



# 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

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

# 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.

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 Djoyobisono

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

2

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

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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*

2



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Since 2018 the program in Bhutan has supported

**20+**  
partner organisations

**30+**  
Australian volunteers

**30+**  
in-country volunteer assignments

**15+**  
remote volunteer assignments

**9**  
small grants

## Small grants

Through the Impact Fund, we provide small grants of up to AUD\$10,000 to our partners to support their vital work and progress towards achieving their development objectives.

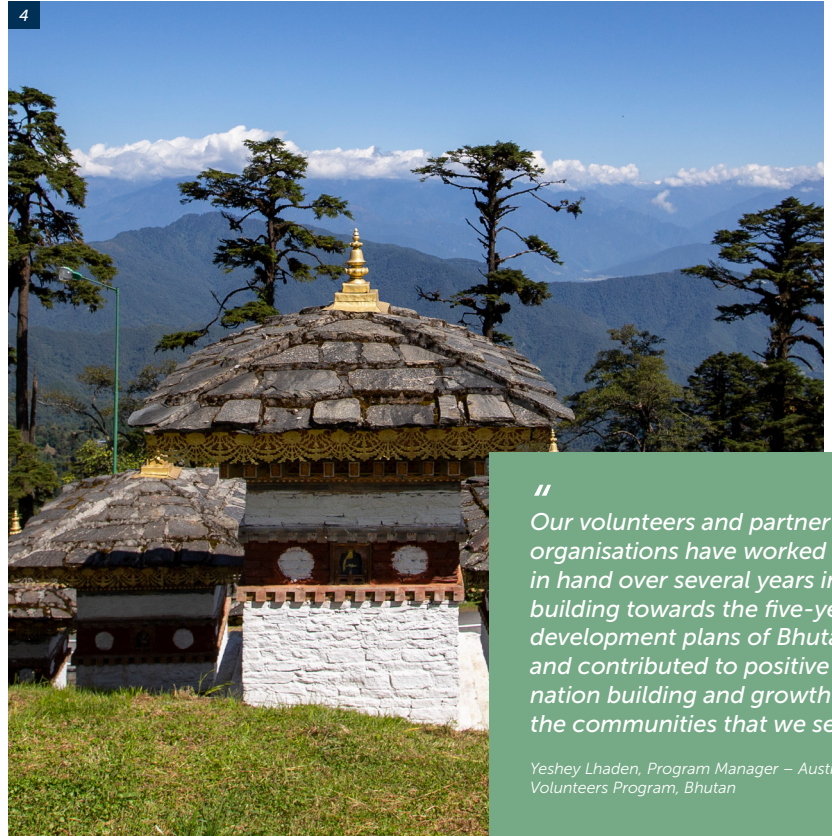
The Impact Fund has supported over 200 partners to deliver hundreds of projects. Projects have been across a range of thematic areas including gender equality, disability and social inclusion, climate action, organisational strengthening, and COVID-19 response and recovery.

## 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*



“ 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 Thimpu to Punakha. Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono*

5

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



### In-country

*International volunteering is an incredible experience. It's an opportunity for volunteers and partners to share their skills and culture, while making a tangible difference to communities.*



### 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.*

# Spotlight on RENEW

With mental health being a growing concern in Bhutan, the professionalisation and certification of Clinical Counselling is a priority to ensure effective mental health services are provided to the larger community in Bhutan.

Respect Educate Nurture Empower Women (RENEW) is a professional body working to register, train and certify counsellors in Bhutan to ensure a high standard of service and professionalism. There are few postgraduate counselling professionals in Bhutan, plus the profession is in its infancy, so support in this area is required. RENEW has been a partner of the program since 2020 and is the program's only non-governmental partner organisation in Bhutan.

Australian volunteer Karen Anderson completed a remote volunteering assignment working as a Counselling and Certification Mentor in partnership with Edith Cowen University. With Karen's support, RENEW were able to train 35 counselling professionals in clinical counselling supervision. Karen delivered lectures, discussions, role play in breakout rooms and assignments, as well study materials and resources.

RENEW also received support from the Australian Volunteers Program's Impact Fund. RENEW has received three small grants to date, including funding for training required for supervisors to obtain certification level two and three in clinical counselling supervision. Upon completion of their training, the participants will be eligible for the endorsement and certification by Edith Cowan University (Perth, Australia) as professional supervisors. These supervisors will provide case consultation, clinical supervision and support to enhance and develop the counselling profession in Bhutan.

RENEW's involvement with the Australian Volunteers Program has successfully supported the professional development of the counsellors involved. As a result of the training, senior counsellors are now able to provide clinical and professional support to their junior counsellors in the field, which will directly impact the quality of services provided to the community. Karen's teaching strategies and methodologies were commendable and appreciated by all the participants.



## 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 

Suite no. 2 F-1 Thori Lam Plaza, Thori Lam, Thimpu, Bhutan  
bhutan@australianvolunteers.com

australianvolunteers.com  
#AusVols @ausvols