



A Safe Place: Preparing to Support Refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan

March 30, 2022

Sponsored by Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce (WCGB)

(report prepared by David Morris, Chair, WCGB)

Welcome and Introduction to the Evening

A great many people throughout Grey and Bruce have opened their hearts, wallet and even their homes in support of people displaced by the wars in Ukraine and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, there were still many questions surrounding Canada's response to both of these crises and how we, as individuals or organizations, can support those who would like to be relocated to this area. This virtual meeting was intended to:

- Provide answers to these questions, where possible, and to indicate what still was not known.
- Begin to form a network of people and organizations wanting to support refugees and people displaced by war in coming to Grey and Bruce
- Outline the challenges faced by those interested in hosting or sponsoring refugees or displaced people.

WCGB sees this as the first of a potential series of workshops related to the topics introduced this evening.

Presentations:

- 1) **“What is Canada doing to support refugees and people displaced by war?”**
“What are the requirements for Ukrainians and Afghans to come to Canada?”

Tania Maksymenko, Rural Employment Initiative, [Newcomer Centre of Peel](#) (NCP)

NCP receives about 15,000 newcomers per year. Through the Rural Employment Initiative, NCP has partnered with Grey and Bruce Counties for several years to assist newcomers considering relocation here. As of March 30, NCP had a list of 147 Ukrainians looking to a place to live and work in Canada. About half were already in Canada. Ukrainians who come to Canada are not called “refugees” because they are coming under a [Three Year Temporary Visa](#). The term being used is “people displaced by war”. When they apply for a visa, Ukrainians may also apply for an open 3-year work permit that allows them to work here without restriction. [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada](#) (IRCC) has indicated that they will be eligible for the supports provided by [Grey Bruce Settlement Services](#). (Details in the GBSS presentation.) However, people coming to Canada on temporary visas receive no financial support from the government either to come here or to assist with living expenses here. So, they must find work here as soon as possible, which they are eager to do. It is important for them to obtain housing in areas near employment opportunities that match their skillset. None will have driving licences valid in Ontario when they arrive. Housing must be in a place where they are

safe and feel safe and welcomed. Fluency in English varies, so some will require English language training (ESL) before they will be able to start work.

from the Chat: There are several good mobile language translation phone apps to help with in-person communication with newcomers with limited English. You type in what you want to say and the app speaks in the selected language. Many Ukrainian do speak Russian as well as Ukrainian. The official languages of Afghanistan are Pashto and Dari.

Note that the name of the country is Ukraine, not “The Ukraine”. Ukrainian find the latter term insulting because that is the Russian term. Similarly, the capital city is Kyiv, not “Kiev”.

Some other possible resources are:

[Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel](#)

[Apply for the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel \(visitor visa and work permit\)](#)

Ukrainian Canadian Congress

<https://www.ucc.ca/>

<https://www.ucc.ca/stand-with-ukraine/>

They have an online form for interested volunteers:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HYPCHTP>

Embassy of Ukraine to Canada

<https://canada.mfa.gov.ua/en>

Canadian Red Cross Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Appeal

<https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/current-emergency-responses/ukraine-crisis>

Resources to support Ukrainians <https://www.facebook.com/groups/canadahostukrainians/>

2) My experience of supporting refugees or displaced people to come to Grey Bruce

- a) Susanne von Törne (Flesherton) commented on her experience of arranging for a Ukrainian family to come to Canada. She flew to Germany. Then, she and some friends drove to the Polish border to meet and pick up the family and drive them back into Germany. Displaced people receive no financial support in Germany. They found it very hard to apply for visas in Germany and had to hire a lawyer. It was impossible to book an appointment to obtain the necessary biometric scanning in Germany before June. They were able to get an appointment in Lyons, France in mid-April.

Most Ukrainians were able to bring very little money with them and will need help to pay the costs of coming to Canada. E.g. airfare, living expenses here. People who agree to host a family in their home need to be prepared to cover many expenses for an indefinite period of

time . Do not convey to your guests that you expect them to say how thankful they are. They will do that when they are ready.

The Ukrainians are deeply traumatized and may also have survivor guilt and/or PTSD. Some have been abused physically, emotionally or verbally during their escape or while in a “host country”. It will be important for them to have access to counselling from someone who speaks Ukrainian (see note in chat). Once here, they will need to feel that they are starting to regain some control over their lives so allow them to make their own decisions as much as possible, cook their foods, pick out the clothing they like, which jobs to apply for, etc. As much as you can, help them support family members and friends still in Europe.

From the Chat

Re: counselling and mental health

From Tania Maksymenko: I can help connect you with Ukrainian psychotherapists

Book recommendations: 1) The Choice: Embrace the Possible by Edith Eger. 2) The Gift: 12 Lessons to Save Your Life: Dr. Edith Eva Eger

Dr Clare Pain is a Toronto expert on refugee mental health. She has a variety of youtube videos that are publicly available.

CMHA Grey Bruce <https://greybruce.cmha.ca/> has connected with the Opening Doors program of CMHA Toronto https://toronto.cmha.ca/opening_doors_project/ that provides training related to addressing the mental health needs of newcomers.

- b) Marg Whitley (Southampton) shared from her experience of being part of the Huron Shores Refugee Support Group (HSRS) group that temporarily hosted 17 Afghans in the fall of 2021. It was a lot of hard work with a steep learning curve but was very rewarding. Among other things, HSRS had to provide or arrange for food, housing, suitable clothing, ESL, transportation and emotional support. The Afghans were “Government-Assisted Refugees” and in due course, they did receive some financial support from the Canadian government. However, they needed much personal support in settling here and in meeting their physical and emotional needs. The [Arden Language Centre](#) in Owen Sound was very helpful in providing ESL at no cost. To obtain the government services that they needed the Afghans had to relocate to Toronto or K-W. However, they still keep in touch with their new friends in Southampton.

Tips for those hosting refugees or displaced people:

Maintaining confidentiality is mandatory because family members in their home country can be put at risk if the names of those who are here become public. Do not allow any identifying information or pictures to become public (e.g. the city they came from; their profession. etc)

Afghans communicate with each other using WhatsApp, (as do people from many other middle-eastern countries) so become familiar with it.

Be fully present for them. Accept their hospitality if offered (e.g for a meal). They want to help you learn about them, their culture and who they are. Don't make decisions based on your assumptions about them. Ask if there is something you really need to know but don't intrude. They may share their story with you when they are ready. Initially, you will need to do a lot for newcomers but it is important that they learn how to live independently here so don't keep doing everything for them. Be sure to take care of yourself. It will be demanding work and you may experience vicarious trauma. Do not try to do this by yourself; arrange for a diverse group to assist you.

They are traumatized but will be in crisis-mode when they arrive. It may take some time before the symptoms of the trauma and/or PTSD begin to appear.

Symptoms of PTSD: Reliving the Trauma (“Flashbacks”), Nightmares, Depression, Anxiety, Mood Disorders, Substance Use Disorder

From the Chat

Many people in Ukraine use Telegram and Viber. Some use WhatsApp

3) Settlement and support services in Grey Bruce

a) Suneet Kukreja, Grey Bruce Settlement Services Coordinator

Grey Bruce Settlement Services (GBSS) is a collaboration between YMCA of Owen Sound Grey Bruce and Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce. Their services are funded by IRCC and are free to eligible newcomers. (permanent residents (PR), those approved for PR and convention refugees). IRCC has indicated that Ukrainians coming on special visas will be eligible for settlement services from GBSS. (GBSS is not funded to serve other temporary residents. However, GBSS will assist them in connecting with other agencies.)

GBSS services begin with a one-on-one meeting to assess client needs and help them create a personal settlement plan. Follow-up services include assistance with: monitoring progress on the settlement plan; completing forms, applications and other documents; navigating local systems such as health care and public school, recreation services, education and income assistance; provide referrals to programs and services within the community; finding employment. GBSS also offers citizenship classes and information sessions on a wide range of topics related to living in Canada, generally and in Grey Bruce specifically. GBSS offers free LINC certified English training and conversation circles. Settlement Worker in Schools (SWIS) provide support and service for newcomer children and youth throughout schools across Grey & Bruce Counties. For more details visit the GBSS website at:

<https://www.ymcaowensound.on.ca/community-initiatives/settlement-language-services-programs/>

b) Azar Azad, Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce <https://welcominggreybruce.ca/>

WCGB is a non-profit corporation that can:

- Provide support, guidance and information for people or groups hosting or sponsoring newcomers;
- Help such groups connect with a network of local people with sponsorship/hosting experience, with needed resources and with the service agencies best able to assist them

- Collaborate with other organizations and agencies to address the needs of newcomers not eligible for government-funded services (e.g. migrant workers; international students; other temporary residents)
- Provide workshops on: Welcoming and supporting people of other cultures; and equity, diversity, inclusion

From Chat Box

Re: Afghanistan

- *Here is the link to watch the Special House Committee on Afghanistan. Friba Rezayee, Founder of Women Leaders of Tomorrow in Vancouver, and former AFG Olympic athlete (Athens 2004), was in the last group of three who spoke to the committee: This video is very informative.*
<https://parlvu.parl.gc.ca/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2?fk=11561967>
- *Does anyone have a contact for refugees who are still trying to leave Afghanistan? Afghan colleagues have applied through the email address given by the government but have heard nothing. Alex Ruff's office has tried to follow up but with no file number issued by Canadian Foreign Affairs, we can't move forward.*
- *From Margaret Whitley: Many of our Afghan friends have family members who have escaped to a third country or are trying to escape from Afghanistan, but to come to Canada they will need private sponsors and since our group arrived with nothing and are still trying to even find jobs, we need to find groups that are able to provide sponsorship for 4 families. Our initial group, Huron Shores Refugee Support Group have already donated and raised tens of thousands of dollars to support the 17 that are already here. If you are interested in doing this please let us know.*
Margaret Whitley mwhitley0110@gmail.com Cheryl Grace cherylgrace1@gmail.com
- ***Are you interested in helping to sponsor an afghan family defined as high risk through UNHCR?***
If you are interested in helping to sponsor a family from Afghanistan that is at high-risk of harm from the Taliban, please contact Laura Robinson (laura.robinson@sympatico.ca; 519 270 9050). Laura lives in Grey-Bruce and works with Senator Marilou McPhedran. Since August they have worked to evacuate women and their families who have received death letters from the Taliban. Laura knows of families in third countries for who desperately need private sponsorship groups. There are also female athletes who escaped to a third country and are on their own, and a couple who founded the Civil Society organization in their province, also in a third country. People who would like to join private sponsorship groups should contact her right away. -Thank you so much!

4) Question and Answer Session

Q: Does one have to apply to the government to host someone from the Ukraine?

A: There are 2 main ways that Ukrainians can come to Canada. One is through the family reunification process, for which family members in Canada have to apply to sponsor family members. The second option is for them to come on a 3-year temporary resident visa. This latter option is open only to citizens of Ukraine. In this case, no application is required from potential hosts in Canada because the Ukrainians are not officially designated as “refugees” or as permanent immigrants. The Ukrainians in Europe must apply and must undergo biometric scanning. They must also apply for an open 3-year work permit if they want to work here. Once Ukrainians obtain a visa, they only need a way to get to Canada and a means to pay the air fare.

Links:

[Ukraine immigration measures: Help bring family members to Canada](#)

[How to apply for the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel \(visitor visa and work permit\)](#)

Q: What is the process for sponsoring a refugee privately?

A: **This link to IRCC’s “Sponsor a Refugee” page outlines the requirements and process in detail**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/private-sponsorship-program.html>

The Refugee Sponsorship Training Program provides much the same information, as well as training and many helpful resources. <https://www.rstp.ca/en/>

In Grey Bruce, groups have sponsored refugees either a) in cooperation with a Sponsorship agreement holders (SAH) that has signed an agreement with the Government of Canada or b) as a Group of Five which must make their own agreement with the government. Many of the larger church denominations are recognized as SAHs. Working in partnership with a local congregation of one of those denominations is recommended because the process is much simpler and the SAH will guide you through the application process to make sure that it is done correctly. Ask a local church if they would support your application if your group could raise the money needed (which will be several tens of thousands of dollars). Sponsors are legally required to provide financial support for the first year. IRCC has a list of refugees who are eligible to come to Canada. The process for sponsoring someone not on that list, (e.g. a relative or friend of someone who is here already) requires a lot more paperwork and time.

Many refugees come to Canada as “Government-Assisted Refugees”. (GARs) The government provides funding for GARs for the first year but it is often not enough to meet all their needs. Once they have permanent resident status, GARs may relocate anywhere in Canada. One does not need to be a “sponsor” to assist them. To date, few GARs have come to Grey Bruce.

Anyone hosting or sponsoring a refugees or displaced people is strongly encouraged to do so as part of a diverse group. (i.e. gender, age, profession, etc.) Being part of a group spreads the workload and financial burden, makes for better decision-making, and adds a level of safety for the newcomers.

Q: If we host someone from Ukraine, how long is our commitment?

There is no legal requirement. However, you would have a moral obligation to help them as much and as long as needed. Most will have no money when they arrive. It may be months before those with little English would be able to start work. Even those who can work immediately may not earn enough to meet all their expenses.

Q: Where can one find out what services are available locally?

A: [Grey Bruce Settlement Services](#) is a good starting point.

Email: settlement@osgb.ymca.ca

Phone: 519-371-9222 ext. 6 or 519-379-1512

[Newcomer Information Bruce Grey](#) is an online portal to the services for newcomers included in the 211 database. It is searchable in 45 different languages.

[Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce](#) has a list of resources on its website

[Beaver Valley Outreach](#) in Thornbury has lots of resources and articles for daily living and services to offer - we have done this before. There may be ESL people in the community as well as people who speak Ukrainian. 519-599-2577.

[Grey Bruce Community Legal Clinic](#) has started an interagency group to explore ways to support temporary foreign workers and may also be able to provide initial assistance for other legal matters for other newcomers.

Q: How can we coordinate offers of housing and employment?

A: As a first step, Jacinda Rudolph volunteered the Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership (GBLIP) to collect housing information for possible host families. GBLIP is a project that collaborates/coordinates in fostering welcoming communities. If you have a home or would like to open up your home to a newcomer family, please reach out. Jacinda.rudolph@grey.ca

Q: How can we support people or groups who are hosting refugees or displaced people?

A: Welcoming Communities can organize training/information sessions and help connect new hosts with people who have sponsored refugees in the past.

Q: What can be done to ensure the safety of newcomers to the area?

A: There is no guaranteed solution. There does need to be a vetting process of people who offer space in their homes, before newcomers are placed with them. If something doesn't feel right, investigate. If there is a concern about human trafficking, contact your local police department. The Anti-Human Trafficking committee of Violence Prevention Grey Bruce also has many resources. [Anti-Human Trafficking Committee - Violence Prevention Grey Bruce](#)