

## The Hearts of Love Center Reopens to Bring Hope after Quarantine

**Summer Camp Update from Jeff** – After our last newsletter was published, the Ukraine government announced that summer camps would not open during July. Thus, this will be the first time in 25 years that we have not conducted summer discipleship camps. We are hoping to do smaller VBS style outreaches along with private “family vacation holidays” for some of our foster families. Our staff is creative and energetic and they plan on encouraging at-risk kids and families with the Gospel this summer. Until then, we appreciate your faithful support!

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The following letter is an update from Lena Yuschenko, director of the Hearts of Love Center in Konotop, Ukraine. It breaks our hearts to hear their stories, yet we felt you would want to know, and pray. Thank you.

### Children Suffer When Daily Routine Is Interrupted

#### From Lena

At the Hearts of Love Center we continue our work with special needs children. It is especially difficult for autistic children to be isolated at home during quarantine. They crave habit, order, and predictability. Most of the children during quarantine began to show aggression. Even non-speaking children demanded that they return to their usual routine of attending the Center. The consequences mean that it will take us months to restore children to their previous level of development.

We now conduct some classes at the Center, and continue to use online lessons for those children who cannot attend because they live far away and public transportation does not work yet. We try to keep safety precautions, and disinfect all objects that children touch. For schoolchildren, we offer online help in preparing homework in math and English. In our hearts, we try to fulfill the Word – “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.” Col. 3:23

### Eugene Beats His Head on the Glass Window at Home

Eugene is 7 years old and has autism. His mother told us that during the quarantine, Eugene sits for hours near the window, beats his forehead on the glass, constantly climbs on the windowsill and makes very loud noises, nibbles the corners in the rooms, and breaks everything he touches.



Lena holds a child quarantined in their 1 room house.



They give individual attention to all the children at the Hearts of Love Center.

His mother said, "All the neighbors became our enemies due to Zhenya's constant cries. The cancellation of classes and our daily walks along the road to the Center led to serious deterioration in his condition. I don't know what to do. He bites himself and pinches everyone."

For Eugene, this is auto-stimulation, which helps expend energy and tension, to feel your body. He cannot understand why he cannot live as before. Aggression against himself and his relatives becomes a way of expressing his pain, like a form of protest.

### 13 Year-old Kysusha Has Schizophrenia

Another little girl's mother told me, "Every morning of quarantine immediately after waking up, Kysusha would prepare for classes at the Center. When this did not happen, she became hysterical and aggressive, biting her hands until they bled, screaming, crying, and demanding to go to class. Some days, Kysusha ran from home to the Center, screaming and waving. After arriving, she would calm down."



The kids get individual attention in all their classes. They have made tremendous progress.

### Mothers Ask For Prayer and Help

"My son is 5 years old with autism," Mrs. Hamdi said. "During quarantine, the boy simply 'blows the roof.' He screams a lot, cries, and can't calm down. He is sleeping poorly and has developed many strange fears and reactions. He is eating dangerous objects and biting others. He scratches his face till it bleeds. Video assignments and classes at home just do not help. Please pray."



12-year-old Sasha depends on the Center.

### "The Closure of the Center Was Our Biggest Crisis"

"Sasha is my 12-year-old autistic son. Quarantine has become a real test for us. The worst part was not an avalanche of frightening news on the television, or home isolation and the inability to purchase the necessary things (only two stores remained open). The closure of the Center was our family's biggest crisis. It was hard to see that with every missed day of classes, the precious reading, writing, counting, skills that our boy had mastered, despite his autism, weakened. It was difficult for me, because I simply had nobody to leave my autistic son with. I have no relatives or friends who can deal with him," Sasha's mother said.

*Lena closed her letter to say that, though the mothers suffered from despair during quarantine, they are hopeful now. "We are a close-knit family," she said. "Year by year we have been afraid that this ray of light will be taken away from us because of a lack of funds. But year by year God answers our prayers! We have such a great love and gratitude to everyone who makes this daily miracle happen. Our classes are open now and there is a lot of work to do!"*