



# ROKPA TIMES



**Vocational training –  
The foundation for an  
independent life**

# Editorial

Dear friends of ROKPA

On March 4th of this year we have celebrated the opening of the **Akong Rinpoche Memorial Center** together with our local and foreign honored guests as well as all of our ROKPA Children. Four and a half years after the tragic passing of our longtime President, my ROKPA Co-Founder and teacher, we devote this building to Dr Akong Tulku Rinpoche. It is here that his vision, his teachings and his great kindness towards humanity shall live on.

In 1979, Akong Rinpoche took me and a group of friends on a pilgrimage to Nepal. I had not had any connections to this country before. Through him however, and in the midst of the great poverty that I encountered, a deep and passionate wish rose within me to leave my acting career behind and to serve people in need – especially the terribly neglected street children. Whether or not I would ever succeed in doing so, I did not know at the time – but there suddenly I felt no other choice for me than to embark on this adventure.

In 1980, we founded ROKPA together with my father, the lawyer Dr Veit Wyler. Akong Rinpoche taught me to set up and run the first Soup Kitchen, which I have done for nearly 25 years. Pioneering times! It was then that the first children became involved. The first Children's Home was established as well as numerous other projects which I have been operating alongside my team ever since.

All these years Akong Rinpoche was at my side. He taught me and others not only the practical development of our projects, but most of all he planted in us the seed of the very thing which ROKPA stands for today: To help where help is needed – whenever and wherever possible.

He said: **“You are not helpless if you are helping others!”**

Meanwhile, this principle has become deeply anchored in our children here, as they experienced firsthand that Rinpoche's teachings – when understood and put into practice – work. And even though Akong Rinpoche himself is no longer alive, he continues to live on in the ROKPA Children and now, also in the brand new Akong Rinpoche Memorial Center, to which you, dear friends and donors, made an important contribution. For this, as well as for your loyalty through the years, allow me to express my deepest gratitude.

Yours

Lea Wyler  
Co-Founder and President ROKPA INTERNATIONAL



Lea Wyler with Dr Akong Tulku Rinpoche.

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Lea Wyler, President and Co-Founder /  
Peter Fanconi, Vice President/  
Lama Yeshe Losal Rinpoche / Gelong Thubten /  
Andreas Vollenweider

## Imprint

Editorial team: Corinna Biasiutti / Peter Fanconi /  
Federico Giavardi / Kaja Kurczewska / Caterina Meier-Pfister /  
Thomas Stettler / Lea Wyler / Tina Zaugg  
Copy editing: Liane Brand ([www.lianebrand.ch](http://www.lianebrand.ch)) / Melanie Ewing  
English translation: Kaja Kurczewska  
Graphic design: Renée Reust / Staša Lampret  
Cover picture © Lea Wyler  
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Clara Garcia Ortés / Coen Meintjes / David Neviatzky /  
Anna Paszkowiak / Francesca Pfister / Adrien Rebord /  
ROKPA Support Network Zimbabwe / Tal Siano /  
Pim Willems / Lea Wyler  
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# A success symbol



If you have traveled to Nepal before, you may have noticed the rudimentary knowledge applied to the construction of local housing and the lack of technical possibilities. Earthquake-proof construction using decent construction equipment and materials is still a huge challenge. It is almost a miracle that ROKPA has

succeeded in creating its new Akong Rinpoche Memorial Center (ARMC) in just two years: a unique meeting place that allows young people affected by poverty to be educated in the gastronomy, hotel and textile sectors – an education that offers a chance for a better life.

For me personally, it was extremely fascinating to see how everyone involved has contributed hand in hand to our success: our generous donors, and the male and female construction workers on the ground who carried away earth and heavy stones in woven baskets; the procurement team, who were able to organize the sparse building materials on time; the local, tireless architect, who received valuable support from our local team as well as specialists from Switzerland (architect, civil engineer, EHLsmile – a non-profit association under the umbrella of the Hotel Management School in Lausanne).

The finished building now shines like a wonderful symbol of success – made up of many puzzle pieces. On behalf of the Board, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and respect to all of you and invite you to visit us soon in Kathmandu.

Dhanyabaad – thank you!

Peter Fanconi

Vice President of ROKPA INTERNATIONAL

# Great strides



During my last visit to Kathmandu in the restaurant of the ROKPA Guest House, I had the best Linzertorte of my entire life. The high quality of baked goods there is partly down to Prakash, a 20 year old lad who grew up in the ROKPA Children's Home. Today he, together with a master baker, manages the

bakery that is connected to the Guest House. He definitely wants to further develop his pastry skills. He will therefore become one of the first graduates to join our new Hospitality Vocational Training – read more on page 4.

With the second newly launched ROKPA Project in Nepal, the enlarged Women's Workshop, we are also focusing on the effect of sound vocational training. As trained textile professionals, the prospects for these women – many previously stigmatized – are increasing significantly on the difficult Nepalese labor market. Details about the project can be found on page 6.

With the new Vocational Training Center, ROKPA is making great strides and we depend on your support. Together we will ensure that Prakash as well as many other youths and women in Nepal can move onto a successful future.

Not only in Nepal, but also in the other ROKPA Project Countries we, in addition to our focus on primary school education for children, also focus on continuing professional development (see page 8 onwards).

If you don't believe me about the Linzertorte – even though I have eaten it in dozens of variations – visit us in Nepal and find out for yourself!

Corinna Biasiutti

General Manager of ROKPA INTERNATIONAL

# A bright future for our Hospitality Training students



*Employees of the ROKPA Guest House in Kathmandu: With specialist training, the chances of young people on the Nepalese job market are increasing enormously.*

**The ROKPA Hospitality Training offers young people the opportunity to gain the necessary skills for a successful start to their careers with a one-year training in the hospitality sector. The course focuses on developing practical skills, giving students the chance to find employment at the end of the course.**

The aim of the training is to provide high-quality training for young people – especially for those who cannot otherwise afford certified vocational training. For the older children of the ROKPA Children’s Home, this educational opportunity also opens up the chance to lay the foundation for a life on their own feet.

Students spend 25% of their time understanding theory and 75% on practical training. This educational program is possible because the Hospitality Training is attached to the ROKPA Guest House with 22 rooms and a restaurant.

Students can choose between 3 courses:

- Certified course in food production for cooks and bakers
- Certified course in food and beverage service for waiters and bartenders
- Certified course in room division for front office and housekeeping

All 3 courses also cover topics such as computer skills, English, mathematics and professional behavior.

Students who have reached the required qualification levels will receive a state-recognized certificate from the renowned GATE College.

## Building in Nepal – a challenge

The difference between what we want and what we can actually do has always been a challenge. The Nepalese market is heavily dependent on imports and material procurement has not always been smooth. Even when it worked out, sometimes the quality was not as agreed.

In this area Sagar – a former ROKPA Child and now responsible for the project with me – was pivotal: thanks to his knowledge of local culture and the ability to explain it to a foreigner like myself. At this point in time, the building is well on its way to completion, even though there is still a need for constant follow-up from the suppliers to ensure that Bistari Bistari (slowly and slowly) does not become a complete standstill.

All in all, it has been a great pleasure to contribute to such an effective project and to work with committed, reliable people inside and outside the organization. From a personal point of view, my social and project management skills have benefited enormously. In addition, this exciting project gave me the opportunity to live in beautiful Nepal.

*Federico Giavardi,  
ROKPA Project Coordinator in Nepal*



*Project Manager Sagar (left) and Federico waving from the roof of the new ROKPA Building.*



*ROKPA Child Kelsang becomes an instructor for the housekeeping course.*

” *Help your family or your enemy – help everyone!*

”  
*Akong Rinpoche*

# Kelsang – from village girl to hotel professional

Kelsang is the youngest of nine siblings. At the age of ten, she was taken in at the ROKPA Children's Home. She had come to Kathmandu from Mustang partly on foot accompanied by her sister. Here she wanted to go to school and hoped to find someone who could help her. After finishing school, she completed training at GATE College, the renowned local hospitality school, and now one of ROKPA's associates. This included an internship abroad. After graduating, Kelsang worked in a

well-known hotel in Kathmandu before taking over housekeeping at the ROKPA Guest House two years ago.

In the future, Kelsang will be the trainer for the housekeeping course in the new Hospitality Training Center. In addition, she will take over the co-management of the ROKPA Guest House.

## ROKPA's project partner in the Hospitality Training Center

**On behalf of Olivier Beiner, President of EHLsmile, Adrien Rebord supports ROKPA as project advisor. ROKPA asked him about the current state of the project.**



*Adrien Rebord, himself an EHL graduate, has already opened and led a hotel school in Bhutan.*

programs will begin. The partnership with GATE College, the best hospitality school of Nepal, is without doubt already a key success.

**ROKPA: What can guests expect from ROKPA Hospitality Trainees?**

**ADRIEN REBORD:** The connection between students and guests is key. We expect guests to actively participate in the training by interacting as much as possible with the students. Having more and better trained staff will definitely improve the level of service. The guests benefit from more attention and it will facilitate the development of new

products. Alumni from EHL will also provide their expertise on the field during the initial period, bringing new ideas to the restaurant.

**ROKPA: Where do you see the project in five years from now?**

**ADRIEN REBORD:** The objective is to reach economic sustainability and for the certificate to be recognized nationally. Moreover, we aim at ensuring management by locals and a high job placement rate in well-known hotels for our students.

**ROKPA: What are the biggest achievements of the project so far?**

**ADRIEN REBORD:** The project is still at its infancy. We will soon recruit the instructors and open admissions for the students. In May 2018 the training



Employees at the ROKPA Women's Workshop are looking forward to moving into the new building.



The seamstresses also produce personally customized items.

# Training Center for women: textile crafts for a life in dignity

**For more than 20 years, the ROKPA Women's Workshop in Kathmandu has been offering training as a seamstress and employment to mothers from the poorest backgrounds. It's time for another important step. Thus, more women in difficult life circumstances can continue to shape their own future. From 2018 ROKPA will offer its own textile craft courses.**

The Women's Workshop has been moved to the new Akong Rinpoche Memorial Center in early February. Thanks to generous donations, ROKPA "Child" and now employee Krishna Hari and Babani, instructor for the seamstresses, were able to procure the required infrastructure. Babani has also defined the syllabus for the seamstresses.

The six-month training is intended to equip the graduates with relevant skills for future employers. Due to further inquiries on site showing demand, there is now also a plan to offer a new three-month course for knitters.

With the Nepalese Association for Craft Producers (ACP), ROKPA has been able to gain a partner interested in hiring the graduates of ROKPA Training. Further partnerships are sought – so that women can succeed in making the decisive step into the world of employment.

The recruitment of suitable candidates for the new courses is carried out in various ways. For example, in the winter, potential course attendees are able to reach Lea Wyler, who selects suitable women for training in the Women's Workshop, via the ROKPA Soup Kitchen. In addition, ROKPA checks whether women released from prison can also be included.

## Shopping with a social footprint

■ At [rokpaww.org](http://rokpaww.org) you will find a selection of products whose sale enables the operation of the educational institutions and thus the strengthening of ROKPA Women.

Orders are accepted by our personnel in Kathmandu. Please kindly note that international delivery only makes sense in the case of larger quantities of ordered items due to the transport costs. You can of course purchase the textile products in the boutique at ROKPA Guest House on site.  
[rokpaww.org](http://rokpaww.org)

” *The best way to help yourself is by losing yourself in helping others.* “

Akong Rinpoche

## Katsu Maya – a prospective seamstress

**In spring 2017 in Kathmandu, Katsu Maya reaches out to Lea Wyler. Her deepest wish is to enable her daughter Bibisha to attend school. Moreover, she wants to become a seamstress.**

The young woman had to overcome many difficulties in her life. As an infant, she burned her face in an accident and a part of her right hand remains stunted. It was only after she married her first husband did she learn that he already had a family with four children. As a second wife, she has to live apart from the family by the cowshed, bear the brunt of housework and is treated badly. After the birth of her daughter, the domestic violence increases. She leaves her husband and returns to her family in Sindhupalchok.

She meets her second husband at the construction site, where she now works for a meager salary. As the 2015 earthquakes devastate the country, her family is also severely affected. Her clay hut is destroyed, her daughter buried and discovered only by a sheer stroke of luck. Bibisha recovers slowly but Katsu Maya's husband falls ill and dies after months of expensive care. Despite the difficulties in her life, the petite woman who knocks at ROKPA's door is anything but broken.

An incredible will to survive resonates in her humble ways. She wants to give her daughter a chance to attend school and thus a better start in life.

Since the 26-year-old expresses the desire to become a seamstress, the question arises about the motoric possibilities of her impaired hand. One of her nearly perfectly drawn circles clarifies this question. For several months now Katsu Maya has been part of the ROKPA Women's Workshop team, where she performs simpler tasks. As soon as the seamstress training starts in 2018, her place in it is secured.



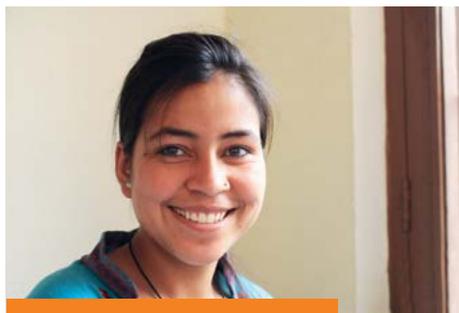
*Incredible will to survive despite a heavy fate: Katsu Maya with her daughter Bibisha.*

## Your support strengthens women

■ Life stories like that of Katsu Maya are sadly not uncommon in Nepal. With the expansion of the Women's Workshop in Kathmandu, ROKPA wants to offer more and more women in difficult situations training in textile crafts and thus a good basis for an independent life.

**Donate now with the annotation "Women's Projects". Thank you!**

## Saru – in training in the ROKPA Women's Workshop



*Saru, the youngest employee of the Women's Workshop, is learning a lot from her colleagues.*

**Saru has been working and studying in the ROKPA Women's Workshop for more than two years. When she was in 5th grade, her mother died suddenly. Her brothers Kedar and Subash, who had been living in the ROKPA Children's Home for years, asked "Mummy" Lea to admit their sister and younger brother Surat, as in countryside where they lived, there was no school and no income possibilities.**

With her approximate age of 15 (in Nepal many do not know their exact age), Saru was too "old" to attend the elementary school again and so more eligible for work in the ROKPA Women's Workshop. Meanwhile, she has completed various sewing classes and expanded her school knowledge with the help of various "ROKPA Siblings". In addition, English is on her curriculum to enable dealing with international customers, so she receives a private lesson every day from her "Didi" Anju.

## ZIMBABWE:

# Income for teenagers

**Widespread unemployment also affects many young people in Zimbabwe. Therefore, local ROKPA Representatives are committed to helping young women and men develop their entrepreneurial skills. It gives them the opportunity to earn an income while serving the needs of their communities.**

One of these projects is the “Sewing Project” at the ROKPA Chitungwiza Center. The young people use old jeans and other donated textiles and re-produce them into school uniforms or other products that are designed by the participants. ROKPA encourages youngsters to develop their own skills and product ranges. Also included are the parents who pass on their knowledge.

*A young girl gives an old pair of jeans a new life: sewing project to strengthen young unemployed people in Zimbabwe.*



Currently, four schoolgirls and three of their mothers participate. Periodically, the excess products are sold. Additionally, for a fee, members of the community also perform small repairs.

” *Education is the key to inner freedom.*

”  
*Akong Rinpoche*

## SOUTH AFRICA:

# Self sufficiency through know-how

**23-year-old John Thabo Mthobi is an apprentice in the ROKPA Tikologo Permaculture Project, where organic food and herbal medicines are grown and the knowledge is passed on to the public. In an interview with ROKPA, John Thabo talks about his work, the lives of young people in South Africa and his plans for the future.**

**ROKPA:** *What is your personal motivation to work for the Tikologo Project?*

**JOHN THABO:** I work at Tikologo so that I can learn new skills to help me in my life. I learn how to plant all kinds of things. I learn how to use different tools and machines. I also work here to have some income. This all improves my life.

**ROKPA:** *How is the situation for young people in Groot Marico?*

**JOHN THABO:** There are very few opportunities for young people. The best prospects come from finding casual work on a farm or quarry which pays about R80/day (ca. 6.5 US dollars) and could last anything between one week and one month. In their free time young people like to play soccer or listen to music. Lots of young people drink alcohol or smoke marijuana. Girls often get pregnant very young, sometimes as young as 13 years.

**ROKPA:** *What are your plans for the future?*

**JOHN THABO:** I would like to start my own project like this so that I can also teach people about permaculture and looking after themselves. This will help make people less dependent on the government.



*Apprentice John Thabo in the Tikologo Medicine Garden: At home he has his own vegetable garden to provide him with food.*

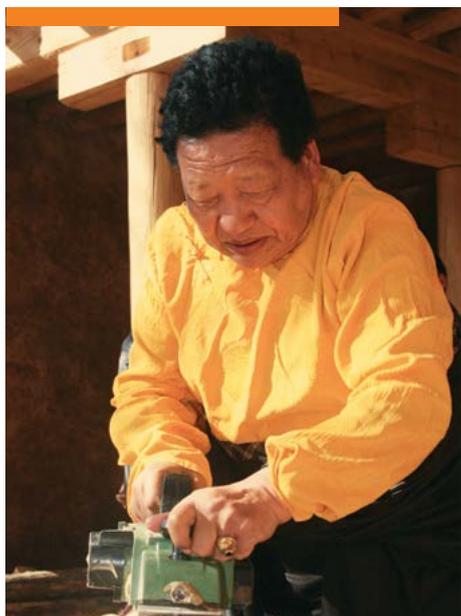
# Vocational training – a key concern of ROKPA Co-Founder Akong Rinpoche

The new ROKPA Multipurpose Building in Kathmandu bears his name. And it is no coincidence that practical skills are taught at the Akong Rinpoche Memorial Center. Vocational training was very important for the ROKPA Co-Founder, who passed away in 2013. “With handicrafts like wood carving, Thangka painting or sewing people can make a living,” he was convinced. To strengthen the local population, ROKPA has been supporting vocational training projects in the Tibetan areas of China for many years.

*Sewing lessons and painting of Tibetan scroll paintings, the so-called Thangkas.*



*Akong Rinpoche visiting handicraft lessons.*



*Liked to lend a helping hand himself: Akong Rinpoche doing woodwork.*

## Situation in the Tibetan areas of China

As one of the few aid organizations still active in the Tibetan areas of China, during 2017 ROKPA was not able to carry out the usual project trip. Although we are in contact with the project partners through our local network, the project payments had to be suspended. In 2018, ROKPA will do all it takes to catch up on visits and payouts of the contributions. Donations made in 2017 for these projects are held as earmarked, to

ensure that the financial resources are available as soon as the situation improves. Of course, we will keep our donors up to date on further developments.

**Thank you for placing your trust in us even in this difficult situation.**

## ROKPA Apéro on 7th of June, 2018 – Registration now open

In the past two years, donors and other interested parties have used the ROKPA Apéro to find out first-hand about the developments in the ROKPA Projects and to hold personal discussions with the ROKPA Team. This opportunity comes again on June 7th: We will be happy to welcome ROKPA Friends at 17.30 in the Helferei in Zurich. As in previous years, we plan a small drink after the informative part, which offers an opportunity for further exchanges. Secure your seat today by registering via [info@rokpa.org](mailto:info@rokpa.org) with your personal information as well as that of your companions. There is limited seating – first come, first served.

## New: A short film about the ROKPA Projects in Nepal

Filmmaker and ROKPA Supporter Tal Siano introduces the work of ROKPA in Nepal. Former ROKPA Children, now responsible for the projects, give an insight: Among others Bijay and Anju on the ROKPA Children's Home and Sagar on the Akong Rinpoche Memorial Center, which has just been opened.



You can find the 8 minute film on our YouTube channel:

[www.youtube.com/rokpainfo](http://www.youtube.com/rokpainfo)

## September 28th, 2018: Screening of a film about the ROKPA Co-Founder, Dr Akong Tulku Rinpoche, in Zurich



“Akong – A Remarkable Life” tells the story of ROKPA Co-Founder Akong Tulku Rinpoche, doctor and Tibetan Buddhist meditation master. Forced to flee from his Tibetan homeland during the Cultural Revolution, as one of the few of the original group of 300

companions of shared fate, he survived the dangerous crossing of the Himalayas to India. When he was close to death in a cave in the mountains, he vowed to devote his life to helping other people, should he survive.

For those interested in ROKPA, we will be showing the film on Friday evening of September 28th, 2018 at the Songtsen House in Zurich-Albisrieden. Further information will follow.

## Nepal: “Rato Baltin” – A new partnership



ROKPA, together with its partner organization Be Artsy (by Clara Garcia Ortés), engages in West Nepal in the fight against “Chhaupadi”, a tradition harmful and damaging to women. During their “time of the month”, women are considered unclean and are exiled from family housing. They are to stay in stables or in even worse conditions and are not only exposed to cold wind and bad weather or wild animals such as snakes, but often also experience sexual violence. Many girls are also forced to stay out of school on those days.

“Chhaupadi” has been banned by law in Nepal since 2005, but is still practiced, particularly in remote areas. The Be Artsy team is approaching this harmful tradition with education and interactive photo workshops. With the distribution of menstrual cups and “red buckets” (Rato Baltin) young women are able to ensure their personal hygiene and strengthen their self-confidence. The involvement of female and male members of the village communities should contribute to the fact that menstruation is perceived as another natural bodily function.

”

## I work for ROKPA because...

Since my arrival in Switzerland in 2013, I have always been looking for a position that will bring me forward not only professionally but also personally. In Poland, where I come from, I was very much involved with animal rights organizations and sometimes found it emotionally demanding, but at the same time really rewarding.

With the voluntary commitment for ROKPA I have been able to find exactly that. It really makes me very happy to use my skills as a translator for the common good and to help people in need. The ROKPA Co-Founder Lea Wyler has become a real role model for me.

I find the work of ROKPA in Nepal, in the Tibetan areas of China, in Zimbabwe and in South Africa very impressive, and I am very inspired by all that the organization has achieved in the more than 35 years of its existence.

ROKPA and I are the same age and I can only hope that in my own 37 years on this planet, I have been able to contribute at least a fraction of what ROKPA is doing with their tremendous efforts to support the people in need. It is also great to be in this fantastic team – I feel very comfortable here and really part of a big family.



*Kaja Kurczewska,  
ROKPA Volunteer, Translation and  
Administration*

”

## The Representatives introduce themselves: ROKPA in Ireland

**ROKPA:** *Chloe und Stevan, what was the triggering factor for your commitment for ROKPA?*

**CHLOE UND STEVAN:** We came out of a long retreat in 2014 at which time Lama Yeshe Losal Rinpoche – member of the ROKPA Board – asked us to take over the running of ROKPA in Ireland.

**ROKPA:** *What motivates you for your work for ROKPA?*

**CHLOE UND STEVAN:** Our commitment and motivation comes from our connection to Akong Rinpoche who was our teacher for more than twenty years. He was very important in both our lives.

**ROKPA:** *What is the first word that comes to your mind when you think of ROKPA?*

**CHLOE UND STEVAN:** Compassion.

**ROKPA:** *What was your most moving experience while working for ROKPA?*

**CHLOE UND STEVAN:** Listening to Bijay, at the ROKPA AGM\* in 2016, talking about his experience of running the ROKPA Children's Home in Kathmandu. It is very

inspiring to see how the former ROKPA Children are growing up to be such wonderful people.

**ROKPA:** *What has ROKPA changed in your life?*

**CHLOE UND STEVAN:** It is good to be able to do something practical to put compassion into action. Although we have found it quite difficult taking over ROKPA in Ireland, it is an opportunity to do something for others.

**ROKPA:** *What are your wishes for the future of ROKPA?*

**CHLOE UND STEVAN:** We sincerely hope that Akong Rinpoche's activity can continue to help others through ROKPA's work, particularly in the Tibetan areas of China.

\*Editor's note: Once a year, the ROKPA Representatives meet for an exchange at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).



*Chloe Jenner and Stevan Hartung with  
Akong Rinpoche (center), who officiated  
their marriage ceremony in 2008.*

” *Above all, learn to be  
compassionate – because  
knowledge without compassion  
is meaningless.* ”

*Akong Rinpoche*



# ROKPA

Helping where  
help is needed:  
sustainably,  
for over 35 years.



*Sunal and Sudip have been abandoned by their parents. They lived in the mountains with their 80-year-old grandfather, who, like them, had to beg for his survival. Food was there only every other day. Now they live in the ROKPA Children's Home and attend school. They receive four meals a day. And laugh a lot.*

## For more chances in life

Thousands of children and young people receive education every single year with the support of ROKPA in the Tibetan areas of China and Nepal. With medical and nutritional projects, ROKPA directly improves the living conditions of many people affected by poverty.

**This can only be done with your help!**

Thanks to your donations we can influence countless lives positively:

- Orphans get a home and are sent to school
- Adolescents from poor families are able to study
- Destitute people receive medical care
- Children and adults are provided with the essentials in our Soup Kitchens
- Girls and women are strengthened

With your financial support, we can effectively support the poorest of the poor – help us to increase their chances of a dignified life.

**Thank you for your support!**

*In Switzerland, donations to ROKPA are tax exempt.*



**How to donate:**

**Credit Suisse (Schweiz) AG:**

IBAN: CH73 0483 5045 5090 1100 1

BIC/SWIFT: CRESCHZZ80A

Or find the account information for your country on [www.rokpa.org](http://www.rokpa.org)

**Project No. 8100:**

For ROKPA Education Projects

**Project No. 8000:**

For urgent ROKPA Projects