PROFILE

Canada Steps Up Support For Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has led to the fastest-growing level of displacement in Europe since the Second World War. Individuals and families — the overwhelming majority of whom are women and children — have been forced to flee their homes, seeking safety in surrounding countries such as Poland and Moldova. Many have also found refuge here in Canada.

For those who have remained within Ukraine, they are faced with ongoing attacks in civilian populated areas, the destruction of critical infrastructure, hampered access to basic services and widespread trauma.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has been working in Ukraine since 1994, alongside local authorities, partners and community organizations to deliver protection and humanitarian assistance to people in need. Nearly three million people were already in need of humanitarian support in Ukraine before the start of the war — a figure that has now increased five-fold since the start of war. As the needs and scale of this unfolding crisis continue to surge, UNHCR has seen a heartfelt outpouring of generosity in support of our efforts to help those whose lives have been uprooted by this ongoing humanitarian emergency.

Artists and entrepreneurs from across Canada have been galvanized to take inspiring action, using their creative talents and business acumen to help raise funds and awareness in support of UNHCR's emergency work in Ukraine. Here are a few of their stories:

Paris Jewellers

Alberta-based Paris Jewellers committed to donating $25,000 plus 10% of their sales as part of their fundraising campaign, which went on to raise $50,000 for UNHCR Canada.

The humanitarian crisis struck a deeply personal chord for the family-owned brand. Having immigrated to Canada from Vietnam, sisters and co-owners Chau and Trang, along with their mother, felt incredibly moved to start a fundraiser after hearing about the devastation of those fleeing Ukraine.

They recalled their own personal experience of having to move to a foreign country without the language skills, and then being able to reach their version of the Canadian dream with ambition, strength and tenacity.

"Some of our extended family members came as refugees. We can't imagine being displaced and not having somewhere to call home anymore. We feel so deeply for the women and mothers who've been displaced because their partners have to stay back and fight.

Our customers know that one of our core values at Paris Jewellers is community support. With so many of our friends' and customers' extended families being displaced and unsure of where their next meal is coming from or where they'll sleep tonight — we, as a company and individuals, want to do what we can to help Ukrainians."

IAM YOGA

Sadaf Hosseini, of Toronto-based IAM YOGA, had no idea what to expect when they decided to hold a Yoga for Ukraine class to raise funds for UNHCR Canada. The response was overwhelming, and even had a waitlist. The Yoga for Ukraine class along with a few other community donations raised $1,234 for UNHCR's Ukraine emergency fund.

Sadaf's business model includes helping the community at large, and she felt that her yoga fundraiser was a way to give back. Growing up in Iran, Sadaf was forced to leave her home under unstable and unsafe circumstances, and this naturally made her feel for the people of Ukraine and the suffering they are going through at this time. Sadaf explains,

"I grew up in Iran and was personally affected by the Iran-Iraq War. It's a terrible thing, to be forced to leave your home, to feel so unstable and unsafe. I know what that's like, so naturally my heart went out to the people of Ukraine when their home was invaded.

When I bought my business in April of 2021, I was excited to be able to use the platform I'd acquired to make a difference – holding a class to raise funds for Ukrainians was an automatic decision for me. I've seen war, I've experienced it — now that I can do something to help, I should."

Peace Collective

Peace Collective has been contributing to a variety of causes since its inception. The mission of the Toronto-based apparel brand is to make you look good while giving back to the causes you believe in. This socially conscious apparel company has been supporting UNHCR through unique initiatives since 2020.

Compelled to act, Peace Collective created a customized sweatshirt to raise money for UNHCR's work in Ukraine and have raised around $7,500 towards the relief efforts in the country and surrounding areas.

Peace Collective founder Yanal Dhailieh said he has seen a wonderful and grateful response from their customers for getting involved.

"When the war broke out in Ukraine we felt that we had to do our part. The situation hit close to home as one of our team members has family in Ukraine and we could see how much the war impacted her and the people she loved."

Jeff Dillon

As Jeff Dillon watched the invasion of Ukraine on the news with increasing alarm, he was struck by the human devastation as millions fled to the borders to escape the war. Called to action, the Waterloo, Ontario-based artist created a painting in support of Ukraine, choosing a field of sunflowers against a blue sky and titling it "Solidarity".

"When I was painting 'Solidarity', I thought of the people of Ukraine. I wanted the image to be beautiful and hopeful. When I completed the painting, I felt lifted up, and grateful for the opportunity to use my art to help others. Despite the real boundaries of our countries, I truly believe charity has no borders."

Jeff says he was inspired to raise funds on behalf of UNHCR because of its well-known history of helping refugees and safeguarding human rights worldwide. It was important to him that the charity he chose was familiar with the issues, could rally the needed international support, and could work with neighbouring countries to respond quickly. He held an auction for "Solidarity," and supporters turned out in force. The auction raised nearly $20,000 for UNHCR's Ukraine response.

Envy of None

Canadian-American rock band Envy of None features the musical stylings of Alex Lifeson, a founding member of Rush, Coney Hatch founder/bassist Andy Curran, accomplished producer and engineer Alfio Annibalini, and singer-songwriter Maiah Wynne. They decided to dedicate a single on their self-titled debut album to raise funds for the emergency in Ukraine.

"I have always believed that music can make a difference, and I thought we could use the song 'Enemy' to try to raise money. I feel truly lucky to be a part of a team that cares a lot", says Wynne. "Everyone jumped on board immediately, and so many people along the way have chipped in. It means so much to be able to help and to use our music to do something good… Our hearts have been aching for those in Ukraine and we send our love to all those affected."

Envy of None was compelled to choose UNHCR as the organization to donate towards after being contacted by friends in fellow rock band Big Wreck, when they launched a similar campaign. Looking to find a way to help, they connected with Big Wreck's manager, who highly recommended UNHCR. Envy of None decided to follow in their footsteps.

"How does one become motivated into action? What is the breaking point of inaction? When does the daily outrage of horrific events become intolerable?" asked Lifeson.

"Thoughts and prayers don't cut it. They never do. Direct action is what's necessary. The presence of UNHCR and their tireless efforts supporting the displaced and traumatized victims of this senseless, barbaric war is a testament of such action. As long as this nightmare continues, we must remain resolute in our support.".

The band has raised close to $100,000 in support of Ukraine — and the total continues to rise. The band says the most rewarding part of their fundraising campaign has been having their fans supporting the cause, pre-ordering the single and sending kind messages of encouragement.

To support UNHCR's ongoing work in Ukraine please visit: www.unhcr.ca/ukraine Submitted by the Private Sector Partnerships team with UNHCR Canada. This blog post contains excerpts originally published on unhcr.ca