

## The Ukrainian refugees under our roof in Poland



Greetings, from our guests from Ukraine!

I was asked to share with you our experience of hosting refugees from Ukraine in my family home in Poland.

I come from a small mountain village, my family house is situated off the beaten track, quite high up. Both my siblings and I started our own families and moved out some time ago. My father stayed in a large, empty house and decided to rent most of the house to tourists coming to Szczyrk this winter.

When war broke out in Ukraine, families automatically started fleeing the war. As soon as that happened, I started to wonder and do research on how I could help. The easiest form of help would be to make our home available, but reservations already made would be a problem. Unable to sleep, I spent the whole night browsing the rapidly emerging help groups for Ukraine on social media. Without thinking, I started texting my Dad that we had to do something to help these poor people. At 6 am my wonderful Dad wrote back to let me know that he agreed to invite some families under his roof.

Four double rooms can accommodate as many as eight people, so I notified one of the support groups where volunteer drivers were going for people waiting at the border. By 8am we were contacted by one driver who had 8 people, already waiting at the border, he could bring them around 3 - 4 p.m. So my father and I got to work to prepare a house to receive guests. The inspections at the border were dragging on, in the afternoon I got a call that it was not known when they would arrive; and that instead of 8 people there would be 10. So we adapted the living room as an additional bedroom. We did some basic purchases and decided to take care of the rest the following day.

At about 4 am, two vans brought 4 women and 7 scared children. They carried just small backpacks or handbags. I noticed they were wearing spring shoes, which in our mountain conditions, still full of snow, were not the best! It turned out that all the ladies were from one family, a grandmother with daughters, a daughter-in-law and six grandchildren.

I was touched by the story of one teenager who came with them as a translator — he speaks English



Pictures are made by some of Ukrainian children for me and my dad

very well. The boy was sent by his mother to live abroad. Mom was unable to travel, and Dad and older brother went to the front to fight. The next day the boy wanted to visit his brother's friends, in a completely different part of Poland. Polish railways made their trains available to refugees from Ukraine for free, so my husband and I packed the boy on the train, asking him to stay in touch.

The ladies from Ukraine turned out to be very nice. With the help of family and friends, we quickly organised help in the form of groceries, personal hygiene products and a clothes collection. I have to admit that social media is a great tool for this.

On the second day, our visiting families asked if three more mothers with children could come to be with them. My dad said if they can accommodate each other he saw no problem. I organised transport for them, and soon another 6 people arrived to stay under my father's roof. My dad kept two rooms and a bathroom for himself, and the rest of the house now serves our new friends from Ukraine.

Through Facebook, the message about my father's big heart spread quickly among the inhabitants of Szczyrk. At intervals people brought gifts and offered him help. The children are able to go to school, they organise various activities and trips; the ten women take care of my Dad and cook for him every day. My wonderful Dad has become a few years younger, he smiles and takes every phone call. Following the example of this good man, several other families agreed to accept refugees into their homes. The local community supports as much as it can; in this way, Poles are somehow able to repay the world their debt of gratitude from the Second World War.



Ukrainian guests' first outing in Poland

Thinking about the situation, I suddenly realised that we should speak out about helping the Ukrainian families, because most people will not perceive it as pride, but as a motivation to give help themselves.

Gabi K



"Dziekuje" on pictures in polish means Thank you