

Association of Ukrainian in Victoria Noble Park Branch Presidents Report for 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022

20 months in and out of lockdowns
6th lockdown ended 22 October 2021

No words can begin to describe the past year for Ukrainians in Victoria.

After 20 months in and out of Covid lockdowns, on 22 October 2021 we were finally able to resume normal activities. Many people in the community had received their 1st and even 2nd Covid vaccinations, we were starting to plan our community calendars again, the world was looking brighter.

Then on 24 February 2022 the unimaginable happened. Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine shocked and devastated our communities.

We went from planning social events and making varenyky to crisis management. Whilst dealing with our own personal and emotional hurt, the AUV structure galvanised and set about doing what we do best – working for the good of Ukraine.

Our Noble Park hromada quickly went about fundraising – no longer for our community but financial support for Ukraine.

As Branch President I began doing many interviews for radio, print and television. The local Dandenong Star Journal did a feature about our Branch.

The Branch organised printing of t-shirts "Stop Putin your Hands on Ukraine". We sold these online and at rallies and in total donated \$4,700 towards the AFUO Humanitarian Crisis Appeal.



Ukrainian Community Saturday School

The Ukrainian Saturday school is an integral part of our Branch and we have always worked in closely with the school and Parents Committee.

Very early on the school rallied and started sewing Ukrainian flags to raise money for Ukraine.



When Ukrainians started arriving in Australia from around March our school went from 20 students to around 50 by the end of the financial year.



We commend the initiative of the Parents Committee namely Victoria Golets and Nadiia Zagirchuk who already in March saw the need to welcome newly arriving Ukrainians and started weekly Saturday social catch ups and support. These then moved to information sessions on a variety of topics to assist newly arrived Ukrainians.

School Principal Orysia Stefyn organised free English classes for adults and children. These are still running in September 2022 with both online and face to face classes



Ukrainian Seniors Club

It was all hands on deck from February 2022. Our Seniors Club headed up by Roman Kitt and Yaroslava Ryszczak began providing free lunches for newly arrived Ukrainians. Every second Wednesday the Seniors meet at the Narodny Dim but now they were feeding around 30 students who were attending English classes.

The Seniors Club also helped with catering and set up for the regular Saturday social event and were an integral part in assisting our Branch to help newly arrived Ukrainians.

Working with newly arrived Ukrainians



Being the only Ukrainian Community Centre in the South East of Melbourne, we began attracting people from the Bayside suburbs of Melbourne, Caulfield, Frankston etc.

Unfortunately the location of our Narodny Dim meant that travel to Noble Park was an easy feat for most.

Despite having many government officials visit our Centre, nothing eventuated by way of financial support. We were often congratulated on the work we were doing but financial assistance was not forthcoming.

It soon became apparent that all these activities were placing a strain on our financial position. After April we were unable to continue raising money for Ukraine and had to “put the oxygen mask on our ourselves” as our expenses had suddenly increased.

At one point our bank balance was down to around \$16,000.

As Branch President I actively looked for and applied for all manner of grants. We asked members to pay a donation in addition to their annual membership fee. I contacted the local council, various charitable organisations, spoke at local Rotary clubs. Centralia assisted us with funds to cover catering. We worked with Foundation House to obtain funding for expenses. By end of the financial year we were in a much healthier position with over \$50,000 across our 3 accounts.

It also became increasingly difficult to find volunteers that could take up active roles in organising activities, planning and doing the general leg work that is required when organising events. By June it became evident that the small number of consistent helpers/volunteers we had, were fatigued.

More and more Ukrainians began regularly connecting with our community – some had already lived here for many years. Others had just arrived.

We began encouraging these people to sign up as members and offered newly arrived Ukrainians the first year membership for free. I made a video and posted it on Facebook encouraging people to join and we were flooded with applications.

Activities and events

Apart from the regular Saturday meet ups, a number of events were held for the benefit of newly arrived Ukrainians:

- Free disco afternoon for children and parents
- Easter bazaar – pysanky workshops
- Easter lunch
- Workshop on how to make “Motanka” dolls run by Tamara Ianova recently arrived from Ukraine
- Handing out free Optus phones

Maintenance

Amongst all of the activities working with newly arrived Ukrainians, we still managed to keep up with the upkeep and beautification of the Narodny Dim.

- A new velvet stage curtain was installed replacing the 30-year-old tattered red one
- Switchboard was upgraded and new security lighting installed
- Large screen TV was purchased and installed in the club room – it was used every week for presentations to newly arrived Ukrainians
- Repainted the entire exterior of the building
- Repairs to roof leaks

All in all our little branch did a lot of heavy lifting. I am proud of the members who worked tirelessly during very difficult circumstances. No one is trained to work with refugees. Most have day jobs and children. It was exhausting work but was never questioned because of our love from Ukraine.

Liana Slipetsky
Branch President – Noble Park