

Sewa International Garneres Major Disaster Relief Grant Funding



Yagnesh Patel and S. Venkata Subramaniam receiving the GHCF grant from the Foundation CFO Michael Pawson.

In its first and major such foray, Sewa International has garnered a \$397,600 grant awarded by the Greater Houston Community Foundation (GHCF). The grant was awarded for offering Disaster Case Management Services to the Greater Houston community that includes Houston and Harris County.

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Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Supporters:

I believe 2017 has so far been a successful year for Sewa USA. There are many accomplishments to remember, cherish, and learn from.

We have seen extraordinary work done by the Houston team during the Hurricane Harvey disaster; they mobilized more than 800 volunteers, united many local organizations and connected them with Sewa, raised significant donations, were successful in getting a substantial grant, and effectively promoted Sewa work in local media. It is astonishing to see how this team has done so many great things with smiling faces. The Houston team deserves a big applause. On top of that, the San Antonio chapter has supported the Houston team with logistics. Team work!

Similarly, during Hurricane Irma, the Atlanta team took on a new initiative. This team was successful in encouraging many families to open their doors for strangers. During this time, they did an excellent job bringing many like-minded organizations together to accomplish this big task. Also, this team has promoted our work through a successful media campaign. This was one of the first times that Sewa has managed to get the support of local media during a calamity to support the community. The whole Irma effort was not small; it required many volunteers, strong logistics, and the solid commitment of volunteers. Kudos to Atlanta!

After so many years with Sewa, it was heartwarming to see that around 80 volunteers attended the Sewa national conference in Houston this May. The Houston team did a marvelous job of conducting this big event flawlessly.

On another great note, the newly formed North Jersey team has done an excellent job of running many Sewa events this year. This chapter is like a nine-month-old baby, but its accomplishments are like those of a teenager. It is a pleasant surprise to all of us how far this team has come in such a short time.

Of course, the Bay Area, Boston, Chicago, Phoenix, Raleigh, PA-DE, Washington DC, LA, and other chapters have made tremendous progress this year, as well.

What is the secret sauce of this widespread success? When we observe a little closely, a few things emerge as common factors among all these success stories:

- Strong chapters have a good organizational structure, volunteers with designated roles.
- Clear communication among members.
- Regular weekly or bi-weekly chapter meetings.
- Closely-tracked finances.
- A reliable donor base.
- A supportive leadership team.
- And above all, heart!

It takes years to develop this kind of an organizational structure and to implement effective programs. We are seeing certain chapters emerge as role models, and we hope to hear more great stories next year.

Happy Holidays!

Sincerely,
Syam Kosigi
 National Director of Volunteer
 Engagement and Chapter Support



Looking Ahead and Planning for the future

A strategic planning meeting was held in Cleveland, OH, over the October 28th weekend. Led by Hira Fotedar, President, Sewa Cleveland Chapter, Nidheesh Patel, volunteer at the Sewa Cleveland Chapter, and Dhiren Shah, adviser to Sewa International, the meeting was attended by a small group of Sewa leaders who discussed important issues that will guide the growth, trajectory, and direction of Sewa International over the next five years.



From left to right are Shyam Parande, Nidheesh Patel, Hira Fotedar, Sree Sreenath, and Soumitra Gokhale

“Strategic planning is essential not only for the growth of an organization but also for its survival and sustenance”, said Sewa International President, Prof. Sree Sreenath. “Such planning deals with the challenges of a constantly changing environment, both responding to that environment to achieve the organization’s goals as well as in helping shape the environment to the organization’s benefit”, he said.

The most important and fundamental step in strategic planning is to draft a clear vision and mission statement. A good vision statement is focused on societal goals rather than activities; it is outward looking; concise but comprehensive; and communicates hopes for all to share. Ideally, a vision statement considers in advance the organization’s contribution in its realization. Sewa’s present vision statement says the following: “Sewa international desires a world of equality where everyone is happy, enjoys good health and lives in harmony with nature. Sewa, when called upon, would be among the first to serve when disaster strikes.”

The “mission statement” is a one-sentence statement describing the reason for the existence of the organization stating whom it serves, what specifically it does, and where. Our mission statement currently focuses on “serving humanity in distress; aiding local communities; and promoting volunteerism”.

On Day Two of the meeting the participants worked on strategy deployment and action plans, and produced the following:

Proposed Vision Statement: Inspired by compassion and social justice in Hindu faiths we believe that the whole mankind is one family. We envision and strive for a world in which all people live happily, free from suffering due to illness, poverty, discrimination and in peace and harmony with nature and each other.

Proposed Mission Statement: The mission of Sewa International is to serve humanity in distress, promote social justice, aid local communities in the face of emergencies, and assist people in transformational change by mobilizing its partners, generosity of donors, the strength of volunteers and the power of innovation. Sewa, when called upon, will be among the first to serve when disaster strikes.

Proposed Guiding Principles:

- We believe in dharmic principles of “Serving Humanity is Serving God”.
- We value people and serve, irrespective of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation and nationality.
- We build confidence of all, by being neutral in hostilities and not taking sides in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
- We practice team work and solidarity.
- We serve families.
- We value our volunteers, partners and donors.
- We strive for customer satisfaction and innovation.
- We are responsive.
- We promote health and wellness.

In its second round of grants amounting to \$28.9 million announced on November 15, Sewa Houston was one of the award recipients from GHCF, which has raised more than \$80 million for the Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund. With strict criteria in evaluating grant proposals, and a very quick seven-day grant announcement to grant application submission turnaround, the Sewa Houston team worked hard and smart, and when the award was announced on November 15 their hopes turned to joy.

The Sewa International team was led by Sewa Houston Chapter's President Gitesh Desai, and included Achalesh Amar and Vasudev Singh. They were supported by the grant writing team headed by Kavita Tewary. The grant writing team included Anuja Deshpande, Hasita Kartick, and Jaydeep Chaudhari, and they were advised by Prof. Sree Sreenath, President, Sewa International.

"We are excited", said Gitesh Desai as they got the email from GHFC late on Friday, November 10, announcing the second round of grant awards. "Sewa International has broken through a barrier of sorts in receiving such a major grant for offering Disaster Case Management Services to Greater Houston Community that includes Houston and Harris County. We are proud of our work, but we are also anxious to start offering the services we have been tasked to deliver", he said.

What the Sewa International Team, led by a project manager and assisted by 20 caseworkers, will do is to identify and assist 600 clients in assessing their "individual/family needs resulting from a specific disaster event, help them develop a recovery plan, and screen for duplication of benefits and provide them access to resources for their unmet needs". The grant money that Sewa has received will have to be spent over the next four months. As per the grant guidelines, Sewa has to begin providing disaster case management services within 30 days

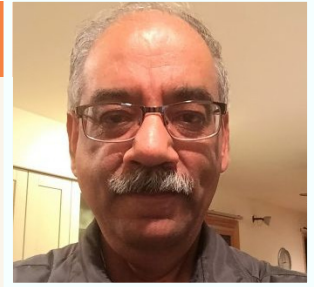
or less of receiving funding.

"This is a kind of 'get set, ready, go' kind of challenge and opportunity for us", said Kavita Tewary, Executive Director of Sewa Houston who spearheaded the grant writing effort. "We want to spend this money wisely, correctly, and carefully, and do it all within the next four months so that Sewa International will emerge as a reliable, trustworthy organization that can seek other such grants for disaster relief work across the United States and around the world. We will make Sewa proud and we will, as a Hindu faith-based organization make Hindu-Americans proud. We indeed believe serving humanity is serving divinity." she said.

"If we execute our work well this time, we can submit an application for the third round of grants by GHCF", said Prof. Sreenath. "We have on our own raised about \$500,000 for Hurricane Harvey relief work, and this additional \$397,600 will have us spending about \$850,000 in the Houston area. We have brought onboard a respected social work professional, Bhawna Luthra, to provide technical expertise. Our Program Director is Ashok Nigam and we have hired Anuja Deshpande as our Project Manager. We have hired 10 caseworkers and more hiring will happen soon. We will set up the required IT needs, and prepare to submit 30-day reports. There is a lot of work to be done, and we will have to do it well, and prove to the world that we belong with the established organizations that offer such services and garner such grants", he said.

Our salutes, greetings, and good wishes to the Sewa Houston team!

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Yogesh Bhargava has been involved with Sewa's Chicago Chapter for over five years and is the chapter coordinator for the past three years. He says "Chicago is lucky to have a very strong and dedicated team with many volunteers who lead many different programs with great dedication. The team is what makes working with Sewa a worthwhile and satisfying experience".

The team members volunteer in the local community all through the year and not just on the one dedicated *Sewa Day*. "With responsibility distributed and shared among volunteers, we are able to do a wide variety of projects including all three parts of Family Services (Emergency Support Service to Needy Families, Health and Wellness, and Awareness and Education). *Get Inspired Chicago* is a very popular internship program and participation has been growing every year. Some of our volunteers are on the national team of *Yuva for Sewa* – an international your internship program, and the Stop Diabetes Movement project", says Yogesh.

Yogesh and his wife Sangeeta have been living in Chicago since 1999. They have two children. Sangeeta is a librarian by profession, and Yogesh manages his own industrial automation business doing hi-tech work, including upgrading a machine that used to make heat-protection tiles for the Space Shuttle, and upgrading manufacturing technology for the F35 fighter jets. Yogesh was born and brought up in a lower middle class family in Karnavati (Ahmedabad), Gujarat, with his five brothers and sisters. He graduated in electrical engineering from the Lalbhai Dalpatbhai College of Engineering in Karnavati, and was the gold medalist of his batch.

From an early age his mother had instilled in him the motto of serving others, and Yogesh has willingly and happily done so. He says the challenge is in finding the right balance between Sewa, family, and professional life. He has been instrumental in building his team recruiting a large number of volunteers, and believes there is a great potential for doing more of Sewa work.

Nrityameva Jayatey – Sewa Boston's 5th Annual Fundraiser



Chief Guest, Shri.Udit Batra, CEO of Millipore Sigma, distributing prizes to participants from Amudasri Dance School

Sewa International Boston chapter hosted a dance competition - Nrityameva Jayatey at the Keefe Technical School in Framingham, MA on November 5, 2017 for its fifth annual fundraiser. Over 825 people attended the event which raised over \$45,000 to be used for various community service projects of Sewa International such as rehabilitating victims of Hurricane Harvey, Irma and Maria, feeding the hungry, yoga for humanity, and education of underserved children.

286 Students from 19 leading dance schools of the New England area participated in a dance competition with spell binding performances of Classical, Folk and Bollywood dance forms captivating the audience for seven hours performances.

Upcoming Events

Dec **02**, 2017 : Orchard City banquet Hall, Campbell, CA –Annual Dinner Event

Feb **16**, 2018 : Katy, Sugarland, West Houston, TX – Stop Diabetes Movement Camp

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