

CIVICS, CULTURE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Shakti Mission: Serving the Chronically Underserved

There are some people who you know exude goodness from the moment you meet them. The Shakti Mission is comprised of such people.

While the group had been active for years before formalizing, The Shakti Mission ("TSM") was established in December 2018. The organization is committed to responsible citizenship by playing an active role in the growth and development of the communities in which its members worship, live and work. The organization's mission is centered on alleviating and ultimately eradicating hardships faced by chronically underserved populations such as the elderly, women and children.

While each of the founding members of TSM yearned to give back and serve others, a series of fortunate events came together to inspire the group to mobilize and formalize. Members were moved by the many devastating stories they heard from those in their own temple (most worship at The Shri Shakti Mariamma Temple). These stories came from single mothers and grandmothers, most whom were recent immigrants from the Caribbean struggling to meet basic needs. The needs were not just for physical items, but also extended to a desire for friendship and connectivity to others. Members also observed the income disparities in the community and recognized that many do not have access to basic things that we take for granted (i.e. food, clothing, school supplies etc.). TSM members were also inspired by the work of other local organizations, such as

Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus, Caribbean Equality Project, Jahajee Sisters and the United Madrassi Association.

sion.

TSM can be seen doing necessary work that doesn't typically hit the news, but is worthy of recognition. Among its flagship programs and services are charitable fundraising for vulnerable populations, providing hot meals to select homeless shelters and

victims of domestic, sexual, and other forms of abuse. Most recently, the organization announced its Tech-Start program which aims to build technology skills for after-school programs, by procuring used computers from corporations and individuals.

On Sunday, March

By **AMINTA
KILAWAN
NARINE, Esq.**



The Angels Caribbean Band, with vocals by Geeta Bisram, Dexter M., and Rick Ramdehal, had guests on their feet throughout the duration of the event only to pause for a moving message by Dave Kutayiah, spokesperson of TSM, who explained the importance of giving to those who need a helping hand.

TSM's members and volunteers bring to the organization many of the same exemplary qualities they possess in their personal lives, including a sense of commitment, energy, fresh ideas, and a deep appreciation of serving the most vulnerable. The Board of TSM brings significant experience to the organization. The Board is comprised of Dave Kutayiah (Chairman & Spokesperson),

Media Outreach); and Rohine Kempadoo, Suchitra Nanandhan, and Cindamanie Thaman (Inventory Coordinators).

Since its establishment 3 months ago, TSM has distributed clothing at the Briarwood Residence (300 residents served), Urban Strategies (125 residents served) and Albermarle Family Shelter (325 residents served). The group has provided hot meals at United Hindu Council Senior Center (70 seniors served), United Day Care Center (150 seniors served), and Brooklyn Adult Day Care (150 seniors served). TSM also serves those facing poverty in Guyana through its Guyana Food Relief Program, launched in March, which provides needy families with a month's worth of groceries. Additionally, TSM works with Animal Care Centers of NY to provide pet food and clothing to animals currently awaiting adoption.

The Shakti Mission calls on the community to join its efforts to give back and to restore dignity and pride to underserved populations in our local community.

To donate, you may contact TSM at info@theshaktimission.org, visit their website at www.theshaktimission.org, or mail a check to The Shakti Mission: 105-20 101st Ave, Ozone Park, NY 11416. If you would like to sponsor one of TSM's hot meal events or have gently used clothes you'd like to donate, the organization can be reached via the information above.



Members of The Shakti Mission, a local organization that prioritizes alleviating hunger and poverty.

Some of the founding members recalled the story of a young Indo-Caribbean woman who frequently stands by the Rite Aid Pharmacy on 101st Ave in Ozone Park. They engaged with her a few times and were saddened by her situation. They offered as much help as they could, but the young woman did not wish to disclose the details of her situation, perhaps out of fear. The two TSM founders felt powerless. They had exhausted all the options available to them at the time, but vowed to one day have the financial resources to create a "safe house" for Indo-Caribbean women fleeing domestic violence and/or other types of oppres-

senior centers (as well as entertainment on an as-needs basis), conducting clothing and toiletry drives in partnership with local homeless shelters. TSM also partners with other community based organizations to promote environmentalism by cleaning up local beaches and parks, and to address social difficulties with resource referrals, counseling, and group facilitation to

24th, the Shakti Mission held its first major fundraiser, a masquerade ball at Liberty Palace in the heart of Richmond Hill.

The event grew to become standing-room only, a testament to an eagerness in the community to support a good cause. Each table was adorned with masquerade décor, and a festive backdrop with photography was provided by Sharmela Ramsammy.

Chandra Ramsammy (President), Zaheer Gobindpersaud (Treasurer), Vidya Narainram (Co-Treasurer), Uvika Kutayiah (Organizing Secretary), Ramesh Nanandhan; augmented by a steering committee: Anita Kutayiah (Executive Director), Sharmela Ramsammy (Secretary), Rob Kutayiah (Controller), Parbattie Thaman (Program Coordinator), Chandni Kalu (Social



The Shakti Mission's first annual toy and clothing drive at the Briarwood Shelter. Photo by Sharmela Ramsammy.