

CATEGORY | Best Environmental Health Project

WINNER | CIEH North East Region and Water for Kids



“Water for Kids”

INTRODUCTION

The CIEH North East Region raised money to deliver a sustainable environmental health project in Kenya. It partnered with Water for Kids and The Kenya Acorn project and seven environmental health professional volunteers with the assistance of local people provided safe drinking water, facilities and water for hand washing and hygiene education for the first time in four remote primary schools. The effectiveness of the project in terms of reduction in school absences continues to be monitored locally and reported.

We have worked as Environmental Health professionals all of our working lives and can say that on the whole we have enjoyed it and been able to make a difference to some people’s lives. However, the time we spent in Kenya has put this very much in perspective and has given us the most job satisfaction we’ve ever had.

It took us firmly back to the Environmental Health basics of public health and sanitation. It was an amazing experience shared with great people and we would go back tomorrow and carry on if we could. It’s a terrible injustice that so many people don’t have access to safe water and the reasons behind this are complex and many.

To see it first hand is very shocking. However, thanks to the generosity of the Environmental Health Community of the North East and Muriel Armstrong of the Kenya Acorn Project, together with the expertise of trustees of Water for Kids and some hard graft from a group of volunteers, four schools in rural Kenya, 1,500 children, have been provided with: guttering; pipework; tanks collecting rainwater; hand wash stands and water purification filters. This has now been handed over into the care and ownership of the school boards, teachers, pupils, parents and community. It was very hard to walk away when the project was finished because there is so much more to do. It was a privilege to be part of the project. We hope the photos explain why.

Brief and objectives

To use money raised by CIEH North East members in a sustainable environmental health project in Kenya with whom the region is historically twinned. To help people to get safe drinking water for the first time. To provide facilities and water for hand washing together with hygiene education.

Rationale



CIEH North East region has no experience of delivering such a project and therefore needed to find a partner who had well established links and experience with relevant organisations in Kenya. The region approached Water for Kids and their trustees considered our proposal and they agreed to support the project by sending two trustees and supplement the funds with a contribution from the Kenya Acorn project via Muriel Armstrong.

Strategy

To introduce a sustainable and measurable solution and approach, and creating ownership by involving the school board, parents, teachers and children, which benefits the local economy by using local materials, transport, suppliers and labour.

Implementation

Fund raising was carried out over a period of years. Planning was done over a period of 12 months to identify the area and schools to be supported. Delivery was over a three week period in Spring 2018 using contacts already established by Water For Kids. Water for Kids advised on budget and how it could be used with maximum impact. They advised to provide 4 remote schools with rainwater harvesting equipment including guttering, pipework, tanks, a water filter, hand washing units and drinking water containers for each classroom. Additionally, we engaged with children, teachers, school boards and parents in the use and maintenance of the water filters and with basic hygiene education.

Measurement and evaluation

The benefits to the local populations of the work that was carried were numerous and wide ranging. These included a reduction in the need for children to collect water from local sources and carry it long distances, increased educational contact time as a result of having clean water available on site and the benefits to the community of having to take responsibility for a shared asset. However, in terms of research and evaluation we gathered data from school records about numbers of children in each class, the number of children absent due to ill health in the two months prior to the project, the health reasons for absence, and then obtained commitment from a nominated teacher at each school to maintain the equipment provided and maintain the culture of hand washing during the school day and at home. We asked the nominated teacher to continue keeping absence records for 12 months and arranged for a local contact to collect data on our behalf at regular intervals. Early results suggest a 25% reduction in absences due to ill health.

Budget and cost effectiveness

Our budget was very limited. We had £8k from the CIEH North East region and £2k from the Kenya Acorn project. All funds were used directly to deliver the project as all of the WfK and CIEH volunteers paid their own costs. An average of £2.5k was spent on each school providing clean water for on average 400 children and teachers. £6.25 per person to provide safe drinking water and hand washing facilities for the first time. Why is this project different to others? It was borne out of a desire to deliver simple and effective environmental health interventions in a complicated world. The CIEH North East region had links with public health professionals in Kenya and a desire to improve lives in its twin country. It brought together three diverse partners - Environmental Health professionals, Water for Kids and the Kenya Acorn project - using the knowledge, skills and expertise of each. It demonstrated the adaptability, creativity, resourcefulness and problem solving skills of Environmental Health professionals.