

# NEWSLETTER

#### **Chapter: Central Jersey**

#### October 2022

#### A Message from Rajesh Sharma Ji The Central Jersey Chapter Coordinator



As our batch of 2021-22 LEADs complete the year-long program, I would like to congratulate them for their extraordinary community service. This is our 4<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> batch for 2022-23 and are looking forward to some more innovative and unique projects to serve the community we live in.

We were fortunate this year to be able to do all in-person volunteering activities (with the exception of the summer tutoring). Our annual planning meeting in January had great participation from our core volunteers. We completed a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat) analysis, which was reviewed with our VP of Administration, Ashwini Ji Garg, and there were primarily two take-aways to overcome our weakness. The first was that fundraising efforts are to be more structured and treated the same as the service projects we do, as without the funding we would not be able to execute projects that have far-reaching impacts to the society. The second is to build and train core volunteers towards carrying out the vision of Sewa International. I must admit we have not been able to make much headway in either of these so far, but we are putting in place more structured fundraising tracking and conducting more outreach to our partner organizations. We are also planning a specific training for our core volunteers.

Recently, we also had the opportunity to meet with our President Arun Ji Kankani, Bhutanese Empowerment Program coordinator Yashwant Ji Belsare, and Sewa Columbia volunteer Adriana Ji Vegas. LEADs and their parents were able to see the vision for Sewa International that Arun Ji laid out during his interactive session. Yashwant Ji met with core volunteers and provided suggestions on our inner working and partnership with other organizations to expand our work in true spirit of our motto, "Together We Serve Better". Many LEADs were excited to meet Adriana Ji and learn about the prospect of traveling and working on a sustainability-based project in the Amazon rainforest or serving the native population of Colombia. This is certainly something we are looking forward to seeing this year if we can form a group to travel and help with these projects in South America.

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 2 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 project, serving many families across the Central and South Jersey areas now. This reminds us, especially our new LEADs and partners, to always look for an opportunity to serve, no matter how small. We can always find a way to support it. The SewaMeal project is unique also in the way that it is self-sustained. I request you to please spread the word about this program with friends and family so on a special occasion they can sponsor a SewaMeal or a small donation to the underserved and homeless.

In addition to our efforts, this year we were able to work with some new partners while continuing to strengthen our partnerships with existing partners. The program to support kids on the autism spectrum now consists of 3 classes that our LEADs are participating in. We are also piloting a program for social skills development for autistic kids by providing young sibling volunteers (age group 8-11 years) from Sewa family. Our partnership that started last year with YMCA of Metuchen, Edison, Woodbridge and South Amboy is growing- our Chapter helped with the logistics and execution of the September 5K Run in Roosevelt Park. Recently, we had SewaDiwali collection boxes kept at the Metuchen YMCA and will be helping with upcoming blood donation camps there. Additionally, we continued with quarterly cleanup of Route 27 in Metuchen that we have adopted in 2018 as part of the Adopt-a-Highway program of NJ state.

The Southern Centers are also expanding in the same way. In Franklin Township, we were requested to help with the Franklin Township Fair and Diwali Fair. The Marlboro community garden has become a great project for the Monroe Center, along with the new partnership with Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple and

#### Chapter Highlights

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#### **Center Highlights**

Fundraisers by LEADs

#### Volunteer Spotlight



Shuba Simha from the Somerset Center is an active parent volunteer involved in planning and execution of several initiatives and projects within the Center and has also assumed the responsibility of newsletter coordinator for the Center for the last one year. While volunteering and community service with empathy is in her heart, Shuba leads the Global Drug Development Organization-IT at Bristol Myers Squibb accelerating drug development efforts. She is the founder of Toastmasters' local Gavel Club. As a leader of Merck's Asia Pacific Network, her Employee Resource Group drives to ensure equal opportunities for women and to succeed as leaders. When she is not volunteering, Shuba enjoys the company of her daughter/LEAD Shriya, son Mihir, adopted son Hunter (a Beagle) and her husband. She is an avid reader who also enjoys travel, movies, music and meditation.

Cultural Center. The Chesterfield Center, as usual, is doing some unique projects, including the harvesting at Ramblin' Sol Farm and reforestation at Neshaminy State Park. The Cherry Hill Center is collaborating with Cherry Hill Environmental Board on trail clean-ups, and supporting Trenton Cathedral Kitchen with vegetable supplies.

This year we also started a new partnership with the Lions Club of NJ. Our LEADs were part of a unique project that achieved a new Guinness World record by creating longest chain of spectacles using 100,000 spectacles measuring 13,030 meters which will be donated globally to eradicate preventable blindness.

Our Family Service program is continuing to support the helpline for our Chapter and providing support to MANAVI, an organization to support survivors of domestic violence. We have provided case management with a few cases to work on alongside the Consulate of New York for repatriation because of the unfortunate death of young professionals or students. This is one of the hardest things for a family to navigate and our volunteers are able to step-up and support the family in these tough times.

Internationally, we continue to keep our commitment to support various projects in India as well. Our support for Sri Guruji Anbu Illam Girls Hostel in Nagapattinam, TN will continue for another year. At present there are 17 girls residing at the hostel. We also sponsored SHE-CAF projects for hygiene education and distribution of sanitary kits. This year we are planning to have a fundraiser gala to support both our projects here and abroad.

Rounding out the report with some exciting news - this year, along with the North Jersey Chapter, we have embarked upon one of the most ambitious projects for both these Chapters and Sewa International. We have received a grant from AmeriCorps to provide an after-school supplemental program in the Newark School District. With the help of additional donations from our partners to fill the gap, we will be starting this program in the 3<sup>rd</sup> marking cycle (Feb 2023). Our volunteers helped shape the initial curriculum and other required program support. We are recruiting AmeriCorps members to run the program. Hopefully, you all will be part of this journey in some form in the coming years. On a personal note, I am also happy to announce that I have been given additional responsibility to act as National Coordinator for the AmeriCorps program to standardize and roll-out this program in other Chapters across the nation.

In summary, we had 186 LEADS registered for the 2021-2022 program and the majority of you have put in over 100 hours of volunteering with some few exceptions who have done over 200+ hours of service. This is testament of your dedication to serve the community. As a final highlight to this successful year, you all also had the opportunity to participate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> National LEAD convention, and some of you participated to conduct a few sessions. Our Chapter was very instrumental in planning, organizing and execution of this convention. Our 4-minute video clip that was created using a drone was very well-received.

I would like to thank all the parent volunteers who helped us during the year for making another very successful year to serve the community we live in. I would also like to thank Sandesh Ji, our LEAD Program Coordinator, and Anitha Ji, our SAC and SHE Program Coordinator, for their relentless effort to make this program successful. There are many core volunteers who help make this program successful with their background support. I would like to thank all the core volunteers and Center Coordinators for their commitment and dedication to the programs. As you will notice, we are the only Sewa Chapter that has started with the LEAD program as the main offering and continues to keep that as our focus track. It is the hardest program to run so I request new parents to get involved and help us.

Lastly, I welcome the new LEADs (2022-23) 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.

#### "It is only by doing good to others that one does good to oneself" - Swami Vivekananda

Yours in Sewa (YiS),

Rajesh Sharma

#### Together We Served Better: November 2021 to October 2022

It was a year where the Central Jersey Chapter LEAD program grew from **145** strong to **186** strong helmed by the very inspiring and dedicated LEAD Program Coordinator Sandesh Kamath Ji and his team of dedicated Center Heads of the Chapter. As we returned to normalcy post the pandemic, and the high school LEADs were adjusting to being back to school in person, we had the opportunity to once again do 'Sewa' in person. This year the Chapter further expanded on service activities such as assisting at Covid testing sites, serving monthly home cooked meals for the homeless, and environmental sustainability projects throughout townships such as global 'Save Soil' movement, the State Program of Plastics recycling, and 'Keep My Street Green' Sustainable Jersey program. This was the year where we saw the difference we made to the lives of domestic violence survivors, cancer survivors, those with special needs, those from under-resourced communities, and to the beneficiaries of the SAC and SHE program.



#### A Message from Sandesh Kamath Ji The Central Jersey Chapter Joint Coordinator and Chapter Coordinator for the LEAD Program



"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam— The whole world is one family". Arguably one of Hinduism's greatest gems, this beautiful philosophy is one we must all live by. Collective consciousness allows us to achieve things never thought possible. But this idea of strength through unity cannot be forced down upon anyone. Instead, it must come from within. And it must be taught from childhood. This is exactly what we try to inculcate in our volunteers through the LEAD program.

When we eat, we think of people who struggle to put food on their table. When we keep our homes clean, we think of cleaning our towns, forests, and oceans. When we keep ourselves warm in the winter, we think of those who do not have access to coats and jackets. When we plant trees in our backyard, we think of improving our parks & the local ecosystem. When we celebrate our festivals with our entire family, we think of our brave troops serving abroad away from their family.

Since 2018, more than 400 LEADs have been part of the LEAD program and worked to build a better world. It's overwhelming to see how their experiences have not only impacted others, but also fostered change in themselves. Though the initial pull was the hours and awards, volunteers stayed for the difference they were making. This positive attitude & enthusiasm has helped us build a partnership with more than 70 organizations in just a matter of 4 years. Volunteers like these are the reason I keep doing what I do. I hope we take this passion forward and continue making a difference in the society we live in. I look forward to yet another great year.

#### A Message from Anitha Krishnamurthi Ji The Central Jersey Chapter Joint Coordinator and Chapter Coordinator for the SAC and SHE Program

This year the Central NJ Chapter funded Sponsor A Child and Women Sanitation, and Hygiene Projects in India. Our Chapter sponsors the needs of girls residing at Sri Guruji Anbu Illam Sewa hostel located at Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu. The hostel hosts girls as small as second graders to eleventh graders. All girls live in this hostel and attend the local school. It's mind-blowing to see them shine in different areas of interest like paintings, making thread bangles, singing bhajans in local temples, and participating in local competitions. We have been sponsoring this hostel for the past few years and will continue to support it in the coming years.

This year, our Chapter also contributed funds to the menstrual awareness program. It's amazing to see **1027** underprivileged adolescent girls and women benefit from this program! We completed the awareness camps for beneficiaries across multiple states (Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Delhi).

We will continue supporting these programs and some local programs in the coming years. This support is possible only through the funds raised by our LEADs.



# 2022-2023 LEADs Open House and Registration

October 2022, the Central Jersey Chapter held the Open House and Registration for the LEAD – Leadership, Development through Community Engagement – program for 2022-2023.

LEAD program is the Sewa International Youth Engagement program for High School students. It introduces socially conscious leadership to 'Sewa' enthusiastic volunteers. It provides a platform to the youth to serve the greater community and experience the joy of giving. It provides a great platform to meet socially aware community leaders, develop leadership, teamwork and organizational skills, and serve the community.

The Central Jersey Chapter LEAD program started in **2018** with **62** LEADs who put in **9000**+ hours of community service. In **2022** the Chapter expanded its services activities with **186** LEADs who put in **40,000**+ hours of community service.

For the year **2023**, the Chapter has grown even further with **247** LEADs having registered for the program.



#### Sewa 'March for Unity'



Central Jersey Chapter Coordinators Rajesh Sharma Ji and Sandesh Kamath Ji with Chapter LEADs and adult volunteers participated in the 'March for Unity' event organized by the Indian Consulate and the Federation of Indian Associations and other community leaders on October 30, 2022 in Edison, New Jersey.

People from diverse backgrounds participated to showcase India's Unity in Diversity. The Chief Guest of the event was India's Consul General in New York, Shri Randhir Jaiswal Ji. The Guest of Honor was Edison township's Mayor Sam Joshi Ji.

The event was also to commemorate the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel which falls on October 31st. Sardar Patel also known as India's 'Iron Man' is credited with unifying the country as the first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister.

The Central Jersey Chapter of Sewa International in accordance with its guiding principle of 'Unity in Diversity', marched to spread the message of peace, harmony and unity in diversity.

#### Sewa Diwali Food Drive 2022 continues ...



The Central Jersey Chapter began the 2022 'Sewa Diwali' Food Drive in the month of September across townships in Central Jersey. This drive will continue into the month of November where all the food being collected will then be donated to food pantries and soup kitchens across New Jersey.

With the mission of fostering togetherness and selfless giving for the welfare of society, in the enlightening spirit of Diwali the drive is to celebrate this joyous occasion of Diwali by ensuring no one goes hungry.

# Sewa at NJ Walk for Polycystic Kidney Disease (PKD)

Central Jersey Chapter LEADs volunteered at the NJ Walk for PKD event at Mercer County Park in the month of October. The event was to raise awareness and funds for the treatment and cure for Polycystic Kidney Disease (PKD).

LEADs and adult volunteers assisted in setting up and in managing the event, manning the registration desk and coordinating the participants in the walk for the cause.



### Sewa at AttachAvi Autism Foundation

AttachAvi Autism Foundation is an organization that is involved in the autism awareness cause. They focus on early intervention and other treatment options. Central Jersey Chapter LEADs volunteer through the year to spend time communicating with kids with special needs to improve their skills. They assist the teacher run the class by assisting the kids in playing games with them. These games included Snakes and Ladders, Carrom Board, Cha-Cha slide. LEADs also sing nursery rhymes along with the kids. This is a fulfilling experience for the LEADs.



This month the LEADs also participated in the AttachAvi Diwali party. The LEADs helped in many different activities such as helping the children dance on stage and making sure the kids were safe.

The party helped bring the AttachAvi families together and show how much their children have progressed and that it is all about how to get the children involved.

#### Sewa Fall Cleanups - 'Adopt-A-Highway', Chesterfield Community & Beach Cleanups

On October 8th, Somerset and Edison LEADs participated in the Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup of a 2-mile stretch on Route 27. They collected trash such as bottle caps, coffee cups, and cigarette butts. This project is done every quarter. Not only do the LEADs and adult volunteers clean the highways and improve the environment, but this project also brings awareness of how our actions impact the environment.





Chesterfield Center LEADs, came together to clean up White Pine Road, in Chesterfield, New Jersey. This was a 2.5-mile stretch of isolated road where people had littered along the sidelines. The Chesterfield township had requested Sewa to clean the area because people tend to use such remote roads to dump their trash.

LEADs cleared plastic and glass bottles, plastic bags, Styrofoam, and other forms of trash. There's a lot more trash than one would have thought. The LEADs found small streams littered with plastic bags which is detrimental to the fish and other animals living there and also leading to further environmental pollution.

The Central Jersey Chapter LEADs across all Centers volunteered for the State Wide Beach Sweeps effort where they participated in cleaning up their local beaches. The Chesterfield LEADs cleaned up Belmar beach, while Somerset/Edison LEADs cleaned up South Amboy beach.

The goal of the Beach Sweeps effort is to reduce and eliminate sources of litter. The Beach Sweeps events are more than people picking-up trash from beaches. This program builds community support for solutions, as well as raises awareness about the negative impacts of litter on wildlife and the ocean. Citizens learn about the types and quantities of debris found along the coast and the shorelines of rivers, lakes, and streams.



## Sewa at Farms and Community Gardens

If collected food waste was a country, it would be the world's third-largest emitter of CO2, after China and the United States. In our nation alone, we throw away around 63 million tons of food a year, even as 40 million Americans are facing food insecurities. An estimated 30 to 40 percent of food is wasted from the food supply.

The Central Jersey Sewa team has been working with local farms to prevent the produce waste. We help harvest the produce which is economically not feasible for farmers. Either these products are not up to market standards (still very much edible), or they may not fetch enough after deducting the labor cost. Sewa volunteers then donate this harvested produce to the local food banks.

This month the LEADs harvested more than **150** pounds of raw & ripened tomatoes at Ramblin' Sol Farm. These tomatoes are on the way to be dropped at the Camden Cathedral Kitchen, Franklin Food Bank, and the Radha Gopinath Temple in Edison.





Chesterfield and Monroe Center LEADs went to the Freehold community garden to help maintain the garden. LEADs helped harvest raspberries, sweet potatoes, carrots, and bell peppers. They removed weeds and dead plants. LEADs then added mulch to protect the area around garden beds from weeds in preparation for the upcoming year. Monroe LEADs continued to work this month at the Marlboro Community Garden, engaging in new experiences every other Saturday. They first worked to harvest sweet potatoes, with their efforts and hard work resulting in three baskets of sweet potatoes. The LEADs planted a fresh batch of garlic along with filling enriched soil in the beds and filling stone dust in the pathways. LEADs moved soil to the plots, cleaned up the compost system, and moved leaves to the bed. They also celebrated master gardener Ellen's birthday!





Every other Sunday, Monroe LEADs maintain the West Windsor Arts Council's main entrance area and along the side of the building. They clear the shrubs and trim bushes as well as cleaning up dead branches and leaves. LEADs raked the area to clear up dirt, collected it and finally discarded it at a designated trash area.

### Sewa Meals for the Homeless

In October 2022, Central Jersey Chapter LEADs continued with their monthly service of providing home cooked meals for the homeless, food shelters and food pantries.

The LEADs prepared burrito bowls, muffins, veggie pasta with marinara sauce, roasted veggies with Italian herbs, and chickpea salad and bread rolls. Kids' meals were PBJ sandwiches, grilled cheese sandwiches, baby carrots, fruits and fruit juices. Dessert was brownies and muffins.



#### Sewa at Food Banks and Soup Kitchens

Somerset LEADs took on the marvelous responsibility of volunteering at the Franklin Township Food Bank. Their jobs included sorting food, stocking shelves, and cleaning up. Their service puts food on the table for many families, and people who benefit from the food bank leave knowing that the community cares about them.





The Edison Center LEADs volunteered at Hands of Hope Community Soup Kitchen in Edison, NJ. Their activities included sorting donations, packaging food for distribution, and delivering it to the cars of those that came to the soup kitchen. The work they did helped many families by providing food along with other household items to them

#### Sewa Food Donation to Food Pantry

Chesterfield Center volunteers dropped off 15 boxes of Starbucks Cheese Salami at Rise Food Pantry, Hightstown, kindly donated by Sewa volunteer & local businessmen Ram Malladi Ji. The Rise pantry immediately distributed it to the local families as part of their weekly distribution.



#### Sewa at Township Events

Somerset LEADs volunteered at the Franklin Community Senior Center to help organize and set up the Franklin Diwali event. The LEADs set up tables and chairs, packaged boxes of food, assisted with the cleanup, and performed live on stage at the event. This event not only was a celebration for people, but informed many on the Hindu festival of Diwali also known as the Festival of Lights.





Somerset LEADs also helped out at the Franklin Township Trunk or Treat celebration. The LEADs helped decorate trunks and helped at game stations. LEADs also decorated an entire food truck for kids to get candy from. The event was a success with many kids trick or treating at the event and all cars being fully decorated with the help of the volunteers.

Monroe Township Environmental Commission, in cooperation with the Monroe Township Library hosted Green/Health & Wellness Fair at Monroe Township High School where the Chapter had an opportunity to showcase its initiatives in making the world a greener place. Our LEADs, represented the Chapter by hosting the booth. They made a trifold presentation that explained some of our projects, like 'Keep My Street Green', reforestation and more. They were responsible for presenting the booth as well as answering any questions visitors had. They took turns hosting and viewing others' projects. Overall, the LEADs found the experience to be both enjoyable and knowledgeable!





SEWA International in collaboration with Rock the Vote set up a stand/booth in Chesterfield NJ. Rock the Vote is a non-profit organization that is aimed at building the political power of young people. The purpose of setting up this stand was to facilitate people to register to vote. This was a great way to get engaged with the community and ensure eligible residents to cast their vote. The Chesterfield Center LEADs volunteered in encouraging all the residents to vote as well as to help out at the voting booth. Many people came forward and registered to vote! Overall, the LEADs got a great response from the community.

# Fundraisers by Chapter LEADs

Monroe CLEADs came together to raise funds for the 'Sponsor a Child Program' that the Central Jersey Chapter supports. Funds were raised by selling handmade bracelets, potted mums, curry leaves and aloe vera plants, bake sale of brownies, strawberry, chocolate flavored cheesecake cups and coconut laddoos.

The LEADs had a very successful fundraiser and raised a total of \$580.



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

# **Newsletter Team**



Abhinav Nagineni Grade: 9 Interests: Art, Table Tennis, Tech Favorite Sewa Project: Fall Cleanups



Harikrishnaa Ganeshpandi Grade: 11 Interests: Music, Games, Reading Favorite Sewa Project: Balaji Temple Digital Project



Riddhi Rajpal Grade: 9 Interests: Music, Travelling, Baking Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meal



Shriva Simha Grade: 12 Interests: Painting, Music, Crafts Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals



Avaneesh Subramanyan Grade: 11 Interests: Tennis, Keyboard, Swimming, Traveling Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals



Krisha Soneji Grade: 11 Interests: Swim and Dance Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals



**Rishi Horaginamani** Grade: 9 Interests: Tennis, Swimming, Tech Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals



Shubhi Savalia Grade: 11 Interests: Dance Favorite Sewa Project: Balaji Temple Sewa



**Chahel Kumar** Grade: 10 Interests: Volunteering, Cars, Anatomy Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals, Franklin Diwali



**Moksh Kopikar** Grade: 8 Interests: Swimming & Art Favorite Sewa Project: Fall Cleanups



Sahas Murthy Grade: 10 Interests: Volleyball Favorite Sewa Project: KKWC



**Communication Channels** 

Twitter: @JerseySewa

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Chapter

FB: @JerseySewa or Sewa Central Jersey

Please visit our Chapter website and Follow us on Twitter, Facebook &

Web: https://Sewausa.org/centraljersey-

**Instagram**: sewainternationalcentraljersey

Email: CentralJersey.Sewa@gmail.com

Helpline: 702. 900.SEWA



- Welcome to 2022-2023 Sewa \* LEADs!
- \* 'Sewa Diwali' Food Drive for the Underprivileged
- Treats for Deployed Troops ....
- ÷ AttachAvi Autism Foundation
- Sewa at Autism Speaks Walk \$
- $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$ Sewa for Manavi - Support for Domestic Violence Survivors  $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$
- Sewa Meals for the Homeless Sewa at Food Banks, Food Pantries  $\dot{\mathbf{v}}$ & Food Shelters
- \* Sewa at Veteran Homes
- \* Sewa at Farmers Market
- ÷ Sewa for Community Gardening
- Sewa at Township Events \*
- ÷ Fall Cleanups Continue!