



FIRST STEPS

news

Spring 2022



**“ There is an appointed time
for everything.
And there is a time for every
event under heaven...
A time to search and a time
to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time
to throw away.”**

Ecclesiastes 3:1&6



First Steps' work in North Korea sometimes feels like navigating an ocean journey. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused us to change direction and find an alternative route.

North Korea was one of the first countries to respond to the pandemic by limiting travel in and out of the country. Since that time, according to North Korea's own reports, the country has had very few COVID cases reported and almost no deaths. To accomplish this, they have virtually stopped the international flow of people, goods, and services. This near-total halt in international business has come at a tremendous cost in other areas, especially in regard to food security and commercial trade. First Steps has directly experienced the impact of this. Borders are closed to imports, including our soybeans and Sprinkles, and they're closed to almost every other form of international interaction.

Within the past ten days, however, the North Korean government reported a COVID outbreak that has been spreading rapidly. Forecasts predict that the country could double its number of cases every

few days, and the disease has spread outside the major cities, making it a problem that is now nation-wide. Officials and experts who study the data of this week's events say that the outcome could be catastrophic. They have described the situation as a threat with multiple complicating factors: few goods, services, and medical supplies permitted to enter from outside the country, an unvaccinated populace, a medical system that's already strained and lacking even basic anti-fever medicine such as Ibuprofen, as well as widespread malnutrition and other health issues that compromise the immunity of individual North Koreans.

While we at First Steps are absorbing this news, we're also making a difficult decision regarding two shipments we sent to North Korea at the peak of COVID restrictions. We sent them nearly two years ago, but they only got as far as Dalian, China. We've decided that the time has come to accept this shipment as lost. It's the first shipment we've lost in First Steps' 20-year history. We mourn this shipment, and what it could have

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done to help the children and mothers of North Korea, and we mourn the sacrificial investment of so many of you who contributed to it. At the same time, we know we must not give up. We must remain determined to search for new ways to feed the children and nourish mothers in North Korea.

In this dire scenario, where do we stand? We have not lost hope in God's enduring love and faithfulness. We're convinced that we must be prepared to help at the first possible opportunity.

There are signs that an opportunity may come soon. One indication is that, even before the news of the North Korean outbreak reached the rest of the world, our Korean partners had asked if we'd consider sending a shipment of wheat and another shipment of soybeans. That request, and others, lead us to expect that North Korea will facilitate the shipment and that we'll be permitted to import our soybeans and Sprinkles into the country. And if the North Korean COVID outbreak expands to the point that the country requests international

assistance, our opportunity to send shipments may come even sooner than we expect.

After 20 years of successful quarterly visits to North Korea, it's been challenging for us to accept that we must now wait. Please pray that the One who calmed the sea with a word would soon bring peace and resolution in this situation too.

We will keep searching with hope and determination. We'll keep moving forward.



Koreans, known for their hard work, busy planting rice and crops during the short spring season.

People Profile: Max Pedret and Mr. Hwang

Max Pedret grew up hearing Bob and Susan talk about North Korea during car rides to baseball games with their son Sam. The stories sparked Max's curiosity to learn more about that distant land, its culture and its people. Even at eight years old, Max took an interest in learning a few phrases in Korean.

By the time Max turned 14, his curiosity had solidified into a desire to volunteer at First Steps. When he was 18, he wanted to learn more Korean and he had a new hobby in photography. When Susan invited him to join a team visiting North Korea as a photographer, Max was all in! So, in the spring of 2018, Max and Sam joined the

First Steps team and spent two weeks in Korea. They saw the First Steps programs in action first-hand and met some of our North Korean partners. They also met some children in our programs, which might have had the biggest impact of all.

Looking back on that trip, Max still vividly remembers a bout of food poisoning that hit him while he was in North Korea. Incredibly, a North Korean doctor in a primary care clinic used her last clean needles to treat his stomach pain with acupuncture. Max lost 25 pounds to that illness, but to his credit, he never lost his enthusiasm for the work of First Steps. In fact, his determination to volunteer intensified.



Max in Pyongyang, DPRK, 2018

Being involved with First Steps was rewarding, both personally and professionally," Max says. "From the wide range of work I was responsible for, I gained experience in research, communication, administration, leadership, and logistics. I highly recommend, for anyone in high school or university: before pursuing a professional career, find an organization that calls to you and start by volunteering. Even if the entry-level role has no relevance to your degree or career path, just get your foot in the door and see where it takes you—you might be surprised by how much you learn.

— Max Pedret

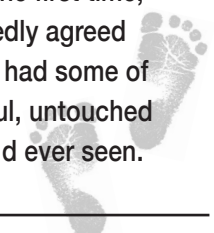


Samjiyon airport, Ryanggang Province, DPRK.



Mr. Hwang (third from left) is a KCCA (Korea Canada Cooperation Agency) Associate from Pyongyang. Max nicknamed him Larry simply because he thought it fit. Larry and Max developed an unusual friendship during Max's two weeks in North Korea. Communicating in Korean, English and French,

Larry and Max bonded over a mutual fascination with each other's homeland. They agreed to disagree over their perspectives of history and their taste in music, but as they both saw remote parts of North Korea for the first time, they wholeheartedly agreed that North Korea had some of the most beautiful, untouched landscapes they'd ever seen.



Gifts of Kindness



Soybeans are shipped from Canada to North Korea to make soymilk. One cup of soymilk costs just 3 cents, including shipping. A gift of \$12 typically provides a daily cup for a year.

Donate \$ _____ towards soybeans.



Micronutrient Sprinkles are sachets containing a blend of vitamins and minerals that are added to food. Sprinkles prevent anemia and rickets and lower the rates of diarrhea and pneumonia, the leading causes of death in children under two years of age. A \$50 donation to the Sprinkles program provides nine months of sachets for a pregnant and nursing mother and 18 months of sachets for a baby (6 to 24 months).

Donate \$ _____ towards micronutrient Sprinkles.



20-litre **stainless-steel milk cans** are vital for storing and transporting soymilk from production centres to the children we serve. They cost \$100 each.

Donate \$ _____ towards milk cans.



The **VitaGoat** is powered by *combustible fuel* (wood, coal, etc.). It processes soybeans directly into nutrient-rich soymilk and provides about 1,500 cups of soymilk per day to hungry children. The cost of a VitaGoat is \$5500.

Donate \$ _____ towards a VitaGoat.



VitaCows process soybeans directly into soymilk providing children with a warm and protein-rich drink. The VitaCow is powered by *electricity* and can produce 2000 cups of soymilk per day to feed hungry children. The cost of a VitaCow is \$7000.

Donate \$ _____ towards a VitaCow.

name _____
address _____
city _____ prov. _____ postal code _____
phone _____ email _____

Please make cheques payable to First Steps Health Society and forward to: 3260 West 5th Ave. Vancouver, B.C. V6K 1V4 Canada
BIN: 821724036 RR0001. Gifts are acknowledged with an official receipt for income tax purposes.

For further information contact us at 604.732.0195 or visit our website at www.firststepscanada.org

Please Recycle or Pass Along. Contact us at info@firststepscanada.org to receive First Steps Newsletter by email.

I wish to purchase the First Steps book at \$60 including shipping, and understand that the cost is not tax deductible.