

Bergnek Community Projects

Bergnek Community Projects, Cooperative., is a My Arms Wide Open Community Empowerment Initiative that was started to support the women, youth and children of the Bergnek and their families. Our goal is to transfer needed skills into the community through a number of development opportunities. Each of these projects and initiatives will include starting a community-based business venture around the need identified by the community. The projects and initiatives will, in turn, support food security, education, infrastructure, and leadership development within the community to ultimately empower the community to sustain itself from within.

At present, there are a number of initiatives and projects already underway and working, within the community, and each one is connected to the projects and initiatives that will follow, to create synergy and sustainable and a growing employment base. Our goal is to ultimately create employment within the community for 250+ people, through a number of opportunities including the 'My Family My Community', 'GirlStuff™', 'One Brick at a Time', and the 'My World In a Garden' programs. That is first milestone and the community has plans to grow from there to provide for the needs identified from within the community by using both the support generated from My Arms Wide Open, and its supporters in North America, and the profits from each of the businesses that are started to achieve their goals.

Enabling development from within

Our family, Bergnek: What has become evident as we work in communities is that we must work alongside community from within and we must support and create continuity with each step we take building upon the previous one. In many communities, they have seen people and organizations come and go, but they see very few that come back. Each time we return, we are greeted with a smile and "You came back!". In creating trust, we create hope and our hope and belief is that each of the communities we work with are a part of our family. A family that works and grows, together; a family that always 'comes back'.

It begins with Mindset

My Arms Wide Open and Bergnek Community Projects start not by listening, but by hearing the conversations that goes on within the community itself, without judgment or any filters. Creating the first "dot", so to speak. We hear how people think about themselves and their community? How people feel about themselves and their community? What is they are willing to do to create the changes they are talking about? We work alongside the community to access the knowledge and skills that are already there starting with the person and working in our [Iziko Labahlali program](#). The name means: 'Hearth of The Community' and is designed and facilitated to help and support each individual to learn to understand and accept that they count, that they are worth it, and they can contribute and DO deserve more.

The Commitment

As with each of the [community businesses](#) My Arms Wide Open® supports, we are committed to working right along side Bergnek Community Projects, GirlStuff, My World In a Garden, and each of the other initiatives, for a minimum of 5 years to ensure they have the support and skills they need to create and sustain a successful business.

Connecting the dots

Mindset & Leadership → | Education → | Water Security → | Food Security → | Employment → | Sustainable Community-based Business → | Infrastructure and Health-care → = Self-Sustaining Community

Connecting the dots on projects

Iziko Labahlali → Building Leadership | Water Security → | Temporary Water Access | Food Security → | 6 additional Food Walls | Employment → | Sustainable Community-based Businesses → | One Brick at a Time → | Infrastructure and Health-care → = Self-Sustaining Community

It all started with *Iziko Labahlali* and a new well and water pump in Bergnek. *Iziko Labahlali* is the foundation to all our programs, causes and initiatives at My Arms Wide Open, and is a part of the My Arms Wide Open [My Mentor My Coach](#) cause. Each of the women in GirlStuff and those that would like to support other initiatives have participated in and completed the *Iziko Labahlali* program.

Current Initiatives and next steps

By the Community, For the Community

What we do within communities is determined from within the community. In the case of Bergnek, the first step was to get access to a clean and [reliable source of water](#). The key was not to just find water but to transfer in the skills to maintain the water source for the long term. After achieving a first crucial step of installing a diesel pump and lock house for the well and pump, the community then moved on to the next 'dots' they wanted to connect. These were identified as education, food security and employment, keeping in mind the water security project is not yet complete and we still have work to do to install a deep well electric pump running off solar to ensure uninterrupted supply to the community. This is our next step working with Engineers Without Borders.

Education and Food Security

Bergnek Community Projects and My Arms Wide Open® are helping the Bergnek Community address the education priority by supporting girls to get back into school giving them a chance to break the cycle of poverty by providing basic sanitary supplies. And, by working with the community to build its first My World In a Garden vertical vegetable garden we are helping to keep the girls in school by providing the girls and their families with fresh vegetables each week from the garden.

Building for the future... Employment

Adding to what's already been said and to address unemployment in Bergnek, Bergnek Community Projects and My Arms Wide Open® are supporting the community to help 10 village women start a business that they have named "GirlStuff". GirlStuff is a community-based business that makes and supplies washable, [reusable menstrual products](#) to support young girls can stay in school and is coupled to the My World In a Garden program to help keep them in school.

It is not only important to get the GirlStuff business running on it's own but also to establish the other vertical gardens in the community so that we can produce enough raw food for the children in the community and to sell the vegetables to produce income for a small group.

In addition to this, an initiative that is more long term, named [One Brick at a Time](#) is starting to get underway. This project will not only provide additional employment in Bergnek, it will also generate the resources to address other priorities within the community including health-care and housing needs.

More on, GirlStuff™

GirlStuff is a community-based initiative under the umbrella of Bergnek Community Projects. We've been spreading the word with the people we meet and talk to and have already received commitments of support the teachers in the local schools. In addition to that we have already started receiving orders from a number of people and organizations for GirlStuff.Period Menstrual Kits. The demand is here and very evident.

Working with our global network of supporters we were able to make additional purchases and expand marketing and production the past few months to add an additional industrial sewing machine; an industrial surger; and a shrink wrap machine for the packaging of our the GirlStuff.Period Menstrual Kits. We have also now produced the flyer's, instructions and business cards for the business.

The new machines now put us into a position to really take control of producing and finishing our own products at a much larger scale than we've been able to do up until now. Before this GirlStuff.Period has been working to perfect making the menstrual kits and having them finished by third parties as we did not yet have a surger. Now they are in a position to complete the entire production process on their own. We already have orders coming in and are receiving support from some large organizations across the country.

More on, My World In a Garden®

Our gardens are growing in both our Vancouver based, My World My Garden and our South African based, My World in a Garden® programs.

BUILDING GARDENS TO FEED CHILDREN AT AN IMPORTANT TIME OF THE YEAR



We are so excited and enthusiastic about the My World My Garden program. The My World My Garden program has proven to be very successful in both Vancouver and Bergnek this year. Each of the Vertical Food Garden Walls has been able to produce enough fresh veggies

for 150 families each week during the growing season. This is due to the tenacity and support of both communities and the volunteers who keep the programs alive and thriving.

In Bergnek we are back into spring and the planting cycle to move the wall from it's winter state back to full food production. We are looking forward to another great year and in fact, are hoping to **increase the number of walls in Bergnek to a total of 7 walls** by the end of 2015 that will have the **capacity to feed 900+ families** in total. That capacity would provide for immediate needs as well as storing food for winter use.

In Vancouver, at the Ray-Cam Cooperative Centre, we have had a fantastic growing season and the wall provided fresh **veggies for over 150 families each week** and we are now preparing winter veggies for the wall and preparing the wall for winter in general.

More on, One Brick at a Time

In our most recent project update and report we let our individual donor community know about the activity taking place that supports the Bergnek Communities goals to create employment through the [One Brick at a Time](#) project. The project is not just about establishing a brick-making business in Bergnek. It's about establishing the brick-making project as an anchor in the community to create a sustainable business that generates revenue to support a whole host of initiatives within the Bergnek Community. The projects in our program include:

- An expanded, reliable and sustainable water source;
- Water on demand for the community with increased distribution and access;
- The Brick-making facility itself;
- A healthcare centre; and
- 6 additional 'My World In a Garden®' vertical veggie gardens.

Over the past few months we have been working hard to come to an agreement with Engineers Without Borders, in the United States as we had noted in earlier communications. We are very happy to report that we have completed the project planning paperwork and submissions.

Our next step was to break the overall project, which is sizeable, down into three projects that will each be implemented in 2014 and 2015. The chapter supporting the project was getting everything ready to present to Engineers Without Borders, USA for approval. The commitment My Arms Wide Open has made is to raise 5% of the total costs of the overarching project directly, in support of the community.

Since that point we are happy to report and that we have now received approval from Engineers Without Borders, USA for the overall project and that the first phase will begin later this year.