

# Compact

Newsletter for friends and supporters

Edition June 2020

Dear friends,

who could have anticipated the challenges we have faced over the past few months? At Nehemiah Gateway, for almost 30 years our DNA has been forged by unforeseen challenges and disasters, working to stay cutting-edge with our services and impact.

As you look through this issue you will see us in action amidst COVID-19 restrictions. We are providing aid and educational services in an adaptive manner, with a close look at the daily and weekly changing local regulations.

You'll learn about our Bavarian hotel that undergirds our charitable work as a social enterprise. We introduce you to two impressive NGU alumni who are working towards their Master's degrees in Berlin.

As always, thank you for your partnership.

Your Compact-team



Food parcels for our soup kitchen clients in Gjirokastër

## Moving Forward Through The Corona Crisis

**Nehemiah Gateway's social services become creative in their efforts to help**

How does a community organization maintain connections with the people it serves when nobody can leave their home? Nehemiah Gateway's Social and Medical Improvement (SMI) team has had to grapple with this question since the COVID-19 lockdown began in March and is even now working out how to adapt moving forward.

As of the time of the writing of this article, there are no cases in Pogradec or Gjirokastër, and the government has identified both cities as "Green Zones."

Schools remain closed, and gatherings of more than 10 people are prohibited. Public buses, including the NG bus that travels between



This Amaro Tan student and his grandfather bring food parcels to their family by mule - still a common means of transport in rural areas.



Sara is one of the first SMI clients to come back to the clinic in May.

Pogradec and Buçimas, are not running. Still, people are going back to work, including NG coworkers. [Throughout Nehemiah Gateway Albania's operations, coworkers stringently adhere to Albanian government requirements, and meet or exceed recommended practices to protect the safety of the team and the people we serve.]

Anybody who has spent time with the teams in Buçimas, Gjirokastër, and Amaro Tan in Pogradec knows how deeply they care about the people they serve. In these cases, the cliché about “not just a job, but a calling” is a good description. Therapists at the Buçimas clinic have known many of their patients for years. At Amaro Tan, a small group of teachers works with each child over many years at the school, and they become deeply invested in their lives. In Gjirokastër, soup kitchen meals and after-school activities take place in small groups, fostering close connections.

In all three locations, clients receive multifaceted assistance to address their circumstances. Difficulties with the Albanian education system are tightly linked to endemic poverty in the Roma community, so youth programs in Pogradec and Gjirokastër address both poverty and education. Similarly, people with disabilities have few options for self-sufficiency. If they need a caregiver, that person is probably a family member—and his or her income and mobility are sacrificed to the imperatives of caring for someone with special needs. NG's aid response includes not only therapy for one patient, but aid and support for the rest of the family as well.

When the COVID-19 lockdown started in Albania in early March, addressing the pressing needs of people trapped at home turned out to be relatively simple. NG has long delivered aid parcels to families in need, so

scaling up to biweekly deliveries, for everyone, was a logistical and fundraising challenge but not a new service. A partnership with the Pogradec municipality facilitated deliveries during the lockdown and expanded the reach of the program. NG donors in the US and Europe stepped up, contributing to an emergency campaign to fund the expansion. To date, over 1000 parcels have been delivered.

These deliveries created an opportunity to check in with clients — but it was limited. Many vital services simply could not be provided virtually or from a safe distance of six feet.

In normal times the clinic at Buçimas campus offers ongoing free therapeutic services to over a hundred patients of all ages, with a variety of lifelong medical and cognitive conditions. These include speech therapy for children with Down Syndrome, autism, and other developmental differences; and physical therapy, massage, and other palliative treatments for all ages. “You can't do therapy virtually,” explains Nikoleta Xhindole, leader of social work in Buçimas. But that's what her staff had to try to do under the conditions of the lockdown. Without public transport, the clinic was (and remains) difficult for low-income patients to access.

Although the team has tried to provide phone and online support to family members to help them help loved ones, that is a poor substitute for hands-on specialist care. The team is anxious and eager after so long away from their patients. Two months of missed sessions can lead to serious regression. Yet many conditions are accompanied by increased vulnerability to COVID-19, and the team recognize that it would be dangerous to risk exposing them.



They are grateful for food parcels that help them overcome this difficult time.

In mid-May, the clinic is preparing to begin receiving patients again. Coworkers are all equipped with masks and gloves, and have rearranged the workspace within the clinic so that each therapist has a dedicated space that is not shared with other coworkers or their patients. Procedures for cleaning between patients have been implemented, and they are ready to welcome patients back. The question is, how many patients will be able to come back, and how much regression will need to be remedied?

At Amaro Tan, in Pogradec, food aid deliveries occurred every other week during the lockdown, delivered to each pupil and soup kitchen client's home. Marin Piqoni, director of Amaro Tan, reports that families were deeply appreciative of this assistance, which made the difference between eating and not eating at a time when nobody could go out and work. Deliveries were customized to each family's needs, so that a family with older siblings or grandparents received enough food for everyone. Looking ahead, the Amaro Tan team is figuring out how they might pick up clients, one by one, and bring them to the school to use shower and laundry facilities they lack at home.

In Gjirokastrë, the team delivered aid packages to the homes of each student in the school program, as well as food and medicines for each soup kitchen guest. When restrictions on movement began loosening in April, they started daily hot meal delivery - more logistically complicated, but also more nutritious. The cherished social connections that normally take place every day at the soup kitchen are still a way off. At least the team is bringing a taste of community to people's homes.

So, how does a community organization maintain connections with the people it serves when nobody can



With the soup kitchens closed, our clients receive staple food delivered to their homes and have to try to cook for themselves.

leave their home? They do what they can. They find ways to keep themselves available, even if they are standing six feet away or communicating by phone. They keep their eyes open, looking for new problems and ways they can continue to help from a safe distance. They adapt as circumstances change. And they continue to care, keeping faith that someday soon they will be able to fully resume their work.

*Although many restrictions have been lifted, the SMI program's clients are the community's most vulnerable, and it will be a while before they can return to normal life. They will continue to need food and medicine deliveries. If you have the means to help, please consider donating:*

IBAN: DE52 760 50 10100 11777711

or online: [www.ng.team](http://www.ng.team)

## Reaching Out to Their Teachers

Amaro Tan students can't wait until school starts again

For many children living in poverty, school is much more than just a place to learn. School can be a special sort of haven for children living in unstable circumstances—a place that is clean and safe, with predictable rules and expectations. For many, it is where they get the best meal (sometimes the only one) they will receive all day. School can also be a place where students learn from adults outside of their immediate families: advocates, caregivers and role models.

NG's Amaro Tan School is such a place. "Amaro Tan" literally means "our place" in Romani, and for 140 Roma, Balkan Egyptian, and at-risk Albanian children every year, Amaro Tan is also a safe, clean, and positive place for students to go, meeting their present needs and teaching valuable skills to build a brighter future.

When the Albanian government locked down the country in March to prevent the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus, Amaro Tan closed. Staff scrambled to put together food packages for each child to offset the loss of daily meals. They also put together homework packets and started figuring out how to stay in touch with the children.

Because Amaro Tan's students all come from poor families, figuring out how to keep the students learning and engaged has proven to be a bigger challenge than keeping them fed. In a dynamic that is playing out everywhere, schools are closed and children from more affluent families are readily able to access classes and materials online, on family computers, laptops, tablets, and cell phones. In Albania, the government is offering a limited curriculum over television. But what if your family doesn't have any of those things? Or is without electricity, or an internet connection?

Some Amaro Tan students have been able to participate in group lessons via WhatsApp, or follow the government curriculum on the TV. Other students have borrowed phones to talk to their teachers, and have received a lot of one on one instruction from their teachers, because that is the only tool available. Teachers are working harder than ever now.



Esmeralda gets support via WhatsApp and phone calls.



Leoni (left) picks up food parcels for his family at the school.

Amaro Tan director, Marin Piqoni, reports that the students have been proactive in reaching out—not only out of zeal for the schoolwork, but because they miss their teachers and the environment at school.

As of the writing of this article at the end of May, Pogradec is located in Albania's "Green Zone," with no known cases of COVID-19, and some restrictions on movement are very slowly beginning to lift. Government guidance will dictate when and how children can go back to school next year.

In the meantime, Amaro Tan is hoping to adjust planned summer schools to bring the students back. Summer classes in shifts—a morning group and an afternoon group—will reduce numbers and encourage distancing. This will help catch up on missed time in the classroom and welcome the kids back to a haven they all miss.



International students studying online in the small dining hall in Buçimas with Gian Paul keeping them company.

## Adapting to a Strange New Reality

### NG University continues to adjust with an eye to self-improvement and sustainable progress

Chris Hale has been coming to Albania to teach since 2009. “I was scheduled to fly from my home in Austin, Texas to Albania the weekend of March 14 to lecture for two weeks on contract law and torts,” he said. “Earlier that week the government of Albania abruptly closed all schools and universities, within days after the country’s first Covid-19 cases were discovered. Instead of in-person classes, the students were required to shelter in place and attend class via Zoom.”

Hale would be the first Nehemiah Gateway University (NGU) professor to teach a module entirely online. Fortunately for professors and students, NGU is not completely new to online education. Professors live and work all over the world—and so do the students. NGU began investing in the possibilities of virtual education long before the current crisis. Zoom was already established, and moving classroom sessions onto Zoom happened fairly smoothly.

According to Hale and others, the Populi education system, which NGU has been using for several years, perfectly augments Zoom to make distance instruction effective. Professor Roy Atwood had to return to the US at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, and teach two planned Masters’ modules entirely from his home in Idaho. He has been impressed by the organization and control the Populi system provides. All assignments are in one place, and instructors can monitor each student’s progress and engagement. Still, there is no substitute for being in the same place at least some of the time. Dr. Atwood emphasizes that “education is about the relationship between students and their professors.”

Without a foundation in real-world interaction, even the best-organized online class will be distant and abstract. For Atwood, who already knows the Masters students from his years in Albania, such a foundation existed. For Professor Hale, teaching some students he had never met, “my biggest disappointment was in not being able to establish personal connections with the students.”

So, how has the “work” part of dual study functioned during the lockdown? [NGU’s curriculum is based on the German dual study model, with 50% classroom, 50% practical experience.] While NGU’s Albanian students have been able to go home and learn from there, international students have had to stay put in Pogradec. With workplaces closed that would normally host interns closed, guidance counselors Gian Paul and Andy Ardueser created informal learning modules in response to student interests, including producing instructional videos for Amaro Tan and Nehemia School students.

NGU has adapted to this strange new reality. The questions it faces going forward are hardly unique. Institutions of higher learning all over the world are grappling with how best to move forward in a way that is safe and sustainable for students and staff. Says Rector Dr. Peter Makiriyado, “It is apparent that the times have found us, and the goal is always forward progress. With the newfound normal, not everything will go perfectly, but we continue to adjust with an eye to self-improvements and sustainable progress. In addition to addressing the immediate educational consequences of COVID-19, we build up the long-term resilience of our education at NGU.”



## Hi from Joshua

**Jebale** (Hello)! My name is Joshua Luyonza. I come from Kampala, Uganda and through NG's scholarship program, I was able to get a quality education and study my Bachelors Degree at Nehemiah Gateway University in Albania.

For the last two years, I went on to study a Masters program in International Management. On July 3rd I will hand in my thesis about the impact of values on the success of international organizations, which operate in Uganda. Thereafter, my graduation will be on 20th September 2020.

Currently, I am doing my internship at NG's Berlin Office

as part of my university assignment. As I take up this internship, my focus will rotate around marketing, social media management, financial controlling, public funding applications as well as administrative tasks.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my country Uganda shut down and as a result, people started starving for food! Having the possibility to live in Germany right now, I started a campaign where I tried to raise funds with the help from my international friends; the idea was to at least help feed 100 families back home: luckily, it was a success! However, it would not have been possible if I didn't have the opportunity to live here in Germany.

Living in Germany has taught me many important lessons, for example 'time management': Germans are so good with keeping time... learning the importance of time management has actually increased my efficiency and productivity.

Secondly, you will notice how orderly everything is in Germany. This explains all the beauty. My mentor told me that order is the rightful arrangement of things and when you come to Germany, that statement makes a lot of sense. These are some of the things I am learning here, so that I can implement them when the time comes for me to move back home. **Webale nnyo. Siiba bulungi!** (Thank you. Have a good day)!



## Hello from Enisa

**Përshëndetje** I'm Enisa Mucelli from Pogradec in Albania! I'm currently living in Nürnberg, Germany, and at the moment I am doing an internship at the Nehemiah Gateway Office. Here, I'm responsible for the Manual - a digital platform for the whole NG Team,

where important documents are kept. I help with the editing and updating of the documents before putting them online. I work twice a week in the office and the remaining days I am working from the home office. Very soon I will also be graduating with my Master's degree in International Management. I am excited, happy and grateful for this milestone in my life.

While in Nürnberg, I enjoy attending international gatherings (for example evenings of encounter among international students) where I have met new friends from France, Germany and many other countries ... but due to the COVID-19 situation, it is difficult at the moment to access many services or to meet up with friends. The COVID-19 pandemic, has slowed down a lot of things here in Germany but also all around the world. My country Albania has been so much affected, but I am glad that at least both my parents are safe and healthy. **Faleminderit dhe mirupafshim** (Thanks and goodbye)!



Linden Hof Hotel in Hubmersberg near Nuremberg

## Investment For The Future

### Hotel Linden Hof - a part of the NG Team

The DNA, the innermost core of Nehemiah Gateway, includes helping people to help themselves, enabling them to live in dignity. In doing so, NG is always looking for new ways to be innovative. A non-profit organization that manages donations has a special responsibility: careful and sustainable handling of donations is an absolute must. The organization naturally needs a solid financial basis so that the costs of administration can be reliably covered, today and for many years to come.

In 2017, an interesting opportunity arose. Gertrud Mörstel, the owner of the Hotel Linden Hof in Hubmersberg was desperately looking for a successor. Managing Director Arnold Geiger and the partners of NG Services recognized the hotel's potential. Idyllically situated, surrounded by breathtaking nature, by car only 40 minutes from Nuremberg, with excellent cuisine and - according to surveys by a big local newspaper - one of the most beautiful beer gardens in the region! It is a popular place for conferences and holidays, well known to many of our friends and supporters. In the future, the hotel will not only cover its own costs, but also generate surpluses which will then go into NG projects without deductions.

Arnold Geiger explains: "NG is like a constantly growing family. A new 'child' was born into it, now it has to grow and gain independence to help feed the NG family as soon as possible. And at some point it will also have children of its own. The organization is growing!"

"The starting point of NG was charity, supported by the four pillars of human existence:

**values** taken from and lived by the Christian faith, **social and medical aid, education and project empowerment**, we also call it business development - and fundraising. The Linden Hof also works in the area of project empowerment. Vocational training for various crafts and trades are offered and insight into real business life is provided. There are apprenticeships for kitchen, hotel management, butchery, patisserie and agriculture as well as business internships and seminars. So the hotel is more than a pure investment, it is becoming an integral part of the NG work!"

### Corona crisis - better now than later!

Naturally, something like the Corona crisis was not foreseen in the strategy. In Germany all hotels and restaurants had to close in March, only from the middle of May the rules started to slowly relax. Of course, this is a setback financially, but there could not be a better timing. The renovation work is in full swing, unhindered, without disturbing any guests. When the hotel and restaurant will be allowed to reopen, the house will shine in all its new glory - modern, but with all the charm of its 150-year-old history.

So, if there is a chance for holidays abroad again - why not spend them in Germany with us at the Linden Hof?

[www.hubmersberg.de/en](http://www.hubmersberg.de/en)

By the way, Hotel Linden Hof is not the only business venture of Nehemiah Gateway. The innovative tiny-house project "Mohab" is also intended to help NG to stand on a secure financial footing in the long term. You'll read more of it, soon.



## AT A GLANCE



### NEW!

In March 2020, Nehemiah Gateway Switzerland was founded with headquarters in Muri/Aargau. Why?

- Friends and supporters from Switzerland have been supporting NG for many years. Now they have their own point of contact in their country which also facilitates their donations for NG projects.
- A new project partner of NG, Glowbal Act, is based in Switzerland. Glowbal Act helps victims of modern human trafficking (especially from the sex industry) to free themselves and to provide jobs (Kite Pride). They work mainly in Zurich and in Tel Aviv, Israel.
- Kai and Anne Uellendahl have been supporting the work of NG for many years. Living in Switzerland they have taken over the work on site, supported by Arlinda Merdani of NG Germany.

Due to Corona, the activities in Switzerland are starting a little delayed, but we are looking forward to hearing from people interested and to a personal exchange with the friends of NG in Switzerland as soon as possible.

Our E-mail address: [office-ch@ng.team](mailto:office-ch@ng.team)

Anne & Kai Uellendahl

### #add4aid - we're in!

An ng.team initiative to support small businesses affected by Corona, launched in different countries and languages: simply round up the amount you're buying for! We received positive feedback, for example from a friend who opened a small café at the beginning of March. Two weeks after the brilliant start Corona struck. She was only allowed to offer To-Go any more! She was thrilled by the #add4aid - not only financially, but also as an encouragement and appreciation of her work.

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