LHA Charitable Trust
Institute for Social Work & Education

Lha is a resource for education and knowledge that provides meaningful, multi-leveled social and education services for the benefit of others.

Phone: +91(0)1892-220992
Email: office@lhasocialwork.org
www.lhasocialwork.org
www.contactmagazine.net
www.tibetnature.net
BACKGROUND

Since 1959, hundreds of thousands of Tibetans have chosen to leave their homeland in pursuit of the freedoms and opportunities denied under Chinese occupation. Every year, new refugees arrive in India after an arduous journey, carrying only an armful of personal belongings. Countless refugees arrive with little or no education, speaking only Tibetan, and possessing no viable job skills to support themselves and their families. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult for adults and older refugees to receive an adequate education in India due to strict school system requirements.

Lha plays a crucial role in facilitating the transition of Tibetan refugees from their homeland to the Indian community by providing long-term rehabilitation and education resources. Each year, programs and projects are adjusted to meet the conditions and needs of the region, yet the commitment remains constant: to help the Tibetan people survive and prosper in their new home and to preserve their profoundly unique culture. In addition, Lha offers volunteers and students the opportunity to engage in meaningful community service and social work. Lha seeks to generate an atmosphere of harmony and co-operation within the community by tending to the needs of the impoverished and underprivileged.

Lha is unique in the range and quality of services it offers. These include English, French and Chinese classes, cultural exchange programs, IT classes, vocational training, health and environmental awareness education, a wide array of volunteer opportunities, distribution of clothes and medicine, a soup kitchen, clean water projects and many other programs and activities. Through these rehabilitation resources and educational services, Lha facilitates an easy transition for the Tibetan refugee community to India. On a daily basis, Lha serves over 200 people, hosts between 15 and 25 volunteers and provides up to 17 different services including on average 45 to 50 meals per day for financially disadvantaged people.

OBJECTIVES

1. To provide a meaningful variety of social services to Tibetan refugees as well as to the local Indian population and people from the Himalayan region.
2. To provide Tibetan refugees with education and health services, as well as the skills and assistance needed to build a new life in exile.
3. To facilitate meaningful mutual learning and cultural exchange experiences between Tibetans, volunteers and groups of students who visit from countries around the world.
4. To create awareness about the Tibetan refugee situation and preserve the endangered Tibetan culture.
5. To generate an atmosphere of harmony and co-operation within the community.
MISSION STATEMENT

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WHO WE ARE

Lha is a sacred Tibetan word that means an awakened state of mind and alludes to the fundamental nature of goodness.

- Lha Charitable Trust is a grass-roots, 12AA and 80G non-profit and one of the largest Tibetan social work organizations based in Dharamsala, India. We aim to provide vital resources for Tibetan refugees, the local Indian population and people from the Himalayan regions.
- Founded in 1997 and registered as a charitable trust by the H.P. Indian Government in 2005, Lha has continuously provided vital resources to those in need for over 15 years. Lha’s financial accounts are audited annually by a Government-approved chartered accountant.
- Lha comprises many different local and international contributors. The organization is managed by local Tibetan refugees who draw their expertise from firsthand knowledge of what it means to be in exile. To supplement staff efforts, Lha is fuelled by volunteers and generous donors from around the world.

PARTNERSHIPS:

Lha works in conjunction with various local and international organizations to build a strong network of affiliates, working towards the improvement of community social services. International organizations include Louisiana Himalaya Association “LHA”, Tulane University, Loyola University and Lifework International, while local partners include the Central Tibet Administration, Dharamsala Rotary Club as well as many Tibetan NGOs.

Ahimsa House is home to the Lha Community Soup Kitchen and also provides accommodation for volunteers and cultural exchange students.

A group of Lha’s exchange students from Mexico with a Tibetan NGOs representative.
GET INVOLVED

VOLUNTEER
Lha is the largest volunteer host and co-ordination organization operating in the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala, India. A wide array of meaningful volunteer opportunities are available for both skilled and unskilled individuals. Most volunteers work directly with Lha, while others are placed throughout the community with other NGOs. Every year, approximately 600 individuals donate their time and energy to Lha – about 15 to 25 volunteers at any one given time.

Lha offers a wide variety of long and short-term as well as prearranged and drop-in volunteer opportunities at no cost for both individuals and groups. All volunteers from different walks of life are welcomed, but Lha has ongoing needs for professionals in the areas listed below:

- Language and computer teachers/language tutors
- Project professionals/fundraisers and grant writers
- Computer and IT professionals/web designers and developers
- Human rights researchers/journalists and editors
- Massage therapists and instructors/chefs and cooks
- Medical, healthcare and environmental professionals
- Photographers/videographers/video editors

For more information, contact Lha’s Volunteer Co-ordinator or visit www.lhasocialwork.org and apply online.
DONATE

Generous financial support from individuals, volunteers and organizations allows Lha to provide a variety of FREE social services to the local community. With our limited financial resources, Lha is made possible through the tireless dedication of our staff who work long hours on base-level salaries and our volunteers who donate their valuable time and energy. Lha works hard to operate with minimum administrative and program costs to produce the maximum output, but in order to contend with the ever-growing community, we depend on donors like you.

The donations from volunteers and exchange groups staying in Lha’s accommodations have allowed Lha to become more self-sufficient and sustainable. Our language, computer classes and other social services operating on a daily basis continue to be provided regardless of outside funding. However, to keep up with the growing needs of the community and maintain the operation of our other social services and special projects such as the soup kitchen, eye, dental and health care, clean water and environmental initiatives, we continue to rely on your generous donations.

Since Lha’s founding in 1997, we have continued to be inspired by the compassion, dedication and generous contributions of supporters and thousands of volunteers from around the globe.

With your support, we hope to continue providing these invaluable services to the local community and engage in many new initiatives in the coming years.

One of the delicious dishes served at Lha’s community soup kitchen made possible by donations.

MATERIAL DONATIONS are crucial to aid and support the local refugee community. Lha’s donation drop-off center accepts all items, including medicine, clothing, books, office and classroom supplies, kitchen equipment, used or broken laptops and so on. Items are collected each month and distributed to those most in need.
By making a donation, you can support Lha’s efforts to:
• Provide free social services to the Tibetan refugees and the local community
• Expand and improve our programs
• Support Tibetan refugees with educational and health services, as well as the skills and assistance needed to build a new life in exile
• Create awareness about the Tibetan refugee situation and preserve the endangered Tibetan culture.

Your donations to Lha, no matter how large or small, help us improve and increase our services. Projects benefitting from donations are: the soup kitchen, clean drinking water, eye exams, Contact Magazine, environmental awareness and dental health.

FREE COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Students participating in one of Lha’s many language classes.

LANGUAGE CLASSES
Language classes have been taking place at Lha since 1999. Currently, there are 100 to 120 students per month participating in our language classes at Lha. On a daily basis, Lha offers five English classes, three French classes, three Chinese classes as well as Tibetan classes, all at varying ability levels as well as Spanish and German individual tutoring. All courses are staffed by volunteer teachers and are open to the public. Lha also offers a tutoring program to supplement each language class. In the future, Lha plans to add more advanced language classes and provide students with certificates of completion.
• Lha’s classes have dramatically improved the language skills of hundreds of students.
• For Tibetan refugees, English and Chinese are essential for finding employment and establishing a productive life in exile and in Tibet, while French and Spanish are useful abroad.
• Lha does not limit the number of students or the duration of study; however, students are required to make a minimum commitment of one month.
• The majority of students attend classes for at least two to six months and approximately 40% continue their studies for one to three additional years.
• Lha also offers Tibetan school children advanced Tibetan language courses during their vacation time.

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Contact Magazine is a free monthly magazine published by Lha. It has been a popular source for Tibetan news and community information in Dharamsala for over 14 years and is recognized by Lonely Planet. It is one of the longest-running Tibetan publications in the area and provides local residents and international visitors with news and resources relevant to the Dharamsala community. 700 to 1,000 copies of the magazine are published every month and distributed free of charge around the community with 85% of its readership being visitors to the region. www.contactmagazine.net.

Lha computer courses prepare students for working life.

COMPUTER CLASSES AND IT WORKSHOPS

Lha has a well-established computer training program that aims to provide refugees with viable job skills for the future. We provide training in basic and advanced computer skill levels, web design and development as well as graphic design. A small fee is requested to cover administration costs; however, the computer school also offers full scholarships every month to those unable to pay.

COMMUNITY LIBRARIES

Lha runs a library in McLeod Ganj. The facility allows students, volunteers, tourists, and the general public to check out books free of charge.
Lha collects clothing and other materials from generous individuals and groups. Every month, the Dharamsala Rotary Club distributes 100 articles of clothing to the needy, especially to the slums in the lower Dharamsala area. In addition, Lha delivers articles to local Tibetans and families throughout the year.

In July 2008, Lha’s U.S. partner, the Omprakash Foundation, shipped a total of 30,000 books from the U.S. to Dharamsala. All of the books were distributed to Tibetan and local Indian schools, charitable organizations, libraries and individuals in Dharamsala and surrounding regions. Lha continues to collect books and donate them to libraries and schools.

**VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

Lha provides free vocational training, including professionally taught IT classes, photography courses and massage therapy courses. Lha plans to provide other types of vocational skills in the future, such as chef courses.

- Every year, Lha organizes two to three massage training courses. This training is greatly beneficial to refugees because it enables them to work independently, providing treatment in India and other countries.
- From time to time, when a qualified IT teacher is available, Lha offers an IT program focusing on web design and development, graphic design as well as business skills.
- The basic photography courses taught by professionals are available to all interested persons. At the course completion, students display their work in the ‘Lha Photography Exhibition.’
- Cookery and bakery classes are available to those wishing to pursue careers in the food industry.
HEALTH AND HYGIENE INITIATIVES
Every month, Lha facilitates initiatives to improve community health and increase awareness about the importance of hygiene and physical well-being.

- Donations of medicine are collected and distributed by Lha to local public health centers, such as Delek Hospital and the Central Tibetan Administration’s Department of Health.
- Lha holds workshops on HIV/AIDS and provides information on sexually transmitted diseases, including the distribution of condoms and the promotion of their use.
- Lha has worked with the Leprosy Assistance Project, which aims to provide free medical treatment to better meet the needs of the homeless population.
- The community kitchen provides extensive hygiene and nutrition education classes to improve community health.
- Lha has a clean water and sanitation program that provides filtered water free of charge to the community.
- In 2004, Lha installed hand pumps to provide clean water for impoverished people in slum areas who have not had access to clean water for 35 years.

EYE EXAMS, GLASSES AND DENTAL PROGRAM

In September 2009, Lha implemented a free eye-testing program for Tibetan refugees who reside in Dharamsala. Lha worked in conjunction with several doctors and optometrists who performed preliminary testing at Lha’s office, conducted detailed testing at Delek Hospital and prepared prescriptions for those who required glasses. Lha was able to provide around 145 check-ups and now distributes 100 pairs of glasses every year. Lha continues its eye-testing program and hopes to fit 200 more people with high-quality prescription glasses.

In 2011, Lha also began to provide dental health care to members of the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala. 35 to 50 people now benefit from this service annually with hopes to expand the program over the next several years.
ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND AID INITIATIVES
Lha initiates environmental awareness activities such as clean-ups, trash collection, installation of garbage bins and education on wildlife conservation. In addition, Lha has created an environmental website to inform the global Tibetan and Himalayan communities as well as the general public about the importance of environmental issues within Tibet.
www.tibetnature.net

COMMUNITY SOUP KITCHEN
Hundreds of community members lack one of the most basic elements of survival – constant access to nutritious food.
On July 6, 2011, Lha opened its Community Soup Kitchen at its building, Ahimsa House. This is the first public soup kitchen in the Tibetan refugee community serving low-cost, nutritious meals to the community. Approximately 45 to 50 needy refugees are able to take advantage of this service everyday for a nominal fee of 15 rupees (33 cents) per person per meal. Meals are completely free for those who cannot afford to pay this amount. The opening of the kitchen commemorated the 76th birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Those using Lha’s Community Soup Kitchen also have access to no-cost, clean drinking water. The system ensures that all water used in the cooking process is clean and uncontaminated.

CLEAN WATER
Since 2010, Lha’s Clean Water Project has provided clean filtered water to Tibetan communities. The purpose of installing these clean water systems is to ensure that people can access free, filtered water, thus helping to keep the community healthy into the future. The filter unit is an RO+UV+UF and TTS, which is considered one of the best filtered water systems available in the area. It will provide more than 100 liters of clean and safe drinking water per hour to the students and their teachers and staff members, while the stainless steel tank is capable of storing 500 liters of water.
The water is used not only for drinking but also for cooking, thereby improving the quality of food served at the schools. Additionally, a water cooler providing instant hot and cold filtered water was installed with funds provided directly from Lha. We expect these improvements will help alleviate some of the waterborne illnesses children commonly suffer from in this region, especially during the monsoon season, and that it will contribute to maintaining a high level of general health among students.

Lha volunteer, Jim Petersen, fills cups of clean, filtered water for pupils at Youngling School.

SERVICES FOR FOREIGN VISITORS
Lha offers a variety of low-cost services and courses allowing visitors to experience genuine Tibetan culture. Income generated from these services helps to cover staff salaries and general operating expenses, while moving Lha toward its goal of organizational self-sustainability. Services include:

TIBETAN LANGUAGE
Lha offers Tibetan language courses for those interested in learning about the Tibetan people, its unique culture and traditions. We offer classes for both beginner and intermediate levels with a qualified Tibetan teacher.

- Approximately 20 to 30 visitors take Tibetan language classes each year.
- Lha has between three and seven Tibetan classes operating on a daily basis, depending on demand.
- Many visitors learn the Tibetan language to understand and study the Tibetan Buddhist religion more comprehensively or become a translator.
MASSAGE TREATMENT AND COURSE
Lha offers massage treatments for complete physical and mental stress reduction with the revitalizing techniques of deep tissue and acupressure by professional therapists. We also offer full massage courses depending on the availability of our professional massage therapists.

TREATMENT
• Lha has both male and female therapists offering a combination of Swedish and remedial massage using traditional Tibetan healing oils.
• In our dedicated massage space, we have quality massage beds and chairs in a rejuvenating atmosphere - assisting you to get the most out of your physical treatment.
• Please make an appointment at Lha reception at least one or two hours before your massage.

COURSE
• Massage courses are conducted by professionally trained therapists for seven to nine students, with each course providing a certificate of completion.
• When a massage course is scheduled, we will advertise at least one week prior to the course commencement. The timing of the course will be based on the availability of both the teacher and students.
• Lha maintains working relationships with massage colleges and training institutions both nationally and internationally, such as the Boulder Colorado Massage College in the USA.

TIBETAN COOKING
Learn how to make delicious Tibetan food from a qualified teacher. Take lessons on how to cook Tibetan dishes including momos, thukpa and tingmos. Bring home the taste of authentic Tibetan food to share with others.
CULTURAL EXCHANGE
In 2002, Lha was asked by Tulane University’s School of Social Work to assist a group of graduate social work students on an international social work expedition to Dharamsala. Students were engaged in social work projects within the Tibetan refugee and the local Indian communities and thus our cultural exchange program was born.

The cultural exchange program involves pairing each visiting student with a ‘Mutual Learning Partner’ – a Tibetan-English student at Lha of similar age. The students are able to share stories about their lives and experiences, while engaging in social work and other meaningful activities. Students also get to visit the homes of their partner, meet other members of their family and make friends in the Tibetan refugee community.

TIBETAN ART
Hundreds of students have taken advantage of Lha’s exchange program for authentic Tibetan arts. Lha’s art class is a unique cross-cultural experience that teaches students traditional painting and drawing methods.

TIBETAN HOMESTAY
Lha arranges short or long-term homestays with refugee families, giving visitors the chance to experience the Tibetan lifestyle. Homestays provide a valuable opportunity for visitors and locals to connect and learn about each other’s culture.

- The profits from the homestay program are received by the host families and help support their lives in exile.
- Lha organizes homestays of one month with Tibetan refugee families including accommodation, breakfast and dinner.
- During the month, you will share meals and take part in daily life with your Tibetan family.
- If you are interested in the Tibetan language, you will be able to practice your language skills in the home, while teaching the family interesting facts about your home country.
- For more information, please see the Lha Homestay Service form online at www.lhasocialwork.org.

Cultural exchange students with Dr. Lobsang Sangay, Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration after his lecture at Kashag Hall, CTA.

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Lha has been welcoming growing numbers of visiting student groups each year. In 2012, there were nine groups of university and high school students. Lha can arrange lectures from well-known professionals in the evenings on particular topics such as the political situation of Tibet, the social status of Tibetans in Tibet and those in exile, Tibetan medicine and Tibetan Buddhism and culture. Lha also offers classes in Tibetan language, Tibetan cooking, Tibetan arts, yoga, and massage treatment to visitors and group students. Exchange groups, or individuals within the group, can arrange lessons based on their interests. Every year, more than 75 students participate in the program. Length of stay varies from one week to one month. Lha works with student groups every summer from Tulane University, Centenary College, Loyola University, Lifework International and other American universities and high schools. In December 2012, students visited from Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey Campus, Santa Fe (ITESM CSF), Mexico. A group of students from Kentucky also visited the region in August 2012.

Professor Samdhong Rinpoche (center) pictured with an exchange student group from Tulane University at Ahimsa House.

RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION
Lha’s Reception and Orientation services are designed to provide all the necessary assistance needed for safely arriving here in McLeod Ganj and being prepared with cultural awareness and sensitivity for interacting with this unique culture. If you have not already visited McLeod Ganj or had personal experience with a Tibetan community, we highly recommend signing up for at least the orientation service to be properly prepared for volunteering here.

Lha realizes that India can initially be a quite a shock and that some people find it challenging to become accustomed to Tibetan culture, so we offer different services to help smooth your arrival and travel in India and orientate you in the Tibetan community here in Dharamsala. We offer two primary options for volunteers and additional services to further enhance the volunteering experience. Please visit www.lhasocialwork.org for more details.
RECEPTION
Our reception service helps volunteers with their arrival in New Delhi and their onward travel to Dharamsala. It is highly recommended for people who have never traveled in India or a developing country, especially if you are arriving late at night or early in the morning. Unfortunately, Delhi Airport has a fair number of scam artists and unsuspecting tourists regularly fall prey to their schemes. Many well-seasoned travellers have signed up for this service, knowing the value of having trusted transport waiting at the airport.

Reception service includes:

- Meeting on arrival in Delhi Airport
- Taxi transfer to Majnu Ka Tilla
- One-night hotel stay in Majnu Ka Tilla
- Information about restaurants, money exchange and internet
- Bus ticket to McLeod Ganj.

ORIENTATION
Orientation includes all the important information you will need to help you settle into McLeod Ganj and offers an introduction to Tibetan culture. Lha’s volunteer co-ordinator will meet with you to discuss cultural awareness and specific subtleties of Tibetan communication, which will help you be most effective and welcome in your volunteer position.

Orientation includes:

- Cultural orientation for awareness and sensitivity
- Background information and specifics about your organization
- What to expect from Tibetan organizations and what they expect from you
- Tips from previous and current volunteers
- An insider’s guide to the best places to eat, shop, and meet other volunteers
- Walking tour, including historical and cultural sites
- Information on places for meditation, philosophy, yoga, cooking, language and more
- Accommodation assistance to help you find a suitable room for long or short-term stays.

SERVICES AT PUBLIC EVENTS
During His Holiness’ teachings at Dharamsala, we at Lha Charitable Trust run another social service. We set up a booth staffed by three to four people whose main purpose is to keep visitors’ cell-phones, cameras and other items which they brought unknowingly, as well as those items which were rejected by security guards. We wish to make things less complicated and convenient for those who need cell phones right after the teachings. We also rent out FM radio for translations at the Dalai Lama’s teachings. In addition, we set up a speaker to announce the availability of free copies of Contact Magazine and distribute free information on Tibetan issues including health and environment.
QUICK FACTS 2003 - 2012

✓ More than 5,187 volunteers from 40 different countries have contributed to Lha’s work
✓ More than 1,365 foreigners have participated in learning Tibetan cultural programs
✓ Approximately 789 students from international education institutes have participated in the organized mutual learning exchange
✓ 30,000 free books have been distributed to Tibetan and local Indian schools and libraries
✓ More than 29,031 articles of clothing have been collected and distributed through the donation center
✓ Multi-language courses have benefited over 8,718 people
✓ Computer and IT workshops have helped over 2,322 people
✓ 296 FREE eye check-ups and glasses for more than 276 people
✓ Over 485 people have attended Lha yoga classes
✓ More than 160 people have graduated from the Lha massage course
✓ 67 people have graduated from the Lha photography course
✓ The Lha Community Soup Kitchen has fed between 35 and 50 people daily and 105 needy have benefited since it opened in July, 2011.

(from July 2003 – December 2012)