

Sewa's Policy Recommendations on Service, Philanthropy, and Volunteerism for G20 Leadership



Sewa volunteers helped the flood affected families by evacuating them from low-lying areas, providing free medical assistance, and distributing essential items in India.

Ten months ago, Sewa International spearheaded an initiative to forge policy recommendations concerning "service, philanthropy, and volunteerism," in collaboration with the worldwide civil society consortium, C20 or Civil20. The outcome of this endeavor is a compendium of insights amalgamated from over 200 global civil society organizations, culminating in 32 precise policy suggestions. These propositions have been conveyed to the Indian government and are currently under deliberation with G20 global leaders. Their culmination is eagerly anticipated at the G20 Global Summit scheduled for September 9-10 in New Delhi.

Executive Corner

Namaste, Sewa Families!

On behalf of all of us at Sewa, I hope that you and your loved ones are healthy and well.

As I reflect on the past few years, I see how we dealt successfully with natural disasters and Covid shutdowns. During the pandemic, we noticed young people becoming disconnected from schools and community-based services. There is no quick fix to the challenges exacerbated by these unforeseen circumstances, yet we are coming back with a triumph. Despite the challenges we faced during the past years, most young people have dealt with the crises well and come out stronger. We are seeing more and more young people volunteer through our programs. The resilience of our youth speaks to our resolve, the strength of our programs, and our committed and dedicated volunteers. Most importantly, it also points to the determination of the young people and families who continue to access our programs or seek them out for the first time.

As we celebrate ten years of LEAD, the high school youth engagement program (started in 2013), we reflect on how far we have come from being a small summer internship program to an initiative to engage youth and families nationwide. We have grown from 20-25 participants in one or two chapters to over 1,000 high school students across 22 Sewa chapters.

Beyond their strategic significance, this compendium also serves to introduce the Indian principles of "sewa" (selfless service) and "tyaaga" (sacrifice) to international discourse on civil society organizations. By embedding these virtues into the policy deliberations, the document strives to foster a more compassionate and sustainable world. This initiative stands as a testament to the power of collective endeavors in shaping global policies, underlining the pivotal role of collaboration between civil society, governments, and international forums. The full report can be accessed at the link: <https://t.ly/ZlpNK>

All this would not be possible without the help of our adult LEAD coordinators, who motivate, guide, and funnel steady learning resources to students and help safeguard our collective future. We strive to achieve the following LEAD program goals:

- Programmatic Excellence
- Systemic Impact
- Recruitment and Retention

Sewa will continue to expand and strengthen the youth community by providing opportunities in all three verticals (Leadership, Education, and Development). We will amplify the voices and experiences of Sewa's youth to help guide families to find solutions to challenges facing our communities.

Youth and families often have competing demands on their time and energy. Involving them in planning and implementation, making frequent contact, and giving incentives to participate are ways to retain the youth in these programs. Please consider the following suggestions to encourage youth participation:

- Have their voices heard: Allow youth to contribute and offer their input for other Sewa initiatives, create opportunities to express themselves, voice their ideas, and provide information for projects or programs.
- Service opportunities: Youth who participate in service tend to feel more connected to the community, are more engaged in school, and are better prepared for the workforce.

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From Inspiration to Achievement: Sewa-AmeriCorps Summer Camp in Atlanta, GA



Srikanth Gundavarapu (sitting front), President, Sewa International, Atlanta Chapter, with Sewa AmeriCorps volunteers

Sewa International, in partnership with AmeriCorps, conducted a summer camp benefiting 45 underprivileged children in the Metro Atlanta area. Made possible by an AmeriCorps grant, the camp concluded in the third week of July.

Noteworthy personalities, including John Funny, Brookhaven's District 4 Representative, Zaneta Ivery, Program Officer at the Georgia Commission for Service and Volunteerism, Poonam and Ashok Datta of Seva Adult Day Care, and Jose Solis, a successful entrepreneur of La Chiquita, attended the closing ceremony.

The camp, a product of two months of dedication from Sewa volunteers and AmeriCorps members, offered a platform for children to enhance their social skills and access valuable Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Math (STEAM) education. Preceding the camp, Sewa volunteers, led by Program Director Satish Damle, identified attendees' needs and devised plans to address them.

Sewa's high school volunteers designed engaging STEAM experiments with the guidance of summer intern Ishita Raghuvanshi. The camp provided top-notch education with professional tutors secured through the AmeriCorps grant. The Property Manager at Sienna Ridge Apartments, Celia Lopez, graciously opened her leasing office to conduct these activities.

Executive Corner

- Close the generation gap: Allow active collaboration between adults and youth -- integrate youth into committees with adults who can act as mentors. Consider establishing a youth position on your chapter organizational board.
- Allow them to be changemakers: Connect youth to policy efforts by including them in the assessment of policies. Many elected officials nationwide have created opportunities through youth councils that advise on matters pertinent to young people.
- Pursue their passion: Encourage youth to identify their interests and activities where they can make positive changes; give them opportunities to develop essential life skills.

Functioning as an extension of the Sewa-AmeriCorps academic year initiative, the in-person summer camp complemented virtual tutoring sessions and in-person activities held throughout the year. Beneficiaries shared stories of the program's positive impact, lauding the commitment of AmeriCorps members and Sewa volunteers.

Satish Damle's term as Program Director concluded with the event, passing the torch to incoming Director Varsha Chauhan and Associate Director Rita Belsare.

Srikanth Gundavarapu, President of the Sewa Atlanta Chapter, said, "It is gratifying to see the impact that Sewa is making in the local communities. Education is a gift that keeps giving, and we are honored to collaborate with AmeriCorps on this initiative." The Sewa-AmeriCorps collaboration expressed gratitude to all who supported the program, underscoring the enduring value of education and community upliftment.

Jodie Gilfillan and Kevin Farrow of the Chamblee Park and Recreation Department (CPRD) offered the facilities. Generous contributions from Poonam and Ashok Datta of Seva Adult Day Care and Mike Roberts of Bread of Life Development (BOLD) Ministries provided essential resources. Jose Solis generously donated 40 Chromebooks for families in need.

Sewa volunteers resolved challenges like transportation by organizing pickups and drop-offs. The program's economic impact exceeded \$400,000, covering transport, meals, and enriching activities, offering a secure environment for children and respite for parents.



Children immersed in engaging activities

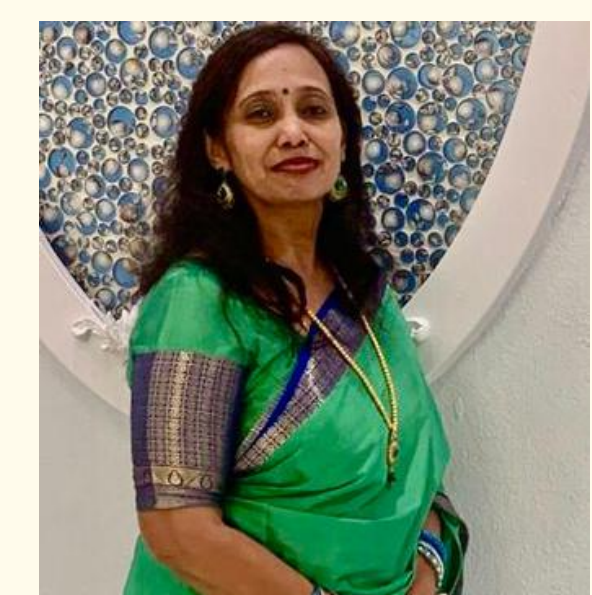
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- Follow their civic duty: Allow youth to confront serious social problems and become active community citizens. Please support them in leading an event and encourage them to develop efforts that nurture healthy adolescents.

Engaging youth in community development is essential for Sewa. We are optimistic about their future. We thank you for your belief in the program and your help in ensuring that all young people at Sewa have access to the skills, resources, and relationships they need to thrive.

Jyothsna Prasad

Jyothsna Prasad
Joint Director - LEAD Program
Sewa International (USA)



Rebuilding Maui's Spirit: Sewa International Responds



Raging wildfires swept through Maui, Hawaii. Picture Courtesy: Hindustan Times

The catastrophic wildfires that engulfed Maui, HI, on August ranks among the most destructive fires in the US over the past century.

Lives lost, homes reduced to ashes, and a haunting aftermath paint a grim picture in Lahaina. Over 115 people died, 2,700 structures demolished, and nearly 400 individuals remain unaccounted for. The fires have caused an estimated \$3.2 billion in property damage, destroying entire communities

Against this dire backdrop, Sewa International's fundraising effort to support Maui residents raised about \$4,000, and Sewa's volunteers have been hard at work offering immediate relief and vital resources. Arun Kankani, Sewa's President, appealed for unity and generous support, underscoring the urgency of assistance. To be part of this transformative endeavor, visit www.sewausa.org

"The Virtuous are Generous," says Acharya Vivek Gupta



Arun Kankani (top left), Dr. B.K. Mohan (top right), Acharya Vivek Gupta (bottom right), and Madhav Dharba (bottom left), at Sewa's Partners' Summit

Sewa International held a "Partners' Summit" on August 20, 2023. Eighty people, representing fifty partners, participated in this enriching one-and-a-half-hour event. Sandeep Khadkekar, Sewa International's Vice President for Marketing, welcomed the attendees, reminding them of the organization's commitment to teamwork, self-reliance, and the invaluable roles of volunteers, donors, and partners. Addressing the gathering, Arun Kankani, President of Sewa International, called for joint efforts, highlighting the multiplier effect of collaborative synergy that partnerships have sustained.

Acharya Vivek Gupta, from the Chinmaya Mission, Niagara, shared his insights on collaboration, reminding the audience that unused privilege is wasted.

His message of the virtuous being generous and happy people are helpful people struck a chord. Gupta urged for systematic giving of resources, time, and effort.

Dr. B.K. Mohan, Cardiologist and Founding Trustee of the Hindu Temple of Atlanta, viewed temples as hubs of architecture, energy, worship, meditation, and spiritual activity. Swami Boggarapu from the NRI Vasavi Association emphasized the integration of the strong Hindu heritage with non-violence. Soma Venkat from the Sringeri Vidya Bharati Foundation said that temples serve as platforms for community service.

Bhuvan Pyakurel, the Bhutanese American City Council Member from Columbus, OH, shared his transformative journey from that of a Bhutanese refugee to a city council member. Ashwini Surpur from Yoga Bharathi expressed gratitude for Sewa International's pivotal role in rehabilitating the affected.

Testimonies and videos from eminent figures like Jagdip Ahluwalia, Prabhakar Bhanoori, John Cornyn, Sylvester Turner, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Shri Ganpati Sachhidanand Swamiji, Sandeep Chakraborty, Pujya Chaitanya Murthy Das Swami of BAPS Sanstha, and Mustafa Ali Khan highlighted the trust that partner organizations and elected officials have placed in Sewa initiatives. Madhav Dharba conducted the proceedings as the event emcee.

I Am Buddha Foundation Honors Sewa International for Selfless Service



Renowned actress, Pallavi Joshi, handing certificate to Sachin Sugandhi, Coordinator, Sewa International's Dallas Chapter

The "I Am Buddha Foundation" acknowledged Sewa International's work with a certificate recognizing Sewa for alleviating the hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sachin Sugandhi, the coordinator of Sewa's Dallas Chapter, accepted the certificate. The presentation took place on August 15 in Dallas Fort Worth, where a group of over twenty Sewa International volunteers graced the stage during the ceremony. Renowned Indian Hindi film actress, Pallavi Joshi, with accomplished Indian film director and author, Vivek Agnihotri, known for his contributions to Hindi cinema, bestowed the honor. The event culminated in an engaging interactive session with Vivek Agnihotri and Pallavi Joshi.

Following the recognition, the documentary The Vaccine War was screened. The documentary chronicles the human story behind the development of a COVID-19 vaccine amidst challenging circumstances. Coinciding with India's Independence Day, the screening of the film added a new facet to the celebratory event.

A 12-Year-Old's Mission: Building Toilets, Changing Lives in Rural India



Sewa volunteers organized 5k walk/run event in Boston, MA

Ayan Mishra, a 12-year-old residing in Shrewsbury, MA, mobilized support from senior Sewa volunteers in the Boston Chapter to organize a 5k walk/run event to help Sewa International's Sanitation, Hygiene and Empowerment of the Girl Child (SHE) program. The event attracted over 100 registrations and supplementary walk-in participants, culminating in an impressive fund of nearly \$4,000. This financial windfall facilitated the erection of six sanitary units, benefiting more than 1,000 disadvantaged children in rural India.

Having witnessed the deplorable state of many school toilets during a trip to India with his mother, Ayan recognized the urgency of his cause. The objective was to raise funds for constructing much-needed toilets in impoverished areas of rural India, where the absence of proper sanitation facilities hindered educational access.

With meticulous planning, he planned the event, charted a course along the Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT), Hudson, MA, gave a presentation, and secured approval from Sewa volunteers. Ayan also took charge of designing a compelling event flyer, which found its way onto notice boards in local gyms, stores, and the "Hudson Fest," and secured vital event sponsorships.

The venue featured registration desks, hydration stations, and check-in counters, all leading up to a fine start marked by sponsor inaugurations and the resounding call of a conch. Ayan's determination and idealism demonstrated that age is no barrier to meaningful change.

Community Collaboration Supports Indian Jump Rope Team at 2023 World Championships



Indian athletes participated in the World Jump Rope Championships in Colorado

The Indian Jump Rope athletics team participated in the 2023 World Jump Rope Championships held from July 16 to 23 at Ed Robson Arena, Colorado College, in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The event hosted over 1,200 athletes from 27 nations competing in various categories.

In partnership with other partner organizations like the Colorado Marathi Mandal, Sewa International raised about \$8,000 through an online GoFundMe campaign and a "Walk for a Cause" event.

Comprising thirteen athletes, two coaches, and one department head, Team India included participants aged thirteen to fifteen. Lacking financial aid from the Indian Government due to its non-Olympic status, Team India relied entirely on public contributions.

Sewa International, Colorado, in collaboration with the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), Colorado Tennis Cricket League, Colorado Telugu Association, Colorado Kannada Koota, Indian Association of Rockies, and Colorado Marathi Mandal, ensured the team's accommodation and food for the team during their 13-day stay in Colorado Springs.

Sewa volunteers collaborated with local communities, provided Indian meals throughout the team's stay, and facilitated recreational visits to places like Pikes Peak and Garden of the Gods.

Sewa International Receives AmeriCorps Public Health and ASPIRE Grants



ASPIRE volunteers and students involved in an activity

Sewa International has been awarded the prestigious AmeriCorps Public Health Grant for Mental Health Program, alongside the Achieving Students Progress, Instilling Resilience, and Excellence (ASPIRE) grant for their after-school program.

This dual award has provided Sewa with the means necessary to extend its services to additional schools in underserved communities. The ASPIRE grant opens doors for Sewa to expand its presence in marginalized communities, enabling it to provide crucial support and resources to students who need it the most.

The Mental Health Program is a core initiative to promote mental well-being through preventive measures. By conducting awareness sessions, Sewa aims to break down stigmas about mental health and foster understanding within communities. Moreover, they equip members and the community with valuable knowledge through Mental Health First Aid training. This program provides vital skills to support individuals facing mental health crises or challenges.

Sewa's SHE-CAF Centers Celebrate Independence Day to Empower Women and Students



Sewa's SHE team observing India's Independence Day in Bengaluru, India

Over 1,100 women and students joined Independence Day festivities at sixteen of Sewa's SHE and SHE-CAF centers. The occasion marked the observance of India's freedom and highlighted the commitment of these centers toward fostering empowerment, education, and progress in their communities. More than 300 women beneficiaries and children enjoyed cultural activities, embracing Indian traditions.

The inauguration of twelve school toilets highlighted progress and inclusivity efforts. These facilities provide access to basic amenities and promote hygiene among students. Menstrual health awareness workshops reaching over 300 adolescent girls have helped in breaking the stigma of menstruation and enabling the girls to navigate their adolescence with confidence and awareness.

The insights shared by notable figures at these festivities enriched the celebrations. Army Officer Baldev Singh's presence honored selfless service. Dr. Ram Kureel, Vice Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi Horticulture University, delivered an inspiring talk during the inauguration of school toilets in Sankara village. Muralidhar Yadav, Block Education Officer in Viratnagar, and Usha, Sub-Inspector, Traffic Police, Bengaluru Urban, also graced the occasion. The skill development programs for 200 beneficiaries in Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, as well as in Maharashtra emphasized empowerment.

A Heartwarming Day of Giving Back



Sewa volunteers participated in the "Back to School" festival in Houston, TX

Over 25 Sewa volunteers gathered at the George Brown Convention Center, Houston, to participate in the Houston Mayor's "Back to School Festival" on August 5. Underprivileged children and families received much-needed items and health checkups, which made Sewa volunteers realize the significance of volunteering. The Mayor's Office partnered with the University of Houston, the National Kidney Association, and the Houston Health Foundation to organize the festival.

Sewa Houston Celebrates 5k Walk/Run in Aliana, Richmond, TX

Sewa Houston's "Sleep, Exercise, Lifestyle Practices, Food and Diet" (SELF) team held the 29th installment of their monthly 5k walk/run event on August 12, in partnership with Maheshwari Mahasabha of North America (MMNA) and the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS). Over 120 participants, including children, participated at Aliana, Richmond in the challenging hot weather. The event commenced with warm-up exercises, followed by a rendition of the national anthems of India and the US, commemorating India's 77th Independence Day.



Sewa's SELF team conducted a 5k walk/run event in Richmond, TX

Sewa Welcomes Gangaraju and Vijay Kapoor to National Team

Gangaraju Hanumaiah and Vijay Kapoor have joined Sewa International as the Director of Internal Audit and Compliance, and Associate Director of Employee Success, respectively. Gangaraju is the founder and CEO of RightTaxMate. He worked with Ernst & Young in their expatriate tax division and specialized in international taxes. He is a recipient of the "High Impact Award" from Ernst & Young.

Specialized in international compliance requirements for US individuals and business taxpayers, Gangaraju is an Enrolled Agent admitted to practice before the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and has over sixteen years of experience in the US tax industry. He has successfully represented taxpayers with the IRS in resolving tax issues. Gangaraju, who lives in Katy, TX (Houston) with his wife and two children, hails from Karnataka. He has helped the Sewa finance team since last year.

Vijay Kapoor is taking responsibility as the Associate Director of Employee Success and will be part of the Programs and Projects team.

Vijay Kapoor will focus on AmeriCorps projects and help chapter teams in hiring, planning through the execution, and helping in the success of each staff member and the project. He worked at the United Nations Headquarters in various capacities, mainly in operations including, Finance, Procurement, Logistics, Military Support, and Administration. His last position at the UN was as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at support offices in Nairobi (Kenya) and Mogadishu (Somalia).

A Chartered Accountant by education, Vijay has worked with Pioneer Hi-bred Seeds in Ethiopia, Modi Olivetti in Delhi, as well as with VIP Industries, Modi Xerox, and Reckitt Benckiser.

Vijay Kapoor, who hails from Delhi, completed his education at Delhi. He recently retired from the United Nations after 25 years of service. He lives with his wife Ashu in Edison, NJ. Their daughters are in New York City. He loves traveling, photography, golfing, and cooking. Arun Kankani, President of Sewa International, welcomed Gangaraju and Vijay Kapoor to the Sewa family.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Uttam Bidesi, from Hyderabad, India, is a dedicated Sewa volunteer from the Central Jersey Chapter. Influenced by his parents' teachings, he has assisted those around him, irrespective of age or social standing.

Sewa, to him, is not just an organization; it is the platform that helps his commitment to community service.



Uttam Bidesi

His affinity for Sewa finds expression in various roles, including volunteering at the Radha Gopinath Mandir and contributing to family camps. The past summers have seen him contribute to the planning and execution of many family camps, channeling his energies toward creating enriching experiences for both the young and old.

Uttam Bidesi lives in Edison, New Jersey, with his wife and two children.

ASPIRE's Summer School Program -- Students Earn an Enriching Experience



Students and volunteers at the ASPIRE summer school program in Newark, CA

ASPIRE has completed its seven-week summer school program, offering children an incredible and enriching experience. The program was held at Schilling and Lincoln Elementary Schools in Newark, CA.

It was led by 46 volunteers who offered their expertise and support to over 400 student participants.

The program offered a diverse and well-rounded educational experience. Students had the opportunity to engage in various enrichment programs, including coding, robotics, performing arts, arts & crafts, and science experiments, showcasing ASPIRE's commitment to providing holistic learning opportunities. The finale showcased the students' achievements and the distribution of over 400 goodie bags.

Professor Dhapodkar coordinated work in one of the schools and dedicated more than 60 hours of work every week.

LEAD's Third National Youth Conference Unites 800 Students Virtually



Sewa's LEAD volunteers at the National Youth Conference 2023

The third National Youth Conference, hosted by LEAD, brought together nearly 800 students from all corners of the US for a virtual event on July 29. One of the conference's highlights was attracting about 1500 viewers via live stream on Facebook.

This online viewership marked the conference's success and highlighted its growing significance in empowering youth nationwide. The conference served as a platform for these young leaders to showcase their passion and commitment to serving their communities. Through engaging discussions, interactive sessions, and inspiring presentations, the conference provided a space for young students to connect, collaborate, and collectively explore innovative solutions to societal challenges.

The conference acted as a catalyst for fostering leadership skills, enhancing teamwork, and promoting community engagement among the participants. LEAD continues to inspire and empower the next generation of change-makers who will shape a better tomorrow.

Upcoming Events

- September 10, 2023: Annual Golf Charity Event | Clear Creek Golf Club, Houston, TX
- September 10, 2023: Bike-A-Thon 2023 | Sewa Bay Area | Milpitas, California
- September 16, 2023: SERVE-Volunteering@ East Spring Branch Food Pantry | Westview Dr, Houston, TX

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