

On The Ground In Zanzibar

Dear School Family

As our hearts go out to all people and countries suffering through this terrible hardship, we want to give you a quick update on our COVID-19 strategy, so you know how your donation directly helps during this time. We can't help without you, and this is what you are doing here in Zanzibar right now;

I decided to close school last Wednesday – it was such a stressful decision because I wanted to ensure the wellbeing of students and staff at school, but I also knew our students would continue to be exposed to the virus through their siblings attending government schools. With great timing, that same night the Zanzibar government closed all schools, madrassas, and universities, which brought me great relief. The streets in Stone Town are less deserted due to the loss of tourists, but in the area of the school, it's almost business as usual, which is rather worrying. We gave our students as much education about safety precautions as we could before they left us, and hope and pray they and their families will remain safe.

Distance Learning, Old Style

While the rest of the world turns to distance learning, here in Zanzibar we don't have that option with our students. Momentarily our Trustees discussed raising funds to buy smart phones for students so that virtual teaching could commence, but as we all know, responsible and safe use of the internet for children requires shepherding and a close eye, and our students don't have that level of care available in general.

So, this week we are going all hard copy! Our teachers are busy collating Home Education Packs with work books, new material, and practice material, including some art materials (our students don't have pencils and paint at home like our own children do). Each pack will also have newly purchased text books – as a Steiner School we don't formally use text books, but now we need to adapt to changing circumstances. Readers will also be purchased to ensure each student is actively reading at their level. This handover time will also be a great opportunity for us to talk to caregivers about safe hygiene practices as we try our hardest to ensure the well being of the whole family. Each pack contains learning for a month, and we are expecting to follow up with another pack at the end of April.

How Will We Ensure our Students Understand and Learn This Way?

In our community not all people have access to a phone, but usually someone living nearby does. When caregivers come to collect the Home Education Packs this week, we will update all contact numbers, ensuring we have the closest phone number to the parent. Each week teachers will be calling their students individually to discuss their progress, talk through any difficulties and check generally on the health of the student and their family.

How Will We Ensure the Well Being of Our Students?

Caregivers will be told to call the students' teacher at any time for advice in learning, or for health matters. We have stepped in many times in the past and provided healthcare for students and also members of their families – now will be no different – the chances are that we might need to help on a larger scale. Any spare funds we have will be directed to providing family nutrition to those who need it most, and of course, our chickens continue to lay eggs, which we will distribute to those in most need whenever we can.

Going above and beyond is what our team are about, and some of our teachers have volunteered to drive to visit individual families in the coming weeks, while maintaining safe social distancing, and assuming we don't go into lock down. Not only will they be checking on student work in these visits, but will truly know the needs of families – especially our many widowed mothers who are all alone in this.

What Challenges are there for Zanzibar and our Student Families?

With a lack of running water in the home, it's hard to drive home the priority to wash hands, however, during the Home Education Pack collection, we will be handing our soap and more soap to caregivers, and again rehashing the very important message. Buying soap is a luxury in our student homes – washing the hair body is usually done with OMO, which causes many skin issues. We figure if we provide the hand soap, if there is water, it will be used. Once people understand the gravity of the situation, hand washing will become a priority.

We have a duty of care to our students and their families

Not just a school, but one big family, with each student sharing hardship at the core of their belonging. The big challenge in Zanzibar is access to healthcare and medicines if people do get sick. Again, just like in education, to make a difference, we need quality healthcare; not just healthcare. We will

use the local military hospital as our family reference center for those with health issues, and do our best to cover their medical needs.