



Where Second Chances Bloom

Inside Nazhoen Lamtoen's compassionate mission to guide vulnerable youth back to safety, dignity, and hope

When I first stepped through the gate of Nazhoen Lamtoen's shelter home in Thimphu, I was greeted by a group of children busy watering plants in the courtyard. There was laughter, muddy shoes, a shared snack being passed around and a sense of ordinary life that felt deeply precious. As someone who has spent the past years helping people reconnect with their bodies, breath, and inner balance, I know that healing often begins not with dramatic change, but with the quiet return of routine, dignity, and belonging.

What I didn't yet realize was just how much this organization had grown, and how deeply it had already shaped the lives of hundreds of children across Bhutan.

This is the story of Nazhoen Lamtoen: a story of resilience, community, and second chances. It is also the beginning of a new chapter in my own journey.

LISTENING FIRST

My work in well-being has taught me many things,

but perhaps the most important is the value of listening. Whether I'm guiding someone in a yoga pose or offering space for meditation, it's never about perfection, it's about allowing people to feel safe enough to be honest — with themselves, and with what they're carrying. That same principle guided me as I stepped into my new role as Ambassador for Nazhoen Lamtoen. I began by listening — to the team, the volunteers, and especially the children.

Some were in conflict with the law. Others were healing from trauma, neglect, or life on the street. Many had experienced rejection — not only from institutions, but sometimes from their own families. Despite their young age, their stories were heavy.

But their dreams were still alive.

One girl told me she wants to become a social worker so other girls like me don't feel alone. A boy showed me the watercolour on canvas he completed for an art exhibition by Nazhoen Lamtoen, his voice proud and shy all at once. These aren't just stories of survival — they're stories of transformation.



A DECADE OF GRASSROOTS IMPACT

Nazhoen Lamtoen began in 2014, not as a formal organization, but as a handful of volunteers moved by lived experience. Its founder, having faced stigma and rejection after a troubled youth, understood how fragile the path to reintegration could be — especially for children released from juvenile centres without family support, a safe home, or even a No Objection Certificate to pursue work or education.

Their first initiative? Fruit juice cafés, where young people could earn an income with dignity. Between 2014 and 2016, ten formerly incarcerated youth were reintegrated through this model — supported not just with jobs, but with mentorship, purpose, and community.

That grassroots energy became the foundation for Nazhoen Lamtoen’s official registration in 2016 as a Civil Society Organization. What followed was a powerful expansion. Life skills programs inside juvenile centres. Parenting workshops. Vocational training. Empowerment for children and families in six districts. Tailoring kits and dairy cows. Photographic storytelling. Reconciliation circles.

In every corner of the country, they began planting seeds of possibility.

FROM PROTECTION TO PREVENTION

One of the things that impresses me most about Nazhoen Lamtoen is its holistic approach. It’s not just about offering care after harm is done — it’s about preventing that harm in the first place.

Their community-based programs are designed with this in mind. In 2018, they launched a livelihood empowerment project across Zhemgang, Mong-

gar, Chukha, Paro, Thimphu, and Dagana — working directly with families living in poverty or distress. The goal was not only to support children but to stabilize entire households.

Local case managers helped families start micro-businesses — home-based tailoring to small-scale farming initiatives— offering income, agency, and hope. Over 1,500 children and 300 families were supported through this initiative alone. This kind of grassroots prevention matters. It acknowledges that most children in conflict with the law or trapped in trauma aren’t “bad kids” — they’re simply surviving systems that have failed them. When you lift the family, you lift the child.

SAFE SPACES THAT RESTORE DIGNITY

In 2019, Nazhoen Lamtoen opened Bhutan’s first shelter home dedicated to children in difficult circumstances. It offers both short- and long-term protection for children referred by police, The PEMA Secretariat (inaugurated in 2022 by Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen), schools, or communities. Since opening its doors, over 150 children have found refuge there.

That same year, the Happiness Centre was launched in Phuentsholing — Bhutan’s only aftercare home for youth recovering from substance or alcohol use disorders. Many of these young people leave rehab with no place to go. The Happiness Centre offers them safety, structure, and a chance to rebuild. Since its inception, 390 youth have been supported there.

For me, these spaces feel especially important. In yoga therapy, we speak of holding space — creating an environment where someone feels safe



enough to let down their guard, to breathe a little more deeply, to begin again. Nazhoen Lamtoen holds space in exactly that way.

TRANSFORMING JUSTICE WITH COMPASSION

One of Nazhoen Lamtoen’s most groundbreaking initiatives is its Diversion Program, launched in 2022. In partnership with over 80 agencies across 12 districts, this program gives children involved in minor offenses an alternative to the criminal justice system.

Instead of jail time and a permanent record, children are offered community-based alternatives: counselling, skills training, restitution, and community service. More than 100 children have already benefited from this approach.

This is not just about avoiding punishment. It’s about believing that children can grow. That compassion is stronger than control. And that accountability doesn’t require shame.

In Buddhism, we speak often of tsem — regret, but not guilt. A desire to do better, not a belief that we are inherently broken. The Diversion Program embodies that wisdom.

VILLAGE WATCH: PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE BEFORE THEY FALL

In 2023, the organization launched its Community Child Protection Team (CCPT) initiative — training local volunteers, in partnership with district women and children’s committees, to identify and respond

to early signs of abuse or neglect.

These community-based teams are now active across Bhutan, acting as the eyes and ears that can spot vulnerability before it escalates into crisis. In a country where close-knit communities are both a strength and a silence, this project fosters dialogue, trust, and early action.

Sometimes, saving a life begins with simply noticing.

WHY I SAID YES

When Nazhoen Lamtoen asked me to become their Ambassador, I was deeply honoured — but I also paused. What could I offer that would truly serve their mission?

Then I thought back to the girl who told me she wanted to help others like her. I thought of the boy with the camera. Of the mother in Paro who started a tailoring business after losing her husband. Of the social worker in Monggar who walks miles to check on children in far-off villages. Of the 17-year-old boy who said, “I thought my story was over. But now I think maybe it’s just beginning”.

I realized that my role is not to save or lead — it is to amplify, to connect, to accompany.

Nazhoen Lamtoen’s name means “Guiding the youth on their path”. But to me, it feels more like tending to a flower garden — offering care, space, and sunlight so that young lives can grow and unfold in their own way. Each child, like each flower, needs

something different to thrive. And as someone who has spent much of her life nurturing well-being — of animals, of people, of inner worlds — I felt called to offer what I could — a little sunlight, a little soil — to help them bloom.

Gelwa Flowers – Petals of Possibility

Lovingly made by the children of the Children’s Half-Way Home, each arrangement is a reflection of creativity, care, and resilience. All proceeds from the sale of Gelwa Bouquets go directly towards supporting the daily needs of the shelter home, helping them provide a safe, nurturing space for children in need

HOW YOU CAN JOIN

People often ask me how they can help.

If you’re arriving in Bhutan, drawn by its quiet wisdom and deep-rooted values, consider planting a gesture of kindness that will take root long after you’ve gone. And if you’re leaving, carrying with you the compassion you’ve witnessed, there’s a way to bring that spirit forward.

Through our campaign on Global Giving, Nazhoen Lamtoen invites international supporters to join our growing circle of care — not just by following our journey, but by helping sustain it.



THE BHUTAN WE’RE GROWING

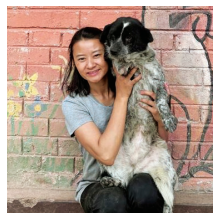
In Bhutan, we’ve always believed that raising a child is a shared responsibility — one rooted in compassion, community, and care. But today, perhaps more than ever, it also takes courage. Courage to see. Courage to act. Courage to believe that every child — regardless of their past — is worthy of protection, opportunity, and love.

In Nazhoen Lamtoen’s world, I see that courage every day. In their staff. In their volunteers. And most of all, in the children.

This is the Bhutan I love and want to nurture. A

Bhutan where well-being is not reserved for the fortunate but extended to those who need it most. Where we are not defined by what we’ve done, but by what we can become.




This is where second chances bloom. And this is where I choose to stand.



YOGA YANGCHEN




She is a yoga and meditation teacher, yoga therapist in training, sound healer, animal rights advocate, and content creator. Her passion in life is improving the well-being of all sentient beings, people and animals alike. Based in Thimphu, she works on changing mindsets through her well-being practice.

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