

Education Summit 2024 Addresses Challenges for Immigrant Students



Rakhi Israni, moderator; Julie Sugarman, Associate Director for K-12 Education Research at MPI's National Center; Sudha Prabhunandan, moderator; Brittany, an 8th-grade student; Dr. Piyush Agarwal, educationist and United Nations consultant; Victor Fisher, teacher; and Krishnan Balasubramaniam, Sewa donor at the 2024 Education Summit (from top left, clockwise)

On October 5, 2024, Sewa International held its virtual "Education Summit 2024," attracting over 160 participants. The summit focused on the challenges faced by immigrant and refugee students in U.S. schools and ways to close the education gap for marginalized communities.

A panel moderated by Rakhi Israni, Sewa's Vice President of Government Relations, featured experts including Julie Sugarman from MPI's National Center, Dr. Piyush Agarwal, an educationist, and Carole Juarez from AmeriCorps. They discussed the hurdles immigrant students face, with Sugarman noting that 25% of U.S. schoolchildren come from immigrant families. Dr. Agarwal highlighted lessons from past immigrant waves, emphasizing educator training and bilingual support.

Juarez explained how AmeriCorps members assist students in Sewa's Aspire program, particularly those with limited English proficiency.

The second panel, led by Sudha Prabhunandan, began with a yoga session by instructor Sridevi. The panel included Brittany, an 8th-grade student, Krishnan Balasubramaniam, a Sewa donor, and teacher Victor Fisher. Brittany shared how Aspire helped improve her grades, while Fisher discussed the positive impact of individualized attention on at-risk students. Balasubramaniam stressed the importance of donor engagement and financial transparency in addressing educational inequality.

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5k Walk/Run at Hermann Park, Houston



Participants gathered for a 5K Walk/Run at Hermann Park, Houston, TX

On October 12, Sewa Houston, in partnership with HCA Houston Healthcare Medical Center, organized a 5K Walk/Run at Hermann Park. About 75 participants gathered to promote community well-being and healthier lifestyles.

Mike Lance, HCA's Interim CEO and Chief Development Officer, highlighted the organization's nearly five-decade commitment to helping people in Houston. He emphasized HCA's expertise in critical healthcare services and dedication to community outreach through strategic partnerships.

Arun Kankani, Sewa President, encouraged attendees to prioritize healthy habits and engage with Sewa's community initiatives. Alpana Loyalka, Sewa Houston Team Executive Member, highlighted the features of the "Achieving Students Progress, Instilling Resilience, and Excellence" (ASPIRE) program.

ASPIRE is an after-school initiative by Sewa for underserved, refugee, and immigrant children in Southwest Houston, helping over 200 students improve their academic performance.

Hurricane Milton Strikes Tampa Bay: Sewa Tampa Leads Relief Efforts

A Category 4 storm, Hurricane Milton, rapidly approached Tampa Bay, bringing catastrophic storm surges, flooding, and widespread destruction. As the hurricane tore through Florida, Tampa Bay emerged as one of the hardest-hit areas. The region faced devastation on a massive scale, with hundreds of thousands left without electricity, water, and essential supplies. Surges reached heights of 8 to 12 feet, while rainfall exceeded 15 inches, forcing thousands to evacuate. Milton's impact was reminiscent of Hurricane Helene, which claimed over 230 lives.

Sewa's Tampa Chapter volunteers supported students at the University of South Florida (USF) who lost access to power and water. On October 12, the team packed and delivered over 400 hot meals to USF students in need. In the aftermath of the storm, Sewa Tampa volunteers swiftly mobilized to provide emergency assistance on the ground. They offered immediate relief, including shelter, food, and clean water for displaced families.



Volunteers from Sewa's Tampa Chapter packed and delivered over 400 hot meals to USF students who lost power and water after the storm



Sewa volunteers delivered hot meals to residents of Anand Vihar, a senior community in Tampa Bay, Florida

Volunteers also assisted with medical care for the injured, provided fuel and battery products to areas suffering from power outages, and helped repair and rebuild homes and schools in the affected regions.

To aid recovery efforts, Sewa Tampa announced the availability of a list of essential contractors for post-hurricane repairs. Residents in need reached out to receive contact details for contractors specializing in services such as roofing, fencing, fallen tree removal, damaged light poles, window glass replacement, floor leak repairs, lanai restoration, and structural or concrete work.

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) tweeted appreciation for Sewa's relief work, stating, "Gratified to see Hindu American charities such as Sewausa and BAPS charities deeply engaged in - - as they always are -- in relief work after Hurricane Milton struck the Tampa Bay Area."

Diwali Tribute: 400 Hot Meals Served to Emergency Responders in Tampa, FL

On October 19, the Tampa Chapter of Sewa USA distributed 400 hot meals across 15 fire stations and a homeless food distribution center, expressing heartfelt gratitude to first responders for their dedication and service during the post-hurricane recovery efforts. This act of kindness recognized the tireless work of these emergency personnel. It celebrated the spirit of Diwali—the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness.

Ramanathan Rama Subbu, the Tampa Chapter Coordinator, stated, "Every day, we live a peaceful life thanks to these first responders who put their lives at risk to ensure we can sit at our tables peacefully. Sewa Tampa organized a meal delivery just a week before Diwali, the festival of light, to show our appreciation. By honoring the first responders during the post-hurricane season, we celebrated Diwali to emphasize the importance of community support to disaster victims."



Sewa's Tampa Chapter volunteers distributed 400 hot meals to first responders in Tampa, FL, after the hurricane Milton devastation



Sewa Tampa Youth led a clean-up effort to help the local community recover from the storm's aftermath

Ramanathan continued, "After a challenging fortnight of storms and power outages, Tampa Bay Sewa volunteers teamed up with organizations like Art of Living and The Nandalala Mission to cook hot Indian meals for local first responders. Young volunteers packaged the meals at a member's garage and delivered them to fire stations in the area. Additionally, we provided food and water to those seeking refuge at comfort centers opened by the City of Tampa."

A team of 45 Sewa volunteers participated in the initiative to prepare and deliver the meals. The event highlighted the community's appreciation for those who selflessly serve in times of crisis, reinforcing the bonds of support and gratitude that unite the community during challenging times.

As part of the ongoing recovery efforts, Sewa Tampa Youth also led a clean-up effort at Pride Elementary School, helping the local community return to normalcy after the storm's destruction.

Seattle Chapter Hosts Dandiya Fundraiser



Dandiya event participants gathered at the Microsoft office in Redmond, WA

Sewa Seattle hosted a two-day Dandiya (folk dance performed in honor of Goddess Durga) fundraiser on October 4 and 5 at the Microsoft office in Redmond, drawing hundreds of enthusiastic participants. The event brought together extended families and friends for an evening of music, dance, and community service.

Consul General Prakash Gupta praised the progress achieved by Sewa's LEAD (Leadership, Education, and Development) students. He highlighted their community involvement and academic achievements, including being the only high school team to qualify for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) project.

Sumeet Sharma, a participant, said, "The dandiya program was very well-organized, and we had an awesome time with family. We felt good attending it, knowing it was for a noble cause. Sewa Seattle chapter raises awareness for social causes and brings people together."

The funds raised at the event will support initiatives like the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) program for government schools in India, providing 400 weekly meals to seniors through the "Service @ Senior Center" program, and developing an organic farm to supply fresh produce to needy families. Microsoft's support drives these efforts.



Sewa Seattle Dandiya fundraiser organizing team posed for a photo at the event

Sewa Boston Hosts Garba Event Celebrating Culture and Community



Sewa Boston organized a garba event at the Sai Temple in Groton, MA

Sewa Boston hosted a vibrant garba event on October 5, with over 500 participants, celebrating culture, community, and compassion. The event at the Sai Temple in Groton, MA, featured traditional music by DJ Ashok, inspiring everyone to dance and celebrate their heritage.

The event also featured a marketplace that allowed local artisans and businessmen to sell jewelry, sarees, and artwork. Youth volunteers played a key role, helping with raffle tickets and refreshments, reflecting Sewa Boston's spirit of service.

Attendees enjoyed Indian cuisine prepared by Gurnam Catering. The event also focused on giving back to the society, with funds raised going to local non-profits like New England Leherein, Aidworks Foundation, and Sewa's SHE program.



Participants involved in dancing during the garba event at the Sai Temple in Groton, MA

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Sewa's Aspire program, launched in 2013, provides academic support in Math, English, and Arts for K-6 students. The program has grown across multiple locations with support from AmeriCorps. Anjana Bhadri, Regional Project Manager at Sewa, outlined its impact.

In his closing remarks, Sewa Bay Area's Chapter President and Stanford's Prof. Anurag Mairal underscored the importance of education and innovation for underserved communities. He observed that the challenges stem not from students' abilities but from their access to resources and sense of belonging.

Sewa Partneres with Oracle to Help Rural Livelihood Development



Veterinary officials conducted a one-day orientation program for livestock caretakers and model farmers in Pokhri, Uttarakhand

Sewa's Krishi Kendra, Pokhri, Uttarakhand, hosted a one-day orientation training in partnership with the multinational software company, Oracle.

This training benefited *pashu sakhis* (livestock caretakers) and model farmers from Rudraprayag and Chamoli districts.

Dr. Ashish Rawat, a Veterinary Pharmacist, Rakesh Sati, a vaccinator, and Jagdish Rawat, an officer at BAIF (Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation) Center, trained the attendees. Sewa's District Manager, Pradeep Negi, and block LEADs also participated.

Dr. Rawat spoke about departmental schemes, breed selection, animal hygiene, nutrition, and regular health check-ups. Jagdish Rawat shared information about artificial insemination (AI) techniques and highlighted how the *pashu sakhis* can use these skills in villages to improve their income.

The training will help villagers increase their income while supporting the Sustainable Development Goals of the Government of India. By empowering *pashu sakhis* and model farmers, Sewa and Oracle seek to foster sustainable agriculture practices and economic growth in the region.

South Jersey Cultivates Community Spirit with Garden Project

Sewa South Jersey partnered with the Chesterfield Community Garden Committee to establish a community garden, fostering unity and sustainable living in the town. After 18 months of discussions and six months of planning, the project was inaugurated. The township has provided the land, while Sewa South Jersey's volunteers, led by Arathi, a key member of the Community Garden Committee, will work on the project.

The 9,000 sq. ft. garden will feature approximately 55 plots for residents to rent and grow their preferred vegetables. Sewa South Jersey volunteers started the project by spreading two truckloads of compost in the garden.

Commending this initiative, Arun Kankani, Sewa International President, said, "During my recent visits to New Jersey, I saw LEAD (Leadership, Education, and Development) volunteers actively involved in community gardens, with some expanding to small-scale farming and donating produce to temples. One family even grows enough vegetables for the entire year.



Sewa South Jersey volunteers spread two truckloads of compost across the garden in Chesterfield, NJ

The dedication to sustainable gardening and community support is remarkable, and our Serve and LEAD programs can strengthen these connections."

"This community garden will not only provide residents with fresh produce but also serve as a hub for socialization, education, and community engagement. We are thrilled to see this initiative take shape," said Arathi.

An Eye Camp in Noida for Senior Citizens



Sewa organized an eye camp for senior citizens in Barola Village, Noida

In partnership with TechnipFMC, a global leader in energy projects, technologies, systems, and services, Sewa International conducted a comprehensive eye check-up camp for senior citizens in Barola Village, Noida, on October 18. Over 80 senior citizens benefited from the initiative, receiving essential eye care and corrective measures to restore their vision. The camp brought together 15 volunteers from TechnipFMC and five Sewa team members, demonstrating the power of collaborative efforts.

The eye check-up camp is part of Sewa's ongoing efforts to address healthcare disparities in rural and underserved areas in India. By partnering with corporates like TechnipFMC, Sewa aims to expand its reach and impact.

Suswagatham 2024 Welcomes Indian Students

Sewa's Suswagatham 2024 program extended a warm welcome to students from India in Denver, CO. The Sewa Denver team collected essential items from twelve households across Highlands Ranch, Aurora, Centennial, Erie, and Longmont and distributed them to students at the University of Denver (DU) and the University of Colorado, Boulder (CU Boulder).

Donated items include furniture, bicycles, utensils, lamps, monitors, and microwaves, ensuring students settle comfortably into their new surroundings. The Sewa Denver team thanked Shashi Kiran and Sumedh for supporting international students and promoting community engagement.



The Sewa Denver team hosted a welcome program for university students from India in Denver, CO

Sewa Spreads Diwali Joy in South Africa



Sewa volunteers distributed Diwali hampers to the people in need in Johannesburg, South Africa

Despite stormy weather, over seventy Sewa volunteers distributed 200 Diwali hampers to those in need on October 23 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Coinciding with Diwali celebrations, Sewa also launched a podcast to share information about programs and initiatives.

Sewa Empowers Women Through Entrepreneurship



A trainer empowered rural women with marketing and sales skills

Sewa's Mahila Jyoti Center in Delhi, supported by Oracle, conducted marketing and sales training for 45 women from three centers, providing essential entrepreneurship skills. The interactive session and hands-on activities equipped women with tools to build confidence, enhance their marketing and sales skills, and achieve self-reliance by overcoming socio-economic constraints.

Sewa Atlanta Joins AmeriCorps for National Day of Service and Remembrance

In collaboration with AmeriCorps, Atlanta chapter volunteers observed the National Day of Service and Remembrance at Mary Alice Park in Cumming, GA, on September 15.

Georgia's Insurance and Fire Safety Commissioner John F. King, Fire Chief of Forsyth County Barry Head, State Senator Shawn Still, and Forsyth County Commissioner Alfred John attended the commemoration ceremony.



Sewa Atlanta chapter volunteers observed the National Day of Service and Remembrance at Mary Alice Park in Cumming, GA



Sewa's Atlanta chapter volunteers are actively preparing for the National Day of Service and Remembrance

The guest speakers shared their memories of 9/11, with the Fire Chief Barry Head highlighting the sacrifices of firefighters and their families.

Sewa organized 49 events across 17 chapters nationwide, including a park cleanup in Cumming, GA. These initiatives also featured other activities like tree planting and educational sessions.

Upcoming Events

- October 18, 2024, to April 25, 2025: Sewa PA/DE LEAD Fundraisers | Philadelphia Area and Delaware
- November 17, 2024: HELP 2024 - Fundraising Gala | GSH Events Center | Houston, TX
- November 23, 2024: Sewa Bay Area 2024 Annual Banquet | OFJCC, Fabian Way, Palo Alto, CA,
- December 7, 2024: HSS- Sewa - 5k Walk/Run | John Paul Landing Park - West Rd, Cypress, TX

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