

# Moldovan orphans warmed by individual, corporate generosity

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Hats hand-knitted by 82-year-old Hazel Hilton were distributed at two orphanages in Moldova as well as this small church in a poor community outside the capital of Chisinau.

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**By Craig Bird**

## *Baptist Child & Family Services*

SAN ANTONIO—An 82-year-old woman’s last mission project and employees of a large Christian music company teamed up to keep Moldovan orphans warm in the midst of the country’s worst winter in 70 years—proof that both the “widow’s mite” and big corporate donations can work together to do good.

Hazel Hilton, a longtime Texas Baptist, died in February, just one month after Baptist Child & Family Services mission volunteers distributed a box of her hand-knitted caps to 60 orphans in Moldova.

Meanwhile, Nashville-based EMI—working through Sweet Sleep, a Baptist Child & Family Services-related program headquartered in Tennessee—started out with the goal of raising enough money to buy 250 coats.

By the end of its fund-raising effort, 1,040 orphans had coats, hats and gloves.



Children from Moldovan orphanages benefit from the coats and hats provided by Christians in the United States.

And while children in Moldova—a small Eastern European country with a climate like Minnesota—would have welcomed the warm gifts anytime, this winter marked the coldest in 70 years.

In mid-January, temperatures plunged as low as 11 degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

At least 13 people froze to death in a five-day period, and several others died when makeshift fires got out of control and burned houses down, the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS reported.

An EMI employee traveled to Moldova last year with a Baptist Child & Family Services/Sweet Sleep team and returned so moved by the experience that others at EMI wanted to get involved.

“Once we heard about the need and the desperate situation these children face, there was a tremendous response among our staff, record labels, artists and songwriters,” said Holly Whaley, director of corporate communications for EMI.

In early December, EMI employees—after picking up hangers with a picture of a little boy or girl who needed winter wear—rode charter buses to a Nashville discount store to buy coats and other items. Then they wrapped and vacuum-packed all their purchases for delivery half a world away.

Hazel Hilton spent most of her 82 years leading friends and neighbors and new acquaintances to faith in Christ and going around the globe—including China and Russia—to share her faith, including lengthy tenures at First

Baptist Church in Beaumont and Willow Meadows Baptist Church in Houston.

Physical problems halted her overseas travels several years ago and necessitated a move from Texas to Little Rock, Ark., to be near one of her children.

But her heart still belonged to missions and her mind to Texas, so she read, prayed and sought out things she still could do.

In November 2004, she read about Baptist Child & Family Services' work in Moldova and asked her son-in-law, *Arkansas Baptist* newsmagazine editor Charlie Warren, to find out how she might help.

Teams from the Texas Baptist child care and family services agency go to Moldova twice a year, so it was last winter before the box she shipped to San Antonio made it to Eastern Europe

"We gave the hats to children in the two orphanages and at a small church in a small village," said Tony Tomandl of Baptist Child & Family Services.

"It is not unusual for these kids to go without hats and gloves, so they met a great need. When I first saw the box, I thought, 'That's nice this lady made a few caps for kids.' But when I started packing them in my luggage I was totally amazed. There were over 60 caps in many colors—what a tremendous labor of love."

Information about mission trips to Moldova with Baptist Child & Family Services is available at [www.bcfs.net](http://www.bcfs.net) or by calling (210) 832-5000 or (800) 830-2246.