

## Sponsor A Child – Now Exceeds 1500 Sponsorships



Sponsor A Child (SAC) program added 141 new sponsorships in 2019 taking the total number of sponsored children to 1584. It also added four new learning centers and expanded its work to seven states in India.

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## Executive's Corner

*Dear Sewa Families & Friends,*

We have started a new year, and a new decade! We live in busy times, with major changes that affect all of us in important ways – both where you live and where you are from, and elsewhere around the world. There are matters of urgent challenges – from environmental degradation to mass migration of people because of war, economic hardship, religious persecution, and other social upheavals. But it also depends on how we see the world: glass half full, or glass half empty! If we merely are concerned about and focused on the challenges facing the world we are apt to ignore the positive changes in the world, and those positive changes and influence include people like you who contribute your time, energy, your wealth and your skills and knowledge to make this world a better place. So, it is in this spirit I write to you this month.

You will find in this newsletter reports on the annual fundraisers in different chapters and of their success in attracting small and large donors to help the causes we are passionate about. You will read about the increased interest in the *Sponsor a Child* (SAC) program, which now has reached another milestone: more than 1,500 children

in India supported by Sewa donors. This is fantastic news, and every child you support is one child that goes to school happy and returns home happy and informed. Education is the engine that keeps our world humming and bright, and every child that you support therefore is a light that shines upon the world. We thank all of our SAC donors, and we hope that you will take just that little extra time to spread the word about this fantastic endeavor of ours.

There is more news about the good works being done both our volunteers and our affiliates and partners around the world, and we urge you to take a few minutes to read about them all. Your interest, your dedication, and your support in this enterprise of doing good for the world and enabling us to grow as individuals and as a community of volunteers is very much a beacon that will continue to shine in this new decade!

Sincerely,

**Prof. Sree N. Sreerath**  
President



## Sponsor A Child – Now Exceeds 1500 Sponsorships



In the recently released 2019 annual report SAC Program Director Ravichandra Chakinala expressed confidence that SAC would see a larger increase in sponsorships in 2020. He said many website enhancements targeted to increase donor interaction with sponsored children and better program impact measurement would be implemented in 2020.

The number of sponsored children has grown from 480 in 2011 to 1584 in 2019. Currently 357 donors help fund the SAC program and 55 percent of beneficiary children are tribal, 26 percent are children from rural areas, and 19 percent are from

urban areas. Among the children helped by the program, boys comprise 55 percent and girls makeup 45 percent: new sponsorships in 2019 included 74 girls and 67 boys.

Seed funds from Gayatri Yoga Center, Kiev, Ukraine helped expand the SAC program. Anil Dhamani from Georgia (US) supported 100 tribal children from Madhya Pradesh, and New York and New Jersey Sewa chapters sponsored another 100 children from Telangana. Arvind Sodhani from California supported 30 tribal children in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and Pramod Sajja from Georgia supported 25 tribal children from North Karnataka. Ananda Rajagopal from California sponsored 18 tribal children from Mysuru, and Shirim Foundation from Ohio sponsored 12 children from Bengaluru. Veerashaiva Samaj of North America, Connecticut Chapter sponsored 10 tribal children from Mysuru.

From October 2019 the SAC team has begun publishing monthly newsletters, which are sent to donors, and the first weekend of every month a video call is arranged between donors and children. The SAC program team has received a great response from donors for these initiatives, Ravichandra said.

## Pratap Singh Chouhan, wife, succumb to injuries suffered in New Zealand volcano eruption

Pratap Singh Chouhan (49), Sewa International Atlanta Chapter President, passed away in New Zealand on January 28, 2020. He succumbed to injuries that he sustained after New Zealand's White Island volcano erupted on December 9, 2019. In the immediate aftermath of the eruption some of the 47 tourists from a Royal Caribbean cruise ship that were visiting the volcano on a day trip died, and dozens were injured.

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## Pratap Singh Chouhan, wife, succumb to injuries suffered in New Zealand volcano eruption

Pratap's wife Mayuari (42), who was with him, and suffered burns over 70 percent of her body died at a New Zealand hospital on December 22. Pratap, who was battling for his life, having suffered burns over 40 percent of his body, passed away at Auckland's Middlemore Hospital where he was being treated.

Sewa Atlanta chapter members are mourning the death of their president who was known for his cheerful approach to life, his active role in fundraising for good causes, his will to help the underserved, and his strong and sustained belief in the concept of "sewa" – selfless service.

Pratap, a successful businessman, and Mayuari, a financial advisor, leave behind a grieving family with three young children, Luv, a boy aged 11, and twin girls Navya and Nidhi, aged 6. Mayuari's mother was on the cruise ship with the children on that fateful day as the family vacationed but survived. A prayer meeting will be held on Thursday, January 30 at the Global Mall in Atlanta.

## Begging and Brawls Make Way for Development.

On that day, Laxmi was feeling good even while waiting for her daughter Mauni under the hot sun. As soon as she arrived Laxmi wiped the sweat off from her face and hugged and kissed her daughter. Mauni was looking very proud and pretty while holding the trophy in her little hands. How could Lakshmi ever forget that just three years earlier Mauni used to spread her little hands before every passerby in lanes, and outside temples -- just for a few coins?

Probably these little hands would have continued begging for a lifetime – if Sewabharati had not taken the responsibility of educating children of Kapadia Basti. Not just Mauni, but Mohit, Vishal, Meethi, Asha and several others were among the children whose destinies were transformed, owing to tireless efforts of Sewabharati. Kapadia Basti of Kanpur was widely known as the locality of beggars. Not just children, but entire families were engaged in begging as their means of livelihood.

Three years ago, the dedicated women members of Sewabharati began Bal Sanskar centers, as well as sewing centers to make the residents of the locality educated and self-reliant. At present, 52 children of this locality are studying in the Gurukul Public School, with the entire expenses borne by the Vivekananda Committee. Initially, Sewabharati members had to plead with the women in the locality to send their children to the Bal Sanskar Center but soon the women had their own request: open a training center for sewing and a literacy center where they could learn to sew, read, and write. A local woman, Veda, offered space in her home for the literacy center, and another woman, Sarla, agreed to teach the women. Over the past three years several women have learnt Hindi, alongside elementary arithmetic.

The task was not easy at first. Initially, people of the locality used to look upon the Matrimandal volunteers with suspicion, and even made fun of them. They avoided any conversation with them. However, due to persistent efforts of dedicated volunteers like Tushmul Mishra, Shailaja, Kshama and others the first center was opened on October 22, 2016. Now, not only are the children getting educated they have also given up the consumption of tobacco and begging.

Women like Soni, Shivani, Sadhana and others have completed training in sewing and have now started working at home and in local tailoring shops and boutiques.

President of the Matrimandal Sewabharati in Kanpur, Kshama Mishra, said that alongside education, children of the locality have won prizes in various athletic and sports competitions. In a program recently, the full rendition of *Vande Mataram* by these children received a huge applause from the audience. Women are also learning to sing *bhajans* and they meet every week to learn, practice, and keep in touch with one another. Now, instead of quarrelling, these women gather to talk about how they can cooperate with one another to make their lives better.

## Bay Area Raises \$59,000 at Annual Banquet

In another successful end of the year event, Sewa International's Bay Area Chapter raised \$59,000 at the annual banquet held at the Ranch Golf Club in San Jose, CA on December 14. The event, which was attended by more than 230 people, including donors, volunteers, and partner organization members started with an invocation by members of the IndiaRaga group.

In his keynote address, philanthropist and founder/chairman of *Indiaspora*, MR Rangaswami talked about the importance of giving back to the community, and commended Sewa on the good work it is doing.

The gala started with a 45-minute networking time that included display of Sewa projects and time to interact with Sewa project leads. Chapter President, Jayant Somani, offered an overview of the work for the year. In a presentation on the Family Services project, Minal Joshi talked about Case Management, and Nivedita Krishnaswamy and Seema Murthy gave an overview of Education and Awareness workshops and the Stop Diabetes Movement events.



*Sewa International Bay Area Volunteers at the Annual Banquet*

build houses for others. Sewa's National Vice President for Marketing, Sandeep Khadkekar interviewed Sachin Kulkarni, Sewa donor and North East India ambassador about the projects taken up and the goals to bring education and development to the neglected areas in the region.

Dr. Richard Osinbajo, Executive Coach and Program Facilitator moderated a panel discussion on the importance of giving back to the community. Participating in the discussion were Chapter Coordinator Guruprasad, and advisors Raju Reddy and Dr Anurag Mairal.

Gautam Desai, former president of the Bay Area chapter, presented the 2019 Sewa Excellence Award to Nathan Ganeshan, the founder of 'Community Seva,' an organization that helps homeless people in the Bay Area by providing clothing, hot meals, and a facility to shower. The second Sewa Excellence award was given to Venu Nadella, Founder and Chair of the nonprofit organization, *Janyaa*. Ms. Venu told the audience about how *Janyaa* is helping teachers to teach science and mathematics through experiments and developing creative problem-solving and innovative design skills to enable rural children in India to become innovators and empower them to make progressive changes to their immediate communities

Sewa beneficiaries from different social backgrounds gave valuable insights into the impact of Sewa's work in their live testimonies. A school principal, a student, and her parent shared their thoughts on the ASPIRE project and the difference it has made in their lives. Gajanan and Malika Dhapodkar initiated the ASPIRE project recently in the Bay Area.

Speaking about Sewa's Disaster Recovery Project, Alyssa Nolan Cain, a Sewa partner who is building homes near Oroville, CA narrated how she lost her home to the wildfire and learned to



## Sewa Chicago Raises \$5000 in Annual Garba Fundraiser, Sponsors 32 Children

At the end of an eventful year, Sewa Chicago conducted an annual Garba fundraiser, sponsored 32 children under the *Sponsor A Child* program, and conducted a cricket tournament and a food drive. In the fundraiser, the chapter was able to raise \$5000.

Family Services was one of the lead projects taken up by the chapter, with the Sewa Help Line providing emergency assistance to several families in the area. Helping a sick senior citizen to return to India safely, aiding a student's mother who was injured in a road accident were some of the emergency cases handled by the chapter volunteers.



*Families participating in the Sewa Annual Garba Fundraiser in Chicago*

During the summer, Sewa volunteers in Schaumburg, Buffalo Grove, and Vernon Hills set up tables and boxes outside American and Indian grocery stores and sought food item donations. They collected \$750 in cash and several boxes of food and donated the food and cash to the local food pantries for the homeless.

The annual Sewa Garba was hosted in Bartlett, IL and more than 800 people participated in the event. Many local businesses sponsored the event, Jigar Patel of *Sai Saffron* catered food, and Indian artist Rex D'Souza played music at the venue.



Raghav Narayan comes to Sewa International via the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF). He was introduced to the HSS in 1996 by a friend in the Boston area. Since then he has always been an active participant in their weekly meetings (*shakha*) and other activities. Raghav loves the song “*Manasa sathatham smaraneeyam, vachasa sathatham smaraneeyam....*” (“Let us always remember; Let us repeatedly speak out: Our duty is to do good to humanity”), which embodies the mindset and values that steers every Sewa karyakarta (volunteer).

Raghav loves discussions on and listening to lectures on the great Indian epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as well as Indian folk tales, which he believes have enormous relevance and application even today.

Raghav was later introduced to IDRF during the Gujarat Earthquake (2001) fundraising project and later got involved with the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation’s program/project of one-teacher schools. He liked the concept of reaching out and helping the community around him locally as well as in Bharat.

Raghav started his work with Sewa International in 2008 helping Bhutanese refugees. He, along with other Sewa volunteers, assisted with resume preparation, job searches, and training and education on basic American values, culture, etiquette, and norms to the newly arrived refugees from Bhutan, and enabling them to acclimatize and acculturate themselves to American life as well as possible.

Raghav has been leading the Food for Hungry program in the Boston area for the past ten years: this includes cooking a vegetarian meal at a meal center twice a month. Various groups of volunteers participate in this with enthusiasm. This event also enables team development. Corporations such as CVS Healthcare and EMC Corporation have been sending their own teams for the past six years to volunteer and to learn.

Raghav has an MS in Mathematics from Bharatidasan University and currently works as an IT ERP consultant. He lives in Andover, MA with his wife Indu. They have two daughters -- Madhumita and Taejasvi

## Upcoming Events

Dec 16, 2019 to Jun 30, 2020 : Sewa Bay Area | *Authentic Yoga to Prevent, Control and Manage Diabetes* | Fremont, San Jose, San Ramon, Saratoga, Bay Area, CA

Jan 1, 2020 to Dec 31, 2020 : Sewa Bay Area | *LEAD Program for Middle & High School Students*

Feb 8, 2020 to Sep 30, 2020 : Sewa NJ | *LEAD Program for High School* | Parsippany, NJ

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