

# Silver Linings

The Together for Ipswich

## Ukraine Response

A review of the way the Church in Ipswich has responded

Alan Cutting

January 2023



# TOGETHER

FOR IPSWICH

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## Summary

In liaison with our local authorities and other civil partnerships, the Together for Ipswich (TFI) Ukraine Response seeks to support and coordinate those among the 80+ Ipswich Churches that are responding to the crisis in Ukraine.

On the basis of my working knowledge of the Eastern Slavic region, my hands-on experience with various disaster and refugee responses around the world, and my love for seeing practical expressions of the One Church in a town, TFI asked me in February 2022 to coordinate the response.

We provide a matching facility, by introducing potential Ipswich sponsors (or hosts) to reliable Ukrainian guest contacts. We offer support to the hosts by means of cultural and trauma awareness training, and host forums (a learning community for host families).

We offer support to Ukrainian guests by means of Community Hubs, which deliver English language classes, sewing classes, cafes and clothing banks, and give space and opportunity for Ukrainians to support one another.

TFI has also hosted Prayer Vigils and Suffolk (minibus) Tours, and provides signposting for community orientation and cohesion, employment, and housing opportunities.

I hate the war, and wish all this had never had to happen. But there have been some silver linings, and it has been a joy to see the Christian community in Ipswich being so responsive. Those refugees who arrived as strangers and in shock - weary, frightened, drawn, bewildered, and speaking only in Ukrainian or Russian – are now good friends, look so much healthier, are much more integrated, engage in comfortable and increasingly complex conversations in English, and have proved themselves in the employment market as those with a highly impressive work ethic.

As far as events are concerned, the Cultural Awareness Training for hosts, the Suffolk Tours, the Job Fair and the Hope New Year party must be up there among my personal highlights.

Although primarily an Ipswich-focussed response, those representing or collaborating with TFI have also delivered supplies to the Poland/Ukraine borders, funded and equipped partners undertaking similar initiatives in Romania and Moldova, and trained other like-minded groups across the Balkans, as well as across other parts of East Anglia.

With an entirely different strategy to address their very different needs, TFI is now coordinating and supporting the efforts of various Ipswich churches as they reach out to those seeking asylum and presently living in local hotels.

Unless otherwise stated, the words in this report are mine and, as such, I should make it clear that not all the comments and opinions made are necessarily those of Together for Ipswich.

- Alan Cutting



# Together for Ipswich – an Introduction

“...seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

(Jeremiah 29:7)

Emerging from the covid pandemic, Christians in Ipswich held a conference in April 2021, called ‘Ipswich I’m in’. Its aims were to celebrate the many initiatives that were underway to support those in need in the town, and to explore how to do more of this together.

There was a recognition of the need to become more strategic and more co-ordinated through developing mechanisms for:

- Dialogue with civic leaders and statutory agencies

(an ‘Engagement Vehicle’)

- Enabling creative responses to identified gaps in provision and shared priorities

(a ‘Delivery Vehicle’)

Among the many positive outcomes from the ‘Ipswich I’m in’ conference was an offer from Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) to identify an officer as a key conduit into the council, highlighting the need for the Christian community to reciprocate. In effect, the Leader of IBC said, “If something kicks off in Ipswich, I can’t possibly make 80 phone calls to mobilise the 80 churches in town. I want to make one phone call, and know that the whole Church is mobilised.”

As a result, a group of Church and Christian charity leaders met together in November 2021 and agree to set up an ‘Engagement Vehicle’ which, it was decided, would be called ‘Together for Ipswich’.



# Together for Ipswich – It's Purpose

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

(Acts 18:9)

The main purpose of Together for Ipswich is to provide a communication vehicle between the Civic Authorities (particularly the Local Authority) and the Christian churches, charities and people in Ipswich. The aim is that this will enable a better understanding of how local policy impacts on ordinary people, and is a way to explore shared initiatives and effective partnership.

Together for Ipswich seeks to provide a single point of contact for Civic Authorities into the Christian community in Ipswich.

Representatives aim to walk together in facilitating a work programme that promotes Christian values, and supports activities which serve identified need and promote welfare and community cohesion across the town.

Over time we envisage there being representatives and ambassadors for Together for Ipswich that represent every Church across the town, Christian Charities and the sectors of Arts, Business, Education and Health. We envisage a lively and passionate prayer movement. We also envisage new initiatives that can be seeded and grown to address issues in areas such as employment, mental health, housing, youth work, families and children, domestic abuse, migration, race, gangs, money and debt and addiction.



# Early Responses to the Ukraine Crisis

If you falter in a time of trouble, how small is your strength! Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this", does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?

(Proverbs 24:10-12)

In February, at the commencement of Russia's war with Ukraine, the leader of Ipswich BC contacted TFI. He asked, "What are you (the Church in Ipswich) going to do about the Ukraine conflict?"

On the basis of my working knowledge of the Eastern Slavic region, my experience with various disaster and refugee responses around the world, and my love for seeing practical expressions of the One Church in a town, TFI asked me if I would coordinate the response.

We held a vigil on the Town Hall steps on the Cornhill on 9 March, at which a number of Ukrainians who were already living locally were identified and introduced to one another. A second 'Town Hall vigil' to pray and express unity and solidarity with the Ukrainian people took place in May.





Hundreds attended both events, and then in November, six thousand people heard Natalie Lawrence speak powerfully and passionately on behalf of the Ukrainian community during the Remembrance Day ceremony at the Cenotaph in Christchurch Park. The East Anglian Daily Times (13 November) report of that event stated that “the most moving part of the ceremony came in an address from Natalie Lawrence, who was born in Ukraine but has lived in Ipswich for 20 years and has been working to support refugees from her homeland who have moved to Suffolk.”



As soon as we knew Ukrainians were due to come to the UK, Archdeacon Rhiannon King arranged for the creation and distribution of colourful welcome bags for those who arrived in Ipswich in the first month or two following the crisis.



# Matching Hosts with Guests



Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

Noting the frustration people had with the slow matching of the national 'Homes for Ukraine' mechanism, we set up a data base of those local households who were willing to become sponsors, or hosts, to newly arriving guests (we tend not to use the word 'refugee', although this is the formal status of our Ukrainian friends). Observing the panicked urgency with which some were making decisions to sponsor, we decided to embrace a slightly more cautious or considered approach. Our values made it clear that we would rather welcome 30 families well than rush into hosting 100 families – and then not be able to meet their needs or sustain their lives in the UK.

I led some cultural awareness training sessions to assist hosts in understanding more about their guests' rich but very different cultural heritage, and how this would impact day to day life in the home, such as greetings and small talk, family attitudes and values, food and mealtimes etc. We looked at the different ways our cultures greet one another, our rituals and customs, misconceptions, behaviours and expectations, communicating across languages, and the differing ways we tend to approach confrontation.

Not better. Not worse. Just different!



# Hosts Forum

An interactive evening for the encouragement and support of those hosting (or hoping to host) Ukrainian refugees this year.

Pre-booking required by emailing  
[info@togetherforipswich.uk](mailto:info@togetherforipswich.uk)

**Wednesday 30th June**  
**7.30pm-9.15pm**

**Burlington Baptist Church,**  
**London Road IP1 2EZ**

We will look at present day joys and challenges, resources and opportunities, and will look ahead to prepare well for some of the challenges ahead (e.g. employment and rehousing)



To aid the matching process, we appointed Peter Forty to be our 'Matching Officer'. He has worked hard with our database of 60 or so potential hosts to identify and introduce them to potential guests. Whilst we were able to give a basic framework of practical advice, we made it clear to all concerned that we were not recommending, but merely introducing. It was up to the host and the guest to work out whether or not this was a suitable match. In the end, we probably directly matched about 40-45 host families with about 70 guests, and one Anglican Parish in Ipswich released their rectory for two more families to live in.

As time went on, this matching service also had to embrace the need for Ukrainian families to move on, them having completed the six-month minimum requirement that our government requested of sponsors. We are full of admiration for the hosts on our database, for their welcome and hospitality, their willingness to have their lives significantly disrupted and their plans changed through sponsoring a family. Although we have picked up on the need for some independently paired Ukrainian families to move on to a second host, we can gratefully report that not one of those from our database were a 'failed match'.



# Equipping and Supporting Hosts

...to equip his people for works of service... (Ephesians 4:12)

As wonderful as it is to love and welcome strangers into our homes, we did also see the need for equipping our amazing hosts in certain skills, namely, to ensure they understood that they were not just to 'give things to' their guests, or 'do things for' them, but how to give them the space, power and opportunities to make their own decisions, and to become the masters of their own destiny. The urgency of an 'aid' approach had to give way to the importance of a 'development' approach.



**Ярмарок  
вакансій  
для українців**

Цей ярмарок організований спеціально для українців, які шукають роботу в Іпсвічі та окрузі. Низка роботодавців пропонує реальні робочі місця та кар'єрні можливості в різних секторах.

Вхід вільний, без попередньої реєстрації!

**23 листопада  
10:00 - 13:00  
St Felix House (door B)  
Ipswich, IP1 1TF**



**Ukrainian  
Christmas  
Party!**

ЗАПРОШУЮТЬСЯ ВСІ УКРАЇНЦІ, ЩО ПРОЖИВАЮТЬ В ІПСВІЧІ ТА ПРИЛЕГЛИХ РАЙОНАХ

ГАРАНТОВАНО:

- ГАРНИЙ НАСТРІЙ
- РОЗВАГИ ТА ПОДАРУНОЧКИ ДІТЯМ
- ЗУСТРІЧ ЗІ СВЯТИМ МИКОЛАЄМ

БУДЬ ЛАСКА, ПРИНЕСІТЬ ІЗ СОБОЮ ЇЖУ АБО ЗАКУСКИ. НАПОЇ БУДЕ ПРЕДОСТАВЛЕНО

**ОБОВ'ЯЗКОВА ПОПЕРЕДНЯ РЕЄСТРАЦІЯ!**

П'ЯТНИЦЯ | **30** | 15:30-19:30  
ГРУДНЯ

THE HOPE CENTRE  
10 ST MARGARET'S ST, IPSWICH, IP4 2AT  
ВХІД З ЛІВОЇ СТОРОНИ БУДІВЛІ

# TFI's Role in Facilitating Integration

We developed healthy relationships with statutory and voluntary agencies around the town and county, many of whom we were not aware of or had no relationship with before the war.

From Ipswich's Christian community, Oasis English Language School was already experienced in providing English Language Classes, but during the spring months new community hubs at All Saints Kesgrave, Burlington, Hope and River Churches also sprang up.

TFI did not seek to own or control any of these family hosts or church initiatives; merely to match needs with assets, and to help coordinate them and ensure they had the skills and resources to respond appropriately. This involved holding more events such as cultural awareness training, trauma awareness training, and host and guest support meetings.

As more and more Ukrainians arrived in the town and its surrounds, we saw trust and friendship grow, and the resilience, the determination and the great work ethic of this fine nation's people shine through the trauma and uncertainty that wraps itself around their circumstances.

Planning ahead is a challenge, more so of course for our guests than for ourselves. How can one plan ahead with any confidence, when such uncertainties continue in your homeland? Despite these challenges, we quickly saw the three priorities that stared each of our guests in the face:

Learn English. Secure a job. Find a home.

Although we were well ahead of the game in this messaging, these massive challenges still remain.





In attempting to meet these needs, our Community Hubs intensified their English Language Training and Conversation Classes. The summer holidays were spent equipping children to have more confidence in returning to school in September. We rejoiced at every conversation articulated in English, every job found, and every rental arrangement secured.

As an expression of our desire to be holistic and relational in the response, we secured the hire of a large minibus (kindly donated by John Grose Ipswich) for two Suffolk Tours - fabulous days spent exploring Kersey, Lavenham and Hadleigh, and Snape, Thorpeness and Aldeburgh for a total of 28 guests. And just recently, more donated minibuses took thirty of our Ukrainian guests to the Ukrainian Christmas Celebration at Bury St Edmunds Cathedral.





# Community Hubs

Some of our new friends from Ukraine felt quite smothered with love and attention in their early days in the UK, and the various Community Hubs hosted by churches around the town became a broad and accepting space where our Ukrainian friends could leave the intensity of the host/guest relationship for a couple of hours, and laugh, weep and speak with their peers and compatriots in their own language.

Each of the Community Hubs has had its own unique focus and atmosphere. One was a social space for relationship building and signposting on a Saturday morning. Another was built around a community café. A third was a sewing class, and a fourth held a structured English Conversation Class followed by the option of lunch. We regularly invited professionals from health, refugee support, employment and housing authorities to hold clinics and to offer their expertise and advice.

I put this in the past tense purely because this was our experience during 2022, and the situation remains fluid as we move into a New Year. As more of our Ukrainian guests find employment, the structure of the hubs has to change. Some have found that an early evening or weekend model is becoming a more attractive and accessible option.



# The Need for Jobs and Housing Intensifies

As we had expected, the issues of employment and finding sustainable housing solutions intensified in November. Many sponsors had now reached the UK government's minimum requirement of hosting for six months. Many were willing to continue hosting but, for others, household circumstances had changed, or they felt the need to regain their own space.

We reached out to the Ipswich Jobcentre, and now have a great relationship with them, culminating in a dedicated Ukrainian Jobs Fair in November, which attracted 85 Ukrainians from a twenty-mile radius of Ipswich.

We have also been knocking on the doors of the housing world, urgently seeking a resolve to issues surrounding the risk of homelessness, rent deposits and guarantees.



The staff members at Suffolk Refugee Support have been great friends, and we cheer one another on and seek to support each other's events and services. Their wisdom, local knowledge and encouragement has been invaluable. And we have walked well with other agencies such as Community Action Suffolk, and with other Ukrainian-specific initiatives from the Christian Communities in Felixstowe, Woodbridge, Lowestoft, Maldon and Rayleigh (Essex).

During the year, Alan has also visited and worked with Ukrainian refugees and responses on the Ukrainian borders of Romania and Moldova, and in Bosnia and Croatia, training them, comparing and contrasting what we do and how we do it, and learning from them, as the world seeks to respond with compassion and wisdom to this unique and therefore unprecedented crisis.





# The Growing Unity of the Churches

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.  
(Psalm 133:1-3)

"My prayer is... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you... so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:20-21)

Comment:

"Overall, and over the years, the churches in Ipswich appear to have had a relatively good relationship together. Often this has been expressed in church leaders meeting for ministers' breakfasts and praying together, or of members of different churches holding a Sunday evening meeting to worship together, or of occasional town-wide prayer and communication events such as Ipswich in Prayer, and Crown Him. From time to time, other churches come together to host one-off outreach projects, which can, of course, take a lot of planning and energy, create a real buzz for a week, but then afterwards everything tends to return to pre-project levels of engagement and co-operation.

What's different about this response? Well, not every church has engaged, and for those that have, they have been responsible for their own initiatives. But the Ukraine response is ongoing, it is practical, and it is responsive to priority needs. As such, this has enabled more robust inter-church relationships to grow, trust to be built, and a strong sense of our need for one another to be recognised. One church rejoices when another does well, and another decides to delay their event, in order to give preference to a third. We are sharing resources, learning from one another, and supporting one another like I've never seen before in the UK."

- Alan Cutting

# Some Facts and Figures

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in a major escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War, which began in earnest with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The invasion has likely resulted in tens of thousands of deaths on both sides, and has caused Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II.

An estimated 8 million Ukrainians were displaced within their country by late May, and 7.83 million had fled the country by 6 December 2022.[1]

The UK government introduced the Ukraine Family Scheme on 4 March 2022. This allowed applicants to join their family members (or extend their stay) in the UK. This was followed two weeks later by the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, which allowed Ukrainian nationals and their family members to come to the UK if they had a named sponsor (i.e., host) under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Weekly arrivals on this Scheme peaked at over 8,000 in the first week of May 2022. The rate of arrivals on both of the Ukraine visas schemes (the Family Scheme and the Sponsorship Scheme) has fallen since, and there were 2,000 arrivals in the final week of September.

By 20 December, 255,200 visa applications had been received through the two Ukraine schemes and 208,900 visas had been issued, but not all of those people had actually arrived in the UK.[2]

By mid-December, the number of Ukrainian refugees arriving in the UK under these two schemes just topped 150,000 (70% of them through the Sponsorship Scheme). Almost seven times that number (1.02m) have gone to Germany, and similar numbers to those in the UK went to Spain (157,429) and Italy (166,467). France had received 118,994 Ukrainians.[3]

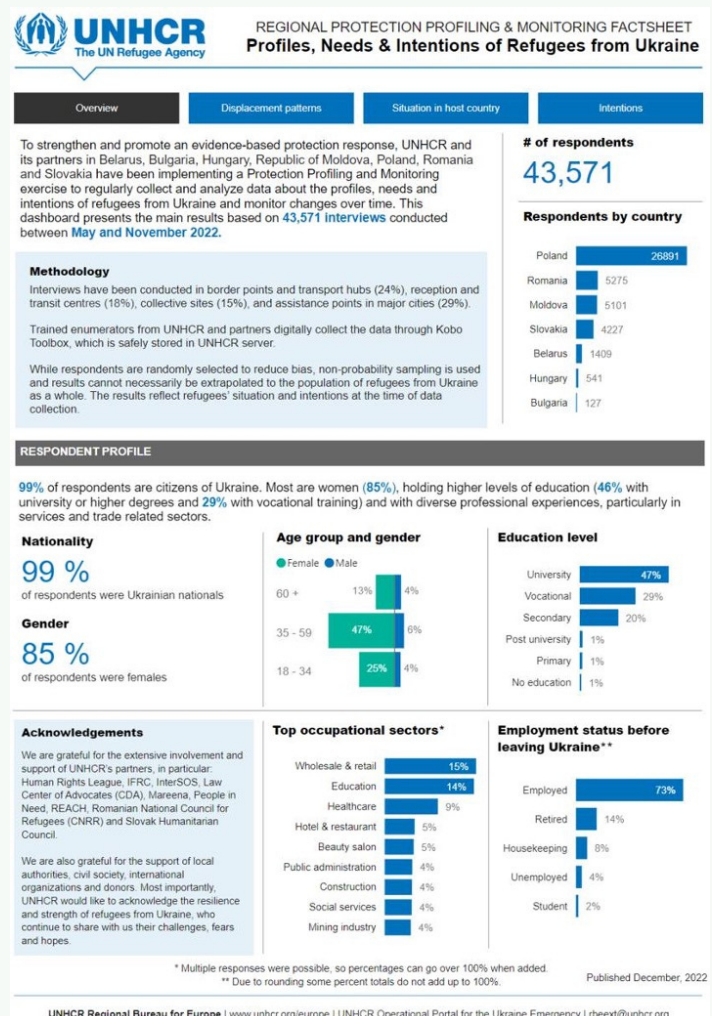
According to the Home Office and the DLUHC, as of 20 December 2022, 1,203 of the UK arrivals under the Sponsorship Scheme were living in Suffolk. At the 'lower tier' local authority level, East Suffolk had received the most (371), and Ipswich the least (103), although those living with reach of

Ipswich and regularly accessing its infrastructure (such as Jobcentre, employment, health providers etc) is probably 2-300. Initiatives related to Together for Ipswich have served approximately 250 Ukrainians (plus hosts), and we have seen maybe one third of this number very regularly during 2022.

According to national statistics, 15% of Ukrainian arrivals to the UK are men. However, anecdotally, we have seen fewer than 10% men. Maybe this is because they are not so keen to engage at Community Hubs and English lessons, or that they have already found work.

We have also found it easier to find and engage with those who came via the Homes for Ukraine (Sponsorship) Scheme, rather than the Family Scheme. Possibly this is due to those coming to stay with family members didn't feel the need to search out others of their compatriots, somehow assuming that their UK-based relatives were already fully integrated into life in the UK. However, this is not always the case, and many arriving through the Family Scheme have been among those most isolated and disconnected. We have also been involved in the rehousing of those whose family relationships have become too strained.

Nationally, by December, 56% of surveyed Ukrainian adults who had arrived in or before June were in work, and 17% were already living in private rented sector accommodation. Anecdotally, we would say that the local numbers in employment are a little higher, and those in private rented accommodation lower.



1. [www.migrationdataportal.org/ukraine/crisis-movements](http://www.migrationdataportal.org/ukraine/crisis-movements)
2. Statistics on Ukrainians in the UK - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))
3. [data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine](http://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine)

- Alan Cutting

# Did you know...

**...that Jesus was a refugee?**

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

(Matthew 2:13)



**...that Jesus knew what it meant to be homeless?**

Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

(Luke 9:58)

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

(John 1:11)

Then they all went home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

(John 7:53-8:1)





# Five Observations



These are some of the values that have been formed in us as we have sought to listen to, walk alongside and serve the Ukrainian community in Ipswich.

## **1) Importance must ultimately weigh heavier than urgency.**

In times of crisis, it is easy to panic into making rash responses that are not thought through well enough, and which become unsustainable and even harmful in the mid- to long-term. 'Do no harm' is a value weaved into all our messaging. Decisions such as inviting a potentially traumatised guest from an entirely different culture and language into one's home for 6-12 months should be considered very carefully, 'slept on', and fully agreed with all family members and others who might be impacted.

## **2) Relational kindness is ultimately more impactful than functional service.**

So many practical aspects of life in the UK, such as finding a doctor and dentist, biometrics, job centre appointments, rightly and inevitably consumed many sponsors' time and attention in the first few weeks of hosting but, in the longer-term, the most successful host/guest relationships have been just that, a relationship. Events such as 'Suffolk Tours' and Christmas parties were not merely organised to be the frilly edges of our response, but were fundamental to the building of good, wholesome, kind and trusting relationships.

The statutory health and educational agencies rightly took up their responsibilities to provide essential services to our Ukrainian guests, but who would accompany them to their first doctor's appointment; who would stand with them at the school gate? This relational 'soft support' makes the difference between a 'house' and a 'home'; between functionality and integration.

### **3) 90% of trauma recovery can be worked out through giving space and time.**

Where there is significant trauma, specialist services are available and invaluable, but we have found that despite the ongoing horrors of what their nation is facing, giving permission, space, time, and a healthy environment in which to lament and stabilise, and arranging peer support for our Ukrainian friends, are among the best things we can do to facilitate steps towards inner peace and healing.

### **4) Good mission is seeing where God is already at work, and joining in.**

This response has taught us again how churches should be supported in doing things their own way. Some churches focus more on forms of gospel proclamation, others on community and social action, and others still on prayer and sacrament. Words, works and wonders. The proclamation, the demonstration and manifestation of the one gospel. It is not the role of TFI to influence doctrinal emphasis, but to cheer on each church in the values and the ways they already feel called to serve God.

### **5) The priority of learning English, securing a job, and finding a home.**

Within weeks, it became very clear that to establish oneself in the UK, our Ukrainian guests arriving in the UK were faced with these three massive priorities. However wonderful the host, rural placements came with severe limitations of access and transport, creating issues and barriers with regard to these three priorities. And churches and hosts alike had to adapt from being those who kindly 'did things for people and gave things to people', into becoming equippers and mentors in the challenging task of supporting their guests to stand on their own two feet. 'Aid' had to turn into 'development'. This process will continue well into 2023.





# Building Healthy Relationships in the Community

Comment:

“Liaison, credit, confidence, and cooperation with local authorities - statutory and volunteer - has grown significantly through this response. It seemed to me that much of the pre-covid Church had lost its way in its relationship with its wider society, and had become intimidated with some of the perceived values and emphasis of local authorities that differed with their own. Consequently, some churches had settled for doing their own little thing, almost as a ‘set apart’ alternative to mainstream society. You in your small corner, and I in mine.

In one sense the church will always be alternative. There are certain thoughts and values that we will treasure and pursue, that others may not. Because ‘the love of Christ controls us’ (i.e., for the sake of following Christ) there will be aspects of societal direction and values that we will always say ‘no’ to. But whereas partnership is sometimes too strong a word, cooperation is not. We are called to be salt and light in the community, and there is so much we can do together, with good communication and cooperation, for the collective wellbeing of our town and community.

Christian community – this town needs your skills and creativity, respects your faith and values, and appreciates your energy and commitment.”

- Alan Cutting

Some of our host households share their stories:

“The national agencies seemed unable to match us – maybe because we live in a rural location - so we chose to go through Together for Ipswich, which was a simpler and more personal process, and they gave us lots of preparation, so we knew mostly what to expect.

We love being hosts! Our guests are lovely - so gentle, respectful, generous and kind. What's not to like about getting dinner cooked for me a few times a week, smiles and laughter, learning lots about the history, culture and cuisine of Ukraine, doing things and going places together? The men have enjoyed watching the World Cup together with beers and crisps. All of these things have been a great joy. And the GP, hospital and Jobcentre services have all been wonderfully supportive to them.

There have been some household challenges, such as calculating food costs and communicating schedules. And it was tough for them in the early days. We live quite a long way from Ipswich, and it took a long time for them to meet other Ukrainians and to find out about WhatsApp groups.

There were also some unexpected battles to fight. For example, getting a Ukrainian driver on my car insurance (he had to exchange his licence for a UK one first, or I had to pay double and change my policy), sorting Covid boosters, finding suitable jobs at something near the level at which they were working in Ukraine.

A typical day includes greeting one another, watching birds on the feeders whilst making breakfast, then getting down to work (our guests on their laptops applying for jobs and learning English, or going to classes or appointments - driving my car, and us doing our jobs), then meeting up for dinner around the table, having lots of conversation, and often playing with Word cubes after dinner.

It's been a great joy to know we can support them through a difficult time."

- B & J



"We all started communicating through WhatsApp, and then Google Translate, but that's not so necessary now, as our female guest has been determined to improve her English.

She is also an expert on the Church life of the town, having sampled at least four different churches. Most have been welcoming and pleased to see a new young person, although she was shocked to see one church community playing basketball in the main body of their building!

# Host Stories

# Host Stories

Our guest lives largely independently of us but shares in the cooking, and has introduced us to unfamiliar dishes and foods; buckwheat, pomelo and foods from the Polish shop, all of which were new to us.

She has found a part-time job in a local store, and we fit in with workdays ending at nine o'clock. It is interesting to experience our surroundings through a stranger's eyes; she is used to the cold in Ukraine, but many places in the UK are not as well heated as flats were at home."

- Anon.

"We are currently hosting our second family from Ukraine, and it has been a positive experience on both occasions.

We have found both families to be very polite, friendly and gracious. The kitchen could have been an area for tension, but it has proved to be a happy shared space where we can chat and have also shared meals. With only one bathroom we are taking showers at weird times, and using the downstairs toilet in the middle of the night so as not to wake our family. Sharing a house does constrain us, but we actually wish that the families would use the lounge and dining room more, as they have tended to keep to their bedrooms when we are at home.

One real benefit has been sharing Ukrainian food and learning about life in Ukraine, although it was easier to talk with our first family who had a greater command of English.

We have been humbled by the hard work and commitment both sets of parents have shown, particularly O, who is on her own with two sons, and leaves home to travel to work her 8-hour shift at 4am, and continues to work when she gets home."

- P & M

"We were one of the many couples in the UK who had offered rooms for the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme. But it was Alan and the 'Together for Ipswich' matching scheme that eventually connected us to our guests.

In July 2022 a Ukrainian mother and seventeen-year-old daughter arrived (along with another daughter who's living with the Bishop's family nearby). We have always enjoyed sharing our home with lodgers from different parts of the world, as a married couple and when we were single, so having people in our house is nothing new. However, we haven't before been so involved with our 'lodgers' and it has been a privilege and a challenge helping them climb the mountain of finding English language courses, jobs, dentists, grants, bank accounts and so on. We have learnt the joys and epic failures of google translate (!) and how frustrating form-filling can be when it's your twentieth time. We have also loved showing them the best of Ipswich and Suffolk.

Our eyes have been truly opened to many aspects of life in the UK that we hadn't experienced before – seen from the perspective of new arrivals to our shores – and our hearts have grown bigger to the plight of refugees around the world. As a result of our experience P has been inspired to enrol on a course to learn about teaching English to speakers of other languages, and we both hope to have other refugees stay with us in the future.

We are fortunate in getting on really well with our family. We enjoy their company (and their cakes!) but also weep with them when we see the news and are reminded of the sober reality that the rest of their family and friends are still very much in danger."

- R & P

“Having realised the urgency of need and been frustrated by the delays within the official channels, we decided to find our own family via Facebook. Not the recommended method, but we were led very quickly to a wonderful Christian family of five that needed help. It was our pleasure to step out and help.

As a retired couple living in the country, we were used to a quiet house and a quiet lifestyle, having five extras, including three children was quite a big change for us. Our guests were amazing people and so considerate and helpful, even though they were clearly struggling with the drastic changes they found themselves trying to adjust to.

It was a great blessing to us all that we had two kitchens which enabled us to cook separately - we eat very differently and at different times.

We were surprised at the amount of formal process there was for our guests to get through. From getting the government support, to schools, doctors and lots more. And don't even think about the dentist! Before all that, the original visa application process was a massive nightmare too.

Before our guests arrived, we attended one of Alan Cutting's Cultural Briefings - that really helped us get ready for the experience.

Ongoing support was fantastic - our guests got really plugged in to everything that was happening at the Kesgrave Community Hub and the Hope English Conversation Classes, as well as other events that took place from time to time. I think that those experiences helped the family dramatically.



The big issue our family had was living in the country, where public transport is challenging, to say the least. With the family settling in, this could have drawn them in so many directions (2 jobs, 1 college, 2 schools), and they found that all too much. Fortunately, through the network of Together for Ipswich, our guests arranged a transfer to another home right in Ipswich, which enabled them to connect up with the transport links they needed.

It was a great pleasure to be part of this family's story."

- j & s

"Our guests arrived from another sponsor placement in the beginning of September. They are a mum and a 17-year-old daughter, from Odessa.

They have their own bedrooms and bathroom, and share our kitchen, eating, cooking and washing facilities with us.

It has been a pleasure to meet them, and have them in our house. They are friendly and helpful, noticing little ways to help out. Sometimes we share meals together. Our guest is a good cook, and makes delicious food every day. Sometimes they try my cooking too! They are interested in chatting with us and communicating by Google translate.

The misunderstandings are often funny, as the Mum's English is not as good as her daughters.

They have not shared anything about their lives in Ukraine. I have asked them some questions which they answered in brief. They have no desire to discuss what is happening in Ukraine regarding the war, but they are constantly in touch with friends and family there.

I am surprised by how well it is going. I had anticipated more difficulties but there have been none. They are a joy to have in the house and they add to our lives.

We use a lot more fuel because they are at home quite a bit in their rooms and they cook hot food for every meal, but that's what the government financial help will cover.

With hindsight, I would do it again and when they move on, I probably will."

- Anon.

"We met our lovely guests on social media, as we had heard that the official matching process was slow, and watching the Ukrainian crisis unfold on the news, we couldn't sit by and do nothing. It could be risky, but sometimes you just have to hope and trust. It turned out much better than we expected! The visa application process was difficult, but when O and her daughter K arrived in the UK, we knew straight away that we would get along with them really well.

There were some further challenges ahead in helping them to adjust and find out about life in a new country, in finding a school for K, and helping O into employment, but now they've been with us for eight months and they are part of our family. We know that it's difficult for them to be so far from their home and family in Ukraine, but we do our best to show how much we care for them.

O is happy to have a safe home, a job, and a school for her daughter. They appreciate the kindness that English people have shown them since they arrived."

- S & S

# Stories and Quotes from our Ukrainian Friends

"I cannot find the right words to describe just how grateful I am to Together for Ipswich for their amazing support, for all your help, for your energy working tirelessly to help Ukrainians in need.

As a Ukrainian living in England for quite a number of years, Together for Ipswich has been an incredible support to me.

It was at the First Vigil where I discovered I wasn't alone and met other Ukrainians for the first time in Ipswich, and we became friends for life. Having to cope with this horrendously unfair and unprovoked war together was easier, understanding each other's pain and worrying sick about our loved ones.

Then, when the first Hubs opened, I had the pleasure of meeting so many amazing Ukrainians, who supported one another, listened, cried, hugged, laughed and sang together.

Ukrainians are extremely grateful for the support, love, and care they received from Together For Ipswich, their hosts, and the entire UK - we are certainly grateful for life!"

- N.L.



## Stories and Quotes from our Ukrainian Friends

"When we came to England, we didn't know what awaited us in a foreign country, but our worries were in vain. Our hosts have become our friends and we feel safe in their home."

- I.B.

"Every Thursday morning, I joyfully go to Hope Church Conversation Class. These meetings are more than English lessons. I want to say thank you for everything you do for us. For your support, for your kind words, for your knowledge and for the hope you give us. Thank you very much, I will never forget this."

- I.V.

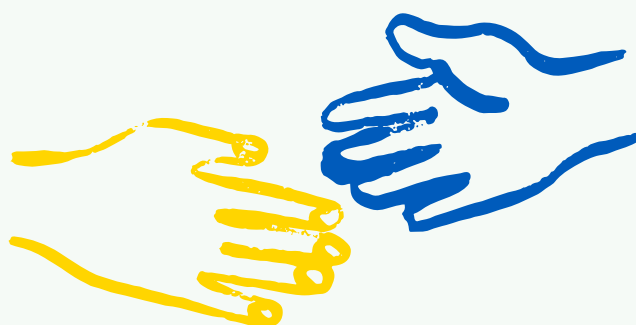
From a family who decided to return to Ukraine in November:

"Never in our lives have we had to experience such a mixture of feelings. But among them there is joy and hope and thanksgiving. The star shines brighter, the sky is bluer, the footsteps of the One who came and must come are heard louder."

We are personally convinced of your important work and service to Ukrainians in Ipswich. And now we hear and know about it not only in the UK, but also abroad.

Everything is fine with us, with the exception of frequent power outages. The children now have school holidays for five weeks. We continue to serve in the Church. Thank you for your prayers! Pray for us!"

- S.B.





## Stories and Quotes from our Ukrainian Friends

"The year passed very quickly. Many new things happened in our lives. We are very glad that with God's help we could live it. We were lucky to have you on our way. Your kindness, sincerity and love helped our family to overcome life's difficulties. Thank you for being with us. We will remember and pray for you. May God bless you, and your entire church family, and your country in the New Year 2023! Health, well-being, wisdom! With love."

- S.B.

"I would like to express my gratitude to the leadership of the country, all involved organizations, institutions, centres for work with refugees, religious communities, ordinary English people and all the people of Great Britain for the great and invaluable help they provide to our Ukraine, including citizens who have found refuge in this country.

I want to express my endless, special thanks and respect to my hosts, K & A. These are extremely kind, responsive, pleasant and kind people who were able to create excellent living conditions for me, and constantly supported me in everything. I wish them and their families good health and good fortune, and that they continue to be as responsive and cheerful as I know them to be."

- S.R.

"I am very grateful to God for you, and for your family. For the fact that I met you and now my family is in peace, security and we live with wonderful people!

The only problem is to actually find a job, because you get rejected ... but without a job, you can't move on. But in general, everything is fine."

- K.B.

## Stories and Quotes from our Ukrainian Friends

"Many thanks to the organisers of the New Year celebration! It was very nice to meet so many people from Ukraine. It is impossible to convey these feelings – it was as if I had visited Ukraine itself. Thank you for such a warm and soulful atmosphere."

- V.G.

"The children at the New Year party were absolutely amazing – you couldn't hide their joy! I am so proud of them all! What I absolutely loved was hearing the children talk amongst themselves, helping one another, cheering each other on. I truly felt as if I was in Ukraine, and it melted my heart! Thank you for organising such an amazing event that meant so much for so many."

- N.L.

I would like to express my gratitude to you, to Nataliia, to Helen and to all volunteers from our Ukrainian Hubs in Kesgrave and in Ipswich for the great support of all Ukrainians!

Thank you for your open hearts and invaluable support! How desperately you help to every Ukrainian during this hard time - it's a gift of life! Receiving such great support from the UK people helps us stay afloat. You are an amazing nation!

Thank you for your great work and humanity.

- T.M.



# Reflections from Church and Hub Leaders

“At River Church, we ran: (1) a ‘Love Ukraine Hub’ providing general support with registering for services, getting UK SIMs etc, and signposting to other events; (2) an ‘English Language Hub’ providing opportunities to practice conversational English; and (3) ‘Re-Work’, which is an employability course, as part of our response to receiving Ukrainian refugees in Ipswich. We also supported individual families with essentials and things like decorating on an ad hoc basis.

Our experience is that it was a joy and privilege to meet the Ukrainians who attended these programmes, and wonderful that several have now become regular, well-integrated members of our church as a result, with one of them now being on our staff team as an intern in our coffee department.

Our experience also demonstrated that the volunteer and/or staff hours required to do justice to these events was greater than anticipated, and we were more stretched than was ideal, at times. We also learnt that consistency is key, and uptake was less than we had hoped for, in part due to being let down by official partner organisations on several

occasions, which led to events being cancelled or not as advertised.

We have engaged with around 25 Ukrainians in total across all events, however the level of use of the two hubs dropped to a level where we did not feel that it was necessary to continue, and that other hubs around the town were offering sufficient support to meet the present need. We now refer Ukrainians to other hubs as and when we become aware of need, and we greatly value ecumenical partnerships with other churches as we collectively respond to this crisis.



More recently, we distributed 103 bags of kindness to Ukrainian families in the Ipswich area as part of our Love Christmas campaign, with a further 197 going to other refugees, and over 700 to other vulnerable and isolated households around the town."

*- Matt and Amy Key, Leaders, River Church*

"It was a new experience for us to be involved in the Conversational English Classes when this new initiative started at Hope Church.

It reminded me of my mother talking about the splitting of families in the UK in WW2 in 1940, when the government encouraged the evacuation of women and children from our cities into more rural areas.

The separation of families is always so challenging, but it soon became clear that although our friends from Ukraine loved their country, they were determined to make the best of a very difficult and traumatic situation.

A community very quickly formed and grew stronger. It has been an absolute privilege to have had some involvement in the weekly meetings and to see progress in terms of friendships, development with education for the young people and job opportunities.

It has been so good to see that some have returned to their homes in Ukraine and been reunited with family and friends. However, parting with our new friends is not easy but the experience has been a real blessing. We continue to pray for peace to return to Ukraine."



*Phil and Beryl, Volunteers,  
Hope Church English Conversation Class*



“Kesgrave Ukraine Hub, an All Saints Kesgrave initiative, opened May 2022. Seventy people attended our launch day and a survey showed 94% of guests spoke no or little English. We had no experience working with refugees, nor non-English speakers, but through church we are active in pastoral care, so we felt confident.

From Day 1 we adapted continually, taking things gently. Initially, our Ukrainians only needed each other. They formed small tight Ukrainian circles, desperately swapping stories, news and contact details. We played with the children and made tea.

On Week 5, a change happened. Our smiles were becoming familiar, and our guests began to make eye contact. We learned how to say ‘Welcome, my name is....’ in Ukrainian. This made the teenagers laugh. Trust was forming. As trust grew our guests began to let us help them, accepting the donated clothes, eating the food provided. One mother said in broken English, ‘Only here can my children play in Ukrainian with other children. I give you my heart.’

From June to September we provided: clothes, toys, bikes, computers, friendship, days out, school uniform and new school shoes, taught English, furnished homes, and helped our Ukrainians find employment and learn the language skills to start school. A football and a blanket under a cool tree allowed the children to form strong friendships. We provided gentle constancy and strong support while their lives were in turmoil.

I am proud of our Ukrainians.

They have shown courage, dignity, and worked diligently on English language. Most are now in employment.

And I am proud of our volunteers and community who give generously from their hearts.



Where is God in war? In our hubs - really evident in the love. We've seen Him feeding, clothing, caring and supporting his children.

Need a bike? Pray – it arrives within an hour. Need to furnish a three-bed house? Pray – fully furnished from donated items within 48hrs.



'Ask and you shall receive' – we've seen small miracle after small miracle at the hub, and it's been awesome.

What have we learned? It is important to grow a community of hosts before welcoming refugees. Remember, hosts are key, so support them to support happy relationships.

Include your community in such initiatives, give them a sense of ownership, let them help. Use your community Facebook page to ask for bikes, invite the person who gave them to visit the hub, accept their offer to volunteer, enjoy all your new friends! Ensure DBS and safeguarding always."

- Helen Wittgreffe, Leader, Kesgrave Ukraine Hub

# Gathered or Scattered?

## Different Models of Response

Gathered, or scattered? Centralised, or decentralised? What are the pros and cons when it comes to a town-wide refugee response?

We have coordinated with and learned a lot from similar responses regionally (across East Anglia), nationally (Sanctuary Foundation), and overseas (particularly in Romania and the Balkans). The model that the majority of these friends and partner organisations have adopted is based on one, town-wide hub, where collective energy, wisdom and resources are gathered and centralised, and where the Ukrainian community know where to go and what to expect.

The Ukrainian Community Hub based at the MegaCentre in Rayleigh (Essex) is a great example of this model, where up to 250 Ukrainians meet for English language, play therapy, jobcentre advice and a hot meal every Tuesday afternoon and early evening.

In Ipswich, there are a handful of different Community Hubs, and a handful more Top-Up shops, spreading their services over different days and times of the week, providing slightly different services, and having slightly different goals. Whereas coordination becomes a greater challenge, and certain results can be better achieved by gathering large numbers of people, our smaller, scattered, or decentralised model has enabled our Ukrainian guests to find a location and time that suits them best, are not overwhelmed by large events, and have the opportunity to develop deeper and trusting relationships. They also enable each church centre to express themselves in ways that best suit them, their vision and their schedules.

It would be foolish to argue one model over another, and both models have seen considerable success in the work they've done when responding to this unique crisis and need.

# The Unique Nature of this Response

It is worth noting how different this response is from other migration crises, be they people seeking asylum, those seeking economic improvement, IDPs or refugees. For example, at the time of writing this report, the Home Office has required Ipswich to receive about 200 more asylum seekers into a town centre hotel.

At first glance, appropriate responses to those 'arriving on a boat from Calais', and those 'arriving on a coach from Warsaw' would appear to be very similar.

However, in reality, the responses are very different.

For example, the Ukrainian refugee community in Ipswich is almost exclusively made up of women and children. They are from a European, mainly Christian (cultural) background. The vast majority are being hosted in local homes. They have the right to work. Many are planning to stay permanently in town.

In contrast, the vast majority of those seeking asylum are young men. Many are from non-European and Islamic cultural backgrounds. They are being housed in hotels. They have no right to work in the UK. They are likely to be in town only temporarily and then move on.

Consequently, the strategies required to serve these communities are very different, and TFI is in the process of setting up another team to meet this need.



# What Next?

As the anniversary of the conflict approaches (24 February 2023), many uncertainties remain. Many guests are constantly asking themselves, "Should I stay, or should I return to Ukraine?" They are having to make decisions 'with a blindfold on' – no one knows what the future holds. Maybe 15-20% of the 150 Ukrainians we have regularly related to have already made the decision to return. For some, they were missing their families too much, and for others, it was the difficult realisation that life in the UK was just too expensive.

In one sense, and for some, this is probably the best decision. Many of those who have returned have made life-long friendships in the UK. But for those who seek to remain, the challenges of integration, mainly relating to employment and housing, will continue well into 2023. It is our hope and prayer that we – Together for Ipswich representing the Christian community in Ipswich – can continue to rise to the challenge and respond with Christ-like wisdom, compassion, and in wholesome cooperation with the other amazing agencies our town is blessed with.

## Ipswich Vigil for Ukraine



- Prayer. Solidarity. Unity.
- On the first anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine, we plan to hold another vigil for Ukraine on the steps of
- **Ipswich Town Hall**
- **Cornhill IP1 1DH**
- **Friday 24 February 2023**
- **5.30pm**



# Biblical Mandate for Supporting Refugees



Let's start at the beginning:  
In Genesis 1 God says, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish... the birds... the livestock (etc.)."

So, God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

All human beings are made in the image of God. Every human being from every nation and language, and who has ever lived, bears the image of God and therefore is to be recognized as fully human, and given that dignity and equality of value.

In the Bible we meet all kinds of people: Jews and Gentiles; rich and poor; strong and weak. Hundreds are mentioned by name; many millions more are mentioned by their tribe or nation. Among them are refugees and IDPs (Internally Displaced People), normally referred to as 'aliens' or 'strangers', although not always. The noun 'alien' occurs over 100 times in the OT alone. Other times a different language is used, but it is nonetheless clear from the context that we are talking about those who for one reason or another have become displaced from their own homes and communities.

Today we use different words to describe the various peoples moving to Europe – migrants, refugees, asylum seekers etc., and we make distinctions between them, often on a political or legal basis, and usually through a consumeristic and/or a cultural lens, i.e., we are primarily concerned about economy and integration.

Some of the best-known Old Testament characters were refugees:

Abram (Genesis 12). Abraham was called by God to leave the land of the Chaldeans and journey to the land he would show him. The land of Canaan was promised to Abraham – but do you know how much he owned during his lifetime? One plot: a burial site for his wife Sarah. Abraham defined his status in Canaan as being an alien; a foreigner; a stranger (Genesis 23).

Joseph's family, and then the whole people of Israel became refugees. Because of famine they were forced to leave Canaan and move to Egypt where they remained 400 years.

Moses became a refugee, fleeing Egypt and living in Midian for 40 years. In Exodus 2 he refers to himself as an alien and named his son 'Gershom' (meaning 'alien in the land').

Ruth: the book of Ruth is a story about refugees. Forced by famine in Judah, Naomi's family moved to Moab, but after the death of her husband and boys she returns to Judah. Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law goes with her and enters the land as an alien. The book then gives us a detailed, beautiful, tender-hearted account about how the Levitical law is applied to refugees. Ruth of course, belongs to family-line from which Jesus would come.

Jeremiah: the prophet Jeremiah was a war refugee. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem Jeremiah and some others escaped to Egypt and remained there until their deaths.

All these OT heroes were aliens; strangers in the land, vulnerable, and needing to lean on the hospitality of their hosts.

It is clear from all these examples that being a refugee is not by definition negative, or unacceptable, or manipulative. It is circumstantial.

## Biblical Mandate for Supporting Refugees

The Bible not only gives us stories of refugees, but also provides teaching on how we should respond to those who (often quite literally) land on our shores. The law stipulated how the people of God were to treat non-believers who sought refuge in the land of Israel:

“Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt.”  
(Exodus 22:21);

“Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9);

“Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.”  
(Leviticus 19:10);

“When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him.”  
(Leviticus 19:33);

“The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:34);

“He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.”  
(Deuteronomy 10:18).

Clearly this issue is fundamentally important to God. To summarise: Israel was not to mistreat or oppress aliens. They were to welcome, to love, to care and provide for them. There is no sense in which the attitude was, ‘OK, we’ll let you in, but once you’re in you must fend for yourselves’. There was ongoing relationship and provision. What’s more, it is clear from the teaching of the Old Testament that this was not only a relational or societal issue, but also an issue of covenant and of justice.

Of covenant (Leviticus 19): To love God is to “love your neighbour as yourself,” (v18), and to “love the alien as yourself.” (v33).



Of justice (Malachi 3:5): "So I will come near to you for judgement. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice..." says the LORD Almighty.

Aliens had obligations as well. For instance, they were to abide by the law of Israel. "You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God." (Leviticus 24:22).

What does the New Testament teach us about refugees?

Come the New Testament we learn that the overall view toward refugees remains the same as in the Old Testament. However, there is a shift in emphasis, or direction. We read less about the nations coming to Jerusalem and more about Jerusalem going to the nations, sometimes due to persecution, and to reach people for Christ.

The life and ministry Jesus has things to teach us about the treatment of refugees and strangers.

Matthew 2 outlines Jesus' own experience of being a refugee, his parents and him being forced to flee not only from Bethlehem, but from Judea, and therefore entering Egypt as refugees.

In Matthew 25 Jesus told a parable about sheep and goats. "For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in" (v35). "Truly," he continued, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (v40).

In John 1 we read that "he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

Think also of Jesus with the Centurion, or with the Samaritan woman, and consider the story of the Good Samaritan that he chose as an illustration with the Rich Young Ruler. All these point to his acute awareness of the need to cross cultures with equity, respect, compassion and understanding. And other writers of the New Testament follow the same theme. “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2).

In fact, none of us who claim to be Christian can hold too firmly to our national roots, or possessively own them as ‘ours’. The New Testament teaches that when I repented and believed in Jesus, I was actually uprooted - raised with Christ and seated with him in heavenly places, from where I have received every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 2:6, 1:3). It teaches me that now that my commonwealth - my citizenship - is in heaven (Philippians 1:27, 3:20), and that I am merely back here on earth not as the possessor of territory, but as a reconciler; an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20) – someone who gives himself away for the sake of others.

Hebrews 11 lists many Old Testament women and men of faith and says of them (v3); “All these... were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.”

And Peter (in his first epistle) describes God’s elect as “strangers in the world, exiles, scattered throughout the provinces; (those) who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.”

Just how rigidly does your theology allow you to control your borders? Perhaps God’s people – his ambassadors - feel just a little too settled in their embassy’s, too self-protective, and need to hang a little more loosely to national identity, to homeland, to property and to possessions.

# Jobs Fair



One of the agencies we initially found it difficult to connect with was the Jobcentre. We were aware that they were doing a great job seeking employment for our Ukrainian friends, but unless one had a pre-arranged and ticketed appointment, it seemed impossible to connect with them.

Other agencies had voiced the same to me. In order to speak with the management of the Jobcentre, I had rung their 'Ipswich' helpline, which turned out to be a national helpline. I had a rather bizarre telephone conversation with someone in a distant call centre, who had no idea how to address my request. I was aware that one of our Ukrainian friends, Nadiia, a very capable and proactive young woman who had recently arrived in town with her mother, had managed to gain three weeks work experience with the Jobcentre, and she told me about a Job Fair that she was helping to arrange at Ipswich Corn Exchange. So I went along.

It was massive, loud and buzzing with employers and opportunities, but at least this time I could walk in without a ticket. Even as an ethnic Brit, and one not needing to find a job, I found it overwhelming.



I also saw little clusters of my Ukrainian friends, in twos and threes, looking equally bewildered.

## Jobs Fair

As we huddled up together, virtually unable to hear ourselves think, I thought we could do something similar, only different. A Ukrainian-specific Jobs Fair.

Spotting someone with a Jobcentre lanyard on, I introduced myself and my role. Suddenly the impenetrable walls of the system fell. Kelly was a real person, and was delighted to connect with us.

Over the next few weeks, I met with her team, and my request for a Ukrainian Jobs Fair was immediately embraced. So Together for Ipswich and the DWP Jobcentre, with Nadiia in the middle, worked on hosting a Jobs Fair. I had prepared a team of eight, to welcome, interpret and promote TFI's wider response to the crisis.

The day came, and it was pouring with rain. Nadiia was ill in bed, the TFI display didn't fit through the door of the Jobcentre, and one of the team misread the brief and misunderstood the timing of the event! Despite this potentially disastrous start, the Fair was wonderful. The recruitment personnel of twelve employers or employment sectors (retail, sports, health, care, local authorities etc) - representing hundreds of jobs - exhibited, and 85 Ukrainians flooded into the room. There was great buzz, and we look forward to the outcome in terms of new jobs secured.

As the event was coming to an close, and the last of the Ukrainians had left, and the exhibitors were ready to pack up and go, I stood and with a loud voice grabbed their attention. On behalf of TFI and the Christian community in Ipswich, and in partnership with the DWP Jobcentre, I thanked them for coming, and trusted that they had felt it was worth their time and energy. I told them again of the unique demographic and great work ethic of the Ukrainian community, how they could see that lashing rain would not prevent them from coming, and said how much it meant to our Slavic friends that Ipswich employers were ready to invest specifically into them.





The following day, one woman who had attended the event came to me with sparkling eyes. “It was wonderful,” she said. “I had previously been to the big (general) Job Fair in the Corn Exchange, and exhibitors were sour and impatient and clinical. It was so noisy I couldn’t hear properly, and I was so overwhelmed that I just left. This one was completely different. People were friendly, interested in me, and there was a great atmosphere. I learned so much about the job market and how things work around here.”

- Alan Cutting



# Stories from Siret, Romania (on the Ukraine border)

Alan reports from the Romanian border with Ukraine on 23 March 2022.

"I looked in the direction of two policemen, who were not unkindly - but merely with functionality - directing a simple woman in her forties and her son to their tent for their initial briefing. An older woman followed them a few paces behind. Citizens of Ukraine, the second largest country in Europe, when they woke this morning, they had, against all their expectations a few weeks ago, become 'refugees' the moment they had crossed the Romanian border, five minutes previously.

My mere glance in their direction was all it took for me to register the nature of this disaster in a whole new way. The boy was about ten or eleven, and wore his coat not over his shoulders, but hunched protectively over his head. The expression on his mother's face, her gait, and her body language, cut me up deeply, and took my breath away. She looked utterly bewildered, like a lamb being led to the slaughter, numbed by deep shock, as she followed two unknown policemen into a completely unknown country and an utterly unknown future. With a hand on her son's shoulder, she gently steered him along, a touch that was clearly as much for her reassurance as it was for his. I don't know their circumstances, where they had come from, who they had left behind, or where they were headed, but I really trust that they have found kind people to help them through this dreadfully traumatic experience.

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# Stories from Siret, Romania (on the Ukraine border)

Arriving as we had just minutes earlier, it was obvious that it would have been far too intrusive to ask any questions of these refugees. They didn't want to talk about it to strangers. Maybe in the west, people would want to talk, to tell their story for the umpteenth time. But these are Ukrainians, proud, solid, stoic people from a Slavic land, hard-working, not greatly given to demands of their human rights, or too concerned for their mental health, at least for the moment. They are excitable and volatile when they want to be, but generally they are a nation of people who roll up their sleeves and get on with what needs to be done.

But our friend, host, and partner Liviu had met a few of the workers on his visit to this border a week or so earlier. He introduced us to Vadim, and Vadim was happy to talk.

"This is Vadim," Liviu told us. "He helped set up the convoy we drove in into Ukraine last week." Vadim, late teens or twenty by my initial reckoning, was a cool dude. Wearing a black Nike tee-shirt under a black hoody, and a black Mercedes baseball cap perched at an angle on his head, the only splash of colour was from the big official translator badge that hung from a black Mercedes lanyard around his neck. He hopped from one foot to the other, each shoulder dropping in turn, as if he were exercising on an invisible treadmill, or riding uphill on a bike.

A Ukrainian living very near the border with Romania, Vadim had grown up speaking both languages. He spoke no English, but with Liviu's intrinsic

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Romanian and my dreadful and faltering Russian, we were able to have a chat. In between several interruptions, that is. Vadim was much in demand.

“Are you working?” I asked him. He looked at me and laughed. “No, I’m 15.” Double take from me. I guess he did look 15, but it was the job he was doing, and the way so many people were dependent on him that made me think he was 20. He had been travelling over the border each morning for five or six weeks, coordinating convoys, liaising with the police on the front line, linking refugees with aid workers, giving SIM cards to those who had crossed into Romania, setting up phone charging stations and giving them food and drinks. And then, each evening, he would cross back into a war-torn Ukraine and go home to his Mum.

“So, was this part of your plan in life, to help people? What were your dreams before the war started? Did you want to study and travel?” Vadim looked at me again, mystified; eyes that said, ‘What planet has this man come from?’ “No, of course not. I just wanted to ride my bike with my mates.”

“I bet you’ve learned a lot in the last few weeks,” I said, somewhat unnecessarily. Vadim’s response was merely to exhale, puffing out the affirmative response of a boy who’d become a man, almost overnight. We chatted some more, Liviu able to give him good, compassionate

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big-brother encouragement. “When this is all over, you get back to school, eh?” Vadim agreed. It’s not easy for a young Ukrainian lad to submit himself to vulnerability, but he was clearly receiving energy from this supportive attention. All the while Vadim hopped his silent rap, eyes tired but still animated, respectful, engaged, energetic and smiling.

Smiling, that is, until I gave him a big hug. Physically, this wasn’t easy. The stiff peak of his baseball cap clunked awkwardly into my forehead. But he wasn’t resistant. And when we let each other go, those smiling eyes were distinctly wet. “I must go and help,” he said, fighting off his pain and exhaustion with yet more worthy action.

‘Look after him, Lord,’ I prayed as he left. ‘Look after him’.



# Together for Ipswich

Irrespective of whether their home in the UK is temporary or permanent, it has been our privilege to walk with those Ukrainians who have sought refuge in our town during 2022.

We pray for peace in their nation and, should they wish to stay, are committed to supporting their integration into our community.

We sincerely thank every church, agency and individual who has rolled up their sleeves and worked so hard towards this response, and look forward to further joint cooperation in the coming months and years.

For information on other initiatives from Together for Ipswich, go to...

 [www.togetherforipswich.uk](http://www.togetherforipswich.uk)

or contact us at

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