

April 9, 2023

Report on Ukranian Food Drive in Torun, Poland

I would like to report on the Ukranian Food Drive during the WMA championships completed on April 1, 2023.

On March 15th, 2023, with the benefit of Vern's understanding of how all things work at the WMA level, I initiated a communication to Team Manager Fennie Van Osch from Holland, specifically to help me both explore the viability and navigate the possibility of establishing a Ukranian Refugee fundraising initiative for the duration of the WMA championships.

With a bit of prior investigation, I learned of a very important foundation named **Fundacja EMIC** (**website address is <https://emic.com.pl>**) who are present in the Torun and Bydgoszcz region of Poland. The **EMIC** have broadly served approximately 33,000 Ukranians in the past year who now reside between these areas with general necessities, and more specifically in recent months, offer all of the key services so to safely and effectively settle newly arriving families (approximately 4,000 people) into unfamiliar surroundings. Each person receives somewhat customized support depending on their needs. From Canada, the justification for the initiative was clear. But how to execute was challenging given that there was no visibility on whether there could be interest to use the WMA venue as a place for such an initiative, and, we were a mere 10 days away from the commencement of the championships.

Within one week prior to departing for Poland, we received approvals from WMA executive, the Local Organizing Committee of the WMA championships and the Torun City Council to proceed. This was all to the credit of Fennie's enthusiasm, support and excellent communication channels.

A letter to define and request participation in the fundraising program was created and immediately shared with the all of the world's Team Manager's on What's App. Within days, I received commitments from several key countries of their eagerness to share my letter with their athletes both ahead of and during the championships. Flyers and one very large campaign banner were printed in Toronto and off to Poland we were with a plan.

A booth location was chosen for us in a key, high traffic position at the competition arena where all athletes and spectators has to pass through every day. On the first day of the championships, we noticed that two charities were now involved with the initiative. The LOC explained that the needs in Poland are far more diverse than we imagined. While EMIC, our originally intended recipient of goods focuses on needs of families, another organization named Dobra DLA Dobra focuses on the needs of the soldiers and medical teams at the Polish side of the border. Our comprehension of the scale of actual needs for war relief grew but we also gained an immense understanding of the strain placed on the people in Poland who have selflessly been at work helping the refugees now for over one year. The two agencies agreed to work together and the project became even more important than we ever could have imagined.

Commencing March 25th, Canadian Masters athletes and athletes from around the world, started to generously collect non-perishable food items from nearby grocery stores for donation to these organizations. Day by day, the donations grew and grew and grew. One incredible American athlete crocheted a blue and yellow baby blanket with a message that brought us all to tears. It read

"To whomever receives this blanket, I made this blanket as a way to show my support for the people of Ukraine. Sending love and peace to you!"

I am proud to confirm that our donations have gone directly into the hands of the Ukrainian people. There has been joy, and there have been tears. But in the end, we have made a difference. As of April 1st, 1,000 pounds of non-perishable food, along with money in the equivalent of \$1,000.00 CDN was directly distributed to those in need. In some cases, we have even been blessed with corporate matching programs so the dollar amount is likely to increase in the coming weeks.

The incredible energy and generosity of our global athletes made this all possible. And I want to recognize everyone who took time from their competition focus to show their compassion for not only the Ukrainians but also, to the good people of Poland who have carried the heavy weight of welcoming 1.2 million individuals to Poland in the last year.

To give greater context to this incredible initiative, Vern and I were privileged to have visited the offices of EMIC, the registered charitable organization mentioned above who serve to integrate Ukrainian refugees into Poland's society. The offices have a food drive for weekly needs, a medical advisor, a career counselor and Polish as a second language classes; services which are all offered without delay. I personally felt the anguish on the faces of those who had just arrived to Poland and saw the masked heartbreak on the faces of those a bit further along and presently enrolled in language class. We also saw the strength and conviction of the Ukrainian people to re-build their lives as quickly as possible. And we received in-depth explanations from the five incredible case workers who tirelessly endeavor to give hope and much needed services to people who have had to leave their world behind. The long range effort that goes into integrating the children for example, is remarkable. But above all, we saw first hand, the impact of war on beautiful human beings no different than you and I. Back at the stadium, handing food to a Ukrainian grandmother who is caring for the welfare of three generations of refugee family members was poignant on so many levels. Her tears became my tears. Knowing that our open hearts have had such a positive impact is thanks to you.

If you have not been able to find a meaningful way to support the Ukrainian people in the past year, I stand behind my recommendation to donate money to the amazing group at EMIC who have taken on the responsibility to create a safety net of settlement services for hundreds and hundreds of refugees. Their ongoing need for support in funding the services they provide revolves on a weekly basis. I know Olga and her team personally and the work they do is life changing.

Here attached is a Certificate of Appreciation and award from an organization named Dobra DLA Dobra which I believe marks the positive impact of our project so well. Additional certificates were awarded to the Team Managers from around the World, Fennie Van Osch, Vern Christensen and Dala Bortolussi who were so generous and supportive in making this a huge success. Thank you all for making this matter!

Wendy Melvin, Team Manager, Canada
Photos attached



All the food collected!



Sorting the food.