

Sustaining an Endangered Culture

Sieykin, Panama



Engineers Without Borders™-USA (EWB-USA) is a non-profit organization established in 2000 to partner with developing communities worldwide in order to improve their quality of life.

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Chapter

EWB – Greater Austin
(EWB-AUS)

Project Cost to Date

\$65,957

Implementation Cost

Approximately \$ 12,000

Funds Needed for

Next Phase -

Assessment:

Approximately \$ 6,000

Project Partners:

- CH2M HILL
- Malcolm Pirnie
- Waterlines

Project Recognition:

EWB-USA Greater Austin's Panama Project was recognized as one EWB's five outstanding Projects for 2010 at the 2010 EWB International Conference.

Background

Among the smallest and most impoverished indigenous groups in Panama, the Naso people number approximately 3,300 and are spread across eleven communities in Bocas del Toro region of northwest Panama. They retain the last monarchy governance system in the Americas with a ruling king supported by a written constitution and a counsel of representatives elected by each community.

Sieykin, one of the eleven Naso communities, is the site of EWB-USA Greater Austin's Panama Project, which seeks to support Naso self-sustenance through the improvement of their local infrastructure.

The Need

The 400 residents of the marginalized Naso community of Sieykin drink untreated surface water from streams and rivers in the surrounding area. Sanitation within the community is limited to shallow pit latrines that are subject to flooding during the heavy rains. These unsanitary conditions, coupled with consumption of non-potable water, cause the people of Sieykin to suffer from diarrhea and other gastrointestinal health issues.

The Greater Austin Response

The principal objective of EWB-USA Greater Austin's project is to reduce waterborne diseases by providing the community with clean water, sanitation, and health education. The first step is to improve the water quality by installing a potable water system in each sector and / or to upgrade the existing water distribution system.

Accomplishments in 2009

EWB-USA Greater Austin traveled to Sieykin in January, and August of 2009. The principal goal of these assessment trips was to meet the community and identify a project goal. In addition to consulting with the people of Sieykin, the project team also performed health assessments, water tests, land surveys and assessed the availability of materials.

Accomplishments in 2010

During the summer of 2010, the project team returned to Sieykin for eight weeks to implement a dual potable and non-potable water system in the Central District of the community. Accomplishments during this trip included: constructing a 5000 L poured

concrete tank and a water collection box, and burying piping from the clean water source to the tank and the main line of piping from the tank to the community center.

Accomplishments in 2011

The EWB-AUS team conducted an assessment trip in January and an implementation trip in July of 2011. During the implementation trip, the team built the pediments for two aerial crossings for the PVC pipe to cross the river and reach the houses in the second district (Sieykin Arriba) of the community. The team conducted assessment activities which included locating and testing potential sources for use in this sector. The team checked the system in the Central District to ensure that the system continues to work properly and that maintenance is being done. The team also met with the water committees and continued health education efforts.

Results

During the first four months since the Central District potable water system was installed in 2010 the number of waterborne illnesses dropped from an average of 50 - 60 per month to 5 - 6 per month. The reports of waterborne illness symptoms in 2011 have decreased to two incidents in January, three in February and none since then.

Moving Forward

The team returned to Sieykin Arriba district in January 2012 to assess slow sand filters and chlorination as treatment options. During the summer of 2012, the project team will return for a full-scale implementation.

CONTACT US!

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