

Your Gurkha Welfare Trust Newsletter  
Samachara means 'news' in Nepali

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## LIFE-CHANGING SUPPORT FOR SUMAYA

Our regional offices are the beating heart of our work in Nepal, with their clinics providing first-class medical care to Gurkha veterans and widows.

For 86-year old widow Sumaya Gurung, the medical clinic at Kaski is a lifeline. After her last visit for a check-up, she reported, "The doctor informed us that everything was fine and even gave me a flu vaccine. I like the medical service; it is good. I get my medicines here, and I am happy."

*Continues on page 2*



# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

GWT continues to be a vital lifeline for Gurkha veterans, their families and wider communities across Nepal. Through our extensive network of welfare centres GWT delivers financial, medical and practical support to ageing veterans and widows, many of whom reside in remote and challenging locations.

In addition to direct aid, GWT plays a transformative role in developing Nepali communities. This includes the construction of earthquake-resilient schools to provide safe and effective learning environments. Recognising the critical importance of clean water, the Trust installs water systems in isolated areas improving health and restoring dignity while reducing the burden on families.

We are also known for our disaster response expertise and we continue to build earthquake-resilient homes for our most vulnerable beneficiaries to ensure their safety during future seismic events. The recent earthquake in Tibet, just north of Everest, provides ample illustration of this.

Medical support remains at the core of our work, offering regular medical camps in locations where sometimes even the most basic healthcare is unavailable, home visits for vulnerable individuals, access to world-class treatment through primary healthcare centres and rehabilitation care.

The Trust's dedication reflects an enduring commitment to supporting the most vulnerable

while fostering resilience and development. Through all our work GWT strives to continue to honour the legacy of Gurkha service.

Finally, it is with profound sadness that we learned in January of the passing of long term supporter Alasdair MacConachie OBE who died on Christmas Day. Alasdair was involved in launching the annual concert of the Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas in Darlington and continued to play a part in it for 24 years. Alasdair made a huge contribution to his local community and will be dearly missed.



Al Howard  
CEO, The Gurkha Welfare Trust

## OUR VITAL MEDICAL CARE IN NEPAL

*Continued from page 1*



Sumaya and her son at the clinic

### A TURNING POINT FOR SUMAYA

Sumaya Gurung lost her husband, veteran Gagan Singh Gurung, many years ago. She now lives with her youngest son and daughter-in-law, who take care of her.

*"We live in Tanahun, and the Pokhara Welfare Office is the closest welfare centre to us. It takes about 3-4 hours by a hired vehicle to travel from our village to the office."*

*"I have been suffering from paralysis on my right side for almost three years, caused by high blood pressure. We came to the welfare office for a check-up and to refill my medicines. I met the doctor, who advised blood and urine tests, which we did here. They told us they would call once the reports were ready."*

Her family shared how the support you help fund has been a turning point in her recovery. Sumaya was admitted to our Residential Home in Kaski for rehabilitation and stayed for three months.

*"Before, she was very frail and unable to stand or use the toilet on her own due to paralysis. She couldn't even sit upright."*

*"After staying at the rehabilitation centre, her condition improved drastically. She can now sit on a commode chair and eat by herself. The staff also taught us exercises before sending her home."*

### LIFE CHANGING CARE

The family expressed immense gratitude: *"We also took her to another rehab hospital before, but there wasn't much improvement. Here, the service was exceptional, and her condition improved significantly. We wish we could keep her here longer, but we are thankful for the huge difference this organisation has made. Thank you very much."*

As well as visiting the clinic at Kaski, Sumaya now receives regular home visits by GWT medical staff, giving her the peace of mind that she will always receive the care she needs.



## OUR DEDICATED MEDICAL STAFF

Navin Thapa has worked for GWT as a Medical Centre Assistant (MCA) for six years. As the first point of contact for pensioners visiting for medical check-ups, Navin has a busy role requiring much patience and dedication.

## A TYPICAL DAY

Navin begins his working day at 8.30 am with a daily meeting, where tasks are divided among the team. *"We are three MCAs here, and each of us covers one area - phone handling, checking vitals, and assisting walk-in patients. Our primary aim is to manage appointments efficiently and ensure smooth patient flow."*

The team makes a confirmation call to each patient to remind them of their appointment. *"If they cancel, we accommodate walk-ins or reschedule another patient."*

As patients arrive, they are booked in and one of the team checks vitals such as height, weight, blood sugar level and blood pressure. They then have a consultation with a doctor, and any necessary lab tests and prescriptions issued. All patients' details are recorded on our medical system.

## FACING THE CHALLENGES

Navin's role in a busy clinic is not without its frustrations. Handling phone calls and walk-ins simultaneously can be overwhelming, but Navin and his colleagues remain calm and polite.

An added complication, much like in the UK, is backlogs after weekends or holidays. *"On Mondays or after holidays, we receive 70-80 calls, in addition to 10-12 walk-ins - despite advising beneficiaries to follow the appointment system."*

As many of the patients are elderly they can struggle to understand the system. Navin explains: *"For instance, a pensioner booked a medicine refill appointment but later complained of a headache and cough. They don't realise that a refill appointment and a doctor's consultation are separate."*

*"We always tell our beneficiaries to call us 10-15 days before their*

*medicine is about to run out. But pensioners only call us after their medicine has run out! We have to explain we cannot instantly provide them with medicines."*

## TOUGH DECISIONS

Navin's role often requires tough decisions. While 5-6 emergency slots are reserved daily, defining an 'emergency' can be tricky. *"If a pensioner travels 2-3 hours from a rural area for gastritis medicine, I feel terrible sending them back empty-handed."*

*"Referrals for specialist care or dental issues are another source of friction. Beneficiaries assume referral letters will be issued immediately. However, like other appointments, these follow the regular system unless it's a severe case, like unbearable pain or difficulty eating."*

## REFLECTIONS

Despite the challenges, Navin remains committed to his role.

***"It's not easy hearing complaints or arguments, but we maintain our composure and speak kindly. At the end of the day, it's fulfilling to know we're helping our pensioners the best we can."***



## YOUR SUPPORT DOUBLED: HOW THE BIG GIVE MADE A DIFFERENCE.

We are incredibly grateful to **The Reed Foundation** and **The Medlock Charitable Trust** for their generous match funding during our Big Give Christmas Campaign last year.

**Thanks to their support and your amazing generosity, we raised an incredible £88,918.** This vital funding will go directly towards supporting our dedicated nurses, who provide life-changing care to veterans and their families in Nepal. Thank you for making this possible!



# RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE: A NEW SCHOOL FOR MUSTANG



Last year, we embarked on a school improvement project in one of the most remote regions of Nepal, Lomanthang in northern Mustang. You may have read in Samachara 68 about the project recce and the immense challenges of working in such a remote region of Nepal.

We are delighted to report back on the success of this project and the incredible impact it has had on the local community.

## A SCHOOL IN DISREPAIR

Lowo Nyuphug Namdrol Gumba school was in deplorable condition with cracked walls and leaking ceilings. Students had to travel to an alternative school in the cold and snowy winter months as the school did not provide enough protection from the harsh elements.

## A MOUNTAINOUS TASK

Due to the remote location of the school, the team were faced with many logistical challenges.

Lomanthang suffers from extreme winter weather so the project needed to be completed between May and October, during monsoon season.

The materials for the build were transported from Pokhara, a three-day trip by road outside of monsoon season. But once the heavy rains began, many roads became blocked by floods or landslides causing major delays in delivering vital materials.

The school committee worked together with our team in Nepal to surmount these challenges and the school construction was

successfully completed ahead of the winter, in October 2024.

## CELEBRATED BY THE COMMUNITY

An opening ceremony was held recently where members of the local community praised the hard work and dedication of GWT staff on the project:

***“The school management, students, and community are all very happy and grateful for this project, and wish to express our gratitude for the support received from GWT in such a remote village like ours.”***



## THANK YOU

We are immensely grateful to everyone who donated in response to our last appeal to raise funds for our schools programme. You have ensured many more children, like those in Lomanthang, will have better access to education and a much brighter future.

# THE STORY OF GUNJA BAHADUR RAI: A GURKHA VETERAN'S STRUGGLE



Many thousands of Gurkhas, after serving in the British Army, returned to a life of hardship in Nepal, living in poverty-stricken communities in a country at constant risk of earthquakes and monsoon flooding. They depend on financial and medical aid from The Gurkha Welfare Trust for their survival.

## A VETERAN'S STORY

Rifleman Gunja Bahadur Rai, veteran of the 7th Gurkha Rifles, is one of the courageous veterans who needs our help.

Rifleman Gunja Bahadur Rai began his military journey in October 1954. Following his training, he joined the 7th Gurkha Rifles and during his service was deployed across Malaya, Hong Kong and Brunei. Gunja was awarded the General Service Medal for his service in Malaya.

*"I received this medal after fighting in Malaysia. We had to fight against the Malaya communist rebel fighters. I remember the tense missions in the dense jungles of Malaysia, where I lost a friend to enemy fire. He was beside me when he got shot in his neck and he sadly passed away. I was fortunate to survive."*

The memories of those days are a vivid reminder of the sacrifice of brave soldiers. Like so many Gurkhas, Gunja carried not just weapons but the hope and resilience of a brave soldier.

Upon his discharge in February 1965, Gunja returned to his village in Sankhuwasabha, a traditional Gurkha recruiting area. He built a life with his wife, Bishnu Maya Jimmi Rai, and together they raised four children. Life was challenging. With no pension at the time, he took on labour work, even helping to construct the Dharan-Dhankuta highway. He also worked as a porter, transporting goods across remote areas, walking for days with supplies on his back. Farming provided some food, but it was never enough.

Gunja is now 95 and faces many health issues including rheumatoid arthritis, dementia, constipation, high blood pressure, and hyperthyroidism. His hearing has deteriorated to the point where even hearing aids are ineffective. He suffers from frequent hallucinations about old times and has significant memory loss, often failing to recognise his own children. He also has severe dental problems so can eat only soft, blended food.

The GWT has been a lifeline for Gunja and his family, paying him a monthly pension for eight years. He currently receives NPR16,500 per month (approx £108). This pension, along with a Home Carer's Allowance for his daughter-in-law, has been vital in helping him and his family to manage his medical expenses and daily care. He receives home visits from GWT medical staff every three months and has been provided with essential items such as a wheelchair, commode chair, and an air mattress.

Gunja's daughter-in-law said:

***"We are really grateful and happy for the support the Gurkha Welfare Trust has given us. The pension has been a huge help. I along with my family want to thank the donors from the bottom of my heart. Hope your support continues and helps people like my father and all the needy Nepali people."***

Gunja's story reminds us of the sacrifice and resilience of countless Gurkha veterans during their service in the British Army. Your continued support of the Trust ensures that they can live their remaining years with the dignity and care they deserve.



# SUPPLYING CLEAN WATER TO NEPAL FOR OVER 40 YEARS



## THE HISTORY

From 1976 to 1989 the Trust delivered water projects in conjunction with the Canadian Educational Development and Relief Programme.

Then in 1989 our Rural Water and Sanitation Programme was established in partnership with the British Government's Overseas Development Administration.

From July 2021, a new programme to combine the delivery of clean water and sanitation with emergency preparedness was created, jointly funded by both UK Aid and GWT. However, as you may recall, due to reduced funding by UK Aid the agreement will be terminated early and drawn to a close by March 2025, ending a partnership of over 30 years.

## THIS YEAR

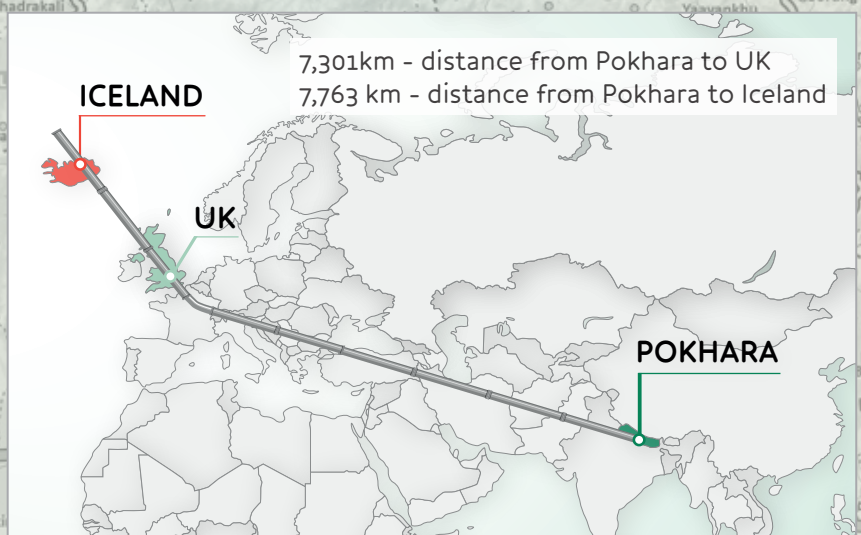
Despite the challenges this brings, we will continue to provide villages with clean water. For each water project, every household in a village will receive a tap stand fed from a clean water source and filtered down from new storage tanks. This year we plan to provide clean water to 2,257 households, benefiting nearly 11,500 individuals.

We will also provide Simple Drip Irrigation systems (SDI) for 28 people. SDI is a lifeline in Nepal, where water scarcity is a constant challenge. By providing an efficient and sustainable way to water crops, SDI not only conserves precious water resources but also boosts agricultural productivity, enhancing food security and nutrition for our Gurkha families.

During this time, GWT has laid 8,279.74 kilometres of water pipes in Nepal - that's further than the distance from Pokhara to Iceland.

This accounts for about 10% of the rural water system in Nepal, serving about 2% of the population with clean water.

Each project has provided safe drinking water, improved hygiene, and safe sanitation practices for the communities involved.



Since 1976, through three different programmes, GWT has collectively delivered **2,422** water supply projects, installing **63,660** tap stands that have benefited a total of **517,374** people in **82,442** households across 53 districts.



## ONE HOUSE - ONE TAP

Our implementation of the 'one house, one tap' concept in our water supply programmes is one of the greatest achievements of our clean water schemes.

Until 2015, the construction of shared community taps was common practice in Nepal. However, by installing a tap stand for every household, the back-breaking water-fetching time, particularly for women and girls, has been reduced by up to 2-4 hours per day per household. This concept has subsequently been adopted as formal Government of Nepal policy for water provision.



## ADAPTATION TO COVID-19

With the assistance of the British Embassy, GWT received government approval to operate our official-plated vehicle fleet so that we could continue to deliver our essential work.

This assured our freedom of movement, although staff still had to negotiate police checkpoints, locally erected barricades, and community checkpoints. Despite the COVID crisis, we were able to deliver 43 water schemes during this time.



## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

- We promote gender balance within the community committees that take ownership of the water projects. 48% of members with decision-making roles are held by women.
- A large proportion of the 'Village Health Promoters', a key role played by community members to ensure good health and sanitation practice, are held by women.
- Women are also involved in the construction and maintenance of projects.
- Menstrual hygiene management has been a key component of the programme, improving school attendance of female students.

# THE HISTORY OF THE KUKRI KNIFE

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It was the start of a unique bond that has lasted over 200 years.

Though technology has advanced through the centuries, Gurkhas have carried kukris into every major conflict where the British Army has been deployed. To this day, Gurkha soldiers are issued with two kukris – a ceremonial one for parade, ceremonies and display, and the second kukri for training and general use. The legend goes that whenever a Gurkha draws his kukri in anger, he must also draw blood...

Though the kukri is best known as a ruthless weapon in combat, the knife has several other uses. Gurkhas can use their kukris to chop or carve wood, cut meat and vegetables, dig, and hunt wild animals. The famed knife also has ceremonial uses in weddings and other formal events.

The kukri knife is an iconic symbol of the Gurkha military tradition and has a fascinating history. Originally from Nepal, it is closely associated with the Gurkha soldier, symbolising strength, courage, and loyalty. The kukri, with its distinctive curved blade, can be used as both a weapon and a tool. We take a look at the origin, evolution, and cultural significance of the kukri, highlighting its importance in history.

Kukris are forged from spring steel with a notch at the end of the blade, designed so that blood and sap drip off the knife instead of seeping onto the hardwood handle. A typical kukri blade measures 16 to 18 inches, curved with a hard, tempered edge and a softer spine.

## THE RISE OF THE GURKHAS AND THE KUKRI'S MILITARY LEGACY

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When Britain initially encountered Gurkhas in the mountains of Nepal in 1814, the Gurkhas fought so fiercely and admirably with their kukris that they were recruited into the British Army.

## A SYMBOL OF HONOUR AND TRADITION

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Beyond its practical use, the kukri holds deep cultural and spiritual significance for the Gurkhas. It is often considered a sacred object, passed down through generations. The act of sharpening a kukri is a ritualistic process, symbolising the soldier's commitment to duty and honour.

Today, kukris are often given as gifts or awards within the Gurkha regiments, and they are treasured by veterans and families alike. Modern kukri designs retain the traditional curved blade but may be crafted with contemporary materials, making them both functional and commemorative. The kukri has even found a place in popular culture, appearing in films, books, and games, further embedding it as an icon of the warrior spirit.

*Matibahadur Pun (pictured below) is one of the brave veterans supported by The Gurkha Welfare Trust and, like many, is proud of his kukri knife and his heritage.*



Gurkha veteran Matibahadur Pun



Gurkha soldiers on parade

# GURKHA PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO COMPETITION



The Brigade of Gurkhas Photography Competition is an annual event which showcases the rich heritage, history, and experiences of Gurkha soldiers. It gives us an incredible insight into the life of serving Gurkhas. Winners were:

First Place – Rifleman Bibas Thapa, The Second Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles.

Second Place – Rifleman Bikash Limbu, The First Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles.

View all entries and the winning video at [www.gurkhabde.com/news](http://www.gurkhabde.com/news)



## OUR IMPACT IN NEPAL

Every year we report back to you, our supporters, on the impact of our work in Nepal. We tell you how we raise funds, what we spend on our services and how we are transforming the lives of Gurkha veterans, their families and communities.

- In the last year\* we supported over 3,000 of our most vulnerable beneficiaries with a monthly pension. We distributed 1,413 hardship grants to provide emergency support.
- Over 23,000 people accessed our medical facilities and our medical teams undertook over 10,300 home visits.
- We completed 42 water projects and installed over 1,907 tap stands, getting clean water to over 10,500 people.
- We built 2 major schools, completed 14 minor extensions and carried out 96 refurbishments.
- We built 71 earthquake-resilient homes.
- We had 41 permanent residents across our two Residential Homes.

Through the generosity of our supporters and the dedication and commitment of our staff both in the UK and Nepal, we strive to deliver the best possible service to our beneficiaries.

View the full report at [www.gwt.org.uk/resources](http://www.gwt.org.uk/resources)



## OUR FUNDRAISING INCOME

In 2023/24 our total fundraising income was **£14.143m**. Income from legacies was **£6.92m**, 73% of which came from known GWT supporters.

We received £3.6m Grant in Aid (GIA) from the MOD in support of delivering our welfare and £4.9m GIA in support of our medical services. We received £1.6m from FCDO for delivery of our water projects.

## WHERE DOES MY DONATION GO?

Last year, for every £1 of income, The Gurkha Welfare Trust spent just 13p on fundraising (including management of our investments) and 87p on supporting Gurkha veterans, widows and their wider communities.

For every £1 we spent on fundraising last year, we raised **£5**.

## ASTOUNDING EFFORTS FROM OUR FUNDRAISERS



### DOKO ULTRA MARATHON

A tough group of British Officers from the Brigade of Gurkhas took on an incredible challenge in December 2024. The team completed an Ultra Marathon in the foothills of the Himalayas in Pokhara, covering a massive 50km, each carrying a 15kg weighted doko basket all to raise money for the Trust.

This demanding feat was set in the light of the legendary Doko Race that has been an integral and gruelling part of Gurkha recruitment in Nepal since 1989. The race sees recruits running 5km uphill with a Doko basket weighted with 15kg of sand. The young men must complete the challenge within 46 minutes to have a chance of making it through to the next stage of recruitment.

The team explained their motivation for the challenge:

***"The Gurkhas, despite being the most respected and bravest soldiers in the world, are also the humblest and kindest. As young men they commit themselves to a life-changing venture, to serve a country thousands of miles away and potentially risk their lives to be the vanguard of the free world. If you are British you, perhaps unknowingly, owe them so much."***



### 600 MILES TO MANDALAY

Two Gurkha Soldiers from 2RGR have run 600 miles to raise money for The Gurkha Welfare Trust and Combat Stress.

Rifleman Laxman Gurung and Rifleman Parsuram Buda embarked on a three-month challenge beginning in September 2024, to run 600 miles which is the distance from Nepal to Mandalay. Their motto, '600 Miles to Mandalay: Step by Step, We Conquer with Courage,' guides them on this ambitious journey.

The challenge was completed on 29 November. Parsuram commented: "Thank you so much for all your incredible support! We have successfully completed the 600-mile charity challenge without any injuries or issues. Your encouragement made this possible - without your support, we couldn't have done it. Thank you again for standing with us!"

### JOIN THE GWT DOKO CHALLENGE

Every year we run our own Doko Challenges in Leeds and London - both offering a beautiful location and a fairly challenging cross-country route!

It's a 5km run (or walk) with a Doko basket and your chosen weight of 5kg, 10kg or 15kg. Whether you're feeling competitive, or choose to put a team together for a fun day out, it's a great way to fundraise for GWT and experience first hand what the young Gurkha recruits have to go through.

#### Doko North - Sunday 25 May 2025

Roundhay Park, Leeds

#### Doko South - June 2025

Exciting new location - to be announced soon!

[www.gwt.org.uk/doko](http://www.gwt.org.uk/doko)



19-21 SEPTEMBER 2025  
**TRAILWALKER**  
 4 PEOPLE | 100KM | 30 HOURS

## THE ULTIMATE TEAM ENDURANCE EVENT

Can you put together a team of four to tackle a mighty 100km across the South Downs in under 30 hours? Take part alongside hundreds of military and civilian teams to become #TrailwalkerStrong!

Event weekend includes free camping, cooked breakfast at the start, support at nine checkpoints across the course, medal and T-shirt and the famous Gurkha curry at the finish.

[trailwalker.gwt.org.uk](http://trailwalker.gwt.org.uk)

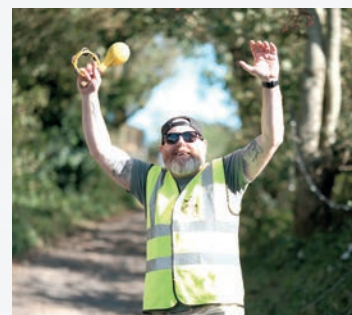
### EARLY BIRD OFFER - SAVE £40

Register your team before 30th March and save on entry (full price £300 per team of four)

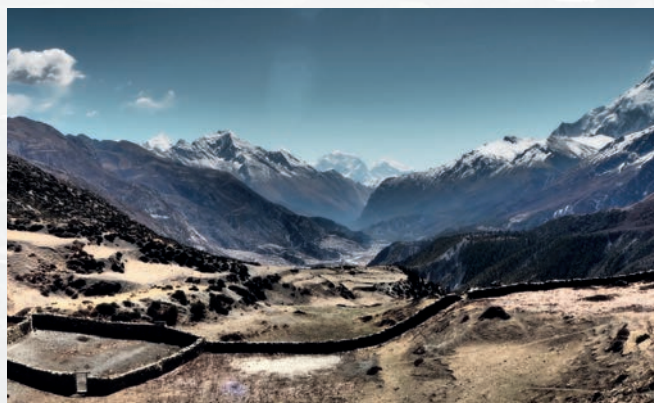
## CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

We organise a host of exciting events throughout the year, with volunteers out in force helping at Doko races, Armed Forces Day celebrations, summer shows and more. We also need to recruit around 100 volunteers to help over Trailwalker weekend - on checkpoints, at registration and cheering at the start and finish. Volunteering is enjoyable and hugely rewarding - please get in touch if you would like to find out more.

[www.gwt.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.gwt.org.uk/volunteer)



## NEPAL TREK 2025



### 11-26 October 2025

Join us on this incredible trek through the stunning Annapurna region of Nepal. The route will take you deep into the Himalayas, passing colourful mountain villages and remote monasteries, soaking up the inspiring vistas of Dhaulagiri, Manaslu, and the majestic Annapurna massif, rising over 8000m.

You will also have the unique opportunity to visit our Area Welfare Centre in Pokhara and Kaski Residential Home, and see first-hand the incredible work we are all so passionate about.

## UPCOMING CHALLENGES



Edinburgh Marathon - 25 May 2025

Edinburgh Half Marathon - 25 May 2025

Doko Challenge North - 25 May 2025

Doko Challenge South - June 2025

Saucony London 10k - 13 July 2025

AJ Bell Great North Run - 7 September 2025

Trailwalker 2025 - 19-21 September 2025

Find out more and sign up at:

[www.gwt.org.uk/events](http://www.gwt.org.uk/events)

## THE POWER OF CREATIVITY: ENHANCING LIVES IN OUR RESIDENTIAL HOMES

Our Residential Homes provide round-the-clock care to elderly Gurkha veterans and widows who would otherwise struggle to live alone. With no comparable facility in Nepal, they set the standard of care for the elderly, combining the best in western geriatric care with an eastern culture of respect for elders.

As well as taking care of their physical well-being, our teams ensure the residents have the opportunity to take part in creative activities to help enhance their mental well-being. They provide a range of activities including painting, colouring in, writing, playing music, knitting, crochet and sewing. Sharing activities fosters a sense of community and belonging among the residents, improves their emotional well-being, and most importantly brings smiles to their faces!



### THE GWT ANNUAL RAFFLE



### EXCLUSIVE PRIZE - A RARE TREAT AT WINDSOR CASTLE

A delightful and unique chance for two people to enjoy a private tour of Windsor Castle.

You will be met at Henry VIII Gate by Lieutenant General Peter Pearson, the Governor of the Military Knights of Windsor. Your visit will start with coffee with Peter and his wife in their residence in the Mary Tudor Tower. You will be accompanied to the famous St George's Chapel, final resting place of the Late Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, before continuing independently on to the magnificent State Apartments.

**Tickets cost £5 each - on sale until midnight on Sunday 30th March**  
[www.gwt.org.uk/raffle25](http://www.gwt.org.uk/raffle25)

### SHOP AND SUPPORT THE GWT

Browse our range of gifts and clothing with the classic crossed kukri logo

[shop.gwt.org.uk](http://shop.gwt.org.uk) or call 01722 323955



### OUR NEW RECIPE CLUB

Bring the taste of Nepal straight to your kitchen with a selection of delicious recipes for authentic Gurkha curries, savoury dishes and sweet treats.

Donate a one-off payment of just £29 to receive a welcome pack full of goodies, Chilli & Spice Club gift and 12 monthly new recipes by email.

**sign up at: [www.gwt.org.uk/recipeclub](http://www.gwt.org.uk/recipeclub)**