



New Jersey Family Camp – A Memorable Event



North Jersey and Central Jersey chapters of Sewa recently organized a family camp on two separate weekends at the Jagannath Dham campsite located in the beautiful Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. Jagannath Dham is nearly six hour drive from New Jersey. Despite the distance, the combined attendance at the camp exceeded 170 people!

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Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Family,

Namaste! I write this especially to those of you whom I have not yet met or interacted with. This is both a little self-introduction and some loud thinking about my role at Sewa, and what I believe our goals are here at Sewa.

I came in contact with Sewa after my college days in late 2004, and since then this journey has continued. In my personal and professional life Sewa has taught me so many things that also helps me in my day-to-day life. I will be grateful for those values forever.

As you all know, one among Sewa's top three missions is promoting volunteerism. It is also part of my own family values and traditions. This sense of responsibility for the well-being of fellow citizens, countrymen, and society in general is what needs to be continually nurtured. This not only gives increased recognition to an individual but also creates public awareness of the crucial role played by volunteers in the organization's mission-oriented goals and value system.

Another objective of Sewa is to support the local community and its growth. Our engagement with people locally and to enhance and appreciate the diversity of the communities we live in, especially as it relates to our life in our adopted nation of the United States is very, very important. By promoting volunteerism, we not only bond with fellow citizens and the diverse society we are a part of, we also contribute to the individual's growth in attaining a higher level of satisfaction in their life.

Coming to the immediate events, we have had severe monsoon floods in Bharat. The tireless efforts of our volunteers, and the generous donations from our donors have helped us lend a helping hand to rebuild and repair homes and communities. With hundreds of volunteers on the ground we have begun to make the difference and people are thankful for the dedicated and hard work of our volunteers.

In this digitally connected world where information can travel instantaneously, Sewa is trying to create a footprint in social media platforms and trying to provide firsthand and quick information about the efforts we are making to provide relief, and to help people connect with one another and inform their loved ones about their status and/or their need for help.

It is always a privilege to reach out to our volunteers, our well-wishers, and our supporters through this monthly column in our newsletter. So, in closing, let me request once again from all of you your help in spreading the goodness of Sewa and to touch every life you come in contact with in this world with love and care.

Thank you, and dhanyavad!



Rakesh Pathak
Director, Information Technology



Sewa Yatra: A Visit to Amrithasakthi

Sewa Yatra provides opportunities for volunteers to visit Sewa projects when they travel on work or with their family. It allows them to experience the different dimensions of Sewa work and share experiences from their home chapters with members of the host chapters. Here is a first-person account of a Sewa Yatra by Rajni Menon from Rochester, NY.

"I'm Rajni Menon from the Westchester NY chapter. I joined Sewa last year, and I'm one of the founder members of our chapter. Last month I visited Kerala, India with my family. I made it a Sewa Yatra.

My passion is cooking and working on projects supporting children. I wanted to learn more about Sewa projects in Kerala, and with the help from local Sewa volunteer, Gopa Kumar, I decided to visit a Sewa girls' home -- Amrithasakthi -- on July 6, which also happened to be my birthday.



Amrithasakthi is currently home to 12 young girls, and I decided to prepare lunch for them. It gave me immense joy to cook and eat lunch with the children and caretakers of Amrithasakthi along with my family. Together, we had great fun. After lunch, I discussed the importance of emotional intelligence, self-confidence and education with these young girls. I felt very happy to meet these incredible girls on my visit, and I plan to raise funds for them by organizing cooking event fund raisers.



I would like to thank trustees, Pushpa Balakrishnan and Sheena Arjun, staff member Saju Santappan, and my family for making our Amrithasakthi visit a memorable one."

2019 Floods - Sewa Rescue Work in Kerala

Following the severe monsoon flooding in South India this year, the Deseeya Sevabharathi Keralam stepped in to provide aid and work on rehabilitating the flood victims. The flood hit the hardest in northern Kerala, specifically Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode, and Wayanad, but overall the whole state experienced severe disruption. Over 13,000 houses have been damaged and 113 people lost their lives. Hundreds of camps have been set up in the state to help families affected by the floods.

Sevabharathi volunteers focused their efforts mainly in northern Kerala, with more than 15,000 volunteers working 24/7 to save more than 10,000 people. With over 240 rescue activities around the state, an operating control room at Thrissur and a medical unit at Calicut, Sevabharathi has been operating with the motto 'Service to Man is Service to God'. During the period of rescue operations, Linu, a valuable volunteer from Calicut, lost his life while saving others.

Some of Sevabharathi's rescue activities include arranging boats to pick up people trapped in the Kozhikode and Malappuram districts and cremating the dead. Food, clothing, and other essential items have also been collected and donated to flood victims, especially those in villages and remote forest communities. Sevabharathi has supplied over 200,000 liters of drinking water to people in the flooded areas. Deseeya Sevabharathi Keralam volunteers continue to give their all protecting and serving those affected, and in dedication to their country and to the local communities.

Bench Restoration Earns Goodwill

Sewa International's Chesterfield, New Jersey team recently restored 115 benches in city parks and other public places. They cleaned and polished the benches by sanding and staining them. It took an average of five hours to make each bench look like new, and 52 Sewa volunteers worked over a month to complete fixing all 115 benches.

The Sewa team logged over 650 hours in this effort and earned a lot of praise for their work by the local community and the county administration.



Sewa International Chesterfield, NJ volunteers with the City Police Chief and the restored bench in a park

Kiddie Keep Well Camp

Central New Jersey Sewa volunteers also earned kudos for their help in conducting the "Kiddie Keep Well" summer camp for underprivileged children organized by the Middlesex County Recreation Council. About 25 to 30 children attending Sewa's LEAD program volunteered for 30 days at the camp. Working in three three-hour shifts, they clocked 1800 volunteer hours and helped serve breakfast, cut vegetables, and wash dishes.

Sixty volunteers participated in Central New Jersey's LEAD program this year. Sewa's help in restoring benches and running the "Kiddie Keep Well Camp" has garnered a lot of positive attention to Sewa International, and the City of Chesterfield invited Sewa volunteers to the township meeting on August 28 to thank them for their work and to hand over certificates of appreciation.

Ongoing Efforts to Rehabilitate Kerala Flood Victims

In collaboration with Kerala based Deseeya Sevabhharathi Keralam, Sewa International continues to provide relief and rehabilitation to the many thousands who have been affected by the severe monsoon flooding as well as the continuing heavy rainfall in the region for months. There are four major projects that have been undertaken to provide the services needed for the affected people: counseling centers, housing, school building, and reverse osmosis (RO) based water purification plants.

Counseling centers: The Punarjani Counseling Center project was officially inaugurated on March 5 in Ernakulam. Within the first two months after the inauguration, five centers were opened – in Alwaye, Budhanoor, Kodungallur, Angamaly, and Thuravoor – with one state coordinator and five counselors. In May, nine other counselors were posted at nine centers, and a two-day training workshop was organized to train and prepare all 14 counselors. A clinical psychologist has been appointed as a technical coordinator who provides expert guidance. By the end of June, all 14 centers were fully functioning, and were offering psychological counseling to children, flood victims, and the general public. A two-day camp was also held at Thalavady, a heavily flood-affected area, and counselors visited about 250 houses and offered group and individual counseling. Following the successful first camp, four more counseling camps were conducted -- at Thiruvananthapuram, Chalakudy, Kodungallur, and Mayannur.

Out of the 14 centers, eleven are in girls' hostels (dorms)/schools (*Balika Sadanam*). The counselors stay in the dorms and offer regular counseling.

Housing Project: Alappuzha is one of the most flood-affected districts. As part of the flood rehabilitation program 24 new homes are being constructed for the flood victims in 12 villages (panchayats) of the district. The initial work of selecting beneficiaries, building contractors, and forming the coordination committee was completed in April 2019. Foundation and brick work have been completed on all 24 houses, with finishing work done on 20 of them. Completion of work on four homes has been delayed due to heavy rains. All houses are planned to be completed by the end of September 2019.



School Building Program: Two schools in the Alappuzha district selected for the project. Saraswathy Vidya Mandiram, a school located in Thuravoor, a remote village, and Sree Krishna Vidyapeedham, in Ambalappuzha, a coastal village, are being helped in constructing new buildings. The building plans have been approved by the municipal authorities, and land documentation completed for both schools. Building contractors have been chosen, and a construction committee is monitoring the construction.

Reverse Osmosis (RO) Plants: Water-borne diseases are rampant in Alappuzha district, as residents have limited access to safe, hygienic drinking water. As part of the flood rehabilitation project in Alappuzha, Sewa international, with the support of United Way Chennai, has taken up the installation of RO plants in Kuttanad taluk (county) which was the worst flood - affected. Three RO plants are already in place, with the first one located in Kavalam in North Veliyanad benefiting about 150 households.

New Jersey Family Camp – A Memorable Event

The North Jersey family camp, held between August 2 and August 4, was attended by 102 people. The Central Jersey family camp was conducted on August 10 and August 11 and attended by 70 people. Both camps included participants of all ages – from grandparents to toddlers.

Prof. Sree Sreenath, President of Sewa International, attended the North Jersey camp and gave an overview of the organization and projects across the globe. He spoke about Sewa's vision, mission, volunteer base, and the positive impact Sewa has had in improving people's lives in many countries. Many families that were new to Sewa learned about the organization's work from his talk.



Central Jersey Sewa - JD - CAMP - Participants

In the Central Jersey camp, Vijay Mallampati from the *Sponsor a Child* project team also talked about Sewa International's vision, mission, and achievements. Sewa volunteer Rajesh Sharma gave a brief talk about qualities of great leaders.

In both camps, after the inaugural session, participants were divided into multiple teams to perform service tasks such as mulching the trees and shrubs, moving hay-bales, weed removal, and cooking at the Jagannath Dham and tending cows at the Govind Goshala. Volunteers also painted six picnic benches at the campsite and cemented the Goshala's basement.

After the service tasks, participants from both camps visited Letchworth State Park, called the Grand Canyon of the East, 30 miles away from the campsite. Sewa families enjoyed trekking to the several waterfalls and beautiful valleys situated in the park. After driving back to the camp site, they enjoyed camp-fire activities, cultural programs, and fireworks at night.

Sewa families returned home from the camp with fond memories and newly made friendships that would fuel their Sewa journey.

Suresh Vaishya, originally from Uttar Pradesh, is now a resident of one of the big metros in the US – Atlanta. He was introduced to Sewa in 2014 and was immediately inspired by the good work being done by the Atlanta chapter. He saw how as a team the chapter members worked together to make a difference in the community. He says, “In Sewa we get to work with many like-minded people who want to serve selflessly and help those in need, and it is always inspiring and energizing”. He decided to join the Atlanta team and since 2014 is an active volunteer. His current responsibility is that of joint coordinator for the chapter, which includes maintenance of the Sewa website for Atlanta. The Atlanta chapter has grown much over the past few years and now has an event almost every other week. Recent developments/ initiatives include building and growing the ASPIRE program, community services like “Adopt a Highway”, blood drives, sports events, and of course the major annual Holi festival gathering. Suresh is a graduate in Chemical Engineering and is currently working with Rheem Manufacturing. He was born and brought up in the small town of Boisar, Maharashtra. He is married to his very supportive wife Rachna, and they have a pretty daughter, Pavki, who is currently in sixth grade. “I am lucky to be a part of this wonderful team in Atlanta, and Sewa has inspired me to contribute to the welfare of society as much as I can,” he says.



Ongoing Efforts to Rehabilitate Kerala Flood Victims

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Water distribution is monitored and supervised by a local committee, with the neediest paying about 50 paise per liter (a few cents per gallon). The beneficiaries can collect 10 liters of water at a time, morning and evening.

The second and third RO plants will be located at Bajanamadam and Kayalpuram. Construction work is being supervised by a local committee, and electric connection is being sought to begin operating the plants by September 15, 2019.



Upcoming Events

- Jan **19** to Dec **21**, 2019 : Sewa Atlanta | *Food for Hungry* | Otwell Middle School Cafeteria, 605 Tribble Gap Road, Cumming, GA
- Aug **1** to Jun **30**, 2020 : Sewa Bay Area | *Authentic Yoga to prevent, Control and Manage Diabetes* | Fremont, San Jose, San Ramon, Saratoga in Bay Area, CA
- Sep **7** to Sep **29**, 2019 : Sewa Bay Area | *Authentic Yoga to prevent, Control and Manage Diabetes* | Evergreen, San Jose, CA
- Sep **21**, 2019 : Sewa San Diego | *2019 Fundraiser* | Lincoln High School, 4777 Imperial Avenue, San Diego, CA
- Sep **21**, 2019 : Sewa Arizona | *Sewa Fundraiser – Bollywood Musical Evening* | Piper Repertory Theater, Mesa Arts Center Address: 1st East Main St, Mesa AZ
- Oct **5**, 2019 : Sewa Bay Area | *Dandiya 2019* | Silver Creek High School, San Jose CA

Sewa International

P.O.Box 820867
Houston, TX 77282-0867

(708) 872-7392
info@sewausea.org
www.sewausea.org



Editorial Team: Prof. Ramesh Rao, Columbus State University, GA; crucially supported by Vidyasagar Tontalapur, Denver, Inchara Kumar (Media Intern), and Kusuma, Sewa Bengaluru Office, India.