



Builders without Borders: An Overview

By Joseph F. Kennedy, Director, Builders without Borders

Our Mission:

“Builders without Borders is an international network of ecological builders who form partnerships with communities and organizations around the world to create affordable housing from local materials, and to work together for a sustainable future. We believe the solution to homelessness is not merely housing, but a local population trained to provide housing for themselves.”

BUILDERS WITHOUT BORDERS

Formed in 1999, Builders Without Borders (BWB) advocates the use of straw, earth, and other easily-obtainable materials for the construction of homes, to decrease reliance on expensive, and often unavailable, alternatives. We are developing simple, easy-to-understand educational resources that can be used to learn how to site and construct buildings.

One of our main goals is to promote ecologically-sound and energy-efficient building methods using facilitation techniques that are culturally-sensitive, fun and effective. To achieve our goal of a populace trained to provide housing for themselves, BWB focuses on training programs, outreach, workshops and community building projects.



Volunteers working under the guidance of BWB to build a straw-bale hogan at Sacred Mountain Camp, New Mexico

THE NEED

Housing is a human right, yet many people around the world are chronically underhoused. Increasing numbers of people are also homeless due to war and environmental disaster. Many of the housing projects proposed to solve this housing crisis, however, are dependent on energy-intensive industrial models that are often inappropriate to climate, culturally inflexible, wasteful, environmentally destructive and expensive.

We have the opportunity to do better. Through improved design, appropriate materials use, creative networking, and a human-centered process, we can help create real homes for those most in need. Simple structures can provide quick shelter in an emergency, yet can be replaced or added to in the future, while designs can be flexible to respond to the materials and skills available, and to fit within cultural and social mores. With the catalytic addition of minimal modern technology to the timeless wisdom of traditional techniques, “hybrid” solutions can greatly improve strength and durability, and through using locally-available, energy-efficient and earth-friendly materials, mitigate environmental damage and save energy through utilizing resources like sun and wind.



Myra Valez mixing straw-clay plaster by hand at the “Casas Que Cantan” project co-developed with local communities by BWB partner the Canelo Project

Builders without Borders has found that in places without decent housing, natural building techniques can be a key component of cheap, warm, easy-to-build shelter. Building with straw bales, for example, which are widely available at low cost, is a technique that has been revived over the last decade in the US, and is spreading throughout the world as an extremely beneficial building system. In recent years straw has been used with great success to provide low-cost housing in such diverse locales as Mongolia, China, Mexico, Argentina, Belarus and US Indian Reservations. Together with earth, stone and local timber, building with straw can provide shelter at 25% of the cost of conventional systems, while saving 75% or more of the energy to heat and cool dwellings. These techniques serve the goal of reducing dependence on non-renewable energy and material resources, and promoting ways of building that rely on perennially-available, renewable resources instead.

Yet, no matter how appropriate our design or materials are, Builders without Borders will never solve the problem of homelessness by simply building houses for people who need them. Rather, we wish to engage in a process that empowers those without homes to create them themselves, utilizing local skills, native wisdom and community-centered educational and economic systems. Builders without Borders’ goal is to act as a catalyst to mutually empower local builders and craftspeople, as well as ourselves, to learn how to build such locally-appropriate, ecologically-sustainable, affordable, sound and beautiful homes.

To do this we seek to put aside our preconceived ideas and open our eyes to the traditional skills and local materials that exist within the community to be served, and most of all to the hopes and desires of those people. Through “deep dialogue” together, a truly sustainable process can be created. While such a process has been developed by a few forward-thinking development organizations, little effort has been made to create a system by which the skills and sensitivities necessary for such a process, as applied to housing, can be learned without years of trial-and-error effort. BWB has determined that this is our task.

HISTORY AND MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

BWB was formed in December, 1999 through the initiative of Catherine Wanek, Joseph Kennedy, and Steve MacDonald, with a focus on education, networking and outreach. We held a series of organizational meetings over the past two years to reach consensus on goals and methods, to share information, and create the framework of the organization. More and more people are contacting us for assistance, or to join our efforts. We now have over 130 members, and have raised over \$35,000 for various projects since our founding. In 2001 Joseph Kennedy succeeded Catherine Wanek as Director of the organization.

National Indian Youth Leadership Project

In July 2000 BWB organized a pilot project in association with the National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP). We coordinated a diverse group of volunteers at Sacred Mountain Camp, near Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, to build a straw-bale hogan (a traditional Navajo home) in a week-long workshop. Volunteers represented four other organizations: NIYLP, Americorps, Americans For Native Americans (ANA), and the Civil Air Patrol (CAP). One measure of this project's success is the initiative of some of the Americorps participants, who have now established the Native Women's Strawbale Building Association. They plan to work on and off reservation lands, to illustrate for others that people can learn to build for themselves.

Mongolia Research Tour

In September 2000 BWB welcomed a Mongolian UNDP delegation on their Straw-bale Research Tour of the U.S. Southwest. Builders without Borders coordinated the itinerary, provided logistical support, and facilitated the Mongolian team making personal and professional connections, thus helping to advance work that may become a model project of global significance.



Mongolian team member studying straw-bale testing documents with BWB member Jeff Ruppert, in Colorado.

Educational Resources Fund

BWB has also created an Educational Resources Fund. Our first donation of materials was to the Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA) in China. We collected two packages of books and videos, as well as cash donations totaling \$500, to further their work of introducing straw-bale construction to China. We recently learned that these materials were a key element in ADRA having the opportunity to create a proposal for a Hong Kong foundation that may be interested in helping ADRA spread straw-bale technology to five provinces in northern China during the course of a three-year, \$1.2 million project.

Natural Building Workshops on the US/Mexico Border

Our most recent work has taken place on the US/Mexico border, where Builders without Borders members have led straw-bale wall raisings and earth plastering workshops in Spring 2001 with Annunciation House in Ciudad Juarez, and with Tierra Madre, a women's housing cooperative near El Paso, Texas.

BWB Bulletin

Our first edition of our biannual newsletter, the BWB Bulletin, is off the press. It goes into detail about our most recent activities, answers frequently asked questions, and profiles the work of some of our partners. Please contact the BWB office to receive a copy.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

- *Design and Facilitation Handbook.* Funded by a grant from the Graham Foundation, this handbook will be a resource for teacher trainers in our Project Facilitator Training process, and will eventually be adapted for field training purposes. Illustrated with photos and illustrations, the Handbook is comprised of chapters dealing with strategies



BWB organizer Susan Klinker, peeling logs for the hogan post-and-beam framework

for working with communities, a non-prescriptive “tool kit” of ecological building tools and techniques, project assessment guidelines, and a series of case studies of “best practices” using these techniques in the field.

- *Hands-On Workshops.* A number of hands-on workshops to demonstrate various natural building techniques are planned for Spring-Fall, 2001. Contact the BWB office for an updated list of upcoming projects.
- *Project Facilitator Training Course.* This will be a ten-day course in Kingston, NM in October 1-10, 2001. The course will include climate-appropriate design, hands-on training in a variety of natural building techniques, and skills to enhance working in the field, including logistics, cultural sensitivities, etc. Besides training facilitators, this will be a “test” opportunity for the *Design and Facilitation Handbook*. Course fees on a sliding scale: \$850 for North Americans, \$450 for those attending from other “first world” countries, and \$200 for those coming from “developing regions.” We hope to replicate this course in up to four different locations globally during 2002.
- *Creating Regional Chapters and Partnerships.* Another 2001 project is to create and strengthen regional chapters and partnerships with like-minded organizations. One

partnership of note is with Ecoversity, an internet-based “virtual campus” that will allow college students to receive class credit when volunteering their time and skills with BWB.

- *On-Line Forum.* BWB is creating an online forum for those members unable to attend meetings, those who wish to “chat” with other BWB members, post an announcement, or look for resource recommendations. We plan for this forum to be a clearinghouse for info on projects, workshops and volunteer opportunities.
- *BWB Video.* Catherine Wanek is working to complete a video from her travels to Sonora, Mexico, Belarus, the NIYLP straw-bale hogan project, and the Mongolian straw-bale tour, which will enable us to further educate those interested in natural building and BWB’s mission.
- *BWB Web Site.* We want to improve both the content and layout of our web site so viewers will be able to learn about our work, become interested in BWB, and browse the site with ease.
- *The BWB Bulletin and Brochure.* Completing, printing and distributing 2,000 copies of our 2001 “Bulletin.” Printing and distributing 5,000 copies of the Builders without Borders brochure.
- *Networking and Outreach.* Sending a representative to various conferences to make presentations on the work of BWB, share information, make contacts, raise funds, and develop partnerships.



The NIYLP hogan framework in place, with straw bales going in.

GOALS OF BUILDERS WITHOUT BORDERS

- Promote awareness of and participation in ecologically-appropriate building and education initiatives
- Network with other organizations to share our knowledge, leverage resources and increase effectiveness
- Create dynamic funding programs for our organization and our projects
- Develop educational process guidelines and materials for effective cross-cultural trainings

OBJECTIVES FOR 2001 TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS

- Test and revise *Design and Facilitation Handbook*
- Revise web page, create internet Forum

- Facilitate hands-on workshops and Project Facilitator Training
- Share information, develop partnerships and raise funds at conferences and events
- Print and disseminate information on organization, collect and disseminate educational resources

CURRENT SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES FOR 2001

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|--------------------------|---|
| April-September 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing work on <i>Design and Facilitation Handbook</i> (funded) |
| April 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Finalization and printing of <i>BWB Bulletin</i> (completed) ▪ Tierra Madre Straw-bale Workshop (completed) |
| May 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annunciation House Earth Plastering Workshop (completed) |
| June, 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepare conference presentations (funded) ▪ Print copies of newsletter and brochure (completed) ▪ Midwest Renewable Energy Association Fair (partially funded) |
| July or August, 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NIYLP Workshop |
| July, 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First International Conference on Ecological Building Structure (funded) |
| July – September, 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepare for October Project Facilitator training (funded) |
| September, 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2nd Ecomaterials Conference, Cuba (provisional) |
| October, 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Builders without Borders Project Facilitator Training (partially funded) ▪ BETEC Sustainable Buildings Symposium (funded) |
| October – November, 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revision of <i>Design and Facilitation Handbook</i> |
| Ongoing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of Internet Forum and Web Page ▪ Networking with BWB members and Partners ▪ Development of new projects (South Africa; Tijuana and Ciudad Obregon, Mexico; Kyrgyzstan) ▪ Answering inquiries, email/phone consultation |

A PROFILE OF THOSE WE SERVE THROUGH OUR ACTIVITIES

- Members of Builders without Borders and BWB partnering organizations.
- Attendees of conferences, fairs and other presentations.

- Participants in BWB Project Facilitator Training and other workshops.
- Existing BWB project partners in New Mexico and Mexico, as well as new partnerships as they develop.
- Those served through email and other networking/consulting activities.
- Readers of *Design and Facilitation Handbook*
- Indirect service to organizations and individuals producing or receiving housing

BUILDERS WITHOUT BORDERS STEERING COMMITTEE

- Joseph F. Kennedy – Director, BWB
- Catherine Wanek – President, NetWorks Productions, Inc.
- Melissa Malouf – Graduate, Vernacular Architecture Program, Oxford Brookes University
- Susan Klinker – Independent Development Consultant
- Alfred von Bachmayr – Architect, von Bachmayr Architects
- Derek Roff – University of New Mexico

PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS (partial list)

- The Canelo Project
- Habitat for Humanity
- Adventist Development and Relief Agency
- National Indian Youth Leadership Project
- Straw Bale Construction Association
- Global Straw Building Network
- California Straw Building Association
- Ecological Building Network
- Development Center for Appropriate Tech.
- World Citizen Diplomats
- EcoVersity
- SBAN – Straw Bale Association of Nebraska
- Straw Build Europe
- Straw Bale Projects
- Sustainability International
- Permaculture Institute of Northern California



Li Yiqing and her son Yangyang have recently has the opportunity to obtain a straw bale house built by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency

FUNDING

While Builders without Borders is a relatively young organization, we have been quite successful in obtaining funding from a variety of sources as outlined below.

Funding Sources for General Operation Support

- Lifebridge Foundation Grant (received 2000)
- Richard S. Petty Charitable Foundation (received 2000)
- Member and Partner Donations (received)
- Other sources of funding are actively being sought

Additional Project Funding

- Graham Foundation (*Design and Facilitation Handbook*) (received 2000)
- UNDP/Mongolia Client Contribution (received 2000)
- Cottonwood Foundation (*NIYLP Project*) (received 2000)
- Foundation for Innovation and Sustainability (*Networking, Education and Outreach*) (received 2001)
- Cottonwood Foundation (*October Facilitator Training*) (pending 2001)

Current Funding Goals

The limited funds we have received have been sufficient to help BWP get off its feet, but as we seek to intensify our activities, we need funding to:

- Pay living-wage full-time salary for Director and part-time staff
- Pay utilities, rent and equipment costs necessary for running an effective office
- Project resources for giving trainings in four different locations in 2002
- Further develop our Educational Resources Fund
- Create video, CD ROM, Internet and other educational outreach materials/technologies
- Fulfill our “wish list” of in-kind items needed for training projects in North America.



A member of the Mongolia Straw-bale Tour in front of a round bale of straw in Nebraska

CONCLUSION

Builders without Borders has gotten off to a modest yet successful start. Our successes (and our failures) have given us hope that we are doing something that truly meets the need of a human species endeavoring to shelter all its members. We welcome you to join us in this exciting effort as we continue to grow in small but incremental steps to be a force of service in the world.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Send all letters, comments and any articles for our newsletter to:
Builders without Borders

119 Main Street
Kingston, NM 88042

Or by email at:
<mail@builderswithoutborders.org>

Builders without Borders'
phone number is (505) 895-5400
and fax (505) 895-3326

Find us on the World Wide Web at:
www.builderswithoutborders.org
or at our online forum: www.communities.msn.com/builderswithoutborders

TO JOIN US

Please send in a membership donation to the address above. It is free to receive the newsletter and be put on our email list, which will update you on meetings schedules, agendas and minutes but we would greatly appreciate your donations.

- \$15 Student/low income \$25 Individual/Family
 \$100 Business or Partner \$500 or more
 An additional \$15 if you would like to receive a Putumayo "The Best of Folk Music" CD (retail value of \$16) or an organic cotton The Last Straw Journal T-Shirt (retail value of \$16)
 An additional \$25 for the Straw Bale Solution video (retail value of \$29)
 I would like to donate an additional \$ to the following:
 The Canelo Project - "Casas Que Cantan"
 ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency)
 Educational Resource Fund

Name _____
Business (if applicable) _____
Street _____
City, State, Zip _____
Country _____ Phone _____ Fax _____
Email and Web Site (if applicable) _____

We admire and applaud the work of Doctors Without Borders but we are not affiliated with them in any way.