



DHARMA GATES

2023 Annual Report

Mission

Dharma Gates is a grassroots nonprofit dedicated to opening pathways into formal meditation practice for young adults.

We connect young practitioners to a variety of Buddhist teachers and practice centers, working to eliminate conceptual, logistical, and financial barriers to practice.

We foster connections through which practitioners can cultivate compassion, resilience, and clarity to meet the unique challenges of our times.



A Note from Leadership

A few weeks ago, Dharma Gates hosted our 15th multi-day meditation retreat. It was our first retreat in Colorado and first multi-day retreat away from the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. When we arrived, we learned that participants had flown from Los Angeles, Portland, Washington DC, Alberta, and New York City, as well as travelling from the Colorado area.

That participants were willing to fly from so far demonstrates what we've come to observe: there is a deep need for accessible, affordable multi-day retreats with high-quality teachers among young practitioners. Young people are hungry for intensive practice in community with peers. Many are hesitant to engage with their local Sanghas, unable to afford expensive retreats, or have difficulty finding the depth of practice they seek.

Creating the conditions for young practitioners to deepen their engagement with the living Buddhist tradition has been our mission from the beginning. Over time, we've realized that the kind of spaces we've been creating are both rare and precious. We will sincerely and wholeheartedly strive to make them less rare, but we hope they never lose their preciousness.

Now, we're on the cusp of a transition to a different kind of organization: one that can operate nationwide and offer retreat experiences to hundreds of young practitioners per year. As we celebrate this year's programs and impact, we invite you to contribute to our 2024 vision: making intensive practice available and accessible to every young adult who seeks it. We are grateful for your support and look forward to what comes next.

—Aaron Stryker, Executive Director



2023 by the Numbers



323 participants impacted through online and in-person events programming

228 participants at
6 multi-day retreats and
3 one-day retreats

30 advising connections

10 active volunteers

\$155,273 funding raised to support young adults' meditation practice

From our "Luminous Bones" retreat, September 2023

Our Commitment to Dāna

Dāna: the Pāli word for generosity

As of January of 2022, each Dharma Gates program, including our multi-day meditation retreats, has been offered on a donation basis. We proudly remain committed to offering all our events by donation. We aim to promote accessibility and to honor the original spirit in which Buddhist teachings were offered.



Participants at our September 2023 "Luminous Bones" retreat



Our 2023 By-Donation Programs



January

6-day
retreat

February

March

5-day
retreat

April

7-day
retreat

May

June

July

August

8-Week Online
Program

5-day
retreat

1-Day
Retreat

September

7-day
retreat

October

November

December

1-Day
Retreat

8-day
retreat

1-Day
Online
Program

5-Week Online
Program

1-Day
Retreat

1-Day
Online
Program

Love & Spaciousness: 6-Day Retreat with Jogen Sensei

In the first week of 2023, Sensei Jogen Salzberg led a 6-day retreat for 24 participants at High Pastures Retreat Center in the mountains near Asheville, North Carolina.

The retreat focused on practices of spaciousness and heartfelt embodiment, inviting love and openness to melt, enliven, instruct, and awaken. Many deeply enjoyed going for solitary walks in the animated, beautiful Appalachian forest.



Retreat Participants from our January 2023 Retreat "Love & Spaciousness"



Participants Share Their Experiences



I experienced meditation as accessible. Before this, I had a story that meditation was always painful and involved an excruciating amount of mental labor. Now I understand that it can feel easeful as well. It renewed my practice and I feel ready to give it my all.

—Heather

Incredible! My whole body, heart, mind, and universe has been cracked wide open.

—Sovereign

I found space I hadn't known existed.

—Zach



Living a Zen Path:

5-Day Retreat with Shoan Ankele & Gokan Bonebakker

This retreat was an opportunity for beginning-to-intermediate practitioners to experience Zen training within the supportive environment of Zen Mountain Monastery. 29 participants learned Zazen, participated in work practice and art practice, and brought many questions to the teachers in the Q&A sessions. It was a rich and wonderful five days.

Right: The group gathers for a closing photo

Below: Participants meditate with guiding teachers



It was life-changing to meet other college-age folks with the same passion. —Miles



Participants Share Their Experiences



Heart-opening, expansive, challenging: exactly how I want to be living these precious moments of life. —Anonymous

Attending a retreat at a monastery was a true immersion in not only the practice of meditation but the teachings of the Dharma. I learned as much at this retreat as in the past year, and I have a growing sense of what the tradition means to me and what role it has in my life. —Karina

This retreat was difficult, powerful, and emotional. I feel grateful to be around so many loving, kind, knowledgeable beings. Thank you times a million! —Elena



A Beautiful Relationship to Our Mind: 7-Day Retreat with Beth Upton



On this retreat, teacher Beth Upton led 34 people at The Claymont Society, a retreat center in West Virginia. Beth encouraged participants to cultivate a relaxed and beautiful relationship with their object of meditation, to “fall in love with meditation practice.”



Revelatory—I thought I knew how to meditate, but this retreat took me deeper than I would have thought possible. I now understand how to cultivate a caring, loving, deeper practice.

—Zach

Photos: “A Beautiful Relationship” participants embrace and meditate fireside

Participant Experiences by the Numbers



Percentage of Retreat Participants Answering "True" to the Following Statements	
Attending this retreat has improved my sense of optimism about the future	92%
I feel more connected to others after the retreat	87%
I feel more clear about my values and how I want to live after this retreat	96%
Attending this retreat has deepened my understanding of the Buddhist tradition	95%

This data comes from post-retreat surveys from participants who gave consent to use this data for purposes of furthering organisational goals.

Cultivating Peace, Wisdom, and Kindness: A 5-Day Retreat with Nikki Mirghafori

Dharma Gates collaborated with *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, to offer a 5-day silent retreat, Cultivating Peace, Wisdom, and Kindness. We have deep gratitude for *Tricycle* in fully sponsoring this retreat for 25 participants. Three *Tricycle* staff members attended, one of whom covered their experience in the magazine. Dr. Nikki Mirghafori led participants in silent sitting and walking meditations, as well as interactive practices to cultivate a sense of care and connection in the community.



A closing photo from our August "Cultivating Peace, Wisdom, and Kindness" retreat

Luminous Bones: Wisdom Dharma of the Five Elements

A 7-Day Retreat with Jogen Sensei

18 participants gathered in Livingston Manor, NY for a week-long retreat at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, Kongo-ji led by teacher Jogen Sensei. Practices included meditation on the elemental nature of the body, direct meditative absorption in each element (fire, sky, water, earth, and wind), contemplation of the Elemental qualities of life, mind, and internal energy, and ritual work with the elements.

Right: Participants discuss the Dharma with Jogen Sensei

Below: Luminous Bones participants meditate in the forest



Listening in stillness just might be the deepest medicine I've yet to taste. Prior, I only read about and yearned to taste the peace others describe. This week, I got to taste it.

—Gaby



Being Outside: An 8-Day Retreat with Shinei Sara Monial & Soten Danny Lynch



Dharma Gates heads West! For our first retreat in the Western United States, Dharma holders Shinei Sara Monial and Soten Danney Lynch led a group of 20 young adults at Colorado's Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center. Through group and solo sits, contemplative hikes, Dharma talks, and Q&As, "Being Outside" focused on the ways that the living, animate world can remind us of our True Nature.

This retreat gave me a well-needed and true yet hard check on the realities of suffering and the diligence awakening calls for.

—Adin



Participants come together for a photo at the "Being Outside" retreat

One-Day Retreats

Embodiment-Based Mindfulness Meditation

with Lama Rod Owens
August 5th, 2023
32 participants
Still Mind Zendo, NYC



Zen Meditation: Taking Our Masks Off, Discovering Freedom

with Rev. Teijo Munnich
October 28th, 2023'
18 participants
Great Tree Zen Temple
Asheville, NC



1:1 Advising Program



Through our advising program, we meet 1:1 with practitioners looking to deepen their practice. We set up a Zoom call with them, listen to their experiences and what they are looking for, and then we offer the perspectives and resources we have available, referring them to retreats or residency opportunities that we believe would be a good fit. This year, we advised a total of 30 young people. Many who sought out this program went on to participate in longer retreats or residential training.



A participant meditates outside at our August 2023's "Cultivating Peace, Wisdom, and Kindness" retreat

Dharma Gates Staff



It was a special year for the Dharma Gates team! This year, we hired three new staff members: Gabe Keller Flores as Digital Marketing Manager, Ellen Adams as Director of Media & Outreach, and Sydney Slavitt as a Retreat Manager. We instituted training for all of our retreat managers to receive Red Cross First Aid, AED, and CPR certification, as well as Johns Hopkins' Psychological First Aid certification. We have 10 regular volunteers helping Dharma Gates with outreach to new communities, the majority of whom are past retreat participants.

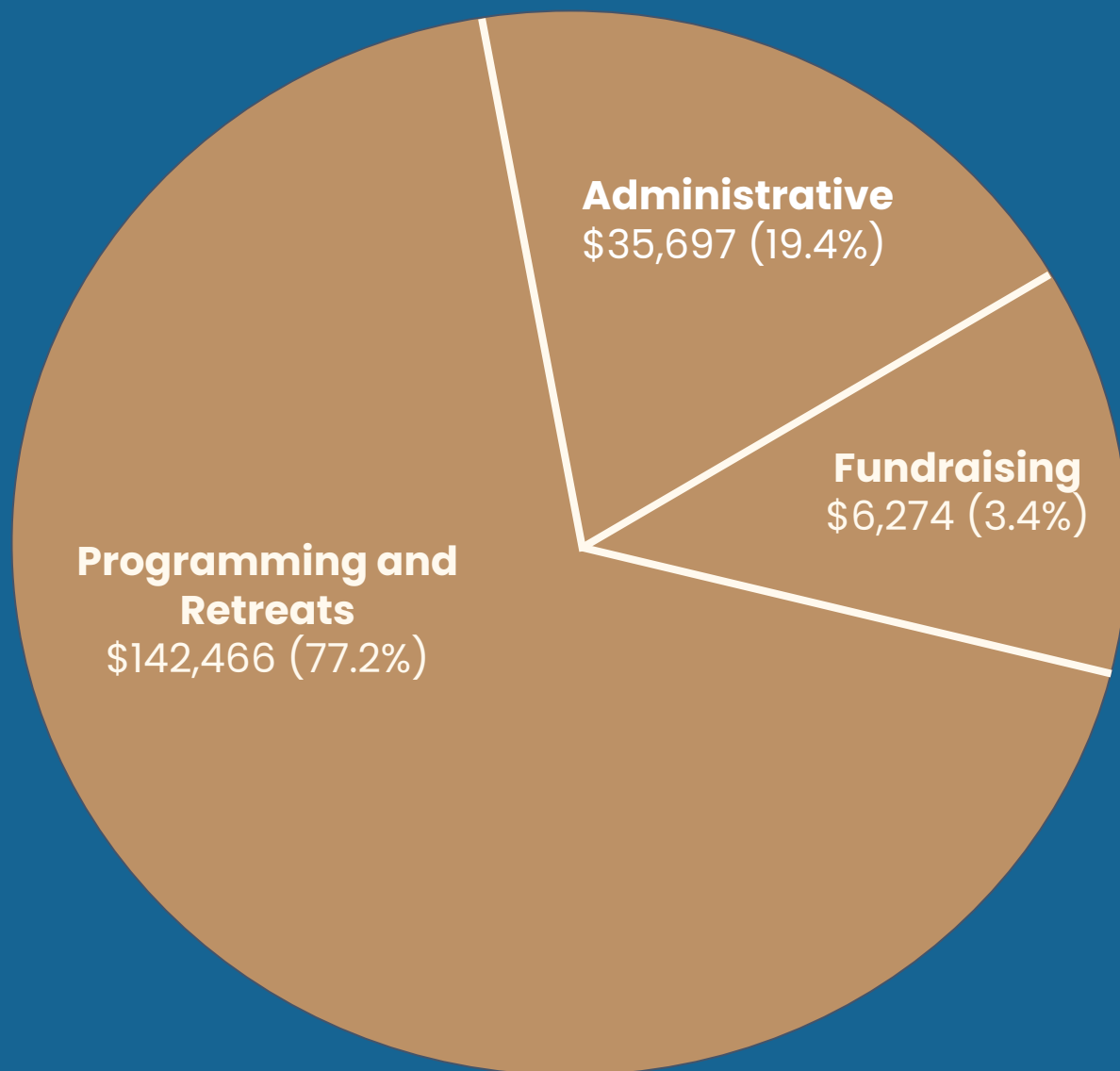
We maintain a team commitment to sitting personal retreat. We feel grateful and blessed to have livelihoods that allow us to do so. In total, our team sat 450 days of personal retreat this year, with an average of 75 days of retreat per team member.



Photo from our "Luminous Bones" retreat, September 2023

2023 Total Expenses: **\$184,542**

(Jan. 1 - Dec. 1)



Thank You to Our Major Donors

Hemera Foundation

Frederick P. Lenz Foundation

Khyentse Foundation

Jon and Elizabeth Hochman

Benjamin Pence

Anonymous



HEMERA
FOUNDATION



The Frederick P.

LENZ
FOUNDATION
for American Buddhism



KHYENTSE FOUNDATION

Buddha's Wisdom for Everyone

Some examples of how your support counts



\$35,000

2024 salary for our executive director

\$16,000

6-day retreat for up to 30 participants

\$8,000

4-day retreat for up to 30 participants

\$4,000

One year of legal, accounting, and website hosting fees

\$2,000

A weekend commuter retreat for up to 30 participants

\$1000

On-campus half-day retreat for up to 30 participants

\$600

Room and board at a 6-day retreat for one participant

\$100

Cost for one day of retreat for one participant

Support the Next Generation's Practice



Dharma Gates is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, EIN 84-4831330. Our programs are offered entirely on a by-donation basis.

Donations can be made online or by mail:

dharma-gates.org/donate

500 State Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217

Photo: October 2023's "Being Outside" Retreat

