

## Give to Gain and Gain to Give -- Sewa Explained



*Sewa's VP of Technology Anil Deshpande, International Coordinator Shyam Parande, Advisor Saumitra Gokhale & President Arun Kankani (front row - left to right) with participants at the MOS workshop, in Karnatavati (Ahmedabad), India.*

"Sewa is an experience where the idea of 'give to gain' and 'gain to give' happens. It is like the water from a tank that is poured back into the tank," Saumitra Gokhale, a member of Sewa International's board of advisors, said recently.

Speaking at Sewa's two-day mission-oriented-staff (MOS) workshop, Gokhale defined Sewa work in three layers. He outlined three roles in Sewa – "Sevya," the ones deserving to be served; "Sevak," the one who serves; and "Sevith," the beneficiary. Sewa organized the MOS workshop on January 6 and 7 at Hedgewar Bhavan in Karnavati/Ahmedabad, in India.

"Sewa addresses specific segments of people like 'dukhit' (distressed), 'peedit' (hurt due to external force), 'vanchit' (deprived), 'shoshit' (exploited), and 'upekshit' (neglected). We need to maintain the dignity of the Sevya. The Sevak must refrain from thinking or speaking that he is helping the other. Sevak's mindset must be to provide service while working with Sevya," he explained.

"The progress that happens when a sevak serves the sevya is of two types; the service materially benefits the sevit and spiritually elevates the sevak. It is a win-win situation where sevaks must show gratitude to seviths for allowing them to serve and accepting the service offered," Saumitra Gokhale emphasized.

Discussing the contribution of members of the Indian diaspora, Saumitra Gokhale said that until the immigrant community starts serving the residents of their host country, they will not win their trust. Sewa can do wonders by connecting hearts, he said.

Speaking in different sessions in the workshop, Sewa's President, Arun Kankani, explained Sewa's work with Bhutanese refugees and the programs for refugee empowerment, the "Leadership, Education and Development" (LEAD), and Get Inspired programs. He also spoke on Sewa's strategic plan for the next five years. The MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator) sessions he conducted won many hearts in the workshop.

Sewa's Vice President of Technology, Anil Deshpande, discussed Sewa's strategy for 2023-27. He explained how Sewa plans to be the best in program initiative across multiple geographies and communities. Sewa wants to spread out into 100 chapters and would like to have 10,000 trained and active volunteers with 100 MOS by 2027. Sewa aims to have a 250,000 unique donor base by 2027 and cumulatively raise \$75 to \$100 million over the next five years.

## Bay Area Chapter Identifies Major Projects for 2023

In its 2023 annual planning meeting, the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter identified over 18 projects and 25 program leads to direct these initiatives. In the meeting organized on January 21 at the Sewa Community Center in Milpitas, more than 45 volunteers participated.

Sridhar Talanki, a Member of Sewa's Board of Directors, attended the event. In his concluding remarks, quoting a verse from Chanakya Neeti, a two-thousand-year-old political treatise, Talanki said all we need is an efficient manager and enabler for people to carry on meaningful work.

Anurag Mairal, President of the Bay Area Chapter, set the day's objectives in his initial remarks. Conducting a "Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats" (SWOT) analysis for the chapter, Chapter Coordinator Guru Prasad led the team in probing each area.

Sewa volunteer Rajesh Shastry introduced the 2023 Bay Area Program Leads and volunteers. Team leads briefly explained their teams' purpose and scope before going on to the breakout session to plan activities for the entire year. Each group presented the goals and activities planned for 2023 in the afternoon session.

### Bay Area Sewa Project Teams and Leaders for 2023:

- ASPIRE -- Mallika Dhapodkar
- Case Management -- Nivedita Krishnaswamy
- Chapter-level Events -- Ajay Takkallapalli, Anil Annam, Atul Shah
- Community Engagement -- Praveen Dhir
- Disaster Relief -- Anil Vijaypal, Anil Annam
- Engagement with Community Partners -- Sim Gopalan
- Grants -- Akshata Makkaru, Guru Prasad
- Health & Wellness (Mobile Clinic) -- Gaurav Khurana
- Health Awareness (AACI) -- Neeraj Sharma
- IT/Technology/Web Updates -- Rajesh Shastry
- Volunteers and Program Leads Development, Organizational Development -- Ajay Takkallapalli
- Marketing Communications & Donor Relations -- Nivedita Jain, Anjan Badri
- Public Officials Relationship Development -- Pranjali Dani
- SCC / Infrastructure -- Swamy Varda, Anjana Badri
- SELF -- Abhay Joshi
- SERVE (Volunteering, Corporate Volunteering, Family Camping, Food Security) -- Padma Chegondi, Anitha Takkallapalli, Kanika Khurana, Gayathri Chidambaram
- Stop Diabetes Movement -- Sanjeev
- Youth Development (LEAD) -- Jyoti Sachdev

## Love Your Community to Serve it Better -- Venkatesh Murthy



*Venkatesh Murthy, a member of Sewa International's Board of Advisors at MOS session in Karnavati (Ahmedabad), India*

"Volunteers who love the community they live in or work for can understand its needs well. Nar Sewa is indeed Narayan Sewa (serving humanity is serving God) and it is the ultimate expression of Sewa Bhav, or service mindset. We get an answer to the question of how we see God in human beings when we learn to see God in all living and non-living beings," said Venkatesh Murthy, a member of Sewa International's Board of Advisors.

Speaking at Sewa's two-day mission-oriented-staff (MOS) workshop on January 6 and 7 in Karnavati (Ahmedabad), India, Murthy said volunteers who love people could better understand the community's requirements.

Sewa expects an individual to be "Dharmaprajan" (righteous) and a social system to be "Dharmadhishtitha" (virtuous, honorable, and morally right). Dharma is that which sustains or holds, and Sewa wants people who are grounded in dharma. Sewa works on creating such individuals," Murthy said.

In another session, Venkatesh Murthy spoke on the importance of being on time, completing work on time, and scheduling work. He also underlined the prominence of storytelling for fundraising.

Shyam Parande, Sewa International's Global Coordinator, spoke at length on Sewa's values, vision, mission, and journey of the global Sewa movement and Sewa International, USA. He said Sewa International's founders started the organization to create a service-based organization that adhered to Indian ethos and commanded a global presence.

Sewa International's Executive Director (India), Abhishek Kumar, chronicled Sewa's 25-year journey. He spoke about Sewa's global presence as a registered organization in more than 20 countries, and how Sewa worked in other countries collaborating with partner organizations in managing disasters. Sewa's HR Manager (India), Hema Malhotra, detailed various administrative processes that the mission-oriented staff must follow.

## AUM School Opens in San Antonio, TX



*Chinmaya Mission's Swami Shivatmananda at Aum school event*

AUM School (<https://www.aumashram.org/aumschool/>), a dharma-based childcare facility and preschool where children can learn in a dharmic environment, opened its door to the public on January 22 in San Antonio, TX. AUM School is accepting applications for the current school year. Dharma, the Hindu concept, refers to moral law governing individual conduct, whatever be the position the individual is in, and dharma constitutes one of the four ends of life, with the other three being artha, kaama, and moksha.

Over 700 people attended the inauguration. From five in the morning, and throughout the day donors, supporters, and volunteers visited the school modeled on ancient Hindu ashrams. The school is an initiative to fulfil an unmet need of the Hindu community: an academic institution that teaches the basics of dharma to children.

Swami Shivatmananda from the Chinmaya Mission blessed the event. Prof. Sree Sreenath, President, Vivekananda Yoga University (VaYU), Arun Kankani, President, Sewa International, Digant Dash and Venkat Raghav, of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, AUM School's National Team, and representatives from over 20 dharmic organizations, language schools, and dance and music schools from San Antonio participated in the event

Speaking at the event, Arun Kankani said, "AUM school will focus on an unmet Hindu community need – a dharma-based childcare facility and preschool where children can learn in a dharmic environment. It is perhaps one of the first institutional initiatives for Hindus in America – a Hindu faith-based, multi-service facility with a sustainable model. It will truly become the center of overall positive value transformation in the community".

President of VaYU, Prof. Sreenath, said he was proud that Sewa International had been part of this journey since Sewa's San Antonio chapter president Dr. Hetal Nayak, is one of the brains behind this initiative. Prof. Sreenath hoped that Sewa chapters continue to be the catalyst for such institutions in the United States, which are building blocks of resilient communities and healthy societies.

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, Sewa International, Samskrit Bharati volunteers, and the San Antonio Hindu community took several weeks to prepare for the inauguration. Volunteers offered home-cooked prasada (offering to the deities) to devotees during the event. Volunteers from all three San Antonio temples played a part in conducting the school's inaugural rituals, which included vastu yajna, worship, a traditional meal preparation, and serving the attendees.



*Children playing with building blocks at Aum school*

## Sewa's 17th National Conference on May 6 & 7 in Atlanta, GA



*Participants at the Sewa's 16th national conference in Washington, DC in May 2022*

Sewa International's 17th Annual National Conference will be held on May 6 and 7, 2023, in Atlanta. The Sewa Atlanta team has begun making arrangements for out-of-town visitors who will be staying with local hosts, and for airport pick-up and drop-off arrangements for the attendees.

This two-day meeting is an occasion for Sewa volunteers from across the country to meet one another and hear and learn from Sewa's board members, advisors, and the executive team.

The conference begins at 8.30 am on Saturday, May 6. The Atlanta Sewa team has requested attendees to reach Atlanta by Friday (May 5) night and book their return flights after 4.00 pm on Sunday (May 7).

Announcing the conference dates, Arun Kankani, President of Sewa International, extended a hearty welcome to volunteers and urged them to participate in the annual event. Release of Sewa's 2022 Annual Report, presentations from various Sewa teams and functional area directors, and project-focused sessions are going to be a few highlights of the planned conference.

## SHE Team Constructs Toilets, Offers Menstrual Health Camps



*A still from a SHE menstrual health camp.*

Sewa International's SHE (Sanitation, Hygiene, and Empowerment Project for the Girl Child) team constructed 41 toilets in Magadi, Karnataka, and six at the Linguistic Knowledge Builder Government School at Mayandipatti, Madurai, in Tamil Nadu. Hindu Seva Pratishthana and Mukul Madhav Foundation funded the toilet constructions in Magadi, and the EKAM Foundation enabled the Mayandipatti construction.

The SHE team is surveying schools for toilet construction in Ayodhya and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh; Viratnagar near Jaipur in Rajasthan, and in some rural areas in Chattisgarh. Sewa's North Jersey chapter's LEAD volunteers and Google, based in California, will fund this project.

SHE volunteers conducted menstrual health and hygiene camps in Magadi (Karnataka) and Kolhapur (Maharashtra) schools. In addition, the SHE program conducted 575 menstrual health and awareness sessions and distributed reusable cloth sanitary napkin kits to adolescent girls studying in seventh to tenth grades. The SHE team also organized Q&A sessions with students and beneficiaries from its program for Covid Affected Families (SHE-CAF) and collected feedback.

Nearly 635 SHE-CAF beneficiaries completed their training, got jobs, or started businesses. The SHE team has targeted to reach out to 950 beneficiaries, including Covid-impacted women from urban, rural, and tribal areas, transgender communities, and migrant workers.

## Volunteer Spotlight: Latha Barthwal: Bringing Hope to Families of Tribal Women



*Latha Barthwal*

Latha Barthwal, from Uttarakhand, India, grew up seeing the beauty of the surrounding mountains as well nature's fury. Her father taught her that most people work for their own prosperity, but she should, while making a living, also help others prosper.

A few months after her marriage, her husband, a hotel management graduate, left the village in search of work. While at the village, a few Sewa volunteers visited Latha's family and encouraged her to take up organic farming. Latha, trained by Sewa in growing commercial crops organically, started training other women in nearby towns. She went from village to village with Sewa volunteers to teach other women to start earning, as she found hunger and poverty in many mountain villages.

Although she heard many disparaging comments from her neighbors, Latha remembered her father's words and continued her work. Soon, Sewa's work spread to thirty villages, and over 1,500 women joined its organic farming initiative. Many of these women, who had a tough time earning even Rs.10 a day, started looking after their families.

Latha thanks Sewa for helping these rural and tribal women make a decent living, allowing them to buy food, clothes, and other gifts for their family members on festivals like Harela, Phooldei, Holi, or Diwali. In addition, Sewa International has provided training in organic farming to men who returned from the cities to their ancestral villages during the COVID pandemic.

Latha's story was featured in Dainik Bhaskar, India's largest Hindi-language daily newspaper, ranked third in the world by circulation. Latha now works for Sewa as a "mission oriented staff" member (MOS) for Sewa and has been designated as a Community Development Officer (National Programs) in Uttarakhand.

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