

TBM provides clean water, Living Water in Papua New Guinea

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For years, Marsha Relyea-Miles had prayed for 36 remote villages in Papua New Guinea. She lived in them and ministered among them.

She and her husband created the first written language for many of the Aruamu people. They translated the first New Testament in that language in 2005. Soon, the first complete Bible in the Aruamu's language will be published.

They knew people in these isolated places thirsted for the Living Water that is Jesus Christ, as well as clean drinking water that wouldn't make the children sick and cut their own lives short.

The couple first arrived in 1986 as Pioneer Bible translators. The field was fertile spiritually, and people responded. Churches were started—and even a Bible college. The gospel took root and is flourishing.

Physical water proved more challenging. Relyea-Miles tried every avenue she could find. Local drillers couldn't get their equipment in. Some nonprofit organizations could drill the well but weren't working in the area. Others could teach churches how to drill a well.

'We were the only people who could do

both'

Then she learned about Texas Baptist Men.



TBM volunteers work alongside villagers in Papua New Guinea on a well-drilling rig. (Photo / Tim Wint)

“We were the only people who could do both” drill wells and teach churches how to do it, said DeeDee Wint, vice president of TBM water ministry. “We couldn’t get it out of our minds. We felt God impressed it upon our hearts. We had to do it. We don’t decline projects just because it’s hard.”

For Wint and her husband, Tim, it didn’t matter that it took three days to get from Texas to the nearest city to the Papua New Guinea villages. Or that it took three days to gather supplies or another day crossing World War II-era bridges to get where they needed to be. Or even the notion of sleeping in open bamboo huts with little electricity and no running water.

All that mattered was the need and God’s call to meet it.

Overcoming obstacles

The TBM team overcame all the obstacles, sensing God’s presence with them along the journey. They found the parts they needed and made the necessary connections on an exploratory trip. The villages came together to support the effort, volunteering to help however they could and offering encouragement along the way.



The Aruamu people of Papua New Guinea learn from TBM how to drill and maintain a water well. (Photo / Tim Wint)

Still, with the rainy season nearing, it seemed all the effort to drill a well in late November would be for naught. When the rains begin, transportation in or out of the villages is impossible. After two weeks of hard work, it came down to one day. If they were successful, the first village would have clean water. If not, the entire effort would have to wait another year.

“People doubted that it could be done but they had underestimated God’s people. We were amazed at the Aruamu people’s capacity to learn, their physical strength, their faith in God and their positive attitude. They didn’t see obstacles. When something went wrong, they just figured out how to fix it—no complaining, no doubts,” DeeDee Wint said.

“At one point, we thought the borehole had caved in on the bit 40 feet down. If this happens, you can not only lose the borehole; you will likely lose the bit and drill pipe. Replacements are in Utah. After prayer and discussion, they just went back and started drilling again, and it worked. We still don’t know exactly what happened. It was another God thing.”

The entire community participated in the effort. The hope and desire of the village was clear as they worked together for the betterment of all.

“The entire village came and watched and helped,” DeeDee Wint said. “The ladies carried water. The men worked the rig. The children dug clay out of the ground and made clay marbles to seal the borehole below the surface. When it was done, it was a community accomplishment.”

Changing lives—now and for eternity



DeeDee Wint, vice president of the TBM water ministry, joins villagers in Papua New Guinea at the dedication of a new well. (Photo / Tim Wint)

When the community dedicated the well, tears filled people's eyes. When a child filled a five-gallon container with clean drinking water, people felt they were seeing the impossible. Several individuals remarked how God had shown himself to be "plenty big" enough to meet their needs.

A local church team, The Aruamu Water Projects, has the TBM drill and can use it in other villages. To qualify for a well, a village must raise 15 percent of the needed funds, form a committee to care for the well and have at least one toilet. Already, communities are working to become eligible. Another TBM team will visit the area in June to further train and drill more wells and encourage the church.

"It's a groundbreaking thing," Tim Wint said.

Everywhere the church goes with its drill, lives will be changed.

"They will be healthier because they're not drinking out of a contaminated river," DeeDee Wint said. "With open defecation everywhere, the water is quite bad. They are sick all the time."

Church members also will share the gospel as they drill each well. People will be healthier physically and spiritually. It is a visible reminder of how God loves his people, the Wints noted.

EDITOR'S NOTE: After the article originally was posted, the first and fifth paragraphs were edited to correct a misspelled name.