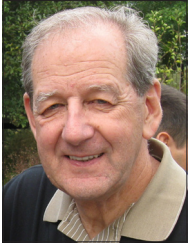


BEACON of HOPE

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



by Louie Sawatzky
Project Director

Greetings again from the Mennonite Benevolent Society in Winnipeg, and from the Board, the staff and the many clients of the Mennonite Family Centre in Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine. In spite of the ongoing war, which at the time of this writing is in Day 620, the people of Ukraine are again preparing for Christmas. But how do you celebrate the coming of our Lord who proclaimed Peace on Earth, in time of war? The human spirit is wonderful and amazing. Even when you experience the most awful events, it allows you to accept them as a reality, set them aside, and find a way to move on.

Less than two years ago, as they were celebrating Christmas of 2021, no one expected war. Christmas was filled with joy and there was hope for even better times to come. It is easy to celebrate Christmas and thank God when things are going well. All has now changed. No one is untouched by this war. Everyone knows someone who has lost family members or friends. Countless families are without fathers. Many mothers with their children have left the country for safety. Cemeteries are being filled with new graves of those fallen in the war. And yet, people are finding ways to see the good in people and ways to support each other. They are tired of thinking and speaking about war which they cannot influence, and long for peace. The air war and the ground war are ongoing. It is awful and everyone is a victim. And yet they will again celebrate Christmas. The prophetic words expressed in Isaiah 2:4, bring renewed hope in this age, as it has throughout the ages.

“He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Although Zaporozhye has also seen many rockets and drones, it has fared so much better than many cities. When a rocket or a drone hit, first responders arrive quickly and people are looked after, cleanup begins, and if possible repairs are made. There are fewer people in Zaporozhye now, since many people have left for greater safety, and the city is now a military city just 45 km from the southern front line. Many people who left the city, are putting their apartments up for rent for others who come to Zaporozhye from the war zone. Those who remain go about their daily life as normally as possible. The markets and banks function between air raid sirens. Air raid sirens begin whenever there is activity in the air, (which is virtually every day) and last from 20 minutes to several hours. When this happens, banks and many businesses close, only to reopen when the siren ends. Many people no longer rush to air raid shelters but carry on whatever they are doing. At the time of this writing, the central heat has not yet been turned on, and many people turn on the stove for short periods of time to generate some heat.

The work of the Mennonite Family Centre also carries on, caring for those in need who have no family support. Usually that means widows. Here is a quick review of the programs of the Centre:

Home Care: This is the biggest program. We have had 127 clients this year. When someone passes away, the spot is filled quickly. We continue to supply about 3,200 hours of care per month, besides travel time.

Day Program: This program is suspended for now and will resume when it is safe to do so. In its place the staff make personal visitations to these clients (about 40), delivering food packages and medications as needed.

Respite: Currently 5 clients receiving 24 hour care. This program continues in partnership with the Pentecostal church.

Support for children with Special Needs: We continue to provide financial support for two programs run locally for approximately 160 children.

But these are just numbers. Behind every number, there are real people, with aspirations and needs. The work of our Care Providers brings joy and hope and real help to every person. “Clients” and the “numbers” become friends and family.

The staff at the Centre consists of 31 people. Just a few of the staff have left the city for safety and we have been able to replace them with new staff. The needs of seniors and displaced people who arrive in Zaporozhye continues to increase, but it is difficult to hire more staff because the work force is smaller and every business seems to be looking for employees. **We are grateful for the caring staff, who, with love and concern, continue to take care of the needs of the clients.** When I ask the question about being afraid, the answer varies. Some are very afraid, and yet go about their work, while others talk more about the fact that they are needed and there is no time to be afraid.



This is Boris Letkeman, Director of the Centre, Sergey Butyrin, Assistant Director, Nadia Nikitina, Program Coordinator, and Tanya Timoshenko, Assistant Program Coordinator. They provide excellent leadership to the Mennonite Family Centre staff.

I speak with Boris virtually every day since the beginning of the war. We talk about the programs and events in the city, and what is happening in Ukraine. We try to remain positive and hopeful. When decisions need to be made, they are made together. This has been very positive for Boris and for our Board. Every day he expresses his gratitude for the support.

Here are a just two short stories of real people, supplied by Tanya. There are about 160 clients in various programs.



This is **Natalia Kucenko**. She is now 67 years old. Natalia was born and grew up in the village of Zelenoe where she attended to school. Following graduation she studied at the Medical College in Zaporozhye where she then lived and worked, got married and gave birth to a daughter. In 2007, her father died, so Natalia moved back to the village to look after her. Soon her brother who lived in the same village also fell ill with cancer, and Natalia looked after him as well. Natalia has health problems of her own. She has trouble walking and needs hip replacement surgery and has other issues, but there is no money for it. There was never time to look after herself. Even as the war, the shelling and evacuation began, Natalia could not leave her brother. When he died in September 2022 Natalia came to Zaporozhye and now is a client of the Day Program. She receives visits and food packages and help with daily living.



The second story is about a young man, in the Home Care program. His name is **Sergey Serebrinsky**. He is 50 years old. Sergei was diagnosed with a severe form of cerebral palsy as a child. He cannot walk but can sit in a wheelchair. He can neither feed nor take care of himself. He was born in Zaporozhye and lived with his mother until he was 11 years old. As a child, he lived in several homes for children, and then for adults with special needs where he was able to attend school. On October 11, 2022, when Zaporozhye was subjected to heavy rocket fire, the home where he was staying was relocated, for safety reasons. Sergey's mother, who is 74 years old brought him home. She finds it difficult to care for her son. Our Care Provider visits twice a week to help with bathing, changing clothes, to buy groceries, and once a month brings food packages. She also provides moral support.

Support for the Mennonite Family Centre

There are many needs in the world. The local and national news now focus on the latest war in the middle east. Ukraine is no longer the centre of concern, but that does not mean it is over. The war rages on, leaving destruction, death, and broken lives. We believe our presence in Ukraine is essential to the people there. We provide physical help and bring hope and reassurance to those in need. They are not forgotten. We are most grateful for your support, and welcome you to continue to partner with us. We believe we can be a witness to God's love in peacetime and in war. May the people of Ukraine also experience the Peace of God in their hearts and in their everyday life.

**We wish you special blessings this Christmas holiday season.
May the spirit of Christmas and all that it means, stay with us all year.**

(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.

Name: _____ Amount: \$ _____

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*Please note: Donations from the US are administered in Winnipeg, Canada.
Receipts are issued by the Mennonite Family Centre (USA) Inc.*

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Ukraine Ministry
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Registered charity # 119244952 RR0001

In the USA, make checks payable and send to:
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1045 Concordia Ave.
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