clock, almost every day of the year. Their commitment is unparalleled and deserves the utmost respect. Without them, the Tadra Project could not function. For them, the reward for their immense efforts is the positive change in their karma.

The Village monk in Golok told me during my last visit that he always tries to make the house-mothers understand that constant prayers or donation of money in monasteries is not necessary. Their work in the Children's Villages is the highest form of compassion and cannot be improved upon. How much better the world would be if there were more such selfless people. For me, these wonderful people express the highest and purest form of compassion and love for their fellow beings in action.

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by Beat Renz

House-mother Sonam Pakyi in Dawu, one of the approximately 15 house-mothers in the whole Tadra project.



left:
Lingtso Kyi

below:
Lingtso Kyi
after winning
the inter-
regional
contest

LINGTSO KYI

A pupil at our Tadra School, comes from Machu Yultso, Golok district. Her father died in an accident when she was five years old. Her mother suffered from an obscure illness that often caused her to lose consciousness, leaving her unable to care for her children. The family was also very poor. Lingtso Kyi was forced to move in with her grandparents in order to receive support.

In the autumn of 2017, we visited their home and were able to get an idea of the difficult family situation. Lingtso Kyi was then brought into our Children's Village. She was 8 years old at the time, but was at the developmental stage of a 6-year-old.

In our care, it soon became apparent that she had a particularly good memory and a touching, melodious voice. She was diligent in class and sang traditional songs that captivated the audience. Eventually, she also sang at various school events, and gradually she participated in various cultural events in the Golok district.

Her stunning and soothing voice won everyone's hearts and she was highly praised.

She was one of the ten best child artistes selected in 2023 from a national competition organized by the state broadcasting service Amdo. She has since received several medals and awards. In addition to her school lessons, she is also learning to play various instruments.

We are very proud of how beautifully Lingtso Kyi has developed.



The seven siblings in 2006. from left to right: Gangsar Lhamo, the eldest, with Monlam Gyatso, the youngest, Kelsang Phuntsok, Ogyen Lhaki, Tsering Yangtso, Choden Wangchuk, Sherab Palmo



A TADRA FAMILY HISTORY

In 2006, we came across this group of seven siblings who were living on their own in very poor conditions and six of whom we were able to take into our Children's Village in Dawu. (See below for the story of the other child, Choeden Wangchuk.) Their mother had died and their father was addicted to alcohol and could no longer look after the children. The eldest daughter Gangsar Lhamo was just 14 years old and had the task of supporting her siblings and herself. Here is the story of what has become of them, a story of sorry and joy:

Gangsar Lhamo was 15 years old when she came to us with her siblings. As she was too old for elementary school, she went to craft school and learned to weave carpets. She has since married and lives with her husband in Amdo.



Monlam Gyatso came to us as the youngest of the siblings at the age of just seven months. Staying in close contact with his brothers and sisters, he was cared for by one of the house mothers as if he were her own child. He is currently attending secondary school.



Kelsang Phuntsok came to the Tadra Children's Village at the age of 9. He now works in Chengdu in the internet industry as a talent live streamer.



Ogyen Lhaki was five years old when she came to us. After successfully completing her schooling, she is now studying to become a teacher at university.



Tsering Yangtso's story is the saddest one of this family history. She came to us when she was nine years old. After finishing at our school, she attended high school in Chengdu. To everyone's dismay, Tsering Yangtso died of Covid in 2020 at the tender age of twenty-three.



By the time his six siblings were taken in at our Children's Village, Choeden Wangchuk had already entered a monastery as a novice, where he received an education. He now lives in Tso-Ngön (Amdo) near his eldest sister Gangsar Lhamo.

7 SIBLINGS

Sherab Palmo came to us at the age of twelve. Despite starting school late, she fulfilled all the requirements and successfully completed her schooling. She now works in the provincial capital Chengdu as a railroad employee.





TRANSLATING FOR TADRA

For a considerable number of years now I have been translating Tadra's Annual Report into English at the end of each year. Never before in my long career as a professional translator had I worked with tears in my eyes, or wept as I saved a text into my computer...

Doing these translations, I have learnt much about the Tadra Villages. Learnt about so many people who give of what they have: individuals or companies that sponsor construction at the Village, education, or the purchase of clothes for the children; who volunteer their time to carry out repairs and technical improvements or medical or dental care when on a visit to the Villages; offer their organisational capacities, setting up fundraising events in Switzerland and elsewhere to benefit the Tadra project; who make a regular donation; who sell goods on a stall at craft fairs and other events in favour of the project; the contributions of the wonderful children of the Pestalozzi high school at Unna and other schools in Germany, who not only conduct fundraising activities at home, but have made the difficult journey to the Villages by the dozen with their teachers, some of them staying on for prolonged periods to teach English to the Tadra students; preparing textbooks for teaching English; the loving care of the Village heads and the house-mothers, who need less to say do more than just a "job".

The above list, as long as it is, is doubtless only a fragment of the background and foreground activities that characterise this extraordinary world of solidarity.

And a particular tribute, if I may, to my friend Beat Renz, who gave up his work in Switzerland to devote himself full time and put his love and energy into the development of the Tadra project and the well-being of these children. A master of fund-raising, he travels („in normal times“) to the Children's Villages several times a year, often accompanied by others including on two occasions myself. Without his sponsorship, such a trip that would have been literally impossible. All of us visitors have come back home with admiration and gratitude, and wonderment after meeting and playing with the wonderful, extraordinary, Tadra children.

On his arrival in one of the Villages, Beat is welcomed by shouts of „Father, Father“.

All of us visitors have been moved by the stories we heard: children who for years had been living in squalor and distress, sometimes only just staying alive by the skin of their teeth, about whom the head of one of the Tadra Villages is somehow alerted and are then brought there, sick, dirty, badly clothed, bewildered and frightened, to be taken in by loving adults and above by all the hordes of children who then care for them, turn their lives around and make them part of this extraordinary family, and who, years later as young adults, leave the Village with an education and skills enabling them to stand on their own feet and function as responsible adults in a difficult society, working as teachers, doctors, skilled artisans and more. And I am saddened to know that there are thousands of other such children in Tibet and elsewhere, to whom no such fairy godmother will one day come...

I have learnt of those Tibetan refugees who live in Switzerland and elsewhere, who are prohibited by the Chinese authorities ever to return to their homeland, and who support the Villages in many ways from afar.

I have also learnt that a little goes a long way in Tibet: a regular monthly contribution of just a small sum of euros or dollars will help to feed and clothe hundreds of children, every day.



The "before and after" photographs and the stories of some of these boys and girls tell it all. These children seem somehow to be genetically programmed to be supportive, adaptable, honest, loving, relationship conscious, with natural social and motor skills and enthusiasm for life. They even practise what might be called psychotherapy with one another, or certainly something just as effective. As the travellers who write about their visits to the Villages say: we have so much to learn from them. Perhaps we too are genetically programmed to be all these things, and all it takes is the opportunity and the understanding to be our true selves?

I am proud and moved to be a part of this world of solidarity, however small my contribution, and once again I write with tears in my eyes... There is still hope in the world.

by Brian Levin, France



MOMOS - TIBET'S UNOFFICIAL NATIONAL DISH

Anyone who knows anything about Tibet and has had contact with Tibetans has heard of them: momos.

These steamed dumplings, usually filled with meat (yak meat in Tibet), have become a major Tibetan export hit. Restaurants and bars serving momos are now to be found everywhere.

They consist of a pastry shell and a huge variety of filling options. They come in vegetarian or vegan versions, and are sometimes also served as a sweet dessert. Traditionally, they are filled with yak meat and fat and lovingly shaped by hand.

Making them is always a great event and everyone gets involved, often with much singing, chatting and laughing.

Momos can take many different shapes, so there is never a dull moment, but the general rule is: the smaller they are, the „nobler“. This „national dish“ was of course also prepared for Beat and Michael in Tibet.

Here are a few photos showing how momos are made.





THE TADRA PROJECT IN FIGURES

The 2022 income of our German association „Tadra-Projekt e.V.“ was roughly on a par with the previous year, while our Swiss „Tadra-DEMIGH-Stiftung“ was even able to make a marked improvement on last years' figures. This is a pleasing result and guarantees our continued projects.

At this point, we would like to explain why the costs of financing the two Villages fluctuate from year to year. This will always depend on the renovation measures found necessary, which we carry out once their funding is assured. The requirements for 2023-24 will be found in the article on renovation work included here.

A further expense that varies from year to year is that for the education and training of our external students.

The difference in the distribution of funding between the German Tadra Association and the Swiss Foundation is mainly due to the severely limited options available for transferring money to the Children's Villages.

2022 TADRA-PROJEKT E.V. GERMANY

2022 Income and expenditure

01.01.22 to 31.12.22 (in Euros)

INCOME

Sponsorships	65.305,91
Donations	65.995,20
Total	131.301,11

EXPENDITURE

1&1 Internet AG (Homepage)	540,09
Bank charges	633,64
Office supplies	470,26
Computer	855,98
Lexware bookkeeping	64,90
Postage	332,26
Project financing Tibet-Golok	140.000,00
Tax counselling	238,00
Telephone calls to Tibet	545,84
Total expenditure	143.680,97

Total income less expenditure -13.379,86

Administrative costs 3.680,97 € = 2,58 %

2022 TADRA-DEMIGH-FOUNDATION CH

2022 Income and expenditure

01.01.22 to 31.12.22 (in CHF)

INCOME

Sponsorships	17.625,00
Donations	249.154,33
Interest	63,44
Total	266.842,79

EXPENDITURE

Bank charges - Credit Suisse	272,90
Current account fees- Raiff	1.886,63
Project financing Dawu	151.080,66
Project financing Golok	70.000,00
Treuhand- u. Revision AG	969,30
Gesamt Ausgaben	224.209,49

Total income less expenditure 42.633,30

Administrative costs 3.128,83 CHF = 1,49 %

As in previous years, we did not incur any costs for the printing and layout of the Annual Report 2021; these were offered to us as donations in kind. A heartfelt „thank you“ for this gesture!



left:
Entrance
Sun & Moon
House

right:
Damage to
one of the
children's
houses

below:
School
building

RENOVATION WORK

As a result of the altitude and extreme weather conditions (Golok for example is situated at over 4,000m and has temperatures of -30 degrees C in winter and extreme heat in summer), the buildings in Tibet age faster than in Europe. Added to that, earthquakes occur repeatedly in the region.

The local construction methods and materials have little in common with the conditions we are familiar with, especially when in terms of the construction costs. As a comparison, on the basis of today's average values, a comparable house there costs around six times less than here.

Currently, four children's houses in Golok are in particular need of renovation (Diana House, Sunrise House, Tinley House and Andi & Beat House). There are cracks in the brickwork and the stone facing on the outer walls. One further children's house (Sun & Moon House), the floor slab at the entrance of the house appears to be raised up and is cracked. The Village manager puts that down to the last earthquake. The whole entrance area needs to be renovated.

A large area of the external tiling has fallen off the back wall of the elementary school in Golok, exposing the brickwork. Furthermore, the roof connecting the kitchen and the main hall is leaking and needs to be repaired. In the school itself, the flooring of one classroom needs to be replaced on account of water damage.

Finally, the official regulations require that all the power lines of the Village be renewed.

It is not yet possible to make an accurate assessment of the total costs, and our Village manager will obtain estimates. These renovations are essential if further major damage is to be avoided.





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CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

100%

VOLUNTARY WORK

SPECIAL THANKS

TO MR. BRIAN LEVIN

SPECIAL THANKS TO
MR. BRIAN LEVIN, WHO
VOLUNTEERS EVERY YEAR TO DO
THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
THE ANNUAL REPORT

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