



Community Partners

Program

Engineers Without Borders-USA

Project Location

Guatemala

CH2M HILL has partnered with Engineers Without Borders-USA (EWB-USA) since 2003. The organizations share a commitment to supporting service learning opportunities for engineering students and professionals through the implementation of sustainable engineering and construction projects in developing communities around the globe.

Environmental Engineer Follows Passion for Social Responsibility Through Involvement in Engineers Without Borders-USA

John Helwig is an environmental engineer with a passion for helping developing countries. Working out of Virginia for CH2M HILL's Water Business Group, he has been able to fulfill his sense of social responsibility by partnering with the Johns Hopkins chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB-USA).

Helwig's expertise includes water treatment and managing water supply, critical specialties for helping improve an impoverished community. As a student at Tufts University he began to take an interest in using his skills to help build a better world. Fluent in Spanish, he took a year off before graduate school in order to teach English in Costa Rica. When he began to work for CH2M HILL in 2005, he saw that the company's strong connections to EWB-USA offered great opportunities to continue international community service work.

Helwig contacted the EWB-USA Johns Hopkins chapter and began to mentor a group of engineering students who had applied for a project in Chicorral, Guatemala. The team went to Guatemala in the spring of 2007 and decided that their goal was to discover a way to provide a more efficient water source for the community of roughly 200 people. Currently the only water the community has access to is at the bottom of a ravine several hundred feet deep. The residents are forced to spend a significant amount of time climbing this ravine with buckets or empty soda bottles in order to get any water – and they are still not getting enough.

In any poverty-stricken region, time spent not working means that the next day will be harder. The pump the team plans on installing will allow the residents to simply draw the water from the ravine rather than climb down it. Hours will be saved for every family, and it will greatly improve the quality of life for the community.

The team plans on going on another assessment trip, during which they will ask more specific questions in order to align the needs of the community with what the engineers can provide. During the students' winter break, they plan on returning to implement the project.

Helwig's involvement with EWB-USA has given him a greater perspective on the discrepancy between the developed and developing worlds. It has given him a chance to be creative and innovative with severely limited resources. Helwig's experience was extremely rewarding. As the only fluent Spanish speaker on the trip, he was critical to the project and left with a feeling of "tremendous desire to reach the community's expectations."