**Homie is helping Ukrainian refugees to find peace in The Hague**

*During* [*Just Peace Open Day*](https://denhaag.com/en/calendar/just-peace-open-day) *on September 24 The Hague will be centered around peace and justice. Various national and international organizations will open their doors to the public.*

For Ukrainian refugees however, peace still seems far away. The Homie Foundation tries to offer them a safe space in The Hague, where they can find peace and connect with each other.

Ukrainian refugee Elena and The Hague resident Nina started the initiative in April 2022, a month after they met each other at the Polish border. Nina - half German, half Iranian - knows what it’s like te be a refugee. Her family is Christian and had to flea Iran in the late 70’s after the ayatollah’s took over. Ukrainians did the same after the Russian invasion. “I understand their story. That’s why it touched me so deeply. I know what my family went through. They went to the US in the late 70s and had to leave everything behind. I understand that trauma.”

She has been living in The Hague for the last four years. On tv she saw Russian troops invade Ukraine on February 24th last year. Nina and a friend gathered tons of relief supplies and rushed with an aid convoy to the Polish border at the beginning of March.

After dropping of the aid in a Polish community center, they were asked if they could take Ukrainian refugees back to The Netherlands with them. “We could take four people back and that is what we did. We met Elena, her 12 year old daughter, her grandmother and her grandson”, Nina tells.

Elena was living in Odessa and heard explosions on the morning of that February 24th. Russia had started the war against her country. The first days she stayed indoors, but then she decided she had to bring her daughter into safety. On social media she reads that refugees were offered protection and accommodation in The Netherlands. She travelled 800 kilometers by a crowded evacuation train - while hearing gunshots - and stayed in an old gymnasium at the Polish border. After three days she met Nina, who brought her to The Hague. There, she, her daughter, her grandmother and her grandson, her cousin en her children could stay temporarily in a house.

Back in The Hague, Both Nina and Elena felt there was an urgent need for a community for refugees. A safe space, where people could connect and receive practical help. Together they decided to fill that need. Nina’s mother Flora is a member of the local German Evangelical Church, who was much obliged to help. Nina: “She spoke to pastor [Thomas](https://www.kerkindenhaag.nl/2020/05/04/75jaarbevrijding/), who is a very young, engaging, open minded and extremely helpful man. He said: come here, you can use our rooms, our kitchen, our community center. Whatever you need, we give it to you. So he received us with open arms, no strings attached, just wanting to help. I asked Elena to do this together and she said yes.”

Thus, the [Homie Foundation](https://homiefoundation.nl/) was born. Since April 2022 the foundation organized meet-ups for Ukrainian refugees, every Friday from 11.00 tot 14.00 [in the Church in the center of The Hague](https://indebuurt.nl/denhaag/gids/duitse-evangelische-gemeente-in-den-haag/). Church rooms were made available for weekly meetings, workshops, clothes donations, art therapy sessions for the children, joint singing, Ukrainian concerts and celebrating Christmas together. But also for group or individual psychology sessions and garden therapy. Every week between ten or a hundred people attended the meetings.

Nina and Elena tried to offer the refugees a safe and familiar environment to connect. With coffee, and refreshments, volunteers cooking Ukrainian foods or a BBQ in the garden of the church. With clothing, toys, books and household items. With support and advice in practical matters such as locating schools, finding sports clubs for children, help in medical care, language courses, housing and more. Nina: “Most of the refugees were women, children and the elderly. Arriving in a completely strange place, they must feel very lonely and anxious, I thought. So the most important thing was to create a place where they could meet, drink a cup of tea and connect to others in the same situation. That’s the space I think we created for them. The speed with which we could respond was only possible because we are not a big organisation that had to go through different channels to get a green light. That’s also why we didn’t make it a official foundation. All the support and donations are handled by the church. Also we were lucky to have volunteers ready to give their time and expertise.”

Since January 2023 the weekly Friday meetings turned into a once a month basis. Both Elena and Nina saw that after ten months the Ukrainians got settled. Including themselves. They found jobs, their children went to school and they all got accustomed to life in The Hague. They knew each other, started Facebook groups and kept in contact, so there was less need for weekly meetings. “But they cannot live without the coziness and the vibe of those meetings. And once a month we can both manage and in the end it brings peace to people who desperately need this connection in The Hague.” Says Nina.

Homie now focusses on cultural events for Ukrainian artists, musicians and performers. Again in the German Evangelical Church. Those concerts, exhibitions and events attract a mixed crowd of Ukrainians, people from the neighborhood and the church community. “For the Ukrainians it means a lot to hear their country’s songs in their own language. That’s comforting”, Nina says. The next concert will be held in October 2023 and is open for the public.

Join the Ukrainian community in The Hague

For typical Ukrainian Doll making workshops, concerts, art sessions, etc. https://homiefoundation.nl/

Other initiatives in the City of Peace and Justice

*At the time of the outbreak of war, various initiatives were launched in The Hague to support Ukrainian refugees. Think of the hotels that offered shelter. Activities carried out by partners in the city. It is fitting for The Hague as a city of peace and justice that these initiatives are developed. More information will be found: https://www.denhaag.nl/en/municipality-of-the-hague/ukraine.htm*