

BEACON *of* HOPE

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



by **Louie Sawatzky**
Project Director

Greetings again from the Board of the Mennonite Benevolent Society, and the Mennonite Family Centre in Zaporozhye, Ukraine. It is now Day 845 of the Russian war on Ukraine, and I can report that the work of the Mennonite Benevolent Society is ongoing, and express gratitude to God for protection and guidance. In spite of the war, God is good and steadfast, and continues to bless the work being done. We hope and pray for an end to this conflict.

When the war began on February 24, 2022, many people thought this was impossible. The ground war is fought mostly in the three Oblasts (regions) of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporozhye, so there are about 4 main front lines. Particularly hard hit are the towns and villages and cities within reach of this front line. That means within about 25 km of the front lines. The bombardment is relentless, often 24 hours a day. Most people have left these places for the safety of distance. But some stay, maybe because they believe this will pass, or they believe they have no place to go and don't have the means to travel and stay for any length of time, or they just can't leave for health reasons. It is hard to make a change when all your life's work is there and it is home.

The front lines are mostly static, with just slight movement toward either side. Often, when there are gains from one side, the other retakes it during the night. However, in the Donbas region (which is the eastern most regions along the Russian border) several small cities have been taken by Russian forces. Russia currently controls about 20% of Ukraine.

Zaporozhye is within about 35 kilometers of the southern front line. It is just outside of reach of the artillery fire, but well within earshot of the explosions along that line. Many villages and small towns along that front line, where our forefathers lived, have been devastated and lie in ruins.

The air war is like a separate war, where bombs, missiles and a wide variety of rockets and drones can hit anywhere in Ukraine. Ukraine radar picks them up as soon as they are launched and issues warnings on cell phones and also by activating air raid sirens. The Ukraine air defense system is fairly good, particularly in protecting the larger cities. Most rockets and drones are intercepted, but they approach so fast that often they have just minutes to respond and when intercepted, the debris falls on anyone below.

In spite of the war, and the fatigue and stress, people try to go about their affairs as normally as possible. And so it is at the Mennonite Family Centre. The Homecare program goes on serving those in need. There currently are 120 clients in the program, and as clients pass away, the spots are quickly filled by others. In May we provided 3363 hours of care and the staff spent another 1857 hours on the road, traveling mostly by bus or street car.

The small Respite program continues to provide 24-hour care for those most in need. The Mennonite Family Centre works with the Pentecostal church to provide this care. One person provides all the care including bathing, cleaning, cooking and feeding, and doing all the housework, rotating with another, every 3 days.

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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HOME CARE STAFF

The staff of the Home Care consist of women of various ages and backgrounds. It is important that they have training in the work they perform, that they are women of faith, and have the personality and character that allows them to form relationships with their clients. They provide physical and emotional care. Following is a brief introduction to two Home Care workers within the group, provided by Tanya Tymoshenko, our Program Coordinator.



This is Oksana Sovgir. Born and raised in Zaporozhye, she graduated from school and became a nurse. Her mother, Yana, was already an employee of our Center since shortly after the program was begun in 2002. Following high school, Oksana joined her mother and both worked in the Home Care program, each with their own clients. In 2018 her mother was diagnosed with cancer, and Oksana looked after her until her death in 2020.

Oksana is now 42 years old and has three children. Following her mother's death, Oksana worked in a clinic at the military hospital at the airport, which was near her home. Due to the war, the airport was closed, so she came back to work at the Family Centre. Oksana treats clients with love, and takes good care of them and they love her.

This is Marina Belokopytova, with her clients, a husband and wife.

Marina is 45 years old, born and raised in Zaporozhye in the family of a pharmacist and a heavy truck driver. She graduated from school with a special certificate as a seamstress. She worked in a garment factory and out of her home, cutting and sewing outerwear, dresses, and suits and much more. In 2003, Marina's mother fell ill with diabetes and had a stroke. Marina had to leave work to care for her mother. This was her first experience caring for a person who needed constant care. Marina came to work with us in 2020 having learned about our Center from friends already working here. Marina quickly mastered the work. She is a positive person, loves people, communicates well, and treats difficult situations with humor. She has clients who are in serious condition. Marina loves her job. She enjoys helping people, and her clients love her. Despite the difficult situation in the city now, with frequent alarms and sometimes explosions, Marina is doing her work.



PROMETHEUS

Prometheus, the program for children with special needs is a tremendous success. In spite of the war they have been able to hold classes in their building, which is a former public school closed prior to the war. They currently have about 160 students of all ages, and more are asking about coming. Slowly they have been able to repair and modify the classrooms and replace windows to accommodate their own particular needs. In May, they had a special day of festivities, that included a talent show. Parents, neighbours and interested people could attend and take part. This is part of what they wrote about the event:



On the 26th of May, our Center was transformed into a magical world of musical enchantment as the young musicians showcased their incredible talent and amazed everyone present at the concert.

The laughter and joy echoed through the corridors of our organization as the young artists brought their unique atmosphere. Playing various musical instruments, the children captivated everyone with their wonderful performances.

We are happy and proud that our Center became the perfect venue for such a magical event. The concert became a tranquil corner in the bustling life of the Center, where children could express their creative individuality and delight everyone with their talent.

The expressions of everyone present testify that they immersed

themselves in the world of art, where each musical and dance number was particularly unique.

The children musicians played various musical instruments. They performed different compositions ranging from classics to contemporary pop music, allowing the audience to enjoy a variety of genres and styles.

In the end, our Center was a happy place where little stars enchanted us with their magical melodies. We are very grateful to all the participants and their families for taking part in this incredible event. The showcase concert of child musicians became a shining example of how our Center can be not only a place for learning and development but also for joy and creative expression.

Prometheus is run by a local parent's organization, with costs covered firstly by parent donations plus regular support from various organizations. You may see this program mentioned by various organizations. They are part of our budget as well, and we are pleased to contribute monthly.

BLANKET SHIPMENT



About two years ago, we had a call from someone asking if we could use quilts. These are prized and very practical for our clients in the various programs. The problem was, these were quilt tops only and unfinished. What to do? A group of women in Landmark, Manitoba get together regularly for an afternoon of quilting. They agreed to take on a project of completing these quilts. Since they began, they have completed over 60 great, colorful quilts. Prior to delivering them for shipment, they have a short dedication service in the local church, and then prayerfully pass them on. They are so appreciated.



To ship the blankets, we go to Nadia and Ruslan Zeleniuk, who operate a small Export/Import store on Selkirk Street called “Svi-toch”. They carefully pack the blankets or the clothes we send, prepare the paper work, and ship in large packages. Nadia and Ruslan’s roots are in Ukraine, so they provide this service to us free of charge and we just pay the shipping costs. The packages arrive at our door in Zaporizhzhya in about 2 months.



Support for the Work of the Mennonite Family Centre

Life in Ukraine has changed dramatically since the beginning of the war. Many families are without husbands and brothers, who joined the military. Many will not return. Many mothers with children have left home and community to distant parts for safety, and many of these will also not return. In spite of that, there are elements of a normal life. People still go to work. Buses are still going on schedule in the bigger cities. You can still buy what you need in the market or grocery store. People cope as best they can. Even though they have to adapt over and over again, they have not lost hope. Even though there are power outages often 12 hours a day, they do not lose hope. The Mennonite Benevolent Society continues to support the various programs for seniors and the children with special needs, through the **Mennonite Family Centre**. We invite you to participate in this Ministry.

(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: \$ _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Prov/State: _____ Postal/Zip code: _____

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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The Mennonite Benevolent Society

Ukraine Ministry

1045 Concordia Ave.

Winnipeg, MB R2K 3S7

Registered charity # 119244952 RR0001

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The Mennonite Family Centre (USA) Inc.

Ukraine Ministry

1045 Concordia Ave.

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