

British Humanitarian Aid

UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2022

For over 25 years, British Humanitarian Aid, founded by The Rev. Tony Budell, has been working to support the needy in Chernihiv Oblast. This region in the North of Ukraine is bordered by both Belarus and Russia. On 24th. February 2022 troops moved in from both, when Putin invaded with the aim of capturing Kiev and installing a pro-Russian government. This failed completely and troops were withdrawn by 5th. April although shelling from across the border has continued.

The large Russian army's failure to cope with less, but more efficient, Ukrainian troops led to aggression against the civilian population, despite the Kremlin's claim that all their "pinpoint actions" were directed solely against the military. During the occupation, and the retreat, they focussed on destroying the infrastructure of the region, hospitals and schools being prime targets. 115 schools and 37 kindergartens are destroyed or damaged.



Despite the mass exodus at the start of the war, by the more affluent and mobile, there are still around 130,000 people still living in Chernihiv city. However, daily life is not easy. Electricity, gas and water supplies are all damaged and there is a lack of specialists to see to the repairs. The residents have been warned that the city will be without these services, as well as communication and residential block heating, for most of the winter. There is no public transport, major stores have been destroyed and most shops are just permanently closed. With access to the region hampered by the destruction of most rail and road bridges getting even basic supplies in is problematic. Hours spent queueing can easily end with a failure to get anything. Support from Charities has become vital.



Prices have shot up, but pensions, which for many are in the region of £50 per month, and wages (possibly £120) have not. It is almost impossible to find paid employment anyway. Even in normal times, social benefits, that we take for granted are effectively non-existent. There is no national structure for wages which in a poor region like Chernihiv are 20 % of those in Kiev, 100 miles down the road. In Ukraine, there are the oligarchs and then the rest. Even doctors, teachers and would other professionals struggle to exist. During our visits prior to 2022, we found that while food and fuel were a little cheaper many items were more expensive, presumably because of the lack of chains of stores that could bulk buy. If you factor in the differences of incomes things for those in Chernihiv Oblast cost about 15 times as for us.

Since Ukraine gained its independence in 1991 it has struggled with its transformation from a Soviet State ownership to becoming a democracy. Chernihiv Oblast is predominantly agricultural and was badly hit when the state funding stopped for the huge collective farms imposed by Stalin in the 1930s. Employment for many from the rural communities ceased and although the land is again farmed, it tends to be just three men with huge machines who arrive in the Spring for sowing and the Autumn for harvest. The region is roughly the size of our "home counties" with 20% of the population. It used to be very beautiful.

Basically, we collect unwanted items and funds from supporters and organisations in the UK. We sort the aid and pack it in our Canterbury warehouse and despatch it via hired lorries to Chernihiv. During a visit in 1996, Tony Budell suggested that translator Victoria Filatova and her friends should create an organisation to fill some of the gaps in social care. Aratta Charitable Organisation was formed and has been BHA's partner ever since. Together we have supported social services, hospitals, schools, and residential homes for adults and children, and individuals in many of the region's districts. Other charities, especially those looking after the handicapped, have also received regular support. Seven lorries and five part-loads have been collected and sent this year approximately 92 tonnes.



The team from Aratta deal with the authorities and supervise the distribution of the aid, with our assistance when it is practical to visit. In normal times, every item that is handed out must be recorded along with the recipient's details. These records then are submitted to the relevant authorities for checking. Currently, things are a little less rigid but to cover their backs Aratta are still recording all donations and coping with about 60 people a day many of whom have lost everything and struggle to survive and somehow rebuild their lives.



The question now is “What do they need?”

This is trickier to answer than it might seem. The simple answer is “everything,” but this is not practical as we have to cope with it somehow. There are some specific requests:

Sanitary Items, Nappies (incl. adult), Adult bicycles, Colouring books & crayons, Small toys, Washing powder, Shampoo & Bodywash, Soap, Candles, Matches, Torches, Tinned and Dried foods (not cereals), Long life milk. Tea & coffee, Building Materials!

Other needs: All clothing and shoes, Bedding, Plates, Bowls, Mugs, Cutlery, Saucepans, Kettles, Wheelchairs, Crutches, Wheeled walkers. Sleeping mats.

TRANSPORT COSTS HAVE INCREASED DRAMATICALLY AND BHA HAS URGENT NEED OF DONATIONS TO COVER COLLECTIONS IN THE UK AND TRANSPORT TO UKRAINE.

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