

# NEWSLETTER

**Chapter: Central Jersey** 

October 2023

# A Message from the Sewa Central Jersey Chapter Coordinator



Rajesh Sharma The Central Jersey Chapter Coordinator Sewa International Inc.

The year 2023 has been a significant year for our Chapter. This year, five years since our inception, we have been awarded the NJ Governor's Volunteerism Award Honoree in the Health Care Category.



We continue to make significant contributions to healthcare, where our Family Services team undertook three major efforts this year. The team conducted our first free health camp; close to 100 people took advantage of a free blood screening and review of results by an Endocrinologist, Cardiologist, and Nephrologist. Secondly, the team conducted our first Yoga Therapy Camp for Back Pain Management with our partner Subodh Yoga.

Throughout the year, Family Services handled complex cases related to domestic violence, families in distress due to critical health conditions, and providing financial and legal advice through our partners to the affected families. Dedicated volunteers provide around the clock help on very critical cases. The call volume on our helpline has been slowly increasing, meaning we will need more volunteers to help in this area to continue making an impact on society.

Another significant achievement this year was being awarded the NJ Commission of AmeriCorps Planning Grant for Environmental Stewardship for Middlesex County. This is our first grant for the Chapter. We are also part of the National Commission 9/11 Service Day Grant. We have on-boarded dedicated staff to help with the planning and execution of these grants. We plan to apply for more grants in the coming days to serve the community at a much larger scale and impact.

This year, we were also able to do two fundraisers. One was a closed-group Musical Concert by the parents of a LEAD, with close to 200 people in attendance. The second one was a Garba Night we organized in partnership with an event management company. The Garba Night was a sold-out event with close to 1,000 attendees with our volunteers managing all the aspects of the event. We also had a Kite Festival event planned with Vadtal Dham, but it was canceled due to weather- we do still plan to do it next year. We also developed another idea in which we helped manage a 5K event for a non-profit organization, and in-turn, they helped to support our SAC program by sponsoring children.

Along with these new experiences and areas to expand, we have hit some milestones on our long-standing projects as well. The SewaMeal program, our flagship project to help with food insecurity in our areas, has rounded out 3 years. The small project we started to serve a family that suffered from loss of both earning parents in Edison has transformed into the SewaMeal program and is now serving 1,000 meals per month to families across underserved communities in Central and South Jersey.

Recently, we also had the invitation to be part of major outreach events like the Edison Dussehra Event, which had close to 10,000 people in attendance, the Edison Diwali Mela, the largest Diwali Mela in the US held by a township, with over 15,000 attendees, and also the grand inauguration of the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, with a turnout of over 3,000 attendees, including more than 60 heads of various organizations.

Internationally, we continue to keep our commitment to support various projects in India as well. Our support for SAC and SHE programs continues; we have already sponsored close to 20 children this year and are working to add support for SHE in the next few days.

#### **Chapter Highlights**

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#### Sushrut Sarpotdar



This month we would like to convey the heartbreaking news of the untimely passing of our Chapter's young volunteer LEAD Sushrut Sarpotdar.

Sushrut was an integral part of our LEAD program and made a significant impact through his volunteer work with the Central Jersey Chapter since 2022. He will be remembered for his hard work, kindness, gentleness, and the indelible mark he left on everyone he encountered.

Our condolences to the Sarpotdar family, as they navigate this incredibly challenging period.

#### **Om Shanti Shanti Shanti**

As our batch of 2022-23 LEADs complete the year-long program, I want to congratulate them for their extraordinary community service. This is our 5th batch of LEADs since we started our program in 2018-2019. Our Chapter was formed with the LEAD program as our main offering, and we continue to improve and expand this program every year. We are ready to welcome our 6th batch for 2023-24 and are looking forward to some more innovative and unique projects to serve the community we live in.

This year LEADs participated in a multitude of projects that varied from Clean Communities, Biodiversity Conservation, Mitigate Water Pollution, Tree Plantation, Reforestation, & Reduce Plastic Usage Efforts, Soil Conservation, Community Outreach & Engagement Events, Diversity & Inclusion Efforts, Education Support Initiatives, Food Packaging Distribution Services for Food Insecure, Sustainable Gardening & Produce Donation for Sustainable Diet, Healthcare Services & Support for Special Needs, Sewa at Places of Worship, Sewa Blood Donation Drives, Sewa CPR & First Aid Training, Sewa Diwali, Support for Underprivileged and Underserved, and Advocacy & Policy Support.

I would also like to thank all the parent volunteers who helped us during the year, making it another very impactful year serving the community we live in. There are many volunteers who help make this program successful. I would like to thank all the core volunteers for their commitment and dedication to the programs.

This year, while our Chapter experienced significant achievements, we also faced the sad demise of one of our very caring and dedicated LEADs Sushrut Sarpotdar. Losing a team member who has been a part of the Sewa family is a challenging and emotional experience. We need to remember that celebrating accomplishments and supporting each other during difficult times are both important aspects of building a resilient and close-knit team. It is moments like these where we need to take a pause and remember what we are here to do and who we are here to serve.

Sewa International and the Central Jersey Chapter extends our continued support in this trying time to the Sarpotdar family. Om Shanti.

I end this message with a welcome to the new LEADs (2023-24) and their parents to the program and am looking forward to more initiatives to serve the community. I close this post with a quote which I hope will resonate with you and has a profound meaning.

"Do not wait for extraordinary circumstances to do good; try to use ordinary situations". - Peter Cooper

Yours in Sewa (YiS), Rajesh Sharma

# Sewa for Servicemen - Flags for Heroes



"Flags for Heroes" is a heartfelt tribute to the individuals who have profoundly impacted and inspired us. Each flag symbolizes the acknowledgment of those who have made a meaningful difference in the lives of others. The event, organized by the Rotary Club of Robbinsville Hamilton, is dedicated to supporting our heroes.



In the month of October, approximately 25 Sewa volunteers of the Central Jersey Chapter actively participated in the "Flags for Heroes" Community display at Robert Wood Johnson, Hamilton. With their dedicated efforts, around 250 American flags were thoughtfully arranged across the area by the volunteers. They diligently carried the poles and carefully planted these flags into the ground.

As this inspiring project came to a close, every person involved felt an overwhelming sense of pride in contributing to something truly remarkable. The collaborative effort left a lasting impact, creating a powerful and touching display honoring our heroes.



# Central Jersey Sewa Yoga Therapy Workshop

The Family Services Team of Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International in collaboration with Subodh Yoga conducted a Back Pain Yoga Therapy Workshop in September, October 2023. It was a transformative 4-day workshop to master back pain management through enriching yoga therapy for individuals seeking relief from back pain or discomfort. The yoga therapy was a comprehensive approach to addressing back pain, offering muscle strengthening exercises, providing personalized guidance, sharing lifestyle tips, and facilitating Q&A sessions for the participants.

Chapter volunteers were involved end to end from registration till end of the program in pre-event planning, organizing, promotions, and setup. On the day of the event they assisted participants in performing yoga poses and exercises designed to alleviate the back pain, provided support to ensure participants performed exercises correctly, and created a supportive and encouraging environment for participants throughout the therapy sessions.



Yoga therapy is very well recognized for its potential to enhance physical well-being, promote mental health, and improve overall quality of life. This workshop aimed to empower individuals with the tools and knowledge needed to manage and alleviate back pain. It was a well-rounded and holistic experience for the participants.





The sessions were helmed by Sri Rahul Ji Bhalerao, Co-Founder of Subodh Yoga, and a certified Yoga instructor with a MS in Yoga Therapy from Svyasa, and by Smt Viyaya Turimella, Lead Therapist, Director Subodh Yoga, with a MS in Yoga from VAYII.

"The first workshop on Back Pain Management, a joint effort by Subodh Yoga and Sewa International - Central Jersey Chapter, achieved great success. It offered a significant opportunity for both organizations to contribute to community well-being. This workshop laid the foundation for future collaborations between these entities, aiming to enhance communitu service and promote better health. " Subodh Yoga.

The Chapter would like to thank partner organizations Sri Radha Gopinath Temple, Edison, India Heritage Foundation NJ NY Inc, and Indian Business Association - IBA NJ for enabling this event to be a great success.

#### Sewa at Grand Dussehra Festival Event

In the month of October, 2023 a month that is recognized in many towns across USA as Hindu Heritage Month, the Central Jersey Chapter partnered with the Indo American Festival Inc. for the 25th Grand Dussehra Festival in Edison.

Dussehra, also known as Vijayadashami, is a major Hindu festival celebrated across South Asia. The word "Dussehra" is derived from the Sanskrit words "Dasha" and "Hara," which mean "ten" and "defeat" respectively. The festival marks the victory of the Hindu God *Sri Rama* over the demon king *Ravana*, as narrated in the epic *Ramayana*.

The central theme of Dussehra is the triumph of good over evil. Key features of Dussehra celebrations include a *Ramaleela* performance that is a dramatic reenactment of the life of Sri Rama, culminating in the slaying of the ten-headed demon king, which is depicted in form of a large effigy of the demon king which is set ablaze, symbolizing the victory of good over evil.



Central Jersey Chapter volunteers contributed their time and efforts to ensure the event's triumphant success which had close to 10,000 people attending.

The volunteers played a pivotal role in guiding the performers throughout the event, distributing snacks to performers and event volunteers, and distributing certificates. They also lent a hand in event setup and ensured smooth running of this massive event.

Volunteers setup a Sewa International booth at a prime location at the festival, an impressive outreach opportunity, where the volunteers distributed the Central Jersey Sewa Chapter flyer and engaged with the festival organizers, vendors, and visitors on the various service activities carried out by Sewa International.



The volunteers additionally also stepped up to serve drinking water supplies and create 'henna art' for festival visitors to raise funds for the 'Stop Diabetes Movement' of Sewa International.



The volunteers young and old had a joyous time being part of the celebrations and got the opportunity to see the unveiling of the first ever 15-foot-tall statue/murthy of *Sri Hanuman* in the Tri-State.

They also got an opportunity to be a part of the team decorating the murthy. Sri Hanuman is a central figure in Hinduism, particularly in the epic Ramayana. Sri Hanuman is worshiped for his qualities of humility, selfless service, and devotion, and a symbol of unwavering faith.

Edison Mayor Sam Joshi graced this event and Sewa International Central Jersey Chapter was recognized with a plaque for the remarkable service being provided to the local communities.

The Chapter appreciates all the volunteers who enthusiastically contributed to making this huge outreach event a great success.



## Sewa Garba Event

In the festive month of October, the Central Jersey Chapter also organized a 'Garba Night' in partnership with an event management company.

Garba a traditional dance form is an integral part of the celebrations of the festival of Navaratri, a Hindu festival that spans nine nights and is dedicated to the worship of the *Goddess Durga Devi*. The word "Navratri" is derived from two Sanskrit words: "nava," meaning nine, and "ratri," meaning night. During Navaratri, communities come together to celebrate and perform Garba as a way of honoring the Devi and expressing joy and devotion. The dance has gained popularity around the world, where people of Indian origin celebrate their cultural heritage and now has people from diverse communities joining in on the celebration as well. This cherished tradition made its way to various venues across the city, including the esteemed halls of John P. Stevens High School, where the event took place.





The Garba night was a truly splendid affair, bursting with vibrant colors and an atmosphere of joyous celebration. Witnessing everyone adorned in exquisite traditional attire, exuding a profound sense of cultural pride, was truly heartwarming. The interplay of colors and lights infused the surroundings with a magical aura, creating an enchanting ambience that captivated all who attended.

The Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International emerged as a notable contributor, playing a pivotal role in ensuring the event's success which had 10,000 attendees. The Chapter planned, organized, and managed every aspect of the event right from setup, decorations, efficient ticket management, distributing bands, which facilitated easy access for attendees, managing the photo booth, ensuring drinking water supply, and crowd management. The tireless efforts of the Chapter volunteers in orchestrating various facets of the event were instrumental in creating a seamless and unforgettable experience for all those in attendance.

The Chapter also setup a Sewa booth in a prime location where those attending the event could have an opportunity to learn of the various service activities being carried out across townships in Central and South Jersey as well as learn about Sewa International as an organization.

The Chapter would like to take this opportunity to appreciate all the volunteers who stepped up to the challenging task of managing an event of this magnitude.





# Sewa Through the Year - Recurring Service Activities by the Central Jersey Chapter

The Central Jersey Chapter has a commitment to Sewa and the dedication to making a positive impact on the local community throughout the year. The volunteers engage in service activities throughout the year to contribute to the well-being of the community to not only help address immediate needs but also strengthen the bonds within the community and promote a spirit of unity and cooperation.

# **Fundraising Initiatives**

In the month of October 2023, the Central Jersey Chapter organized their first Sports Fundraiser to encourage Charity through Sports.

The "Chess for Charity" fundraising event was managed start to finish by the Chapter LEAD volunteers and their dedication and commitment was remarkable as they worked hard for weeks prior to the event and to ensure it was a successful fundraiser. It was a great learning opportunity for the LEADs where they were able to demonstrate their skills in organizing this event.

The LEADs worked together and came up with many unique ideas to make the event fun for participants. They worked diligently and collaboratively to bring many participants to the event. They were able to garner 25 participants and raise a good fund in support of various programs of Sewa International. The event was designed to include both an online tournament and a final in-person gathering for winners across different age categories, resulting in three deserving champions. All participants had a blast playing chess, and the winners were rewarded with well-deserved prizes, making it a memorable and fun event for everyone involved.







### **Healthcare & Special Needs Services**



Central Jersey LEADs volunteered at AttachAvi Autism Foundation's Halloween event this October. LEADs welcomed the guests with an enthusiastic spirit and got to work. They managed the food stall by stacking cold soft drinks, serving pizzas and samosas to trick-otreaters. They even danced to DJ's beat along with the visitors towards the end of the event. They managed the crowd as a team, and learned to work with each other.

Chapter LEADs dedicated one of their weekend mornings to volunteer at the annual Autism Speaks walk 2023 in Mount Laurel Township, NJ. LEADs arrived early to help set up tents and stations. During the walk, they helped out at different booths. They regulated selfie stations, passed out Legos, supplied snacks and water to the walkers. Some LEADs also assisted at the pumpkin painting station, where kids could choose a small pumpkin and paint a creative design on it in the spirit of Halloween. The event was a resounding success, with over 250 attendees. At the end of the event, LEADs helped clean up the stations. Overall, they said it was an exciting and heartwarming experience to help and bring joy to the children's eyes.





Chapter LEADs played a crucial role in various aspects of the Walk for PKD event, a fundraising event for polycystic kidney disease (PKD), including setup, registration, cheering on the walkers, and assisting with the wrap-up. Our sincere appreciation goes out to the organizers for granting Sewa volunteers the opportunity to actively contribute and be a valuable part of this significant and impactful event.

Central Jersey Sewa LEADs extended their help at a 5K walk organized by Briella's Friends Foundation (BFF) in Chesterfield. LEADs helped in this event by standing along the 5K route and directing and cheering the runners. They also helped with the clean up towards the end of the event. The BFF group was very grateful to all our volunteers for their hard work.

## **Sewa Beneficiaries:**

AttachAvi Foundation Edison Autism Speaks Walks, Mount Laurel Township Walk for PKD, Mercer County Metuchen YMCA, Metuchen Briella's Friends Foundation (BFF), Chesterfield





Chapter LEADs volunteered at Metuchen YMCA blood drive event by checking in the registered donors and walkins, helping the drive run smoother. They also worked with the canteen, providing the donors with snacks, juice, and water to prevent fainting, lightheadedness, or reactions post blood donation. LEADs learned many things about the blood drive process through the staff and hope to serve their community again by helping at similar events in the future.

# **Educational Support Initiatives**

Through the month of October, Central Jersey LEADs volunteered at the BookSmiles Book Bank over weekends. LEADs helped with organizing books according to their genre, cleaning up, and shelving the books. LEADs shared that the experience really made them feel good and they said that they loved to help again.

#### **Sewa Beneficiary:**

BookSmiles, Pennsauken





# Sustainable Agriculture, Biodiversity Conservation, and Environmental Initiatives



Central Jersey Sewa LEADs helped to work on building a new cedar boat this month with the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership in the month of October. The LEADs helped hand weave seats on the boat created last year. They were also able to get started on the new project for this year. They helped create strips of wood to start the project. This allowed them to use and learn about new tools. The LEADs also learned to carve wood to create new mallets.

This was a great opportunity for Central Jersey LEADs to learn hands-on techniques and further their knowledge in engineering and also continue contributing to the environmental initiative of biodiversity conservation.

Chapter LEADs also worked very hard this month to help prepare the Freehold Community garden for winter. LEADs prepared the garden beds with compost, clearing out weeds/undesired plants along the fences and properly disposing them. The LEADs also shoveled and spread out compost evenly in the garden beds along with adding compost around the different plants in the garden. The LEADs learned a lot about how to prepare plant beds for the winter and how compost is beneficial to gardening.

This event was truly special towards the Central Jersey Chapter because the LEADs have been working on this garden tirelessly for the last few months. The LEADs have put in numerous hours learning about plants, gardening techniques, and so much more.





Chapter LEADs cleaned up a 2.5 mile stretch of White Pine Road, Chesterfield, NJ as part of the Chapter's environmental initiative. Although not a busy road, it still got large amount of litter. Thanks to all the volunteers for their hard work and commitment.

#### Sewa Beneficiaries: Chesterfield Community Cleanup Lower Raritan Watershed, Edison Edison Township – Dwyer Park, Swales Park, Edison Memorial Tower Freehold Community Garden

Chapter LEADs participated in cleaning the Community garden in Dwyer Park in Edison. They assisted in redefining the garden's appearance and rehabilitated several dying plants. This event served to aid the environment and bring Sewa, as a whole, closer to Nature's roots.





Sewa LEADs enjoyed working and cleaning up the garden beds at Swales Park in Edison, as it was a relaxing experience in a busy week in October. Although the weather was rainy the volunteers persevered and kept working and kept a smile on their face. The LEADs helped set the garden up for the upcoming winter season and helped maintain the park. It was an amazing learning moment and a very successful event.

The Edison Memorial Tower Clean-Up is an important community activity focused on tidying up the area surrounding the Edison Memorial Tower, a memorial dedicated to the inventor Thomas Alva Edison.

The dedicated Sewa LEADs played a crucial role in this endeavor by actively participating in the removal of weeds, vegetables, and unwanted plants. Employing a variety of tools, they worked diligently to enhance the overall beauty and appeal of the space.

The collaborative spirit was evident in every task, as the LEADs came together to achieve a common goal. Through their collective efforts, they not only improved the aesthetics of the area but also contributed to the overall well-being of the community.

This Clean-Up activity serves as a testament to the positive impact that can be achieved when individuals work together for the betterment of their surroundings.



# **Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure**



In our recurring volunteering at Franklin Township Food Bank (FTFB), Central Jersey LEADs sorted out produce, restocked the produce crates, and helped the clients with shopping and bagging the goods. It was very gratifying to help people in need get access to the things they need.

Sewa Beneficiaries: Franklin Food Bank, Somerset

# **Feeding Programs for Hunger Relief**

As part of the SewaMeal program, LEADs prepared a variety of dishes that were donated to the homeless and underserved communities.

#### **Meal Items:**

Peas Pulav, Channa Masala, Pita Bread, Brownies, Semolina dessert, Pasta, Portuguese Rolls, Salad, Cake, Pretzels.

## Meals' Sponsors:

Naveen Ji Trishala Ji Roopa & Arvind Bellur Monika & Shashi Khurana Pooja & Rajeev Kumar Singh Puja & Sameer Jain Malini & Muralidharan Krishnan Shilpa & Mukul Rathi(State Farm) LEAD Aman Wakankar and Family LEAD Akash Talluri and Family

## **Meals' Recipients:**

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Trenton United Methodist Church, New Brunswick









# **Community Outreach & Engagement**

Central Jersey LEADs volunteered at the Franklin Diwali event held on October 22nd at the Franklin High School. They assisted with a variety of activities including helping guest's check-in, boxing and serving of food, and setting up chairs and tables. It was a fun experience volunteering for the Diwali festival that is celebrated widely across the world.

#### **Sewa Beneficiary:**

Franklin Township



# **Serving at Places of Worship**



This month, Sewa LEADs volunteered at the Sri Guruvaayoorappan Temple garden in Morganville to help with harvesting and removing weeds from the garden. The produce from the garden is organic and used in the temple's kitchen.

#### **Sewa Beneficiaries:**

Sri Guruvaayoorappan Temple, Morganville Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple, Monroe

Chapter LEADs have been very versatile helpers, addressing the needs of the Balaji temple in Monroe Township. They vacuumed and swept the premises to maintain the cleanliness of this place of worship. They ensured the upkeep of the classroom areas by rearranging supplies as necessary and maintaining the classroom spaces. LEADs were involved in moving items from the store room to the main hall. They also helped in decorating the deities and statues at the temple.

In another special event to celebrate Navratri, an annual Hindu festival observed in honor of the goddess Durga, LEADs have cleaned and set up table space for people to join in the celebrations. The varied contributions of the LEADs are a testament to the adaptability of Sewa volunteers. Through the program LEADs are learning important life skills such as planning and logistics, as well as gaining cultural knowledge.



Consistency and dedication are the driving forces behind the recurring Sewa activities of the Central Jersey Chapter. By consistently aligning efforts with the skills and interests of Chapter LEADs and adult volunteers, the service activities remain meaningful and sustainable. This approach not only benefits the volunteers by allowing them to engage in activities they are passionate about but also makes a significant difference in the lives of those they are serving.

'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' – The World Is One Family Together We Serve Better

# **Newsletter Team**



Akhil Nalamalapu Grade: 9 Interests: Camping, Animals Favorite Sewa Project: Pumpkin



**Ankhita Prakaas** Grade: 11 Interests: Drawing, Painting, Dancing Favorite Sewa Project: Indian Independence Day Parade



Anusha Seeri Grade: 11 Interests: Dancing, Music Favorite Sewa Project: Boat Building



Anvita Malepati Grade: 10 Interests: Swimming
Favorite Sewa Project: SewaMeal



Dedeepya Tadapaneni Grade: 9 Interests: Swimming
Favorite Sewa Project: SewaMeal



Ghazal Madaan Grade: 11 Interests: Swimming, Dancing, Track Favorite Sewa Project: Edison Dussehra Event



Krithik Alluri Grade: 10 Interests: Volley Ball, Robotics Favorite Sewa Project: STEM Summer



Maanya Arora Grade: 10 Interests: Badminton, Painting Favorite Sewa Project: Edison Dusshera Event



Medha Inapuri Grade: 11 Interests: Drawing, Reading, Baking Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Tutoring



Niyati Sunku Grade: 12 Interests: Dancing , Reading Favorite Sewa Project: SewaMeal



Teesha Kaw Grade: 10
Interests: Reading, Playing Instrument Favorite Sewa Project: Balaji Temple

# **Upcoming Events**

- Family Services 2nd Free Health Camp Screening at Raritan
- \* Sewa Diwali
- \*
- Treats for Troops Winter Coat Drive 4
- \* Pumpkin Drive
- Sewa for Autism Speaks Walk ø.
- \* Sewa at NJ Health Camp
- Sewa at National Federation of the Blind
- **Environmental Cleanup Initiatives**
- Organic Farming & Gardening
- Sewa at Food Relief Agency, Banks & Food Pantries
- SewaMeal for the Underserved at Churches/Shelters
- Sewa at Places of Worship



Please use below QR Code or link and proceed to click 'Register' to donate



Click → https://sewausa.org/event-5084580 and fill the information

#### **Communication Channels**

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## Instagram:

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Email: centraljersey@sewausa.org

Helpline: 702. 900.SEWA