

## Harvey Rehab work by Sewa International

Sewa International was awarded a \$397,600 grant by the *Greater Houston Community Foundation (GHCF)*, and raised a similar amount of money through its own donation drive, post Hurricane Harvey. The GHCF grant was awarded for offering *Disaster Case Management Services* to the Greater Houston community that includes Houston and Harris County, and to help families affected by the floods rebuild their lives.

Sewa is carrying out rehabilitation activities in the Greater Houston Area as well as in Coastal Texas offering the affected families help in identifying and mitigating their unmet needs, especially in the areas of health and physical infrastructure. Toward that end, Sewa is organizing medical camps, and helping rebuild destroyed homes and damaged roads.

Given the quick turnaround needed following the GHCF grant, Sewa hired Ashok Nigam as the Director for Disaster Case Management, and Achalesh Amar as Director of Rebuilding and Rehabilitation. A total of 25 case managers were recruited, and they are working to identify affected families, survey their needs, and organize relief. An additional staff of four was hired to provide administrative and finance-related support. Nearly 1,250 volunteers have also been involved in the rehabilitation work.



From Left: President Sree Sreenath, conversing with Houston Rehab Team.

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## Executive's Corner

### Dear Sewa Supporters:

Greetings! I want to share with you my thoughts on the significance and real benefits of community service -- *sewa*. Each of you has been serving humanity in your own way by sharing your time, effort, wealth, and talent with needy people. Serving the less fortunate brings an immediate sense of happiness, which every Sewa supporter has experienced. But what really keeps us continuously engaged in *sewa* is the subtle impressions on the mind left by serving. When someone else who has no direct relationship with us benefits from our *sewa*, it makes us happy – why? Why does a hungry mom feel satiated when her hungry child eats food? This happens because we are all interconnected, but this awareness of interconnection remains dormant until we serve others out of compassion.

Serving others activates awareness in our mind and leads to expansion of our consciousness, which translates to happiness. Our sages had this insight long ago and articulated it as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, meaning “the whole world is a family.” Therefore, one indirect but real benefit of community service is the expansion of our consciousness and the happiness that comes with it. As our consciousness expands, the way we perceive the world gradually changes:

competitiveness transforms into collaboration; indulgence translates into sharing; and that generates harmony in society. Therefore, harmonious living in society is another real benefit of serving the community.

Finally, this reduces conflicts among individuals, between an individual and a group, and among groups. The subject of global peace is an important matter of public discussion and debate at present. The path to global peace begins with community service.

I want to congratulate every Sewa supporter for contributing to global peace by your act of *sewa*. I invite everyone reading this message to join us and contribute to any *sewa* project of your choice. Sewa International has various service projects in different spheres such as education, healthcare and nutrition, and family services in more than 40 cities across the United States, and several countries around the world. Let me exhort you: pick a project and become its ambassador in your local community! With best wishes,

Ashwani Garg  
**Ashwani Garg**  
 VP Administration



## Reviving and Celebrating Native/Ancient Traditions

Swadesh Katoch, Sewa International's Director for Disaster Recovery as well as the Bhutanese Empowerment Project, attended the Sixth Triennial International Conference and Gathering of Elders, in Mumbai, India.

The conference, from February 01-04, was organized by the International Center for Cultural Studies (ICCS). The conference brings together tribal representatives from around the world in celebration and the cherishing of ancient life, cultures and traditions, consonant with the Hindu traditions and ethos of India.

ICCS is a non-profit organization with a mission to facilitate the revitalization of diverse ancient traditions and cultures of the world by fostering a forum for learning, understanding, and networking. The event is held every three years in India, in different locations, with this sixth conference held in Mumbai. The theme of this conference was "**Exploring Divinity through the Feminine in Ancient Cultures**". Some 250 people from more than 32 countries attended the conference.

The four goals for this conference were:

- Exploring ancient cultures
- Facilitating relationships
- Cross pollinating ideas and experiences
- Inspiring and encouraging delegates to spread their influence across their native lands

The goals were pursued by:

- Ceremonies
- Sharing circles
- Workshops
- Film screening
- Cultural fair



*Celebrating the sacred fire at the ICCS Conference*

Katoch said, "For me, attending this conference was an unbelievable, magical and spiritual experience. A few decades ago many of these surviving cultures had no idea that similar cultures exist in other parts of the world. All these ancient cultures worship nature, sun, fire, water, mountains, and planets like us. Even if some of them knew between them, and no effort to bring them together to share knowledge about themselves and to exchange ideas, sustain their culture, and empower their members. ICCS should be commended for this impressive and laudable effort."

## Fundraising: Bay Area Chapter Thinks Out of the Box

Sewa Bay Area chapter has organized unique fundraising events for various domestic and international projects.



- The LEAD team of high school students organized a bike-a-thon in November 2017 and raised more than \$4,000 for the *Stop Diabetes Movement* program.
- Students in the San Ramon LEAD program sold pizza to raise funds for the local Sewa chapter.
- In December 2017, a dance program showcasing 125 performers from nine dance schools and one music school performed "*Dance for Sewa*" a multicultural dance extravaganza raising over \$6,000 for the project "*Toilet and Hygiene for the girl child*". A similar event is planned in April 2018.
- "Paint for Sewa" -- a unique painting/art workshop by Minu Shukla, well-known artist residing in the Bay Area, raised funds for the *Stop Diabetes Movement* program.
- The Sewa team is also promoting *Mangala Nidhi* -- encouraging fundraising by individuals on occasions like *Arangetram* (dance debut), and music or dance concerts where the student requests attendees to donate money to Sewa through the Evite invitations.
- Under the Eat for Sewa program, the team plans to approach restaurants to donate \$1 per check of a week's transactions to Sewa.

## Harvey Rehab work by Sewa International

Beneficiaries include people of diverse backgrounds who were affected by the floods. Sewa is working with single parents, senior citizens, veterans, undocumented immigrants, and everyone across the communities. Over 800 households/1600 individuals have already benefited from this work, and the list is growing.

Among the many who have been helped we recount a couple of examples: when one of Sewa's case managers went to an outreach event, she was approached by a single mom. Just like any other client, the case manager registered the client's case and took down the details. On an average, it takes at least ten days to resolve a case. However, the client had no more than three days to find relief. The hurricane and the rain had flooded her house, and she was staying in an apartment complex with her teenage son. Due to property damage and increasing expenses she could not pay the rent and was facing eviction. If she did not pay her rent in three days she and her son would have had to move out. Reaching out to other organizations that provide financial aid would take longer. Fortunately, Sewa's case manager reached to the Sewa chapter coordinator who quickly took note of the case, arranged for the funding check from Sewa and personally delivered it to the client in order to save her from eviction. The case was resolved within three days!

Another case involved a couple of Sewa case managers who were scouting a flooded area in the neighborhood. One of them knocked on the door of a house that seemed to be damaged quite a bit. The owner, an old lady, opened the door. Our case managers entered the house and could not believe what they saw! There was mold all over the place and the rotting sheetrock had not been removed. The lady was in a wheel chair and could not get much done by herself. For reasons unknown, she could not get FEMA help. Lacking the money, she had not been able to hire construction workers. She had been living in the house full of mold for the past four months! Since the two Sewa case managers were also volunteers who had undergone training for the Hurricane Harvey clean-up and demolition, they helped clean a little bit of the mold so as to make the place livable until they could find more help. Our case managers were quick to set up an appointment for her with a housing repair non-profit group, and Sewa is in the process of getting financial aid for this senior citizen. They have also arranged for new furniture once her house is repaired. She has been given information about the free clinic for a health check-up, and will be advised appropriately for further action as regards her health. This is a typical example of a client with multiple needs and how Sewa case managers approach their work with passion and care to identify those in need and offer them the help and succor they deserve.



Sewa team inspecting and receiving Rehab material

Sewa International President, Prof. Sree Sreenath visited Rosharon, one of the hard-hit areas where our case managers and volunteers are pitching in to help. "Having visited many disaster recovery areas, I was truly shocked at the extent of the devastation and lack of recovery even after nearly six months in the Rosharon community, less than an hour away from Houston. Sewa International has made a commitment through our volunteers to serve this most underserved area -- a painful reminder of affliction and need in the midst of prosperity," he said.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Karishma Himatsinghani is a Sewa volunteer from the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) chapter. Introduced to Sewa by Rajesh Verma and Abhay Garg in 2008, Karishma began volunteering by offering driving lessons to members of the Bhutanese community. She has been a part of the core Sewa DFW team ever since.



Karishma volunteered during the Nepal Earthquake Fundraiser and led the Harvey Fundraiser in 2017, where Sewa DFW raised \$32,000. She has been promoting yoga as a healthy lifestyle practice by successfully organizing “*International Yoga Day*” for the past two years. As part of the “*Sewa Day*” celebrations, she has coordinated many activities including conducting free medical camps for the Bhutanese community. Prior to committing herself to Sewa, Karishma had volunteered with Santana Dharma Foundation and the International Hindi Association.

*“The clear purpose of Sewa International and its professional functioning pulled me towards this organization, and since then I am honored to be part of the Sewa DFW Team. My husband and two sons also take time off to volunteer and we are proud that we are able to volunteer as a family,”* says Karishma. She has also pledged 10% of the gross revenue from events organized by her company to Sewa.

Karishma began her career as a media professional in 2004 and currently runs her own internet radio, [www.radiokarishma.com](http://www.radiokarishma.com), as well as an event management company. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in Commerce and a Master’s degree in Economics. After working for a short period as an accountant and audit officer in India, she chose to pursue her passion in the performing arts. Karishma relocated to New Jersey in 2002 with her husband, Vinod Himatsinghani, and two sons, Devin and Jatin. They moved to Dallas in 2005, where they now reside. They adore their dog, Leo.

Sewa is proud to have the Himatsinghani family as volunteers and commend their commitment to serving society.

## Yuva for Sewa -- International Summer Internship

*Yuva for Sewa* is a summer internship program offering opportunities to college students as well as young professionals to contribute their time to serving humanity. The program is designed to actualize the message of Sewa International USA, which believes that “Service to Humanity is Service to Divinity.”

This year, the summer internship is from Jun 11, 2018 to Aug 10, 2018. Last date to apply for internship is Mar 31, 2018. [Click here](#) to learn more about *Yuva for Sewa*.

## Upcoming Events

Mar 17, 2018 : Bay Area, CA– *Stop Diabetes Yoga Workshop 2018*

Sep 14, 2018 : Sugarland, Katy, West Houston, TX – *Stop Diabetes Movement Camp*

### 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; Shyam Byra, Media Entrepreneur, Philanthropist and Businessman, Phoenix, AZ; and, crucially supported by our mission oriented staff -- Kavita Tewary, Sewa Houston; and Aravinda Rajagopal, Sewa Bengaluru Office, India.