



Sewa News

www.sewausea.org

May 2017

Sewa Dancing Stars raise \$25,000

Sewa International's power-packed dance competition and fundraiser "Sewa Dancing Stars" captivated the Houston dance landscape on Sunday, April 2, at Houston Durgabari.



Three genres, four age groups, 15 dance schools, 20 sponsors, 30 volunteers, 49 performances, 204 participants, and 600 attendees raised over \$25,000 by the end of the 7-hour program. The magical event drew unparalleled support from Houstonians.

This event was organized to raise funds exclusively for "ASPIRE Tutorials", an education initiative undertaken by Sewa International for over 100 children from low income, under-served refugee and

immigrant communities. The children are from Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Kenya, Syria, Eritrea, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. The guest of honor, Richard Rodriguez, Director of the Brays Oaks Management District, acknowledged the amazing work being done by Sewa International and said he has seen the difference ASPIRE tutorials team has made in the lives of the students. He exhorted the larger Houston community to step-up and support ASPIRE tutorials.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, acclaimed author, educator and speaker, who was the chief guest at the event said she truly enjoyed the show and being an educator herself, ASPIRE tutorials' cause is close to her heart. She said "Being an immigrant, my family and I were helped by others to settle in this country, and I am very happy that Sewa extends similar support to the community."

Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Supporters:

Welcome! I am very excited to share our very first newsletter with you all. Since the inception in 2003, Sewa International and its volunteers have been involved in great humanitarian work in varied ethnic, linguistic and religious communities across the world in Colombia, Guyana, Haiti, India, Japan, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Capturing this in a monthly newsletter is a definite challenge.

As a Hindu faith-based humanitarian nonprofit organization, registered in the US under 501(c)(3) since 2004, Sewa International is driven by universal Hindu principles that cuts across religious and ethnic lines.

The principle of *Serving Humanity is Serving Divinity*, provides a spiritual dictum for Sewa to serve humanity. *Let all be Happy*, ensures a fundamental entitlement of every human being

to be happy. And the principle of *The Earth is One Family*, urges acceptance and rejects discrimination across humanity, ethnicity, religions, and classes, while even extending this to all living beings and non-living matter.

This introductory newsletter highlights a number of regular columns: Executive's Corner, Volunteer Spotlight, events at our 40 US Chapters, fundraising highpoints, and much more. Visit our website www.sewausea.org and social media handles to learn more about Sewa International and support us.

Prof. Sree N. Sreenath,
Ph.D., MNO
President



Sponsor a Child

“Sponsor a Child” (SAC) program serves children of low-income families by providing tuition expenses, uniforms, books, bus passes, subject coaching, career guidance, and counseling.



- 2 Countries (India and Nepal)
- 7 partner organizations
- 10 Indian states
- 1,335 children sponsored

Started in 2014, the program today supports 1,335 children of the “invisible poor” (maidservants, taxi/auto drivers, construction workers, and vegetable vendors) in urban, tribal, and rural settings in Nepal and India (ten states). During the first four months of the year, 56 new students were sponsored and two new partners -- one each in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh were added to the list, taking the total count to seven partners across India.



Livelihood training to Reang tribal refugees in Tripura, India

After the 1997 ethnic clashes in Mizoram, a large number of Reang tribals were forced to flee to the neighboring state of Tripura.

Two decades later, over 35,000 refugees continue to live in seven makeshift camps in Northern Tripura district. To provide livelihood opportunities to the refugees, Sewa organized training and skill development programs benefitting over 300 families.

During the year, three training sessions on bamboo handicrafts were conducted benefiting 51 people; traditional Reang handloom weaving was taught to 35 women; and, a four-month tailoring training program was offered to 52 women in five refugee camps. To the women and teenage girls who were confined to their make shift homes, these training workshops provided livelihood opportunities resulting in an additional source of income to support their family with increased access to basic necessities. For 19-year-old Galongti, and many of her friends who were born in the refugee camps, these training workshops provide hope, confidence, and above all, an identity.

To the youth, Sewa provides computer training through two programs – a three-month basic computer

training and a six-month diploma in computer skills. Over 100 young men and women have benefitted from these two programs at the two centers.

For children unable to attend local schools, Sewa started *Remedial Education Centers* after discussion with the local team. Starting with two centers on a pilot basis, today, Sewa runs 14 centers in two camps benefiting 280 children, and plans to run more centers at five other camps.



This year, Sewa plans to conduct training sessions on sewing (4), bamboo craft (6), handloom weaving (2), basic computer training (3), and diploma in computer skills (2).

Major Landslide in Colombia affects Eight Ethnic Groups

Flooding and mudslides in the Colombian city of Mocoa sent torrents of water and debris crashing onto houses in the early hours of April 1, 2017 killing 115 indigenous people from eight different ethnic groups and injuring over 400. Nearly 300 families have lost all their belongings and over 90 people are missing.



Sewa International released a grant of \$3,000 for immediate rescue operations. In collaboration with our partner organization *International Center for Cultural Studies* (ICCS), and indigenous Yanakuna local contacts, relief work was carried out by helping people move to safe areas. First aid and shelter were provided to the victims and corpses pulled out of the debris.

The grant was used to buy food supplies, mattresses, blankets, and construction material for building temporary shelters to 150 people. Sewa thanks the 30 volunteers who came from neighboring Neiva, located 300 km north of Mocoa.

This has been a tragic experience for hundreds of villagers from Mocoa leaving six indigenous councils completely erased from the map.

International Youth Activities

More than ten chapters in the US will be conducting “Get Inspired” and “Lead” internship programs for local youth this summer.

The internship program will last eight weeks, and is geared towards providing opportunities to high school and college students. Participants will have the opportunity to work in such areas as public health, public relations, community empowerment, grant writing, and refugee empowerment. At present, Sewa chapters are conducting interviews and recruiting interns.

International Youth Activities: This year, Sewa recruited ten enthusiastic college students to be part of the *Yuva for Sewa* internship program. These interns will work on understanding the healthcare system in India, and they will help develop marketing tools for products and services offered by differently-abled adults in Pune and Bengaluru.





Irene Jose

Irene Jose is the AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) member for Sewa International, Houston this year. A recent graduate of the Honors College, University of Houston, Irene earned her BA in Psychology with a minor in Medicine and Society. She believes passionately in social justice, social service, and community involvement – and is strongly motivated to work for these objectives. During her visits to Angola, she taught English at a local orphanage, and organized recreational activities and events for children. This experience not only broadened her outlook on life but triggered her passion for service. It shifted her focus from herself to social duty. While at the University of Houston, she was an active member of an organization that arranged food and clothing drives for the less fortunate. In addition, she also participated in psychological research labs to explore and deepen her understanding of the science behind human emotion, and to sharpen her empathy. She did most of her schooling in Dubai, and the resulting interaction with expatriates from diverse backgrounds made her an avid supporter of diversity and inclusion, and celebrate human differences. Thus, she finds immense fulfillment in her duties as a member of Sewa International as it focuses on community involvement, human understanding, and strengthening the potential of various ethnic groups and communities in the United States.

April Events & Updates

SEWA WISCONSIN:

Thirty young artists participated in a two-hour dance workshop -- “*Dance for Sewa*” -- conducted by Kunal Phadke, Department of Dance, Indian Television Academy School of Performing Arts. The proceeds from the dance-based fundraiser event will be used to support projects locally in the Wisconsin area.

SEWA CHICAGO:

About 40 people participated and benefited from the *Stop Diabetes Movement camp* -- a holistic approach to address diabetes and stress management through yoga, nutrition and lifestyle.

SEWA BOSTON:

Ten volunteers cooked and served Indian meals at the Cor Unum meal center under the *Feed the Hungry* program -- a monthly event held every third Saturday.

SEWA ATLANTA:

At a community health fair organized by partner nonprofit in Atlanta, Sewa conducted a *Health Care Proxy* workshop which was attended by 51 participants.

Upcoming Events

May 17-18 Atlanta - Yoga and meditation sessions on stress management @ Bharathakala Natya Academy.

May 21 Chicago - Community seminar on Genealogy and its Importance, in collaboration with Schaumburg Library.

Sep 8 Houston - Stop Diabetes Camp, Houston. For details, call (713) 834-4909 or email info-sdm@sewausa.org.



Thirty Sewa volunteers and staff from seven Sewa chapters and the national team successfully completed a certificate course on *Essentials of Nonprofit Strategy* conducted by Philanthropy University, in association with Haas School of Business, UC Berkeley. The participants enthusiastically look forward to planning the strategy for Sewa’s growth over the next five years.

Sewa International

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