

280 Toilets and Counting



Ratan baag - Kashi

Started in 2015 in partnership with a local non-profit organization in Bengaluru, India, the project *Toilet and Hygiene for the Girl Child* was initiated on a pilot basis to address the needs of four government schools in Anekal Taluk of Karnataka, India. The result – girls' attendance in school increased by a staggering 87%.

The success of the pilot project, encouragement from beneficiaries, support from donors, and most importantly the need from the community made the team rethink and redefine their objective.

Cont. page 3

Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Supporter,

It is my pleasure to bring to you some "breaking news". I am thrilled to report that the American Red Cross has awarded Sewa International a \$500,000 grant to rebuild homes of the economically underprivileged people devastated by Hurricane Harvey in Rosharon Village, Brazoria County, TX! This grant, in the next 18 months, will help Sewa reconstruct 11 completely destroyed homes and 24 partially-damaged homes thus benefitting 154 men and women, including 35 seniors and 47 children. The total cost for rebuilding and repairing homes at Rosharon for this project is estimated to be about \$675,000, out of which Sewa International's donors are contributing \$175,000 or 25%.

You know that since day one of Hurricane Harvey's sweep across Southern Texas we have been at the forefront of rescue operations, and then in relief and rehabilitation efforts. One of the most affected communities was Rosharon, which suffered major damage.

Known as Little Cambodia, Rosharon with a population of approximately 1,400 is 30 miles south of Houston in an underserved rural area. Home to predominantly Cambodians refugees, and some Laotian and Mexican refugees, the majority of the people in Rosharon are involved in subsistence farming.

Nearly fifty percent of the families are involved in growing water spinach, a staple of Asian cuisine. When Hurricane Harvey roared through South Texas it devastated Little Cambodia, bringing down houses and leveling greenhouses, thus destroying livelihoods. You also know that some of the Sewa team members in Houston had to bear losses to their homes, despite which they have been

hard at work in raising funds from supporters across the US, as well as applying for grants from organizations like the Red Cross. Sewa has raised over \$2 million for disaster recovery in less than a year since Hurricane Harvey hit, including this latest American Red Cross grant of \$500,000.

This grant from the American Red Cross is an affirmation of the good work done by Sewa as well as acknowledgement of the "can-do" spirit of our organization. I am proud that we stand out among our peers in terms of the success we have had in raising money but more importantly, getting important relief work accomplished. Achalesh Amar, our Houston coordinator for disaster recovery, has said that despite the generous support of funding agencies, the task at hand is enormous, and that the experience of rebuilding Rosharon "has been demanding, sometimes frustrating, but more often rewarding and always an optimistic one".

Gitesh Desai, the President of our Houston Chapter told us that he felt honored by this recognition and that the grant further strengthens Sewa International's resolve to fulfill the mission of giving back to society through selfless service.

I want to congratulate the Houston team, and thank you all for believing in us, and for working with us to contribute to society.

Sincerely,

Swadesh Katoch
Director, Disaster Recovery



"Gift" Exchange

This summer, I visited my grandparents in India and had the unique opportunity to visit a project supported by Sewa International – the Saraswati Avasa Vidyalaya at Bandalguda in Hyderabad, Telangana. On July 4, I went to the school accompanied by my younger brother Rajeev, my mother Susmita, and my grandfather, Dr. Prabhas Chandra Singh -- a retired Civil Surgeon and Director, Osmania Medical College.

We were greeted by Shri. Saravanan and Shri. Hari of Sewa International, who gave an overview of the school. Children from tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Maharashtra as well as destitute children are enrolled in this residential school.

The boarding school is located on a 16-acre campus with playgrounds, a beautiful garden, and a goshala (protective shelter for cows) which houses 50 cows, including 10 Gir cows -- native breed from Gujarat. Their day starts at 5 am. After performing surya namaskar (sun salutations) and pranayama (breathing exercises) they have breakfast at 8am. Their lessons start at 9 am and include Telugu (the local language), math, social studies and science. Students in grades 3 to 5 are also taught Sanskrit! Classes conclude with sports and dance club activities. They are then off to sports and games from 5 to 6:30 pm playing cricket, kho-kho, kabaddi, and other games. Similar to our schools they also participate in a Science Bowl competition. The school also boasts of a national level champion! The day's activities end with a study hour and dinner, and children go to bed at 10 o'clock.



Eesha Singh Family with Saraswathi Avasa Children.

As we walked into one of the classrooms, all the students stood up and greeted us with a Namaste (the Indian way of offering greetings). They were shy at first, but Shri. Hari encouraged them to ask questions. Within a few minutes, their hesitation turned to enthusiastic questions about me, life in the US, and my schooling. And before I knew it we had become friends with the whole class. Everybody sang songs for us. It was an incredible experience because in my school nobody does such singalongs. In another room, Rajeev played the tabla and I sang a few songs for all of them, to reciprocate the love they had shown us.

There was also a dance club where wonderfully choreographed dances are taught. The older and younger kids performed a couple of dances. Everybody dragged me into the dance and I had such a good time dancing with them. We then visited the goshala which houses 50 cows.

After getting to know their background and the challenges the children faced, I realized that I am such a lucky kid to have such great education and access to great opportunities. I believe spending an hour or so of our time interacting with these children over video-chat can greatly help with their spoken English even as we get to know one another better. This opportunity of visiting Saraswati Avasa Vidyalaya was one of the highlights of my India tour.

With the mission to “empower underprivileged children, youth, men and women through education, healthcare and innovative employment to achieve greater potential in their lives”, the team set out to scale the work into a multi-year India-wide program covering three beneficiary segments -- government schools, government-guaranteed permanent land dwelling urban slums, and rural India.

Two types of toilets are installed based on the need of target beneficiaries:

- i) Portable stainless steel toilets -- for schools and in slums where there is a likelihood of change in location over a period of time. These installations are locally governed by the beneficiaries.
- ii) Non-portable RCC toilets with a low-cost bio-digester -- suitable for rural areas. This brick and mortar model is more suitable to villagers owning permanent private properties.

As of July 2018, a little over three years since the project started, the team has installed 280 toilets (245 portable toilets, and 45 bio-toilets) across four states in India benefitting 16,624 individuals.

“Thank you Sewa International for providing toilets to our school. Now we don’t have to wait until we get home. We can concentrate on classes without worrying about taking a break to walk a long distance to attend nature calls in the open fields, avoiding prying eyes. We are locking the toilets after every use, and we clean them by assigning cleaning duties among ourselves,” says 14-year-old Pushpa, a ninth grader at the Lucknow Government School, Uttar Pradesh.

The Sewa team soon realized that for overall and holistic development, sanitation facilities provided has to be supplemented with education, healthcare, and community development. In this context, we note the following:

- 1,584 students have benefitted from after-school tuition centers: five in Bengaluru, Karnataka and twelve in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
- 9,663 people benefitted from health camps organized at nine locations in the states of Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.



After-school tuition center at Annamadevi School - Bangalore



A Bio-Toilet under construction

Our hard work and effort has paid off – as 46 schools, 10 slums and two villages have been declared *Open Defecation Free* (ODF) with the sole effort of Sewa International. Our upcoming projects aim to establish new sanitation facilities and refine the existing ones to the nominal level. By the year end, the team has an ambitious target to complete 44 new toilet installations, repair 22 toilets, and undertake shifting and reinstallation of 14 toilets across India.

Sewa invites you to be part of this great project by sponsoring a toilet. For more details, visit <http://toiletandhygieneproject.org/>

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Raju Datla is a result oriented IT professional and a thought leader with many years of experience in client relationship management, problem analysis and resolution, software programming, and enterprise-level deployments. He developed a passion for community service at a very young age. Before being introduced to Sewa International in 2013 Raju volunteered with various nonprofits in the greater Boston area and helped raise funds for disaster relief, education, women empowerment, and healthcare related projects in India. A graduate of Southern New Hampshire University, he works as a Senior DevOps Architect at HCL Technologies.

As a core team member of Sewa Boston chapter, he is focused on increasing Sewa's footprint in the Boston area by promoting Sewa's mission. He is passionate about projects in education and has motivated a lot of his friends to be actively involved in volunteering for the community.

Raju, a native of Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh has been in the US for over 20 years. He lives in Tewksbury, Massachusetts with his wife Sandhya and two lovely children – six-year-old Sahil, and three-year-old Sloka. Raju enjoys cooking South India dishes and spends his spare time learning about Indian history and reading up on current geopolitical affairs.

Sewa is proud to have Raju as an active volunteer and supporter.

Our Sewa Yatri this month

Summer is when many Indian families visit their near and dear ones in India. It is a wonderful opportunity to visit Sewa-supported projects close to their home. Sewa promotes this through "Sewa Yatra" – an inspirational personal journey of self-growth and development through experiential learning. Many of the participants eventually move on to become brand ambassadors for these projects. This July, Syam Kosigi, Sewa VP Organization, visited two projects in Bengaluru accompanied by his daughter Vaishnavi, and son Vishnu.

The Toilet and Hygiene Project for the Girl Child -- a star project of Sewa International that has installed 280 toilets till date across India. *Nele* (meaning shelter in Kannada) -- a project offering education, food, and shelter to 262 boys and girls studying in K-12 grades, across ten centers in five towns/cities in Karnataka. Students are also trained in sports and other extra-curricular activities.

"Visiting the toilet project locations and spending good time at Nele Boys' Hostel in Bengaluru has made a good impact on my children and demonstrated how Sewa funds are utilized for the needy in Bharat. *Sewa Yatra* made our Bharat trip more meaningful," said Syam Kosigi.



(L-R) Kusuma Swarup – Sewa Coordinator, Vaishnavi, Syam Kosigi, and Vishnu, with Jayant and Shivu (toilet project field coordinators)

For further information on Sewa Yatra, visit <https://www.sewause.org/sewa-yatra> or write to sewayatra@sewause.org.

Upcoming Events

- Aug **3** to **12**, 2018 : Sewa Cleveland, Yoga workshop, Solon, Ohio.
Aug **11**, 2018 : Sewa Bay Area Bike A Thon, 7601 Shady Creek Rd, Dublin.
Aug **16** & **25**, 2018 : Sewa Washington DC, SDM Workshop at India International School, 4433 Brookfield Corporate Drive, Chantilly, VA 20151, Virginia.

Sewa International

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