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Covid 19 in Kosov, Uganda

A long overdue update

I just received a report from the Minister of Education in Uganda. It sounds like they are going to open the schools for the “candidate” classes (7th grade) on September 20! That’s great news! They are then going to expand the number of grades and students back to school every couple of weeks after that until everyone is back. The plan is dependent on there not being any significant increase in Covid cases in the schools. Wow—does it ever feel good to be able to report that to you.

It has been a long time since we last communicated with you—too long! Here are some of the things that have happened over the last 5 months. All schools in the country have been shut down since the middle of March. They, like here in America, were ordered to stay at home for a period of time. No transportation was allowed, either public or private. As you already know, mothers and fathers were out of work overnight. With no way to provide for their families the situation became very desperate. It was at that time that we began to raise food support for the families of TKPS. You were so generous! All children and staff in the school received food from that distribution. It really helped the families get through this most difficult time. Pastor Deo says your generosity saved the lives of people in Kosovo! The teachers have been trying to visit the children and families to see how they are doing and to offer support and counseling. They provide work sheet photo copies to the children to do work at home which the children bring back to the school to be graded and then receive more. Teacher Harriet is the one facilitating this process. She has been a fixture at TKPS for as long as we have been going to Uganda and is very capable and dependable.

The number of Covid 19 cases is around 2500 and the number of deaths is under 30. The good news, I suppose is that the average age of Ugandans is under 25. And it seems younger people do not have as much

trouble with the virus as those over 65. Since Uganda does not have advanced medical care, the people are trying to be proactive by drinking lots of water and eating lots of fruit, rich in vitamin C.

In Kosovo, Pastor Deo says things are getting back to normal. Shops are now open and day to day life is returning to normal. Currently there are three “businesses” that are still shut down by order of the government - churches, schools and bars. Pastor Deo was able to return home to Uganda in the middle of July after close to 6 months in the USA. It was a long time for him and his family to be apart. The Ugandan government arranged for Ugandan nationals to fly home with Ethiopian Airlines in mid July. He then had to stay quarantined for 14 days in a hotel by the airport. Thankfully we were able to raise the money to help him return home. We wanted him to be able to return home as soon as possible.

So the big question on everyone’s mind is “What happened to all that money we’ve given during this time.” That is a more complicated question to answer than you can imagine. I have asked Pastor Deo that question directly. Let me try to answer it as best I can.

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Muwendo Children’s Choir and Staff

First and foremost it is important to understand that your monthly sponsorship gifts are for educational purposes. It pays for school fees for the children which in turn pays for teachers and administration salaries, books, worksheets, a noon meal, medical care and a new uniform each year. When the government closed all schools, your gifts went primarily to pay the costs of running the school. Teachers sign contracts on a yearly basis. That is by far the largest portion of the budget. Those contracts needed to be honored and so the money went primarily to provide for the teachers, administration and support staff. It was a legal responsibility and obligation the school had to fulfill. But there was another issue. What if the sponsors stopped sending support? So the educational committee made a decision to hold back part of the teachers salary in case school did not reopen until next year (February). If sponsorship funds went down, how was the school going to fulfill their contractual obligation to the teachers?

The school could actually be sued if they didn't honor the contracts. Not knowing when or if the schools would open again, the decision was made to begin to train the teachers in other skills. They have begun a program which they call TEF—teach, empower and follow up. They have arranged for interest free loans from the local SACCO (bank) so the teachers have funds available to begin a business of some sort. Like I said, it's a bit complicated. However during this time the teachers and staff have received some salary along with one or two meals per day. The goal was to prepare for a worst case scenario while believing God for the best—schools to reopen.

The school is trying to help the students by providing worksheets for them to work on at home (no online ability in Kosovo). They also have told the students that if they are hungry to come to the school and they would give them something to eat. Apparently no one has been turned away.

Managing the Covid 19 crisis has been difficult all over the world. The challenges in the slums of Kosovo have been enormous with great suffering. But they have persevered and are now coming out on the other side. It looks like schools will begin to open on September 20th. The Ministry of Education will be restructuring the school year so students can get the most out of this school year. They will pick up the second term from October to December and the third term from January to March. Because the school continued to pay the teachers a portion of their salary and provided other opportunities, the teachers and admin staff will be there when the schools are allowed to open. When they

do, TKPS will be in a good position to once again love, teach and minister to the children.

For those of you sponsoring a high school student, tuition has not been paid to the high schools since they were not in session. Your sponsorship money has been collected and deposited in an account at the local bank. In the next two weeks Deo Ministries will begin training high school students in income producing skills that they can use during and after high school. When the high school students return to the classroom they will once again pay tuition from your monthly support.

Unfortunately we have not been able to fulfill our goal of sending you letters from your child twice a year. The sponsorship staff in Uganda is working to have the children write letters for you as restrictions are lifted. And it will be our joy to send them to you as soon as we receive them.

Jennifer and I want to thank you so so much for continuing to support the work in Kosovo. The Covid 19 crisis has thrown all of us a curve ball. Just like here in America, Heart for African People (Deo's ministry) is doing their best to live life while ministering to the people in their community. Please pray for favor with the government. Pray that school (and churches) would once again be allowed to open. In the meantime, we are thankful each week as we receive your sponsorship money. We collect it and send it over once a month. Pray for the ministry so they know how to help the children with their education within the restrictions imposed on them. And pray that everyone will be able to move past this Covid season and return to some sort of normal. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you may have. We will try to get answers for you.

Love and Blessings from us to you!
Ross & Jennifer
269-743-9161

