

USA SAI YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP RETREAT

September 2018

"I want you to be leaders to protect the world, leaders like lions - self-reliant, courageous, majestic, and just. Lion is the king of animals and I want you to be king among men."

Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Summer Showers 1992



With Swami's love and blessings, the third USA Sai Young Adult Leadership Retreat was held September 29-30, 2018 in St. Louis (Region 4). It was indeed a special occasion that the Regional YA Representatives and Advisors from across the nation were gathered in person for only the third time since the beginning of the Sathya Sai Young Adult program in the USA, which started in the early 1990s. The three core objectives of the retreat were:

CONNECT	INSPIRE	UNITE
Strengthening our connection with Swami, with each other and eventually with every young adult in this country	Learn about the amazing work going on in each of the regions, share best practices and return home with tangible takeaways	In this entire process, unite in Swami's divine mission, unite the YA community in this nation and celebrate our love for Sai together

This was truly a leadership retreat for and by the Young Adult (YA) officers in collaboration with the National Young Adult team. The retreat program was developed and designed based on input from regional YA officers. Each program element was managed by a small group of YA officers from different regions creating a valuable opportunity to interact prior to the retreat itself. This created a wonderful synergy at the retreat since more than half of the regional YA officers including the national YA reps were newly selected in the last one year.

The retreat was attended by about 30 regional YA officers along with a few senior leaders from SSIO, USA. This report includes highlights and key learnings from the retreat. For additional information, please visit the link to access videos of the talks and presentations.

Dr. Jack Feely

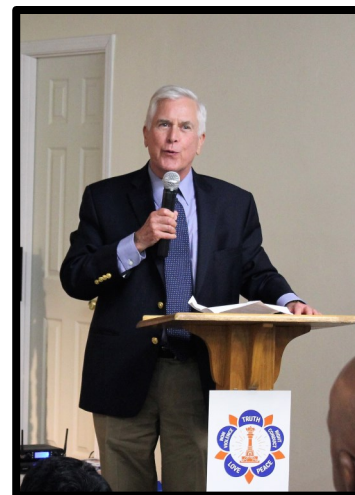
President, National Council, SSIO-USA

Our first speaker, Dr. Jack Feely welcomed the audience on behalf of the National Council of the SSIO-USA and reminded us of the good fortune to serve as an officer in the Sai organization.

In our role as an officer, Dr. Feely said we have to learn to lead and manage. He further elucidated on the difference between leading versus managing a group of people. If we spend too much time leading, the leader may be moving forward without having any followers. If we spend too much time managing, the group might not be making any progress or moving forward. One must balance both leading and managing when representing a group.

"Leadership is not about being the best, it is about making others better."

Leadership is not about being the best, it is about making others better. Take every opportunity to make the other YAs better, to coach and motivate YAs to take on leadership activities and responsibilities. Dr. Feely illustrated this concept with a personal example. Dr. Harvey, his mentor at work, helped him to develop confidence and skill sets in small increments that when it was time for the big stage, Dr. Feely felt ready.



During the musical offering of the 2009 pilgrimage of Region 4 and YAs of Region 7, Dr. Feely was seated next to Swami. He had an opportunity to hold Swami's hands for an entire minute and Dr. Feely felt completely at peace holding God's hand. This incident helped him stay calm when an unpleasant situation occurred a few days later. Dr. Feely said that he continues to draw strength and inspiration even today when faced with challenging situations. We have a similar connection with Sai Baba. As office bearers, even in the best efforts of leading and managing we may not be able to please everyone all the time. Some people may become upset with what we do. Dr. Feely advised to "listen respectfully to what they are saying. The Sai organization is a spiritual organization, but an organization with personalities. Remember that God loves you and that He is holding your hand. Listen to the wisdom from within to make a decision."

Dr. Feely concluded his talk with a request to be mindful of the local culture and welcoming to the locals, as we move towards representing Swami's message, which carries a universal and unifying message of love all, serve all.

Creta Schiermann

President, Region 4, SSIO-USA



Creta, sweetly and masterfully weaved together the lessons she learnt from the 1981 Bal Vikas (SSE) teachers training camp in Prasanthi Nilayam to our roles as leaders/officers in the Sathya Sai Organization. Swami would attend the training camp every day and encourage the teachers in training to ask questions, assuring them that He will answer them all. In that same light, Creta said, if we had questions, to be assured that Swami will definitely answer them. She encouraged us to see Him beyond the form, in each other's eyes and hearts. Swami elaborated on the three types of teachers- one who complains (complaining), one who meets expectations (explaining) and lastly, the best, one who inspires (inspiring). Being an officer is similar to the teaching experience and there are three types of officers- complaining, explaining and inspiring. So, what is it going to take to be an inspiring officer?

In keeping with the concept of three, i.e three type of teachers, Creta shared three lessons learnt during her journey as a Sai YA. The importance of discipline, the power of love and the knowledge of what it means to be a human being- truth, goodness and beauty (Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram). Utilizing the five koshas or sheaths (food, life, mind, wisdom and bliss) we can experience God and His guidance. We can hear God's voice through our conscience. The conscience guides the mind which then instructs the body. Unity of thought, word and deed is achieved. If we can set an example to others by improving ourselves, others will be similarly inspired. In essence, "Be, Do, Tell."

"The most important task for us is to transform ourselves."

How does one share Sai's message of light and immortality? First, learn to lead yourself; the most important task is to transform ourselves. If we achieve that, others in the Organization (the second circle/realm) will be similarly inspired. The third circle is Society, where there are different expectations; however, the spiritual hunger and yearning is the same. Swami has given the most practical and valuable tip. If a group of individuals are asked what juice they would like, they may have different answers. To satisfy the group's needs, you serve the same juice in different color glasses. The juice represents the essence of what all religions have expounded in different texts and doctrines- the message of oneness. Creta asked the audience to reflect on, "What is the color of the glass you are going to put the teachings of Sathya Sai?" and concluded with a sweet reminder "do not fear for He is here."

Dr. William Harvey Member, Prasanthi Council

We were very blessed to have Dr. Harvey, one of the founding fathers of the YA program in USA, as the guest speaker at the retreat. Here are some takeaways from his talk. We have gathered here today to recharge our spiritual batteries, discuss policies, and to become better instruments of the Divine. We all have an important and unique role to play in the unfolding of the Lord's mission here on earth. Swami's mission cannot fail; it will succeed with or without our help, and being given the opportunity to be instruments of Swami, is a blessing beyond description. However, we should remember that we are not the only instruments of God and all the so called "others" also have divinity as their core and are also playing roles in the Divine mission.

The integration and synergy of the young adults into the mainstream of the Sai organization, especially the leadership roles they have taken up, and the positive and inspiring impact they have had in the SSIO was unimaginable in the early 1990's when the YA program began. His students, and we are all His students, are now serving in roles at all levels of the SSIO worldwide. They have led so many key initiatives such as the Go Green efforts where they have provided compassionate stewardship of Mother Earth. Even with all of these accomplishments, we should be asking "What else?" Dr. Harvey also stressed how SSEHV is so important to help share Swami's message to children and youth who are not even aware of Swami. The young adults can play a major role in this initiative and will always be encouraged by Swami's words, "Only youth can transform youth."

Rendering selfless service to society is the ultimate duty of every human being while in this incarnation. This is a central teaching of every major religion. Humans are given the responsibility for fostering, protecting, and caring for lower creatures and nature. As Sai devotees who have studied and strived to practice His teachings, we are aware of this duty because we see it as mutually beneficial since we are caring for the one divine principle present in us and in all of creation. We must continually acknowledge the universality of Sai. His teachings such as *'The Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man'*, *'Do unto others as you would have others to do unto you'*, *'Love God with all thy might and Love thy neighbor as thyself'*, are universal teachings in Christianity and other major religions. Any instrument carrying His name must also reflect this universality not only in its proclamations but in the manner in which we lead our lives and the way we operate our YA program and the Sai Center programs.

"When we are able to let Him be the doer, we quickly recognize we are able to accomplish more than we thought."

Swami particularly told Dr. Harvey that if things get done in America, then it will quickly get followed in other countries as well. What are we doing well will surely inspire others around the world. When we do an outstanding job at home, work and in the SSIO, He gives us more work and more intricate assignments. When we are able to let Him be the doer, we quickly recognize we are able to accomplish more than we thought, and being given these additional responsibilities is a good thing. In summary, we are making our organization strong, by working together with unity, with young adults having a distinctive integrated role.



Ice Cream Circle

After dinner Saturday evening, everyone was invited to share any inspirational story or Swami experience while enjoying delicious ice cream. This continued through the night as "informal satsangs" at the homes of the respective hosts and during breakfast the next morning.



A Journey Across the United Sai America

The two pilots of Sai Airways Flight 108 took us on an exciting journey across the ten regions of the United Sai America. When we landed in each region, the regional YA team greeted us and gave a fantastic tour of their region, plus the latest and the best updates of local YA activities. It was inspiring to see the commitment, passion and dedication of the young adults in making their lives a reflection of Swami's life and love. Here are highlights from each region.

- Gender Equality YA Retreat - applying spiritual solutions to modern society problems
- Group 4 SSE Retreat - planned and executed by YAs for Group 4 students

Region 1

- Roadshows to all the centers to learn the uniqueness of each center and get to know them face to face.
- Sai Cares - regional initiative to helping fellow Sai brothers and sisters

Region 2

- SSE Camps - on the theme of 'Inner-net Connection'
- Sports Day with refugees - fun fill day with carnival games, painting and bonding moments
- YA offering at regional retreat

Region 3

- YAs in leadership positions at centers
- Inspired people outside the Sai family to participate in service activities such as Sharing the Warmth, Beat the Heat.

Region 4

- SAIX talks
- Active part in planning and hosting the regional retreat - from being emcees to organizing music programs, blood drive and SSE activities.

Region 5

- Monthly YA newsletter
- Monthly YA meetings with diverse workshops topics, service projects including clothing drive, pillows with plastic filling and service to local refugee community.

Region 6

- Tutoring school children and weekend Sai Camp with elementary school students
- Passion Pods: harmonium classes, zero waste events and the Sai combinator
- 9/11 multi-faith public offering

Region 7

- Ability First Beach Project – YAs getting together with adults and children with disabilities
- Regional medical camps for free health screening
- YA offering at the regional retreat

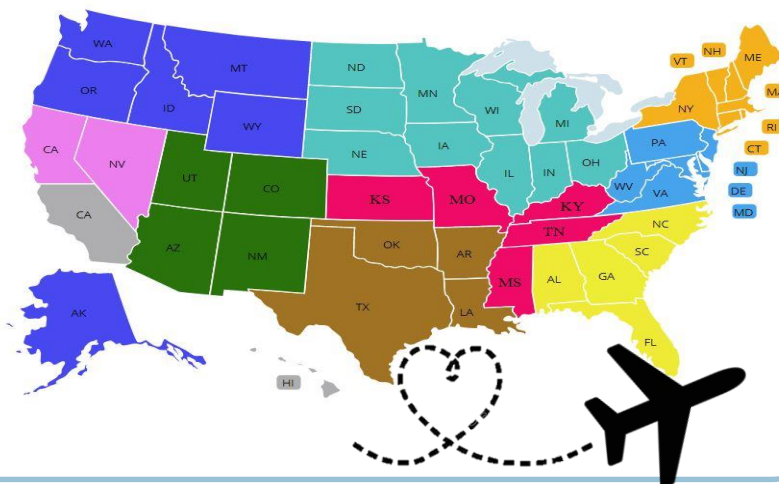
Region 8

- Project CURE - packing medical supplies to ship across the world
- Love for animals - feeding animals at Sedona Vedic center
- Liquid love blood donation project

Region 9

- Juvenile Detention Center Service
- Community Engagement by means of participating in lake, river and hike cleanups
- Hurricane Harvey Relief

Region 10



Based on the input from regional YA officers, three workshop sessions were conducted to focus on : 1) Finding balance-managing our commitments. 2a) Aspire, Affirm, Achieve now (for YA Reps). 2b) Heart and Art of an Advisor (for YA Advisors). 3) Sai Young Adults: Current leaders of the Divine Mission. Sessions 1 and 3 were designed, developed and conducted by teams of reps and advisors across the regions. This provided ample opportunity for them to interact with each other even prior to the retreat.

Finding Balance: Managing our Commitments

The objective of this workshop was to have tangible takeaways from Swami's teachings that can be used both in our officer role as well as in daily life. A self-assessment questionnaire was distributed to everyone, which prompted a rich discussion on the different hats that we wear in our daily lives. Swami has elaborated on the four stages of life: student (brahmacharya), householder (grihastha), hermit (vanaprastha), ascetic (sannyasa). With the insights on each of the stages as the foundation, we derived some practical applications on maintaining balance in whichever stage that we were in. Switching our discussion partners to a small group, we reflected on the following questions: 1. *What motivates us to add more tasks and responsibilities?* 2. *Are we taking on more than what we can handle?* 3. *What role should each of us focus on; is one more valuable than the other?* 4. *How do we lovingly communicate these priorities to others.* The workshop concluded with each group presenting creative solutions and practical tips.



"Spend a few minutes every morning and evening in the silence of your own shrine or home; spend them with the highest of all the powers that you know of. Be in His elevating and Inspiring company; worship Him mentally; offer unto Him all the work you do; you will come out of the silence nobler and more heroic than when you went in."

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Aspire, Affirm, Achieve Now

This was the concurrent workshop for the young adult reps, which started with an interesting question: *If you were Sathya Sai for 1 day, what are the 3 tangible things you will do?* We may feel that our actions be it a service project or interacting in person with a YA may not make a difference to the bigger world; but to that one person on the receiving end, it makes a world of difference. Time and again, Swami said that His students and devotees although very few in number would bring a change in this world, and often emphasized on the role of young people in His mission. We as officers in the Sathya Sai Organization have that unique opportunity to drive that change in the world. In our role as YA officers we spend most of the time in getting things done as also explained in the Mahavakya: *Leadership = knowing what to do + getting things done.* Since most of the officers were new, we were divided into two groups to discuss the "life cycle of a YA event or a service project" that involves aspects before, during and after that event or project. This was an exercise with various real life scenarios and the discussion involving different factors to consider in dealing with a specific situation or deciding on the next YA activity. Some examples were: how would we decide to start a long term project at the school, dealing with lack of response from YAs towards organizing an event etc. Each group shared ideas on how to deal with these situations.

The workshop concluded with stories ascertaining Swami's assurance:

- ◆ **Aspire:** "You take 1 step towards me, I will take 100 towards you."
- ◆ **Affirm:** "Show me your availability, I will give you the ability."
- ◆ **Achieve NOW:** If this were the only opportunity you get, how would you approach it?



Heart and Art of a YA Advisor

This was the concurrent workshop for the young adult advisors. There were three focus areas – the history of the USA YA program, strengths and challenges. A few highlights from these discussions – some of the current advisors belonged to the first batch of young adults from the USA and we were all touched to see how Swami has continued to keep many of us connected over the past 25 years at many different touch points such as conferences or retreats in the USA or during conferences in the Divine presence in India. Most of



the current YA group are multi-talented, creative and most innovative, and they continue to inspire and with time are now serving in more leadership roles in the SSIO at the center level, regional, national, and international level. Engagement and YA participation at the Sai Centers and in the YA program in general continues to be a challenge. The wide age range 18-40 has also provided some additional challenges. Some of the young adults who have grown up in the USA do not feel that they can relate to the YA program or the Sai Center activities. For some YAs, these activities, especially at the Sai Center level, seem more Hindu religion based or Hindu culture based rather than spiritually based. Making the young adult program a vibrant program that focuses on the practical application of Swami's teachings and at the same time making it relevant and universally appealing to all cultures, ethnic groups, and religions, is our goal, and we will continue to work on this with even greater intensity.

Sai Young Adults: ~~Future~~ ^{Current} Leaders of the Divine Mission

The objective of this workshop was to realize that Sai YAs are no longer the future but the current leaders in His divine mission. The workshop started with a "Selfie time" followed by an introspection exercise on "I AM" and discussions on *what does it mean to be a Sai Young Adult and why is it so precious?*, *differences between a leader and a manager*, and *what are the secret ingredients of a successful YA program*. The next section focused on the leadership process - To Be, To Do, To See and To Tell - and developing your leadership style based on what Swami said: "*A good leader knows his or her people better than their mothers do and cares even more.*" We also examined where and how we were spending our time and energy as a leader and teamed up with a partner on ways to building a heart to heart connection with the YAs.

The final group discussion topic with a goal of collecting best practices was on: "*How can we inspire and engage a diverse group of young adults?*" In order to encourage commitment and accountability, a novel ideal of a "conveyor belt" was done where each participant shared one takeaway message and one resolution with another person. The workshop concluded with an inspiring incident from the 1st World Youth Conference when one of the speakers, Jagadeeshan, challenged every youth "*I dare you to go back and be divine*"- something for all us to think about when we walk through life!



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Taking a selfie during a workshop



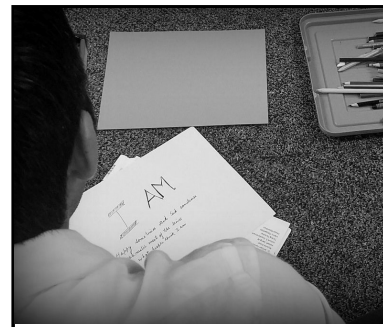
Region 7 presenting about events in their region



Group discussion during a workshop

*"A good leader knows
his or her people better
than their mothers do
and cares even more."*

-Sathya Sai Baba



"I am" activity



Getting ready for regional presentations



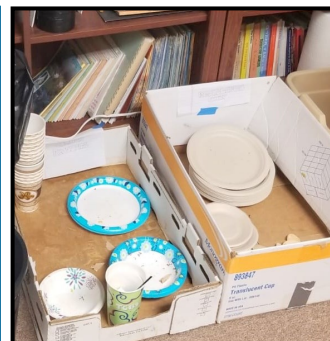
National YA Team: Aparna, Shanti, Lakshman, Dr. Joe



#Saigirlpower

*"We ourselves feel that what
we are doing is just a drop in
the ocean. But the ocean
would be less because of that
missing drop."*

-Mother Teresa



Going green

What Was Your Main Takeaway From The Retreat?

The most important thing that I learned and has touched me is the quote from Swami "A good leader knows his or her people better than their mothers do and cares even more.

- Anonymous (Rep)

I would invest time on gaining an understanding of the team members (fellow reps, center reps, and YA leads), skill level and personal skills and to organize workshops and training to improve among the YAs and Reps.

- Niranjan Kanepathipillai (Rep, Region 7)

Highlight was just being able to share the collective journey as a YA and embracing the YA advisory role. Being able to learn about innovative YA programming and sharing similar challenges across the nation as YA groups.

- Anonymous (Advisor)

One of the key take-aways for me was the importance of connections. Obviously, each of us works to strengthen our connection to God, but a healthy YA program also depends on a strong, meaningful connection among the young adults themselves, which requires coming together through service or other activities that are interesting and relevant to them.

- Ketan Kharod (Advisor, Region 10)

I have to approach my fellow YAs and everyone else in general with the feeling of brotherhood, concern and love. I should not approach them as part of my duty to get them involved in Sai activities.

- Abhilash Gangula (Rep, Region 4)



There were three takeaway for me from the retreat. First, a leader must care for his/her team like a mother and love them even more. Second, there must be a healthy balance between center activities and personal sadhana/care. And finally, we are all connected and are all one – our strength is unity.

- Rushil Sharma (Rep, Region 10)

This retreat was unique in that it really offered us an opportunity to connect as YA Representatives, YA Advisors, and our National YA Team in one YA voice. Simple and clear messages from Dr. Feely and Dr. Harvey provided energy, inspiration in uniting us all with one purpose: doing Swami's work.

- Chetan Bhatt (Advisor, Region 2)

Although the retreat was what we all needed, my favorite part was Aparna Akka's speech at the end. More specifically when she stated that we are all miracles. It resonated so close to my heart as if Swami was the one speaking directly to me. It was exactly what I needed and will be a constant reminder. Also knowing that we are human and we as leaders should also take care of ourselves and that will enable us to be there for our YAs better.

- Deepa Rajendran (Rep, Region 4)

Recordings

The recordings and photos from this leadership retreat are available:

- Speaker Sessions: [Click here](#)
- Regional Presentations: [Click here](#)
- Photos: [Click here](#)

Leaders like Lions

In a discourse on September 29, 1962, Swami said, ***“It is not mere devotion that I want; I want action motivated by devotion.”*** We experienced the truth, the power and the sweetness of these words in all aspects of the retreat. A few highlights:

- ♦ Warm Hearts: unconditional support of the hosting region with transportation, venue, food and accommodations.
- ♦ Name Tags: greening the retreat with no name tags, minimal printouts, compostable cutlery and waste segregation.
- ♦ Percussion: sisters who were instrumentalists played during the devotional sessions.
- ♦ Mandate: for the officers by the officers, developing an agenda that mandated interaction, creativity, candid sharing and solutions oriented. Every aspect was owned by a team of reps and advisors from different regions.

And organically, all three objectives of the retreat were met - Connect, Inspire and Unite!

With gratitude to our dear Swami, we pray for His guidance for all our Young Adults, for the Young Adult Program, for the wisdom to be His instruments and the courage to be His Lions!

Jai Sairam!

