



Rigpa Australia Annual Report

22 January 2018

This report is a summary of Rigpa's activities in Australia in 2017 and of the challenges that have arisen and our responses to them. It focuses on national activities and in this report we have not included centre activities in detail. As Appendices, we have included our Vision and Mission, the annual audited financial reports, the strategic priorities, and the members of the Board and national Executive.

Without doubt, this has been the most difficult year in our history. The allegations that were made by eight former students against Sogyal Rinpoche, the spiritual founder of Rigpa, caused a shock wave throughout our community as well as the Buddhist world. As directors of Rigpa Australia, we have a duty to provide a safe and protected environment for our members to study and practice the Buddhist teachings. Therefore we took matters very seriously. We believe the steps we took during the year, in unison with the international Rigpa family, were appropriate and responsible, and showed concern for anyone who feels they have been harmed. More details of how we responded to this crisis can be found on page 3 of this report.

TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES

Rigpa Australia began the year with a visit by Sogyal Rinpoche, who gave teachings to 450 people at the Great Lakes Retreat at the Tuncurry TAFE and School campus, a new venue which was transformed into a most inspiring space to study and practice the teachings. Rinpoche also gave a public talk in Sydney and taught at a two-day Practical Wisdom Retreat for business and community leaders.

As he had been doing over recent years, Rinpoche spoke of how Rigpa students must hold the lineage of these teachings in the future.

Later in the year, a successful Tsik Sum Ne Dek Retreat was held in Australia at Maitripa Centre in Victoria, led by Dominique Side and Jane Packham. This was the second Residential Retreat of this kind held in Australia. 37 students from across the country spent ten precious days meditating away from distractions and the busyness of life. With Dominique and Jane's presence, this type of retreat and the Tsik Sum Ne Dek teachings, a maturing of students took place. Another Tsik Sum Ne Dek Retreat is being planned for October 2018 for Dzogchen Mandala students.

During her visit to Australia, Dominique Side also led a two-day course on "The Life of the Buddha" at the Melbourne Centre, in collaboration with Australian instructor Jan Van Der Breggen. This gave fresh perspective on the life of Buddha

Shakyamuni and the relevance of his experience to our lives in the 21st century. It was well received by Australian students, who attended in person and via streaming. Anne Alkin (Hospitality Director) coordinated hospitality for our international visitors during this visit, as well as Rinpoche's Tour in early 2017.

Of course Rigpa Australia's network of centres continued to offer courses and practices both for sangha and the public ranging from Drop in Meditation sessions through to, and including, a study program for Dzogchen Mandala, ensuring a clear and complete path of study and practice for all. This included a new event - the successful Guru Yoga online course, completed by around 20 students over 33 weeks. More online study is being offered in the Deepening Ngöndro course run by Jan van der Breggen in Brisbane. A good technological set-up enables the interactive nature of the sessions and it is hoped this will be reproduced in other centres.

Peter Brazier (Teaching Services Director) and centre instructing teams continue to support the study program through curriculum development, instructor support, online courses, streaming, sangha days, the All Encompassing Path and more.

RIGPA AUSTRALIA NATIONAL CENTRE

Throughout the year major renovation work continued on the National Centre building in Sydney with the goal of occupying it in early 2018. As well as Sogyal Rinpoche, a number of visiting lamas have blessed the site, auguring well for its future.

MANAGEMENT: RIGPA AUSTRALIA

Rigpa Australia Board

The role of the Rigpa Australia Board is to hold Rigpa's Vision and Mission. The Board also ensures Rigpa complies with Australian legal and government requirements.

In terms of its fiduciary responsibilities this year the Board continued its process of development with the invaluable assistance of Lynn Ralph, from Practical Wisdom. Rigpa Australia's governance is now clearer and much better established, and further work will continue to improve our organisation. In 2017 we strengthened financial oversight and responsibility for major financial decisions (such as around debt and asset management), adopted an updated Child Protection Policy and continued a process of Board member renewal. As part of this process of renewal a number of long-term Directors have retired namely Wendy Wright, Tina Rae, Merryn Kennedy and Chris McCarthy and we warmly welcomed two new members: Malcolm Ray and Kim Appleby. These new members bring with them a wealth of expertise and experience.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

In February, at the end of the 2017 Tour, Andy Fitzgibbon, National Director for the previous five years, took sick leave. Andy was offered ongoing support, including financial support until his resignation in September 2017. A group of five people, approved by Sogyal Rinpoche and Andy, formed a holding group – Sylvia Maseyk (who took on much of the work), Lisa Behne, Lisette Brittan, Kate Bunting and Kathryn James - until September 2017. At this time Kathryn James agreed to take the role of Acting National Director until mid-2018.

Other major changes in the National Executive in 2017 included the resignation of a number of key role holders due including Kate Bunting (Tour and NE Support), Jane Gray (Spiritual Care Director), Vanessa Clayton (Marketing and Communications Director) and Joe Shannahan, (Practice Director).

Joe is handing over the Practice role to Kerryn Moloney and Kerryn joins Malcolm Beattie (Finance), Peter Brazier (Teaching Services), Gai Roper (Student Support) and Anne Alkin (Hospitality) with Sylvia Maseyk and Lisa Behne as part-time participants. Kerryn Moloney is also working with Peter Brazier to look at offering practice retreats in 2018, and she will connect with all the centres as she settles into her new role in Practice Support.

There is unlikely to be any funding for a National Director for 2018. The role will be examined and redefined so that a new volunteer National Director or group can be appointed before mid-2018. Efforts are also underway to fill the other vacancies.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

In March, activity holders from all over Australia came together for our annual strategy meeting to review Rigpa Australia's strategic priorities. Topics covered included: implementing the Clear Path, online study and practice, financial management, and governance in Rigpa. Recommendations from the meeting led to several changes to our strategic priorities.

CHALLENGES

Allegations of Abuse

On 14 July 2017 Rigpa eight former students made public allegations of abuse and misconduct against Sogyal Rinpoche. This led to Rinpoche's retirement as Spiritual Director of Rigpa and he entered into long-term retreat. The focus of Rigpa's activity since then has been to deal with the consequences of the allegations for students, volunteers, Rigpa's reputation and more.

Internationally the three key responses were: to establish an Independent Investigation into the allegations, providing an opportunity for those who made the allegations to present them to an independent third party; to appoint a Vision Board to provide spiritual guidance to the Rigpa organization and community, until a new spiritual successor is appointed; and to develop a Code of Conduct in consultation with Rigpa students internationally. The Investigation has begun and the Vision Board has been announced. We expect the Code of Conduct to be implemented in February 2018, following much input from the Australian sangha through the Monthly Gatherings.

Within Australia the National Executive threw itself wholeheartedly into supporting the sangha in the wake of the allegations, setting other priorities aside for a time. Gai Roper, particularly, led the student support coordinators with energy and dedication. Most of this has been done locally, and it continued at the annual retreat in January 2018. In 2017 centres held open sessions where students could honestly express their feelings. Workshops were held to consider how Rigpa can develop into the future. A positive change has been the openness in discussing topics that some considered were not talked about before. Work will continue into 2018 to support the sangha, working with its diversity and seeking common purpose.

There is naturally concern about loss of students, both current and future, because of the allegations. Some students have left Rigpa, including some long-term students and others may be waiting for the result of the investigation. However most students remain committed to Sogyal Rinpoche as their teacher (even though he has no further role in the management of Rigpa) and to Rigpa to support their path. For those who have chosen to leave, centre and national student support coordinators have done and will continue to do their best to help students find ways to continue their spiritual path after leaving Rigpa.

Decline in the Number of Students

Even prior to the allegations Rigpa Australia has, in the last couple of years, experienced a slight fall in student numbers and financial losses nationally and in some centres. We also noted that this trend is reflected internationally.

Activity in the International Rigpa group based in Lerab Ling is declining: because of financial losses the number of people employed by Lerab Ling is being reduced significantly. As a consequence there has been increasing collaboration between countries, including Australia, on communication, supporting students, event planning, curriculum planning and so on, making Rigpa more united as an organisation. A working group is considering how best to establish a formal structure to link Rigpa entities worldwide.

The business model for Rigpa in Australia is also becoming outdated because of changes such as online courses being streamed from centres and possible lack of viability of small centres if student numbers decrease. A team is forming to look at alternative models.

Financial challenges

With the appointment of a new Treasurer and at the urging of the Board, Malcolm Beattie, Finance Director, helped centres develop budgets for the 2017/18 financial year and these contributed towards a national budget. This coordinated, nation-wide budgeting process has been a huge help as the year evolved. With the reduction in student numbers and the impact on Rigpa's reputation following the allegations there has been a financial impact with a reduction in the number of Rigpa subscribers. Additionally, the January 2018 Retreat registrations were just under half of the usual numbers, although this was also due to the decision to hold a closed retreat for sangha members only.

This decision was taken in order to provide a safe environment to enable people to express any concerns and to continue the process of healing.

Rigpa Australia's National Centre renovation finances are also under review at present, with some increase in renovation costs, and an expected reduction in donations in the current climate.

On a more positive note, centres have good reserves to cover at least one year's running costs, and most are running on budget or better. Planning is also underway to identify ways to reduce costs and generate new income. For centres, student attendance and subscription numbers will be closely watched in the coming year.

Changes and challenges in centres

The Sydney sangha has not had a physical centre this year and is renting spaces. Members of the Sydney sangha are looking forward very much to the opening of the new Rigpa Australia National Centre in early 2018, which will bring an exciting new era to Rigpa's work in Sydney and in Australia.

The Bush Telegraph (BT) has fewer instructors, making it more challenging to run courses. One option being examined is having streamed courses run from centres in an interactive live format, as Brisbane has been doing successfully. Stronger links with centres will also support BT students. Albany centre has dissolved into BT since its only instructor will not be instructing for the foreseeable future.

Generally, there has been a drop in the number of students holding activity in many centres and nationally. Fewer people are doing more – this is a challenge faced by many volunteer organisations but Rigpa Australia continues to try to find ways to better support volunteers.

Practical Wisdom

As a result of the July allegations, the main Practical Wisdom group has formally separated from Rigpa. This is a significant loss to Rigpa in terms of the long association with this group. We also wish to express our appreciation for the generosity of members of Practical Wisdom in financial contributions to Rigpa's projects both nationally and internationally over the years.

Spiritual Care Outreach Education Programme

Two "Mindfulness and Awareness in End of Life Care" outreach education courses were conducted in Newcastle in 2017. This three-day course supports health care professionals who work with the dying. Two more courses will be conducted in 2018. Internationally Spiritual Care is separating from Rigpa, but this has not happened yet in Australia. There is no National Spiritual Care Director currently and, although events are still being held successfully, it is vital that the role is filled. There is a stable and experienced faculty of instructors.

HOW RIGPA AUSTRALIA IS TACKLING CURRENT CHALLENGES

National collaboration

At the Roundtable meeting in November 2017 there was a stronger sense of centres coming together with the national teams to work together in a more integrated way. We will build on this at the Strategy Weekend in March 2018, when centre and national role holders will discuss and advise the Board on strategic priorities.

Centres are keen to continue business as usual, including public courses, and with the addition of short retreats and visiting senior instructors.

Centres are being invited to contribute towards a working group to develop a new business model for Rigpa in Australia. This is likely to include offering more online study options.

Students around the country have given input into the Code of Conduct and how they would like to strengthen Rigpa's culture, facilitated by Gai Roper, Student Support Director.

Students

In each country the work of supporting students continues through sangha days, where material is designed to respond to current needs; through one to one contact from spiritual friends and from instructors and student support; through increasingly frequent communication of change and development; and also through local retreats, workshops and hosting visiting lamas.

At national retreats such as Winterberg, Ventura and, in January, Great Lakes, students are participating in open sessions. These sessions have been authentic, dynamic and very engaging. They are revealing an increasing maturity of our sangha, of what the spiritual path is ... and isn't.

Although this continues to be a very challenging time in Rigpa, many feel that despite the losses there is an opportunity for Rigpa to transform in a way that makes it more sustainable while focusing on accomplishing both aspects of its Vision and Mission. This brings a sense of optimism! For this we will need to embody Sogyal Rinpoche's teachings of Lamtön, with special emphasis on Lojong - Bodhichitta. For this we are eternally grateful to our precious lama. May he live long, may he accomplish all his aspirations.

EXPRESSIONS OF THANKS

I would like to thank all those National Executive who retired this year: Andy Fitzgibbon, Kate Bunting, Joe Shanahan, Vanessa Clayton, and Board Directors Tina Rae, Wendy Wright, Merryn Kennedy and Chris McCarthy, all of whom have in their own unique way contributed so much to working towards fulfilling Rigpa's vision and mission, many over many years. All are missed for their qualities and friendship. We wish them the very best for their continued spiritual paths and continued involvement and contribution to the Rigpa sangha in different ways. A huge thank you to those continuing on the National Executive and Board for their diligence, reliability (so precious!), humour (also so precious), devotion and friendship.

A very special thank you goes to Lynn Ralph, from Practical Wisdom, for her huge contribution to our development as a Board and to the strengthening of governance in Rigpa in Australia. Her valuable insights into board dynamics and into us as an organisation, her sense of humour when we got too serious, and her great generosity are all priceless. We wish her good health, great joy and contentment in her retirement, and may all obstacles on her spiritual path dissolve the instant they appear.

To the centre role holders who are the backbone of Rigpa in Australia, the Board and National Executive expresses our heartfelt appreciation. You hold the students and bring the teachings to people in our communities. Our best wishes and thanks to those who have left roles this year, our thanks to all those still holding the fort, and a big welcome to new activity holders. Rigpa activity is a wonderful way to bring benefit to the world!

And lastly, to every single sangha member and volunteer – thank you!! Without people to greet the public that attend our Drop In Meditations, the people that support courses such as AV, Hospitality, facilitators, those that take the tea towels home to wash and maintain the centres we would not have centres and retreats. First and foremost we are sangha, practitioners on the path and our activity is bodhichitta in action.

I hope that this year's events will bring lasting changes in Rigpa that will benefit all students and our ability to accomplish Rigpa's Vision and Mission. We aim to strengthen our culture of support for each other to follow the spiritual path, and our culture of respect for all and care for all. If we embody the teachings we can do all of this!

Attached to this year's summary of Rigpa in Australia are:

1. Rigpa's Vision and Mission
2. Board membership

Kathryn James
President/National Director
22 January 2018



RIGPA

Wisdom shining, always unobscured

Rigpa is an international Buddhist community founded by H.E. Sogyal Rinpoche that offers authentic Buddhist teachings and a clear path to enlightenment.

Vision

*“Everything we do is towards this goal:
The enlightenment of all beings”.*

Rigpa is dedicated to bring all beings to the ultimate happiness of the awakened state of enlightenment.

Mission

The purpose of Rigpa is to provide an authentic Buddhist education for the modern world:

- to preserve, uphold, practise and transmit the Buddhist teachings - especially Tibet’s Ngagyur Nyingma lineage and in particular the teachings of Vajrayana and Dzogpachenpo - for those who choose to follow a complete, graduated spiritual path; and
- to work for greater well-being in society and demonstrate how this wisdom of Buddha, with its ancient roots, and its practices of meditation and compassion, can help and transform modern society through its impact on individuals.

Rigpa’s Approach

The Tibetan word *rigpa* means *natural, pristine awareness*. Rigpa is dedicated to helping individuals, young and old, to realize this innermost nature of mind.

Since 1972, through courses, events and publications such as *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Rigpa has helped millions of people to apply the compassion and wisdom of the Buddhist teachings to their lives.

Rigpa is part of the Nyingma(Ancient) School of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Padmasambhava in the eighth century, and in particular the lineage of the Longchen Nyingtik and teachings of the “Great Perfection”, Dzogpachenpo, as upheld by Sogyal Rinpoche. Rigpa’s responsibility is to continue to maintain the practice and

transmission of this dynamic, unbroken, living lineage of Wisdom, for the generations of the future.

Rigpa maintains the spirit of non-sectarian open-mindedness of the *Rimé* tradition, as exemplified in Tibet by the great 20th century Khyentse lineage master Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. It invites teachers from all Buddhist schools and lineages, and promotes dialogue between the ancient tradition of wisdom and non-Buddhist faiths, science, medicine and other fields of human enquiry.

Rigpa Fellowship Inc Board Members January 2017

Kathryn James	President/Chair
Ross Mackay	Vice-President
Malcolm Ray	Treasurer
Kim Appleby	Secretary
Elizabeth Weiss	member
Craig Dalton	member