

Compact

Newsletter for friends and supporters

Edition February 2020

Dear friends and supporters!

In this issue of Compact we will show you ways the new year is already bringing a positive difference to the lives of many young people – both in Albania and further afield. We're pleased to showcase our efforts to bring educational excellence to our K-12 Nehemia School, Amaro Tan School and higher education support to the bright young people of T.O.M. in Tanzania. You'll meet some of the shining stars who are key to our ability to provide a top quality learning environment for our youth.

You'll also learn about the emergency relief response to the earthquake disaster that struck recently in Western Albania. Thanks to many of you we are able to provide ongoing assistance to families in desperate need.

Enjoy reading!

Your Compact team



"The best time ever" - students and parents enjoyed the presentation on more healthy food.

Rejuvenating Nehemia School

Our school development project aims to have an individualizing view of the student

Nehemia School was founded more than 20 years ago. Since then, a lot has happened. There have been crises to overcome, we had to make room for a growing number of students and adapt to the rapid development of Albania's society. And we constantly worked to improve the quality of teaching.

Last year was the perfect time to approach this in a completely new and professional way. After all, with the retirement of the former headmaster Drini Hajdini, a successful era came to an end for the school and a new phase began. The new headmistress Elona Rira was to be given the opportunity to develop the school and bring a fresh breeze into the classroom right from the start.



For 30 years Prof. Dr. Werner Esser held leading positions in various renowned boarding schools in Germany. In addition to his teaching activities he accompanied numerous school development programs at different levels. He completed training as a systemic coach and now works as an independent coach and consultant.
(www.we-c.de)

An expert joins the team

During that transition period the perfect person offered his help: Prof. Dr. Werner Esser. Prof. Esser not only helped with the evaluation and selection of the new principal and a program director, he also offered to coach them and their team in the school development process. His wealth of experience is considerable. The new director Elona Rira and curriculum development director Donika Nasto can count on his help and advice, even after the termination of his coaching contract in December.

Prof. Esser remembers: „When Barbara von Schnurbein, a tireless supporter of Nehemiah Gateway and member of the Advisory Board, invited me to visit NG in Albania, my first reaction was: ‘that’s out of the question! I don’t speak any Albanian.’ However, soon I learned that the Albanian side was pretty fluent in German. All the leaders in the school’s operation had studied the German language, Elona and Donika as well as Executive Director Herolinda Shkullaku. On my first visit I was really impressed, especially by the buildings, knowing the usual standard of living in Albania. Then the trip to a mountain village where NG took care of the elderly and the needy ... that touched me deeply. When I read the motto of Pestalozzi on a wall, “helping with hand, heart and mind”, it was clear for me – this is the place to get involved! A subsequent visit of the Amaro Tan School for Roma children convinced me even more. I found this work incredibly exciting and valuable and an important contribution to the big issue of inclusion.”

The topic “inclusion” is at the core of the entire school development project. Children should be supported on the basis of their abilities, not their background. It is our dream that Amaro Tan and Nehemia School will one day be merged in order to provide all children with an education that suits their individual needs: either



Workshop for parents and teachers with Prof. Esser and Donika Nasto

practice-oriented at Amaro Tan, leading to the advanced technical college entrance qualification, or with an academic focus towards high school graduation/A-levels, the springboard to university. The choice should be made completely independent of family background, whether poor or rich, Roma or Albanian. The school development at Nehemia School is an important first step in this direction.

For one and a half years Werner Esser has coached the school management during regular visits, many conversations and video meetings to lead the staff to a greater independence, to integrate parents and teachers into the school development process and to set the course for a development program for Nehemia School.

Experiences in the classroom

Werner Esser recounts sitting in on classes: „One teacher had her class under control, was in motion in the class as if in a dance. A kind of teaching we also find and appreciate in Germany. In another class, I experienced a teaching style that reminded me of my own childhood but also of teachers from other former socialist countries. The teacher stands in front, conducts the lesson, calls students - but the children are not really involved. They are not addressed as persons, but in their function as pupils, the focus goes away from the individual and towards the collective. This is not a typical Albanian problem; in Germany, too, teachers are expected to perform within a given framework, which gives little room for individualism. Now we ask the teachers to help us change this framework. They can’t do that on their own, they never learned that, they need our support.”

„The key is a very individualized view of the student. Without that, school development is impossible.“



Director Elona Rira involves the parents in the school development program.

„Elona, Donika and Herolinda are mothers who perceive school from a completely different perspective than men. They recognize the deficits more clearly and do something about it. Elona, for example, regularly sits in on classes, advises the teachers and listens to them. In addition, there is the steering group who care for the implementation under the leadership of Donika.“ One first step was to involve the parents in this process. A workshop with teachers, parents and students was very well received.

„School needs opportunities for students to learn, they need to experiment, to try things out, they need to become independent.“

That is why a whole range of events and activities were offered last year: further training for teachers, better selection procedures for new pupils, social outreaches for those in need (in cooperation with the NG social services), cooperation and events with various actors in the environmental, cultural and social fields. A very special event was a full week all about more healthful food. Says Elona: “This was particularly well received. After topic-related teaching units, the children carried out interdisciplinary projects according to their personal interests. In the end, each had a food item that was presented at the parents’ meeting. Students and parents agree: „That was probably the best time ever at Nehemia School.“

... and it was also a small step towards Elona’s big dream:

„My dream is to inspire students, parents and teachers. Their school shall be a place where they are accepted as they are; where they experience understanding and assistance, are challenged and empowered to create a better life for themselves - and to positively influence their environment and society.“



The kindergarten kids love to play outside at the traffic training ground.

Kindergarten Makeover

Development program for early childhood learning in kindergarten

The two NG kindergartens were also subjected to a thorough “quality check”, with voluntary professional support and a variety of improvements already put into practice. Rita Ajas is an educator who works as a consultant for a large private educational institution in Germany. She visited our kindergartens repeatedly and helped them revamp the program. Here’s her interim report:

“Within the framework of the project, the educators have been particularly concerned with the topic ‘Promotion of early childhood learning processes’.

There still remains a prevalent and very strong attitude that the main goal of the kindergarten is primarily to prepare children for school and to serve the ideas of the teachers.

The importance of children’s play as a form of learning has become the focus of attention due to further training courses. Positive growth has taken place in this area. The children can now exercise, move and play outdoors for a longer time every day. A wider range of didactic play materials are used and the rooms have been designed to be more stimulating to learn. Parents are also better involved in educational issues.

I was very impressed by how open and interested the educators were in the professional exchange. Overall, I see a very positive development here.“



Homeless earthquake survivors: Naim and his family are struggling to stay healthy in their makeshift „home“.

Earthquake Recovery in Albania

Donations help those who have lost everything in the natural disaster

The November 26, 2019 earthquake hit northwestern Albania in the dark hours before dawn, shocking households across the region awake, driving many families out of their homes and trapping others inside collapsed buildings. It was the strongest quake to hit the area in decades and centered near the coastal city of Durrës. Fifty-one people lost their lives, two thousand were injured, and four thousand lost their homes. The tremors continued for weeks.

Nehemiah Gateway Albania, based in Pogradec, has been working with partners in the affected areas to help Albanians recover from the disaster. NG provided support to Tirana-based Emergency Response Albania for food and sanitary items for earthquake survivors. In Durrës, NG worked with Nehemia Durrës to provide temporary shelter for people who lost their homes. And, in the rural village of Peza, we are working with NGO partner ProFamilja to help families left without homes after the earthquake. Nehemiah Gateway Albania staff recently visited ProFamilja in Peza to learn more about

their work with earthquake survivors.

The village of Peza is about 40 minutes by road southwest from Tirana. It has a population of almost 7000 people (according to the 2011 census) and is noted in Albanian history as the site where, in 1942, Albanian resistance groups joined forces in the fight against fascism. This small community was hit hard by the earthquake: the local school was so badly damaged it had to be demolished, and the medical clinic was moved to a new, rented space. Sixty-three families lost their homes altogether and are currently living in tents, in the dead of winter.

When the earthquake hit Peza, Tahir and his family (wife and three children) were at home. They ran outside in the middle of the night, and spent the following hours sitting on the doorstep of their home. The house has since been condemned due to heavy damage caused by the earthquake. Since then, they have lived in a tent and in a temporary living structure provided by the local



Here's where Tahir has to live with his wife and three children.



Tahir's wife and their two younger children



Their house was highly dangerous to enter and had to be condemned.

government. The structure of their house is cracked and unstable, and they avoid it as best they can. Living in tents and containers in the dead of winter is not easy. Cooking is complicated. The air is cold and damp, and basic hygiene is an ongoing challenge. Their family has struggled staying healthy in these conditions.

Naim's family also lost their house in the earthquake. Although the tent they now call home holds a small stove, their children, ages 4 and 7, have struggled to stay healthy. The cold and damp of Albanian winter challenges the immune system—especially in circumstances where it is so hard to keep clean. When the NG team visited, one of the children had been sick for almost two weeks and had a high fever.

Among homeless earthquake survivors, these difficulties are all too typical. In winter, nighttime temperatures are below freezing, and the rain and snow are cold. In Peza, many of the people hardest hit by the earthquake were already living in poverty. The earthquake turned difficult situations into desperate ones, and desperate situations into emergencies, easily overlooked in a disaster of this scale.

Nehemiah Gateway is partnering with ProFamilja to bring relief to earthquake survivors like Tahir and Naim's families. Since the earthquake, ProFamilja has worked with volunteers to supply tents for all sixty-three families, disbursed ten tons of food packages, distributed 1,700 blankets, worked with World Central Kitchen to serve 25,000 hot meals, and provided 100 pairs of shoes to school children in need. At this time, ProFamilja is starting to help people rebuild their homes. In the meantime, the need for tents and bedding is ongoing.

Nehemiah Gateway donors were quick and gener-

ous in responding to the emergencies created by the earthquake. The Global Giving Foundation awarded a grant of \$15,000 for earthquake relief, while individual donors worldwide contributed an additional \$15,553. These donations made it possible for Nehemiah Gateway Albania to offer robust support to Emergency Response Albania, Nehemia Durrës, and ProFamilja. You can still support their ongoing recovery work at www.globalgiving.org/projects/aid-for-albanian-earthquake-survivors-1/



Meet ProFamilja

ProFamilja* is a grassroots Albanian nonprofit started by Edi and Toni Gogu (picture) in 2018. ProFamilja's mission is to empower families become agents of change, so entire communities can get transformed and flourish to fullness of life. Toni is a lawyer by training and has served as the Deputy Minister of Justice in the Albanian government, as well as the Albania director for World Vision Western Balkans. Edi is a graduate of the Faculty of History and Philology, University of Tirana, and a dedicated advocate for Albanian families. They have been living in Peza for two years.



Marin Piqoni, principal of Amaro Tan School

I Know What it Means to be Poor!

Amaro Tan School's principal, Marin Piqoni, gives an insight into his life and work What makes Amaro Tan School so important to you?

I was born and have spent the early years of my life in a neighborhood very close to where Amaro Tan school is located today. Most of my neighbors and best friends come from the Roma community. Looking back at my early childhood after the 90s, I remember the sacrifices and efforts of my parents to provide for the family. I remember the excitement when waiting for the New Year's Eve celebration to receive a toy, or the joy of having new shoes after wearing one pair of sneakers for several years. I still remember when my little sister and I were registered to a soup kitchen that was opened by foreigners. My mom often told me the story when a team of these foreigners visited us at home. They wanted to support us and share God's love. Only later I learned one of their names, Arnold Geiger.

When I look at the families of our pupils, who make every effort to survive, lacking almost all necessities, no healthy food, suffering from illnesses, the children being deprived from education due to work exploitation from their parents etc., my heart gets overwhelmed and I want to help them overcome these difficulties.

I believe that my own history can serve as a model for these children: there is hope, God loves them, they deserve to live with dignity. They can make it!

Tell us about your professional history

I started at Nehemia School as an English teacher in September 2009 and later I worked as assistant to the school director. In July 2016 the principal of Amaro Tan School, Defrim Hoxha, retired - a very devoted, humble and loving person whom I dearly respect and admire for his achievements. I was appointed his successor.

Your biggest challenge?

For me personally, the biggest challenge was the transition to become a leader. Before, most of the time I had to deal with papers, following schedules, doing office work. Now I had to start thinking and acting as a leader myself, was responsible and had to care for many people, co-workers, children parents and many others. This transition was not easy.

Another more significant challenge was (and still is) the struggle to improve parent involvement. There is a lack of awareness and proper care for the children in most of the families. The reason, I believe, lie in the inherited problems of this community - a vicious circle. The parents come from uneducated families, suffering from domestic violence during their own childhood. They witnessed divorce, suffered as children from exploitation in forced labor or begging in the street, getting married at an early age, and so on. So, generation after generation they have experienced similar problems- and that was the only role model for them to follow. Convincing a parent that "bringing your child to school, and pursuing a career, or following a higher education, is good for them and their future, instead of sending them to beg for money or get them married" is a daily challenge and struggle for me and all our staff.

School development is a constant concern for us. We already made considerable progress, but there is still



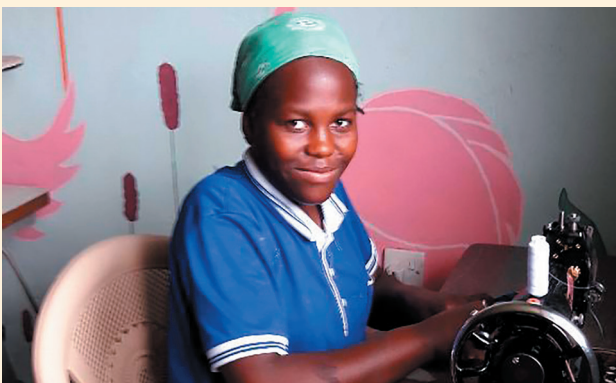
Amaro Tan in Pogradec - close to the suburbs where low-income families live



Presents and gifts - for example the beautiful Christmas presents from guests of Hotel Lindenhof in Hubmersberg - send an important message to the children: they are precious and important.

much more to do. Improving the results of our pupils and to better involve the parents are our foremost challenges. However, Amaro Tan is not just a school, but far more than that. We want to help children and adults alike through our programs in addition to regular and curricular education. We will continue to aid people through

charity. Children cannot think clearly on an empty stomach. Their parents won't be able to motivate their children to study if they lack food and other necessities at home, so charity fulfills the emergent needs. **We show love in the present in addition to the promises of the future.**



Witness returned to the orphan village to work as a dressmaker.



Young Professionals Return Home

NG's partner „Tanzania Orphans Mission“ (T.O.M) has reason to celebrate

Quite a few of the fourteen orphans who received scholarships from NG for their secondary or vocational education graduated in 2019. Now they have the chance for good jobs and a career. However, most of them have other priorities: they return home to the orphan village, in order to work there and support their 'family'.

Four young men (picture) graduated as car mechanics.

One of them, Alex, specialized in car electronics and currently attends driving school. He will work as a driver along with Amos, who already started working. The young woman Witness graduated from a vocational school for sewing and is now T.O.M.'s seamstress and dressmaker. Other scholarship recipients pursue high school education and those who graduated have good chances to find jobs in town.

We think this is a great success and a sign of confidence for the work of T.O.M. We are grateful that NG's help has fallen on so rich a ground! We will continue our support of this life-changing work!

AT A GLANCE

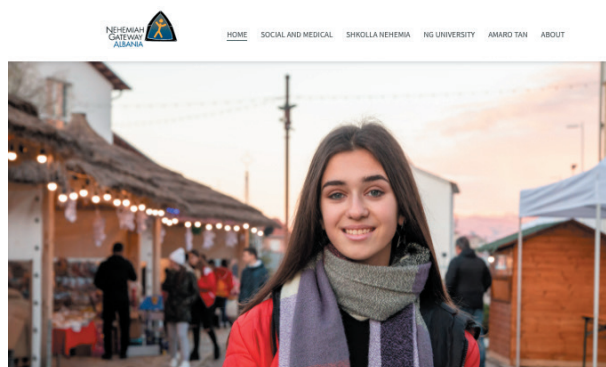


Congratulations to our NG University graduates!

Sixteen young people graduated in December. The two sisters Ekleva and Anxhelina really make us proud: they are the first to finish the remarkable journey from Amaro Tan School to Nehemia High School and then to university! They are also the first in their family with a university degree! Like their Albanian fellow graduates, they have already found a good place of employment. Four of the graduates come from far away: Susana and Moises from Cuba, Chrisis and Joshua from Uganda. They have returned to their countries where they'll assist their organizations for at least two years. We wish them success!

"I have contributed to Nehemiah Gateway for a number of years now as I really believe in what they do and stand for! They are providing assistance to many around the world who need some of the basic necessities of life, that many times I can take for granted: medical care, clothing, food, education and even encouragement during a difficult time in life. Every dollar I give goes right to these causes, and is not used to cover any administration costs of the organization."

Scott Cufu, NG USA



The new NG Albania website is online!

Over the past few months, our NG Albania media team in Buçimas has been completely redoing and recreating the NG Albania website. In English and Albanian you will find a wealth of information about our work in this small, south-east European country. Especially the parents of Nehemia School will be happy to receive detailed information about the school. We would love for you to follow this link and explore the new website:

<https://www.nehemiah-gateway.al/en>

Nehemiah Gateway Services
gemeinnützige GmbH
Kontumazgarten 3
90429 Nürnberg



T +49 911 60009960
F +49 911 60009969
office@ng.team
www.ng.team

IBAN: DE52 760 50 10100 11777711
BIC: SSKNDE77XXX