

## Syria & Turkey Earthquake -- Sewa International Raises \$64,000; Partner to Serve Meals to Victims



**Sewa's partner organization ISKCON's Food For Life (FFL) volunteers preparing and serving food for earthquake survivors in Turkey**

Sewa International has raised \$64,000 to help victims of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria – with donors pitching in \$49,000 on the Sewa website and \$15,000 via its Facebook campaign.

Volunteers from Sewa International's partner organization, Food for Life (FFL), have started relief work in the earthquake-hit areas, serving about 800-1200 meals daily in villages near Antakya, the capital of Hatay Province.

FFL is an International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) initiative and the world's most extensive vegetarian food distribution program serving millions of meals daily, serving people in 65 countries.

In addition, Sewa Houston's AmeriCorps team organized a donation drive on February 18 and collected food, clothes, hygiene items, tents, hand warmers, shoes, and baby necessities.

**Contd... on page 2**

### Executive's Corner

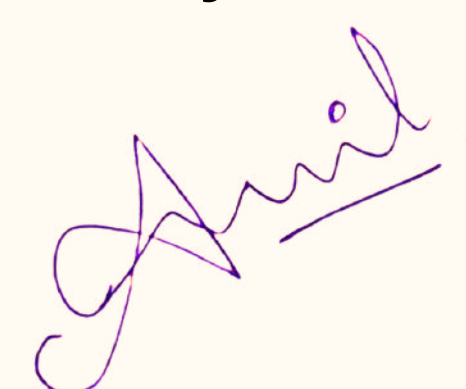
"Sewa hi paramo dharma" is an ancient, time-immemorial concept! Its implementation (sewa in action) is an ever-evolving and continuous process as the world, and its challenges keep changing! Every generation faces different challenges. For example, take the current challenges: Sewa International often focuses on helping people in disaster situations -- may it be war, earthquakes, pandemics, floods, famines, or other natural or man-made disasters.

While responding to the situations, Sewa International provides opportunities for individuals and organizations to serve the community. A hundred Sewa volunteers may have a hundred different reasons for joining Sewa. But they will find common ground in "Sewa hi paramo dharma".

For those who aspire to change people's lives through sewa, the willingness to do something is the most critical element.

We work towards building essential skills in our volunteers (karyakartas). Some sewa skills are innate in individuals. For example, empathy, or the ability to understand another person's experience, is critically important for a karyakarta! Having empathy is in someone's nature, but they can cultivate and strengthen this quality through honing other skills, such as communication, organization, critical thinking, active listening, and technical skills. For example, a karyakarta can empathize with individuals impacted by trauma.

Sincerely,



Anil Deshpande  
Vice President  
Technology Services

**Contd... on page 2**





## Executive's Corner

But empathy without action is limited. Therefore, karyakartas are to be trained to advocate for their clients, identify the most relevant resources, and create and manage plans to help them.

Sewa (selfless service) is an evolving field. Over time, current trends in sewa may become more established and widespread components of an overarching strategy for the profession. For this reason, Sewa International is alert and adaptable, and has cultivated the skills to make meaningful change and deliver sewa to underserved communities.

In that direction Sewa International has carried out developmental activities. Recently we had the "Sewa International Strategy 2023 – 2027" at the Bay Area meeting in October 2022; the "Sewa Mission Oriented Staff Training Workshop" in Karnavathi in January 2023; and the "Global Sewa Chintan Baithak" at Lonavala in February 2023. The "Annual National Conference" is going to be held in Atlanta the first weekend of May 2023.

**Tapping Into Technology:** Another current activity in Sewa International is the use of the latest technology and internet-based platforms to increase access to applications and services. Today, we have expanded our practice into the virtual realm to offer services such as online programs, sessions, social network support, and video-based tutorials and interventions.

In addition, many professionals in the field use advanced software and online services to better track and update our projects. As we tap into these technologies, we also take into account ethical issues such as confidentiality, informed consent, professional boundaries, and professional competence to ensure that the new technology is not abused.

The "technology conversation" has another layer in Sewa practice. Technology has changed everyday life. Therefore, when integrating technological innovations, we remember to build it for all people in every aspect of society. Using the new technological applications means following the protocol and stipulations as outlined by the various organizations of the Sewa field. Once mastered, however, these technological tools can revolutionize our sewa practice.

**Professional Development Opportunities:** Serving people requires that we stay ahead of trends and practices. Knowing the current trends in sewa is essential for us to excel professionally: continuing education and training are therefore essential. The good news is that Sewa International has already started acting in that direction through Sewa Academy, Sewa Fellowship, and think tank initiatives. In short, Sewa International is now a more modern and professional organization, which means that those entering Sewa International have access to an incredible array of resources.

## Syria & Turkey Earthquake -- Sewa International Raises \$64,000; Partner to Serve Meals to Victims



**Sewa's partner organization ISKCON serving food daily in a village near Antakya**

The Houston Sewa team collaborated with the National Association of Christian Churches (NACC) to deliver more than 200 boxes containing these items to Turkey and Syria through a Turkish Airlines flight.

Sewa's Vice President for Disaster Relief, Swadesh Katoch, said FFL volunteers from Hungary and Turkey drove a giant truck filled with cooking equipment, rice, beans, fresh vegetables, 5,000 liters of water, and other essential supplies and arrived in Antakya on February 12.

They worked with the local community to identify Harbiye and two other adjoining villages to start their relief work.

According to Katoch, the Turkish Ministry of Interior's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) has requested FFL to serve in Hatay. Three FFL volunteers from Turkey and four Hungarian FFL cooks, including the FFL Director from Budapest, drove about 15 hours from Istanbul to Antakya.

Thanking Sewa USA's support, Chaitanya Chandra Das, coordinator of FFL's earthquake relief efforts spoke about how FFL's partnership with Sewa provides much-needed relief to the people. He said Sewa USA was one of the first organizations to actively offer funds to alleviate suffering in Turkey and Syria.

Explaining Sewa USA's partnership with Sewa Canada, Sewa Europe, and ISKCON's FFL to assist the earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria, Arun Kankani, President, Sewa International, said that Sewa has always sought provide relief to people during disasters. He thanked Sewa's donors, partners, and volunteers for making a real impact. He appealed for donations to help Turkish and Syrian communities in need: <https://www.sewausa.org/turkeysyriaearthquakeappeal>



## Sewa Yatra: All a Matter of Determination and Focus



**Children at the government primary school, Bhagaonpur, India**

As my mother, Neha Kaushal is Sewa's Marketing and Outreach Coordinator for SHE National Team, we visited the Government Girls Middle School at Jharsa in the North Indian state of Haryana. Overhearing my mother's conversation with the schoolgirls, I realized some of them are irregular to school because of this issue, against their wish. It made me realize how privileged I was in America. In India, every year, diarrhea and other waterborne diseases kill over 770,000 children due to unhygienic and unsanitary conditions at home and at school.

On my return to the US, I searched online and found that half of the globe and about 30 million schoolchildren across India do not have access to proper sanitation facilities. I told my parents If I could do something to raise awareness about building toilets in rural India, I would not just be helping thousands of kids going to these schools, but I would also be helping raise awareness to do more in response to this problem. I set a goal of building six toilets by raising funds through a Facebook campaign.

I shared my goal with various people in my community, school, friends, family and social gatherings, and at after school events.

I printed a QR code on banners and posted it on school notice boards, grocery shops, and Hindu temples. At first, it was a lot of hard work and a low collection on the Facebook fundraiser. Later, I gave presentations to some of my mom's friends and got a few opportunities to present to different companies like Slalom Consulting, Acronis and Hitachi, and the donations started coming in.

I was able to raise \$2,200 over 60 days, which I donated to Sewa International's Sanitation, Hygiene and Empowerment of the Girl Child (SHE) program. They told me about an opportunity in a rural area around Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh (my father's native province), where they had recently got approvals to build toilets. We could complete the construction of six toilets in the Government Primary School, Bhagaonpur, with their help. They even sent me a few pictures of kids with smiling faces that would benefit from our little project. It helped me reach my goal and ultimately helped some girls continue their education.

India is a massive country, and instead of being stuck by the enormity of the problem, it is better to do something to solve the problem of a few. It was in part possible because of the various donors who came forward to help.



**Ayan Mishra**

I thank Sewa International for providing me with a platform to make a difference. The lesson for me is it is all a matter of determination and focus.

(Ayan Mishra, son of Madhup Mishra, and Neha Kaushal is a 12-year-old student at St. John's High School in Shrewsbury, MA.)

## Sewa's AmeriCorps Team Sends Relief to Earthquake Survivors in Turkey, Syria



**Sewa AmeriCorps team sorted and packed the donated items into the boxes to transport them to Turkey**

Sewa International Houston's AmeriCorps team organized a donation drive on February 18 to support and offer relief to the survivors of the recent earthquakes in Syria and Turkey. People from Houston donated food, clothes, winter coats, hygiene items, outdoor supplies, tents, hand warmers, shoes, and baby items.

The Sewa AmeriCorps team partnered with the National Association of Christian Churches (NACC) to deliver donated items in 150 cardboard boxes donated by Home Depot, Lowes, and U-Haul.

The Sewa volunteers sorted and packed the boxes and transported them to the NACC office. Turkish Airlines will deliver these supplies by air, coordinating with local NGOs, non-profits, and government organizations to ensure the packages reach the earthquake survivors. One heart-warming moment that happened during the drive was when a young boy donated his savings of \$28 to the fundraiser.

Children from another family donated their cherished blankets and sweatshirts to children in Syria, even though they loved their possessions. A Sewa-AmeriCorps member and the team lead for this drive, Kira Reyna, gratefully recalled the incredible amount of love, compassion, generosity, and sense of community visible during this event. She was thrilled that they could plan and complete this work in a few days.

Sewa Houston Chapter's former president, Ms. Manju Gupta, who donated items during the drive, said that organizing the donation campaigns required exceptional work and a lot of planning, hard work, and dedication from Sewa volunteers.



## In Honor of MLK Jr., Sewa Volunteer Work with Jewish Relief Agency



### **Sewa's LEAD volunteers helped pack food packets**

About 25 volunteers from Sewa International's Central Jersey Chapter participated in the January food distribution at the Jewish Relief Agency (JRA) in Philadelphia. JRA organized the event to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy. Over 850 volunteers from various organizations participated in the food distribution.

Sewa's LEAD volunteers helped pack hundreds of food packets and assisted in the delivery of food items to 20 households in the local area. The Sewa Central Jersey Chapter started volunteering at JRA in December 2022, and it has been an excellent partnership. In the last three months, more than 100 Sewa volunteers have been part of the efforts and have put in close to 500 hours of work.

## Sewa Colorado Chapter's Annual Planning Meeting in Highlands Ranch, CO



### **A few volunteers at the annual planning meet**

Sewa International's Colorado Chapter conducted its annual planning meeting on February 11 in Highlands Ranch, CO. In the meeting attended by 30 volunteers, the Sewa team planned activities for the next six months.

Yeshwant Belsare travelled to Colorado to attend the meeting as a representative from the Sewa national team. He discussed the vision and mission of Sewa and gave an overview of flagship Sewa projects. Dr. Janak Joshi, President of the Sewa Colorado Chapter and the Chapter Coordinator Atul Saini led the planning and discussion.

Starting with a detailed SWOT analysis, the team identified Disaster Relief, Family Services, Serve, and LEAD (Leadership, Education & Development) programs as focus areas in 2023. The team also identified fundraising as a primary focus area in 2023 to fund its planned activities.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



**Seema Damle**

Seema Damle has been involved with Sewa International over the last year along with her husband Satish Damle who joined the organization post retirement. They are from Maharashtra, India and currently live in Atlanta, GA. Seema is closely associated with Sewa Atlanta's AmeriCorps project.

As a part of this project, Sewa International is providing supplementary language education and tutoring students in STEM subjects. This is to improve academic performance for children from underprivileged communities at several apartment complexes in Dekalb and Fulton Counties in Georgia.

The objective of this program will be to improve students' ability to read, write, comprehend, and speak in English along with providing tutoring assistance in science and technology subjects.

Seema's tireless efforts have made this program a running success. Satish Damle is the program director. Seema's willingness to manage the day-to-day operations of Sewa Atlanta's AmeriCorps program is truly commendable.

Seema brings great attention to detail and exceptional planning skills. She has been instrumental in making the program run smoothly, from organizing volunteer activities to managing all the logistics. Her positivity and enthusiasm have inspired many others to get involved in the program and make a difference in the lives of others.

## Sewa International

P.O.Box 820867  
Houston, TX 77282-0867

(708) 872-7392  
info@sewausea.org  
www.sewausea.org



Editorial Team: Vidyasagar Tontalapur, Denver, CO (Director, Communications), Inchara Kumar & Shreya (Interns),  
Consultant: Prof. Ramesh Rao

