



THE CHALLENGE

October 2021

A Tool in the Hand of the Master Volunteering in Vanuatu

NiVan men, some bare-chested and wearing a traditional loincloth, hack their way through the tangles of vines and jungle debris inching slowly toward the water source. During the dry season, this fresh-water spring on top of a mountain provides the only clean water for miles.

It takes hours to go only a short distance even with their razor-sharp blades chopping and slashing the dense overgrowth. Although grueling, this work must be done because the village children need a pathway to the mountain spring. Volunteer Jeff Benson also knows a little something about clearing a path along the side of a mountain. In fact, he has a lot of practice doing it.

Since the age of 8, Jeff has had a tool in his hand. Growing up as the son of a construction business owner, Jeff was a

student in the school of hard knocks. “I never had any formal training, but by age 12 my hometown builders hired me to excavate basements,” shared Jeff.

Benson spent several years working for various independent oil companies running pipelines in Bradford, PA. “I spent years cutting pipelines, roads, and oil well locations up and down the sides of Pennsylvania’s mountains. I understand how to navigate tough terrain to accomplish infrastructure work,” Jeff commented.

When a recession hit in 1983, Benson was forced to look for work elsewhere. “I had two sisters. One lived in Denver and one in Virginia Beach. I flipped a coin and went to live with my sister in Virginia,” Jeff chuckled remembering. He and his father spent the next 10 years building a successful

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business in Virginia focused on clearing, grading, and installing sewer and water lines.

It was during that time that Jeff also experienced personal and spiritual growth. “I met my wife Leslie and had three beautiful daughters, but even more importantly, that’s when I really came to know Christ,” shared Benson.

“I used to think that all religions were the same. Christianity seemed no different to me than any other belief,” recalled Jeff. His views of the church were tainted by hypocritical Christians. Jeff described himself as an honest businessman and an all-around nice person. “I was a good guy going straight to hell.” But then the Spirit of God caused his young daughter to ask him a question that eventually changed everything.

“Daddy, are you a Christian?” Jeff, not wanting to lie to his little girl but also not wanting to disappoint her, couldn’t answer. This led to a time of seeking which eventually caused him to respond to an altar call to accept Christ. “The impact of that question has caused me to be intentional about witnessing to others. It’s really important to ask people where they are at with the Lord,” shared Benson.



Practical Service & Lasting Relationships

As Jeff grew in God, his daughter asked him to go on a mission trip to Argentina. While excited to see the Gospel shared, Jeff left disillusioned by the lack of discipleship provided to the people. “This door-to-door kind of witnessing wasn’t fruitful. There was no relationship and there appeared to be no follow-up. I came home questioning the impact of our efforts,” Jeff shared shaking his head.

Thankfully godly men from 1040 Visions (a partner mission organization of FIA) hosted a water well-drilling trip to Africa that better captured Jeff’s heart to share his faith. “It was there that I met Matt Durkee (FIA’s Deputy Executive Director). I was so impressed with the work that was being done. From start to finish, all the construction efforts were to make God known.” In his mind, Jeff drew a contrast between the hypocrisy experienced in his younger days and the practical, relational Christianity he encountered working in the field.

“Our volunteer work was like a tool in a toolbox. What we were doing was one part of an integrated whole where relationships were there, and would continue to be there, after we left.”

In addition, FIA’s strategy to partner with national leaders and missionaries living among

– Jeff Benson, Volunteer



the unreached people made sense to Benson. “Our volunteer work was like a tool in a toolbox. What we were doing was one part of an integrated whole where relationships were there, and would continue to be there, after we left,” shared Jeff.

On the business side of life, his parents’ retirement in 1993 caused Benson to acquire a new partner and branch into civil engineering, surveying, and site development – work that continues today. “In my early years, I gained experience in excavating, building roadways, pipelines, and utility work, and as time progressed, the management of business, people, projects, and scheduling. It’s like my whole life in construction prepared me for this,” Jeff shared when talking about his new role as one of the project managers of FIA’s latest effort in Vanuatu.



Bringing Water to Vanuatu

Benson first heard of the NiVan’s desperate need for water at FIA’s annual banquet in 2019. “My heart burned when I learned many of them had never heard the full Gospel and that something as simple as clean water could open their hearts to understanding Jesus,” Jeff said passionately.

Convinced his construction experience could enhance this work of God, Jeff agreed to assist with the water project which promises to bring clean water through 16-miles of gravity-fed piping to 30 villages, 3 schools, and 2 clinics.

The parallels between his early work carving oil lines along Pennsylvania mountains and this work of bringing water piping down jungle terrain along a mountain in Vanuatu are astounding!

Jeff is excited to get in-country to survey the work needed to build the supply road, intake system, and run the first mile of pipe from the water source to Vunamean, the first of the 30 NiVan villages. “We’ve got a great team ready. Water-Tec is the company in charge of the necessary piping and materials. Levi (FIA’s partner missionary) communicates with village leaders, and I’m helping to guide the purchase of equipment, tools, methodology, and training.”

FIA will be hosting work teams in 2022 as soon as the nation’s borders open again.

FIA’s water project is a chance at using physical water to share Jesus, The Living Water and another opportunity for Jeff to again become a tool in the Master’s hand. ■

PRAY:

- 1 Ask the Lord to open NiVan hearts to the Gospel as He provides people, money, and machinery for the water project! We need **2 additional missionary families** to serve in Vanuatu.
- 2 Pray for an **additional \$180,000** to purchase pipe, tools, and materials slated to be shipped by year-end.
- 3 Petition the Lord for an **excavator and pipe fusion unit** necessary to join and install all the pipe!



Relational Evangelism in Africa: The Foundations of FIA's Water Of Life Ministry

"It's not just about finding a piece of property—this is about making a home for this ministry, laying a foundation and building a future that is going to impact this village, this community, and this country for Jesus."

— Jeremy Effler, FIA West Africa Field Leader



Our God keeps opening doors for FIA to serve the unreached peoples of West Africa! The time has come to lay the foundation for a work that is going to impact generations to come.

Now and for the past 20 years, **FIA has served the thirsty and those who are spiritually dry through the provision of clean water.** Isaiah 55:1 says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

This free gift of water, no strings attached, is an act of love pointing many to Jesus, The Living Water. We have committed to serving alongside our African brothers and sisters in Christ in our new place of ministry, and now it is time to show them we're here for the long haul, to put words into action and go the distance. **We do this by building a home among them.**

FIA's New Base In West Africa

God has answered our prayers for a long-term base to work from! **The FIA West Africa team now owns a piece of property situated in the middle of 3 village communities on which to build an FIA mission compound** (including missionary housing with maintenance, storage, and service facilities).

Currently, we are clearing ground and setting up fencing to prepare for the construction of two missionary houses (with sufficient funding) for our team to live directly in the heart of this unreached community. Plans to relocate the well-drilling equipment from its temporary base to this new location add to our ambitious goals for 2022. But we serve a BIG God!

The land is not much to look at—6 acres of rock, sand, a few bushes, two trees... fairly poor farmland. We are starting with no buildings, no real roads, no power, internet or running water. **But in the hands of the Living God, it is limitless in potential!**

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Discipleship through Relationship

This isolated Muslim community, 30 minutes away from the closest town, has welcomed us to call this place “home.” As Christians, we’ve been called to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). We’ve found our “Jerusalem,” and look forward to building relationships with our new neighbors as we live, love, and serve them as Christ would, pointing them to Jesus.

In addition to drilling wells, God is opening our eyes to a new opportunity to serve in this country: training and equipping national believers with technical and professional skills. By giving these men and women of faith the tools to be productive members of society, they can financially support themselves and have a credible purpose for being in the communities in which they live. These practical skills will help build relationships with those whom they are called to witness.

Relationships are the foundation for any kind of ministry work in this country. We must earn the right to be heard and to have a place in the village and community. **This “discipleship through relationship” is one way people are coming to Jesus.** God is positioning FIA to help shape a new generation of national followers of Christ, to be part of a revolutionary movement that takes His Name deeper and further than it has ever gone before.

Our Vision

This type of intentional and strategic partnership fuels the development of the new FIA mission compound as a place of training and discipleship, supporting church growth by equipping those being sent.



Trade School: There will be a school to teach trade skills such as welding, carpentry, construction, masonry, and mechanical work.



Ministry Center: There will be a ministry center to disciple villagers with practical and spiritual tools to reach those in the community we now call “home.”



Rest Spaces: There will be places of rest and refuge for the tired and weary. We see a missional community serving as the hands and feet of Jesus by helping, supporting, and sending others to make disciples among the lost.

And, we envision our own faith being stretched and grown as we practice a heart of love and compassion for our neighbors on the other side of the fence.



This is the vision and the future that our God has called us to in West Africa. **We trust Him for the means and resources to lay the foundation for this task, to realize this dream, and to bring the vision for ministry to fruition.** May God be glorified through how HE, and only HE, accomplishes all this! ■

The Ripple Effect:

One Life Touches So Many

Deb Lintner

Over a Decade of Dedication

Deb Lintner came to work at Friends In Action during a critical time of transition. We had just moved our headquarters from Missouri to Pennsylvania and were functioning on a skeleton crew of three office staff. Three people to administrate 10 projects in six countries across the globe!

It was a daunting task, but one that Deb jumped into with both feet. And from that first splash into the world of FIA mission work, Deb's influence has created ripples of inspiration and faith at our HQ, throughout the North American church, and into the far-flung regions of the globe.

After interviewing her, FIA's Executive Director Tim Johnston took some time to pray and consult and then offered her the job that afternoon.

When asked how soon she could start, Deb replied, "I'll be there in an hour!" That first hour has turned into countless hours of service, faithfulness, and diligence over a decade of managing FIA's HQ office.

As Deb transitions into serving the Lord in other areas, her passage from full-time work at FIA has caused us to ponder the ripple effect of one life.

"I came to Friends In Action because I wanted to make a difference. I knew health concerns meant I could never participate in the Great Commission through travel but working in the office was my small way of playing a part," shared Deb.

Deb's "small part" turned out to be huge contributions as the organization grew to include FIA's volunteers and staff into a team of more than 20 members!



“Deb was instantly passionate about FIA’s mission and talked about it whenever the opportunity arose. She would raise our flag to people in her church, and that’s how we met Paul,” remembers Tim Johnston.



Paul Brosey
Project & Team Coordinator

Pulling from his experience as a self-employed carpenter, Paul joined Friends In Action as a Project & Teams Coordinator.

“When I heard Deb describe the ministry of FIA – blue-collar missionaries, in a sense, who use their construction skills to help further the Gospel, I knew the Lord was asking me to be involved,” shared Paul.

Paul’s involvement has led to recruiting hundreds of volunteers to the headquarters and workers for team travel.

Excited about a recent trip he had taken with FIA to teach missionaries-in-training from Central Asian nations at The University of Divine Grace, Paul shared student testimonies with fellow church member Shannon Medich.



Shannon Medich
Communications Manager

“My heart burned as I thought about these kids going back to closed homeland countries to become part of the underground church. I remember thinking how powerful and purposeful FIA’s work was,” Shannon commented. As soon as her youngest daughter started kindergarten, she began working as FIA’s Communication Manager.

Michelle Perez
Graphic Designer



“Shannon came to me looking for help to get FIA’s branding and website up-to-date. When I saw how much love this organization has for the people it serves, I was excited to be a part,” remembers Michelle Perez, FIA’s Graphic Designer. And the ripple goes on and on.

One life touches so many.

Deb’s influence reminds us of the power that relationship and faith have on everyday life, as well as the life to come. While sometimes the waters appear still and we wonder if the Lord is moving, if our work really matters, or if our prayers are heard, we remember there are always ripples.

“And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

—Hebrews 6:11-12 ■

Openings at FIA

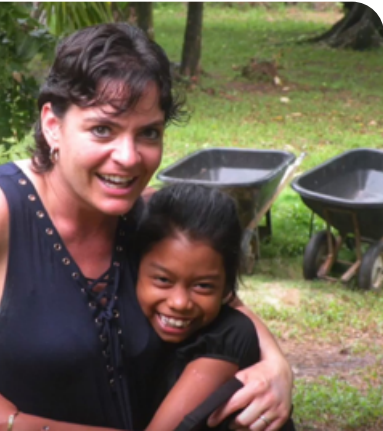
If you’d like to lend your time and talents to FIA’s work, we have openings for:

-  IT Support
-  HR Support
-  Communications Assistant
-  Shipping Assistant
-  Missionaries to Vanuatu & Papua New Guinea

Express your interest or learn more by emailing FIA-USA@fiintl.org.



The Amanda Brandt Memorial Award & Fund: Celebrating FIA's Volunteers



Amanda Brandt's laughter mingled with the chirping of tropical birds as Rama children crowded around her legs to receive the craft supplies she distributed as part of their bible lesson.

Amanda and her daughter Reagan traveled with FIA to help teach Vacation Bible School lessons held each year on Rama Cay Island. More than 140 children would come to learn praise songs, complete related crafts, and listen to Bible stories. For many village children, this was the first time they heard of Jesus.

Our hearts were saddened by Amanda's sudden home-going on March 7, 2018. Although we know that she is safely home in the arms of Jesus, her presence is missed at FIA and among the Rama people she loved so well.

FIA continues to celebrate Amanda's life and the contributions she made among one of the last indigenous people groups in Nicaragua.

At this year's FIA mission banquet held on October 29, 2021, FIA leadership will present the first Amanda Brandt Volunteer of the Year Award, which will thereafter be presented annually.

Created in partnership with Amanda's family, the award will go to an FIA supporter who has demonstrated a commitment to FIA through prayer, fundraising, or volunteering. The Amanda Brandt Volunteer Award honors volunteers who sacrificially invest resources, time, or talents through the ministries of FIA to see unreached people groups transformed by the love of God.



The award is meant to celebrate and inspire those who, like Amanda, labor for the cause of Christ and His Great Commission. In addition to this recognition and in memory of Amanda Brandt, a donation will be made on behalf of the recipient to support the ministry work among the Rama. To this end, The Amanda Brandt Memorial Fund has been created.

Throughout the year, as donors contribute to the cause, the cumulative monies will then be distributed to further FIA outreach efforts among the Rama and beyond. It's amazing to think that the very children Amanda shared the Gospel with could be part of the next wave of Christ-followers bringing the Good News to neighboring, unreached villages throughout Nicaragua!


Readers who would like to donate to the newly created fund can do so at:

FIAintl.org/giving

Even though Amanda served with FIA in missions for a relatively short time, her presence, energy, and commitment have made an eternal impact. Amanda would have been so proud of the many extraordinary supporters who pray, give, and go to see Jesus made known through FIA's work. She would no doubt have echoed the "well done" we know she heard when she entered Heaven to the winner of the award in her honor.

We hope you will join us in celebrating the faith and service of Amanda and the award recipient by giving to see Gospel work continue among the Rama. ■



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