



# Light in the Darkness

## The Work of the Agape Rehabilitation Centre in Lutsk, Ukraine

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**Natalia and Sergiy Bolchuk were involved in a terrible, life-changing accident while serving the Lord in the south of Rivne province. A tyre burst on their minibus; no other vehicle was involved but Natalia's injuries left her a quadriplegic. During the months of hospitalisation that followed, Natalia questioned why God had allowed such an awful thing to happen and wrestled with God as to her future.**

After the accident and months of recovery, the family eventually returned from the city of Ostrog to Lutsk where they could be supported by their extended family. Both Sergiy and Natalia struggled to find answers. They prayed for a miracle cure but none came. They asked the church leaders to pray

over them but, initially, there were no answers. Then after a long period of struggle, God spoke to them very clearly. I remember Natalia giving her testimony at a Philadelphia Trust camp; she said, 'I was healed.' I looked at her in her wheelchair and wondered. 'Yes,' she continued, 'My mind and spirit were

healed. I stopped blaming God and realised that He had a work for Sergiy and me to do. My rehabilitation process taught me how difficult it was for people like me in Ukraine. The facilities are poor. We felt before God that I had gone through this process so we could help others.' It is amazing how God works.

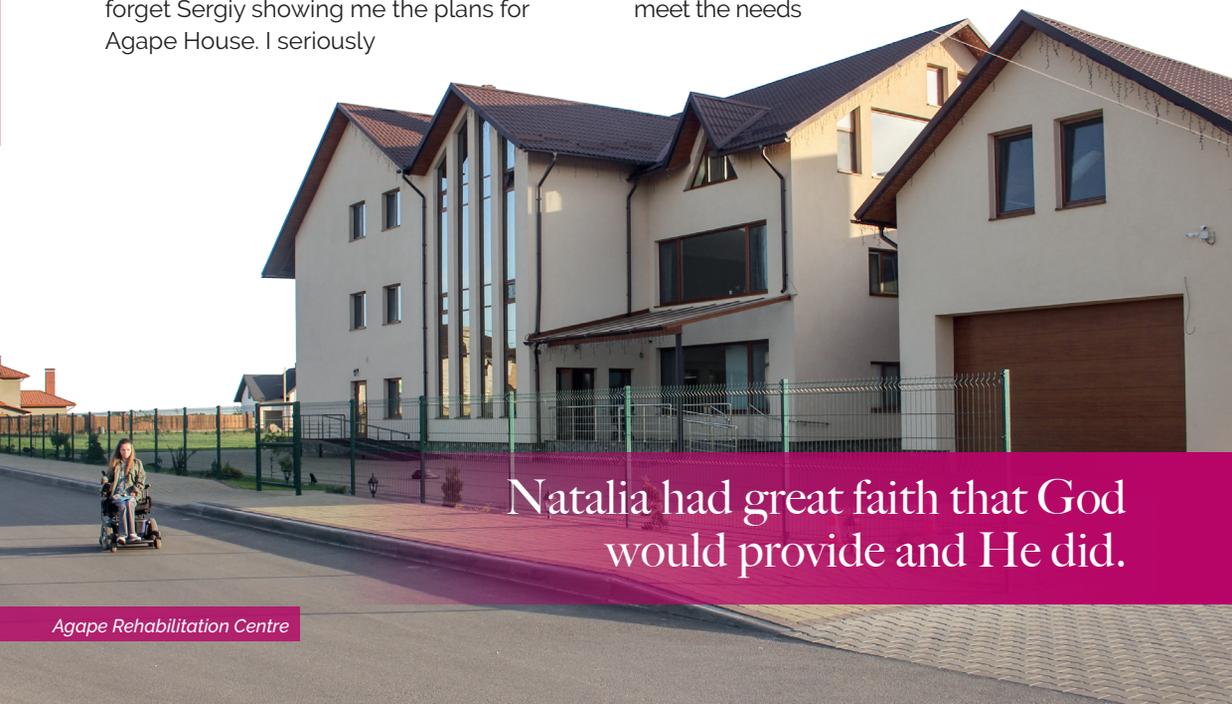
With the support of their home church, Fimiam in Lutsk, they started a ministry helping disabled people. When I first met them, they had taken over the former church building – a prefabricated 'tin tabernacle' like many that we had in Wales in the early 20th century. They had turned it into a clinic, Agape Rehabilitation Centre, where physiotherapists helped those who had life-changing injuries or illnesses. However, they did not only support people physically but spiritually and emotionally.

Sergiy and Natalia were grateful for the support they received but it was not enough. Those with serious disability, whose lives have been shattered, need a high standard of assistance. Their vision was for a rehabilitation centre with residential provision for those who need it, as well as a day clinic for outpatients. I will never forget Sergiy showing me the plans for Agape House. I seriously

questioned whether this dream could ever become a reality, but Sergiy and Natalia had great faith that God would provide and He did. Each time I visited Lutsk in the years that followed, Sergiy took me to view the progress of the building work and eventually it was finished. The faith I saw in action was reminiscent of when George Müller set up the orphanages and ran them in Bristol in the UK. Sergiy and Natalia are real 21st-century 'Müllers'.

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In recent years, I have stayed at Agape House while ministering in the Volyn region of Ukraine. I have seen the work first-hand and am in awe of what God is doing. Sergiy and Natalia are supported by a great team of workers all committed to serving those in need. All the staff are believers and are wonderfully attentive to the needs of all who live within or attend the centre. The team work tirelessly to ensure holistic solutions are found to meet the needs



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of each individual, whether physical, spiritual or emotional. Everyone, however unwell, is encouraged to go out for recreation, to attend the meetings of Fimiam and belong to one of the house groups that take place each week. Specially adapted minibuses are used, the most recently provided through the generosity of Medical Missionary News, which is much valued as it has excellent facilities for wheelchairs. There are many living in the centre who have come to faith as a result of the ministry. As I stay in the centre when I visit, I am able to talk with residents and hear many of their stories.

**Julia**

Julia fell out of a tree when she was 15 years old. She broke her back and is now a quadriplegic. Before she came to the centre, she lay on her back all day looking up at the ceiling and had no purpose in life. The physiotherapy and other treatments she has received have enabled her to live a much fuller life. She is a bright and gifted young woman. The crowning moment for her was

when she became a true believer. She once said to me, 'I'm glad I had my accident, it allowed me to find Christ.'

Sergiy and Natalia's plan that each individual should be helped to live as fulfilling a life as possible has been worked out in Julia's situation. She has been trained to run the logistics arm of a Christian company based in Volyn. The company produces wooden gates and fences, which are sold all over Europe. Julia organises their fleet of lorries, does all the paperwork and schedules, and supports the drivers. She negotiates with customers and plans the return loads. She only goes to the factory occasionally and does most of the work required from her room in Agape House. She once said to me, 'I laugh to myself as I'm negotiating with buyers who probably imagine I have a posh office rather than a small bedroom!' Her financial independence enables her to contribute towards her care and also allows her to travel on holiday and pay for a carer. She has said to me a number of times, 'God is good.'



Julia has found freedom in Christ and is living as full a life as possible with her disability.

Kolya, Julia, Anya (standing), Sergiy (not Bolchuk) & Roman

## Roman

Roman was a member of a criminal gang that went regularly into Poland to steal high-end Western cars, which they brought back to Ukraine and traded on the black market. One day as he was travelling, he was in a car crash that resulted in injuries which left him a paraplegic. A member of the gang had heard of the work of Agape and arranged for him to have treatment. The holistic treatment of body, soul and spirit led him to find faith and he is now a bright witness of the love of Christ in his life. His baptism was a wonderful declaration of his changed life.

## Kolya

One hot summer's day, Kolya dived into a river. He did not know there were rocks near the surface and he broke his back. A married man, he went from being the family breadwinner to a helpless quadriplegic. He found it exceedingly difficult to be unable to do anything for himself. He could only lie on his back and stare at the ceiling. He became deeply depressed until Agape came into his life. Like Roman and Julia, through his experience at Agape, he found Jesus as Lord and now seeks to serve Him. It was a great joy for him when his son found faith and chose to work among disabled people.

There are many people at Agape House today with similar stories of how, in the darkness and despair of serious illness or injury, they have found the light of the Lord Jesus.

## Developments

There have been two recent developments at Agape. A training programme prepares people who would like to share in ministry to the disabled and helps Christians from other areas of Ukraine to organise similar programmes. This is at an early stage but the indications are that the blessings experienced in the Volyn region will be shared in other parts of the country. Accommodation is planned to allow patients' families to stay on the Agape site while they are being treated in the rehabilitation unit. Often, those who have had an accident need immediate care. The rehabilitation centre can accommodate one carer to help the patient but accommodation for more is not possible, so families are often separated. This new accommodation will solve this problem.



Please pray for this amazing ministry and for the excellent medical care, catering, maintenance and administrative teams that glorify God with their sacrificial service.

