



THE TADRA PROJEKT

ORPHAN CHILDREN'S VILLAGES IN TIBET

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NEWSLETTER 2024



Beginning of
a new life: this
year's intake of
children



DEAR FRIENDS OF TADRA,

This year was a very special one for us Tibetans and our contact with the Children's Villages. Two groups of us were able to travel there. With a bit of luck and thanks to new travel regulations (up to two weeks without a visa), we also had the opportunity to visit Golok and Dawu for the first time in many years: my mother "Amala" (Chönyi), my younger sister Serlha and I (Youlha).

Beat and Klaus travelled in a second group a little later, accompanied by Muriel from Switzerland, Pier from the Netherlands and, for the second time, Michael from Germany. This produced a variety of different impressions, as shown by the moving reports by Muriel and Pier in these pages.

Our Children's Village in Golok in the north is growing and thriving. We will be taking in new children again this year. We currently have a total of 260 children in the Village and 270 children in secondary schools elsewhere. And next year we will be able to celebrate our 20th anniversary there.

It's incredible how quickly time flies.

During our short stay, some of our former students came to visit us. It was a wonderful reunion, including a number the children we had already presented in our Annual Reports in the form of "before and after" pages.

We were also deeply touched by a nomadic organisation that travels here once a year to cook for our children (see the article in this report). This time we were there too. But even before we could thank the nomads for their generosity, they expressed their appreciation to us and to the Tadra Association for all the care we give the children. Such a big heart!

In Dawu, the children can still only come to our Village at weekends and during the holidays, as the Chinese authorities are very strict about the boarding school requirements for pupils in the region.

We are not allowed to accept new children in Dawu, which is why three buildings there are currently unoccupied. With the help of former pupils, our headmaster has started making traditional Tibetan paper, giving the craft school a new raison d'être.

Former students can get a job there and with this activity we are protecting an aspect of the Tibetan cultural heritage. We are also working on plans to make use of the other empty buildings.

As always, we thank you for helping us to continue this rewarding work! It is wonderful to have you by our side!

Youlha Tawo

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

Klaus Vedder

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

Beat Renz

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



Back in the
grasslands at last:
Youlha (left) and
Serlha (right)

Below:
Feelings of home:
Chöni on a
white yak

A LONG-AWAITED REUNION

After so many years, the time had finally come once again. My mother, my younger sister Serlha and I were on our way to the other side of the world to visit our two orphan Villages.

After an endlessly long flight, Thubten Nyima, our headmaster of many years, who feels more like a brother after all these years of great cooperation, was waiting for us at the airport.

Although we stay in touch by phone, email, text and voice messages almost monthly, the joy of seeing each other again was immense. After a night at the hotel, we set off the following day, leaving the humid, sticky heat and noisy hustle and bustle of Chengdu behind us, travelling west.

The closer we got to the Tibetan region, the clearer and colder the air became, the many people and cars had disappeared and the first mountains and yaks greeted us.

Tibet

This word alone evokes so many different feelings within me. It is almost impossible for me to describe my emotions when we arrived at our Villages at the beginning of July. Added to that, this was our first trip without our father, Lobsang Palden Tawo, one of the founders of this project.





*Right:
A nomad family
serving the
home-cooked
meal*

*At left and below:
The children
are particularly
happy with their
soft drink*

So it was not surprising that the first tears were already flowing when we arrived in Golok. Normally we save them for the farewells...

The children were standing in a row along the path and greeted us with the usual Tibetan white good luck scarves. There were many new faces: children who had been newly taken in and new teachers. Only our housemothers were almost all still there.

Thubten Nyima had had a nomad tent erected in the middle of the site, so we celebrated our reunion there on the first evening. The tent had come to us as a donation, and he explained to us how important it is for him that our children don't forget this way of life. As the temperatures were almost 20°C in summer, the different classes were allowed to sleep there in turn during the holidays, much to the delight of the children.

We inspected the buildings, made note all the defects, and discussed the pressing questions of our employees on site. Between all that, we tried to spend as much time as possible with the children.

Once a year, our Children's Village in Golok gets a visit by some nomads: a number of nomadic groups who have heard about our project come every year to cook a meal for our children, bringing enormous pots with them. Each child receives a hot meal, plus usually a piece of fruit and a sweet soft drink, to the delight of everyone, as the children hardly ever get sweet drinks. We happened to be in the Children's Village at this time and were able to participate in this great event.



*The children
so love
to sing!
Youlha
(centre)
in Golok*

As our journey was very limited in time, we travelled on to Dawu after just four days.

To our surprise, many former students had also made the journey there, for word of our visit had quickly spread via their chat rooms. As a result, almost a hundred former students arrived at the Children's Village over the next few days. I recognised many of them and it was incredible for me to see them now as young adults. They included teachers, craftsmen, civil servants, artists, cooks and business people. There was even a former student who had decided to live as a nomad again after his primary and secondary school.

They all brought gifts for the children, and spontaneously we decided to hold a party. And so it was that my sister and I found ourselves in an old covered marketplace in the town of Dawu, where it was actually no longer possible to pay with cash. Everything is cashless via WeChat. You can't even pay to park your car in cash. Your number plate is scanned and you get a QR code on your mobile phone. Our young adults generously covered the costs of the barbecue and we had a wonderful evening with lots of interesting conversations around the campfire, under the clear and so close starry sky of Tibet, the highest country in the world.

It was a great joy for us to see that our children are all still so connected and form a real community, and this gave us much comfort. They all knew about the world's trouble spots, the rising cost of living and the decline in donations we receive, and assured us that we didn't need to worry. If in doubt, they would „share their last shoes with the children.“ This moved us deeply and also filled us with pride.

The time flew by and all too soon we had to make our way back.

Even though our farewells were once again very tearful, the anticipation of a future trip and hopefully seeing each other again soon prevailed.

By Youlha Tawo



A DREAM COMES TRUE

or almost eighteen years now, I have listened with fascination to Beat's stories about the lives of the children in the two Tadra Villages. I see from the photos how the children are changing and growing up, and I was happy to give some of my time to this project. My dream of visiting the children finally came true this year.

Several of my friends wanted to make gifts to the children. So after we arrived, we went to the market and bought lots of sports equipment such as basketballs and table tennis bats. Luckily there were five of us to carry all this stuff!

Our arrival at the Village was the first defining moment. I knew that the children would be waiting for us with white scarves, but I never could have imagined such enthusiasm. As we couldn't communicate with words, we had to make do with gestures, the expressions on our faces, and our hearts. All our senses were awakened. My first contact was with one of the housemothers, a woman full of gentleness and benevolence. The love she gives the children shone out of her. She is so proud of „her“ girls and looks after them as if they were her own children.

There were several challenges for me, one of them in respect of hygiene. One morning, three children were playing with a spoon. They put it in their pockets and had fun with it. When the dinner bell rang, they ran to me to bring me the spoon that was meant for me. Of course, I didn't have a chance to wash it. They were so proud! So I had to use it unwashed.

At mealtimes, I often stopped to watch the children. How they enjoyed eating their meals! It is difficult to imagine that these happy children had experienced so much distress in their lives, for every child who comes to a Tadra Village has a terrible story to tell.

In my work as a therapist, one of the focal points is resilience, that is, recovery of one's physical and emotional equilibrium after a trauma. These children are a perfect example of this! One of their main resources is this large Tadra family that each child is a part of. They all look after one other with love and respect. An example of this I experienced was during a table tennis game I was playing with some youngsters. A little boy joined us and sat directly on the table so that he could see better. We were no longer able to play properly, but the game just went on, with nobody having a problem with it.

My favourite moments were the dances. Each song has its own choreography, performed in synchronicity by everyone. There is no need for creativity or individuality. So we visitors had trouble following their movements. When it was our turn to play a piece of music, all the children watched us and imitated us. That wasn't easy! Those unforgettable moments when we danced a waltz or yodelled with the children in the mountains will remain fixed in our hearts!

It was of course difficult to say goodbye. So much emotion! These children are happy in the Villages. They are looked after, safe and have a future. This thought was in my mind as I gave them one last hug.

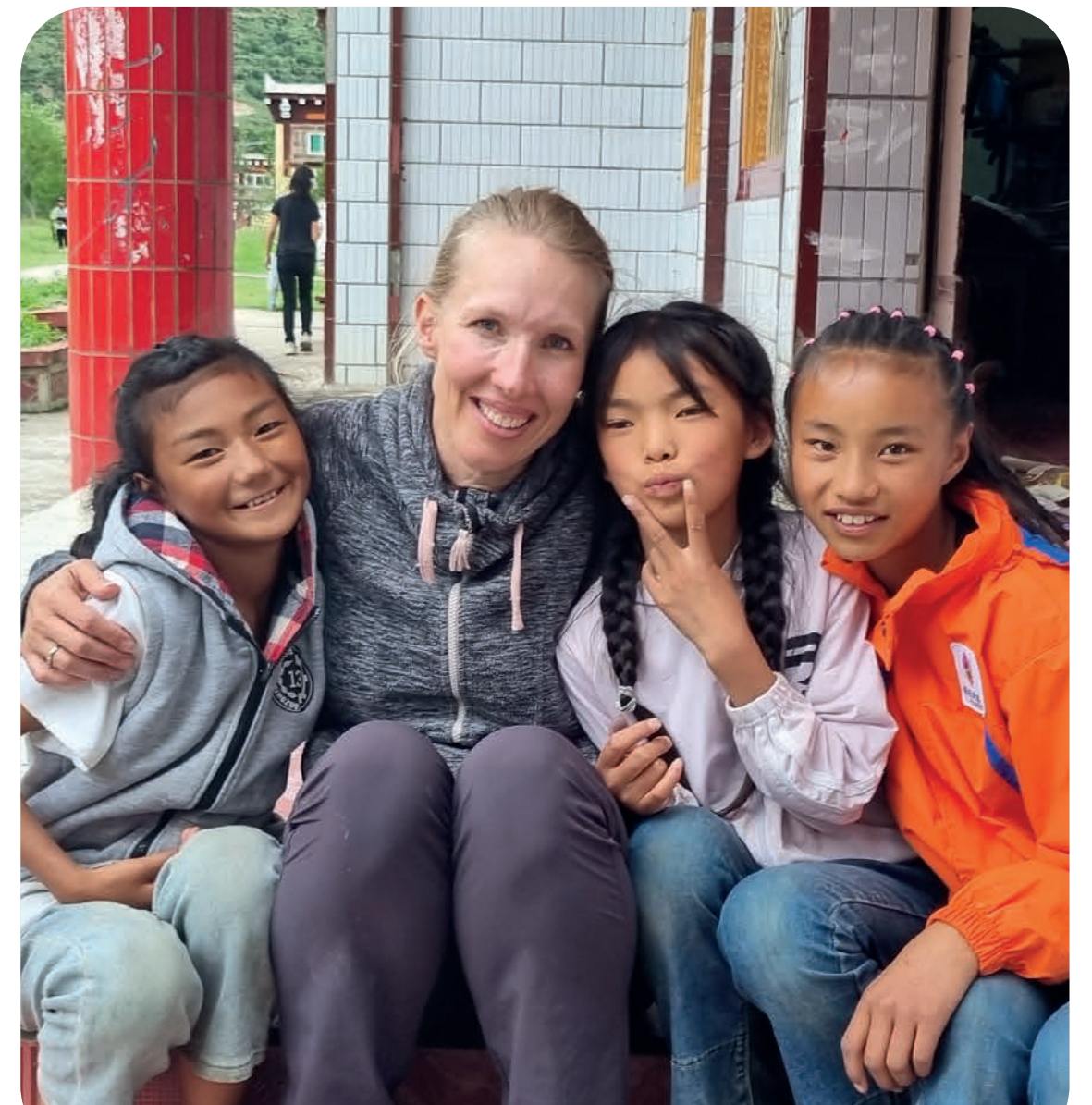
My dream had been to see the Tadra project from the inside and at last meet the children themselves. In fact, it was they who helped me to get to know a part of myself. Several people had told me that I would



come back changed. This turned out to be true, and I am very grateful for it. I have a smile on my face and in my heart that comes from deep inside and is filled with great happiness. I miss the children and when I look at the photos, there is a pang in my heart. But knowing that such happiness is possible despite so many difficulties offers endless hope!

I am deeply grateful to Beat who made it possible for me to have this experience. He gives so much of his time, understanding and love to these children! I also thank Klaus, Pier and Mike for all the wonderful moments we shared together. Finally, I am grateful to the people who keep the Tadra project alive in Switzerland, Germany and Tibet. I also thank the sponsors and of course all the children who opened their hearts to me!

By Muriel Chatagny





SPORTS
DAY IN
DAWU





A DAY IN DAWU DURING THE HOLIDAY.

Every morning, I started my day with a walk around the grounds. The grounds are beautiful. One morning, my attention was drawn to a young boy crouched down the path. His eyes were focused on the ground, as if searching for something very important. At first, I didn't understand what he was doing, but as I got closer, I saw it: he was carefully picking up small animals that ventured across the path and moving them to the grass along the side. The careful patience with which he protected each creature was a simple gesture, but it reflected a genuine love and respect for life, no matter how small.

This scene set the tone for the rest of my stay; it reminded me that the most meaningful moments are often found in the smallest of actions. After the first day, I had a steady group of children around me. Little Jack, Rixi, Sangzhou, and Tsomo became companions throughout my stay. These children, each with their own unique personality, brought so much joy to my days. It was amazing how quickly a simple hand or arm around them created a deep connection. The simple gesture of closeness, of being there for someone, became a source of happiness, both for them and for me. The innocence and sincerity with which they showed their affection filled me with a warm sense of connection.



At exactly 8:00 a.m. breakfast was announced by twelve strokes on an old car rim with a hammer, a sound that echoed throughout the entire compound and called all the children to the dining room. They came out of their houses, neatly lined up, and waited patiently for their breakfast: Mantou, a boiled egg and warm milk. It was a simple meal. Every morning, I tried to sit at a different table, so that I could connect with as many children as possible. After breakfast, everyone showed the Ama (house mother) that they had finished their meal, and then they washed their plates. This routine, so simple and structured, gave me a sense of community and discipline that was deeply ingrained in their daily lives.

The Dawu compound was truly an oasis of peace and beauty. Greenery was everywhere; the trees provided welcome shade, and the houses were arranged in such a way that a large open space was created, a playground for the children. The basketball court was especially popular with the boys. The girls, on the other hand, spent their time braiding each other's hair into beautiful braids, singing and dancing together. It was a lively place, full of laughter and merriment, where time seemed to stand still, and the worries of the world seemed far away.

At 12:00 the sound of the rim sounded again; it was time for lunch. After lunch, all the children gathered in the large school yard for a sports day. There was lively competition going on: we did tug-of-war, hula hooping, and there was even a sprint competition. Luckily, I only had to participate in the tug of war, because playing at 3800 meters altitude proved to be a much bigger challenge than I had anticipated. After three rounds I was exhausted, but it was amazing to see how enthusiastic and determined the children were. Their energy and enthusiasm were infectious, and despite my fatigue I felt more alive than ever. After the exercise there was a quiet period where the children dispersed to relax in their own way.

Just before 18:00 I went back to the dining room. This time the children encouraged me to pick up the hammer and hit the rim 12 times myself, a task I did with pleasure. It was time for dinner. What struck me was how calmly and disciplined the children ate. After the meal they washed their plates and left the table, ready to start the evening activities. The weather was perfect, so we gathered in the school yard again to dance to Tibetan music. We formed a large circle, while a small group in the middle chose and led the music. Tommy, who was standing next to me, gave me instructions on the dance moves. And so, we danced surrounded by the joyful energy that only dance and music can bring. When the dancing stopped, we played with the children in the schoolyard for a while. The coziness and joy of those moments will stay with me forever. The children went to their homes; it was time to sleep. One of the most beautiful moments of the day was to personally wish each child good night.

These two weeks that I spent at the Tadra orphanages were an incredibly beautiful and emotional experience. It was a time of learning and growing, not only about the children, but also about myself. I left the orphanage with a heart full of memories and a deep appreciation for the simplicity and beauty of life.

By Pier Post



DOLMA TSERING

Dolma Tsering, a half-orphan, came to our village in 2002 as a five-year-old.

After her primary schooling with us, she attended the middle and high Kanting Tibetan School, going on to study at Wenxuan Normal University.

Now married with one son, she has been working as a primary school teacher in Lithang since 2017.



KONCHOK

Konchok was born in Dzachukha in 1991 and was orphaned when she was only two years old. She was looked after by her aunt until she came to our village in 2002.

A hearing impairment in her early childhood progressed to almost complete hearing loss despite medical care. As her studies at the Louzhou Technical School did not enable her to find a good job, she learnt Tibetan writing and calligraphy, which she still does for a living today. She is married and has one daughter.



Ama Tashi with the children in her care and some from the past.

AMA TASHI - A LIFE DEVOTED TO THE TADRA CHILDREN

Ama means mother and is used in Tibetan as a respectful form of address for an older woman. The eldest of five children, Ama Tashi was born in 1962 into a farming family in Garthar, a rural area in Kham province some 80 kilometres south-east of Dawu. This was the time of the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution that shaped Ama Tashi's childhood. At the age of around eight, she had to work with her father in a commune and contribute to the family's upkeep, as her mother was ill and her siblings were too young. Ama Tashi did not receive any schooling, but later learnt to read and write Tibetan. Her childhood memories are characterised by hard work and hunger.

The father of her own daughter left the family at a very young age. She heard about the Children's Village from a relative who had worked there as a teacher in the early years. And so she came as a housemother at the age of 37 with her baby daughter of eight months. The first few years as a housemother were not easy for her, she remembers, looking after children who came to Tadra from very poor and difficult backgrounds, who often wet themselves or fell ill. Doing the laundry for all the children in her care, often in cold water, keeping the house tidy often took a lot of effort. But over the years, she got used to it, looked after both boys and girls and grew to love the children as her own. And she came to understand that this work was so important for the children and how valuable it was that she should do it.

She could never afford to buy her own house. With the support of Palden and Choenyi Tawo, she has been able to travel twice in recent years and visit the holy sites in Lhasa and the surrounding area.

Ama Tashi has been working with our Tadra children in Dawu for more than 25 years now. At the present time she looks after the girls in Unna House. Her hands are plagued by rheumatism and some of the work is now more difficult for her. Early on, she had hoped to be able to return to the area where she was born, but now her home is here in the Tadra Children's Village, where she would also like to live in retirement and remain in contact with the former Tadra children and those still living in the village.

By Klaus Vedder





THE TADRA PROJECT IN FIGURES

In the 2023 financial year, the fairly stable income situation in both in Germany and Switzerland enabled us to cover the necessary expenses for the project.

Most of our expenses went to the costs of education and training in the Villages themselves and outside. The ongoing renovation of the school buildings, houses, roofs, sanitation, etc. were once again mainly taken care of by earmarked sponsorship funds.

Our entire project stands and falls with the support of our loyal sponsors and donors. We cannot thank you all enough!

2023 TADRA-PROJEKT E.V. GERMANY

2023 Income and expenses

01.01.23 until 31.12.23 (in Euros)

INCOME

Sponsorships	77.455,93
Donations	54.352,05
Earmarked donation for postage	1.000,00
Total income	132.807,98

EXPENSES

1&1 Internet AG (Homepage)	383,76
Bank charges	640,18
Office equipment/postage	2.116,86
Printer	292,98
Telephone calls to Tibet	538,68
Lexware bookkeeping	64,90
Project financing, Golok	115.000,00
Project financing, Dawu	6.142,27
Total expenditure	125.179,63

Total income less expenditur **7.628,35**

Administrative costs 4.037,36 € = 3,22 %

We did not incur any costs for the printing, layout and postage of the 2023 annual report; these were offered as donations in cash and in kind. We take this opportunity to say a big „Thank You“ to our generous donors.

2023 TADRA-DEMIGH-FOUNDATION CH

2023 Income and expenses

01.01.23 until 31.12.23 (in CHF)

INCOME

Sponsorships	21.830,00
Donations	231.228,38
Accrued interest	1.082,18
Total income	254.140,56

EXPENSES

Bank charges, Credit Suisse	99,80
Fees, Raiffeisen current account	1.298,70
Project financing, Dawu	93.533,11
Project financing, Golok	90.000,00
Treuhand- u. Revision AG	969,30
Total expenditure	185.900,91

Total income less expenditur **68.239,65**

Administrative costs 2.367,80 CHF = 1,27 %



RENOVATION WORK

When we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Tadra project next year, it will also mean that the first buildings constructed in the Dawu Children's Village will soon be thirty years old.

Something to be proud of, we feel. Not many projects in Tibet can have continued for such a long period of time. But of course it also means that a number of important renovations need to be carried out. While the huge temperature differences experienced in Golok are more likely to affect the buildings there on account of the higher altitude, in Dawu this year we mainly have to deal with damage caused by moisture. We gave details of the renovation situation in Golok in our 2023 Annual Report.

The low-lying wooden floors on the ground floor need to be replaced, and parts of the massive wooden frames of the family houses built with traditional construction methods require work. In both of the Villages, moisture has played havoc on the ceilings and damage to tiles on the outside walls, and we have also observed the presence of cracks in the foundations. Looking at the damage to the school buildings, which, similar to Golok, is caused by the presence of moisture, the family houses built using traditional construction methods appear to be more resistant and better adapted to the climate.

Unfortunately, the official regulations for earthquake protection have prevented us from constructing the school buildings in the traditional style of the family houses.

We gratefully welcome any support that enables us to provide our children with a solid living and working space.





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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