

BEACON of HOPE

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



Louie Sawatzky
Program Director

The work in Ukraine continues in spite of the war. In the past year, the front lines have remained in place without much movement. Ukraine is defending while Russian forces continue ever increasing assaults. Many troops die along those front lines, which stretch many thousands of km with the nearest to Zaporozhye just 20 km away. The area of occupation remains at about 20% of the Ukraine territory. Most of the destruction is as a result of the air war, which is seeing many daily drones, bombs and missiles from both sides going far from the front lines into all of Ukraine and into far reaches of Russia. No one is safe, and the destruction is massive. Most of the former Mennonite villages have been obliterated. We are grateful the Centre has been spared, with

some broken windows only, and no staff has been injured. I am in daily contact with Boris, and try to support from a distance. I am in awe of the dedicated staff.

In this Newsletter, you can hear comments directly from the front line staff regarding various aspects of our Ukraine Ministry and how people are affected. It is important work and you can be sure, many people receiving help thank God daily for the answers to their prayer in times of deep despair.



Boris Letkeman
Director of the Mennonite Family Centre

I have thought hard about what I should write in this report, and I would like to share my thoughts. At the Mennonite Family Centre we now have a new generation of young women. We have seven new homecare workers. Most of them come from other regions (who left their homes due to the war). In the beginning when you observed them they looked like lost young women. They were in shock. After a few months they look very different. They talk freely and from the side you see

confident, optimistic, wonderful young women who have moved on. I see young faces that are satisfied and eager to take the next steps in their new life. In my conversations with them, I understand they feel at home within our group. This work has transformed them. They do their work well, and although they are still learning, they are very responsible. I am very satisfied with their work. They have found new friendships with fellow workers. It makes me glad.

Today a new time has begun in our beloved Ukraine. This new generation is standing at the beginning of a new Ukraine which is born out of this hard, long war with Russia. I have spoken with Nadia (our Program Coordinator) about this. She was also very satisfied, and we acknowledged we have received wonderful blessings from God through our work. I have been the leader for this group for 24 years at the Centre. These years have been the best years of my life. Sometimes it was hard but we overcame. We are doing the right thing. We hope this is just the beginning of ongoing help for those in need. Many, many thanks to the Board and the many people who support this work, for this tremendous help. And we are grateful and give thanks to our Lord.

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

We continue to operate the daily programs of the Mennonite Family Centre, although the conditions have changed due to the situation in the country and in Zaporizhzhia. Our home care staff are now working under more challenging conditions. They visit their clients daily and continue to provide care. The challenge is that alarms are sounded many times a day, missiles and bombs are launched, and drones fly overhead, crashing and exploding. Sometimes all of this can happen simultaneously. Whenever possible, staff go to a shelter; if that's not possible, they hide with their clients behind two walls in a house or apartment.

Every morning, Boris, Nadia, Sergey, and I meet in our office and discuss the daily work plan. We compile a grocery list for each day, depending on people's needs. And this includes not only groceries, but also medical supplies, cleaning supplies, and personal care products. Sergey and I go to the store to pick up supplies. Once we have everything on the list, we visit the clients on our list. These include Day Program clients who attended the Center before the war, internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have now moved to Zaporizhzhia from various parts of the region, having lost absolutely everything and arrived with only documents and personal belongings, and Home Care clients who need additional assistance with food or other goods. After visiting clients, we return to the office and create a rough work plan for the next day. We discuss issues regarding our staff's work and call them and the Home Care clients. Then, together with Nadezhda, we go and accommodate some Home Care clients. Calls asking for assistance are coming in frequently now. We discuss the client's needs and the terms of our work. If the assistance our Center provides is suitable for the client, we agree on a time for the visit and, at the appointed time, we go and meet the client. After meeting, we decide on assistance: what needs to be done, how many visits, and select a staff member.

We continue to work regardless of the situation in the city—this is the most important thing, because sometimes our staff member is the only person who comes to someone in need. Thank you very much for this opportunity and support to all the people of Canada who care about the plight of the people of Ukraine. Each client story is different but they are all in need of help.

Today's story is about a family forced to move to Zaporizhzhia from the city of Tokmak. Our clients are 28-year-old Olga Savenko and her 8-year-old daughter, Angelina. Olga has already experienced many difficult situations in her life. She was born, raised, and lived in Tokmak, Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Since childhood, she suffered from joint pain in her legs and arms. It was diagnosed as rheumatoid arthritis, which ultimately left her disabled and unable to move independently. However, Olga met a wonderful young man and married. They had a daughter, Angelina. Angelina had a congenital leg defect: one leg is shorter than the other. They lived as a close-knit young family in Tokmak before the war. When the war began and their city was occupied by the Russians, Olga and her family decided to leave for Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. Her brother and his family were the first to leave, followed by Olga's family. The parents stayed in Tokmak, deciding not to leave their home. Her father has since passed away, but her mother still lives there. Olga's husband, Dmitry, immediately volunteered to fight. He is still in the front lines, protecting us from the enemy. Olga and her daughter, Angelina, are now renting a place separate from her brother and his wife, who live alone with their daughter in a small apartment. Angelina goes to school. They are very afraid of shelling and always try to find shelter if possible. Olga is currently unable to move independently and uses a cane or a walker. Her fingers are severely deformed, making any work difficult for her. Our assistant comes to them three times a week. She helps with grocery shopping, cleaning, cooking, and laundry. Olga and Angelina live in hope that the war will soon end, that their husband and father will return to them, and that they will all return home to Tokmak together.





Sergey Buteryn
Assistant Director

My name is Sergey, and I work at the Mennonite Family Center in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. I'd like to tell you a little about how the Center operates during the war. Since Zaporizhzhia is practically the front line, fighting takes place 15 kilometers from the city, and drones, bombs, and missiles frequently strike the city. The Family Center has been involved in the lives of residents of Zaporizhzhia and the surrounding area for over twenty years. It helps people in difficult life situations, primarily elderly people who are unable to care for themselves, have no relatives, or whose families are in dire straits. Most clients not only

lack money for food but are also physically unable to buy it because they are homebound due to illness. Almost all of them remained in Zaporizhzhia when the war began. For the Mennonite Family Center, each client is part of a family, and the family center continues to care for them. Circumstances in the country have changed, but the people and their needs have not. Several times, explosions have shattered windows in the Center's office and in clients' homes, and some homes have been destroyed. Also, refugees from the region whose homes were destroyed often move to Zaporizhzhia. The government tries to address their needs, but the money they earn is often insufficient even to cover rent. Therefore, the family center also strives to be involved in the lives of these families primarily by providing food, assistance to the hospital when needed, and purchasing medication. These are children and adults. Every day, our minibus travels to different parts of the city, delivering food and a positive atmosphere, telling people that the Mennonite Center is a big family, and that they too are part of it. They hear that many people, thousands of miles away, are thinking about them, caring for them, and praying for them. This story of love and care amazes, encourages, and inspires people. Here everyone is valued and remembered.

There are about 140 clients in the Home Care Program and many more receiving visits and food packages. A total staff of 29 provides daily help. The following pictures show food deliveries to some clients who are living independently, but needing some help as they relocate to the city. (The blanket shown is one of the many blankets made by the quilting group in Landmark, Manitoba.)



Work with children with special needs

The Mennonite Family Centre financially supports two programs for children with special needs. The “Florence Centre” runs a program for children up to 6 years of age, using as their headquarters the building that used to house a small Mennonite congregation. They name this program, the “Kangaroo Program”. Children receive various therapy and learn skills for a productive life.

The other program is called “Prometheus” or sometimes “Promiti”. This program is run by a grass roots parents Council. They accept children with special needs from just a few years old, and prepare them for Public School. They opened the program in 2012 and went through steady growth, and now have over 270 students. They are located in a once closed public school. Many children now are being taught by public school teachers, funded by the public school system right in their own school, with the rest of the costs covered by parents and grants from several charitable organizations, including ours. It is a wonderful success story. They meet in person, and have been throughout the war. There is a shelter if needed right in the school.

Support for the Ukraine Ministry

Although most goods are available in the markets, inflation cuts deep, and many people are forced to subsistence living. War is terrible and no one is spared. Through the Mennonite Family Centre, the Mennonite Benevolent Society is doing what we can to address some of these needs. We invite you to join us.

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

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

Name: _____ Amount: \$_____

Address: _____ City: _____

Province/State: _____ Postal/Zip Code: _____

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Make cheques payable and send to:
The Mennonite Benevolent Society
Ukraine Ministry
1045 Concordia Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R2K 3S7

Registered charity #119244952 RR001

In the USA

Make checks payable and send to:
The Mennonite Family Centre (USA) Inc.
Ukraine Ministry
1045 Concordia Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R2K 3S7

Registered charity # 83-0361680

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