To all of our dear friends far away,

I want to do something a little different this time. I'm sorry I cannot sit down and write to each one of you individually – there are over 400 of you on our current mailing list.

All of you have played an important part in the journey of Elimu in Kenya. Some from the very beginning, others have joined us more recently. If you have been following our regular newsletter you know the impact you have made. You can also visit our eMagazine page for lots of stories of how children and youth are benefiting from your support as they build brighter futures in Kenya: eMagazine

The global pandemic of COVID-19 officially arrived in Kenya on March 12th. The first huge wake up call was the closing of schools – primary, high school, college, university, even Heri Ministries Sewing College, Elimu’s partner in our sewing project. Then my return flight to Canada was cancelled. Prior to that, and in consultation with my team here in Kenya and my Mum back in Canada, I had already made the decision to remain. With all the uncertainty and constantly changing situation, I felt I should be around to support and guide our team here and our beneficiaries.

With this letter I hope to answer some of the questions and concerns that you have been having about what life is like for us in Kenya at this time.

COVID-19 has made it so clear how inter-connected and inter-dependent we are around the globe. Many have been infected and many others are suffering from the effects of the drastic response. We all need new ways to reach out, support and stay connected with each other. We want you to know that here in Kenya, we are praying for courage, hope and health for each one of you and your loved ones.

We thank you again for being part of the Elimu family and for sharing this journey with us.

Kwaheri from Kenya,

Nina

Nina Chung.
ELIMU RESOURCE CENTRE CLOSED

The Centre (or "Resource" as it is lovingly called locally) was officially closed on March 16th. During the first week, the staff continued to come to work daily and we thought we would "make good use of this time" for catching up on housekeeping issues and undertaking some training.

The following Monday, March 23rd, we were told to send everyone home. The words "self-quarantine" or "self-isolation" were added to our daily vocabulary!

A SHIFT IN THINKING

This stage required a paradigm-shift in our thinking and our approach. In all honesty, I think that first week "off" we all took as a bit of a welcome break and time to catch up on rest and housework. The parents amongst us took on the added challenge of keeping little ones busy with meaningful activity and trying to keep them indoors away from their friends in the neighborhood.

Kamotho, our CEO, and I began meeting daily at the Centre to assess the ever-changing situation and to discuss our response. We decided to work in two-week blocks. We wrote a letter of support to our staff and laid out our expectations for the next two weeks leading up to Easter. We are a team that prays together and so amongst the directives were a series of prayer intentions we could share – as a way to keep us united while apart. Otherwise, we divided up tasks including as thorough as possible a review of the first quarter of 2020 so to help us assess the impact of COVID-19 going forward and make plans for the near future of what is called here "cessation of movement". We continue to move forward in two-week blocks.

SEWING PROJECT

The girls of Elimu's Sewing Project returned to their rural village homes after Heri Sewing College was forced to close. Those with access to sewing machines will continue to sew and even make some money.

Those without machines are back to serving their families as house help and field hands. Most live without electricity or normal plumbing and their homes are mud and timber with thatched roofs. They will be planting maize as the rainy season soon approaches. They are grazing goats and milking cows and feeding chickens.

They fetch water and gather sticks for firewood. Food preparation can include harvesting, picking out stones and debris from beans or maize kernels, starting the fire and finally cooking. The whole process takes hours. Laundry of course is by hand and hung to dry. Managing younger siblings is part of the daily routine.
STAY IN SCHOOL PROJECT

From our Stay in School Project, we are keeping in touch regularly with the parents of our sponsored children. We can no longer bring them together for their monthly savings and loan group or prayer circle.

But checking in by phone keeps us in touch. These kids do not have their own room or desk for their studies. If their home is mud walled, it’s also dingy and dark inside.

That’s why you see in these photos that they are seated outside, using any table available to them. Some work on the floor if its cemented. They are all missing the bright conducive learning environment of Elimu Resource Centre – where they would normally be when schools are closed!

NYUMBANI KWETU HOME

At Nyumbani Kwetu Home, the house is busting at the seams with 12 “kids” at home (mostly young adults now). From college to primary school, they have all come home, except three that are already on their own. We’ve set up a schedule of the usual house chores with home-schooling hours in the morning and afternoon.

Our two high school graduates are on-hand as teachers to help with homework assignments. I meet each high school student weekly in ‘Nina’s Office’ (as my one-on-one student meetings have become called) to review the timetable and the work accomplished.

The kids have cleared the land at the back of the house and put up a ‘nursery’ to grow seedlings for a kitchen garden. With a view to life after lockdown, we anticipate food shortages or price hikes. So, having our own kitchen garden for basic vegetables will be helpful when the time comes.

With churches closed across the country, Nina has become de facto pastor for the home, meeting with the kids weekly on Sunday afternoon to read, discuss and pray together.
HOW ARE WE STAYING RELEVANT AS ELIMU RIGHT NOW?

For Nyumbani Kwetu, we’re implementing a home schooling approach and have provided two Kindles so the high schoolers have access to their textbooks.

We have shared instructions on how to make protective face masks with our sewing graduates and students. We are also connecting with the local Ministry of Health to organize sewing masks for the hospitals which are in dire need for their staff. Masks for the kids at Nyumbani Kwetu Home were sewn by the teachers of Heri Sewing College.

We thank God we were able to provide the parents of our sponsored students with a small stipend to help them stock food at the start of a 21-day “cessation of movement”. In an economy where people literally survive by making their “daily bread”, financing the order to stock their houses for three weeks is no simple task.

We are sharing relevant digital resources to keep children reading at home. Our partners, Worldreader.org have developed an app which delivers reading material to phones. Parents can download the app and provide storybooks to their children.

We are also working with volunteers who work from home to create content for our digital edtech platform. This curriculum content will be useful to teachers when schools re-open. It will be incorporated into our Mobile Digital Reading Program which takes our digital education resources into classrooms in the community.

Though Elimu Resource Centre is closed, we are in discussions with partners to find a way to boost the signal from our local server out to homes in the community. This would make our digital educational content available to anyone with a Smartphone or laptop, or any Wifi-enabled device. There is no cost to accessing our server because it is via an intranet and doesn’t need internet or use up costly data bundles.

Our Cisco instructor is also keeping in contact with his students. Some are able to keep working from home on their phones or laptops.

For those of you on Facebook you can follow our stories of lock down in Kenya from our children and our team. We’ve asked them to send us photos so that we can share their stories with you.

Here are the links to our social media:

- YouTube Elimu Development Projects
- Facebook elimuprojects
- Twitter @elimucanada