

# Ukraine aid from Kleinhüningen

**Two and a half years ago, Russia attacked Ukraine. Since then, millions have fled abroad. A couple from Kleinhüningen has initiated help for refugees in a small Czech town.**

For over 35 years, my partner and I have been close friends with a family in the small Czech town of Valašské Meziříčí, or Valmez for short. In March 2022, we, who have lived in Kleinhüningen for 30 years, contacted our friends Jana and Marek. Russia had attacked Ukraine a week earlier and we asked them if any refugees had arrived. In fact, they had already provided emergency accommodation for two women and three children in their own house. We transferred an initial sum of money to help.



A second-hand Töggeli box at one of the emergency shelters brings variety into the everyday lives of the children and young people.

## Start-up aid and school laptop

It quickly became clear that more was needed. New refugees arrived, as Valmez is an important transport hub in the east of the Czech Republic. We asked friends for donations. The response was great. In July 2022, we founded the Valmez-4Shelter association based in Basel, which was recognised as a charitable organisation by the tax authorities. In the first few months, we used the money to buy cookware and mattresses. We also set up a children's

day care centre. Today, the mothers of 18 small children can pursue gainful employment. After all, it is almost impossible to live in dignity on the meagre social benefits.

New refugees are arriving in Valmez every week. As the Russian army makes further territorial gains, more people seek refuge in the west of Ukraine and abroad. Some of them arrive in Valmez practically destitute and deeply distraught. We provide them with a modest cash payment for the first two weeks until the state social assistance flows. For example, single parent Kateryna K. (35) and her 13-year-old daughter Amina arrived in Valmez in mid-August. Kateryna grew up in an orphanage in the Kherson region and learnt to be a saleswoman at vocational school. When her village was occupied by the Russians, she fled with her daughter to the western Ukrainian city of Lviv (Lemberg). She found a job there, but the salary of around 200 francs was not enough to live on. The two travelled further west and were assigned to Valmez. Fortunately, they were housed in the hostel next to our psychologist.



The entry fee helps destitute newcomers to make ends meet for the first two weeks until the Czech social welfare flows.

Anna Gavrilenko, who looks after the two of them.

In addition to cash payments, our team also helps to find emergency accommodation and apply for social assistance. Emergency aid also includes collecting or buying used, intact mobile phones and laptops in Switzerland and giving them to young people in particular. They need the equipment at school.



Our psychologist Anna Gavrilenko has founded an experience group for families with autistic children.

## Opportunities for children and young people

Another focus is on psychosocial programmes. Together with other Board members, I have been to Valmez twice since the start of the war. We got to know the team and were able to visit some of the emergency shelters. The rooms are clean, but extremely small. In most cases, the mother lives in one room with one, two or sometimes three children. Many of the people have experienced war trauma. To help them come to terms with this, we offer a variety of leisure activities: a dance course for younger children, barbecue afternoons, a

Football training on Sundays, cooking together at the end of each week, swimming in a group twice a week and bathing once a week for the senior citizens. All these activities enable the Ukrainians to socialise with each other and with our two staff members Anna Kubalska and Galina Gavrilenko. Both are trained psychologists.

Valmez has a population of 22,000 people, 1,200 of whom are refugees from Ukraine. This 5.5 per cent is almost seven times the 0.8 per cent of Ukrainians with S status living in Basel-Stadt. The public authorities are reaching breaking point and are cutting social welfare once again. Our association is helping to alleviate this precarious situation.

Our association began in Kleinhüningen. Since then, over 150 people throughout Switzerland have supported our work. In April, for example, we organised a charity concert in Basel's Predigerkirche church, and two neighbours donated the proceeds from the neighbourhood flea market to the good cause. If you would like to stay informed about our work, we would be happy to send you our electronic newsletter.

*Pieter Poldervaart  
President Valmez4Shelter*

