

Australian Volunteers Program Bhutan

Australian volunteers have supported partner organisations in Bhutan to achieve their development goals since 2013. The Australian Government's Australian Volunteers Program continues this rich history.

The Australian Volunteers Program develops long-term, mutually respectful partnerships with organisations across the Pacific, Asia, and Africa to contribute to locally led change and the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The program aims to:

- Support partner organisations to progress their development objectives
- Increase program participants' cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries
- Increase key stakeholders' appreciation of the value of volunteering

Australian volunteer Student Counsellor Tiffany Casey and teacher Chimi Pem at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum in Thimphu.
Photo: Harjono Djyobisono

Our work in Bhutan

Our team in Bhutan works closely with our partners to understand their priorities and objectives. Together with our partners, we identify how the program can support them and how that support might change over time.

The program provides support across a range of development priorities in Bhutan, including:

- Education
- Food security and nutrition
- Environment
- Economic diversity and productivity
- Health and social services

In Bhutan, we partner with organisations working in a broad range of sectors, including health, education, and agriculture and forestry. Program Partners are mainly government organizations, with provision for working with NGO partners in the future.

Most volunteer assignments are with partners in Thimphu and Paro Districts. The program also supports partners through remote volunteer assignments.

The program facilitates opportunities for partners to connect with each other, exchange knowledge and share experiences. For example, partners participate in online and face-to-face workshops that focus on specific sectors or topics such as disability inclusion, gender equality and safeguarding.

1

Jennifer Savenake, volunteer Nutritionist, and Kunzang Dek, Nutritionist, at the School Health and Nutrition Division under the Department of School Education, Ministry of Education in Thimphu.
Photo: Harjono Djyobisono

2

Singye Dem and Thinley Tobgay, staff of Floriculture and Amenity Landscaping Centre, observing begonia in the greenhouse, Thimphu.
Photo: Harjono Djyobisono

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Our Australian volunteer is very comfortable to work with as we have worked together in person and remotely over several assignments. She is very experienced and flexible, and it was a pleasure working with her. We have made significant achievements with this assignment and working with the volunteer. Communications through newsletters and updates were good and consistent from the Australian Volunteers Program team in Australia. The in country-team has been supportive and constantly in touch regarding the progress of the assignment and small grant projects.”

Mr. Choki Gyeltshen, National Biodiversity Center

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1



Since 2018
the program
in Bhutan has
supported

20+

partner
organisations

35+

Australian
volunteers

50+

volunteer
assignments

9

small
grants

Small grants

From time to time, our partners can apply for small grants to support their vital work and progress towards achieving their development objectives.

Small grants have supported over 200 partners to deliver hundreds of projects across the program. Projects have been across a range of thematic areas including gender equality, disability and social inclusion, climate action and organisational strengthening.

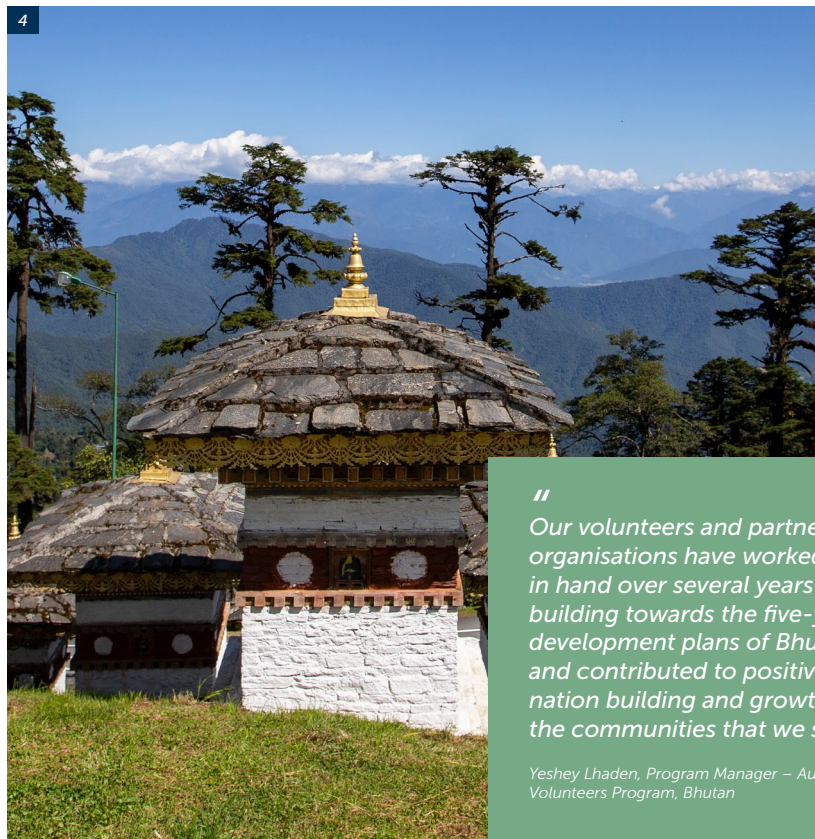
Australian organisations

We also partner with Australian organisations who share our commitment to locally led change. We support existing partnerships between overseas partners and Australian organisations and identify opportunities for new partnerships. Australian partners contribute to skills and knowledge exchange and support volunteer recruitment.

3

Carly Clutterbuck, Australian volunteer Mental Health Services Mentor, with Mindu Dorji, Program Analyst, at the National Suicide Prevention Program, within the Ministry of Health in Thimphu. Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono

4



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Our volunteers and partner organisations have worked hand in hand over several years in building towards the five-year development plans of Bhutan, and contributed to positive nation building and growth of the communities that we serve.”

Yeshey Lhaden, Program Manager – Australian Volunteers Program, Bhutan

About our volunteers

Our program is all about people – volunteers, partners and the communities in which they live and work.

We value volunteers who are open to mutual learning and skills exchange, and who are committed to contributing to partners' priorities in support of locally led change.

We are committed to ensuring that international volunteering is inclusive and accessible to Australians from a range of backgrounds, with diverse perspectives, identities and abilities. We recognise the

unique strengths and skills that people with diverse backgrounds and experiences offer, and we work with volunteers to remove barriers they may face.

Each volunteer assignment requires specific skills and experience. Australian volunteers work in a broad range of sectors including community and social development, health, science, engineering and architecture, skilled trades, education, disaster and emergency management, gender equality and child protection.

4

The Dochula Pass, a mountain pass in the Himalayas on the road from Thimphu to Punakha. Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono

5

Australian volunteer Deaf Education Teacher Trainer Robyn Whitney with Chencho Dem, Senior Teacher II and Interpreter at the Wangsel Institute for the Deaf, Paro. Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono



In-country

In-country volunteering enables volunteers and partners to share their skills, knowledge and culture, and form long-lasting relationships along the way.



Remote

Through remote volunteering Australians are supporting organisations overseas to achieve their development goals anywhere, anytime.



Hybrid

By combining remote and in-country phases, hybrid volunteering offers our partners and volunteers flexibility while still allowing for genuine connections and meaningful skill sharing.

Strengthening the counsellor sector in Bhutan

Counselling services are relatively new in Bhutan. While they are becoming increasingly accessible, there is a need to strengthen the industry by building professional development opportunities for counsellors.

Counselling is one of the many services delivered by local organisation Respect Education Nurture Empower Women (RENEW), and the Bhutan Board for Certified Counsellors (BBCC) delivers training and professional qualifications. Together, RENEW and BBCC have worked with Australian volunteers to train more qualified counsellors.

Sonam Pelden, a remote Australian volunteer, assisted in the development of a comprehensive project plan to address the organisation's needs in policy development, standards enhancement, and professional growth.

Sonam's work culminated in the creation of a Master of Counselling and Psychotherapy scholarship, a landmark achievement that was delivered by collaborating with the program's Australian partner, Edith Cowan University. This three-year scholarship represents a substantial investment in the professional development of Bhutan's counselling practitioners, enhancing their expertise and qualifications, and advancing the counselling profession.

With guidance from Sonam, RENEW-BBCC established a robust roadmap for future research and educational endeavours. The collaboration with Edith Cowan University is set to expand further, with plans to develop specialised counsellor training programs enriched with research components.

Sonam was also helped to strengthen the clinical supervision capacity of counsellors, fostering growth for individual counsellors and institutions. Sonam was one of the facilitators of a three-month training program, led by senior counsellors in Bhutan, which has successfully equipped participants with the skills to assume supervisory roles.

A focus group discussion led by Sonam with graduates of the supervision training provided valuable insights and recommendations. Participants praised the significant professional growth they experienced and emphasised the need for ongoing training.



The Australian Volunteers Program is guided by principles that ensure we



Support locally led change



Grow strong relationships and partnerships



Value volunteering



Evolve good practice and embrace innovation



Enhance diversity and inclusion



Ensure accountability and value learning

Australian
Volunteers

Australian
Aid

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