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## Lifting Hands International

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## Nonprofit Spotlight 1

### Lifting Hands International



**HQ:** Utah, USA

**Mission:** Lifting Hands International (LHI) provides aid to refugees at home and abroad. No politics, simply humanitarian. We respond rapidly to forced migration situations, carefully investigating conditions on

the ground, and working with partners to fill gaps in the provision of timely and impactful aid to those in need.

**Services:** The needs of those we serve vary widely, but most of our aid takes the form of food, home and hygiene supplies, medical equipment, education services, or livestock. We manage programs in Utah, Greece, Jordan, Ukraine, Moldova, and Turkey, with periodic distributions to refugee camps around the world and shelters on the southern US border. Anywhere people are displaced and in need, we learn their particular needs, and fill them in effective ways that understand the contexts of individual lives.

**Partnerships:** Partners are a fundamental part of our strategy. Partnering is about working to each organization's strengths to assist refugees as effectively as possible. We have dozens. Each of our many programs involves partner organizations, selected for their responsibility and commitment, and for their knowledge of the situations in which we are working. We believe those best equipped to determine particular needs are those on the ground, living in the area in question, working directly with its refugees.

In Ukraine, we partnered with several local organizations, leveraging their close familiarity with the region and its people. For instance, our partners the Dead Lawyers Society know of several regional hospitals in the **Mykolaiv/Kherson oblast region**—just behind current front lines—that are now used as trauma surgery and urgent care centers for soldiers and civilians in direct wartime danger, despite having been looted and destroyed while Russia occupied the area. We supply these hospitals with the medical supplies they need to support a large population with severe wounds, from advanced surgical equipment to simple

bandages. We provide equipment and funding for a local, Stas in Lviv, who has turned a building he owns into a refugee shelter—and now also into a headquarters for a small food business started by those refugees to support themselves.

In **Utah**, our partners the International Rescue Committee and Catholic Community Services provide case management for incoming refugee families, learning of specific needs and connecting arrivals to work and school. We also provide basic necessities and household items, and often set up entire apartments for these families.

**Projects:** For the past six years, we have operated a community center for refugees right next to one of the main camps in **Serres, Greece**. This center provides everything from toys, books, and play space for children to communal and psychological needs like yoga and exercise classes, space for women, and camp activities like theater, to educational classes on physical health, technological literacy, employment, and languages like English and German. Two-thirds of the camp uses the center's services regularly, and polled satisfaction rates are very high.

We are in the process of replicating this success in **Ukraine** and **Moldova**. Our new center in **Balti** opened in March, to serve the large population of Ukrainian refugees who fled west and settled in Moldova. Exercise classes, language classes, and psychological support programs are already up and running. The team is currently adapting our space to respond to growing attendance and interest. We already have plans for this center through at least the end of 2024, and—as we already do in Greece—will be constantly listening and responding to the requests of refugee attendees.

**Experience:** Our vast volunteer network run by our humanitarian warehouse in American Fork helps create a welcoming environment for refugees in our community. For instance, a Ukrainian woman named Oksana and her friend Olena—who speaks no English—each fled their home country with their sons (and a big fluffy cat). They lived in Sumy, right on Ukraine's northeastern border, one of the invading army's first targets. They drove away just as Russian troops entered the city. Oksana's car died two hours out, so they continued on foot. They managed to board a train later; but even it at one point stopped, ordered everyone down on the ground, and turned all the lights off to avoid becoming a Russian attack target.

Just a few days after arriving safely in Utah, Oksana came into our warehouse with her son seeking help. We set up apartments for both families. They now volunteer in our warehouse—sorting donations and translating labels for shipments destined to help displaced families in Ukraine! Oksana has now found a job, and still comes over to help in her remaining free time. They have made friends with other volunteers and with fellow Ukrainian refugees in the area—even Olena, who often simply disregards the language barrier and hugs people. Recently they invited several of our Utah volunteers and employees over for dinner.

In Oksana's own written words: *"I was lucky enough to get to America, to Utah. I came here with my son and my beloved cat. Here we started our new life! The girls from Lifting Hands helped me a lot! I am incredibly grateful to them, they helped me find a job and my friends! Thanks to them, my husband and several other relatives and friends are here with us, there are 8 of us in total!!! Now my son is safe, studying at school, he has many friends, and we are very happy to be together in safety! The children of my friends are also studying and do not hear air raid sirens, are not under bombs and Russian shells! I am incredibly happy and don't know what words I can say to the Americans and Lifting Hands for their help and safety!!!! Thank you!"*



### Current Needs:

*Short-term volunteers:* Our American Fork Utah warehouse volunteers sort & pack our worldwide aid shipments, source and transport for needed items or local refugee assistance in the Salt Lake & Utah valleys.

*Longer-term volunteers:* We need support in our Serres and Balti Community Centers—people from around the world travel there to serve refugee communities. We continue to work on communal and psychological assistance such as the Balti Community Center, a playroom for refugee children living in repurposed university dorms, and teams of mobile psychologists

who visit outlying Ukrainian villages underserved by other support programs.

*Donations:* We depend on supporter donations of both money and items. We medical supply shipments to hospitals, blankets and warm clothing are distributed to regions in danger of power-grid and infrastructure attacks, or the 7.5 tons of food kits we delivered earlier this year to towns like Kurakhove and Katerynivka—right on the front lines. Much of the aid we purchase with donated money. The rest is donated directly by supporters. We keep a constantly updated needs list, so people know exactly what to give and how to get it to us efficiently.

We continue to need support for Ukrainian refugees.

**Innovative Approach:** We want to ensure that the aid we provide is fully, highly useful, and that it is provided in the most effective ways possible. The nonprofit world is full of well-meaning people and programs which end up simply sending things they suspect people probably need, or dumping that aid on overtaxed local people and organizations to do the last-mile distribution. LHI was created particularly to solve these problems: our founder was in Greece, helping incoming refugees, experiencing repeated frustration with donations that did not apply to on-the-ground needs, or were difficult to use in a timely manner.

We ensure the efficacy of our aid through being on the ground ourselves, or in constant contact with our local partners who are. This keeps us providing timely, applicable aid to fill definite needs. It also allows us to keep our own organization small enough to respond nimbly to changing conditions and surprise emergencies, because we can afford to pool resources with allies quickly, rather than sitting in another country planning and instituting an entire discrete program of our own. We were on the ground in Ukraine and Moldova within days of Russia's invasion, as refugees swept across the border with almost nothing. We were on the ground in Turkey just days after earthquakes rocked it—soon enough to feel some tremors ourselves—distributing basic needs to people who had lost their homes. In both cases, we relied on existing relationships or quickly forged new ones, to support refugees through crises that had not existed a week ago.

**Visit:** <https://www.lhi.org>

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