

## UC Berkley Students Build Volunteer Match App for Sewa to Win PayPal Hackathon



University of California, Berkley Students who won the PayPal Opportunity Hack with Sewa volunteers at the venue

A mobile phone app that matches Sewa International volunteers with Sewa opportunities during disasters or family or health emergencies won the Eighth PayPal Opportunity Hack for Non-Profits held at the PayPal campus in San Jose, CA on November 2.

A team of students from University of California, Berkley that built the smartphone application during the hack won the prize. This application eliminates manual matching of volunteers with Sewa tasks and supports non-emergency Sewa opportunities. In the initial round 26 teams coded non-stop for 36 hours, and six teams qualified to make a presentation in the final round.

Contd. on Page 2

## Executive's Corner

*Dear Sewa Families & Friends,*

*"Shraddhaya Deyam. Ashraddhaya Adeyam. Shriya Deyam. Hriya Deyam. Bhiya Deyam. Samvida Deyam. (Give with faith and reverence. Never give without faith and reverence. Give in plenty, give with modesty, give with fear of not giving with the right attitude, give with compassion)"*

Hindu scriptures define the principles of giving in no uncertain terms. The above passage from the Tatitiriya Upanishad (Shikshavalli - 11th anuvaka) clearly lays down how to give. Many important books such as Isha Upanishad, Chandogya Upanishad, Bhagavadgeeta, Ramayana and Mahabharata all describe the importance of Daana or charity as a means of dharma and spiritual upliftment.

As per Bhagavadgeeta (verses 17.20 through 17.22), giving selflessly, without expecting anything in return is the best form of charity. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad counts Daana (charity) as one of the three cardinal virtues of a good person and Chandogya Upanishad stipulates Daana as a requirement for leading a virtuous life.

In a dharmic way of life, truth, charity and compassion are all woven into the daily life. Anna Daan (giving food) is considered a noble deed. In ancient India food was never sold and kings and merchants established Dharma Chatra (Centers of Hospitality) in pilgrimage centers on the roadside and cities to serve the poor and visitors. During the British rule, these institutions were considered wasteful and their funding was stopped. Many such places continue to exist even today but their importance has diminished in changed social and economic circumstances.

Indian scriptures are replete with stories and incidents extolling the virtues of charity. Stories of noble kings such as Rantideva, Tamradwaja and Shibi and the cart driver Raikva are a just a few examples. Tatitiriya Upanishad's instruction to treat a guest equivalent to god similar to treating one's own mother, father and teacher speaks in volumes about the importance given to charity in our culture.

The idea of charity goes beyond the established meaning in Indian culture. It is not just about giving but it is more about consuming only what we need. Mahatma Gandhi reflected this age-old wisdom when he said "if only everyone took enough for their own needs and nothing more, there would be no poverty in this world".

Our ancient texts describe many types of Daana such as Vidya Daana (Giving knowledge), Gau Daana (Giving cow) and Abhaya Daana (Giving Protection). They all manifest in various service projects Sewa International executes all over the world. Be it through the houses Sewa distributed recently in Kerala, educational help offered through ASPIRE or solar lights given to families in South America, the eternal principle of Daana lights the path of Sewa.

I wish everyone peace and joy in the holiday season and a happy new year!

*Vidyasagar*  
**Vidyasagar Tontalapur**  
 Director, Communications



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The app receives the request and determines the urgency based on sentiment analyses using artificial intelligence. It then matches the request with users in the Sewa database based on requester and volunteer's location. Once the volunteer and requester are connected and the task is complete, the request is moved to a completed status. Earlier, the Sewa International team consisting of volunteers from the Bay Area chapter pitched the idea at the hackathon. They requested teams to build a mobile solution that would cut down the time taken to match Sewa volunteers with various Sewa tasks in their local chapter in the time and location volunteers desired.

Six non-profit organizations made their pitch at the hackathon. PayPal asked them to submit their problem statements in a PowerPoint presentation about a week early. Sewa International's presentation was very well received, and out of the 16 teams which participated in the competition, 11 teams wanted to build a solution for Sewa.

The app has a dashboard for the Sewa administrator to track requests and the stages they are in. Sewa International Bay Area team is planning to schedule a demo with the Sewa IT team to determine how Sewa can integrate the app with Sewa website. The students from UC Berkley overcame a few technical challenges including tracking the live volunteer locations. Over 134 hackers competed in the event.

## Swasthya Mobile Medical Unit Promotes Health & Hygiene in Chennai

Swasthya ("wellbeing" in Sanskrit) Mobile Medical Unit sponsored by Sewa International and run by Sewa's partner organization Sevabharathi Tamilnadu has conducted 233 medical camps in South Chennai from April to September this year.

Commissioned to create awareness about health and hygiene, reduce non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, and introduce positive lifestyle practices such as yoga, the Swasthya unit treated 7537 patients including 750 children in Mudichur, T Nagar, Kotturpuram, Porur, Mappedu, Jamin Pallavaram, and other localities in five months ending September this year.

Several men and women participated in yoga classes conducted in Mappedu, Kannagi Nagar, Camp Road, and other places as part of the Swasthya initiative. In April 2019, students from Sastra University, Tanjore participated in an internship program and conducted health and hygiene campaigns in several parts of the city. They also spread awareness about harmful effects of smoking and alcohol consumption.

Many patients with hypertension and diabetes and other ailments were treated successfully in Swasthya medical camps. About 60 percent of the patients treated were women. Patients were also educated about nutritional requirements, anemia, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies.





## Newly Built Houses Handed Over to Kerala Flood Victims



*Flood affected families in Kerala that received Sewa-built houses pose for a picture with guests (on stage) who attended the event.*

Sewa International and Deseeya Sevabharathi, Sewa International's partner organization in Kerala, handed over 25 newly built houses to families that lost their homes in the 2018 floods that devastated large parts of the South Indian state. Keys to the houses were handed over to the new owners in an event held on November 25, 2019 at Nandavanam Auditorium in Alappuzha (Alleppey), Kerala.

These houses were constructed as part of "Punarjani," Sewa's rehabilitation program for the Kerala flood victims. Out of the 25 houses planned so far, 16 were sponsored by Sewa International, USA and eight more houses will be ready for distribution by February 2020.

Each house is 800 square feet in area and contain one living room, a kitchen, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. Brahmashree Manikuttan Tirumeni, Secretary of the Chakkulathukavu Sri Bhagavathy Temple in Alappuzha, lit the lamp at the event organized for the house distribution, and Dr. T.P. Senkumar, Retired Director General of Police, Kerala, was the chief guest at the event.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) State Secretary, M. Radhakrishnan, Seva Pramukh A. Vinod, Deseeya Sevabharathi State Vice President Dr. Balachandran Mannath, District President Dr. C. Dileep and other Sevabharathi volunteers attended the event. Sewa International volunteers, Sasidhar Mutyala, Sharat Mudupu, and Aravinda Rajagopal also took part in the event and visited the beneficiary families.

The Sewa International team also visited the "Punarjani" Counseling Centers and sites of schools under construction. The event was attended by over 350 volunteers, beneficiaries, and supporters.

## Opportunities to Serve: One Volunteer's Experience

Sewa International has been working on numerous humanitarian projects in India, one of which includes the Sikshit Kushal Kashi (Clean-Educated-Skilled Kashi) Project. This project's main goal is to provide holistic and harmonious aid to uplift the lives of villagers, especially those who are living in rural areas or have been affected by severe flooding. Over 20 villages and 500 families have been identified for support in the Mirzapur area in Uttar Pradesh.

Avni Nirmesh Patel, a young volunteer from Sewa USA Chicago, traveled to India in July this year. One of her goals after graduation from college is to help create environmental awareness and empower young girls in her home country, India. Sewa International gave her an opportunity to do just that and more through the Educated Kashi Project (Swachch Sikshit Kushal Kashi Project). She tells of her experience while working with the project below:

After I arrived in Kashi, Govind Singh, Project Coordinator of the Kashi Project in Varanasi, called me about offering talks at the Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Camp, and I was very excited about it. Teaching young girls about feminine hygiene and providing "girl kits" at Aditi Convent School was one of my favorite experiences on this visit, and it allowed me to form bonds with them I will never forget. I would love to go back to further their knowledge and be a role model for them so that they can live life to the fullest.

One of the highlights of my entire trip was having the opportunity to present at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Govind Singh and Dr. T P Singh and the Department of Social Inclusion and Policy at BHU gave me the platform to speak about the social differences between India and America. Here, I was able to collaborate with other individuals and share my experiences with them. In total, I presented talks at five schools, helped to plant 500 trees, and assisted farmers in recovering from flooding.

Govind Singh and his team gave me a number of opportunities to fulfill my goal of serving communities, sharing knowledge, and bettering the lives of people. Helping the villagers impacted by flooding is something that I can work on not just during this visit but also in the future. This includes planting trees and giving farmers support for the crops that were lost to severe flooding.

It is this kind of experience that young people are looking forward to so that they can connect with people, do good work, and understand the nature of "sewa" – selfless service. The more we can get our youth and young volunteers involved, the more we can enrich and brighten the lives of many.

Thanks, Avni!

## Diwali Food Drive – Sewa NJ Volunteers Collect 6000 Pounds of Food

Sewa International's Westchester, NY, Chesterfield, NJ and Sewa North Jersey chapters conducted Diwali food drive in November. Together they collected about 6000 pounds of food and donated to local charities.

Sewa volunteers from Chesterfield, Bordentown, Mansfield, Mt Holly, Mount Laurel, & East Windsor collected 3,400 pounds of food and donated to St Mary's Church Food Pantry, Bordentown, Rise Food Pantry Hightstown, Allentown Presbyterian Church & Trenton Soup Kitchen. About 42 high school and college students worked for three weeks and reached out to townships, libraries, businesses and communities for donations.

Sewa North Jersey volunteers collected 2,150 pounds of food and donated it to Morristown Soup Kitchen. North Jersey chapter also supports the Morristown Soup Kitchen on a monthly basis giving donations of nonperishable food items.

Sewa and HSS volunteers in Westchester NY collected 440 pounds of food and donated to Ossining Food Pantry.



## Holiday Cards

Sewa Chesterfield volunteers made 65 holiday cards and gave them to the Bordentown library. These cards were given to senior centers, children hospitals, and homeless and food shelters. Bordentown Library thanked Sewa volunteers for preparing the holiday cards.



Chesterfield Sewa volunteers also worked with local Honey Brook Organic farm and delivered 7 boxes of radish and Chinese cabbage to Trenton Soup kitchen. This is a first of a kind initiative and the chapter is looking forward to working with many more farms to put the produce to right use which otherwise will go waste.



## CPR Training

Chesterfield Sewa volunteers completed a certified life-saving CPR and first aid session. It was an intense 7-hour workshop with thorough training on CPR and usage of AED Defibrillator. As part of first aid, children learned various emergency or immediate care procedures that must be provided when a person is injured or ill until full medical treatment is available. Mansfield EMT squad conducted the session and 30 Sewa volunteers participated



Mani Venkat, originally from Chennai, is now a resident of New Jersey. He was introduced to Sewa in 2016 through the LEAD program for his son Sanjay. He witnessed how as a team the North Jersey Chapter members worked together and served the local communities and was inspired by the work of his friends and colleagues in the chapter. His current responsibility is that of Joint Coordinator of the North Jersey Chapter.

Mani Venkat has taken active responsibility in various North Jersey Sewa projects including the LEAD program, community services like "Adopt a Highway", blood drives, sports events, and the annual Holi Festival event that was recently kick-started by the chapter.

Mani is a graduate in electrical engineering from SASTRA University (The Shanmugha Arts, Science, Technology & Research Academy) in Tirumalaisamudram, in Tanjore District, Tamil Nadu. He is currently working with Otsuka Pharmaceuticals. Mani was born and brought up in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

Married to his very supportive wife Seetha, the two have a son named Sanjay who is currently a high school sophomore, and a daughter named Swetha, who is studying in first grade. Asked what Sewa means to him, he said, "I am grateful to be a part of this excellent team in North Jersey, and Sewa indeed has inspired me to contribute to the welfare of society."

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...Contd from page 3

## Upcoming Events

Jan 19, 2019 to  
Dec 21, 2020

• Sewa Atlanta | *Food for Hungry* | Otwell Middle School Cafeteria, 605 Tribble Gap Road, Cumming, GA

Dec 16, 2019 to  
Jun 30, 2020

• Sewa Bay Area | *Authentic Yoga to Prevent, Control and Manage Diabetes* | Fremont, San Jose, San Ramon, Saratoga, Bay Area, CA

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