

Anna: We received from MCC a request or suggestion, advice, a week before the war to pack our emergency bags... And on Monday, three days before the war, we went to a big shop and buy what was needed. Its lights, chargers, and other other stuff from this list. And we packed all of these in our emergency bags.

Meghan: *That was Anna, an MCC staff person in Ukraine. We're only using her first name for security reasons.*

I'm producer Meghan Mast and today we're bringing you another bonus episode. For years Anna's work with MCC has been helping to support people who were displaced from the fighting in eastern Ukraine. Now she is one of those displaced people, and she shares a bit of what it was like to quickly pack up and leave her home behind.

You're listening to Relief, Development and Podcast, a production of Mennonite Central Committee.

(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)

Before the war, Anna and her husband and three daughters lived in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine.

She says that when they first heard they needed to pack emergency bags, she didn't fully realize the seriousness of the situation.

Anna: Angelina, the youngest one, she asked me, "Mom, how I need to pack my bag? How many things do I need to take with me, clothes I mean?" and I told her to her, "Oh, take your clothes as for two days for seaside, as we are going for the seaside for two days." And, and then as the girls, the middle one, she asked to my husband, "Dad, do I need to take my pictures? I would like to take them." And he said, "Okay, if you want that you can put them in your bag." And as now you know that they have their pictures. Its books, notes, books with pictures in it. And I understood how important is for them to be to have it with them.

Meghan: *Anna and her family lived by the airport, so it quickly became clear that their home was no longer safe.*

She remembers back to when the air strikes started.

Anna: On Thursday very late in the morning, we heard the airplanes, and they were very close to the roofs. And then as a man from our church, he called to my husband, and he told that the war started. And we was very, we were very upset and confused and disappointed and yeah, it's it was hard time for all of us to understand to what to do then.

And we decided that we will move somewhere on the other side of the river. And to stay there probably a night, probably two days just to see how the things will go on.

And so step by step, we understood that we are going close and close more to western part of Ukraine. And our close friend from the western Ukraine, she called us on our way and she said, "how are you? How is your family, we are waiting for you." And that's how we are here in western part of Ukraine.

Meghan: *Anna remembers, when they first arrived at their friend's place, they were shaken up.*

A lot of the things she usually enjoyed, she had no interest in.

Anna: We could not speak few days in a row, we came to the Sunday service, morning service. And one of my friends, he knows that I can sing songs. And he asked me could you sing songs? And I said, “I cannot sorry, today I cannot.” Because it was really hard to, to say some words.

You know, that when they came to the church, on Sunday morning, I entered the church building, and my, and I started to cry. I started to cry a lot. I could not stop. And when the service comes, then there was songs, preachers. And I cried and cried and cried, and I couldn’t stop. Because it was feelings, like, you know, that, I lost something in past and, or I leave something in past.

And I have a lot of questions in my head. Why the war started? Why simple people died from the war? Why we was needed to go through very hard way here, and to leave everything in our silence place and to go away? Like, I understood that we are refugees now. We are far away from our house.

Meghan: *Now that they’ve been in western Ukraine for a few weeks, they’re feeling more settled. They’re even starting to work with the local church to help other people who’ve had to flee their homes.*

Anna: Yesterday and two days before, I was able to say hello to these people who just came from this hard places. And I know I can see that how, how many fear, the fear and worry is they have in their eyes. And they have cried. They cried. I can understood, I can understand what they’re feeling. But I can invite them for the table to sit and to be there and to eat this meal, warm meal. And I told them that now you’re in a safe place. Praise the Lord. We have friends around the world and praise the Lord that God carry of you and us. And yeah, so I tried to be useful. I tried to be helpful for people who just arrived here.

Meghan: *Anna is helping the local church provide beds for people who have been displaced. She helps make food for them. Anna’s family has the option to send Anna and the kids to live in Holland, but they’ve decided not to for now.*

Anna: For now, we are planning to stay here all of our family together. My girls and I we wanted to be together with our father, with my husband.

Meghan: *Now, from a place of relative safety, her family has been able to sing again. Here’s a clip from a video where Anna’s daughters, a couple other internally displaced people and residents of western Ukraine, are singing from inside a church.*

(PLAY CLIP OF SONG and then fades underneath...)

Meghan: The rough English translation of these words is:

Almighty, invincible God, who will understand.

The great Creator.

We are powerless, helpless, but He,

Who came down.

The world sitting in the dark light shine.

God is with us.

King of all creation.

He took upon himself the decaying destiny of all people.

God is with us.

He took off the heavenly garments.

To clothe all His children in glory.

Thank God in the highest.

Peace to the people on the earth rejoice!

God be with us!

Praise God in the highest.

Peace rejoice people with Him.

(FADES UP TO FINISH)

Meghan: *Those were the voices of eight young people—many of whom have been displaced from their homes—in Ukraine.*

MCC continues to accept donations for our response in Ukraine.

We are supporting partners who are providing lodging, meals, basic medications, food items and fuel for internally displaced people.

In the city of Zaporizhzhia, an MCC partner is delivering food baskets to the homes of individuals with disabilities.

An MCC partner is also developing plans to support members of the Roma community displaced from eastern Ukraine.

MCC advocacy offices continue to press Canadian and U.S. governments for non-military support for peacebuilding in Ukraine and around the world. And we've got tools on our website you can use too to contact your governments and ask for peace. Check the show notes for links.

That's it for this episode.

Thank you to Anna for speaking with us.

This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was recorded and produced by me, Meghan Mast, on Treaty 1 territory, the original land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

The interview with Anna was recorded by Jason Dueck.

We'll be back next month with another episode.

Take good care.

(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)

Show notes:

To donate to MCC's emergency response in Ukraine, please visit our website.

For Canadian donors: <https://donate.mcccanada.ca/cause/ukraine-emergency-response>

For U.S. donors: <https://donate.mcc.org/cause/ukraine-emergency-response>

To help press Canadian and U.S. governments for non-military support of peacebuilding, visit:

<https://mcccanada.ca/get-involved/advocacy/campaigns/give-peace-chance-ask-canada-support-peacebuilding>

<https://mcc.org/stories/peace-through-reflective-advocacy-mutual-empowerment>