



BE^aC^oN of H^oPE

REPORT OF THE WORK OF THE MENNONITE FAMILY CENTRE, ZAPORIZHZHYA, UKRAINE



**by Louie Sawatzky
Project Director**

It has been a difficult year in Ukraine. At the time of this writing, it is day 1205 of the war. It has now entered into the fourth year! There has been a lot of talk of

a ceasefire but peace is elusive, and the two parties are wide apart in any terms of ending this war. The war has resulted in about 7 million people being displaced from their homes, many into other countries. Many of the men between the ages of 25 and 60 are in the military. It is estimated 400,000 men in the Ukrainian military have been injured or lost their lives. It is also reported the Russian casualty number has now reached 1 million. These estimates cannot be verified.

It is also understood that about 20% of Ukraine territory is under Russian occupation, as it has been since early on in the war. Communication with people remaining under occupation is almost impossible. When there is telephone conversation, it is always assumed someone is listening, so it is not an open conversation. All adults in the occupied zone have been pressured to renounce Ukrainian citizenship, and accept Russian passports. Without that passport, they cannot be employed and do not receive benefits, such as a seniors pension. Therefore, many have taken the Russian passport under duress.

The air war continues to change as weapons change. The most common weapon now are drones which continue to change. Some fly at very high altitudes, are hard to intercept,

and come down on their target. Others have cameras and search out targets, often targeting an individual car or truck which is then destroyed. Some drones gather information, and some act as decoys. Bombs and missiles are also often used. Many are intercepted by Ukraine forces before they can strike. All of these weapons set off air raid sirens as soon as they are detected anywhere in the sky over Ukraine, often lasting several hours.

Zaporozhye is situated about 20 km from the southern front line. This front line in the ground war has remained virtually unchanged for the past year, but daily attacks occur, with Russian forces attempting to break through.

Although the city of Zaporozhye has been hit many times and many homes and apartments have been destroyed, the people are resolute in defending themselves. On most days, daily activities in the city go ahead as usual, and a casual observer might say everything is normal. The grass is being cut, and workers go about repairing streets and picking up garbage and people go to work. But the constant stress is taking a big toll on everyone's health. We are grateful for protection, and can say that none of the staff and no clients have been directly hit or have lost an apartment. Inflation is high and although markets carry most food items and other goods as they did before the war, people find it hard to make ends meet. This is true for the ordinary citizens and doubly so for people who have moved into the city for safety. The needs of people asking for help continues to grow, and the staff of the Mennonite Family Centre make many client visits to assess needs, and see how they can help with the resources we have.



Report from Boris Letkeman Local Director of the Mennonite Family Centre

When I was asked for a report on the activities of our Family Centre, I paused to think — what exactly should I share? Every month, we prepare a financial report, but those are just numbers. What lies behind them?

At the Mennonite Family Centre, we currently have 31 staff members, 26 of whom are caregivers providing Home Care. They are dedicated to helping the sick, the elderly, and those in physically challenging conditions. At present, we care for 138 clients who need support due to their health.

Among them are 45 internally displaced persons who have lost everything because of the war and do not have the means to cover even the most basic needs. We pay special attention to 17 particularly severe cases — including three children. For example, one girl, Olena, requires constant care due to a severe form of diabetes. Another client, also named Olena, has been undergoing dialysis for nearly 20 years. She has lost a leg and is currently hospitalized, but thanks to our support, she still finds the strength to fight her illness. All of this is the result of the daily, painstaking, and sacrificial work of our team.

Today, Ukraine is living through the greatest war since World War II. The front line is just a half-hour drive from Zaporozhye. For over three years now, we've lived with the constant sound of air raid sirens — sometimes for a third of the day. Daily attacks from ballistic and cruise missiles, drones, and aerial bombs... It is difficult even to imagine.

And yet, despite all this, our staff go out every day to serve people, bringing support, care, and

love. Often, when I see them, I ask myself — where do they find such strength? Where does this resilience of spirit and courage come from? From God. It is only with His help that we are still standing.

There is one more very important thing I want to emphasize. When we come to people who have asked for help and introduce ourselves as representatives of the Mennonite Family Centre, it is not just a name. It is a connection — a return to the shared history of peaceful coexistence between the Ukrainian and Mennonite people, especially here in southern Ukraine, in Zaporozhye. For more than a hundred years, our cultures were deeply intertwined — in architecture, everyday life, cuisine, and agriculture. And today, in this most difficult time for Ukraine, that historical closeness touches people deeply. It awakens real interest, warmth, and hope. This means so much for our future.

Our Centre also provides financial support to “Prometey” a program and school for children with special needs. A heartfelt thank-you also comes from the “Prometey” Centre — they have achieved extraordinary success in their work.

(Note: “Prometey” or “Prometheus” as it is known in English is a local program for children with special needs which the Centre has supported since inception. The object is to equip these children with life skills, which in many cases means, preparing them for acceptance in the Public School system. Promtey is supported by various organizations with most of the costs paid by the parents.)

The same goes for the “Florence” Centre, whom we also support in their work with children with special needs. Praise and glory be to God for everything!

With respect and gratitude, Boris Letkeman
(Boris Letkeman was born and raised in Ukraine and has been the local Director since the beginning of this ministry, in 2002).

Mennonite Family Centre in Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine

Our Mission:

To develop and initiate delivery of health and social services programs, based on Christian values from a Mennonite perspective, in the Zaporizhzhya community:

- for needy individuals with a primary focus on the elderly,
- that train service providers and caregivers, and
- that demonstrate and promote the principles of volunteerism, sustainability and a civil society.

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Tanya Tymoshenko
Program Coordinator

Tanya writes several stories about clients who were forced to leave their homes because of the war. They are just stories until you know the individuals and see them as people in need. Often we show clients who are bed ridden, but the needs differ with each client.

The first client is Vera Medved, 71 years old. Vera lived and worked in the city of Orikhiv all her life. She had a family, a husband and three sons. But the war changed her life, like the lives of many people in Ukraine. Orikhiv was heavily bombed since the beginning of the war: missiles, bombs, drones... the city was destroyed leaving not a single surviving building. There are almost no people left there either. According to the latest data, there are now about 800 people left there. Mostly old people who decided to die at home. Sounds scary. Vera and her husband were forced to leave their completely destroyed house in which they lived and move to Zaporozhye. And all three sons were at war. The eldest son Alexander, 47, died a year ago, burned in a military tank in the Zaporozhye area. The second son died in the war two months ago near Kursk. The third son is still serving. It so happened that Vera's husband also died, having lost both legs six months ago. Vera was left alone in Zaporozhye. She rents a place to live, receives a small pension and lives in the hope of seeing her now only son. And there is nowhere to return to... We help Vera. We buy and bring her food. This is very good support for Vera, because the state is not helping much now. She is very grateful for this and sends a big thank you and a deep bow to the people of Canada, who make it possible for Ukrainian refugees to receive assistance.



The second story is about people who came to live in Zaporozhye two years ago from Gulyai Pole. This is also a Ukrainian city in the Zaporozhye region, which is constantly shelled and destroyed. Galina Levon, 70 years old, Gennady Levon, 74 years old and their elderly mother Agafya, 89 years old. The whole family of Galina and Gennady - two children, grandchildren, elderly mother, lived in Gulyai Pole, where Gennady worked on the railway. When the war began, the daughter with the children left for Poland. And the son has been fighting in the war since 2017, now near Kursk. When it became dangerous to stay in the city because of the bombing and the house was destroyed, Gennady, Galina and the grandmother left

for Zaporozhye and live in rented housing. They receive a small pension from the state. But the most important thing is that people have nowhere to return to and because of this they are confused and depressed. We help them, buy and bring food. The whole family is very grateful for the help and support.

The third story is about Dmitry Pushilin who is 37 years old and lives alone. His parents died more than 10 years ago. He has an older brother who has been living in Russia for many years. The parents and Dmitry led a dysfunctional lifestyle and abused alcohol. Now Dmitry does not drink but has big health problems: diabetes, dystrophy and has trouble walking. He has minor mental deviations. There is no gas and electricity in the apartment where he lives since he was cut off due to unpaid bills. In the fall of 2024, Dmitry was recognized as disabled and assigned a pension, but it is very small. We help him. Our employee cooks food at home from the products we buy and deliver to Dmitry every week and communicates with him. Dmitry is grateful for such important support with products and food since he cannot receive such help from the state.



The above stories feature just three of the 138 current Home Care clients. Clients vary in age, in background, and in life experiences. When calls for help come in, we do not ask about church affiliation or background, but rather, what are the needs, and do we have the skills and resources to help. Many clients are stressed and lonely and can no longer cope on their own and have nowhere else to go for help. Even those who have led independent lives find it hard to cope. And when a Home Care provider is assigned to a client, they become like family, giving physical and emotional help. It is so important for our program that the care providers are women of faith, (from various faith backgrounds) who are able to offer help, companionship and advice from a faith perspective.

Support for the People of Ukraine

In every Newsletter, we give you an opportunity to support the Benevolent Society’s ministry in Ukraine. It is a modest ministry with a great impact on the people there. Individual people are recognized, and receive physical and real help in their desperate state. An even greater help is the knowledge that people care. It gives hope. Again we invite you to partner in this ministry. It is an opportunity, among the many others in this world, to share the love of God in a real way. We are the hands of God to many people, and they thank God daily for this help.

(Cut and submit, or simply send your cheque in the envelope enclosed)

☐ Yes, I want to help the needy in Ukraine! Use where most needed.

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