

# Emma Robbins, Executive Director of DigDeep's Navajo Water Project, Departs After 7 Years of Transformative Leadership

*During her tenure, Robbins' relentless work led the growth of DigDeep's Navajo Water Project, and brought clean drinking water to thousands on the Navajo Nation*

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, June 23, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Emma Robbins, the first Executive Director of DigDeep's [Navajo Water Project](#), will be departing the human rights nonprofit after a seven-year tenure in which she led the expansion of water access across the Navajo Nation in Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. Emma is also a Diné artist, activist, and the founder of [The Chapter House](#), an arts space that fosters Indigenous empowerment and community.

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*Emma Robbins, Executive Director of DigDeep's Navajo Water Project*

As one of the first employees of DigDeep, Robbins was instrumental in growing the Navajo Water Project to nearly forty field staff. In her role, she led the strategic planning and implementation of the Navajo Water Project's field work, innovations, and coalition-building with local

government and other frontline community partners.

Over 30% of people on the Navajo Nation live without running water or a flush toilet at home. Native Americans are 19 times more likely to live like this than White Americans, [according to research by DigDeep and the US Water Alliance](#). DigDeep founded the Navajo Water Project in 2014 to address this hidden water crisis.

DigDeep's Navajo Water Project is Indigenous-led, and staffed by local members of each community it serves. They work to install clean running water into homes with off-grid Home Water Systems, which use solar power to draw water from 1200-gallon underground water tanks that are buried outside the home and refilled by DigDeep's network of water trucks. The Navajo Water Project is also investing in more effective septic systems. To date, the Navajo Water Project has installed nearly 600 Home Water Systems, and begun hooking households up to main water lines.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdowns forced DigDeep to halt in-home installations for the safety of their employees and clients, the nonprofit pivoted to emergency relief. The team deployed over 1,450 water storage tanks to homes. They also coordinated the donation and distribution of over 2 million pounds of bottled water, which was delivered through a network of volunteers from nonprofits, mutual aid groups, health clinics and Navajo government agencies, some even driving the 'last mile' to elders, and people under quarantine. The Navajo Water Project team didn't stop there: they invented the 'Suitcase' Home Water System, which was engineered for zero contact installation and to withstand the desert's extreme temperatures.



Emma Robbins served as the first Executive Director of DigDeep's Navajo Water Project, which has brought clean running water to thousands of people on the Navajo Nation.

The 'Suitcase' Home Water System earned honors in Fast Company's 2021 Innovation by Design Awards, which recognizes the people, teams, and companies that transform society through design. DigDeep's Navajo Water Project is also the winner of the 2018 US Water Prize, which celebrates outstanding achievements in the advancement of sustainable, integrated, and inclusive solutions to our nation's water challenges.

"I am immensely proud of what we have accomplished over the past several years," says Emma Robbins, outgoing Executive Director of DigDeep's Navajo Water Project. "I came from an arts background, but was inspired to join DigDeep and build the Navajo Water Project out of a deep desire to help my community. My incredible Navajo Water Project team, in collaboration with other community leaders and officials across the Navajo Nation, has helped bring this endeavor to fruition. I am confident the team will continue to do great work in the years to come."

The Navajo Water Project team will be led by Cindy Howe, who is being promoted to Director from her current role as Deputy Director, in which she manages the project's 40-person strong field team. Howe has worked with DigDeep since 2018, joining the nonprofit from one of DigDeep's first community partners, the St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School in Thoreau, New Mexico.

"I am grateful to Emma for her stewardship of the Navajo Water Project over all these years," says Howe. "She has been instrumental in expanding water access for our people, and built deep and lasting relationships with residents, community leaders and other local organizations who

share our goal of ensuring all people on the Navajo Nation have access to clean water and sanitation. I look forward to continuing this work in my new role.”

“The impact Emma has made through her leadership of the Navajo Water Project is hard to put into words,” says George McGraw, founder and CEO of DigDeep. “Emma took a leap of faith to join DigDeep as our third employee, at a time when our work on the Navajo Nation was just getting started. It is because of Emma's vision and tenacity that the Navajo Water Project has grown to serve thousands of Navajo Nation residents across three states. Emma's legacy will live on every time one of them turns on the tap.”

Robbins will be leaving DigDeep to pursue a new opportunity as Managing Director at Planet Women, a nonprofit that approaches environmental conservation through women-led solutions.

“One of the things I most enjoyed in leading DigDeep’s Navajo Water Project has been working with other Indigenous women and women of color to take care of our community members and get them the resources they need,” says Emma Robbins. “I am excited to continue this at Planet Women, where I will keep collaborating with frontline organizations like DigDeep to ensure everyone has access to basic human rights, especially on Native nations.”

Robbins will also continue in her role as founder of The Chapter House, an arts space that uplifts Indigenous Peoples and encourages convening and collaboration, and the pursuit of her own arts. Through her photography and mixed-material installations, Robbins strives to raise awareness around crucial issues facing Native peoples.

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