

Walking for Water so Others Won't Have To

Written by Mindy Lucas

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Fourth annual Beaufort Walk for Water set for September

Each year, women and children in developing countries around the world spend millions of hours walking just to obtain water for basic needs such as cooking and cleaning.

In fact, women in African countries alone collectively spend an estimated 200 million hours per day fetching water. Worldwide, it's 40 billion hours per year, according to the Global Policy Forum, an independent organization that monitors policy making around the world.

But thanks to a South Carolina-based Christian organization with hundreds of volunteers right here in the Lowcountry, people around the world are getting life-saving access to clean drinking water.

Started in 1998, Water Mission employs innovative technology and engineering expertise to help communities build safe water, sanitation and hygiene solutions in developing countries and those impacted by natural disasters.

Having served over 5 million people in 56 countries, Water Mission works with church partners and volunteers across the country who raise money through projects such as community walks.

Beaufort's own Walk for Water, started in 2017, has taken on a life of its own, said steering

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committee member Jeneane Ryan.

“It’s really grown,” she said.

Started by members of First Presbyterian Church, the event began after a church member heard about the life-changing work the Charleston organization was doing.

The group set out to do something that would support their mission, but a walk wasn’t even on their radar at



the time, Ryan said. Church members only knew they wanted to do *something* that would have staying power and raise a significant amount of funds for the nonprofit’s projects.

In 2016, the group decided to reach out to other congregations in the area and by 2017, the first walk was underway.

That first effort raised about \$28,000, Ryan said. But last year, the walk raised over \$80,000, and had 660 walkers participate – proof that word about the event is spreading.

“It really has become a community event and an event that is just a lot of fun,” she said.

But it can also have a deeply meaningful impact on the communities the missions serve.

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As Publicity Coordinator Camilla Pagliaroli explains, when a water infiltration system or similar project goes into a community, it can be a permanent and transformative, life-altering experience.

Children who have to spend countless hours collecting water can finally go to school and get an education, while women have time to work or take care of their families.

In addition, many women have to walk at night or through areas that are unsafe, Pagliaroli said.

“And that to me is heartbreaking,” she said.

For those who participate in the community walk, it can also be a deeply moving experience.

Participants walk a three-mile route, symbolizing the walk millions of women and children take every day – just to collect water. Halfway through, participants fill buckets with dirty water, then carry them back to the start.

“It makes for a physical and emotional experience,” Pagliaroli said. “It’s certainly front of mind as to why we’re doing it.”

And even though the pandemic has changed things somewhat for both the walk and the work the organization does globally, safe, clean drinking water is even more critical than it was before, both Pagliaroli and Ryan said.

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