



Thank you

My Dear Friends,

I wanted to thank from the bottom of my heart all of you who responded to my plea and contributed to the Ukrainian Refugee Help Fund. Thank you for putting your trust in me. Your donations truly made a difference.

YOU made so many things happen.

As you know, this is still an ongoing process as more refugees are still crossing the border every day. Any additional donation/help will always be greatly appreciated.

At this point, there are over 2.5 million Ukrainian refugees in Poland. I have heard from volunteers working at the Krakow train station that some of the Ukrainians are still planning and hoping to be able to go back to their homes. For now, their new homes are either in good-hearted people's houses or apartments, hotels, vacation resorts...

Most of the refugees are young mothers, children and elderly. Most of them left with whatever they could fit in their backpacks or even plastic bags.

As some of you may know, I recently traveled to my native city of Krakow, Poland and personally witnessed where your donations made a difference. I have met many mothers and children who found their temporary new homes nearby my mom's parish.

Your gift gave them a feeling of some kind of normalcy during Easter/ Passover time when they received the much needed items to celebrate this time with each other. The young children received the school supplies as well as necessary clothing items. They are also receiving daily lunches at school.

YOU made that happen.

The mothers were extremely appreciative. Many were overwhelmed with emotions to see that there are people on the other side of the ocean who care and want to help.

YOU made that happen.

Some of your donations created food packages that were delivered to the frontline. One of the local Ukrainian women said that she had heard from her soldier husband fighting on the frontline that although soldiers had some food supplies, they were sharing them with civilians who did not. A parish' truck full of canned meat, fish, powdered milk made its way to those in need.

YOU made that happen.



I was actually hoping to write this update while still in Krakow, however, there was really no free time to do that. I found myself visiting many help places and meeting many volunteers. Some of volunteers said they desperately needed small towels for the people freshly coming off the trains or buses, so they could at least freshen up. I spent a day or two focusing on finding as many towels as I could in any stores around the city.

Then a wonderful new friend/ volunteer, Dorota, asked if there was a chance I could bring some fruits for the little kids. "But not apples" she said, "we have apples. Kids are thriving on bananas and clementines and it is easier for us to make small portions." Off I went to buy bananas and clementines.

YOU made that possible.

What I observed, these displaced people blend in very well with the locals. They are humbled and extremely grateful. They have impeccable manners, the kids are very well behaved, they are all greatly appreciative for whatever help they receive. There is no pushing in lines for clothes, there is no screaming. They all say thank you multiple times.

From a teacher at my old elementary school I have heard that these young Ukrainian kids are incredibly talented. They sing, dance, and play instruments. From my cousin who works at the Jagiellonian University, I heard that the few new Ukrainian students that are enrolled also are known to be very talented and serious about their education. And the refugees who live near my old parish are known for wanting to help in any way they can. Whether it is sprucing up a church garden or repairing small things... They want to show their appreciation.

I had initially spent a couple of hours with some of the children who found homes in my old neighborhood. Some of them already made new friends and were like typical kids playing around. But then there were a couple of "new" kids who only crossed the border two or three days earlier. These children, in my eyes, were displaying trauma that they went through. A little 4 year old, stone-faced girl whom I could not get to crack a smile. And an 8 year old boy, Seba, who according to his mother, after spending two weeks in a bomb shelter, immersed himself into drawing. He could create 30 drawings in one day. She showed me the photos of some of his drawings and they were clearly affected by what he witnessed.

There are three temporary structures next to the train station in Krakow. One is collecting and distributing the necessary clothing items. The second one is offering medical help. The third one offers an opportunity to sit down at the table and enjoy a hot meal. Inside the train and bus stations, there are quiet rooms with cots, rooms for families with small children, and rooms to change babies. They are pretty much “guarded” by volunteers to make sure no one inside is unnecessarily disturbed during their rest.

There are signs in the Ukrainian language everywhere throughout the city. The moment a Ukrainian steps off the train, they see signs where they can go to rest, receive a free meal, get a legal help, or find medical assistance. There are thousands of volunteers. The power of help and care is truly incredible.

City buses and trams display on their interior video monitors quick “lessons” on how to say certain basic words in Polish - “Good morning”, “car”, ‘please”, etc.

At some point during my trip, my sister (who also lives in the States) came with suitcases full of items donated by her community in Arizona. We spent hours and hours moving around the city and visiting and distributing socks, toothpaste, toothbrushes and other items so basic but so needed.

I am sharing a few pictures with you as I wanted to show you the faces of people your gift truly helped. Please know it was and it is truly appreciated.

YOU made it all possible.





Accommodations inside and outside the train station



In front of one of the rooms for resting



Video monitors on public transportation in the Ukrainian language



Meetings with the Ukrainian families in my mother's parish. This was the evening where the Ukrainian families received the beautiful care packages.



The storage rooms where we delivered the necessary items



Some of the young children we were able to help



Meeting Ukrainian families and distributing care packages



Suitcases full of necessities for the children



Delivering food to the kitchen



Local signs of support for Ukraine, in the Ukrainian language



At the current exchange rate, \$1 USD = 4 zlotych. \$60 can provide about 240 yogurts for 240 kids, or about 120 bottles of milk for 120 kids. Every dollar makes a huge difference!

Joanna Szwyd

@Help4Ukraine



venmo

If you find it in your heart to donate further, you can do so by scanning the QR code above. As you can see, every dollar has a huge impact and the families are extremely grateful for and humbled by your support.

Thank you very much for your contribution!!!

