

Our Work, Our Achievements, in 2017

What did we do, and how did we do in 2017? It is important for us take stock of the work we did and to which we are committed so that we can ourselves evaluate whether we have been effective and whether we are truly engaged. But we also have to do such stock-taking to inform the gracious donors to Sewa as well as to the larger public who are keen to discover the nature and impact of our work.

In our January newsletter President Sree Sreenath highlighted some of our achievements, but here we want to inform you of the other work you have done:

- Disaster recovery: Hurricane Harvey got most of our attention, but we should not forget the work we did helping those affected by Hurricane Irma, not only in the continental United States, but also in the Caribbean nations. And while the numbers do speak volumes, we should not forget the women and men behind these efforts, whose work rose to the level of “heroic” in many instances. Surely, the epitome of such efforts was that of Sewa Houston President, Gitesh Desai, who led the rescue and relief efforts sitting in a hotel room while his own home was flooded.
- Toilet construction: “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” it is said, and Indians are known to be mindful of personal cleanliness as the daily bath is one of the most steadfast of Indian approaches to cleanliness. However, modern India has failed miserably in terms of maintaining public cleanliness, and every visitor to India notices it. Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office four years ago, 52 million toilets have been installed, and Sewa International has worked toward supporting these efforts. It is estimated that the economic cost to India of open defecation is about \$106.5 billion a year! We need to continue focusing on this issue and ensure a “clean India/swachha Bharat”.

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Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Supporters:

Last month, Sree Sreenath ji narrated the extraordinary journey of Sewa this past year: it will be remembered by all of us as the year of the 'Tipping Point'.

Today, I request you to do some simple things that will help us to increase our reach and impact.

There is a saying 'Unless you speak, no one will know'. Through the wonderful monthly newsletter and regular social media posting by our marketing team, we are now able to consistently share what inspires us and what has enabled us to succeed. Now, it is your turn to 'speak'. You may help us to share this inspiration by encouraging all your family members, relatives and friends to subscribe to this newsletter on our website www.sewaua.org. By this simple act, you will bring the 'Sewa' inspiration into their life.

Last summer, I had made two requests:

1. I had asked all of you to consider undertaking a 'Sewa Yatra' during your vacation in Bharat. Visiting a service project with your family could be a life-changing experience. It not only inspires us but it also encourages workers who are doing the real hard work in challenging situations. Kindly share with us your photos and stories of the 'yatra' experiences so that we can spread the 'inspiration'.

Please send requests about or reports of sewa yatra to sewayatra@sewaua.org.

2. 'Mangal Nidhi' can also be made a part of our family traditions. During all joyful celebrations, taking out 10 percent of the total cost to donate to good causes will not only be satisfying but will also offer valuable lessons of sharing and caring to all our loved ones. It also helps us to identify that thin line between 'wasteful' and 'graceful' expenses. If we think sharing 10 percent of the costs would put some extra burden on us then perhaps we are spending too much on the celebration and crossing the line from graceful to wasteful expenses.

Yesterday, I got an email from a daughter who is planning to celebrate her father's 60th birthday by doing community service on that day and contribute to society. How noble! It is such acts that we can all emulate! Let us make Sewa a part of our family tradition by these simple acts.

Inspiration without perspiration is futile. Let us act in our own capacity and bring the change. Let us begin today.

Arun Kankani
Arun Kankani
Exec. Vice President



Report on Sewa Yatra (Journey for Sewa) by our volunteers

On January 17, I met our India coordinator in front of Aruna Chetana, the school for children with multiple disabilities, in Malleshwaram, Bengaluru.

I was visiting Bengaluru briefly to take care of family matters, but had kept aside a day to visit various locations in Bengaluru where Sewa International is involved – helping institutions like Aruna Chetana and Nele, and installing toilets in shanty towns like Laggere.

We opened the big metal gates of Aruna Chetana to go into a world that is indeed truly special. Over more than an hour, Principal Gayathri Panju, Secretary Suresh Pai, and volunteer Uma Dasrati told us about the school, the people who inspired and founded it, and the people who now take care of the children with special needs: these children, from economically challenged families, and with disabilities that range from the mild to the very severe get free education and the therapy they need to alleviate their physical and mental condition: speech therapy, physiotherapy, acupressure therapy, yoga, counseling and guidance, music, etc.

In the afternoon, we spent an hour at the Vocational Training Center, part of the Aruna Chetana initiative, celebrating the wins of two boys, who had traveled to Ranchi to participate in a national Paralympics competition. Asked to speak to them, I found myself profoundly moved, and had to pause a few moments to reorient myself and talk briefly to the children.

Later, we visited the semi-permanent shanty-town at Laggere where Sewa has installed toilets. Jayant, our coordinator for this important work, provided a fascinating overview of the challenges he faces and the opportunities



From Left to right are: Prof. Ramesh Rao, Jayant, Tejas (volunteer), and Aravinda (Sewa coordinator)

he has in getting these toilets installed and the gratitude and thanks he receives from the people who use them.

At Nele Narendra, one of the eight Nele centers for destitute children, I was amazed to see how the 70 plus children at the center live, study, and prosper under the careful guidance of teachers and volunteers. Checking on how much it costs to run the center I could not believe my ears when told the sum: one generous/well-to-do donor of Sewa can very well take care of its annual costs!

Overall, it was a day that will be etched in my memory, and I was profoundly happy that Sewa International is involved in supporting these institutions and in providing much needed facilities for those in need.

- By Prof. Ramesh Rao

Vacation well spent!

During my stay in Bengaluru, I decided to spend some time to check out some of the life changing projects Sewa has done.



I ended up going to a school called “Aruna Chetana” -- a school that caters to children with all types of disabilities from the ages of 3-15. These children hail from poor families.

I helped out at the school for a few hours every day for a week. It was eye-opening to see these children doing so well no matter what obstacle came their way. To see them so concentrated, determined, and work to the best of their ability, making such pretty things was an experience that I can never forget. These children have to surmount such great odds as they learn basic skills and knowledge on their way to making a living, standing on their own feet, and most importantly not dwelling on what they can't do but instead embrace what they can do is truly amazing.

The one thing that touched my soul was the look on these children's faces when I walked into the room. Their faces lit up with a smile, and they were so glad and excited to see me and my sister Risha. I was also amazed at how much trust they put in me when I tried to help them stationary bikes, etc.)

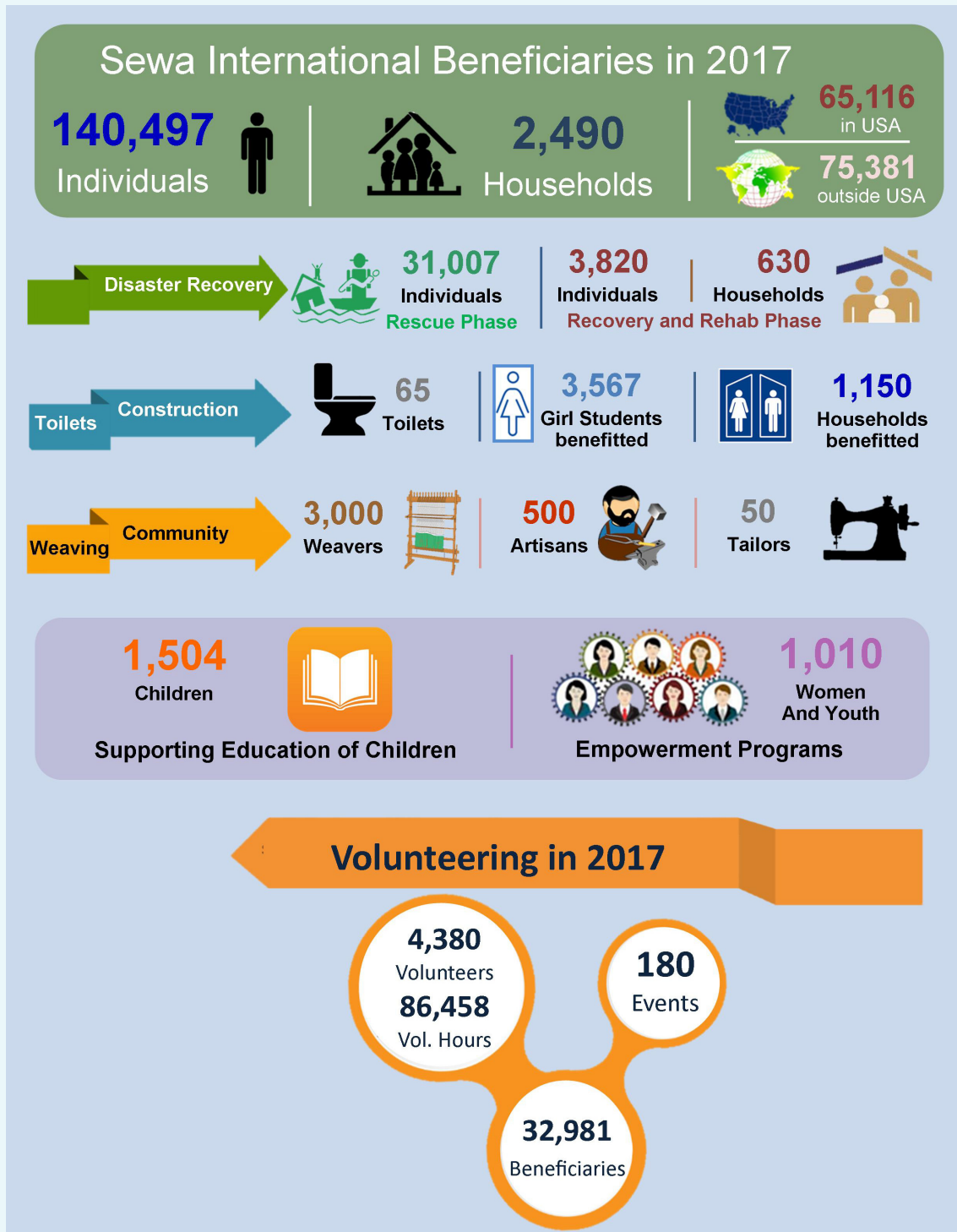
Watching this happen right before me had a tremendous impact. It made me think of how I take my life for granted, and it helped open up a whole new way of looking at the world. I am so thankful that I was able to meet these children and spend time with them. They are truly special. Their outlook on life and the way they approach everything with such a positive attitude seemed out of this world!

- By Ruhi Jain

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- Self-employment and Indian traditional weavers: *Gaata Katha* – the wonderful initiative led by Jayanthi Ramanan – supported nearly 3,000 weavers and 500 artisans – and stands as an exemplar in encouraging and sustaining self-employment and support for the traditional arts and crafts.
- Volunteering: Without you -- the extraordinary Sewa volunteer – nothing would be possible, and with you, everything is possible. Nearly 4,400 volunteers put in more than 86,000 hours in the cause of others. Indeed, *nara sewa* (serving people) is *Narayana sewa* (serving God).

The infographics in this newsletter sums up this good work done by all of you.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Guru Prasad, fondly known as Guru, has been an active Sewa volunteer for the last two years. At present he serves as the Joint Coordinator for the Bay Area chapter. He strongly believes in Sewa's guiding principle of "Nara Seva, Narayana Seva" (Service to Humanity is Service to Divinity), and is a very strong supporter of 'team play' with group ownership and authority. "It has been a great pleasure of my life to be associated with many community volunteers coming forward to help and put their hands together, whether it is a local SERVE event, a relief activity, or a Stop Diabetes Movement (SDM) workshop" says Guru.



He strongly believes in likeminded individuals who are dedicated and willingness to give their *Time, Talent or Treasure* for local and international projects. Guru enjoys talking to people and recruiting them to become Sewa's *karyakarthis* (volunteers). His dream for the Bay Area chapter is to get the next generation youth to become more active in Sewa projects and give back to the community. An example of the chapter's efforts is the evidence of "Sewa LEAD" -- a high school club started for the first time by one of their LEAD youth participants in their local high school and getting students actively involved. With a growing number of committed volunteers, the Bay Area chapter is able to actively support several *Family Services* projects like Emergency Support Services, Stop Diabetes Movement, as well as LEAD summer programs and monthly *SERVE* events. He is very proud of the support from Sewa's partner organizations which is an important arm of Sewa's focus -- in growing support from partner organizations for raising funds and creating awareness for local and international projects like *Sponsor a Child* and *Girls' Hygiene* projects.

Guru lives with his wife Jyothsna and their two children in San Ramon, CA. Jyothsna, a software professional, is also actively involved with Sewa. Guru works at NXP Semiconductors as the Director of Business Development, and has been in the Bay Area for the past 12 years. Born and brought up in Bengaluru, India, Guru graduated in Computer Engineering from the School of Engineering Studies.

Guru is the founding member of *Kannada Koota* in the Bay Area -- an organization he set up in 2006 to bring together people from Karnataka, India. He now serves on its advisory board. Sewa is proud to have him as an active and core member on its team.

Padma Award Winners – We Are Proud!

It is with immense pleasure that we share the news of the honor accorded four Hindu leaders and activists this year. The Government of India announced on January 26 the 89 distinguished Padma Award winners for 2018. Among those were four men who have inspired Hindu activists with their leadership, their dedication, and their commitment to universal well-being. These four are:

Prof. Ved Prakash Nanda, who was awarded the Padma Bhushan -- the second highest civilian award -- recognizing him for his long academic career as professor-of-law at the University of Denver, where he has taught since 1965. Prof. Nanda is an expert in international law. He is the founding director of the International Legal Studies Program, and the director of the Ved Nanda Center for International and Comparative Law. A man of grace and deep convictions, Prof. Nanda has led the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh as its Sanghchalak (director) in the US for a number of years. He has been a swayamsevak (volunteer) since his young days and was a pracharak (propagator) for four years. He has served as President of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and President of the Friends of India Society International.



P. Paramewaran, Founder Director, Bharatheeya Vichara Kendra, one of the senior most leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, the highest civilian honor. He has been associated with the Ramakrishna Mission and the Advaita Ashram in Kalady, Kerala. Author of several books on social, cultural, and religious themes, he is a much beloved leader who has worked across party lines, and is held in high regard for his steadfast fight for freedom of speech, and for his deep insights into India's cultural and spiritual heritage.

Two winners of the Padma Shri, the third highest Padma award, include Damodar Ganesh Bapat of the Bharatiya Kushta Nivarak Sangh, Champa, Chhatisgarh, and Rameshwar Lal Kabra (Mumbai) who is a trustee of Ekal Vidyalaya. We salute all four for their leadership and dedication.

Upcoming Events

Feb **16**, 2018 : Katy, Sugarland, West Houston, TX – *Stop Diabetes Movement Camp*

Feb **25**, 2018 : Suwanee, Georgia – *Volunteer Orientation Workshop*

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