

# Compact

Newsletter for Friends and Supporters

Edition April 2020

Dear friends!

These weeks we are all facing an unforeseen challenge – the Corona-virus pandemic.

How is it affecting the work of NG and what new opportunities have developed through this crisis? New challenges provide us with new opportunities for growth, learning and practicing compassion.

This issue also introduces you to an outstanding young lady from Guatemala who is now studying at NGU, wanting to practice compassion in an even more impactful way upon graduation and returning home. We also read about opportunities two Nehemia School alumni living in the US have encountered.

I wish you well and remain grateful for your partnership.

Michelle Mann  
Executive Director, NG USA



An unusual sight - NG Campus in Bucimas is deserted, school and university are closed

## With Prudence Through The Crisis

### Challenge and opportunities in times of Corona

It is the end of March 2020 and there is hardly anyone who is not affected by the current situation. A virus is making the rounds, bringing public life to a standstill all over the world. Social distancing is the order of the day.

For an organization whose innermost DNA and primary goal are the care and advancement of people, keeping distance is a challenge! In our almost 30-year history we have had to cope with many a crisis, from waves of refugees to armed unrest. The current situation is different.



Food parcels, prepared by the NG social team for needy people in Pogradec, Albania

We are all fighting the global spread of an “invisible enemy” and are looking for solutions to save our students, staff and especially our patients and clients in need from the worst consequences of this crisis. And this time not only in the project countries, but also on our own doorstep. We are partnering with local governments in the areas where we work to broaden our reach, using lessons learned over 30 years of humanitarian work. It’s important to be prepared, to not go down but up when challenged.

Almost all of our co-workers are now working from home, schools and university in Albania are closed. We are currently continuing paying the salaries of those, who cannot do their work from home. None of our team should get into distress through no fault of their own!

At our schools and university, we already have good distance learning methods in place, although we are still in a pilot phase for the school. Teaching, lectures and communication with parents and students are continuing online as long as the schools are closed.

We keep our eyes open for emergencies, such as the distribution of food to the needy or those who are not allowed to leave the house. We will certainly be able to help in many more cases. In Pogradec, this is already going very well in cooperation with the state crisis team, and at our bases in Germany, the USA and lately also in Switzerland (home of our very newest NG office) we are also looking for ways to help.

Like all international organizations we have to fight with travel restrictions, especially at the university: if possible, employees had to return to their home countries or conti-

nents and Albanian interns had to travel home. Travel restrictions made that a tricky task. We constantly observe the developments at the borders, find legal ways in times of curfews and travel restrictions ... and always keep an eye on social distancing and safety - after all, human lives are at stake. So far, everything has worked out well.

Of course, we take care to keep our team healthy and up to the task - often surpassing the official requirements. We want to do everything we can to keep our employees fit for important further assistance during the next phase. To this end the leaders of our NG Team organizations in Germany, the USA, Switzerland and Albania are in daily contact with each other, coordination and mutual assistance work well.

We are confident that this challenge will ultimately make us stronger. One of NG’s organizational principles, and our heartfelt belief, is that

**“Challenges are positive and help us to constantly improve. We set ourselves challenges as a team in order to tap the full potential of our co-workers.”**

Naturally, in all this we depend on the support and cooperation of all our friends and supporters. We are grateful for your generous support, your compassion, and your prayers as we work together, from a safe distance, through this challenging time.

This is a good opportunity for all of us to pause and focus on the really important things in life. We wish all our readers strength, prudence, patience and above all health in this unusual time.

Read more about the topic on the following pages.

## Coping with COVID-19 in Albania

Amaro Tan seventh grader Odise left school on March 9 with some homework and a large bundle of food staples. The Albanian government had just closed all schools to contain the spread of the highly contagious coronavirus (COVID-19). Like children all over Albania, he has had to adjust to learning from home. Odise is able to continue learning through televised lessons and online check-ins. Some of his fellow students, like fourth grader Nertila, do not have TV or reliable internet connections at home. In cases like hers, teachers are working hard and being creative to maintain learning. Nertila and Odise agree—it's better at school, and they can't wait to get back. But for now, this is reality.

After the first two cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) were reported in Albania in early March, the country began locking down. All schools were cancelled, many businesses shuttered, large gatherings banned, and strict fines implemented for failures to quarantine. On March 19, people were further restricted to going out in public for only four hours per day, and only alone. These restrictions are necessary to slow the spread of the virus, but they are making it impossible for people who earn the money they need to live day by day to maintain self-sufficiency. In Albania's socially connected culture, enforced isolation is disorienting and scary.

NG's three schools in Albania, Nehemia School, Amaro Tan, and Nehemiah Gateway University, were included in the closure. All three schools have made major adjustments to continue teaching their students without ever seeing them in person.

NGU has transitioned to online lessons via the Zoom platform. That has made it possible for its diverse corps of professors, who live all over the world, to continue teaching without setting foot in an airport. Students who were in Pogradec when the ban was implemented - like Karla, who is interviewed elsewhere in this issue - are staying in Pogradec and taking classes online. Other students who were in their home countries have had to remain home for longer.



Families receive food parcels from Amaro Tan School.

In the long term, university staff is figuring out ways to deliver the practical units that are a vital component of a dual study program, and to adapt classes with a more hands-on orientation.

With 470 students ages 3-18, Nehemia School faces different challenges. With very little time to prepare for the sudden closure, teachers sent students home with homework and have been available to students by phone or online. School staff have set up Zoom-based "classrooms" for all students. Even kindergarteners are checking in with their teachers now, accompanied by a parent. Teachers are adapting to this new method, bringing the classroom to their students from their homes. They also check in with students by phone, text, or email to make sure that learning is happening optimally.

For the students at Amaro Tan and in the Gjirokastrë after-school program, online education presents an obvious problem. Some students, like Odise, can join group check-ins via WhatsApp. Others, like Nertila, are unable to connect because they don't have internet service at home. Television classes provided by the Albanian Ministry of

Education that covers core subjects is a solution for some. For students with no television or internet access, teachers are instructing students one on one, by telephone—an endeavor that is incredibly labor-intensive.

Many of these students face another, equally immediate problem. Breakfast and lunch at Amaro Tan, and lunch at the Gjirokastër soup kitchen, are the only real meals they normally get in a day. At home, many of them are hungry. Many of them are also in unstable, unsafe environments. For those students, staff at Amaro Tan put together food parcels for each family, with supplies to last for the initial two-week closure. Staff have stayed in constant contact with parents and children in order to address needs as they come up—within the constraints of enforced social distancing. At the time of the writing of this article, school closures have already been extended into April, and the team is planning a second food aid delivery.

NG Albania's humanitarian (SMI) team works with many people who are not only poor, but have persistent health issues, and, in many cases, are also old—a high risk group for coronavirus. At the clinic, only patients whose conditions will get worse without treatment have continued at the clinic. As restrictions on movement expand, many of those patients may be required to stay home. In addition to medical issues, many clinic clients also experience food insecurity and isolation. For that reason, all soup kitchen guests received bundles of food so that they could eat during the first two weeks of closure. SMI team members have made their contact information known to their patients in order to continue providing support in a safe manner, and to address urgent needs as they come up.

The SMI team has been working with local government to develop an aid delivery program during the emergency. NG is providing aid bundles, and social workers from the municipality are delivering the bundles and providing home check-ins. This will likely include not only the people NG already helps, but, depending on funding, may expand to include others in the Pogradec area who have an urgent need. Restrictions on movement and economic activity are quickly draining the resources of people who had previously been self-sufficient. In this case, short-term aid is urgently needed to limit widespread suffering. In the absence of large government programs, it is the only help many of these people will get.



International students, among them Karla from Guatemala, do their homework in the Mission House with Gian Paul keeping them company.



Our team in Gjirokastër is prepared to help.



First Aid and hygiene training for our co-workers in Buçimas

One food bundle costs \$15. You can help NG support the Pogradec and Gjirokastër communities, making sure that, even as we maintain physical distance from one another, we are still taking care of each other and reducing suffering during this global emergency.

Donate on Global Giving:  
<https://goto.gg/45759>

Donate directly to NG-USA:  
<https://www.ng-usa.org/donate>



Karla Cuca

## NG University's First Student From Guatemala

In fall 2019, Nehemiah Gateway University welcomed its first student from Guatemala. Karla Cuca, 30, comes to NGU from Semilla, The Latin American Anabaptist Seminary in Guatemala City, where she has worked since 2013. Karla holds a BA in Art History and is now enrolled in NGU's BA in Business and Economy. Michelle Mann, Executive Director of NG USA, was recently in Pogradec and had a chance to catch up with Karla.

### **How did you first hear of NGU?**

Through Jerry and Leonor Kennell who were working at Semilla in 2018.

### **Where are you living? Do you like it?**

On the campus in a Mohab, one of NG's tiny houses. It is very different from Guatemala City. Here it is safe and quiet. I can take peaceful walks. The first time a car stopped next to me when I was out walking. I became very frightened. Then I realized they were only asking me a friendly question. In Guatemala this would be a dangerous situation.

### **What do you hope to do with your NGU education?**

Give back to my sending organization Semilla, i.e. to help use resources better and to become more self-sustaining. I wish to help them decrease their dependency on donations and generate more income from the guest house and the intercultural program to support their theology training. I want to help them figure out how to use their campus space in the off season. In the future Semilla could be a bridge between donors and smaller local church projects like literacy projects and programs for at-risk teens. These are programs that live the gospel, don't just tell it.

### **What has been your favorite class so far?**

Material Management taught by Professors Engjellushe Icka and Jeffrey Adams. I also really liked Marketing and Sales taught by Professor Melissa St. James. These classes have taught me how to improve what I was already doing at Semilla.

### **Would you recommend NGU to others?**

Yes! I strongly recommend it. Everyone is trying to help you in your studies and wants to see you succeed. Classes are small and you have a lot of personal interaction with professors. They give you tools to do and not just to know.

### **Is this your first winter? How do you like it?**

I used to think I liked cold weather, but it got difficult when winter started. My family complains about the cold at home and I now think that they don't know cold weather at all! The first snow was nice but there hasn't been much snow this year.

### **What has been the most difficult thing so far?**

Being far from my family, especially my mom. I miss going to market on Sundays with the family then eating out and going home for a movie. My role at home during Christmas is to oversee our nativity scene construction. One of my jobs is to select one or two new sheep each year and my goal is to eventually have 100 sheep. I shopped with my family via Skype this year.

### **What has been your favorite experience since you started at NGU?**

Getting to know professors, students, and visitors to the NG campus. I love to learn from others and make connections. Community is very important to me. I am learning a lot about myself.



Elda Pere

## Passion and Science: Klea and Elda on the fast lane in the U.S.

**After Elda Pere and Klea Hoxhallari graduated from Nehemia High School in years 2016 and 2018, they independently went to the U.S. to study. Both are particularly involved with scientific topics and with living and passing on their values. We are very excited and deeply impressed by the careers of those two successful, committed young women!**

### **Hi, my name is Elda**

I am 21 years old and currently finishing my degree in Data Science at the University of California in Berkeley.

I started my studies at a community college, where I was able to win several scholarships that paid my tuition and later gave me the opportunity to transfer to the renowned University of California Berkeley.

### **Supporting women and underrepresented groups ...**

I am a passionate supporter of women and other underrepresented groups in STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Currently, I work as a data analyst for the non-profit-organization VivendasLeon in San Francisco, that aims to eliminate rural poverty. Also, I'm a communications analyst for the Student Affairs Department at UC Berkeley.

### **Children's books and free arm prostheses ...**

In my free time, I enjoy writing: recently I published „Ennie & Entropy“, my first publication in a scientific children's book series in both English and Albanian. I also lead an initiative for free arm prostheses made with

3D printers and I advocate to improve opportunities for community college students with Phi Theta Kappa, in which I sat on the Board of Directors.

In the future, I would like to expand the prosthetics initiative and my data projects to rural villages in Albania to help people in need.

This year I was named Student of the Year in New Jersey and Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship recipient, which I am very excited about.

During my time at Nehemia High School,  
I saw a global community  
open to new ideas.

Academically, I was challenged in different subjects and found my passion for mathematics and literature thanks to the rigor of my teachers. On my graduation day, I created a time capsule and everybody in my class put a memory inside of it. The capsule was left with the school's administration until now and will be reopened this August.



Klea Hoxhallari

## Hello! I'm Klea

... and I am 20 years old. I grew up, aiming to be a successful and powerful woman. Since a young age, I loved medicine and knew I wanted to be a doctor. At the age of 18, I came to the United States to follow this dream.

Currently, I am studying "Biomedical Engineering" at Schoolcraft College in Michigan as a "pre-med" student, because the American education system requires a bachelor's degree before I can apply to a medical school.

So, after graduating as an engineer after two years, I will go on to medical school and become a neurosurgeon. In addition to practicing as a physician, I would like to work on the development of medical devices and also contribute to the improvement of the Albanian health system.

### Tutoring and student representation ...

At my college, I have obtained multiple scholarships, contributed to national publications and I work as an assistant to my professors in chemistry, mathematics, remedial mathematics and physics. I am also a certified tutor and strongly involved in student representation. Recently, I was selected the best student of the college and received the President Award.

### Rockets and launch-vehicles ...

As a participant in the Alka Rocket Project, I helped build a launch-vehicle and a rocket to participate in the Kennedy Space Center, a program organized by NASA. My team made it to the five finalists!

This is my last semester at this college - soon I will transfer to university. Therefore, right now, I'm in the process of applying to the Ivy League universities (editor's note: the eight Ivy League universities in the U.S. are considered some of the most prestigious universities in the world).

## Nehemia High School is my "Ivy League Albanian School"

... with its great academic quality, lab experience, project development, public speaking opportunities and values that make Nehemia's students lucky to be in that great environment.

I am thankful to have worked with so many inspiring people: Teachers Celo, Iliri, Jeta, Drini, Avniu and Fabiola believed in me and sparked my interest in science. Teachers Liza, Anila and Mirjeta inspired me to become a strong intellectual female. I firmly believe in the power of courageous women who overcome all difficulties to accomplish their beliefs and dreams. No matter how much I go through, never, not even for a millisecond, did I think about giving up and taking an easier path.



## At a Glance



### Scholarship interviews in East Africa

In February, just before the travel ban, Nehemiah Gateway in partnership with Cornerstone Development Africa conducted interviews with students from Cornerstone Uganda, Cornerstone Tanzania, Help for Masai and Nehemia Tanzania (Bethania School) looking for potential students who could qualify for the scholarship opportunity NG is offering.

Since 2013, Nehemiah Gateway has given over 35 scholarships to students from Africa, Latin America and Southeast Europe to study the BA program in Business and Economics at Nehemiah Gateway University in Albania.

We are very thankful to Cornerstone Development Africa for their hospitality and the possibility to conduct these interviews at their headquarters in Kampala. Many thanks also to Dr. Helen Nakimbugwe, university professor in Uganda, and to Brenda Birawba and Joshua Luyonza, both graduates of NG University, and both continuing to be involved in the work of Cornerstone and NG.



### Proud parents at Amaro Tan

In February the Amaro Tan School organized two open classes for pupils and their parents in history and biology. Open classes are designed to improve the quality of learning and raise parents' awareness of how to better support their children in school and appreciate the importance of education. In biology, the students learned about the pulmonary and respiratory system. They were given tasks such as building models of the respiratory system. The parents were amazed at their performance. This helps us to attract more parents to the school and to get them involved by watching their own children thrive at school.

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