



(Above) The Ottawa Community Foundation and Mayor Jim Watson presented a \$20,000 grant earlier this year to the Ukrainian Canadian Community Ottawa Branch. (Right) Melania Kuka, store manager, Nina Lozitska, volunteer, Liudmyla Ivanova, volunteer, and Olenka Bastian.



Maidan Market provides lifeline to Ukrainian newcomers to the city

By Jeff Todd

Ilona Priadko arrived in Canada with a suitcase, her meagre savings and thoughts bouncing between panic, fear, anger and, finally, frustration.

Priadko, 27, originally from Kyiv, knew that tensions were high when she left for a holiday in Dubai with her husband in February 2022. And then it actually happened. Priadko received a call from her mother that Russia had invaded eastern Ukraine.

It sent Priadko and her husband into a tailspin. Finally, after two months in Dubai, exhausting what savings they had, the young couple made the decision to fly to Canada and begin a new life. They landed in Montreal and drove to Ottawa, hoping for a fresh start. Overwhelmed, Priadko joined a Facebook group for Ukrainians. It was then that someone told her about a place called The Maidan Market at the Westgate Mall.

“When I came to the market, first of all, I took a deep breath. Breathe in, breathe out,” Priadko remembers. “And then, I felt something warm inside my heart. I hear Ukrainian language. For me, it was very special. Finally I hear Ukrainian language. This was the first step to feeling adopted in Canada.”

Priadko was handed a pin and invited to stick it on a map of Ukraine, indicating where she was from. The map was covered in pins. That was when Priadko and her husband realized they were no longer alone.

The Maidan Market, named after the Independence Square in Kyiv, has been a welcome hub and support centre since the start of the war in Ukraine. Some Ukrainians arrive with very few possessions. The majority speak very limited, if any, English.

“Here is a basket — how many people are you shopping for today?” Olenka Bastian asks in Ukrainian.

A local entrepreneur, Bastian founded the market in May with the support of the Ukrainian Canadian Community Ottawa branch (UCC-Ottawa), along with volunteers, generous donors and community leaders.

“You can collect items of clothing for your family

members, accessories, hygiene products, sanitary products,” she continues, motioning to the shop behind her. “Over there, you will find items for babies and toys for the children.”

Since the war started, thousands of people have passed through the doors. Volunteers expect to service at least 5,000 more by the end of the year.

The Maidan Market, Bastian says, is much like your standard shopping experience, but with no cashiers. In fact, no money is exchanged at all. The property owner provided the space free of charge from day one.

An old physiotherapy clinic, there are 12 rooms packed with donated items on shelves and on hangers. Visitors can fill their baskets with various items, based on the number of people in their family. Anywhere from 40 to 60 people are expected on any given day. In the welcome room, Ukrainians can have a coffee, children play with toys and parents review the bulletin

HOW YOU CAN HELP

MAKE AN IN-KIND DONATION:

The Maidan Market accepts clothing, toys, hygiene products and other goods. In particular, the market is seeking winter clothing and supplies.

MAKE A CASH DONATION:

The UCC-Ottawa settlement assistance fund is accepting donations, with tax receipts available. Visit <https://www.ocf-fco.ca/uccottawasettlement/>

BECOME A VOLUNTEER:

The market is always looking for helpers. While Ukrainian speakers are especially needed, the market accepts help from anyone in the community. Visit <https://www.maidanmarket.ca/>

board full of information on getting settled in Ottawa.

“We have a resource booklet for those that need additional support,” Bastian explains. “Have you got a SIN card? Do you have a bank card?

Do you need help getting a cell phone? We also provide life coaching,

English language training and other services to help them get settled in Canada.”

For Bastian, opening the market has been life changing. Being a young mother with two businesses to juggle while also managing the market and hundreds of volunteers has been a challenge.

Nevertheless, as the granddaughter of Ukrainians who fled the Nazis during the Second World War, “I feel it in my bones, what’s going on there.”

When the war broke out, Bastian, who used to work for the CHEO Foundation, immediately sprung into fundraising and donation mode. She began collecting massive amounts — more than 85,000 pounds — of stretchers, sleeping bags, food, hygiene products and clothing, which would be shipped from Toronto to Ukraine. But then she was thrown a curveball. Just days before shipment, the humanitarian organization she was working with told her it wasn’t able to accept her shipments.

Bastian had to switch gears. She was referred by a former colleague to a local business leader, who then called a friend, who then called another friend. Before she knew it, she had a free space at the Westgate Shopping Centre. The Maidan Market was born.

“I am so unbelievably grateful,” she says. “Even in my first week, I had people volunteering who had landed just four days before. They wanted to help and be among Ukrainians and be part of the community.”

Another key player for the market has been the Ottawa Community Foundation (OCF). In June, OCF announced a \$20,000 grant for UCC-Ottawa via the group’s charitable partnership with the St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Shrine.

“We are proud to partner with UCC-Ottawa and are inspired by their work,” says Grace Xin, interim president and CEO of OCF.

As for Priadko, life has improved. Her husband, who was an architect back in Ukraine, recently found a job in Montreal. Meanwhile, she continues to volunteer once or twice a week at the market. “I feel so hopeless, talking to my relatives in Ukraine. How they are scared, how they are surviving. I need something, for my heart and soul, and to help my people.”

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