



ASPIRE – Sowing Seeds for the Future – Atlanta Shows the Way!



“Dietician addressing Cummings Elementary School Children as part of Atlanta’s Aspire Tutoring Program”

While many of their friends stayed outdoors last summer to hike and bike, a few Sewa volunteers in Atlanta had a different idea on their mind. They teamed up with children from the Cummings Elementary School to grow something for the future.

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Executive’s Corner

Dear Sewa Family,

You might have heard of Maharana Pratap (Singh) of Rajasthan, who fought the Moghuls despite limited resources. But very few have read the story of Bhama Shah, the businessman who gave all his wealth to the Maharana so that he could continue his fight. The valor of Maharana Pratap needed the financial support of Bhama Shah.

In the past 12 months, I found the support of my own Bhama Shah – not one but two – a young man in his early thirties, and the other a senior in his eighties – who have helped us in the battle against poverty, illiteracy, and other social challenges. Since childhood, I have been privileged to be associated with stalwarts who dedicated their life in the service of others and for the upliftment of the society, whether here in the US or back in Bharat. I have also seen wealthy people who have given significant amounts of their wealth for worthy causes instead of spending money on themselves. Such support from these new avatars of Bhama Shah is imperative for Sewa International to continue our service to society.

Ram Gehani, a senior Sangh *swayamsewak*, whom I have known for the past 20 years, called me last year when I was visiting my children at Texas A&M in College Station, and announced his decision to give all his wealth to Sewa International. I was deeply moved to hear his decision conveyed in his usual, humble way to me.

The second ‘Bhama Shah’, Sachin Kulkarni, is a young IT professional in Silicon Valley, who recently gave his shares worth \$1.3+ million to Sewa International. He not only gave this but wishes to give all his future wealth to building educational institutions and community organizations in Northeast India. He is putting his talent, creativity, and resources to support a cause he became aware of just 12 months ago. The first school is already operational in record time. Sachin went to witness the inauguration of the school and to motivate the workers in the tough terrains of Arunachal Pradesh. He is moving towards his target of establishing 100 schools in the region to educate children, bringing families and communities out of poverty, and thus contributing to national integrity, as he said in his video message, “One done, 99 to go”. This is the type of determination that moves the world, I guess.

My ‘naman’ (salutations) to both. I am truly inspired by the simplicity and the commitment of Shri Gehani and the courage and single-minded focus of Sachin Kulkarni. They are an inspiration to us all!

Sincerely,

Arun Kankani
Arun Kankani
 Exec. Vice President



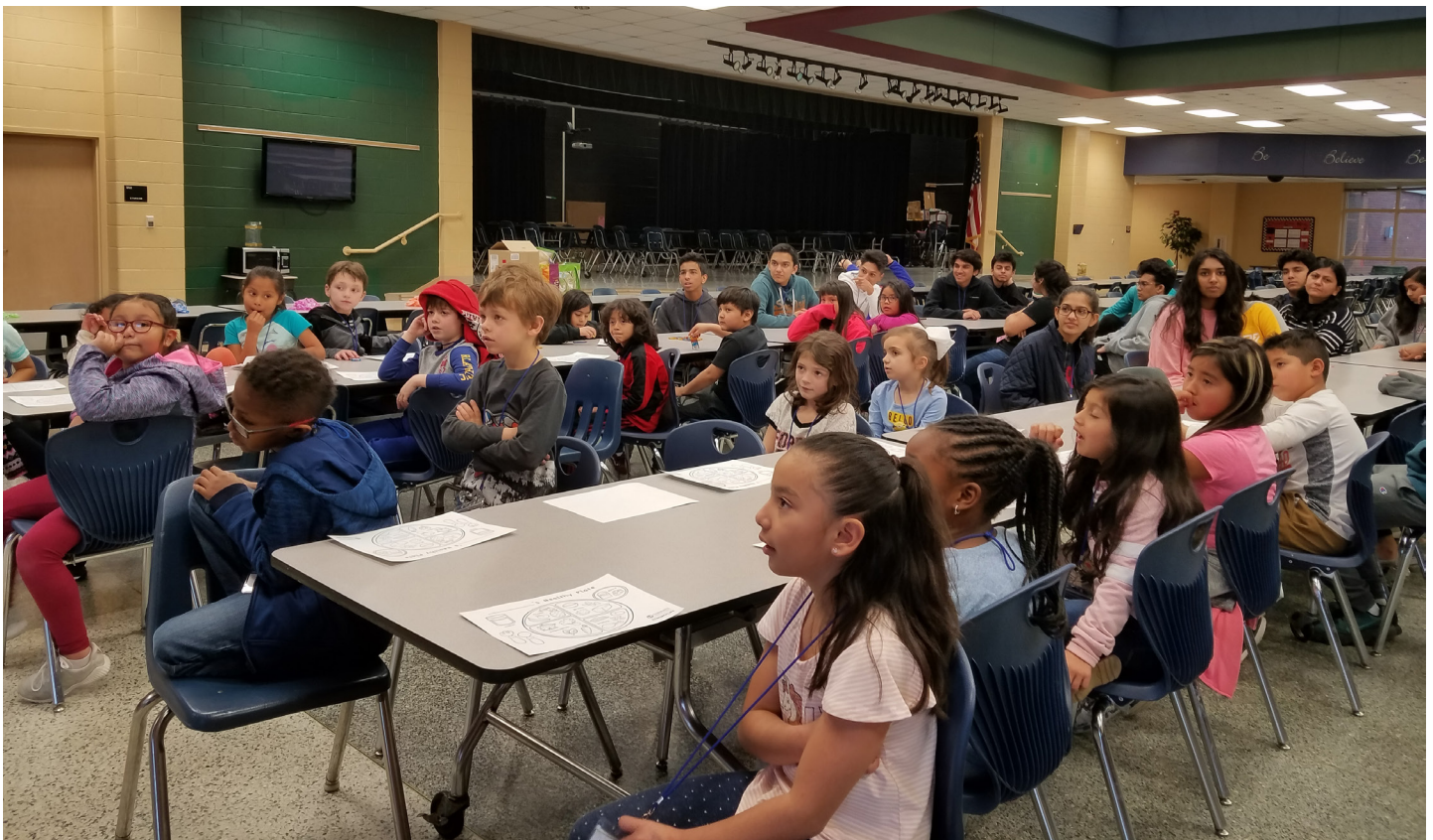
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Sewa volunteers Manika Singh, Divyaraj Singh, Bharat Singh, Amod Sureka, Raj Sureka, Jay Sureka, and Swadesh Katoch helped special education teacher Mrs. Anna Doll to build a community garden. They sowed seeds, watered plants, and laughed and played with the little ones. As seeds sprouted, leaves grew, branches spread, and flowers blossomed they had taught each other a valuable lesson: it is easy and fun to grow fresh, organic and healthy food!

Light the Frame

Considering more than 13 million children live in homes that cannot afford wholesome, healthy food, community and home gardens show a path to achieve food self-reliance. To help Mrs. Doll and her students grow vegetables round the year, Sewa volunteers Siya Katoch, Abhinay Sharma, Nithin Reddy and Abhishek Pasupuleti worked in the indoor green-house garden. They helped replace old lights with new LED bulbs.

During the 2018 fall season, 15-25 Sewa volunteers spent three hours every second and fourth Saturday morning with first and second grade students from the same elementary school. As part of the ASPIRE program, they helped children read, write, and solve math problems. Some high school students from the Sewa community joined in to conduct STEM experiments. They also played soccer with the students, taught them yoga, and shared a healthy snack with the children before heading home.



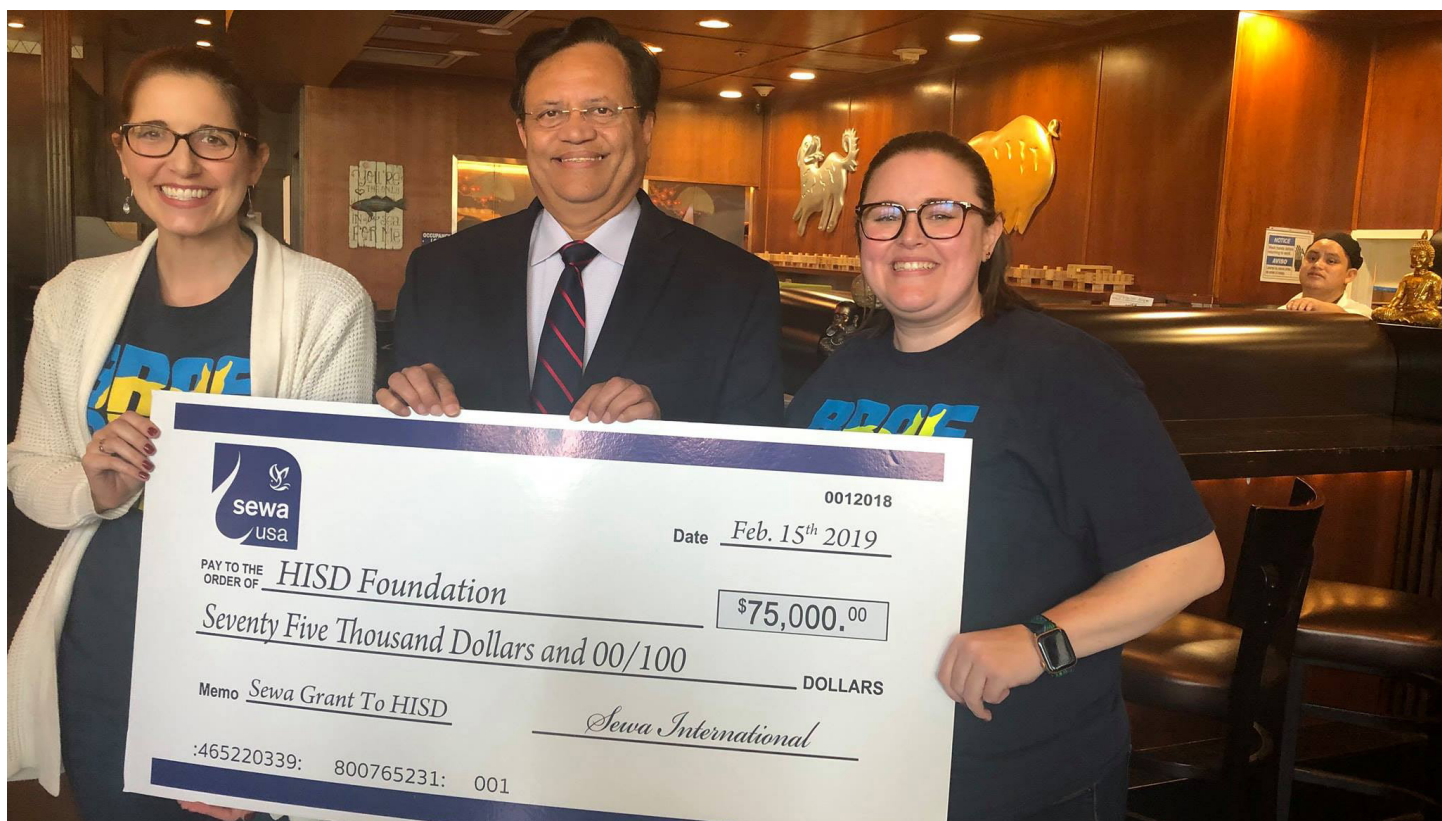
Limit Screen Time

In February, as part of the morning tutoring session, a dietician from Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, delivered an interactive talk on healthy food habits. Children learned about sugar content in soda, sports drinks, and juice and understood why water is the best drink for their body. Children listened in to know why it is important to fill in half their plates with fruits and vegetables during lunch and dinner time. They also learned how staying active and limiting screen time help them lead a healthy life.

Sewa volunteer Abhinay Sharma’s words to Mrs. Doll sum up how the Atlanta Sewa team rallied behind the ASPIRE program: “Just ask Sewa, and you’ll have dozens of people to help!”

Sewa Houston Pitches in to Revitalize Elementary School

Braeburn Elementary School, before Hurricane Harvey did serious damage to it, campus was a place where parents and community members gathered, worked with teachers, shared resources, and ensured children got a good education. Hurricane Harvey caused severe damage to the school, and students have had to relocate twice in the past 18 months because of the damage to the school. Sewa's Houston Chapter saw this as an opportunity to help revitalize the school. They applied for a grant from the Houston Independent School District (HISD) Foundation to provide services to the school, and on February 15, 2019, Gitesh Desai, President, Sewa International, Houston Chapter, presented a check for \$75,000 to the Braeburn Elementary School at an event attended by about 80 staff members, administrators, and teachers of the school.



Gitesh Desai (center) presenting a check for \$75,000 to Amanda Sebba, Vice Principal, Braeburn Elementary (on the left) and Amanda Rodgers, Principal, Braeburn Elementary (on the right)

The grant money will help Sewa launch a mental health and wellness initiative by introducing yoga in the classrooms. It will also help in providing mindfulness training to teachers, staff, and students in the school. Part of this health and wellness initiative includes the creation of a "Wellness Flexible Space" on the school campus, art installation, and hydration stations throughout the school. "It is heartening and exciting that Sewa can work with Braeburn, and the school district, to make the lives of children healthier and happier," said Gitesh Desai.

HISD is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh largest in the United States, enrolling nearly 214,000 students in grades Pre-K through 12. About 75 percent of the students attending HISD schools – or about 160,500 children – are economically disadvantaged. Many of these children, and the schools they attend, have significant needs that go beyond what the school district's budget can provide.

The new Braeburn Elementary School will open in 2020. The two-story 106,700-square-foot-building will feature open, brightly colored learning spaces, large windows, abundant natural light, and extended learning spaces throughout the building for individual and group collaboration. Sewa will use the space towards the front of the building as a Wellness Flexible Space where yoga and meditation classes will be held. Sewa will also offer workshops and classes providing information on diabetes, as well as offer classes on health and nutrition, and financial and mental wellness. "We are here to work with the Houston area communities, and we want to guarantee that our children grow up healthy, along with ensuring that their families grow strong and independent," said Gitesh Desai.



Jayanthi Ramanan, Project Director, Toilet and Hygiene Project for the Girl Child, has spent a major part of her life volunteering for a variety of social causes and being the voice of the poor across India. She has spearheaded many crowdfunding events and has raised millions of dollars to support various social causes.

Now a resident of Austin, Texas, Jayanthi joined Sewa International's Cleveland Chapter in 2010 as a volunteer. She traveled to India in 2013 on a Sewa project but prior to that she had worked in the inner city and local communities of the US working with poor African-American families counselling them on drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancies, and education for children and women.

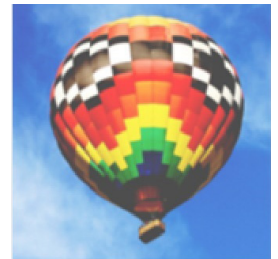
The Toilet and Hygiene Project for the Girl Child was conceived by Sewa International in 2014 with support from donors in the US and India to provide sanitation facilities to the vulnerable sections of society. One of the major goals of the project is to rid society of the accepted practice of open defecation. Jayanthi Ramanan has spearheaded the project since 2014.

The first installation of toilets was in 2015 in the shanty towns of Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka. Other areas of Karnataka were also targeted for such toilet installation in 2015. The project was expanded in 2017 to include the cities of Lucknow and Agra in the state of Uttar Pradesh, and in rural areas of the state of Tamil Nadu. However, just sanitation facilities do not suffice to help in the overall development and education of the girl child. Thus, the model was expanded to include sanitation, education, healthcare, and community development to aim at the holistic development of rural and underserved areas of India.

Jayanthi's husband, Ram Ramanan, a retired executive in the aluminum industry, helps Jayanthi in her busy volunteering work. They have raised three children, all well-settled in the United States, and instead of spending their "golden years" in leisure, Jayanthi and Ram have dedicated themselves to enriching the lives of the poor and the underserved.

Sewa National Conference – May 4-5, 2019, Phoenix, AZ.

Participating in Sewa International's national conference is a great way to network with other Sewa volunteers, learn about the organization's progress, and get inspired. Sewa Phoenix Chapter is hosting this year's National Conference on May 4th and 5th in Phoenix, AZ. Continuing a unique Sewa tradition, Phoenix Sewa volunteers are going to pick up and drop off attendees at the airport. They are also working with local families for attendees' staying arrangements. Participation is by invitation only.



Venue: Thunderbird School, 1750 W Thunderbird Road, Phoenix, AZ 85023
Register online: <https://sewausa.org/NC2019>

Upcoming Events

- Feb **28** to Apr **28**, 2019 : Sewa San Antonio | *Sewa Annual Gala 2019* | Mahalakshmi Hall, Hindu Temple San Antonio, TX
- Feb **1** to Sept **1**, 2019 : Sewa North Jersey | *Lead Program for High Schoolers* | Edison/Monroe/ChesterField Central New Jersey, NJ
- Mar **9** to Apr **6**, 2019 : Sewa Washington DC | *Yoga for Family Bonding* | India International School, 4433 Brookefield Corporate Drive, Chantilly, VA
- Mar **23**, 2019 : Sewa Atlanta | *14th Annual Color/Holi Festival* | Atlanta Cricket Fields – 5323 Keith Bridge, Cumming Georgia, GA
- Mar **23**, 2019 : Sewa San Diego | *Holi 2019 – The Festival of Colors* | Mira Mesa Recreation Center, 8575 New Salem Street, San Diego, CA
- Mar **31**, 2019 : Sewa Atlanta | *ChessMates Tournament* | Chesstronics Academy – 1675 Peachtree Pkwy, Suite # 160, Cumming, GA

Sewa International

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