



Hope Center: Transforming Lives of Latvia's Most Vulnerable

Hope Center was born out of a deep and compassionate response to the needs of vulnerable young women and children in Latvia. Founded in 2004 by the women of First United Methodist Church in Riga, it was inspired by Jesus' call in Matthew 25:40: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me." With this guiding mission, **Hope Center** began its transformative work of changing the lives of mothers and their children.

At its core, **Hope Center** is committed to empowering young, pregnant girls who have no support and nowhere to turn, often facing abandonment and isolation. Many have grown up in orphanages or without strong family support leaving them vulnerable and uncertain about their future. Within a safe, nurturing, and loving environment these new mothers are given the opportunity to discover their strength and move toward independence. Through parenting education, vocational training, and life skills development, **Hope Center** provides a pathway for healing, growth, and the creation of a brighter future for both mother and child.



Hope Center mothers, children, and staff.

- **Our mission:** To reach out and care for a vulnerable and often forgotten group in Latvian society—pregnant, vulnerable, and isolated young girls who are at high risk of human trafficking and exploitation.
- **Our vision:** To nurture and empower young mothers, helping them become independent, self-supporting adults who can create a loving, safe home for their child. We provide a life-affirming choice for mothers and their babies, believing in the inherent worth of every person, and helping them gain their self-respect and confidence so they can reach their fullest potential.

In recent years, **Hope Center's** mission has expanded to include mothers with intellectual or developmental disabilities, as well as those with histories of physical, sexual, and emotional trauma. Many of these young women have been neglected and left to face life's challenges alone, without family or support systems. Having experienced little consistent love or care, they deeply need the stability, compassion, and sense of belonging that a nurturing, family-like environment can provide.

History of Latvia

Latvia endured a profoundly dark chapter in its history during the Soviet occupation, which began in 1944 when Soviet forces entered the country during their war against Germany and ultimately took control.

This occupation lasted until 1991, when Latvia regained its independence. Those five decades of Soviet rule were marked by oppression, fear, and suffering, leaving deep and lasting scars on the Latvian people.



Children living in orphanages were often separated from their parents who had been killed or sent to Siberia.

Under Soviet control, resources were severely restricted and basic human needs were left unmet. The Soviet government infiltrated and controlled every aspect of life, from workplaces to schools, leaving little room for personal freedom or autonomy. The pervasive presence of the KGB eroded trust among neighbors, families, and communities as people were constantly wary of surveillance, informants, and betrayal. Many families, where the parents were educated or leaders, were shipped to Siberia on rail cars. Many people died along the way, leaving families and children to fend for themselves and struggle to survive.



Families being sent to Siberia in inhuman conditions on railcars.

Following independence in 1991, Latvia faced severe economic hardship. The Soviet government removed much of the country's industrial infrastructure, leaving behind an empty treasury and a weakened economy. Rebuilding proved difficult with limited resources and significant structural challenges. At the same time, human and social services were not an immediate priority during the transition to a free nation. As a result, many people experienced significant hardship, including reduced access to healthcare, social support, and welfare systems, which further deepened the struggles of vulnerable populations during this period.

Understanding the historical context helps explain why non-governmental organizations like **Hope Center** have become essential in Latvia society. They play a vital role in filling critical gaps in social services, supporting vulnerable populations, and contributing to the nation's ongoing recovery. Although Latvia's economy has improved over time, recent global challenges—including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine—have once again placed significant strain on resources and social support systems.

Why Hope Center was Founded

When a young pregnant girl walked through the doors of the Methodist church in Riga in 2004 with nowhere to go but the streets, the pastor and the women of the congregation recognized a clear calling to respond. Moved by compassion and a sense of purpose, they founded **Hope Center** as *the hands and feet of Christ*, seeking to fill a critical gap in Latvian society.

In its early years and still today, **Hope Center** serves young pregnant girls who had been abandoned by their families or could not remain in orphanages due to pregnancy. It provides them with a safe home, consistent care, and a sense of belonging and love. Staff and volunteers become trusted mentors, offering emotional support, guiding them through childbirth, and teaching essential parenting and bonding skills.

Beyond parenting education, **Hope Center** equips these young mothers with practical life skills for independent living, helping them build confidence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency. Through its compassionate and nurturing approach, **Hope Center** is a vital refuge—empowering young mothers to break free from cycles of poverty, abuse, and exploitation. It works to restore their dignity, strengthen their self-worth, and helped them create stable, hopeful futures for themselves and their children.



Mothers shop daily and work together to plan and prepare meals for their families.

Today, organizations like **Hope Center** remain vital in Latvian society, providing stability, care, and advocacy to ensure that the most vulnerable are supported and not left behind.

Hope Center Today

Hope Center continues to be a lifeline for vulnerable mothers and children carrying out its mission through a combination of Residential/shelter services and Community-based services. Even though 20+ years have passed since its founding, **Hope Center's** philosophy and mission have remained the same – *to provide comprehensive, long-term care that mentors mothers toward becoming independent, self-supporting adults who can create safe and loving homes for their children.*



A young Hope Center mother with her daughter.

In recent years, Latvian Social Services has increasingly turned to **Hope Center** to support another highly vulnerable group—pregnant young women with intellectual or developmental disabilities who lack cognitive challenges and skills to care for their children independently.

Many of these mothers also carry histories of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, which deeply impacts their mental health and emotional well-being. With no other alternative resources available in the Latvia, **Hope Center** has become a vital source of stability, care, and hope.

Today, most of the residents in the shelter program are mothers with intellectual or developmental disabilities and a history of trauma.

Residential / Shelter Services:

Hope Center's residential program supports a small number of mothers and children in an intimate, home-like setting where staff model healthy parenting and family life. Because most mothers have an intellectual or developmental disability and require long-term individualized support, the goal remains the same of guiding them toward independence and self-sufficiency.

Hope Center has expanded its approach to provide the best possible care for both mothers and their children, including long-term or even lifetime support, ensuring stability, safety, and consistent guidance so families can thrive.



Mothers and children in front of the Hope Center building.

Community-Based Services:

As the need for support grew beyond the shelter's capacity, **Hope Center** developed community-based services which now serve a large portion of families in need. Mothers and families receive essential resources, mental health support, and training in employment, parenting, and life skills.

In recent years, **Hope Center** has also responded to the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Latvia, providing critical assistance such as clothing, food, diapers, and other basic necessities.



A field trip day with Hope Center mothers and children from both shelter and residential programs.

A Sanctuary Against Human and Sex Trafficking



Whether living at the shelter or receiving community-based services, **Hope Center** provides a vital refuge for vulnerable young mothers and children – often the only alternative to life on the streets. In a country where human and sex trafficking is a significant problem, these mothers and children are prime targets.

Hope Center offers a safe and supportive environment where they can heal, grow, and access the resources they need to build a better future. Through comprehensive care, Hope Center helps to prevent trafficking, helping these women lead independent, self-sufficient lives free from exploitation.

Current Programs and Services

Through mentoring, education, and the philosophy that “mothers learn by doing,” **Hope Center** staff provide daily support and services that teach mothers essential life skills, tailored to the age of their child and the cognitive capacity of the mother. These skills include:

Life skills:

Mothers develop practical skills for independence, including maintaining a clean home, using household appliances, planning and preparing meals, managing groceries and finances, and practicing personal hygiene. Daily responsibilities and interactions also build communication, cooperation, and teamwork skills, as well as time management and household management abilities.



Mothers learning together how to bake bread.

Parenting skills:

Mothers learn essential parenting skills, including managing their child's behavior, supporting their development and education, fostering positive social interactions, and meeting their child's physical, hygiene, medical, and overall health needs.



A young Hope Center mother receiving parenting support.

Vocational skills:

Mothers develop vocational and workplace skills, including social etiquette, safety practices, and proper hygiene. The Director works with partner agencies to secure job opportunities, prepare mothers for interviews, and provide ongoing support to help them succeed on the job.

Emotional and behavioral health:

A certified social worker/psychologist provides weekly individual counseling to mothers, addressing personal issues, parenting challenges, and past trauma. They also consult regularly with the Director and staff, offering guidance on managing the behaviors of both mothers and children.

These programs provide practical, hands-on lessons that empower mothers to develop the skills needed for independent, self-sufficient living. With emotional and behavioral support, mothers are equipped to navigate challenges and create stable, nurturing environments for their children. Additionally, the programs help mothers build parenting skills, pursue careers, and work toward long-term self-sufficiency.

Successes:

Since its inception in 2004, **Hope Center** has helped many mothers and their babies avoid homelessness, poverty, and the threat of trafficking. Mothers often express gratitude for the training, life skills, love, and sense of family they found here. (See Anna's Success Story below.)

- Since its beginning, more than 200 mothers and 350 babies have benefited from the residential/shelter program.
- **Hope Center's** community-based program provides annual support to approximately 70–100 mothers and children, serving over 1,000 women and children since its beginning.
- Of all the mothers and babies who have resided at **Hope Center**, only four babies have been given up for adoption—a testament to the support, love, and skills these women receive at **Hope Center**.



Hope Center children and mothers enjoying an outing together.

Use of Donations and Gifts:

Donations and gifts to **Hope Center** are invested directly in the lives of mothers and their children, covering essential services and resources. In addition to general operating costs, donations and gifts specifically support:

1. **Life and Vocational Skills** – Teach practical and vocational skills to empower mothers, focusing on independence, positive parenting, and keeping mother and child together, including those with intellectual or developmental disabilities.
2. **Counseling and Mental Health Support** – Provide ongoing psychological and emotional support to help mothers address past trauma, abuse, and current mental health challenges.
3. **Support for School-Age Children** – Assist children with learning and behavior, and teach mothers how to support their child's education, especially for those with cognitive challenges.
4. **Professional Consultation for Staff** – Certified psychologist/social worker guides staff in managing emotional and behavioral needs of mothers and children.
5. **Operational Costs** – Offset rising expenses for energy, food, medicine, transportation, and staff salaries.

Hope Center operates on a “bare bones” budget, relying on individual and church donations and grants as funding from Latvian Social Services covers less than half the cost of caring for a mother and her baby.

Hope Center Development Committee

In 2020, the **Hope Center** Development Committee was established, with members from both Latvia and the United States. Its mission is to strengthen **Hope Center's** financial stability by expanding partnerships in Latvia and around the world, growing the donor base, researching foundations, and writing grants. **We welcome you to become a partner and help ensure this vital ministry continues.**

For more information, please contact:

Jeanie Kurka Reimer, Chair

Hope Center Development Committee

In Mission Together Partnership Coordinator for Lithuania & Latvia

Global Ministries/The United Methodist Church

Email: jreimer@umcmmission.org Cell: 920-851-5485

The Success Story of Anna

Written in her own words and translated from Latvian to English

Hello,

My name is Anna and I'm a 27-year-old mother to two adorable sons. Here will be a little insight from my life at the Hope Center.

I was 17 then and came to the Center from the orphanage. I was waiting for my first son, and he was about to be born. Of course, pregnancy was a big blow to me at that point, plus going to a new place to live (almost at the other end of Latvia), not knowing about the future, as well as being away from everything close to me (friends and family) was very hard. I sank into depression. All I did then was talk on the phone and cry, cry, cry. I didn't want to eat or communicate with anyone, nothing interested me. I even used to sit in bed just staring at the wall.

A very keen interest in helping me, making me feel better was being shown by nannies and the girls at Hope Center. Everyone was trying to make friends, but I was closed to that. And then my son, Lauris, was born. At the Hope Center, I was taught absolutely everything about parenting. I found it all very strange and didn't believe I could cope or fulfill my mother's duties.



Anna and Lauris at Hope Center



Anna and Lauris today

The fact that I knew there were people around who I could always ask for help or advice comforted and encouraged me to believe that everything would be fine and I would cope. The center helps you learn a lot of different skills, not just in parenting, but everything so you can live fully outside the center. As I had come from the orphanage, I could not cook either but was taught in the center. Living there as well, I was given the chance to finish high school.

I will always be very grateful that I ended up in the Center and had the opportunity to live in the beautiful “family” for three years. I hope there will be more “Hope Centers” in the future, with an equally heartfelt manager and all staff. Because places like this are necessary and it really is a huge support for moms who are lost and confused in life.

Thank you for everything Hope Center!

Anna



Left: Hope Center Director, Gita Binane with Lauris at the annual Hope Center Christmas party. Anna is seated to the right.

Give Hope — Support Hope Center of Latvia

The **Hope Center of Latvia** offers a place of healing, education, and transformation for mothers and families in need. Your gift helps sustain this vital ministry — changing lives through hope, care, and love.

All donations given through Global Ministries are tax-deductible.

100% of your gift goes directly to the Hope Center through Global Ministries.



Scan this QR codes to see a video about Hope Center



Give Online

Visit the Global Ministries website:

- ◆ Go to **umcmmission.org**
- ◆ Search for **Hope Center, Advance #3020447**, or click the link below:

👉 [Hope Center of Latvia – Advance #3020447](#)



Give by Mail

1. Make your check payable to: **GLOBAL MINISTRIES**
2. On the memo line, write: **Hope Center, Advance #3020447**
3. Mail to:

Global Ministries

Attn: Cash Receipts

458 Ponce de Leon Avenue NE

Building A, Suite 1

Atlanta, GA 30308



Give by Phone

Call toll-free: **888-252-6174**

Provide the representative with: **Hope Center, Advance #3020447**



Thank You!

Your generosity brings hope, healing, and transformation to those in need. Together, we can continue sharing God's love through the Hope Center of Latvia.