

Compact

Newsletter for Friends and Supporters

Edition December 2018

Dear friends
and supporters!

Christmas is just around the corner! Most of us are on the lookout for presents - after all, the Christmas season is also about celebrating together, and to show family and friends that they are important to us.

But gifts are also important for people in need; a sign of hope, a signal that they are not alone and that someone takes care of them.

In this issue we present a few stories of children who bravely fight their way through life despite many difficulties - and we show you the ways we found to help them.

Perhaps you'd like to join us and, through your gift, show our little patients that they are not alone.

Enjoy reading!

Your Compact team



The Children's Learning Center

A Gateway to New Opportunities

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." Benjamin Franklin

Helping people attain sustainable self-sufficiency is at the heart of all of Nehemiah Gateway's work, in Albania and worldwide. We not only help people, we work to help them in such a way that eventually they no longer need help—or at least need less help. For some, this means being the first person in their family to attend university. For others, it may mean going to school and learning to read. For people of all ages with disabilities, access to ongoing therapy and care can be a vital first step toward education. For some, it is a gateway toward eventual self-sufficiency. For others, simply gaining access to therapeutic services is an attainment, supporting



The first floor of NG Albania's SMI clinic houses therapy rooms and a small outpatient clinic. The Children's Learning Center will be right in front.

both them and their families.

In Albania, for people with disabilities, access to care is an ongoing challenge. A strong stigma against disability leads to some people never acknowledging or reporting their condition. People with recognized conditions receive a monthly stipend from the government to cover the costs of medicine and treatment, and offset the lost income of family members who stay home to provide care. It isn't enough. For people who are already poor, or who do not have family members to care for them, the cost of regular therapeutic and medical treatment, and access to specialists, makes these services an unattainable dream. Yet physical therapy, massage, speech therapy, and psychological therapy can make a huge difference in quality of life and self-sufficiency.

With your help, NG hopes to expand its ability to provide these services in the Pogradec area. The NG USA office is leading a major fundraising campaign to increase the capacity of NG Albania to provide care and services for people with special needs and disabilities. By leveraging matching grant opportunities and individual donations, we are working to raise \$78,000 to build a new Children's Learning Center on the campus.

The Children's Learning Center will consist of two new special education and therapy classrooms, connected by a shared waiting area and restroom, adjoining existing SMI facilities. The two classrooms will be staffed by specialists providing services for children with conditions including autism, Down Syndrome and epilepsy. The whole space

will be child-friendly, warm, and inviting, and all services will be offered free of charge for those who cannot afford to contribute. Suela, NG's speech therapist, says "I am looking forward to the new place where I can work with the children. For me it is really important to have a designated space only for the pedagogical therapy, suitable especially for this purpose and attractive for the children." Currently, we have two staff members who work with children. With two shared rooms at their disposal, they see 49 children a week. Most children receive treatment 1-2 hours a week, which is considerably less than these special students need to learn and grow. The Social and Medical Improvement (SMI) team loves working with them. Currently, they must turn away families that need help, because there is simply no more space and no more time to offer treatment to more children. With two new rooms and a new staff member, they expect to be able to offer more hours for the children already in their care, and to add about 10 new children per year.

Nehemiah Gateway is one of the few organizations in Pogradec to provide these services to children with special needs, and to provide them free of charge. Without your help, many of these children will not get the care they need.

Splitting out children's services into a separate wing, and hiring additional staff to manage it, will not only expand the capacity of NG's SMI team to care for children with disabilities, it will also expand capacity to offer regular care for all patients. Adult patients, like the children, ideally need more time and care than the SMI team can offer



Those who cannot come to the clinic get treatment at home.



Suitable teaching material and toys animate the children to play and learn.

them with current space and staffing levels. And there are many more people in the community NG would help if they could.

Nehemiah Gateway's SMI operation currently consists of seven coworkers with four shared rooms, and a bathroom that is shared between coworkers and clients. There is no dedicated waiting or administrative space in the clinical area. The single bathroom is not an insignificant problem, either. The people NG helps are poor; several of them do not have the premises to bathe or do laundry at home. When they are taking care of their hygienic needs, nobody else can use the bathroom. This can be a problem for children as well as adults.

The Children's Learning Center will include both a waiting area and a bathroom, adding capacity for the entire team and especially for the children. Nehemiah Gateway Albania is committed to retaining more staff upon construction of the new facility. With children's services concentrated in the Children's Learning Center, there will be increased capacity to see new patients in the main building, as well as more staff time available. An exciting aspect of this project is the prospect of increased access to educational opportunities for children with disabilities. Anybody who has visited NG's Buçimas campus knows



Massage and physiotherapy are in high demand.

that the Nehemia School is quite close to the SMI clinic. A few children who receive treatment at our facility already have scholarships to go to Nehemia School, and we hope that, where appropriate, we will be able to offer this opportunity to others. For some children, treatments received at the Children's Learning Center will be a huge step forward, and access to education they would never have had otherwise. For others, we hope it will be a gateway to greater opportunities. Given the right assistance, they can share their unique gifts and perspectives with the students at Nehemia School—an experience that typically enriches the whole class.

Says Doug Mann, President of NG USA, „While we are often invited to financially contribute to many good endeavors, it is rare that we as individuals get the chance to be the only help some of the least fortunate receive. In other words, without our engagement, many of these lives will be negatively impacted, possibly for generations to come.”

You can be a part of this important work. Make a donation today for the Children's Learning Center. Use the envelope enclosed with this issue of Compact to mail a check, or donate through NG USA's website at ng-usa.org.



Mateo

The Children's Learning Center is Designed for Children Like Him

The thirteen-year-old boy had a difficult start in life. From birth he was often ill and his speech development stopped at the age of two. The diagnosis: early childhood autism. The single mother and his younger brother look after him touchingly, even though their only income is Mateo's small disability pension. For a long time, they stood alone with this huge problem - at least until they heard about Nehemiah Gateway. Then five-year-old Mateo received a therapy place and has been coming regularly to the clinic twice a week for eight years.

Hyperactive, unfocused, often aggressive - this is how his therapists got to know him. He avoided eye contact, hardly spoke and even refused to play games. Speech and development therapy in combination with physiotherapy and a lot of patience and attention brought the breakthrough. Gradually he learned colors, numbers and letters. The aggressiveness lasted longer, only after several years was he able to participate in group activities and summer camps. Today, the hyperactivity is no longer noticeable. Now Mateo gets along well with other children, even for several hours a day at the beloved summer camp. That is a huge step forward!

This was also required for a further step out of social isolation: he now goes to school. He may never master the complete subject matter of the 6th grade, but he picks things up and, above all, he leaves the cramped apartment and is challenged. His little brother has received

a scholarship from NG for the Nehemia School, which takes a big burden off his mother's shoulders.

A key to Mateo's positive development is the connection with his therapists. Anila started with Mateo's therapy, after that Nexhi took care of him intensively. Even though they have only limited training in this field, they were able to help Mateo. Today he is receiving professional help from our speech therapist Suela who studied at the University of Tirana and is now one of Mateo's favorites. With her help he not only memorizes terms and meanings but is also encouraged to think logically and understand connections. This is a big step for him.

You can't expect too much. Says Suela: "When asked who Mateo is, he now answers 'That's me'. He can tell mammals and birds apart as groups. Land animals don't have wings, so they can't fly like birds. That makes sense to him now. He used to be completely disinterested, but for some time now he has become more curious. He begins to take an interest in his environment and to ask questions. In the new Children's Learning Center, he will get even better conditions for his treatment."

Today Mateo is like a different child. Still shy and withdrawn, but no longer aggressive. On the contrary, he smiles at everyone in a friendly way and also plays quietly in larger groups. What an improvement!



„My house” - this is what Kejsi’s biggest dream looks like.

Kejsi A Little Guest in the Soup Kitchen in Gjirokastër

In March 2015, there is a knock at the door of Nehemiah Gateway in Gjirokastër. It is Pranvera Ruli, a young mother who comes from a life of poverty and deprivation. Her three little girls - who would have two little siblings in the next few years - are with her. You can tell life hadn’t treated them well. Today we want to introduce her oldest daughter, Kejsida, called Kejsi.

Kejsi is now 10 years old and goes to fourth grade. She is the oldest sister and everything she does reflects the responsibility and caring for her sisters and her little brother, although she is still a child herself.

Nobody in her family has a job, they only get a little social assistance from the city, just 7000 Lek a month (that’s less than 60 USD). The flat does not belong to them, is much too small and in a miserable condition. Kejsi explains: “All seven people live in a single room. In a small pantry we keep the clothes. The roof is dripping, and the walls are wet.”

Such a life is a great burden - the most basic needs’ provision are a daily struggle, whether food, clothing or hy-

giene. Since the day when the mother knocked on NG’s door, the family receives warm food from Monday to Friday, and there is other support such as clothing donations and parcels for the children. This has also changed Kejsi’s life: “Now we feel more secure and are happy that we get a delicious meal every day. My mother has become much calmer and is not stressed out all the time”.

Kejsi tries not to be a burden to anyone, so she is always good at school and learns hard. “My dream is to become a teacher so that I can help others and teach them something.” When you ask her about her wishes, she lists what most children take for granted: “I want a house that is not damp, to have my own room, decent clothes and good food”. In a game where the children had to imagine how their greatest dream looks, Kejsi described herself in her favorite clothes, trousers and blouse, how she went to a big park and played. “I would also like to play sometime!”

In the new soup kitchen (see next page) Kejsi can now be better looked after and receive further support. Thanks to all donors who made this possible!



High on the mountain ridge, behind the majestic castle complex is Nehemiah Gateway's Gjirokastrë Center with the new soup kitchen.

Nehemiah Gateway in Gjirokastrë, the "City of Stone"

"It was a steep city, perhaps the steepest in the whole world; all the laws of architecture had been overthrown by it. So steep, it could happen that the foundations of one house were on the same level as the roof of another. Certainly, this was the only place in the world where someone who slipped by the side of the road did not fall into the ditch, but perhaps onto the roof of a tall house. It really was a very strange town."

The famous Albanian writer Ismail Kadare describes life in the ancient city of Gjirokastrë during his childhood in the novel "Chronicle in Stone". Walking through the narrow alleys today, one is easily gripped by the same oppressive atmosphere that is felt when reading his tale.

Beautiful castle-like houses on steep slopes, in-between buildings that have fallen into disrepair and ugly new constructions. All this is connected by stairs and steep, colorful cobblestone roads. In the center is a huge medieval castle, surrounded by mountains almost 6,500 feet high, down below the vast valley of the Drino river. It is not for

nothing that the city was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005. A visit to Gjirokastrë is an experience. Especially, if you have managed the steep ascent to the very top, above the mighty fortress. Here's where Nehemiah Gateway works in the Dunavat district.

NG has been looking after needy people here since 1994. Many young people and families have emigrated to nearby Greece or Italy, half of the six hundred old houses are empty. There are less than 20,000 people left, many of whom cannot muster the strength for a new beginning in a foreign country - the elderly, the sick and people on the margins of society. For them there is now a new refuge: the newly built NG soup kitchen.





Inauguration of the new soup kitchen building on 26 October 2018



The kids love their birthday parties, celebrating with friends and staff.

The New Soup Kitchen - A Haven For The Hungry

NG co-workers and friends are overjoyed: the new soup kitchen was inaugurated in October. The style of the new building fits perfectly into the UNESCO World Heritage City: grey stone walls, wooden arched windows and a roof of natural stone - all in the same style as the existing center of Nehemiah Gateway right next door. The building permit has been long in coming, but the wait was worth it. The team in Gjirokastër is happy about this new gem. The Protestant church of Winterswijk in the Netherlands donated the biggest part of the construction costs, provided the kitchen and furniture and practically helped out with its own teams. This project would not have been possible without their support!

Looking back ...

The food aid program started in a large wooden barrack. For children from Roma background and needy families, this was a place of refuge where they could not only be fed but also feel safe. In 2010 this came to an end - for the time being - the hut burned down together with the whole facility. It was probably the homeless who broke in and, trying to warm themselves up, set the whole building on fire. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but it was a severe blow. What was to happen to the needy in the soup kitchen? We couldn't let them go hungry after all. The employees rose to the occasion and without further ado continued the feeding program in a very small kitchen in the nearby NG Centre - for 26 adults and 10 children per day! The project shares the confined space with the local church and other Nehemiah Gateway activities.

More than just a soup kitchen

Their goal is to create a place of refuge for the soup kitchen clients. A place where they can get more than just food. Families, children and seniors should feel safe, enjoy community and find an open ear for their worries. And of course, receive individual support. Some of the seniors cannot come to the soup kitchen themselves, the food is delivered to their homes. Others need help with visits to doctors or authorities, receive medication or food packages for their needy families.

Homework supervision and tutoring

Children are allowed to stay longer after lunch. Lack of support in the families and exclusion at school make school attendance a real problem for them. To compensate for this, they receive homework support and tutoring at NG. And because climbing the hill to the soup kitchen is really exhausting, but also for safety reasons, they are picked up daily and brought home again.

... and more

In the new rooms, 20 more guests shall soon be admitted and the program for children and senior citizens will also be expanded. In order to use the limited space optimally visitors will be divided into three groups and fed and cared for one after the other. The team in Gjirokastër has always been imaginative and manages to make a lot out of very little. Their clients are really grateful. The project not only satisfies hunger, but also gives their difficult lives a degree of dignity.

At a Glance



Roundtable: Social and Medical Work

Together we can achieve more! On 10.10.2018 representatives of various organizations and institutions active in the field of social and medical work in and around Pogradec met. Among them were Nehemiah Gateway, Emergency Care Albania (MNA), Living Water International, Kenedi Foundation, the Methodist Church and representatives of the city administration. This first meeting served to get to know each other. In the future, current social hotspots will be discussed and solutions sought together.

Vocational Training in Germany

In our project learn | match | integrate with our German partner Beck International Recruitment young Albanians are offered the chance of vocational training in nursing in Germany. After taking German courses and special preparation workshops at the NG Campus in Buçimas, they meet German employers for job interviews. Those who succeeded will start their vocational training soon. Good luck!



A Happy and Peaceful Christmas Season!

We wish all our friends and supporters a very special Christmas - the time centered around the great story of Christmas. May the message of peace radiate into all of the festivities and celebrations, and reach far into the coming year 2019. God's blessing and all the best for you!



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