

Military Veteran, Former Affiliate Owner Starts Non-Profit to Help Refugees in Afghanistan and Ukraine

[Emily Beers](#)



Photo Credit: Courtesy of Bruce Roberts

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When Bruce Roberts retired from the US military after 27 years of service in 2021, the former CrossFit affiliate owner and long-time CrossFit athlete needed a new purpose.

"I could have gone into the corporate world and chased the dollar, but I wanted to do something meaningful," said Roberts, who served in the Army in Afghanistan in 2008.

"And then when the US withdrew from Afghanistan over the summer, I really felt like we failed to live up to our commitment to some of those folks," he explained.

This led Roberts to start August Mission, a Utah-based non-profit in September of 2021, whose purpose is to help recover, resettle and assist refugees.

The First Six Months

August Mission, which is [100 percent funded by private donations](#), has already worked with 193 people in Afghanistan in the last six months, some of whom they have helped get out of Afghanistan, while others have been moved into safe houses to hide from the Taliban.

Further, Roberts and his quickly growing team have provided humanitarian support in a variety of ways, as well as help with visa applications.

"We knew Afghanistan was going to be our first mission, but we knew it wouldn't be the last," he said.

Roberts wasn't necessarily expecting the next crisis to be so soon, but when Russia invaded Ukraine at the end of February, he didn't hesitate to turn his attention there.

He and his team, which includes Brute Strength coach Nick Fowler, were "tracking the situation" in Ukraine for two months before the invasion, Roberts explained.

"We had made some contacts in Poland, who we had been talking to on a weekly basis, and Nick and I were just watching how things progressed. And when the war actually started we knew we had to get over there and start helping the refugees."

Fowler, a former firefighter, was the first to volunteer to fly to Ukraine, which he did two weeks ago.

Since then, Fowler and the other August Mission volunteers have been on the ground in western Ukraine doing "threat assessments" and "looking for areas we can have the most impact," Roberts said.

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"A lot of the organizations that are over there right now aren't willing to cross the border into Ukraine, so they're helping from Poland," he explained. This means they're often transferring goods at the border rather than bringing them directly into Ukraine, "which is super inefficient," he said.

Going directly into Ukraine, however, is something his organization is willing and able to do.

"We're small, we're flexible, we're nimble, so we can go to places and determine what are the needs of these people that aren't being filled."

As a result, August Mission is now arranging vans full of goods from Poland to deliver to Ukraine, and will then also be able to take people out of Ukraine on their way out.

Their second big initiative is to bring volunteer doctors from Utah along with

goods and medical supplies, to set up impromptu medical clinics at refugee camps.

Roberts admits a year ago he never would have guessed this is what he'd be doing today.

"I never saw myself going into humanitarian work, but it's very rewarding. I stay up at night trying to think of ways to solve problems. The challenge is figuring out how to solve hard problems in a way that's going to make a positive impact on people," he said.

Roberts will get an opportunity to do just this, as he is heading to Ukraine on April 11 to help out in any way he can.

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