Heart of Asia
Compassion in Action
January 2026 Issue 21

Supporting Vulnerable communities in Tibet and India

Activity report & 2025 projects



Tibetan nomad woman in the kitchen of her winter quarters

THE NOMAD RETURN PROJECT



Tibet's **Drokpa,** or **nomads,** are the heart and soul of Tibetan culture and until recently they comprised an estimated 25% to 40% of the Tibetan population.

Drokpa means "people of the solitudes", and they are truly a mountain people, herding livestock on high altitude pastures for millennia. (The average altitude in Tibet is 14,000 feet.) The nomad way of life has remained unchanged for centuries, until recently, and their traditional ecological knowledge and understanding makes them natural stewards of Tibet's grasslands. They are living examples of original Tibetan culture.

In recent years a government resettlement policy, plus global warming and the pressure to respond to a market economy, have threatened their ancient, self-sufficient and holistic way of life. Some nomads have chosen to settle, in order to be near to schools and medical facilities.

However, many regret the change to a settled life where they are not allowed to keep their herd of yak and dri, are given no re-training, and so have no marketable skills or focus for their lives. They miss the peace, the animals, and the freedom and self-sufficiency of their traditional way of life. Consequently, in many cases poverty and crime are the outcome of "resettlement." Thankfully the resettlement policy has recently been abandoned and the value of nomad life is being reassessed by the authorities. However, most settled nomads who wish to return to their former way of life do not have the funds to buy the animals to start again, and are given no support to return by local government.

"This is how I feel about a life of herding. Truthfully that feeling comprises grassland, yaks, sheep, horses and young men and women. The feeling is as if I have the whole world. I have been many places but they can't produce this feeling."

Trachang Palsang, nomad from Amdo and re-greener of desertified grasslands



THE NOMAD RETURN PROJECT 2025



Heart of Asia is now in the **tenth year** of its project to support nomads to return to, or remain in nomad life. Thanks to the generosity of our donors this year Heart of Asia was able to fund 50 Dri (female Yak), each pregnant or with a calf. These will support 5 small, mainly young families. As in previous years we partnered with a respected local community leader, who advised us as to the 5 families we could help.

So far in 10 years ***Heart of Asia*** has helped **39 drokpa** families return to nomad life. That is **182 people**, and we have distributed 370 dri (female yak) and 370 dri babies. **Tsethar** or **"life release"** Dri are purchased for our project, as they are cheaper. Life release (or tsethar) means that an animal will be allowed to live out its life span and die of natural causes. People often practice this, for example, in the name of a relative who is sick and needs blessings, and a Lama puts a ribbon in the animal's ear to mark it out.

Heart of Asia also provides each family with a canvas tent (if needed), a solar panel and a milk separator. The monasteries of the local communities also loan some yak and dri to our returners.

Due to recent sensitivities in Tibetan areas of western China we will not be including names and location of our beneficiaries this year.

It costs around £480 to purchase a Dri, including transport and facilitator costs. A canvas tent, if required, costs around £336.

Donations to ***Heart of Asia*** ensure not only the well-being of these families, but also the preservation of this traditional way of living with its Indigenous Wisdom. The grazing and movement of Yak and Dri has been proven to have enormous positive environmental impact on the high-altitude grasslands in Tibet, which ultimately benefits us all.

If you wish to support more Nomad Returners please visit www.heartofasia.org to make a donation via PayPal, or see our leaflet for other option

"…The mind of the nomads is very pure, unfettered and happy.

The food that they eat – the butter, the meat, the tsampa, the cheese for example – is completely organic and pure. As they live at very high altitudes the Cordyceps, the plants, the medicinal flowers, the grasslands, the physical environment, is cared for by them…

The nomads are the ones who for many, many centuries have preserved the grasslands."

Gebchak Wangdrak Rinpoche (from a nomad family.)

Most of the families that we helped this last year were, for a very small wage, assisting other local nomad families who had very large herds. They were also collecting, seasonally, Cordyceps Sinensis or Caterpillar Fungus to sell on to Chinese business men. It is highly valued by the Chinese for medicinal purposes, but our families could still not make enough to live on. (Collecting Cordyceps is a notoriously boom and bust economy so highly unreliable.)

Our Project Manager says the families are so happy to have returned to their traditional and more self sufficient life. They now also care for the dri of wealthy nomad families who go on pilgrimage, in addition to their own small herds, and helping out other nomad families with large herds, and so are happily very busy and feeling much more economically secure .



Nomads collecting Caterpillar Fungus
(Cordyceps sinensis or Tibetan: Yaertsa Gonbu.)









4 of the 5 families we helped to return to nomad life in Sershul area, in 2025.



Nomad family on the move with their herd.

SCENES FROM NOMAD LIFE



A rukor (encampment) of black tents near Rongpatsa.



Tying up a dri and her calf prior to milking



Creating rope from Yak wool



Collecting dried Yak dung, fuel for the stove



Interior of a traditional black tent



A nomad "resettlement" village of prefabricated metal bungalows. Sershul area.

THE YUSHU ORPHANS



Heart of Asia's biggest commitment has been to the Yushu Orphans, who lost their families in the devastating **2010 Yushu Earthquake**. Until now we have provided 76% of the funds that are needed to sustain the children until they graduate from school.

(Young people stay in school and college longer in China. Funders in Australia pay fees and support living expenses for the students while they are away at college and University. The young people return to the home during the holidays.)

Our contribution covers the annual cost of food, clothes, house rent, electricity, a cook and helper's salary, school requirements and simple medical expenses.



Our youngest orphans at dinner time in the home.



The Orphans celebrating Losar (Tibetan New Year) in the home.

Our youngest children still studying locally in middle school live full-time in our Yushu home, while the older children still boarding at schools and colleges return for 4 months of vacation each year. So the Yushu home serves as home-base for all our children at their various stages in life.
They are all keeping healthy and on track to complete some form of higher education by 2030.





Visiting a catering course at a private technical college

A small number of our original children moved in with extended family over the years, so we presently have 18 children living in the Yushu home or boarding at schools. A few of them have graduated college, but the job market in China is highly competitive for young people and they so far haven't found professional work. This summer we have been investigating private technical colleges offering vocational courses, such as catering, plumbing, electrical work, car maintenance etc.The courses are shorter, much less expensive to fund and the colleges do their utmost to find their graduates properly paid jobs. These colleges might be a more useful avenue for the youngsters to go down than going to University.

TULSI TRUST



Heart of Asia has again supported the Tulsi Trust, a worthwhile charity operating in south India focussing primarily on bringing health care, education and skills development to the poor. In 2025 we gave them £2,000. Below is their response:



"In the name of all our trustees and the project team in India, I would again like to extend our thanks for the generous donation of Heart of Asia towards out projects. Thanks to your support, we were able to undertake a project that we've been trying to procure funds for for three years now. We have started building a "Tiffin hall" or lunch shelter for the students at our school. Until now, the children have had to eat outdoors, sitting on the bare ground without any shelter from sun or rain at mealtimes. This will soon change as the new structure is completed with the help of your grant. It is joyous to see this project finally coming to fruition, and I've felt to share that joy with you, hoping it will give you an indication of how much impact your help is having for almost 300 children and their families. "

VOICES4FREEDOM

In December we sent £2,500 to **VOICES4FREEDOM** on Giving Tuesday, when funds are matched 100%. So they received £5,000.

VOICES4FREEDOM works with modern slavery in India. It is an American non profit organisation founded by Peggy Callahan, Human Rights Activist and film maker, and friends.

"It is hard to believe, but slavery today is at epidemic proportions, despite being illegal in every country. These are real slaves by the harshest definitions: people forced to work under threat of violence, without pay, and unable to escape. They are trapped in brothels, factories, mines, farm fields, and restaurants. More than half are women and children. Despite real progress, slavery often remains hidden and on the margins of public concern.

Slavery doesn't look much different today than it has throughout history. In northern India, entire villages are enslaved—men, women, and children are literally controlled by another human being and held against their will, generation after generation. They are caught in a cycle of debt bondage slavery, and it's because they are not educated."



Village women with their new ID papers and cooking stoves.

VOICES4FREEDOM's response to our donation is below:

"Thank you for showing up with such heart on Giving Tuesday.



Village children in a Voices4Freedom school.

We raised meaningful support for the Schools4Freedom program in this year's village of 117 people, bringing us over two-thirds of the way to our goal. It wasn't the full amount we hoped to raise, but it is real progress and it matters.

The families you met in the video have already taken their first steps toward sustainable freedom by trusting in our team and sharing their situation and struggles. The work in this village has begun and it will continue until every child is in school and every family has the knowledge and tools needed for sustainable freedom.

Thank you for supporting this village during Giving Tuesday. Every gift helps complete the Schools4Freedom program for all 117 people and strengthens the work that is already underway."

https://www.voices4freedom.org/

KALSANG, AND SHIRLEY'S LEGACY



Over the years Heart of Asia's loyal Tibetan friend **Kalsang Childs** has been raising plants from her garden to raise funds for ***Heart of Asia.***

"Many of the plants that I sold came originally from my friends and family's gardens. The first plants that I ever sold were hollyhocks, the seeds of which came from the garden of Shirley's family home in Devon. The tall creamy yellow velvety hollyhocks sold very well to friends and colleagues, raising some money for ***Heart of Asia.*** *The hollyhocks were soon followed with other plants from Shirley, her family, friends and their neighbour's gardens and so her legacy lives on.*



Shirley sadly passed away in April 2024 and there were many charities listed to receive a share of her legacy. Shirley wanted to make a real difference to people's everyday lives and wanted to ensure her funds were donated to the best charities to enable this, ***Heart of Asia.*** *was one such beneficiary and received £20,000. Shirley was veryindependent and an adventure-loving person, she would be so happy in the knowledge that a proportion of her legacy funds will help some nomads to have the opportunity to follow their traditional instincts and skills to tend to their yaks and live truly nomadic lives. Likewise, Shirley would be delighted to know that some of her lifelong wish to make a difference will continue to help young people and women towards building independence.*

Thank you ***Heart of Asia.*** *for ensuring that Shirley's legacy will benefit those who are very much in need of help."*

OUR THANKS

A big thank you to our wonderful Project Manager in the field. Our major projects would not be possible without him. A big thank you also to our partners in the **Nomad Return Project.** They come from nomad families themselves and fully appreciate the value of drokpa life – both for the families and for the land.

As always the Heart of Asia team would like to express our gratitude to all our generous donors, supporters and helpers, who make our work possible. In particular a million thanks to our amazing donors from the **Golden Sufi Center – www.goldensufi.org**



Prayer flags reflected in flooded grasslands



On the way to high summer pastures