

ALUMNI RECOGNIZED FOR EXPANDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SUPPORTING ROTARY'S WORK



Dr. Geetha Jayaram (far left) with Rotary members and staff at the Maanasi Clinic in Mugalur, Karnataka, India. Jayaram founded the clinic, which provides a range of mental health services.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Dr. Geetha Jayaram

Dr. Geetha Jayaram has dedicated her life to helping people in her native India and the United States overcome the torment of severe depression, bipolar disorder, panic attacks, and other mental illnesses.

Jayaram is a psychiatrist and associate professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and the Armstrong Institute for Patient Safety and Quality. Her work expanding access to mental health services is much needed. Depression affects at least 350 million people and is the leading cause of disability worldwide, according to the World Health Organization.

“In India, there is no mental health care available to people in rural areas,” says Jayaram. “In southern India, for young women in particular, suicide is a huge issue.”

In 1997, a year after joining the Rotary Club of Columbia, Maryland, USA, Jayaram founded the Maanasi Clinic in Mugalur, Karnataka, India, “as a way of giving back to the country of my origin,” she says. The clinic, whose name means “sound mind,” provides mental health services to indigent women in the region. Over the years, she has been deeply involved in the clinic’s development, supplying it with medications, training health care staff and caseworkers,

Dr. Geetha Jayaram has dedicated her life to helping people in her native India and the United States overcome the torment of severe depression, bipolar disorder, panic attacks, and other mental illnesses. and raising funds. The clinic has also become a gateway to primary care, affording patients access to comprehensive health services.

In 2004-05 Jayaram taught psychiatry at St. John's Medical College in Bangalore and at the clinic through a Rotary Grant for University Teachers.

The Rotary Foundation Trustees have chosen to recognize Jayaram with the 2014-15 Rotary Foundation Global Alumni Service to Humanity Award. She will be honored at the Rotary International Convention in São Paulo, Brazil, on 8 June.

The clinic, which operates in partnership with St. John's Medical College, has received funding from the Columbia club and Rotary grants. It has become sustainable through the efforts of the Rotary Club of Bangalore Midtown, which provides administration and oversight. Jayaram's husband, Past District Governor Jayaram Kumar, has helped the clinic acquire a jeep and two mopeds to transport health care practitioners and caseworkers to patients.

Geetha Jayaram believes the clinic can be replicated in other countries to serve people with mental illness. She has helped produce teaching videos about the clinic for the World Health Organization's website and Medibiz TV, a health care channel that broadcasts in 130 countries.

Jayaram's connection with Rotary began when she joined Rotaract at age 19. Her father, a philanthropist and Rotary member, and her mother both set an example of serving others and instilled in Jayaram the belief that, as she puts it, "We have much to give and learn from giving."

Jayaram has also volunteered in National Immunization Days to combat polio in India. And she and her husband were founding members of the Rotary Club of Howard West, Maryland, USA, chartered in November.

"We feel very strongly about global participation [to help others]," she says. "We need to put the word out more about Rotary, because lots of people have no idea what Rotary does."

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION CONCENTRATES ON ADVANCING ROTARY'S WORK

The Rotary Alumni Association of District 4920 in Argentina is well connected to alumni and Rotary members around the globe. Several alumni have joined Rotary and worked to establish other alumni associations in South America, as well as mentoring those who want to become more active in Rotary.

"We possess a strong sense of identity, we work together, we contribute, we develop projects and share our experiences with all alumni and Rotarians in the world," says Jorge Eduardo Moroni, past president of the association and a member of the Rotary Club of Bolivar, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The association, which meets periodically on Facebook, has more than 100 members and enthusiastically supports Rotary's work.

“One hundred percent of [our] members contribute to the PolioPlus Fund,” says Moroni. “And we are planning to become the first association in which all members contribute toward Paul Harris Fellow recognition.”

The group also carries out joint projects with other service groups and is exploring the possibility of a short-term exchange program between secondary schools in Argentina and the United States.

In recognition of its work, the association has been named winner of the 2014-15 Rotary Foundation Alumni Association of the Year Award. Members of the group will receive the award on 8 June at the Rotary International Convention.

Among the group’s other aims, says Moroni, is to “make it easier for alumni to join Rotary [and] working with Rotarians in selecting and training scholarship candidates.”

By Dan Nixon

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