

# Compact

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July 2021

Dear friends,

Where inspiring and life-changing work is happening, the excitement and energy is contagious. It is a natural environment that welcomes the participation of volunteers.

At NG we have achieved much of our long-term impact through the involvement of our many volunteers. We've welcomed volunteers from all walks in life. Long-term, short-term, young, old, student, professor, professional, and skilled craftsman, to name a few. My introduction to the work of NG in Albania was as a volunteer in the mid-1990's. It changed the trajectory of my life.

Enjoy a few stories of our more recent volunteers. If you worked with us in the past, we'd love to hear about your experiences! And we'd love to reconnect and welcome you back.

Gratefully yours,

  
Michelle Mann, Executive Director  
Nehemiah Gateway USA



Team Administration- winners of a tournament fundraiser for the benefit of a family in need.

## Compassion in Action at the NG Team

**“COMPASSION: To be charitable and merciful with other people and ourselves is clearly one of our key goals. Charity and sympathy can't be earned, they can only be given, and therefore we give them whenever necessary and possible.”**

At NG, how do we live by our values? How do we teach them to others? Compassion is one our six core values. In our day to day lives, two ways we show compassion are through volunteerism and philanthropy. Students at our schools regularly engage in both individual efforts and service projects. Our graduates are already making their mark as both philanthropists and volunteers. Members of the NG team all over the world are also generous, through projects big and small.



Nehemia School's student council

NG is an organization that cares, and our people are generous with their “time, talent, and treasure,” as the expression goes.

For older generations of Albanians, “volunteering” has negative connotations. Under the communist regime that ruled the country until 1991, volunteer work was compulsory and unpaid—and, if you did not show up for your assignment, the consequences for you and your family could be both serious and long-lasting. For that reason, in building a culture of volunteerism at NG, we have been careful to create situations where volunteers choose their projects and choose to participate.

For example, Nehemia School Student Council is an extracurricular activity, and students are elected every year. Like student councils in the US and elsewhere, Nehemia School Student Council does a fair share of party planning and liaising with the school administration. But that’s not all they do. Every October, they help the Social and Medical Improvement (SMI) program with aid deliveries to villages outside of Pogradec, an experience many students describe as eye-opening and transformative. They work through the entire process, starting with soliciting donations for food and clothing (augmented as necessary through the SMI program to assure standardization) and they work with SMI staff to assemble bundles and deliver them to the homes of the recipients.

Student Council usually pursues additional volunteer projects in the community during the school year. The character of these projects changes from year to year, depending on the interests of the students. Last spring, for example, students worked with a local church to make hundreds of face masks to donate to the Pogradec Hospital. Other

classes have picked up trash on the shores of Lake Ohrid and conducted small-group peer tutoring before final exams. Next year, one member of student council says he would like to do something to help the stray dogs in Pogradec [note: this is a real problem!]. Student Council members love these volunteer jobs and remember them for years afterwards.

Student Council leaders are already making their mark outside of school. Lazaron Gushe, the very first Student Council president at Nehemia School, co-launched a foundation 3 years ago in the US that provides scholarship support so that academically talented students can attend Nehemia School. The third winner was selected in June 2021—see p. 3 for more details. He also donates his time on the board of Nehemiah Gateway USA. Elda Pere was also a Student Council president when she was at Nehemia School. A graduate student in data science at University of California Berkeley, she uses her data science skills as a valuable volunteer to help nonprofits understand their analytics.

NG staff are generous with their donations and time as well. At NG USA, the first donations to every fundraising campaign come from staff. They recognize the importance of the work of team members in Albania and appreciate the power of being able to tell our donors “I’d like to invite you to join me in supporting...”. NG USA staff volunteer on nonprofit boards and help other organizations with different areas of focus, viewing their roles as community members as an important part of their identity. The team at NG Albania is no less generous. Last year, in the height of the pandemic, they were part of an organization-wide effort to raise funds for teachers at the Bethania School in Kemono, Tanzania, a longtime



Students of Nehemia School distributing aid in the villages

NG partner. Lockdowns in Tanzania meant that parents stopped paying tuition for students, and without tuition, the teachers were not going to get paid. NG coworkers in Albania and Germany agreed to donate as a group to help Bethania School get through the crisis.

Supporting Tanzanian teachers inspired the idea of collective giving on the part of NG coworkers in Albania. This year, when the team began planning the annual intramural volleyball tournament, they decided to make it a fundraiser. Registration fees were pooled and donated to a Pogradec family in need through the Amaro Tan Center. The first five registrants got to pick the family. The Administration team won the tournament, beating out Facilities—and, most importantly, everybody had a great time. The real winner, though, was the Basholli family. A chronic health condition is only one of the challenges they were already facing when a fire consumed their home in May. The team was delighted to help them rebuild their household through their donation.

These are only a few examples of compassion in action among our team. For students in our schools, having opportunities to help others is educational and empowering—and builds habits that will stay with them their whole lives. For our staff, it helps us stay connected to our core values while helping others. Volunteering and other acts of giving help others—and the giver feels great as well.

Are you interested in volunteering for NG Albania? We are currently looking for professionals in the areas of ESL, German as a second language, IT, and library science. Contact Michelle Mann, Executive Director, NG USA, at [michelle.mann@ng.team](mailto:michelle.mann@ng.team) or call 855 683 6769 to learn more.

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## Dr. Jorgji Jajçari Academic Excellence Scholarship 2021

Congratulations to Dea Pici, 2021 winner of the third edition of Dr. Jorgji Jajçari Academic Excellence Scholarship.

The scholarship offers financial assistance to cover tuition at Nehemia School for an outstanding 10th grader from the Pogradec area. The competition is typically launched yearly on February 10 to commemorate Dr. Jajçari's birthday. Lazon Gusho and Lori Çobani launched the Dr. Jorgji Jajçari Academic Excellence Scholarship in 2018 to honor their grandfather, who passed away in 2007. Dr. Jajçari was an epidemiologist and professor of medicine, and for many years served as Director of numerous Regional Health Departments in Albania. Lazon and Lori are Nehemia School alumni. Lazon, 31, lives in New York City and manages large construction projects, while Lori is a Chemistry PhD student in Philadelphia.

Competition for the scholarship was stiff this year and included seven applicants from three different schools. After much deliberation, the 4-person jury selected Dea Pici, a student of Nehemia School since first grade. Selection is based primarily upon academic achievement. Scholarship winners are supported for up to three years of high school, contingent upon continued academic and extracurricular success.

The award was announced at an event on June 15 on the NG campus in Buçimas. Attendance was limited to nominees and their families and a handful of Nehemia School and NG staff. Lazon and Lori joined the ceremony virtually from the US.

Congratulations, Dea, and good luck!



NGU graduate Sandra Akoli started a groundnut business in Uganda



Shipping produce the African way

## Help Launching a Fledgling Business

### Erik Stensland supports Sandra Akoli in the exciting first steps of her business startup in Uganda

When Sandra Akoli needed someone to look at her business plan for the groundnut business she is starting in Uganda, she turned to NG. A 2017 graduate of the Bachelor’s program at NGU, Sandra is working on carrying out her thesis project—a wholesale groundnut business. Arlinda Merdani, Head of Global Operations at NG, asked the team at NG USA if Erik Stensland, a longtime NG friend and donor who is also a successful entrepreneur, would be willing to look at Sandra’s business plan.

It is said that, if you want to get something done, ask somebody who is busy. That was the case here. Erik is a successful and well-known nature photographer in the US, with three galleries (Estes Park and Grand Lake, Colorado, and New Mexico). He has written seven award-winning books and is one of the founders of Nature First: The Alliance For Responsible Nature Photography. He is a longtime friend and supporter of NG, but asking for a donation of time is a request for something more precious than money.

Erik agreed to look at Sandra’s plan, although he cautioned that his experience as a photographer in the US might not be broadly applicable to Sandra’s experience in Uganda. As he says, “there are often huge cultural differences, as well as unique business hurdles that make it difficult to translate business from one cultural and economic context to another.” Still, when they began communicating, Erik and Sandra found that they shared common values. Erik asked Sandra what her overall mission was.

Financial independence? Community improvement? She responded by telling him of her deep commitment to employing women and teen mothers in her enterprise, making special accommodations to keep the women and their babies together. For Sandra, this empowerment mission, which gives the women a means to support their families, is central to her mission.

Sandra says “Erik guided and helped me to see certain things that I had not thought of which will be helpful for my business to be successful.” Their dialogue will be ongoing in the coming months as Sandra works through the crucial first year of her new business. Good luck, Sandra!

**If you feel that you may have expertise that would help somebody like Sandra, please get in touch with NG USA Executive Director Michelle Mann at [michelle.mann@ng.team](mailto:michelle.mann@ng.team) to learn more about volunteer opportunities for mentorship at NG.**



*“I believe that business can be a tool for good. It can take people out of poverty and even transform communities. It provides dignity and allows a community to move beyond dependence. Assisting small businesses in low-income countries is one of the best ways we can make a difference in this world.”*

Erik Stensland

## Online Coding And a Debate Club

Volunteer Victoria teaches new skills to Nehemia School's students

Victoria Bevard was on Zoom with one of her professors at Duke University from her apartment in Pogradec this spring when a small earthquake hit. She says "At first, I thought it was just wind, but when the shaking continued I realized it was an earthquake and stopped to google whether there were earthquakes in the area. Then I had a laugh with my Professor when I realized I couldn't do anything about it anyway, and we continued talking."

Victoria would not have been in Pogradec if not for the COVID pandemic. Faced with a senior year at Duke University that would have been largely online no matter where she was, Victoria decided not to hang around campus. Instead, she says, she started researching interesting countries with a low cost of living (for American expatriates, at any rate) and acceptable internet connectivity. So...Albania. She found her way to Pogradec by way of NG team member James Leithart's "My Albanian Life" YouTube channel. Next, she learned about Nehemia School's longtime participation with Boston Consulting Group's Business@School initiative. Victoria knew Boston Consulting Group. In fact, she started her Albanian adventure with a job lined up at Boston Consulting Group after graduation.

Encouraged by this surprising coincidence, Victoria decided to volunteer for NG while she finished her degree requirements online, focusing her efforts on Nehemia School. In addition to helping with Business@School, Victoria worked with a friend to bring a free 12-week online coding class to Nehemia School and other area schools. About 50 students from the Pogradec area participated. Additionally, she introduced a debate club at the school. The club was popular, but nation-wide school closures due to COVID prevented any actual competitions from taking place.



Volunteer opportunities like Victoria's help both the volunteer and the organization. While Victoria was teaching new skills to Nehemia School's students, she met people and made friends. She has also learned about the world and gotten to know herself better.

NG has been a longtime supporter of this type of learning through its volunteer program. The German Weltwärts program has placed young volunteers at NG since the program's inception in 2008. Other volunteers come through individual connections or through their universities. Their contributions, often at Amaro Tan or the Social and Medical Improvement program, are valued and relied upon, and the volunteers are remembered fondly. "Volunteers at this stage in their lives have a lot to give," says Herolinda Shkullaku, Executive Director of NG Albania. "They are an inspiration for our young people at the school or university. They bring contagious positive energy and genuine motivation as well as a fresh view in our daily work."

Having graduated (online), Victoria has chosen to defer her job at Boston Consulting for a year to continue exploring and studying. She follows in the footsteps of many other volunteers who have passed through NG's gates. We appreciate the gifts of her time and her talent and wish her all the best.

## A Heart For Friends And Donors

**Good news for our donors and supporters in Germany: Sandra Meister volunteered to join our donor care team. She is looking forward to keeping supporters up to date on projects, providing them with information and answering questions. We are happy that she will help the big NG family grow together even better.**

**Welcome, Sandra!**

## Hello!

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My name is Sandra Meister and I'm looking forward to my new task in donor care for NG!

I became aware of the work of Nehemiah Gateway mainly through stories told by my husband Wolfgang. Together with friends and volunteers, he helped organize the first aid transports from Germany to Albania 30 years ago. The exciting reports from that time impressed me very much. How I would have loved to have been there at that time!

The courage and dedication of Arnold and Esther Geiger to stay in this country with four little children, despite many hardships and many a life-threatening situation, to work hard and never give up is both an example and an incentive for me. During a short visit to Buçimas/Albania, shortly before the Lockdown in 2020, I had the opportunity to convince myself of NG's professionalism and dedication. The short visit to this country will probably remain in my memory forever. I got a glimpse of how meaningfully every single donation to NG is used there, but also in many other projects around the world.

Through NG, we have the opportunity to better understand people from other cultures, to meet them with appreciation and, above all, to learn from them. Helping people of all ages and backgrounds get a foothold in life is a choice of charity and that is what NG fights for day in and day out, what the employees stand for and what they advocate for. I am very excited to now be a part of this great team!



A few words about myself: I live in a little village called Wüstenselbitz in Northern Bavaria in my second marriage with my husband Wolfgang and our three grown-up children. My first husband died in a skiing accident in 2011. It was a challenging time for my two children and me, but with God's help we have made it through.

I am very much looking forward to meeting NG's donors, maybe even in person as soon as that is possible again. Until then, I'll try to keep them informed by phone or email.



Network administrator Charlie Feichtinger and family

## A Professional Behind The Scenes

### Charlie Feichtinger supports Nehemiah Gateway in the IT sector

He is one of our supporters who works in the background. Karl Feichtinger, better known as Charlie. For 20 years, he has been helping Nehemiah Gateway to communicate well and safely.

In Albania in the early 2000s, it was a real challenge to build an efficient email system or run websites. At that time, there was no Internet connection in Albania. With Charlie's help, we were able to install our own e-mail server in Buçimas, which was connected to the Internet via satellite link and could also be maintained remotely via telephone. Security has always been Charlie's top priority and his hotline has never let us down over the many years. His servers in Germany still host our German and Albanian websites today, and provides ongoing security monitoring.

Behind all this lies an exciting personal story. Charlie was diagnosed with cancer when he was a student, and his chances of survival were close to zero. His left leg had to be amputated, the extreme chemotherapy destroyed the chance of ever having children of his own. At least that was the doctors' diagnosis. Andrea, a medical student, stood behind him uncompromisingly throughout this time, and despite all the gloomy prognoses, the two married. When it came to having children, they felt that the last word had not yet been spoken, even if there was no hope from a medical point of view. They desperately wanted children of their own.

After eight years Andrea became pregnant! In the years that followed, they became parents to four wonderful girls.

Charlie recalls, *"My illness made me readjust my whole life. I no longer wanted to just have a career, I wanted to do more with my life. I was interested in finding new ways to contribute to society as a Christian. Networking was important to me. Nehemiah Gateway was already a role model for me at that time. Their work appealed to me and has influenced me until today. I am glad to be part of it."*

The Feichtingers have known Nehemiah Gateway since 1994, when they were on vacation in the Albanian village of Tushemisht, very close to Buçimas. While there, they also got to know NG and fell in love with the country and its people. It was then that they felt the desire to contribute to the development of the country, as a way of thanking God for all the miracles they had experienced. When NGS shareholder Helmut Hauser re-established contact with NG in 2000, it was clear to Charlie that he wanted to get involved.

In the summer of 2008, the whole family took a trip to Albania. Many people still remember Charlie and his self-confident and informal way of dealing with his disability. This encouraged many people in similar situations: Even if you wear a prosthesis, you can lead a successful, fulfilled and happy life!



## At a Glance



### SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF THE LINDENHOF TEAM

May 2021: Either social commitment or working short-time. This was the choice faced by the employees of Hotel Lindenhof in Hubmersberg (which is part of the NG Team). The Hotel had been in partial lockdown since November 2020. During this time training, further education and renovation work had been completed, but the hotel and restaurant had not yet fully reopened. Seven employees from the Lindenhof took the opportunity to help out at the local retirement home and the Red Cross test center instead of staying at home.

Kristjana (picture) is one of the graduates of NG University in Pogradec. She worked at the Red Cross test center in Lauf. *"That was very interesting. I learned about medical procedures in a new field of work with new colleagues"* Normally, she is responsible for the hotel's housekeeping as a deputy housekeeper.

At the end of May the Lindenhof was allowed to fully open its doors again. The team is happy - despite extra work due to the demanding Corona hygiene rules.

Nehemiah Gateway USA, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization according to section 501 (c)(3) of the federal IRS tax code. Gifts are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law and contributions are solicited with the understanding that Nehemiah Gateway USA, Inc. has authorization for the distribution of all donated funds. Donations to Nehemiah Gateway USA programs represent a contribution to the entire global mission of Nehemiah Gateway USA and may be used where most needed.



### SUMMER CAMP FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

It was their highlight of the year: the little (and also some older) patients of the Children's Learning Center at NG Albania enjoyed fellowship, activities, games and fun at their annual summer camp. With generous support of the Rotary Club of Estes Park in Colorado, SMI staff, along with volunteers from Nehemia School, were able to give them a wonderful time and create lifelong memories.

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