

## MySahana Creates Awareness about Mental Health Among South Asians

By **PEARL S. DRIVER**  
Special to **India-West**

SAN LEANDRO, Calif. — Within 10 months of being founded, the nonprofit organization MySahana has helped several members of the South Asian community cope with problems concerning mental and emotional health.

According to Parijat Deshpande, founder and executive director of MySahana, the South Asian community is not very receptive to mental health-related therapy.

“During my training in clinical psychology, I realized that very few South Asians seek clinical counseling for mental or emotional problems,” Deshpande told **India-West**. “After working with South Asians, I learnt that they were opposed to the stigma associated with mental health therapy because they lacked awareness on the topic.”

Deshpande’s team of volunteers works to host and update MySahana’s Web site with educational material on mental and emotional health and how they are affected by an individual’s physical health.

“We are coming from the perspective that we want people to live healthy. Research shows that food and mood are intricately connected,” said Deshpande, whose organization picks out an ingredient, which can temporarily alleviate mental health, every month and suggests recipes around it.

“Contrary to the popular myth that foods with high sugar-content help improve one’s mood, research shows that nibbling on healthy foods, like a fruit or a vegetable, is more likely to help you overcome depression and anxiety,” explained Deshpande, who is also a psychology lecturer at UC Berkeley.

While MySahana awaits 501(c) certification, the group is doing outreach work to increase awareness about the problems associated with mental health among the South Asian diaspora through

easy-to-understand descriptions of emotional health issues, educational workshops and culturally sensitive coping strategies.

The organization is currently working with 15 volunteers in the age group of 14-65 across its five committees, including administrative support, fundraising, literature review, marketing and public relations, and recruiting and personnel.

Individuals who approach the MySahana team with their queries are assisted by volunteers who are experienced in clinical psychology; and those who require professional assistance are subsequently directed to professional support groups based on their requirements.

As part of its upcoming events, MySahana is scheduled to have a booth at the South Asian Heart Center’s Health and Wellness Fair Nov. 13 at the Jain Temple in Milpitas, Calif., to bring attention to the subject of emotional health.

For more information, visit [www.mysahana.org](http://www.mysahana.org).



Members of the MySahana team July 18 at the Sevathon organized by the India Community Center in Milpitas, Calif. (L-r) Director of marketing and public relations Vikram Harish, recruiting and personnel volunteer Sonia Fan, founder and executive director Parijat Deshpande, administrative support volunteer Meeral Jael, marketing and public relations volunteer Reema Kakadai and legal counsel board member and marketing and public relations volunteer Anand Upadhye.

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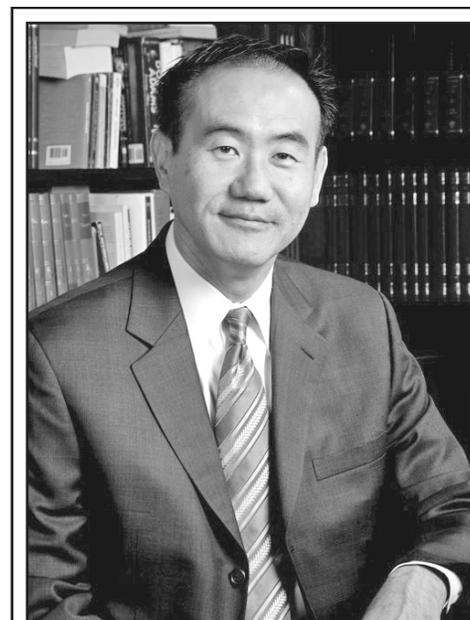
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