

Compact *mini*

May 2021

Dear friends,

A city of stone, a city by a lake, a tale of cities around the globe.

With city walls dating from the third century, Gjirokastër is a beautiful stone city that also shelters the home of NG's after-school work and aid among the Roma children. The work provides a beacon of hope and security among some of the city's most vulnerable little ones.

Pogradec rests on the southern shores of Lake Ohrid. The heart of our Albanian work flows out from our campus here. Let's find out what our SMI (Social Medical Improvement) team is up to at the moment.

Finally, a common theme in cities everywhere is the hope of ending the pandemic. We're happy to provide the latest NG update on life during COVID-19 times.

I'm excited for you to enjoy the second edition of our Compact Mini!

Gratefully yours,



Michelle Mann, Executive Director
Nehemiah Gateway USA



A Place For Children With Special Needs

In April 2020, in partnership with Rotary Clubs in Estes Park and Pogradec, Nehemiah Gateway received a \$35,000 Rotary Global Grant to expand facilities and programming for children with special needs at the Buçimas clinic. "Our Rotary Club is very excited to support Nehemiah Gateway on this project to help children in Albania," said Jack Boatman, grants coordinator for the Rotary Club of Estes Park.

The pandemic delayed the start of the project by a year. Building a new Children's Learning Center, originally planned as the first phase, is on the horizon for summer/fall 2021. In the meantime, grant funding is being used to host trainings on working with children with autism, led by Dr. Migen Sulaj, who is one of Albania's leading experts in childhood autism.

Dr. Sulaj will lead a series of workshops with the NG clinic team over the course of the year to enhance skills and knowledge working with children with autism. Two additional workshops for local teachers will build capacity in Pogradec public schools that have autistic students. Special education programs are a new and growing area in Albanian schools. Training in working with children with autism is a rare and valuable opportunity for classroom teachers.

Homework Help And More



COVID-19 has made things harder for most people in Gjiro-kastër. Tourism is the main industry, and prior to COVID, the city was seeing record numbers of visitors. For now, there are almost no tourists, and unemployment has increased dramatically. The families of children in our program have been receiving aid since the pandemic began, including aid parcels, medicines, and clothes and shoes.

Public school is fully open, with distancing, masking, and disinfecting protocols in place. The children love going to school and learning, although the protocols do make it harder to socialize and play.

Nine year old Senada goes to school every day and comes to the NG Gjirokaštër soup kitchen for a hot meal, social time, and homework help afterwards. She says "I love the school and I want to learn because I do not want to be like my mom and dad who are illiterate."

Knowing how to read and write is a huge step forward for children like Senada and will give them opportunities their parents never had. Single mother Liljana sends her two sons to school for this reason and adds that NG's after-school program provides her children with the homework help she wishes she could give them herself.

Albania Vaccinates

It's the teachers' turn to be vaccinated! At NG Albania, 50 staff members have already been immunized - free of charge, with the AstraZeneca vaccine - by mid-April. Not only the teachers, but also school staff such as drivers and cleaners, and also a social worker and a nurse. Fortunately, there have been no complications so far.

The less good news: NG social teams still have to wait, in spite of their many contacts with people from risk groups. They do not count as hospital staff, who have already been or will be vaccinated in Albania as well as police officers and journalists, at-risk groups and all elderly people over 60. NG University is also still on the waiting list.

Executive Director Herolinda Shkullaku says: "I think it's good that occupational groups are vaccinated in parallel with the risk groups. This way, things will move a little faster with the normalization of schooling and other sectors of society. I hope that the next school year can return to normal and that our campus will finally fill up again with young people full of energy and drive."



ELECTION DAY: On April 25 Albania elects a new parliament - a matter of great importance for the country.

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