



LIVING WATER TRIPS PHILOSOPHY

Living Water is committed to best practices in our community development work. Our strategy with our Living Water Trips (LWT) program is no exception. The main goals of this program are two-fold.

First, we desire to see communities have first time access to safe, clean and sustainable water. We want to introduce positive sanitation and hygiene practices that will result in long-term behavior change that improves health, education and livelihoods. While doing so, we want to support the local church and its pastor to enhance the evangelism and discipleship activities in their own communities, through the provision of a water well and a visit from their brothers and sisters from North America.

Second, we desire to see a US population educated about the global water crisis. With 663 million people living without access to safe water, we must do more to motivate Christians to be advocates for the thirsty. One of the best and most impactful ways to do this is through a well-managed cross cultural experience to get us out of our comfort zone – to challenge us mentally and spiritually. The mission trip experience is a great discipleship tool.

Currently, Living Water Trips (LWT) activities produce over 270 water points per year. These wells help communities in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. In addition, we desire to see God move in the hearts of more than 2,000 trip participants as they serve among community members to help provide clean water.

There are certainly examples of bad community development that has been caused by Americans with good intentions but not being sensitive to community needs and ownership. At the same time there are examples of NGO's (non-governmental organizations) doing bad community development that does not engage the community nor provide for long-term sustainability.

At Living Water, we desire to see the community take ownership of their well and related health, education and livelihood issues. We also desire to see American Christians play a servant role in providing this resource. In no way are Americans the "leaders" of the project or seen as the benefactors for the community. In every step or interaction with the community (before the Americans arrive and after they depart), the Living Water local staff take the lead. They are the ones who are from the country and understand best the culture and specific community nuances. They work with local government officials, community based organizations, churches, and community leaders in every step of the process. Community members themselves help provide both materials and labor throughout the process. In many respects the Americans play a labor role only as the well is being developed. The hygiene and sanitation activities are led by a national staff with Americans providing support.

Each drill team has three nationals in charge. This includes a driller, assistant driller, and hygiene specialist. It is this group that engages with the community and listens to their desires for the water resource. Often it is the community members themselves who are inviting Living Water into their area. They start the process and feel the sense of ownership from the beginning. Generally there are about 8 to 10 Americans on the team who help from a labor perspective but are not making strategic decisions. They always defer to local staff and community members who know best how to create long-term behavior change. Living Water intentionally keeps groups small to encourage relational connections and reduce disruption in the community. The trip participants are invited participants rather than part of an “invasion” of daily life. At most projects sites, we engage an equal number of nationals and Americans, who work hand in hand to help make the project successful.

The local pastor is a key part of the overall project. The pastor is both part of the process from start to finish and a key part of the dedication as he or she brings a message illustrating the importance of not just water, but the Living Water of Jesus Christ. It is the local pastor that leads this and not the American participants.

The success of our work in communities can be felt as maintenance teams revisit villages on a regular basis. They consistently receive reports of working wells and lessened rates of water-borne illnesses. This shows that the community does feel that the well is theirs and that they are using it.

Living Water is proud of the work that the LWT program is doing. We continue to refine and improve but we believe that we have developed a model that is transforming and sensitive to communities and yet opens the eyes of Americans to the water crisis. These Americans often return with a passion to be advocates, fundraisers, and volunteers on behalf of the thirsty, with a special connection to the country program they visited.