

5 Years of the Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International, USA Let Us Celebrate Let Us Reflect. A New Year of Service Begins ...

The Central Jersey Chapter which was founded in 2018 has now completed 5 years of Sewa! Reaching this significant milestone is undeniably a reason for celebration, and certainly calls for a moment of reflection. As we attain this milestone and appreciate the service of our existing volunteers, and as we welcome our new volunteers who start their journey of Sewa with us this year, let us take a pause and reflect on our journey, our purpose, and our individual motivations. Reflecting on our journey and understanding our motivations can provide us with valuable insights and help us align our actions with our values and those of the organization.

Vasudha (The Earth), Eva (Is Thus), and Kutumbakam (Family)

The verse of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* originally appeared in the Maha Upanishad and is considered the most important moral value in society. The Upanishads -part of the Vedas, the oldest scriptures of Hinduism - are the Vedic Sanskrit texts that give us the basis of this philosophy. This verse reflects the idea that the entire world is one family. And it is this philosophy which serves as the foundation for the guiding principles of our organization, Sewa International.

“Our mission is to serve humanity in distress, aid local communities, run developmental projects for the underserved, and assist people in transformational change through the power of innovation by mobilizing partners, donors, and volunteers.”
– Sewa International, USA

Thus our primary goal is to serve humanity, especially those in distress. To seek creative and effective solutions to address the challenges faced by the communities we serve. To mobilize partners, donors, and volunteers in a collaborative effort which is crucial for maximizing impact and having a broader reach. To ensure communication and transparency, key elements in engaging with partners, donors, volunteers, and the communities. To assess and measure the outcomes of our service projects to ensure they effectively contribute to our goal. All of these have to be translated into action through our service projects - in the choice of the service projects, in the manner in which our service is carried out, in how we foster an environment that reflects our values and principles, both internally amongst us and externally in the communities we engage with. Thus to build an overall culture that adheres to the set of principles that prioritize the well-being and dignity of those we aim to serve.

Serving Humanity is Serving Divinity, Sewa (Service) Bhav (Attitude) - Service Above Self

Cultivating a spirit of charity and selfless service starts within oneself and extends outward to the community and beyond. By internalizing the principles of *Sewa Bhav*, we are making informed and impactful choices in our daily life and in our service projects, thus contributing to positive change where it is most needed. And it is this *Sewa Bhav* that enables us to serve others selflessly and with a sense of devotion. It is a virtue, where we encourage all to engage in service to others without expecting anything in return. It embodies the idea of altruism, where one's actions are driven by a genuine desire to help and contribute to the well-being of others.

In a world often driven by individual pursuits, *Sewa Bhav* is a guiding mantra that encourages a collective consciousness focused on the well-being of others, and fostering a harmonious and compassionate society around us. Irrespective of cultural or spiritual backgrounds, acts of kindness and service can be powerful catalysts for positive transformation within ourselves and for society at large. It promotes compassion, empathy, and a sense of responsibility towards the community and society as a whole. It is that which makes individuals like us contribute our time, skills, and our resources to support those in need and also brings about a sense of fulfillment and purpose in our own lives.

And so with “Sewa Bhav,” let us begin yet another year of Sewa

Together We Serve Better

Chapter Highlights

- ❖ 5 Years of Central Jersey Sewa – Let Us Celebrate Let Us Reflect
- ❖ Addressing Food Insecurity – Sewa Diwali Food Donation Drive
- ❖ Treats for Troops Donation Drive
- ❖ Sewa Through the Year: Soil Conservation & Environmental Initiatives
Sewa for Servicemen
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Healthcare & Special Needs Services
Feeding Programs for Hunger Relief
Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure
Community Outreach & Engagement
Serving Places of Worship

Addressing Food Insecurity – Sewa Diwali Food Donation Drive

The Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International, USA, is making a significant impact on addressing food insecurity through the Sewa Diwali Food Donation drive once again this year. Chapter volunteers are actively involved in conducting this drive across townships in Central and South Jersey.

The volunteers made a great start with a commendable effort of collecting and donating **over 7,400 pounds** of food to multiple beneficiaries, and the Chapter is committed to continuing the drive to assist even more individuals and families facing food insecurity during the holiday season.



The dedication of the Chapter volunteers and the support from the community have been crucial in making these initiatives successful. It is a great example of how grassroots efforts can contribute to creating positive change and helping those in need.

The Sewa Diwali drive is a fantastic initiative of American communities collaborating on a nationwide food donation effort during the festive season starting from *Diwali* – a festival that is celebrated across all *Dharmic* traditions, bringing together people from different backgrounds - who believe in *Sewa Parmoh Dharmah - Service to Humanity is Service to Divinity*.

The Central Jersey Chapter would like to thank all the donors for their service to humanity.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

Casa Freehold Food Pantry
Christina Seix Academy, Trenton
FPC Food Pantry, Metuchen
Hands of Hope Food Pantry, Edison
Iselin & Metuchen YMCA
Middlesex County College Food Pantry



'Treats for Troops' Donation Drive

This year once again the Central Jersey Chapter collected **~5,500 pounds** of 'Treats for Troops' which was then donated to the JBMDL - Joint Base McGuire Dix Lakehurst at Trenton, NJ.

The Treat for Troops drive is an initiative that seeks to support and boost the morale of deployed American military personnel by sending them free care packages. These care packages, dispatched through the U.S. Postal Service, are intended for soldiers stationed at Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine bases. The primary goal of this initiative is to convey a message of gratitude and remembrance from the American people to those serving in the military.

The Chapter volunteers engaged local communities, collaborated with schools and libraries, and urged everyone to share a portion of their Halloween candy collections in support of our troops.

Chapter volunteers expressed gratitude to the active military service members and the President & Board of the Spouses of JBMDL Organization for their service to the country.

The active military personnel in appreciation of the service of the young volunteers brought tactical vehicles to showcase to our volunteers.

The Central Jersey Chapter would like to thank all the donors for their generous donations and take this opportunity to thank our deployed service personnel for their service to the country.



Sewa Through the Year – Recurring Service Activities by the Central Jersey Chapter

The Central Jersey Sewa Chapter has a commitment to Sewa and the dedication to making a positive impact on the local community throughout the year. The volunteers engage in service activities throughout the year to contribute to the well-being of the community to not only help address immediate needs but also strengthen the bonds within the community and promote a spirit of unity and cooperation.

Soil Conservation & Environmental Initiatives

The Central Jersey Sewa volunteers actively participated in the Pumpkin Drive, preventing pumpkins from ending up in landfills, instead offering them as a delightful treat for rescued animals. Volunteers collected and dropped off **800+** pumpkins at local farms in the month of November. This not only helps reduce waste but also provides a valuable resource for animals, creating a positive impact on both the environment and the well-being of rescued animals.

Sewa LEADs also participated in the Willingboro Park cleanup initiative. They collected litter and debris (bottles, cans, metal scrap etc.) that was improperly disposed of directly in the park and along Route 130. The act of collecting litter addresses environmental concerns and promotes a sense of pride and ownership in the local community.

Sewa volunteers as part of a community service initiative came together to plant 45 bushes/shrubs adjacent to the Chesterfield Township Volleyball court. With local gardener's guidance, volunteers strategically placed shrubs that serve as a windbreak, effectively preventing sand from blowing off the court during play.

Sewa volunteers also as a part of the environmental cleanup went to clean up the landmark of Edison Memorial Tower museum. The volunteers gathered all the fall leaves, made big debris and then filled them in trash bins. They raked, uprooted dead plants and did some landscaping work.

Volunteers also planted garlic cloves at Ramblin' Sol Farm. They helped plant approximately 2500 garlic cloves at the farm. Learning about the process of preparing the farm bed and using manual plowing tools added an educational element to the experience.



Sewa Beneficiaries:

Mount Laurel Animal Hospital, Mt. Laurel Township
Angels Wings and Hooves Inc, Plumsted Township
Rutgers Student Sustainable Farm, New Brunswick
Willingboro Park, Burlington County
Townships of Chesterfield & Edison
Ramblin Sol Farm, Cream Ridge

Sewa for Servicemen



This month, Chapter volunteers helped in carefully removing and folding of the flags that had been put up as displays last month at the 'Flags for Heroes' event in Hamilton which is done as a tribute to individuals who have profoundly impacted and inspired others. The event, dedicated to supporting heroes, involves the display of American flags, each symbolizing the acknowledgment of those who have made a meaningful difference in the lives of others. This collaborative effort left a lasting impact in the minds of the volunteers.

Sewa Beneficiary:

The Rotary Club of Robbinsville, Hamilton

Educational Support Initiatives

This month, Chapter LEADs gave educational support to children at the Metuchen YMCA Kids Day Care Center where they helped the children from under-resourced families with their homework and social activities. LEADs engagement with the children, playing games, and fostering a positive environment brought joy to the little ones and also made them relive some of their own cherished childhood memories. Volunteering experiences like these contribute significantly to building a sense of community and making a positive impact on the lives of those involved.

Sewa Beneficiary:

YMCA Metuchen



Healthcare & Special Needs Services



Central Jersey Sewa LEADs volunteered at the National Federation of the Blind New Jersey (NFBNJ) Annual Convention, held in Edison. Their volunteering work involved helping the convention attendees, mostly blind folks, by guiding them around the hotel, guiding them towards their destination, helping to get in and out of elevators, and much more. NFBNJ was very appreciative of the help our LEADs and parents provided during the convention. This event was an eye-opening experience to the LEADs, as they learned that blindness ran on a spectrum, and observed how people with blindness led their lives with confidence and didn't let blindness define them or their future.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

National Federation of the Blind, New Jersey

Feeding Programs for Hunger Relief

As part of the SewaMeal program of the Central Jersey Chapter that addresses food insecurity, Chapter volunteers prepared ~370 meals that were donated to the homeless and underserved communities.

Meal Items:

Grilled Cheese Sandwiches, Pita bread, Bread Rolls, Bean Chilli soup, Pasta salad, Potato Salad, Macaroni Salad, Green Bean Sauté, Mashed Potatoes, Garlic Parmesan Roasted Carrots, Mac & Cheese, Vegetable Sauté, Pasta, Jeera Peas Rice, Channa/Rajma Masala, Cupcakes, Pretzel & Brownies.

Meals' Sponsors:

Ashish Ji
Shital & Manoj Khabe Ji
Krishna & Ram Palakodeti Ji
Malini & Muralidharan Krishnan Ji
Shilpa & Mukul Rathi Ji (State Farm)
LEAD Anish Allada's Family



Meals' Recipients:

Ozanam Family Shelter, Edison
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Trenton
United Methodist Church, New Brunswick

Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure



Impactful volunteer work was carried out by Chapter LEADs at Hands of Hope Food pantry during their busiest time of the year. They sorted and packed hundreds of boxed and canned food items not only for immediate distribution but also for the Thanksgiving drive. With over 200 cars in the drive-thru line during Thanksgiving weekend, LEADs helped in bringing out boxes, distributing Thanksgiving food, and providing hot lunches to the families in need. LEADs were also involved in the registration process, helping families sign up and receive their eligibility cards, to ensure that the assistance reaches those who need it the most.

This month LEADs also volunteered at Franklin Township Food Bank. There they assisted in bagging, sorting, and stocking the produce, as well as worked at the register. They also helped people with their shopping, allowing the customers to leave with a full cart and a smile. Overall, it has been a great experience for LEADs when they volunteer at the food bank.





Sewa LEADs assisted Jewish Relief Agency in the greater Philadelphia area where they packed boxes filled to the brim with Thanksgiving and Hanukkah goodies and other nutritious foods along with the household essentials that were to be delivered to the families in need. Such hands-on efforts not only address immediate needs but also contribute to building a sense of community and support.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

Hands Of Hope Food Pantry, Edison
 Jewish Relief Agency, Greater Philadelphia
 Franklin Township Food Bank, Franklin Township

Community Outreach & Engagement

Central Jersey Sewa LEADs volunteered at the second annual Diwali celebration in Edison, NJ. It was an extraordinary event with a swarm of activities, attractions, and thousands of people visiting. LEADs helped setup banners, and get the stage ready for the event, while others helped run the Kid’s Zone, a bouncy house, an inflatable sports area, and a crafts section. LEADs ensured that everyone remained safe and had a great time at the event.



This month Chapter LEADs also volunteered at the Franklin Township Veteran’s Day celebration. They helped with the set up and clean up during as well as after the event. They got an opportunity to listen to the incredible stories of the veterans, which gave them a new perspective. It was an honor to witness this wonderful ceremony & bell ringing by the veterans, and the LEADs gained a renewed sense of gratitude for all the veterans.

Chapter volunteers assisted in sorting equipment for the upcoming basketball season for Chesterfield Township’s Athletic Association. LEADs helped in sorting balls, bagging them along with essential supplies, and disassembling and recycling packaging. LEADs also managed attendance and provided participants in CTAA basketball tryouts with their assigned numbers.



Sewa Beneficiaries:

Townships of Chesterfield, Edison & Franklin

Serving at Places of Worship



The Chapter LEADs volunteered at the Radha Gopinath Temple for the *Govardhan Puja* also known as *Annakut Puja*, a festival that emphasizes gratitude towards nature, the importance of protecting the environment, and the spirit of community and sharing. This was a well-attended event and the Temple required help in multiple ways. LEADs helped in the kitchen with clean-up and tidying everything up. They also helped with arranging the dining hall and finally served the food to devotees at the dining hall.



Central Jersey Sewa LEADs have been dedicating their valuable time to volunteer at the Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple in Monroe Township. This month too they helped at the Temple for the *Satyanarayana Pooja*, a Pooja done for prosperity and overall well-being. The LEADs set up 150 sets of necessary pooja items. In addition, they helped in the decoration of flowers, setting up chairs, directed the devotees for the event and helped with food services. The day was made more special since there was a *Karthigai Deepam* function at the temple and the LEADs got an opportunity to light the lamps at the temple. This festival holds cultural and spiritual significance, and the lighting of lamps is considered a symbolic act of dispelling ignorance and darkness.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

Radha Gopinath Temple, Edison
 Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple, Monroe

Consistency and dedication are the driving forces behind the recurring Sewa activities of the Central Jersey Chapter. By consistently aligning efforts with the skills and interests of Chapter LEADs and adult volunteers, the service activities remain meaningful and sustainable. This approach not only benefits the volunteers by allowing them to engage in activities they are passionate about but also makes a significant difference in the lives of those they are serving.

Newsletter Team

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- ❖ Adwait Jhunjhunwala
- ❖ Amaani Rao
- ❖ Charvi Iruganti
- ❖ Inika Kumar
- ❖ Ishaan Brahma
- ❖ Manya Arora
- ❖ Medha Inapuri
- ❖ Neerav Gupta
- ❖ Pranav Shrivastava
- ❖ Radha Pant
- ❖ Ramkumar Lakshmi
- ❖ Saanvi Sheeri
- ❖ Tanya Sennamsetty
- ❖ Tulika Punia

Upcoming Events

- ❖ Sewa Winter Coat & Toy Drive
- ❖ Sewa Diwali Drive Continues
- ❖ Sewa at Christmas spectacular event
- ❖ Sewa at Christmas Party for Autism Foundation
- ❖ Sewa over Christmas at YMCA Metuchen
- ❖ Sewa at Edison Winter Wonderland
- ❖ Sewa at North Brunswick Tree Lighting Ceremony
- ❖ Sewa Education Initiative
- ❖ Boat Building for Biodiversity Conservation
- ❖ Sewa at Food Relief Agency, Banks & Food Pantries
- ❖ SewaMeal for the Underserved at Churches/Shelters
- ❖ Sewa at Places of Worship

REGISTRATION

- Central Jersey SewaMeal Sponsorship
Donation towards SewaMeal Sponsorship
- Central NJ Chapter General Donation
General Donation to Central NJ Chapter of Sewa International

Register

Please use below QR Code or link and proceed to click '**Register**' to donate



Click → <https://sewausa.org/event-5084580> and fill the information

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