

On International Women's Day, Kavita Tewary Recognized with CAIT Award



Pic: Kavita Tewary being introduced to the guest of honor, the founder of Lijjat Papad, Padamshri Jaswantiben Jamnadas Popat, at the CAIT Award Ceremony held in New Delhi, India.

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Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Friends,

It has been a year since we began responding to the global crisis of the coronavirus pandemic. Our volunteers across the country have done tremendous work, and spent countless hours coming to the aid of those in need during the height of the pandemic. They continue to participate in food drives, giving out truckloads of food every week, and working hard to register people to receive the vaccination.

This good work does not go without recognition. We are proud to have received the fourth consecutive highest 4-Star Rating with a 100 percent score for accounting and transparency from Charity Navigator. This rating means we have maintained strong financial health and offered uncompromising accountability through the past years.

Sewa volunteers are also hundred percent committed to serving humanity in distress without bias. This is possible for Sewa volunteers as they are inspired by the noble ideas of Sarvam Khalvidam Brahman and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. The fundamental principle is that Divinity resides in all beings -- human, animal, bird, or plant. The same Divinity which is present in me is also present in other beings. Therefore, serving humanity and other beings is serving Divinity. Discriminating between "mine" and "others", "believers" and "non-believers", "black" and "white"

goes against the foundational principles of Sewa International and does not fit within our worldview.

In today's world, even charity could be done with hidden agendas or packaged in egotistical expressions. The conscious as well as unconscious urge to expect beneficiaries to follow their beliefs is not uncommon for faith-based charities. However, in the Hindu concept of service, the motive is always the spiritual elevation of the served and the serving, the receiver and the giver, and with the understanding that one should work without expecting "the fruits thereof". Sewa volunteers serve without any expectations and engage themselves in selfless service as an integral part of one's spiritual practice and inner journey.

We celebrated Holi in March, still maintaining social distance, and I hope that just as we sprinkled vibrant colors on each other we will spread love, trust, and understanding between one another.

Sincerely,



Sandeep Khadkekar
Vice President
(Marketing & Fund Development)



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It is not just a feather in the cap of the Houston Chapter that its Executive Director, Kavita Tewary, was honored with the "CAIT Women Entrepreneurship Award" on March 08, 2021, International Women's Day, but indeed a matter of pride to all those who are dedicated to the work of Sewa. Indeed, it is Kavita's award first, but that honor illuminates the work of all Sewa volunteers and leaders. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) is the apex body of the business community of India and represents more than 80 million business establishments through more than 40,000 trade associations. CAIT, in their announcement of the award said that they sought to honor "some of the most credible women entrepreneurs who have excelled in their respective fraternity with outstanding and exceptional work".

Kavita Tewary joined the Houston chapter of Sewa International in 2012 as a volunteer, working in the refugee communities, especially the Hindu refugees from Bhutan in the Greater Houston Area. She joined the Sewa team as a Program Coordinator in 2014. Kavita worked with women in the refugee community starting with a sewing project to help the women refugees earn an income. She also started computer and tailoring classes for the refugees. Since 2017 she has been serving as the Executive Director of Sewa's Houston Chapter.

To support students in the refugee population, Kavita started ASPIRE tutorials in early 2013, and the program has expanded to serve three refugee and immigrant resettlement apartment communities, serving over 200 students now. Her work was recognized by the Texas Association of School Board in 2020. Kavita has continued to serve in the cause of education not only in Houston but has also helped Sewa International chapters with similar programs in California, Georgia, and Ohio. Kavita was also honored with the Parents for Public Schools of Houston Award for her service.

Over the years Kavita has worked in many disaster services projects. She has worked with disaster relief teams both in the US and across the world where Sewa International is active. This past year, the COVID-19 crisis has engaged much of Kavita's time and energy, and her team of collaborators were instrumental in starting 10 helplines across the US. She also played a major role in the launching of the first website for COVID plasma registry.

Currently, Kavita Tewary is engaged in the planning phase of a project to vaccinate vulnerable populations in her community, especially those from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. She embraces the concept of "Servant Leadership" and is committed to ensuring the happiness of all (Sarve bhavantu sukhinah). "Sewa is fortunate and proud to have dedicated, compassionate, and mission-oriented servant leaders like Kavita Tewary. On this Women's Day we thank all our women volunteers who have taken extraordinary initiatives in developing and shaping our various programs," said Arun Kankani, President of Sewa International.

In the context of Women's Day, Arun Kankani also mentioned and highlighted the work of Jayanti Ramanan and her team who started the "Health and Hygiene for Girls" program, and the work of Dr. Hetal Nayak who made "Yoga for Sewa" program a city-wide affair in San Antonio, TX. He also commended the women leaders in Sewa chapters across the US.

White Plains, NY Selects Sewa International to Help in COVID-19 Vaccination Program

The City of White Plains, NY has selected Sewa International, Westchester Chapter, to assist in implementing its COVID Angels project to help seniors in the community register for COVID-19 vaccinations.

Students attending the Sewa LEAD program of Westchester are calling unvaccinated seniors and helping them navigate the process of registering and getting appointments online. The city launched the COVID Angels project after receiving calls from seniors who had difficulty securing an appointment.

The City of White Plains Youth Bureau and Recreation & Parks Department are managing the project. Volunteers can sign up to help senior citizens secure appointments or collect data related to the program.

“The city placing its trust in Sewa International to implement this project is a very important development. This is a result of the great work done by the Westchester team in serving the community during the pandemic. Congratulations and best wishes,” said Arun Kankani, President of Sewa International.

“Sewa’s family services team and COVID-19 helpline teams should consider focusing on helping seniors and underserved population in their communities getting vaccinated. We have the right resources and connections to make a big impact,” Arun Kankani said.

Sewa International Earns the Fourth Consecutive 4-star Rating from Charity Navigator

Sewa International received the fourth consecutive 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, America’s leading independent charity evaluator.

In a letter addressed to Sewa president Arun Kankani, Charity Navigator’s President and CEO Michael Thatcher said, “This exceptional designation from Charity Navigator sets Sewa International, Inc apart from its peers and demonstrates to the public its trustworthiness.”

Congratulating Sewa on attaining the coveted rating, Mr. Thatcher noted, “This is our highest possible rating and indicates that your organization adheres to sector best practices and executes its mission in a financially efficient way”.

As per Mr. Thatcher, attaining a 4-star rating verifies that Sewa International exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in our area of work. Only 21% of the charities received at least 4 consecutive 4-star evaluations, which indicates that Sewa outperforms most other charities in America.

In the ‘Financial’ and ‘Accountability and Transparency’ categories, we received a perfect 100 score. Arun Kankani thanked Sewa’s finance team and volunteers for following Sewa’s guiding principle ‘Serving People is Serving God’. He said this rating would strengthen our resolve to serve people in need and enable them to lead a life with dignity wherever they are.



Certificate issued by Charity Navigator to Sewa International recognizing it as a 4-star rated charity

Sewa Funds Research Center to Study Himalayan Herbs

Sewa International is helping a non-profit in the Himalayan mountain region to build a Nature Cure and Yoga Center that facilitates herbal medicine research. Himalaya is home to numerous medicinal plants and the center aims to study them and develop disease-specific herbal medicines.

On February 19, Dr. Dhananjay Kulkarni, a Professor in Pharmacology at Ayurveda College, Osmanabad (Maharashtra) placed a foundation stone for the center. Named ‘Arogya’ (Health in Sanskrit), this facility is being built in the Research Institute of World’s Ancient Traditions Cultures and Heritage (RIWATCH) campus situated in the Lower Dibang Valley in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, India.



Dr. Dhanjay Kulkarni laying the foundation stone for the Arogya Center on Feb 21 2020 in Arunachala Pradesh, India.

On the same day, Dr. Mrudula Kulkarni, an Ayurveda Practitioner started the groundwork for the meditation Center in the “Himalayan Herbs and Ethnic Medicine” garden of the RIWATCH campus. Arogya Center has an estimated project cost of \$140,000.

Dr. Dhananjay Kulkarni has completed his Ph.D. in Ayurvedic Medicine and has published more than 100 research papers in national and international research journals. His most favorite subject for research is cancer and herbal medicines. Both Dr. Dhananjay and DR. Mrudula Kulkarni are joining RIWATCH in July 2021 to lead the Arogya Centre as volunteers.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Jigisha Shah, a realtor in Marietta, GA, wanted to help others when the COVID-19 infections started to spread in America. While searching on Facebook, she found the Sewa Atlanta group and got added to several Sewa project teams.

To mitigate an acute shortage of masks at that time, Sewa was starting a mask-making group in Marietta. Jigisha became part of that group and also got involved in collecting food and other material donations from people. She started helping in packing and distributing collected items and started her Sewa journey.

While happy that she was able to do her bit to help the people in need during the pandemic, Jigisha’s joy had no limit when she found that people were very forthcoming to donate and all that needed was just a phone call. She would go pick up items from the local grocery or home and drop them off at some volunteer’s home for packing or delivery.



Meanwhile, she came across food4lives, a Sewa group created by Marietta women volunteers, and started cooking meals to serve the homeless people in Atlanta. She is busy with her career and responsibilities at home but says she is always looking to do more Sewa work. Jigisha lives in Marietta and co-owns Safe Haven Mortgage Inc with her husband who is a financial advisor and a mortgage broker. Her son is a senior at Georgia Tech studying computer science. Jigisha’s parents live with her and she counts that as a blessing in her life. She says she is happy to be a small part of the Sewa mission.

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