



Dear friends, supporters and volunteers,

Firstly we send you and your families our very best wishes and hope you are all safe and in good health as this unprecedented virus crisis sweeps across the world. Like most of you we are in “lockdown” at home - doing our best from here to support our school community in Ethiopia from a distance via phone and email.

We thank all of you for your messages of support and in this newsletter we will outline what is happening at the school. Our community of students and teachers are working hard to protect themselves for when the Covid-19 virus inevitably reaches Mekele and even to continue their education despite the tough restrictions on people movement.

At Rainbows4children we are fortunate that all our fundraising and training of our staff at the school by overseas experts is done by volunteers. This means we can continue to manage our operations and support the school without having to lay off staff. We want to take this opportunity to thank all those volunteers for their amazing hard work and dedication to the children.

We believe our founding principle, that 100% of all donations go to the children and the school, is the right one – and especially in this current situation.

Our leadership team and all the staff at the Nicolas Robinson School have responded rapidly and decisively to the actions called for by the national and Tigray regional governments in Ethiopia. Here is a summary of the key actions already taken at the Nicolas Robinson School.

Continuing education

We held extensive phone calls on Friday 13th March with the school director as the crisis grew in Europe to warn him of what to expect in a worst-case scenario. He called his staff together over the weekend and they developed an action plan ready to deploy at a day’s notice including prepared lessons for their students. On Monday 16th March the Ethiopian government ordered all schools, colleges and universities closed as of the next day – and our school team were ready!

On that Monday, the teachers provided students with work plans, duplicated worksheets and textbooks to take home and study. After two weeks, the staff called the students back to school, in small groups at a time, to hand in their homework. This was replaced with more worksheets, sufficient to last for a longer period. Even kindergarten classes were given workbooks to complete, with course work to last until the end of the school year, while they are at home. The teachers have put their phone numbers on the worksheets so if the students need any help they can call them.

Our teachers are all working from home at the moment and many of our auxiliary staff are taking their annual leave. Those remaining at school are the management team who have individual offices. We have paid special attention to older staff and those with underlying health conditions who have been asked to stay at home for their own protection.



Sheila is a regular volunteer at the school and was there at the time of the mandated closure. She is pictured here helping staff collate student worksheets to take home and study during the lockdown.

Health matters

Health is the primary consideration and the biggest problem with the Covid-19 pandemic is the pressure it is putting on even the best-developed health systems around the world. Unfortunately, in Ethiopia, essential items such as soap, disinfectant and health care facilities are either in short supply or non-existent.

So far, only a few cases of the virus have been detected in Addis Ababa and nearby towns. Contacts have been traced and are in isolation and being monitored. Long distance bus services have been stopped and the domestic flight schedule reduced.

In the city of Mekele and throughout the state of Tigray, people are asked to remain in their towns of residence. University students have been sent back to their hometowns in specially organised transport. Public transport between towns has now ceased.

At the Nicolas Robinson School, we have introduced hand-washing stations at each of the entrances to the school as well as by the cafeteria and entrance to the staff room.



Ethiopian design



Staff using one of the school's hand-wash stations

Our science staff have been busy with two projects:-

Producing hand-sanitiser gel, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended formula.

This is distributed to staff and others nearby. We plan to scale-up production if we can obtain sufficient raw materials. (Incidentally – the Director General of the WHO, Dr.Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus is from Tigray!)



Hand-sanitiser production in the school science lab.

Production of bleach for killing viruses and germs.

Some years ago, we were donated a portable bleach production unit, by Amici di Marco charity, which uses the electrolysis of salt solution (brine) to produce sodium hypochlorite bleach.

We have gone from making one batch per week to now producing almost 24 hours a day to supply our staff and others for home use as well as at the school. We would like to try and expand this process and help others, if we can obtain more equipment. We now supply bleach to a local children's orphanage which sends some of their children to our school and also supply a nearby project which houses and protects elderly people and those with mental health issues.



Information management

Passing on correct information and avoiding false rumours is key in the management of any crisis. The Nicolas Robinson School publishes a school newsletter every 2 weeks. They have quickly produced a special edition with a message from Rainbows4children containing information about personal protection from the virus. It also includes advice from the school director and his staff to students and parents about how to work from home and what is expected from both parents and teachers in this process.



School newsletter, distributed to students and their parents

Food Programme

Since the crisis broke out, the price of food has increased, according to official Ethiopian Government statistics, by 26% as a result of supply chain failures both internationally and within the country. However, the reality is that for every day basic foodstuffs such as cereals, the price has gone up closer to 50%. This inevitably puts huge pressure on our students' families, for whom food and rent accounts for all of their monthly outgoings.

Many of our students, particularly some of the younger ones from especially poor families, are very dependent on our supplementary food programme to give them an adequate diet which maintains their immune systems.

We already support some students with extra meals, supplied by our school staff café. While this is temporarily closed, we will help these children and provide them with extra funds to buy nutritional food such as fruit and eggs at their homes.

At the moment it is very difficult to distribute food due to the movement restrictions in place. Despite these difficulties, our team leaders are busy identifying needy families who are most at risk and we will organise extra financial support for them, to protect the children from the worst of the crisis.

We will update the Rainbows4children website regularly and keep you informed on all developments at the school as time goes on.

Meanwhile we wish you all good health in these difficult times and thank you for your continuing support!

Max + Kathryn

Max and Kathryn Robinson

4th April 2020