



# निष्ठा

n i s h t h a

rural health, education & environment centre

Annual Review  
**2024-5**





## Nishtha Trust

**With gratitude to all our supporters we celebrate 30 years in Rakkar Village**

Dr. Barbara Nath-Wiser started Nishtha Health Clinic in 1995 to provide holistic medical care to poor village people. Back then, women in particular lacked the financial resources, mobility and empowerment to go outside the village to seek medical help, therefore they often suffered in silence and led severely compromised lives. Today, things have changed significantly as the villages become absorbed into urban areas, the girls receive education, even to college level and everyone has access to medical care.

However, development is never equal and whilst many are doing well economically others are held back by social marginalisation, disability or lack of individual empowerment. In response to the changing social/economic perspective, our work has adapted to the changing needs of the people. We now focus on providing holistic health

care to those with chronic problems and reach out into the villages by holding health education camps in order that people are better able to understand their physical and mental problems and take appropriate steps to relieve them. Our community centre provides supplementary nutrition and facilities for learning and play for the poorest children who still attend the local government primary schools. We support college students and we hold workshops for young people to enable them to understand and meet the many challenges of modern life.

Nishtha Trust was set up in 1995 by Dr. Barbara Nath with the help of three Trustees: Mrs. Monica Ghosh, Dr. Kishwar Shirali and Ms. Abha Bhaiya. The present trustees are Radhika Shaunik, Soniya Sebastian, Puja Anand, Nayantara Mankotia and Benita Sharma.

### Dr. Kishwar Shirali

Dr. Kishwar Shirali (b. 1937) is a retired reader in Psychology from Shimla University who moved to Sidhbari in 1994. In 1995 She happily agreed to become the settlor Trustee for Nishtha Trust, involving herself in our programs and running the first Nishtha workshops for women and young people. Kishwar has worked tirelessly on women's mental health in the villages of Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir, caring for women and children who are victims of neglect, stress, violence, and oppression, attempting to improve their well-being through studied therapeutic compassion. We are very grateful for her steering hand during the formative years of our work.







## Letter from Dr. Barbara

This year we are delighted to be celebrating our 30<sup>th</sup> year of working for the benefit of the community in this beautiful region of the Western Himalayas. We are looking forward to welcoming many of our long-term supporters in November when we will provide a rich week-long immersive program in the work we do and the area in which we live.

We have much to celebrate on completing 30 years. Our work has moved outward from strong bases in the Clinic and Community Centre into the villages, allowing us to reach many more people in remote areas. Our aim is to support the poorest and most needy people in the community by enabling those who are unwell to understand the causes of their illness and to access necessary medical help. We support children and adults with disabilities. We empower and inform single women through a network of activists who are skilled in talking to people and enabling those in need to access the help the government provides. We also sponsor college education for children of single parents.

In the Community Centre we have been holding remarkably well-attended and popular

workshops for adolescent girls and boys. Because good nutrition is so important, we have extended our school feeding program to include the older children in our local Rakkar school and many more children in schools in outlying areas. In the autumn the centre is abuzz with government school children receiving tuition to help them excel in the school exams that take place in December. We make sure they get through their studies, but also have some time to play!

In November we were delighted to host a group of 16 UK supporters who rode a 500 km route around the district, over 3,000 meter passes and down to follow the famous Beas river. Thank you all for your courageous and joyful effort!

We are very grateful to you all for supporting our work, enabling us to confidently move forward in understanding the situation of each individual we encounter and to build new programs to meet the changing needs of the community.

With all my thanks and good wishes,

*An Nalk-Oiser*





## Nishtha Clinic

Nishtha clinic continues to be open four days a week for drop in patients and those who make appointments. Patients are received in the welcoming semi-open reception area by one of our pharmacists, Suresh or Azad. They book in to see either Dr. Sara who works four mornings a week or homeopath Dr. Shreya, both

of whom are committed to holistic patient care. Dr. Barbara continues to see her old patients and assists the other two doctors with complicated or unresponsive cases. She has been focusing on developing her skills in acupuncture and is currently giving regular acupuncture treatment to nine patients with various problems.

**Clinic staff** As three of our clinic staff have reached retirement age Suresh and Azad's duty times are being scaled back and housekeeper Rasma who has not been in good health has retired. We sadly miss seeing her in the clinic. A very happy retirement party was

held for them on April 1<sup>st</sup> during which they were given a comfortable armchair each in which to enjoy their leisure. Rasma also officially retired at the end of March 2025 due to ill health. Surinder is now full time housekeeper and Vinod is night watchman.



**Dr. Shreya & Dr. Sara** Both Dr. Sara MBBS, who is a fully qualified MD, and Dr. Shreya, who is a homeopath, work very well together as a team, each supporting the other and consulting on difficult cases. Dr. Sara is pleased to have seen fewer infections requiring antibiotics this year and to have reduced the severity of diabetes mellitus and diabetic neuropathy in some patients through prescribing magnesium supplements. Dr. Shreya is happy to have successfully treated skin problems using homeopathy. She is eagerly continuing her studies in psychotherapy, and her counseling skills are of great benefit to our patients. Both doctors have contributed to teaching the health and nutrition components of our adolescent girls' workshops, which they find to be a stimulating interlude to their regular work in the clinic.



**Patients** The number of patients seen in the clinic averages 260-266 per month with very little seasonal variation. We see almost exactly double the number of women as we do men, and when it comes to children, we see approximately one third more girls than we do boys. Since it is not the case that there are more girls than boys born in the village, we presume that boy children are taken to more sophisticated private clinics when they are ill than are girls.

**Subhash Chand** (right) was brought to the Clinic in November having fallen and broken two vertebrae. When he was discharged from hospital he was bedridden at home and because he lives on the mountainside with no motorable access he was unable to receive any further treatment Dr. Barbara decided that he should stay at Nishtha in order to receive physiotherapy and attend his hospital appointments. He receives regular



acupuncture treatment and physiotherapy. His condition is slowly improving and he has started to walk with the help of a walker and has become very much a part of all the activities that go on in the Community Centre.

**Assistance for Destitute Patients** Nishtha helps our poorest long-standing patients, who we have referred to government hospitals by paying 50% of their bills. Although government hospitals are very much cheaper than private hospitals, unless you are admitted as an in-patient, your govt. health insurance card does not entitle you to free medicines. Cases include a patient

who needed expensive stoma bags. Rashma, who is suffering from kidney failure and has been receiving dialysis regularly at the government hospital in Dharamsala. Deenu Ram, a local elderly man who has been taking medicine since June to relieve symptoms related to his cancer and many more local patients who have received help with paying their medical bills.

**Patient Consultations** The following chart shows the number of patients seen in the clinic each month and how many were new patients. With concern that the number of patients attending

the clinic is declining, efforts have been made to advertise our clinic services by erecting two large new signboards at the approaches to the clinic and posting our timings on Facebook and Instagram.

Month	Men		Women		Boys		Girls		Patients	
	New	All	New	All	New	All	New	All	New	All
April	9	76	9	142	3	15	1	11	22	244
May	17	90	18	159	1	10	4	23	40	282
June	10	83	9	135	3	16	3	15	25	249
July	9	58	11	182	2	9	3	19	25	268
August	12	69	15	168	1	18	3	24	31	279
September	10	78	12	169	2	8	8	22	32	277
October	6	79	9	160	2	16	1	10	18	265
November	9	96	18	185	2	11	1	13	30	305
December	5	63	15	186	3	16	1	16	24	281
January	3	48	8	141	0	8	2	14	13	211
February	6	64	14	140	2	3	4	25	26	232
March	8	77	8	158	2	14	2	18	20	267
Total	104	881	146	1925	23	144	33	210	612	3160



## Special Help for the Disabled

Financial assistance for those with special needs is received from all three of our Trusts. The UK Trust provides funds to run the vehicle which transports children and the occasional adult stroke patient to Tapovan for physiotherapy treatment each day. Around 246 journeys to and from Tapovan have been undertaken this year



### Tapovan Attendance 2024-5

Name	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Mitali	18	22	17	12	17	14	16	20	21	19	16	13	205
Saksham	17	23	17	20	18	19	8	16	20	12	8	16	194
Priya	12	22	21	13	18	4	-	16	15	19	20	16	176
Vivan	-	-	7	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
Vihyana	17	21	-	-	13	18	8	16	16	9	16	12	146
Tarushi	7	9	4	5	6	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	39
Akshar	1	-	4	-	-	4	-	2	-	-	-	8	19
Pyare Lal	17	4	1	4	4	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	34
Miraya	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	13	26

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## Children who visit Tapovan and Nishtha

**Shaksham**, **Mithali** and **Priya** form one little group who attend the primary school at Tapovan for the morning and then walk down the road to the physiotherapy centre after lunch. Mithali is attended by her carer Mishro Devi while Shaksham and Priya's mothers stay with them. They all come regularly to Nishtha for the day on Saturdays.

Mithali's comprehension has improved and she is able to make her wishes known. **Shaksam** is able to get up to standing on his own now but, according to his mother is still very fearful about attempting to walk without support. To help his confidence in October we bought him a larger lightweight walker which he uses well and recently he got a new pair of callipers as he is growing so fast. **Priya** is now 10 years old and comes to Nishtha to monitor her epilepsy treatment which she receives from Dharamsala Zonal hospital. She is making good progress with her walking and speech.

Of the younger group—Vivan, Vihana and Miraya—**Vivan**, although he lives locally, has not been coming because of family issues. **Vihana** goes to Tapovan regularly and often comes to Nishtha on a Saturday. She has just received her first set of callipers and is gaining a little more

strength. **Miraya** is 5 years old now and can stand with the help of a walker. Nishtha helped her family rent a room nearby so she has been going to Tapovan regularly for the past two months.

**Tarushi** went to Tapovan regularly up until the end of September. She has a very supportive family but they have had problems and so have moved to their family home. Several of these children come from Chamba or other distant areas but the families move to the Fatepur/Sidhpur area in order to be able to go to Tapovan.

Every day Ravi picks up our special needs children and their carers from their homes to take them to Tapovan clinic where they receive exercise and physiotherapy, treatments crucial to their mobility and ability to manage daily tasks. On Saturdays he picks up the children and brings them to Nishtha Community centre where they enjoy playing and drawing together and our doctors are able to check their health and progress.

## Special Needs Patients

**Akshar** receives homeopathic treatment from Nishtha clinic. His mother home schools him and calls on us for transport to the school for his exams. He is a large 16 year old so very hard work for his mother. Recently Vijay Bhadwaj has been trained in home care for Akshar so he visits three times a week to give him a bath.

**Sanjoli**, who is sponsored Drs. Andrea and Reinhard Becker, no longer attends Tapovan because it is too difficult to transport her from her home to the car and from the car into the clinic. The doctors occasionally make home visits and Baby, her carer regularly comes to the clinic to report any difficulties she is having. She still comes to Nishtha on a Saturday whenever possible because she loves the outing.

**Sejal** and **Sonakshi**, the twins sponsored by Astrid Mayer, continue to do very well on the hormone therapy which they have been receiving since 2017 when they were one year old. They are now nine. Mentally both children are alert and cheerful but physically Sejal still lags behind Sonakshi who is now the correct weight and height for her age. Sejal has grown but whereas Sonakshi gained 4.5 kg this last year, Sejal only gained 2 kg and, as can be seen in the photos is

very much smaller than her sister.

Their sponsorship pays for their expensive hormone therapy and for some of their grocery bills—allowing their parents to give the girls regular supplementary nutrition such as protein powder, almonds and cashews.

**Suraj**, a young man from Salli village who is confined to a wheelchair is quite a success story. Having given him a laptop and table to encourage his studies he managed to pass the exams to work in a bank. With his new wheelchair and greater mobility within his home he gained the confidence to take up a post offered to him in a bank in Kinnaur. He is hoping in time to be transferred to a bank nearer home.

Other children we help include **Bhagwanti** who continues to visit the clinic monthly and receives money for her special needs and 1500 every month for extra nutrition, **Anku**, sponsored by Dr. Strobel, also gets Rs.1500 per month and special remedial classes to help him keep up in school which he started this year.

We are very grateful to all those who so generously sponsor these very needy people, giving them a chance!



## Community Center

The Community Center is managed by Ravindra, and activists Vijay and Ankush who along with two drivers, Ravi and Arvind and a housekeeper, Salochana run a busy program of activities. Starting on Monday, when the materials purchased for the school feeding program are delivered to the local primary schools. Every afternoon the local school children join us to use the library and computer room and take part in all kinds of activities, tuition, games and sports programs. We hold workshops for adolescent boys and girls and Wenlido training and gender awareness workshops for our sponsored students. A little group of disabled children spend the day relaxing and having fun together on Saturdays and on Sundays the students we sponsor hold a full program of classes and activities. Every Wednesday we hold our staff meeting in the hall and one day a month the single women join us to discuss ongoing programs and issues. They also hold their block meetings in the Centre.



We are delighted to welcome little Anku among the new batch of children who have just joined school this year and are now discovering our library and all the toys in our community centre. Anku is a child of special interest to Nishtha as we have been helping his mother take care of him in difficult circumstances since he was born. It's lovely to see how bright and healthy he is now!



## Nishtha Benefit Cycle Tour 2025

In November, Nishtha hosted a team of 16 cyclists from the UK who rode 500 km around the Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh. Using surplus funds from this benefit tour, the computer classroom was upgraded with seven new, up-to-date computers, replacing the 15-year-old machines. These new computers can run the latest software that students are likely to need familiarity with for college or future employment. The visiting cyclists further donated a brand new bicycle, which the girls are delighted with.

## Community Centre Activity Sessions

Kids Club / Games / Computer	Disabled kids visits on Saturday	Tuition	Adolescent / Wenlido Workshops	Sponsorship Sunday Meetings	Staff / Single Women's Meetings
301	28	150	29	40	65





## Library & Kids Project

From the beginning of the school year in April the centre is alive with children coming to use the library, learn to use the computers, read books and play games.

We received a wonderful donation of a trampoline which is now set up in Dr. Barbara's garden, behind the Community Centre. The children are delighted with it and Vijay Bhadwaj is deputed to monitor the children's use of it so they all get a turn, and don't damage it. Even our special children have lots of fun bouncing!

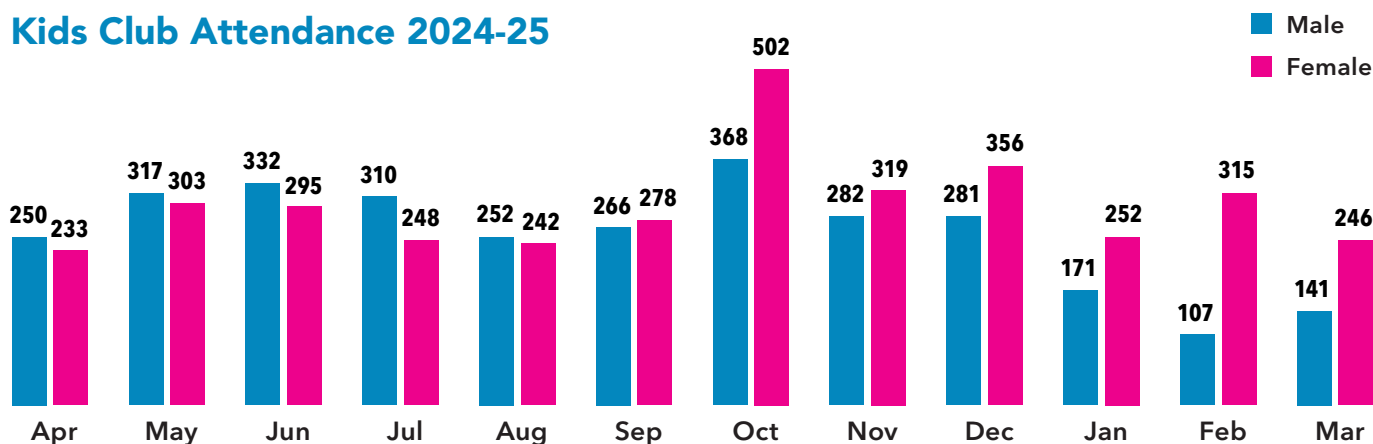
Due to the unexpectedly declared early monsoon holiday, we had to switch all the training programs we had organised for August to take place in July, leaving very little scope to organise anything special for the children. Luckily, they didn't mind because they were too busy bouncing

on the trampoline or playing on the ground on bicycles with Vijay Bhadwaj and Ankush, well out of earshot of the trainings!

After the monsoon we start the Tuition classes to prepare the children for their end of year exams. This year, because we were aware of some children who were not holding their own in the entry class in school, we decided to employ Vishbandu, an anganwari teacher who has done further studies in maths. She came every afternoon and sat in the library with the small group of three to six children tutoring them in very basic literacy and numeracy. They also played games and had plenty of fun.

Kanishka started the classes for children from class 1 to 10 and was joined by Payal when things got rushed and Vijay and Anku who also help were busy. The children really enjoy and appreciate the help they receive with their school work.

## Kids Club Attendance 2024-25





## Single Women

Nishtha's Single Women's program has been running for the last 17 years and has made a huge impact on the lives of women living without the support of a husband. Although societal attitudes are gradually changing, it is still the case that women who lose their husbands are considered to be ill fated and therefore not quite respectable. We learn from the children of single women who we sponsor to go to college just what it is like to live in a society that looks down on widows and other women who are not married. They all talk

about how traumatic it is for their mothers who feel ostracised and how hard it is to grow up with this disadvantage.

Our six single women activists comb the villages to draw out widows or abandoned women to become part of the group which provides them with support and practical assistance. They send us daily reports by WhatsApp so that we are able to track their meetings, the issues raised and the problem cases that come up that need addressing.

**Meetings** The women hold a average of six to ten meetings a week in each of the areas in which they work. These may be monthly village meetings during which they welcome new members and listen to particular problems faced by women in the village. They notify the women of government schemes which they might be eligible to apply for, providing them with the application forms and helping them fill them out. They also select villages in which to organise Nishtha health camps which are very often held in private homes. On some occasions they meet with specific women in their homes to work on particular problems or visit the panchayat and other government officials in order to appeal for help for particular women.

This year the single women have been instrumental in gathering girls from the various areas into groups to attend the Nishtha adolescent trainings. We held five trainings each with 16 to 20 girls in the summer and then followed up six months later with another single day training.

Because the girls all came from remote village areas the initial training was extended from the normal one day to two days. This allowed our team to not only cover the physical and emotional changes that take place during adolescence but

also discuss what we need to eat, how we should exercise, first aid and social issues. They were encouraged to not only dream and have ambition but also to think realistically about their futures. The single women activist from the area stayed with the girls overnight so they had someone familiar with them.

The Nishtha single women's team and three of our staff members along with members of several other local organizations attended a workshop organized by the Tibetan Centre for conflict Resolution. This was a very interesting and helpful workshop. Not only did we learn a number of useful techniques for dealing with difficult situations but we also had a lot of fun getting to know each other, introducing our organizations and the work we do. Our single women described the difficulties faced by some of the single parent families in the district and how they are able to benefit them. It was very good to see how well they were able to present their work to the group.



**Kumo Devi** On May 8<sup>th</sup> the whole Nishtha staff attended the party held to celebrate Kumo Devi who has now retired after 18 years of dedicated work. Her remarkable strength and sense of justice enabled her to overcome her own problems in bringing up her young family as a single woman and to relate to other single women experiencing social, legal and personal issues. We were happy to welcome her mother, brother and two devoted sons to the event and wish her a long, healthy and fulfilling retirement.





## Block level Meetings

In November the single women organised three Block meetings: the first, attended by 51 women from Dharamsala and Kangra blocks was held on November 19<sup>th</sup> at Nishtha. The second, for 54 women from Nagrota block which took place on November 21<sup>st</sup> was also at Nishtha, and the third for Rait block was held on 26<sup>th</sup> November in the home of Sushma, a Single Women living in Rait. Seventy people participated in this meeting. The Nishtha team attended, leading the discussions and cooking the food.

The single women prepare for these meetings by inviting interesting and useful officers to speak to the women and give them guidance and advice about government schemes and how to seek assistance from the government when they need it.

One of the people who frequently comes to our meetings is Rosi, an advocate at the Dharamsala courts who tells the women that if they have any legal problems, especially domestic violence issues they can come and see her and she will help them. Officers from the women's police cell

also regularly attend these meetings, breaking down the fear many people have of approaching the police if they are in trouble. Other officers from government offices and institutions explain some of the government schemes available for the single women and their families.

The organisation draws attention to problem issues such as how women who do not have a smart phone can maintain their ration cards, gas bookings and even receive their pensions because they cannot link their Aadhar (identity) card with a phone number so that they can receive the OTP issued when they apply for these services. Some women are obliged to depend on relatives who do have a smart phone on which OTPs can be received. However, this is not always possible or comfortable.

Another issue which has received a lot of discussion is that women, especially older widows face difficulties when applying for their pensions because their date of birth is not properly recorded on their Aadhar identity card. This is very complicated for older women, so many forego their pension.





## Health Education

This year, each of our six field activists have organised 11 or 12 outreach clinics in their areas bringing the total number of camps held to 70. In July when the monsoon was at its height, the number of people who could come was reduced, but generally around 30 women and men attend each time. By no means all of the attendees are single women—our health clinics open the single women's program up to the wider village enabling those who are less confident about declaring themselves to be in need of help to come forward in a more acceptable context.

Dr. Shreya says: The single women have worked hard to organise our health camps in more remote areas where we have a better response from the local people than in places where they have easy access to health services. This means we are travelling up into the mountains more which is quite hard work but well worth it.

A small stipend is paid to a local woman to help our activists to organise the camp in each area. In

order to encourage people to attend the clinics and to make them feel welcome and comfortable, these village helpers have been providing tea or cold drinks to the participants, fulfilling their strong sense of hospitality when inviting their neighbours, very often into their own homes.

Our aim is to give people health information and advice, not treatments. When they first arrive in a village, while the people are gathering, Suresh and Shreya check blood pressure and weight and when requested test the blood sugar levels of diabetic patients. When asked, Dr. Shreya looks through and carefully explains patients' hospital records. Her talks include basic health, hygiene and nutrition and she teaches some self-help techniques and exercise to relieve tension and pain. Shuresh and Azad specialise in explaining how to make a very effective massage oil from locally available ingredients and Mohinder talks about environmental issues including re-using plastic by weaving it into useful sitting mats.



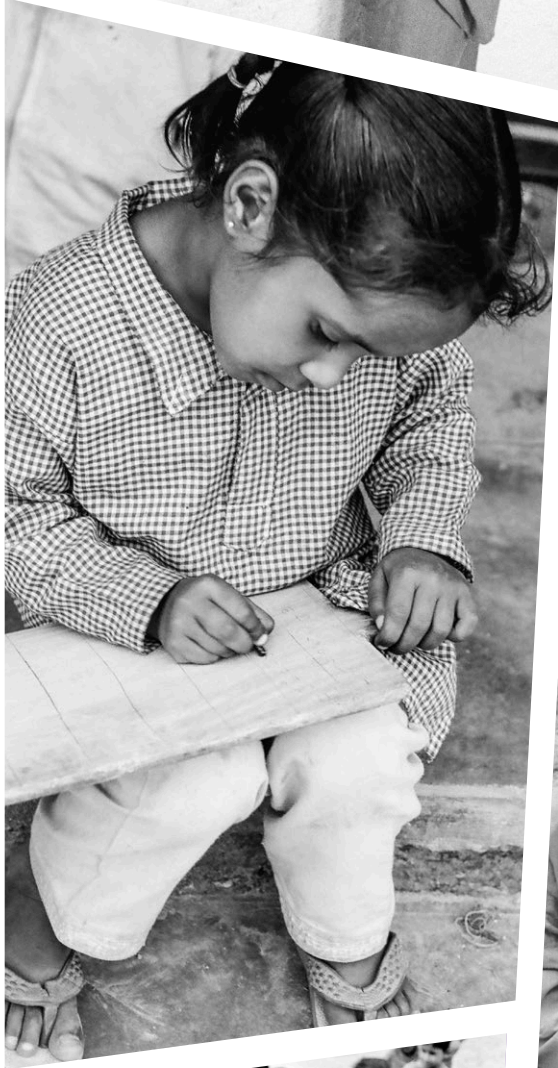
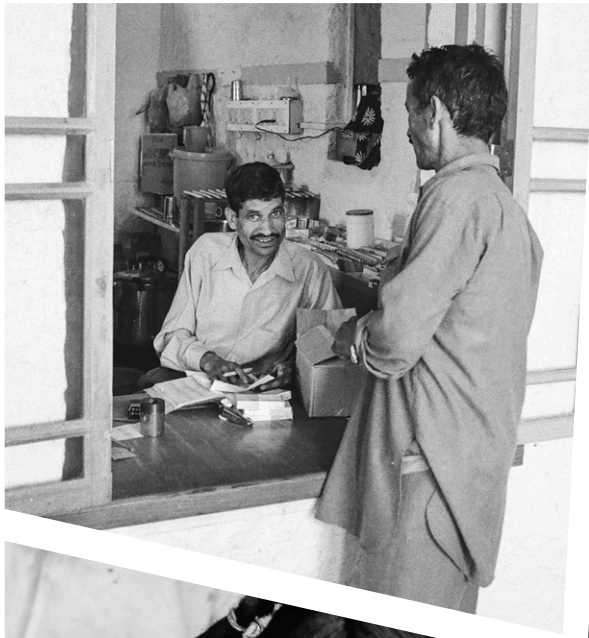


## Outreach Clinic Data 2024-5

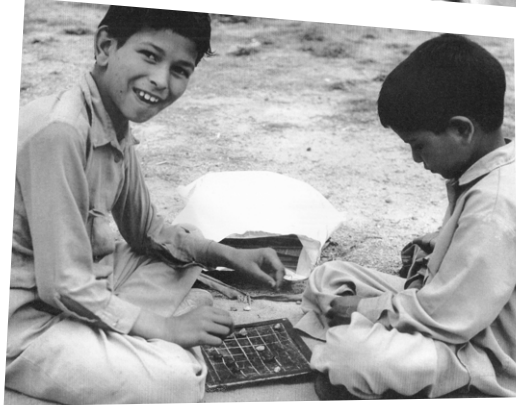
Month	Visits	Attendees	Single Women	Men
April	6	143	37	5
May	5	134	32	10
June	7	199	36	10
July	5	110	19	19
August	6	172	34	14
September	7	207	37	13
October	6	171	36	15
November	4	94	28	5
December	7	195	45	1
January	4	95	19	23
February	7	202	39	29
March	6	178	59	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>1900</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>163</b>

**May 31<sup>st</sup>** Mohita, a young dentist who is involved in a research program on oral cancer has been joining our outreach team giving free dental check-ups. People in the more remote villages who have no immediate access to dentists are particularly happy to take up this free opportunity. It is a good reminder to talk about the importance of good oral hygiene and avoiding chewing tobacco. We are occasionally joined by Mary, a trained dietitian who explains the importance of eating a wholesome, healthy diet.

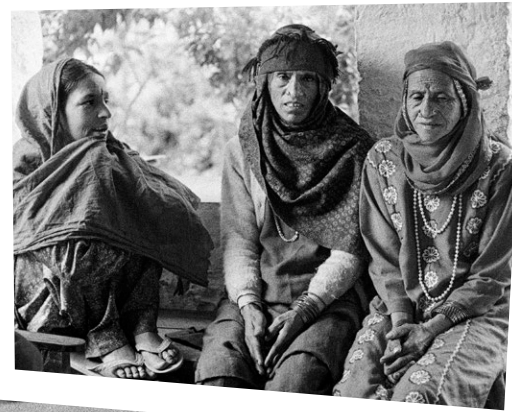
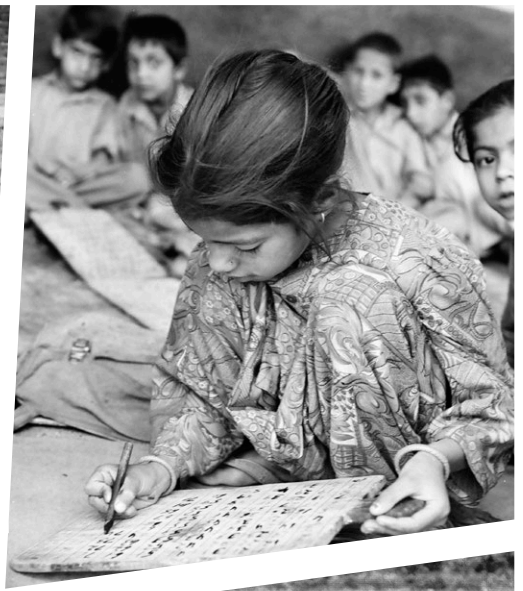




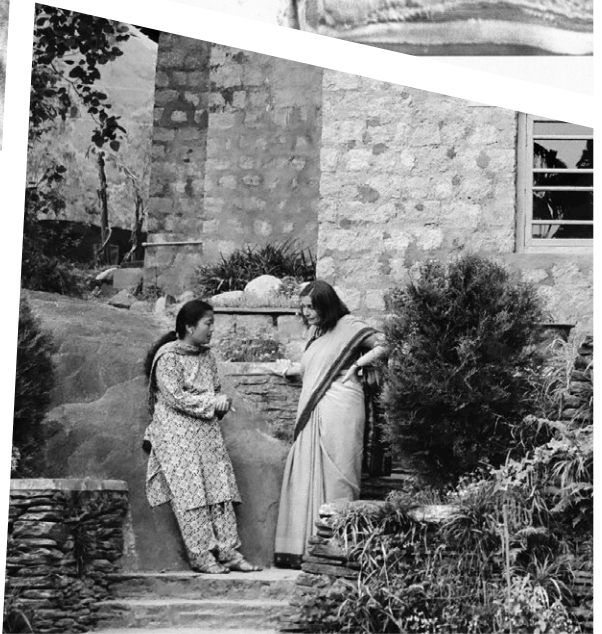
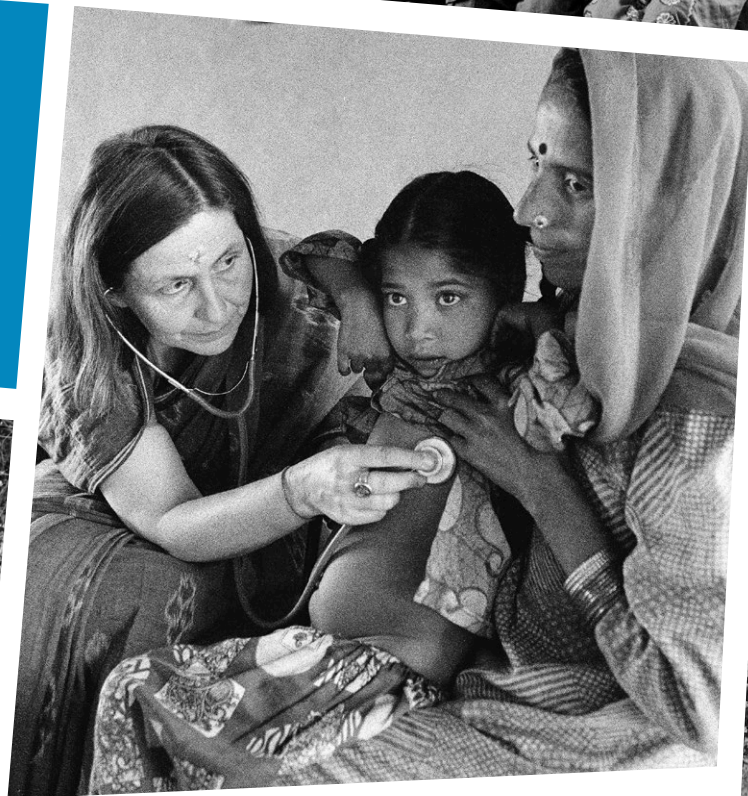
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## School Nutrition

Because the children who attend the government primary schools in our area are the poorest of the poor, in April 2024 we decided to expand our school nutrition program in order to provide better nutrition to more children. This year we have provided a piece of fresh fruit every day for each of the children in ten primary schools, as well as three times a week for the 145 children in the Rakkar Senior Secondary School. On occasion, in the winter season when fruits are very expensive, we buy peanut brittle, roasted channa (chickpea) and peanuts, healthy snacks which the children love.

Each week we purchase around 130 kg of vegetables which is divided and delivered to the 10 primary schools. Each of the 219 children in these schools receives around half a kilo of fresh vegetable in their diet per week. In addition, we provide tofu, onions and tomatoes to make their very basic government meal more interesting and nutritious.

Our effort to provide additional nutrition to 364 children in 10 local schools and anganwaris takes a great deal of dedication and organisation.

Every Monday, Arvind and one more of our

staff get up very early in the morning to visit the wholesale vegetable market. Back in the Community Centre, they carefully weigh and divide each item making bags & boxes for each school for smooth delivery.

Our team then load the bags and crates into the Sumo jeep and set off to deliver to each school. Thatri is 11 km from Nishtha, and during the monsoon, because of a landslide they had to walk 2 km to reach the anganwari and school which serve the labouring families who live in scattered clusters on that section of the hillside.

The supplies are received by the school cooks or helpers who make sure the children get served tastier and more nutritious meals.

### School Nutrition Program 2024-5

Schools	Number of children	Annual cost per child
Primary Schools (10)	219	Rs. 2150
Senior Sec. School (1)	145	Rs. 1200
Kindergartens (7)	37	Rs. 587



## Pre-school Children

Our team visits the anganwaris each week to deliver fruit and snacks to the young children. Then they can assess what is needed and respond accordingly. This year, we replaced the worn-out sitting mats in the Tathri and Slate Godown anganwaris. At Nag Mandir, we built a railing to prevent the children from running out onto the road, which has become much busier in recent years. The railing was donated by Dr. Barbara, and our staff carried out the work of fixing it and providing a simple gate.

Children learn about how to eat well by being given regular good food. Nishtha provides fresh fruits, vegetables and tofu to supplement their school midday meal of rice and dal, instilling healthy eating habits to last a lifetime.







## Public Health & Environment

### Clean, Green Rakkar

The nature of our environmental work is changing. At the beginning of the year, we were still collecting segregated waste—principally, clean plastic—from the village households we have been working with for many years. In October, the number of households keeping their waste for us significantly dropped, as Waste Warriors engaged a jeep that visits the village clusters and collects mixed rubbish regularly. As a result, in October, it was no longer viable to ask people to segregate their waste, so we stopped making blocks but continued to collect waste from less accessible households and delivered it directly to Waste Warriors for processing. By March, it became clear that we should rethink our role in raising awareness of the need to dispose of waste properly and care for the environment.

This year, we continued to hold regular clean-up programs around the village with our staff and local children, focusing on keeping the water channels clear and not throwing plastic packets everywhere. Regular collection of plastic waste

continued from the inner parts of the village where Waste Warriors' garbage trucks cannot reach. We were able to produce enough bricks to complete an order for 200 blocks for an architect building in Jia village.

Nishtha plays an active role in the Dharamsala Environmental Preservation Network, which is working to strengthen its organisation to effectively lobby the government to enforce littering and garbage disposal regulations for hotels and homestays. Our team continues to work tirelessly in the village to educate people by example, encouraging them to pick up litter and segregate biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste.

The most effective way to remind people about littering and keeping the area clean is to maintain the signboards around the playground, school area, and by the bridge, where people find it convenient to throw their garbage. We found an excellent, highly efficient painter whose rates were more reasonable than those of the painter we used last year, so in March, the messages on all the boards were renewed. They now look clear and readable.

### Water Filters

Two new filter units were purchased in September to replace those that were worn out and leaking in the clinic and at Rakkar School. After considerable concerns about the washers, they were finally properly fitted and are now working well. In February, we acquired a complete new set of filters for all the units in the schools and the clinic. Azad is responsible for keeping the filters cleaned and in good working order. We are always impressed by the diligence with which the local people come to our filters to collect water. Not only does this ensure their good health, but it also discourages the use of bottled water, which is increasingly seen as a source of microplastics.

### Austrian Volunteer Ravana

After 10 months of working with us as an Austrian civil service volunteer, we were sad when Ravana left us in August. He was a huge help on the farm, assisting our team with all kinds of innovative and useful ideas and techniques. Our compost has never been better and the vegetables are loving it. Thank you Ravana for your hard work and inspiration!



**Green Worker:** Since October, when our collection and brick-making were reduced, Vijay has been joining the children's program each afternoon to supervise the more energetic children who love to bounce on the newly installed trampoline and, when they go out with the cycles, ensuring they all share and have a good time. Vijay is also actively involved in the school nutrition distribution. As we have extended our reach to more remote schools, it has become difficult to reach them all by jeep. Vijay delivers some of the supplies on his scooter.

Another project that benefited from Vijay's energy was the rebuilding of the wall alongside the clinic entrance, where we created a larger garden with channels to drain rainwater from the path to the clinic. He also works on the farm and has been engaged in clearing a piece of land on which we plan to build a pavilion to hold the children's program and workshops as a fun and energising alternative to the hall.

Vijay, as a musician, has also composed a new song to encourage people to care for the environment and not indiscriminately throw away their garbage. Music is a highly popular and effective way of drawing local people's attention to this important topic.

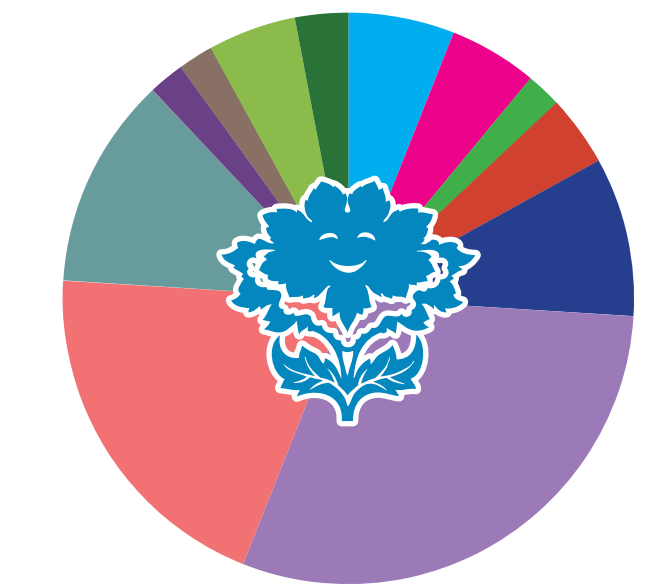


**Land Project** Sujata, Vandhana, and Sunil work steadily on the farm, preparing the beds, seeding the vegetables, and feeding them with compost and mulch until they come to fruition. Below is a chart showing the types of vegetables and quantities we produced this year. Unfortunately, our garden is sometimes raided by a roaming troop of monkeys that scale our fence and steal anything fruiting at the time.

They particularly destroyed the pumpkins, so we only harvested one large one this year. We also had poor results from planting aubergines, which grew to a certain extent but didn't produce any fruit. On the other hand, the peas and beans did very well. Despite the general shortage of water in this area this winter, our farm is plentifully supplied from the irrigation channels that bring water from the upper streams into the fields.

### Farm Production 2024-5

Produce	Yield kg	%
Beetroot	7.30	6
Beans (kyu)	6.25	5
Turmeric	2.00	2
Ginger	5.00	4
Beans	11.10	9
Onion	38.50	30
Lady finger	25.45	20
Potato	14.50	12
Bitter gourd	2.15	2
Peas	2.00	2
Pumpkin	6.00	5
Cauliflower	4.00	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>124.25</b>	







## Sponsorship Students

The Nishtha student's sponsorship program aims to help the children of single parent families to access college level education. This year, 19 students have been funded to do their first degrees. There are five, all girls now completing their final year, two have been studying business administration, one tourism and two commerce. Of the remaining 14, three are boys, one is studying Sanskrit (Shastri) one is at ITI (Institute of Industrial Training) studying architecture and one is in the Dharamsala college majoring in political science. Of the girls, two are studying commerce, two science, one is studying electrical training in the ITI and the other five are all doing arts degree courses in Dharamsala college.

We pay their fees, transport and expenses for books and stationery as well as giving them a small amount of pocket money. As a condition for receiving sponsorship from Nishtha, the students are asked to join the group that meets every Sunday in the Community Centre where they learn computer literacy, English conversation and engage in cultural and fun activities together. We are very pleased with this year's group and feel they have made the most of the opportunities we have been able to offer them.

There are also four students who we are helping

**January 2<sup>nd</sup>** Nishtha students decided to see in the New Year on the hillside above Tatri village where there is an old shepherd's hut and a glorious plain grassy meadow. They had a wonderful time hiking, cooking, singing and dancing around the camp fire, and in the morning warming up by playing cricket and pitu, the local sport of knocking down a pile of stones with a roll of socks.

to study advanced courses. These include our senior student **Rinki Devi** who is in her final year. She helps Ankush to manage the Sunday classes and sets an example for the good behaviour of the group: cleaning and attendance. She will be sitting her final exams in June and is currently applying to colleges to do her masters. She is extremely grateful for the help she has received to enable her to complete this course.

**Avantika** is studying for her masters in Commerce in the regional centre in Mohli. She is just finishing her first year. **Manvi**, who we sponsored through her first BA course has this year been studying for a post graduate diploma in Computer Application and will look for work when she finishes in August. **Ansh** is in the final year of his BA. He only joined us this last year in order to complete his studies after the loss of his mother. He is preparing for the exams to join the administration of Himachal Pradesh which he can do on his own from home with the help of Google.





**Sunday Classes** The Sunday classes have been attended regularly by all 23 students. They include:

**Computer Training:** The computer classroom has 7 desktops and 4 laptops so often two students have to sit together on each machine. We are very grateful for the donated laptops which we use during these classes. Vijay and Ankush teach the basics of computer applications which help them in their education to prepare presentations, present data, graphs and do research.

**Music/Dance Lessons:** Musicians Bandana and Rishi teach harmonium, tabla and singing to the group and practice local Gaddi and Jhamakda

dance. During the monsoon and autumn, they specially focused on preparing a program to present as a cultural event to our Nishtha UK cycling group. More recently they have been practicing Vijay Bhadwaj's latest environment song which we will get professionally recorded along with a selection of our student singers.

**English Classes:** Puja Anand continues to offer her valuable time to teach our students spoken English. She brings the classes to life by introducing skits, plays, songs and other activities. Through Puja's hard work and dedication our students get to a point where they are able to stand up in front of an audience and speak in English.

## Workshops for Sponsored Students

For three days in late November, we invited **Manju**, a very experienced trainer who has provided workshops several times in the past, to run a Gender awareness training for our students, all children of single parents and so have less access to support and are often marginalized by society. Ten girls and four boys participated engaging in extensive healthy discussions on gender, equality, patriarchy, attraction, masculinity. They also talked about their careers and hopes for the future.

They all agreed that the notion of gender pervades every part of our lives and it will take time to change. They face gender stereotyping in the family and in education institutes and wherever they go. The boys agreed that their sisters and female friends don't have nearly as much freedom as they have in society. They also said that it's much worse for daughters of single women because people talk more about them.

When asked, most of the students took their mothers as role models. They talked very emotionally about the struggle they had encountered after the death of their fathers and what they heard their relatives say about their mothers. Their tears showed their pain and the

deeply rooted trauma they carry in their hearts. This session helped the students share their innermost feelings and also showed the trust they had developed between them. They all want to do well so that they will make their mothers happy and proud of them.

These trainings make a strong impact on the group, bonding them together so they will become lifelong friends which can be very useful to them in the future. They enjoy working together and happily come to help our team run children's sports and environmental programs.

**Student Interviews:** In July 2024 we interviewed a total of 17 students to fill the six spaces vacated by students who had completed their degrees. We are very grateful to Puja Anand for helping with this years quite difficult selection process. We generally only take those who want to go to government colleges. We disqualified students from private schools and those we felt were not serious or capable of further study but encourage those studying commerce, science and vocational training courses.





## Trainings

### Wenlido Training

Three Wenlido empowerment workshops for girls were conducted by Ravindra and Deepa this year. The first took place from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> May and was attended by 17 young girls, aged 12 to 14, from various nearby villages. It was a two-day residential training instead of the usual three days, as the girls were only able to take two days off school due to the pressure of the new style of examinations.

It was a little tight to cover the essential topics in this short time and yet the trainers felt that for these very young and bubbly girls two days were enough. Although there were some topics which are beyond their conception, they all actively participated in discussions and so came to understand the topics well. They also enjoyed the games and energizers between the sessions and enthusiastically danced in the evening.

The second workshop was held from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> May for 12 adolescent girls, aged 12 to 14. This was a three-day residential training for young girls from the local government school.

The first day, sessions were based on learning how to recognize danger and what steps need to be taken to ensure personal safety. On the second day it was clear that these girls were ready to learn how to use their bodies as weapons, practicing on cushions to become aware of how much physical power they have which they can use to protect themselves. They imagined situations and how they would respond, then discussed what effect such responses would have.

The third day began by talking about different types of violence. We discussed sexuality and did the body mapping exercise to highlight the

functions of the body parts. Some girls were very shy about talking about the parts of the body but others were curious to know more.

The third program took place from 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> July, this time for 17 girls, aged 15 to 18. Most of the participants of this training were coming for the second time. They were already familiar with the idea of the safety net which means identifying people who you trust to help in a critical situation and how to recognise what is abuse. This time we focused on more advanced ideas and practices. The session on bullying, sexuality and cybercrime went on quite long with a good deal of healthy discussion. Many of the girls shared their experiences of how social media affects their lives and we advised them how to be online safely, protecting their identity.

**Feedback:** All the participants left feeling very confident and powerful, especially after the board breaking activity. They enjoyed and learned a lot from most of the sessions and techniques. At the beginning of the trainings the participants don't look very enthusiastic but after two or three sessions they began to perk up and take a more positive interest in the what we had to say as well as in the physical activities. They learned that fear is not bad but it's good as it makes you alert and powerful in a difficult situation. By the end they were all very friendly with each other and didn't want to go home!



## Adolescents Empowerment Workshops

With special funding from SMILE Germany we were able to hold seven full trainings, four for a total of 48 boys and four for a total of 77 girls, followed by four follow up trainings for the girls and two for the boys. Because the adolescent boys and girls who we invite to our trainings are all in full-time education it is necessary to organize these during their school or college holidays. Our single women activists, the stitching team and our staff did a remarkable job contacting all the participants and ensuring their attendance, preparing the materials

for the workshop and organizing transport, accommodation and food in a very short time. Very fortunately Dr. Barbara arrived back from Vienna just in time and was therefore able to attend and oversee the arrangements.

Following our experience running trainings for adolescents last year, we were able to provide this year's groups with a well worked out effective program to impart essential practical information along with fun activities and plenty of discussion.

Date	Village	Ages	Participants	Trainer
11-13 Apr	Rakkar, Mohli	13-17	13 boys	Mr. Rahul (special trainer), Vijay Kumar
14-16 Apr	Lunta, Rakkar, Khaniyara	15-24	13 boys	Mr. Rahul (special trainer), Vijay Kumar
8-9 Jul	Rehlu, Ladwara, Chari	13-17	22 girls	Dr. Sara, Ravindra, Vijay, Mohinder
11-12 Jul	Basnor, Bhatech	12-17	17 girls	Dr. Sara, Ravindra, Vijay, Mohinder
17-18 Jul	Rehlu, Ambari, Manjgrah	12-17	19 girls	Dr. Sara, Ravindra, Vijay, Mohinder
19-20 Jul	Basnor, Bhitlu, Ghroh	13-18	18 girls	Dr. Sara, Ravindra, Vijay, Mohinder
22-24 Jul	Yol, Dhagoon, Sidhbari, Rakkar	12-16	22 boys	Mr. Rahul (special trainer), Vijay Kumar
25 Jul	1 day follow up - mixed villages	13-18	11 boys	Mr. Rahul (special trainer), Vijay Kumar
26 Jul	1 day follow up - mixed villages	13-18	11 boys	Mr. Rahul (special trainer), Vijay Kumar
2 Feb	1 day follow up	13-17	18 girls	Dr. Shreya, Ravindra, Vijay
10 Apr	1 day follow up - Basnor, Bhatech	12-17	15 girls	Dr. Shreya, Ravindra, Vijay
20 Apr	Rehlu, Ambari, Mangrah	12-17	13 girls	Dr. Shreya, Ravindra, Vijay
27 Apr	Basnor, Bhitlu, Ghroh	13-18	13 girls	Dr. Shreya, Ravindra, Vijay

### Girls' Sessions

Nishtha's doctors Dr. Sara and Dr. Shreya take turns to hold the girls' sessions, covering health, hygiene, menstruation and nutrition. They used videos, cards, real vegetables and pulses as well as games to explain the topics more practically. During the session, participants were introduced to the advantages of the use of cloth sanitary pads and were each presented with a pack.

Dr. Sara reported: The workshop sessions fostered curiosity, awareness and clear communication regarding significant life topics. The girls I met were all quite young and had difficulty engaging in the topics without a good deal of fun, playful and practical chat and activities designed to ensure that what we want to convey is received well and retained.

Dr. Shreya commented that when she and Ravindra showed the anatomy of the female reproductive system with the help of a model and a video, even the shy girls responded enthusiastically, discussing the physical and mental changes that take place during adolescence. We talked in detail about the importance of a balanced diet, why drinking

sufficient plain water is important and why junk food is harmful to your health.

Vijay held a session on **The Essential Things to Know** explaining the importance of knowing your personal details, emergency numbers and so on. He talked about the harmful effects of the mobile phone and that social media and the internet are valuable only if used in moderation. He suggested they start thinking about their real abilities and interests and choose their subject carefully, even when they are still young.

This time we added a **first aid session** in which Mohinder used dummies to show how to respond in a variety of emergency situations.

For most of the girls this kind of workshop was very novel. They appreciated the health and nutrition sessions and were interested to try using the cloth menstrual pads. They had never done a first aid session so it was new for them to think that they could respond properly in an emergency. They also shared their views on internet session and agreed to try to use less phone and concentrate on books and other outdoor activities. They determined to do regular yoga and exercise to keep healthy.



## Boys' Sessions

Following the success of the workshops held last year and the encouraging response from the participants, we again called Mr. Rahul from Pune to be our workshop trainer. This year we decided to engage one group of younger boys from the local Rakkar School and one group of older teenagers from nearby villages. These were boys who had just passed their plus two, final school exam. The third group was of young boys from Yol, Dhaloon, Sidhbari and Rakkar areas.

In preparation, we printed our special T-shirts with the Nishtha logo for the participants to wear during the workshop.

Rahul's first object in running these workshops is to challenge the boys to think critically, to analyse a situation to solve a puzzle. He says: "if the participants don't start thinking and taking in whatever I say they will not understand a single topic." Moving onto the topic of human rights, the boys learned about why the world needs to consider the rights of all human beings. He went through the list of basic human rights, discussing them and presented challenging situations which the boys had to think about and discuss.

The second day began with the topic of sex and gender discrimination. They learned that sex and gender are totally different - sex is a biological term and gender is social. Nature doesn't make much difference between boys and girls but socially we have made the gap so big that it takes lot of time and effort to reduce it. This led on to learning about the changes that take place during adolescence and the development of sexuality. In both groups they had many questions about the changes in their bodies because at home they have no chance to discuss these things.

On the final day, they learned about violence and good relationships. The media is full of



violence and sexuality and is so attractive to boys of this age and influences their idea of masculinity.

We played many games between the sessions to help develop skills such as good listening, concentration, communication, eye co-ordination and attention. Every morning Vijay did a yoga session with them to calm them and focus their energy for the day.

Rahul, the trainer, said: "In the first group there were young boys, full of energy and positive attitudes. They talked too much but that happens and its good to give them a place to express their views to give them clarity. In the second group the boys were serious and deep thinking, they didn't reveal their personality in the workshop but learned many things. In our workshop we work on boys needs rather than on a structured program. Our focus is on attitude building rather than teaching."

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## Participants Feedback

All the participants were excited by the knowledge they had gained. They said they would like to come once more to revise these topics and next time they would also come with more questions. For most of the participants, critical thinking, human rights, body changes and the masculinity topic were the key points for them. They will work to make themselves better human beings.

The follow up single day workshops were held several months after the initial training in order to review and reinforce the information and ideas covered. Most of the girls remembered quite a lot of what had been taught about nutrition, female health issues, first aid, career objectives and phone usage. Some were a little shy and hesitant to ask questions but most felt challenged and empowered by the experience and are eager to

join the next round of Wenlido trainings.

For the boys' follow up we were able to invite 15 participants for each of the two sessions, of which 11 actually came, showing that they are interested and feel they are getting useful information from these discussions. In this follow-up workshop some boys clearly showed themselves to be leaders and helped us to contact the other boys.

During the session the boys took a more mature part in the training than last time. They helped the kitchen staff, cleaning staff and trainer to run the session well. They also showed interest in engaging in the other activities at Nishtha.

We could see a lot of change in their attitude and personality. Many of them said that whenever they start to abuse or tease someone, automatically they remember the discussions during the sessions and they would stop and think. They are also keen to meet again.



## Sports Programs

Our sports programs and the maintenance of the playground are a substantial amount of work to prepare for and organise. Every evening, Vinod, our night watchman goes down to the ground wearing his Nishtha ID badge to encourage the children and their parents playing there to use the waste bags we have set up there and not to misuse the equipment. Our team led by Mohinder visit the ground every Thursday to clean the bushes and make sure everything, the equipment, the garbage bags, the drainage and the water filter are all in good condition. Welding repairs were needed on the swings, tree guards for fruit trees planted during the monsoon were established. Later in the year, further playground repairs and painting was done both on Rakkar ground and Nag Mandir. This spring the equipment is all bright and functional and the ground is full of children and parents in the evenings.



### Winter Sports

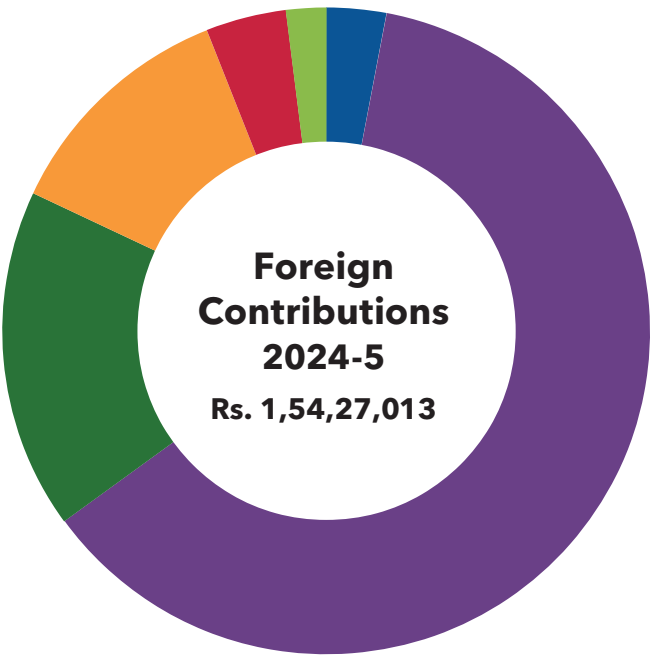
This year we decided to include the children from the schools on the hillside who we take additional supplements and provide book boxes to. Vijay, Ravindra and Anku discussed the timing with school teachers and went up with sports equipment to hold mini sports days in five upper schools and Rakkar village school. From that they selected a total of 70 children to take part in the main sports program which was to take place on

December 25<sup>th</sup> - Christmas Day.

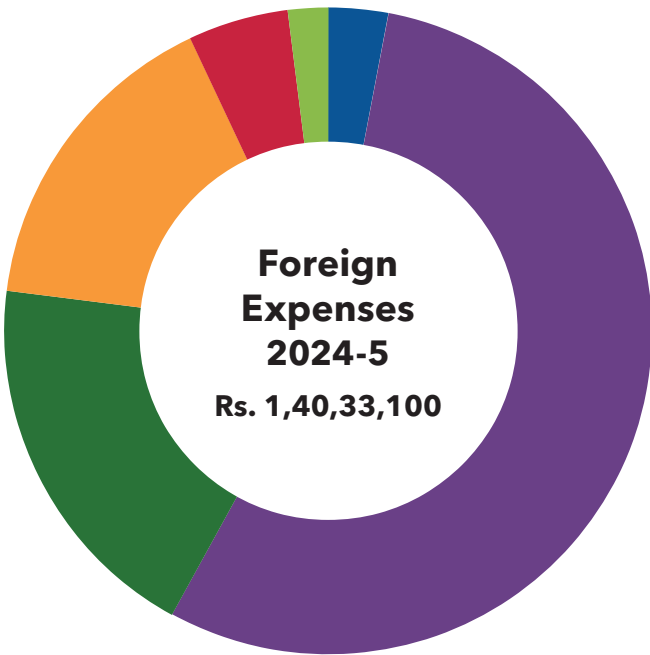
Our Christmas Day sports program was a huge success with an additional 65 children from the surrounding area joining the 70 who we had invited from our six local Primary Schools to take part in the medley of games organised on the Rakkar Ground. Our sponsorship students contributed enormously to the smooth running of the activities, making sure that every child was fed lunch and went home with a gift in their hands.



# Financial Report 2024-5



Bank Interest	5,30,595
Austria Trust	96,84,376
Nishtha UK	26,60,948
Germany Trust	18,72,171
Smile Project	5,25,970
Timberline	1,52,953



Bank Interest	3,98,155
Austria Trust	79,16,863
Nishtha UK	27,19,995
Germany Trust	22,53,948
Smile Project	6,38,188
Timberline	1,05,951

## Local Account

Income	Expenditure	Utilized
9,05,615	8,81,439	97%

## Nishtha Corpus

Old Corpus	60,36,030
Austria	10,697,417
UK	2,821,219
Germany	1,691,687
Total	2,12,46,353

**Note:** All funds are in Indian Rupees (INR)





## United Kingdom



Nishtha UK Trust

Charities Commission

Registration No: 1118248

IR charity status ref No: XT2400

Nishtha UK Trust

sort code: 30 97 41

a/c No.: 00118802

BIC: LOYDGB21063

IBAN: GB82 LOYD 3097 4100 1188 02

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uktrust@nishtha-hp.org

## Germany



# Nishtha Germany

Bank: Volksbank Main-Tauber eG

BIC: GENODE61WTH

IBAN:

DE40673900000084335401

<https://www.nishtha.de>

## Austria



# Nishtha Austria

Gemeinsames Engagement für  
Entwicklungszusammenarbeit

Bank: Oberbank BLZ 15000

BIC: OBKLAT2L

IBAN: AT241500004591018215

Verwendungszweck: Projekt  
Indien

<http://www.nishtha.at>

## United States

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**410-715-8901**

[ExecDir@timberlinefoundation.org](mailto:ExecDir@timberlinefoundation.org)

## Republic of India



**Nishtha Rural Health, Education  
& Environment Centre**

VPO Rakkar, Sidhbari,

Distt. Kangra 176215

Himachal Pradesh, India

Email: [contact@nishtha.ngo](mailto:contact@nishtha.ngo)

**For donations within India only:**

Account number: 55094118584

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Nishtha Rural Health, Education

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Registration No: 51 1/4/98

FCRA No: 182450048

Income Tax Number:

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Tax exemption available

Cover photos by Diane Barker



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