

Atisha Centre



'A Land for Completing
the Human Potential'

Lama Zopa Rinpoche



ANNUAL REVIEW 2024



Our Spiritual Leader
His Holiness Dalai Lama



Our Spiritual Director
Kyabje Thubten Zopa Rinpoche



Our Inspiration and Founder
Lama Thubten Yeshe Rinpoche

“So, it is really of the utmost importance, you learn not just meditation but lamrim meditation. Only then, you can understand how to live life... in a positive way to benefit not only yourself but all the numberless beings.”

Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche



Our Resident Teacher
Geshe Thubten Rabten



OUR PURPOSE WHAT WE PROVIDE

ATISHA CENTRE is dedicated to



- The transmission of Tibetan Buddhism through the promotion of study and dissemination of Buddhist teachings, emphasising the teachings of the Gelug lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.
- Atisha Centre's mission is to preserve the Mahayana Buddhist tradition by maintaining teaching and retreat facilities that support Mahayana practitioners in study, contemplation and meditation.
- We welcome people of all backgrounds and faiths to develop their natural wisdom and compassion through essential education and service.
- Maintaining at all times an affiliation with **FPMT Inc.**, a Californian non-profit, religious corporation representing an international group of organisations and individuals devoted to the transmission of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition and values worldwide through teaching, meditation and community service, and based upon the Buddhist tradition of Lama Tsongkhapa.



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

“Be blissful and enjoy your life; do not let yourself become obsessed with anything. Determine to use the rest of your life to benefit others as much as possible.”

Lama Thubten Yeshe

Looking back over the 12 months from July 2023 to June 2024 (and now to December 2024), the big heartedness, generosity and resilience of the people at Atisha Centre is what impresses me the most.

Venerable Dondrup was director for three years until December 2023, saw the Centre through the disruption of the pandemic, and brought us through into calmer waters. We are grateful for Dondrup’s dedication and service and hope his studies are going well in France.

The change of director to myself following Dondrup’s departure has naturally also brought some changes to the Board, and I appreciate the support and flexibility of the current board – Peter Lane (Chair), Andy Melnic (Vice-Chair), Rose Mazza (Secretary), Jackie Michael (Treasurer), Steph Mcgrane (Ordinary Member) and Venerable Chödrön (SPC).

Many thanks to previous board members Jill Lancashire, Peter Bryar, Jan Townsend and Mary Leet for their service.

The spiritual programme, with Geshe Thubten Rabten’s wise guidance and the support of our wonderful sangha members from Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery and Machig Labdron Nunnery, is steady and strong. We deeply appreciate Andy Melnic’s eight years as Spiritual Programme Coordinator, and he has now passed the baton to Venerable Chödrön, who has much experience as an SPC and as a Centre director. Andy is also kindly still serving as Multimedia Coordinator.

Chödrön is implementing some of the offerings from the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom such as the 16 Guidelines,

and introductory events such as Becoming Your Own Therapist (from Lama Yeshe), to continue to make the Dharma more accessible.

We would like to acknowledge the good work of Venerable Chodak as our previous co-director and previous kitchen coordinator. Chodak supported Sunday meditation with the popular Cake and Chai and implemented the WISE Disability Employment Group volunteering at the Centre, engaging in important community outreach, and gave well-received interfaith talks in the community. We are fortunate now to have Helen Sleswick who has taken over as Kitchen Coordinator – Helen has kept the Sunday Cake and Chai happening, rosters all the retreat cooks, and supports the running of the kitchen in all aspects. She has a great team of cooks (Helen Grundy, Mahesh Kandasamy, Sandra Robertson, Ken Fox and Brian Ashen) who all make very delicious meals that are much appreciated by event participants.

Since Kathy Rice stepped back as Membership Coordinator, after an incredible 20 years, we do not currently have a coordinator, however our members have continued to provide their wonderful support for the Centre, and we have a membership of approximately 110. We implemented the new offerings of “Benefactor”, “Supporter”, “Friend” and “Pet” memberships, and have recently seen an increase in these new membership types, which is an encouraging development.

Many of our members are also volunteers, and we currently have about 40 volunteers supporting the Centre. Carmela Quimbo and Steph Mcgrane have kindly offered to commence a volunteer study to

find out from our volunteers how we can better support them.

After 13 years of dedication and service as Property Coordinator, Steve Williams has moved to the Monastery as Caretaker.

We are very grateful for Steve's long stewardship of the property. We have been very fortunate that Kevin Haines has joined us as our new Property Coordinator, and Kev is kept very busy maintaining the property, as well as supporting and overseeing various projects, with the assistance of Neil Mitting, Billy Atherton and Ray Moore.



Ricciardo Ferrari has continued to work on the Kadampa Stupa with the aim to complete the project this year. Mark Allaway has planted 100's of trees around the Kadampa stupa and is now completing the landscaping. Craig Haines, Kevin's brother, has restored the Golden Buddha with his fibreglass expertise, so the beautiful Golden Buddha will now last many more years.

Ken Fox continues to care well for and oversee our vast grounds and gardens, with Maria van den Bosch, Kemal Cevikoglu and John Spencer supporting with weeding, raking and watering; Ken also takes good care of our WISE volunteers and supports Kev.

Arihn Howe has successfully taken over from Robyn Ralton as the manager of Lama's Dharma Shop and has kept the shop running steadily for the past 18 months. We are grateful for her dedication and for her wonderful group of shop volunteers.

Pauline Walden has a strong and dedicated library team, and Pauline also assists me in the office, taking care of bookings for retreats and accommodation. Pauline and I are supported by a hardworking housekeeping team of Norma Mitting, Emma Mitting, Kristine Walsh

and Rose Mazza, who keep both the Atisha Centre and Monastery accommodation sparkling. Andy Melnic is also overseeing the project to improve the accommodation facilities.

I would also like to acknowledge the beautiful and harmonious collaboration that exists between the four complementary entities: the Great Stupa, Machig Labdron Nunnery, Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery and Atisha Centre. And we rejoice in the near completion of the Nunnery.

After a year of being Co-Director, and then sole Director as well as Office Manager, I've come to realise that carrying these dual roles is not sustainable, and, after much reflection, I have recently submitted my director resignation to the board. I have been very grateful for the opportunity to serve as Director, and I look forward to continuing to support the Centre.

We are heartened that Andy Melnic has agreed to take over the role of Director – with Andy's vast FPMT experience over many years and his eight years with Atisha Centre, this is a natural next step for both Andy and Atisha Centre. We wish Andy all the best.

Everyone at Atisha Centre – Geshe Rabten and Venerable Dorje, all the other sangha members, Centre members, volunteers, residents and staff – you are the heart of Atisha Centre, and why so many people are drawn here – for the Dharma, for the peace, for the kindness, for the generosity. Atisha Centre is all of us, those who have come before, those who are here now, and those who will be here to serve the Centre in the future. 40 years and going strong! We welcome people of all backgrounds and faiths to develop their natural wisdom and compassion.

With utmost gratitude to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who guide us in our aim to make the Dharma more accessible and to be of great benefit to others.

Jan Stewart
CENTRE DIRECTOR

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD - CHAIR

We respectfully acknowledge the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the traditional custodians of the land on which Atisha Centre resides. We also acknowledge that the land is unceded. And we pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.

I have only been Chair for 2 months, however I have been on the Board all year, so will supply a brief report.

This has been a year of change. New Director, resignations from the Board, and changes to many key volunteer worker positions. I would like to sincerely thank all those who have moved on for their contributions to maintaining the spread of the Bodhi Dharma, to benefit all sentient beings.



These are challenging times. Divisiveness seems now to be a cancer affecting all parts of the world community.

However, by following the unbroken lineage of the teachings, if we continue to base our actions on the motivation to avoid harm to all sentient beings, and develop ourselves so we are able to perform acts that actually do good, then perhaps life will be better for all sentient beings.

Thank you to all who have worked for the Atisha Buddhist Centre this year, and assisted to maintain a wonderful teaching programme and nurturing environment that provides great solace, direction, and benefit to so many beings.

As our most dear Kyabje Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche often used to say, “loving kindness comes first”.

Peter Lane
CHAIR



SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME

“The only guardian of peace lies within: a sense of concern and responsibility for your own future and an altruistic concern for the well-being of others.”

His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

“The Mahayana attitude of great compassion is the wish to take responsibility for the welfare of all sentient beings.”

Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche



The year of 2024 is the first year since our precious guru, Lama Zopa Rinpoche passed away.

Rinpoche’s presence remains with us very strongly in hearts and minds and Rinpoche continues to be our holy Spiritual Director.

We continue to recite Swift Return Prayers at the end of all events in Atisha Centre Gomba and pray that Rinpoche will continue to spread the Dharma in the ten directions.



The year was packed with programme events. A special thank you to Andy Melnic for his creativity and dedication in providing a rich and varied Dharma programme over the year. This has been Andy’s 8th year of being in the position of Programme Coordinator.

Rejoicing from the depth of our hearts, for Andy’s health and long life and most auspicious conditions for enlightenment.

Attendance numbers continue to be low in regular weekly events, but higher in retreats and shorter courses and introductory events.

Many thanks once again to our excellent teacher, Venerable Geshe Rabten and his fantastic translator Venerable Lobsang Dorje, for many hours of teachings on traditional texts and instructions.

Everything Geshela has taught continues to be recorded and made available (for posterity) to everyone for replaying and personal study.

Many thanks for the continued programme support from the nuns from Machig Labdron Nunnery and the monks at Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery.

As always, we are very grateful to all the volunteers and coordinators of our different events.

Our weekly programme:

Wednesday Night Teachings from Geshe Rabten with his commentary on Shantideva's famous text "Bodhisattvacharyavatara" ~ "Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Way of Life". Many thanks to Venerable Dorje for his superlative interpretations;

Tuesday Meditations in Bendigo led by Venerable Damcho;

Weekly Sunday Meditations led by various sangha and non-sangha members;

"Prayers for the Deceased" (monthly) led by Venerable Drime;

Children's Dharma Club with Melissa Currie and Donna McMahon, up until August 2023;

Weekly Hatha Yoga on Monday mornings led by Venerable Drime.

This year, the programme has included the following events and topics:

5 Day Winter Retreat with Geshe Rabten and Venerable Lobsang Dorje with retreat leader Venerable Tsapel - "Taking the Essence" by Lama Tsongkhapa - July 2023;

A special all-night Tara Night, in August 2023;

Five-day Shamatha Retreats led by Venerable Tsapel;

"Science in Spirituality" with Jampa Ingyen - November 2023;

"Habit Alignment Key" (HAK) Retreat at Atisha Centre and the Great Stupa with Lama Osel - December 2023;

Our Annual Chenrezig Retreat led by Venerable Gyatso in December 2023;

"Refuge Ceremony" on the 24 February 2024. A stand-alone teaching given by Geshe Rabten, translated by Venerable Lobsang Dorje;

One day Chenrezig Practice Day with Venerable Tsapel - March 2024;

Remembering Rinpoche - Saturday 13 April 2024;

Easter Retreat 2024 with Geshe Rabten and Venerable Lobsang Dorje with retreat leader Venerable Tsapel - "A teaching on Gaining Experience" by Lama Tsong Kapa. Many people attended and Venerable Tsapel led the meditations and discussion sessions;

"16 Guidelines for Life" LEVEL 1. A weekend retreat, exploring embodied mindfulness and universal ethics in April 2024, with Jane Lewis, Carmela Quimbo and Martin Ström;

"Close Mindfulness" Retreat with Venerable Tsapel in May 2024;

Hatha Yoga workshops led by Venerable Drime and Annie McGee;

Celebration of holy days such as Sakadawa, Losar, Lhabab Duchen, Chokyur Duchen, His Holiness Dalai Lama's birthday, Lama Tsongkhapa Day, A Guru Rinpoche Puja in June 2024 at the Great Stupa;

Regular pujas (Guru, Medicine Buddha, Tara) led by Venerables Tsapel and Drime.

This year, our Buddhist Study Group topic from Genla has been: "Middle Lam Rim", a commentary on the text by Lama Tsongkhapa, explaining in great depth the stages on the path to enlightenment. Genla's great attention to detail makes this a very rich and inspiring course of meditation and pure practice of Dharma.

"Lama's Dharma Shop", our book and gifts shop, continues to improve and gets more exciting all the time, under the management of Arihn Howe. Thank you for all the hard work from Arihn and all her volunteers who serve in the shop.

The “Publications Project” continues to record and document Geshe Rabten’s teachings. Gail Haig has recently come on board to train to take over this project. We are always looking for more volunteers to be involved.

All the teachings given by Geshela are available online as audio files, together with supporting handouts. Most of Geshela’s teachings have also been videoed and are available on YouTube.



Thubten Chödrön

SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME COORDINATOR



LIBRARY

Atisha Centre Library goals that were planned for the current year, saw the development of a photo slide presentation of the first 20 years of Atisha Centre, that was incorporated into the community day held at the Centre in January 2024.

The ongoing documentation of the early history of Atisha Centre, cataloguing of new reference books, stocktaking, and the transferring of Geshe Konchok Tsering’s teachings 2004 to 2010, from CD to MP3

has kept the library volunteers busy. Additionally, they have been assisting the Publications Project team who are focusing on the recording and transcribing of Geshe Rabten’s teachings.

Atisha Centre’s “Chorton” newsletters collection held at the State Library of Victoria has also been updated, and we are also most grateful to members who have donated to our library some missing hard copies of the newsletter.

We have been fortunate to have been donated a cupboard for the purpose of displaying and storing Atisha Centre history, materials and precious books from pre-1990. Scanning of early documents for preservation has commenced, and the audio cassette transfer to MP3 of early Atisha Centre teachings is an ongoing task. We rejoice in the discovery that our copies of Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s tapes have already been digitised by Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.



Goals for the coming year are to continue with the preservation of the early teachings and photographs with the view to gradually making these resources accessible to members. I would like to acknowledge the dedication of the library volunteers, Gail Haig, Aileen Wolfe, David Major, Celia Weston and welcome our newest volunteer Sarah Gammon. My thanks also to the many people who have assisted the library during the year.

Pauline Walden

LIBRARY MANAGER



LAMA'S DHARMA SHOP

With all the windy weather we've had of late, my new catchphrase is "Steady as the wind blows".

And steady sales throughout the 2023/24 financial year brought a hearty total of \$85,908 to Lama's Dharma Shop.



Visitors and especially retreatants, were our most enthusiastic customers, with \$69,610 coming directly through in store sales. Online sales provided \$12,891, and allowed for precious objects such as statues, books and thangkas to reach the wider dharma community.

To be sure, it's a fine crew that keeps the shop sailing in smooth waters and much gratitude goes to the efforts of our dedicated team of volunteers, Cilla Brady, Lou Payne, Rose Mazza, Jackie Michael, Fiona Silver and Warwick Shapcott, who stand ready at the helm, with a helping hand and a friendly smile for all.

Gratitude also, to Brian Ashen, Robyn Ralton and Pauline Walden who stepped in to "man the tiller" when the rostering weather was rough.



With a special thanks to Amanda Viner, who picked up the oars without delay and got us through some tricky waters in 2023, often

working both Saturday and Sunday for a time. Sadly Amanda bid us bon voyage in July and set off on a new adventure.

The winds of change blew hard through Atisha this year, bringing both trouble and treasure, and as trouble washed away with the tide, two gems sat gleaming on our shores, in the form of Rose Mazza and Jackie Michael.

Always willing to 'give it a go', whatever the request - shop, accommodation, kitchen or retreat, Rose is there with a 'can do' attitude and a skip in her step.

Moving to the area in March of '24, newcomer Jackie jumped right on in, joining the Great Stupa painting team, attending retreats and breezing into the shop like a refreshing sea change. Having her own shop business for many years, Jackie lends an expert hand to keeping the shop looking shipshape.

Setting forth from calmer waters, we look forward to another year of bounty and blessings, in Lama's Dharma Shop.

Arihn Howe
SHOP MANAGER



PROPERTY

I have been striving to maintain the high standard of the maintenance schedule set by the Steve Williams as I was instructed during the maintenance handover period in March.

I've had the opportunity to continue the work of Bob Waterhouse to complete the Lama Yeshe statue roof, with the help of our dedicated volunteers.

Some major projects are nearing completion - Kadampa Stupa, the Golden Buddha restoration, the Kshitigarbha statue installation, and the repainting of the gompa snow lions.



Kevin Haines
PROPERTY MANAGER



GARDEN

I would like to thank all the volunteers who supported the Centre by working in the gardens or maintaining the buildings. There are a million jobs to be undertaken.

Wise Disability Employment Group has been most helpful by bringing up to 10 clients and support workers. Thank you to Steven and Josh.

I would like to request new and old people connected to the Centre to give some thought of donating their time and effort to volunteering.

Ken Fox
GARDENS MANAGER



MACHIG LABDRON NUNS' COMMUNITY

The nunnery building project has been a project of Atisha Centre since 2016. That is when I joined Atisha Board as the project manager. Venerable Chödrön, then Ruby Karmay, was Director of Atisha Centre at that time and the project needed the assistance of an established Centre to open the project account and pay bills and raise funds. Two years later Venerable Rigsäl and I became residents in the same week. She was a great support and friend in those early stages.

After a slow start with many sites considered, the current, best site became available and was offered to the nuns to use. After further planning amendment and fresh construction plans complete, in August 2023, we put the job out to tender with three recommended local builders - all similar but way too high. The material costs increased around 19% with the supply lines cut during covid. Supply had been restored but prices remained high.



Tact Constructions offered clear cost saving changes, so we were able to retained the design integrity and keep the building well insulated. A

great deal was saved and new engineering and construction plans completed quickly. Once those amendments were approved and a building permit obtained, our next new stage began in earnest - the Tact Constructions teams began with the site cut and fill and under-slab and in-ground services.

The work was expensive but progressed steadily. They struck rock, submitted a cost variation and bought in special equipment and had it

excavated without delay. In early May the gompa and accommodation slabs were poured. The accommodation slab started before dawn with five concrete trucks and two skilled teams working each side and finishing up by 8:30am. Impressive! Then the blue, red and yellow laminated frame arrived looking like a big Lego set. That went up quickly followed by the huge roof trusses. By the end of June we had the gutters and roof providing a dry work space.

We turned our attention to publicity and more active fundraising. The first step was to create a website. We did some research, discussed purpose, content and colours and submitted a brief to Mindful Design web designers - a Dharma-friendly, young team, with FPMT connections. They took our ideas and made something special for our community event - our "Website and Winter Raffle Launch and Lunch" at the end of June. Geshe Rabten with broad support from Atisha



Centre, Great Stupa and Monastery made for a happy day.

The past year has produced some important steps towards realising our nunnery project. Thank you all so much, for you support and enthusiasm for our project.

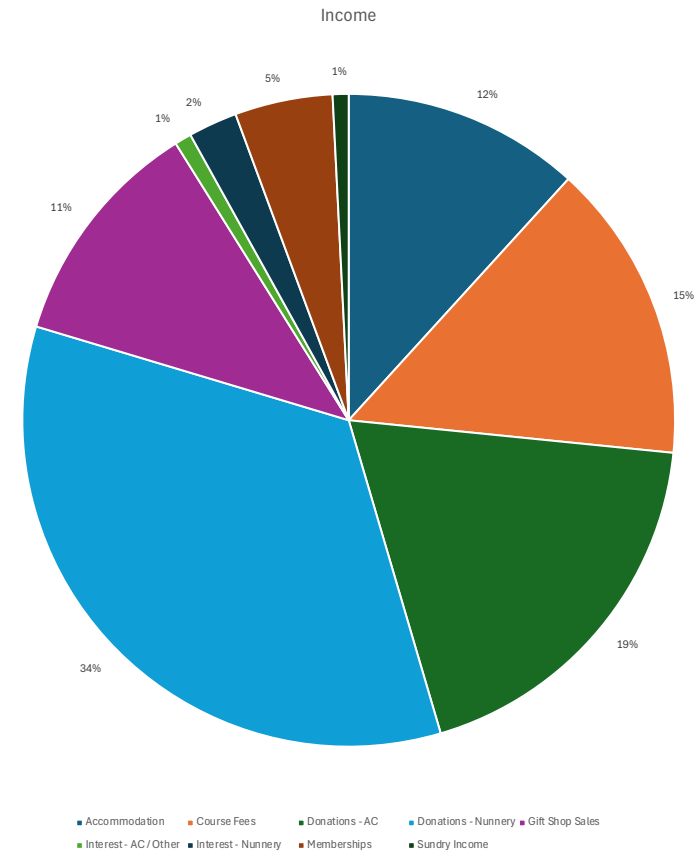
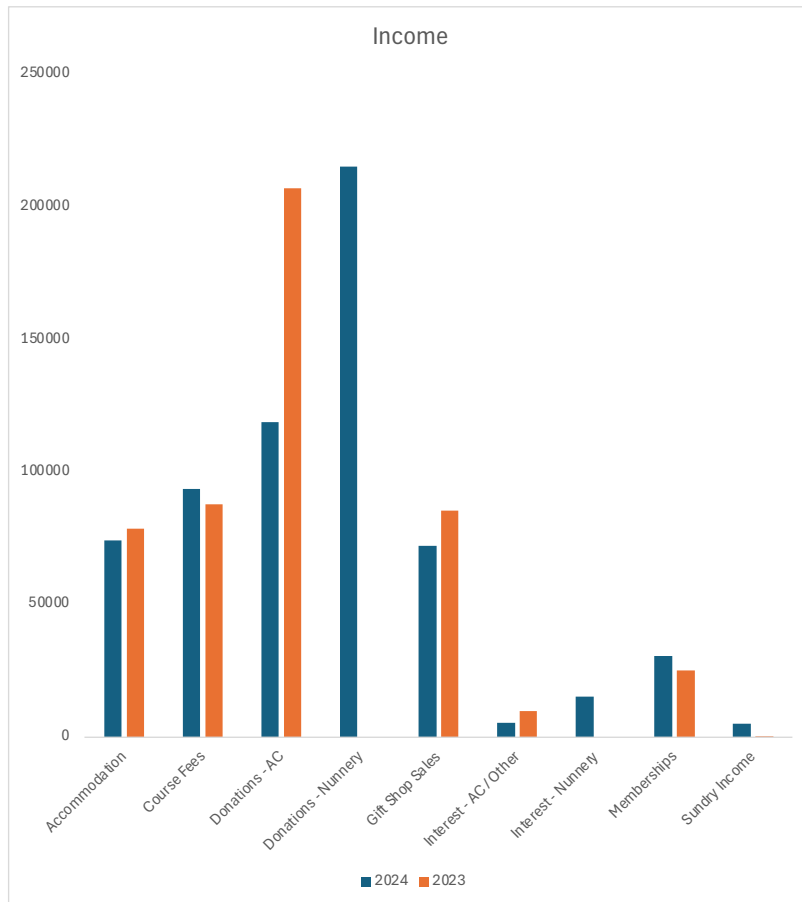
Tenzin Tsapel

MANAGER - MACHIG LABDRON NUNS' COMMUNITY

FINANCES 2023/24

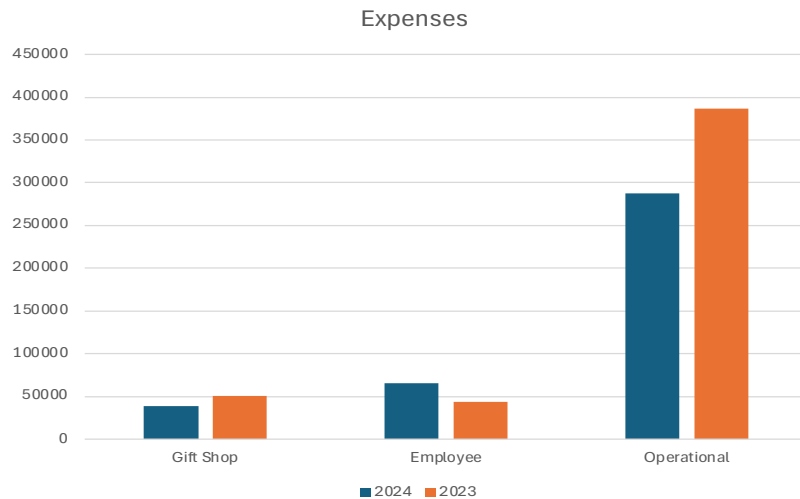
FINANCIAL REPORT

The 2023/24 financial year has seen Atisha Centre report a small profit of \$4,603.25 which is similar to last year. As a small non-profit reinvesting back into the Centre this is a positive result.



In the audit report, the profit is recorded as \$230,258. This is \$4,603.25 for Atisha Centre and \$225,654.75 for Machig Labdron Nunnery. While the nunnery has been developing, it has been nestled as an Atisha Centre project. However as of FY25, the nunnery is now its own entity with its own finances and legal structure.

Atisha Centre accommodation and course fee revenue are similar to last financial year, and the Yamantaka Retreat generated almost \$30,000 in revenue. Andy Melnic has commenced an accommodation project to continue upgrading our facilities including new mattresses and bed bases.



A large focus of FY24 was on supporting the nunnery in raising funds / donations for the nunnery buildings, and we can all rejoice in the incredible generosity for the nunnery and that the nunnery is now on the home stretch. This focus did have an impact on the actual amount of overall donations for Atisha Centre, however the nuns support Atisha Centre in so many ways, including leading retreats, pujas and prayers, and we are deeply grateful for their support. Atisha Centre is also so thankful for all donations we receive.

Gift shop sales were down slightly this financial year, which may be partially due to the current economic climate, however the shop still had a good year.

We had an uptick in membership which was a positive development and may have been partially due to the new membership offerings of Benefactor, Supporter, Friend and Pet memberships.

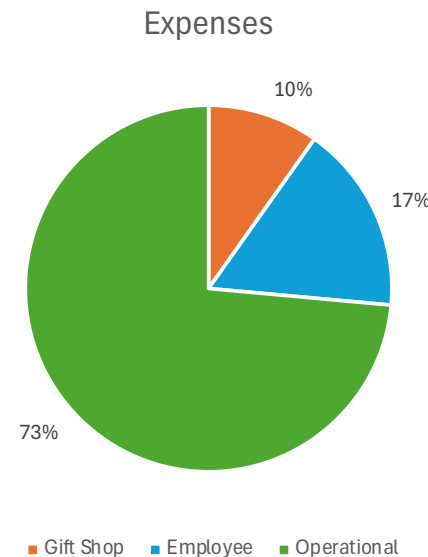
Venerable Dorje was translating part-time for Chenrezig Institute this past financial year as well as for Atisha Centre, and Chenrezig Institute kindly contributed to Atisha Centre’s translator expenses – this is recorded under Sundry Income.

Gift shop stock expenses were slightly down on the previous year, and Atisha Centre operational expenses were also reduced – this was

due to the previous year’s expenses relating to the accommodation upgrades. Employee expenses were increased slightly as in FY24 we brought on a part-time shop manager and part-time housekeeper.

Atisha Centre makes regular offerings to the following:

- \$50 to TSL Monastery
- Offerings to sangha for meditations, teachings and retreats
- Geshe and translator offerings and insurance expenses
- Long life puja for His Holiness Dalai Lama
- Geshe and translator flights
- And other times throughout the year to FPMTA, FPMT and IMI.



Overall, Atisha Centre had another good year financially and is doing very well. Thank you to Maurie Taylor and Denise Barnett from Bendigo Bookkeeping and our auditor Kaiden Skelton from AASB in assisting Atisha Centre.

And a big thank you to everyone at Atisha Centre – Geshe Rabten and Venerable Dorje, all the other sangha members, Centre members, volunteers, residents and staff – for so wonderfully supporting Atisha Centre for another year.

Jan Stewart
CENTRE DIRECTOR

ATISHA CENTRE PERSONNEL

BOARD

CENTRE DIRECTOR: Jan Stewart

SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME COORDINATOR: Venerable Thubten Chödrön

CHAIR: Peter Lane

VICE-CHAIR: Andy Melnic

TREASURER: Jackie Michael

SECRETARY: Rose Mazza

ORDINARY MEMBER: Stephanie McGrane

FINANCE and ADMINISTRATION

OFFICE MANAGER / OFFICE ASSISTANT: Jan Stewart and Pauline Walden

FINANCE MANAGER: Bendigo Bookkeeping

MEMBERSHIP: Vacant

SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME

SPC: Venerable Thubten Chödrön

GOMPA COORDINATOR: Venerable Thubten Drime

SHOP MANAGER: Arihn Howe

LIBRARY: Pauline Walden and Gail Haig

STUDY GROUP COORDINATOR: Kathy Rice

DINING AND CATERING

KITCHEN COORDINATOR: Helen Sleswick

VOLUNTEERING

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR: Stephanie McGrane and Carmela Quimbo

NUNNERY

MACHIG LABDRON NUNNERY: Venerable Tenzin Tsapel

PUBLICITY

WEBSITE: Andy Melnic

NEWSLETTER: Venerable Thubten Chödrön

MAINTENANCE AND GROUNDS

PROPERTY COORDINATOR: Kevin Haines

GARDENS AND GROUNDS COORDINATOR: Ken Fox

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

IT CONSULTANT: Micheal Chambers

ACCOMMODATION

ACCOMMODATION PROJECT MANAGER: Andy Melnic

PROJECTS

HOLY OBJECTS COORDINATOR: Vacant





THANK YOU

Atisha Centre would like to express the deepest gratitude and appreciation to all our teachers, members, supporters, volunteers, friends and benefactors.

Your kindness helps provide the conditions needed to carry out Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche's great vision for the Centre and the FPMT organisation.

Our accomplishments are the direct result of your generosity and commitment to the Centre. May we all rejoice together.



Atisha  Centre

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