

Indianapolis Ekam Chapter 2019-in-Review

Dr. Sailakshmi, the founder of Ekam, visited Indianapolis in April 2019 and spoke about Ekam Foundation's origins, values and mission, and the Ekam Youth Ambassador (EYA) program established by Ekam USA to promote the values of community service and compassion through volunteerism and fund raising. Inspired by her presentation and the leadership of local Ekam champions, a small group of parents held an EYA kickoff meeting in June. The group aligned on three goals: (1) identify and engage in youth-friendly volunteer activities in the local community, (2) adopt three villages in India and raise funds to support healthcare, sanitation and education needs, and (3) promote awareness of Ekam and EYA program to grow the local chapter. Here, we provide a summary of the group's activities and accomplishments through June-Dec 2019.

1. Indy EYA and Local activities

Indy Ekam chapter has organized diverse EYA volunteer events in the local community through partnership with different agencies. These agencies are addressing hunger and food insecurity locally, environmental issues like reducing waste and growing more native/pollinator friendly plants, or providing moral support to families with medical needs. All these causes are well-aligned with Ekam's mission of Healthy Child-Healthy Community and sustainable well-being initiative. Indy EYA participants volunteered a total of 603 hours over these 7 months (286 hours by youth 6 -18 years and 317 hours by adults). This was spread across 66 different individuals (29 youth and 37 adults) who participated in at least one Indy EYA volunteer event.

The primary volunteer activities have focused on hunger relief programs through our partnerships with Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana and Second Helpings.

Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana (6 events):

Food collection and distribution program serving 210 partner agencies in 21 Indiana counties. EYAs have worked at the partner agencies distributing food directly to individuals/families in need or worked at Gleaners warehouse sorting food and/or packing weekend "snack bags" for underprivileged, food insecure children.



Second Helpings (5 events):

Food rescue, hunger relief, community kitchen, culinary job training. This agency welcomes kids of all ages to participate, so it is a favorite of our younger EYAs, even 6-yr olds!



While hunger relief was a major focus, Indy EYAs also participated in other volunteer events, including a nature restoration project and cooking a meal at St. Vincent House.

Founders Park, Carmel, Indiana: In partnership with the Helping Ninjas, another local youth volunteer group, Indy EYAs worked on a native plant restoration project and helped establish a pollinator garden.



St. Vincent House: A dedicated hospitality home for families of patients who come from a distance to receive care at one of the local St. Vincent Hospitals. Volunteers can serve as greeters, assist with craft or other activities, or make meals for the families. Some of our Indy EYAs and parents made dinner for the families.



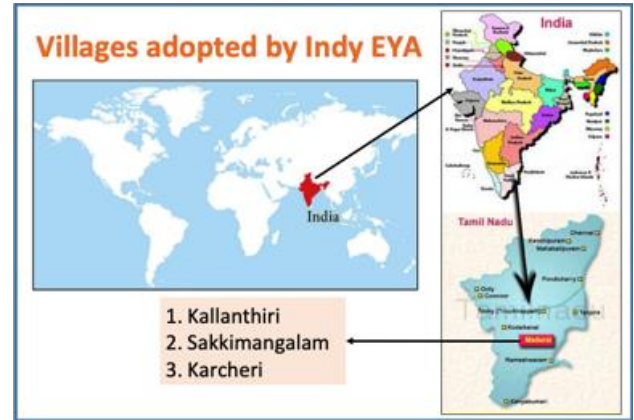
Indy EYA program looks to grow in membership in the coming months and years. To this end, many of our EYAs engaged in awareness projects throughout the year. EYAs prepared posters and volunteered at Ekam booths at two large events: Indianapolis India Day and Temple Fest. Many of our newer members learned about Ekam through the hard work and engagement of our young EYAs.



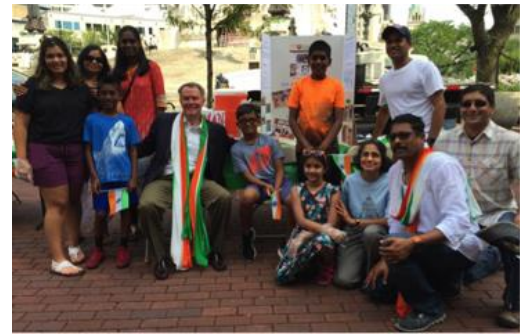
Temple Fest 2019: EYAs stand ready at the Ekam booth to present their posters to individuals interested in learning more about Ekam.

2. Projects in India

Indy Ekam chapter was paired with Madurai district, Tamil Nadu, and Ekam staff in India helped us to identify some needs related to healthcare and education in three villages in Madurai. These needs included a reverse osmosis water purification system, basic accessories for Primary Health Centers (PHCs) such as glucose strips and haemoglobinometers, tables and chairs for classrooms, and education enabling technology such as televisions and printers.



To support these needs, Indy EYAs Adhik/Krithik, Anjani, and Suhaas, wrote three Caring Crowd projects with help from their families, and along with EYAs Maya and Anjali organized a lemonade stand and poster presentation at the 2019 Indianapolis India Day Celebration to raise funds and awareness of Ekam. Through additional gracious donations from Ekam supporters and friends, and matching funds from Caring Crowd® J & J, these EYAs raised \$8680 and successfully funded all three projects.



Mayor of Indianapolis with EYAs in front of their poster and lemonade stand

3. Visits to India

During 2019 three families were able to visit our adopted villages in India and understand first-hand the needs and see positive impact of our fundraising activities, and share pictures with rest of the Indy Ekam team.



Examples of equipment funded- a reverse osmosis water purification system, a roof-top water tank and a classroom television to support academic work through online courses.

Our impressions from these visits: We want to acknowledge and emphasize that the credibility Ekam has developed with these communities is what allowed us so much access to the facilities and staff to understand firsthand the situation. It was quite an eye opener to see both the progress made in terms of health care for the poor in India and the enormous gaps that still persist. On the positive side, they have District Early Intervention Centers in Govt. hospitals where they can test babies for a range of developmental problems and ensure early intervention (cochlear transplants, physical therapy, etc.), dedicated vans to transport newborn babies and moms, Village Health Nurses who visit homes to ensure babies are getting timely immunizations, and provide women access to sanitation products. Against this backdrop, however, it was clear there are serious gaps that still need to be overcome in ensuring adequate staff, drugs and equipment, and some basic amenities. We can continue to partner with Ekam to help in some of these areas.



Uma and Sukumar with Ekam staff at Kallandiri PHC



A PHC and an Anganwadi in Sakkimangalam visited by EYA Akhil and parent Sheela



As an example, feedback from Suresh Raman family that executed one of the Caring Crowd projects to help a school in Karcheri and visited India recently:

“The Karcheri School Principal proudly showed us the amenities we had helped them acquire and emphasized how this infrastructure has helped improve the quality of education using visual aids for learning (e.g. educational videos and virtual content) and supplemental educational materials. The students now have clean water supply at school, which will mitigate the prevalence of water borne diseases and improve their health. We were very happy to see the usefulness and the impact of the infrastructure Ekam provided for children in this school. It was a humbling experience for EYAs Adhik and Krithik to see the lack of infrastructure in a school attended by kids in their age group, and were happy their fundraising support through the Lemonade stand and Caring Crowd project will make a difference.





We also visited Vazhavanthi Primary Healthcare Center (PHC) located in Yercaud town in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. This is one of the first PHCs supported by Ekam. The impact of Ekam efforts was clearly visible and we were impressed with the hospital facilities and staff dedication to patient care. We are encouraged by Ekam team's dedication and the positive impact Indy Ekam is having in transforming villages to better the health and education of those in need. "

Acknowledgements: Several folks have played a critical role in getting the Indianapolis Chapter started, helping organize the various events, spreading word and supporting each other through this year. We apologize in advance for overlooking anyone's contributions, but want to sincerely thank the following, listed alphabetically: Anita Joshi, Arun Jain, Birva Shah, Chetan Patel, Namrata Raman, Sabitha Papineni, Sudhakar Chintarlapalli, Sumi Maun, Suresh Raman, Vijayapal Reddy. None of this would have been possible without the enthusiastic support and engagement of all the EYAs and their parents – Thank you.