

# IMPACT

August 2022

Dear Friend,

Welcome to summer! While we all enjoy longer days, more sunlight, and perhaps some deserved time off, at NG we also shift into busy summer work. Reading this issue of Impact, you will get a sampling of our summer efforts and be inspired by our gifted coworkers who serve with vision and compassion.

Put up your feet, grab a refreshing drink, a seat in the shade and check us out. We have exciting developments within our Amaro Tan school and community, news related to our impressive university students and we highlight local young children who are learning critical summer safety habits as they are out and about on the narrow and busy Albanian streets.

Thank you so very much for your generous support during these summer months!

Gratefully yours,

NG Impact team



## Empowering the Amaro Tan Community — One Fried Potato at a Time

“They ate my entire stock of french fries in the first hour,” explained Pogradec store owner Lorenc Tona, who is working with Nehemiah Gateway on a pilot voucher system that rewards Amaro Tan students for attendance, homework completion, and participation in class.

The students at Amaro Tan come from families living in extreme poverty. They already get nutritious hot meals every day at school, and their families receive aid parcels from the school several times per year. The french fry experience was remarkable for them in that it was a rare experience in being able to choose to personally buy something in a store. And, for kids of a certain age, what could be better than fried potatoes?



Marin Piqoni, school director at Amaro Tan.



Franko Ali, social worker at Amaro Tan.

“Some of the older children did choose to use the voucher to help their families with groceries,” adds school director Marin Piqoni, who has run Amaro Tan since 2016. “But the little ones just wanted their fries.”

### **The team at Amaro Tan faces a broader set of challenges than the average educational program.**

The school was launched in 1998 when coworkers at Nehemiah Gateway’s soup kitchen in Pogradec realized that many of the children coming in every day for a meal didn’t know how to read or write. The school started small, run by the group Youth With A Mission with a definite orientation toward rescuing children who were victims of difficult and even dangerous circumstances at home.

Today, many of Amaro Tan’s 130 students per year still come from the marginalized Roma and Balkan Egyptian minority groups, and face discrimination every day. Most parents have very limited education themselves, see little value in education, and are unable to provide help with homework. Often those in the Roma minority move away if they perceive that they might find better circumstances elsewhere. And there is a troubling tendency for girls to be pressured to leave school early to have children and get married.

Children growing up in such challenging circumstances need much more than classrooms and teachers. They need nutritious meals (and the occasional treat of french fries), access to healthcare and social work and hygiene, and equally important, they need mentors and role models.

### **Roma students at Amaro Tan now have a role model who comes from their own community, Franko Ali.**

He started as the social worker at Amaro Tan in fall 2021 and comes himself from a Roma family. From 2004-2008, he was a student at Amaro Tan with his two older sisters. He continued on to public school, and subsequently attained a master’s degree in social work at the University of Tirana. When he heard that the position of social worker at Amaro Tan was vacant, he immediately applied.

“Franko is a real down to earth guy,” says Piqoni, the school director. “He really cares about the people of Amaro Tan—the students, their parents, and the soup kitchen clients. He’s always thinking about ways that he can do more to help them.” Franko and his mother both live near the school, and they attend the Roma church down the hill from Amaro Tan. This connection to the community gives Franko real credibility with the parents, and they are very honest (and forceful) with him about their challenges and problems.

Franko is always thinking about ways to help people. Orthodox Easter is a holiday in Albania, and this year he decided to take the soup kitchen clients out for pizza. He knew that otherwise they would spend the holiday sitting at home alone. He also brings fresh energy to engaging Amaro Tan students in volunteer projects around the neighborhood. With careful supervision, older students help the soup kitchen clients at home with cleaning and housework projects.

“I want to help the students to be aware of themselves as participants in their own lives,” he says. “Not as victims, or like wounded puppies somehow to be taken care of.”



Dining out: Franko takes the elderly from Amaro Tan's soup kitchen to eat at a pizzeria.

If they have a mind, and skills, and a conscience, they can make something of themselves. I'm always thinking of ways to help them develop that mindset."

### Which brings us back to the french fries.

The idea behind the pilot voucher program, which is being tested on a small scale this year, was to try to introduce the concept of working and earning rewards. From the earliest days of Amaro Tan, the school has provided, and still provides, periodic aid parcels to everyone, free of charge and without any requirement in return. Incentive programs require effort, but they also empower participants with the freedom to choose what to do with those rewards.

"We are liking what we are seeing with this pilot program so far," says Piqoni. "It would be interesting to see what we could do on a larger scale. We could engage some of the more difficult Amaro Tan parents, who are not going to care about homework just so that their children can eat french fries."

Franko's dreams for the Amaro Tan Local Center he runs are even more ambitious. Asked what he would love to see in five years, he describes an Amaro Tan that is twice its current size, with temporary housing for homeless people, expanded training and rehabilitation to help them find jobs, and an even more comprehensive array of supports for the whole family.

Both Franko and Marin have built careers for themselves through hard work. They agree that compassion combined with empowerment can provide incredible results.



At Amaro Tan, children learn life skills, for example at summer school 2022: sewing, computer skills, cooking ... and many more.

They are happy to start small, by offering students the chance to earn treats if they turn their homework in on time. It's self-determination, one french fry at a time.



Werner Hoyer (right) supervising training together with guests from the local police.



Albania's first traffic training area is located on the NG Campus in Buçimas on the shore of Lake Ohrid and close to the city of Pogradec.

## Traffic Safety Training For Children in Albania

### The traffic training school on the NG Campus is a model project - far beyond the borders of Pogradec

Between the buildings, roads meander showing painted arrows, crosswalks, traffic signs and even a miniature traffic light - we are at the traffic training circuit on the NG campus in Albania.

Here, fourth-graders learn to move safely in traffic, especially on bicycles. Not only students of the NG schools train here, but also classes from public schools all over the city of Pogradec and the surrounding villages. Every year about 600 children are enthusiastically supervised by longtime NG employee Eritan Kamolli. COVID restrictions reduced participation in the program, but NG is seeing the numbers going back up again.

In the city of Pogradec, the situation is especially difficult in summer, when there are more tourists than inhabitants crowding the streets. In recent years, much has been invested in road construction and signage, but it is still dangerous on the roads, especially for cyclists and pedestrians.

#### PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Back in 2014, Werner Hoyer, an experienced traffic safety trainer from Germany, helped us plan the traffic training area, the first circuit of this kind in all of Albania. Now Werner comes back frequently, supported by his family and colleagues from the road safety organization Gebiets-Verkehrswacht Schongau e.V.

For their outstanding road safety work and in particular the project "Accident Prevention in Albania - Helping People to Help Themselves" in Buçimas, they were re-

cently awarded the "mobil und sicher" prize 2022 in gold, endowed with € 1,550 - a sum that will help to implement new projects and ideas.



#### SIMULATING INTOXICATION

The next target group in Pogradec is teenagers. As young people grow up and gain more autonomy, they are easily tempted to make bad choices - especially in a country where alcohol is readily available even for people under the legal drinking age of 18. For them, the group brought intoxication goggles that make it easy to get into a simulated state of intoxication and gain experience of how behavior is affected by alcohol and other intoxicants. As part of a multiplier training course, teachers from surrounding schools and employees of NG have already been familiarized with the intoxication goggles.

All kinds of possibilities for using the intoxication goggles were demonstrated and, of course, intensively tested. Werner Hoyer remarks: „Everybody had fun testing the goggles, but also the seriousness of consequences caused by intoxicants in road traffic was not neglected.“ Local police, too, regularly participate in the training sessions. In the future, every high school class in Pogradec shall have the opportunity to take part in this training.

#### PLAYFUL LEARNING

And there is also another target group: kids in kindergarten. Soon, they will learn the most important traffic



Eritan Kamolli trains fourth graders from schools in the area.



Intoxication goggles- a very effective tool to raise awareness.

rules in a playful way on the traffic training course. First lessons have already taken place and instructor training for a long-term concept is underway.

Whenever they come, Werner Hoyer and his colleagues not only bring great know-how, their suitcases are also filled with important utensils: intoxication goggles, safety vests for first graders, pens, crayons, coloring sheets and so much more.

#### BEYOND POGRADEC

Road safety is not only an issue in Pogradec. Increasingly, it is also a concern for public authorities, who are working to make Albania's roads safer. Much has already been done, and the number of accidents has fallen sharply in recent years. Word of the NG Youth Traffic School model has spread as far as the capital, Tirana. There have been talks with Mrs. Rustemi, the Deputy Mayor of Tirana, and Mr. Schaefer, Transport Policy Advisor from the German GIZ (German Agency for International Cooperation), and as early as October Werner Hoyer and four Verkehrswacht colleagues will start with education and safety training in Tirana.

Herolinda Shkullaku, Executive Director of NG Albania summarizes:

*„This traffic education project is very important. Children in fourth grade are just at the right age for training with bicycles, they like to cooperate and show great interest. The teachers, the schools and the school authorities are also grateful for this opportunity for training. I am glad to see a growing interest among public authorities in Albania to increase prevention and awareness of road safety.“*

This project has the potential to bring positive change in Albania and it will save lives.



Local police like to take over parts of the road safety trainings.

Positive trend:

## Decreasing Numbers of Accidents and Traffic Fatalities in Albania

According to WHO, Albania was the country with the highest average number of traffic fatalities in Europe in 2018, with a rate of 13.6 per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

By 2020, this figure has already fallen to 6.5 per 100,000 inhabitants. By comparison, the figure in Germany is 3.7, and in Romania 9.6<sup>2</sup>

It is particularly dangerous in Albania for people traveling on foot. Pedestrians are involved in 45% of accidents.

<sup>1</sup> WHO Global status report on road safety 2018

<sup>2</sup> dpshtrr.al, Analize mbi sigurine rrugore 2020



She is doing her Bachelor's degree at NGU on an Amaro Tan Scholarship.



Typical for NGU: Small classes with students from all over the world.

## NEW SCHOLARSHIPS @ NGU

**This year, Nehemiah Gateway University is excited to announce new scholarship opportunities for students in our Bachelor's program. These scholarships will support the enrollment of highly qualified young people, with a strong emphasis on bringing in the best students in the Pogradec area and throughout Albania.**

All three scholarships are initially awarded for one year, with the option to renew if program requirements are successfully met.

The **Mitrush Kuteli Scholarship** (see below for more information about Kuteli) offers merit-based tuition support to Albanian high school graduates. Applications will be considered in two pools: graduates from Pogradec-area schools, and outstanding scholars from throughout Albania. Gjirokastër

The **Amaro Tan Scholarship** is named after NG's Amaro Tan Project in Pogradec, Albania (for more on Amaro Tan, see our cover story in this issue). Amaro Tan is a place where children from poor families learn the skills they need to build dignified and self-sufficient futures—and to help others in their communities to do the same. The Amaro Tan Scholarship honors this principle of help for self-help. This need-based scholarship is open to students from Amaro Tan, Nehemia School, and NG's international partner organizations in East Africa, Latin America, and Southeastern Europe with demonstrated leadership potential and demonstrated need.

Finally, the **NG Start-up Scholarship** is an outgrowth of Nehemia School's longstanding participation in the business@school program. Business@school is an international competition where students in their second year of high school research, develop and present innovative business plans. The aim of the scholarship is to help students with successful business@school entries to gain the skills and knowledge to implement their projects in the real world.

### Who was Mitrush Kuteli?

Mitrush Kuteli, born Dhimitër Pasko in Pogradec in 1907, uniquely combined prominence as an economist and literary figure, equal parts poet, translator, critic, storyteller, and folklorist. He grew up in Pogradec, and studied in Thessaloniki before moving to Bucharest, Romania, where he earned a PhD in economics in 1934. After graduating, he divided his time between high-level work as a banker and economist, and as a poet, writer, and publisher. In 1942, he moved back to Albania, where he served

as an executive at the Albanian State Bank, helped found the Albanian Writers' Union, and published a series of stories based on Albanian folklore. Under communism, like many prominent intellectuals, he was jailed and sentenced to hard labor, and after his release in 1949 he was allowed to work only as a translator of literature. Mitrush Kuteli, today recognized as one of Pogradec's most remarkable native sons, died in 1967. Nehemiah Gateway University is delighted to honor the memory of this extraordinary Albanian, who thought broadly, lived spiritually, and contributed so much to his home community throughout his life.



International students together with their Albanian peers.

## International Students at NG University

When Arlinda Merdani, NG's Head of Global Operations, returned from her annual recruiting trip to Uganda in March, 2020, she had no idea that it would be her last trip to Africa for over two years (and counting).

Shortly after she returned home to Nuremberg, the COVID-19 pandemic started. Like virtually everyone else in the world, Ms. Merdani was grounded where she was, as work switched to home offices and online meetings.

International students who were at Nehemiah Gateway University in Pogradec also got caught up in this strange new reality. Karla, Adela, Mary, and Faith were thousands of miles from home, and yet they were attending classes in isolation, online. And that was the straightforward part.

The curriculum at NG University is based on the German program of dual study, with classroom time balanced by a roughly equal amount of practical time interning both locally and in their home countries. How to handle local internship time when nobody is allowed to leave home for more than an hour a day, as was the case in spring 2020? And how would practical trainings work with international travel suspended?

As it turned out, none of the international students were able to return home for their practical trainings until 2021,

and local internships emphasized work around the NG campus, along with creative activities devised by student counseling staff Gian Paul and Andy Ardueser.

The University made the difficult decision not to admit new students in fall 2020. At that time, international travel was almost impossible, classes were mostly online, and internships were limited. Deferring for a year would hopefully make it possible to deliver a more complete NGU experience to the students.

During the intervening year, the students who had been admitted in 2020 moved on with their lives and found other opportunities in their home countries. Recruiting new students turned out to be impossible as Ms. Merdani still could not travel to partner countries. "I couldn't responsibly recruit scholarship students without ever meeting them in person," she explains. "Relationships are so important in those cultures and our pipeline of international students is based on relationships—with partners and with students."

Later this year, NG team members hope to travel to East Africa. The main goals of the trip are to strengthen contacts with partners and to meet potential applicants. After a two-year pause, the team is eager to bring in a new class of students as broad and diverse as the experiences available at NGU.

## AT A GLANCE



### PHOTO EXHIBITION AT NG BERLIN

In collaboration with the Albanian Embassy in Berlin, NG's office in Berlin hosted the exhibition "Marubi - writings of light", showing impressive black-and-white photos from Albania's turbulent history from Ottoman times to the communist period - an introduction to the rich photographic history of an isolated European country.



### VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Nehemiah Gateway Albania entered into a partnership with Shkolla Teknike Profesionale "Enver Qiraxhi", a vocational school located in Pogradec, in order to provide a professional environment for their students to get practical experience during their school years.



### BUSINESS@SCHOOL

We are proud of NG's pupils who participated in this year's Business@school competition by the Boston Consulting Group. NG University hosted the national competition in Albania which was won by one of the teams of Nehemia School. They traveled to Milan/Italy to present their business idea 'Strikes me Miq' at the international competition. They finished tying for second place out of nine teams from schools in Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland.

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