

Epsom and Ewell stands with Ukraine

14 March 2022



Epsom accountant Nataliya Irvine is among 350 volunteers working tirelessly to collect essential items at the Ashley Centre in the town to send to Ukraine where her family are currently living in the war zone.

They operate under the name Surrey Stands With Ukraine

“It’s good to be doing something”, Nataliya tells me as we sit down in a coffee shop to speak with each other about the incredible work that she and others are doing on behalf of Ukraine. Nataliya, since Sunday, has been organising local people in Epsom to collect donations of essential items, for those suffering from the current conflict. The vital and impassioned work she’s doing is supported by a network of amazing volunteers, whose numbers have swollen from 4 to 350, in one month.

Nataliya, who is Ukrainian, approaches the task with an almost sombre necessity. Her mother, sisters, brother and step-father, are all in Ukraine as we speak to each other, she worries about them day and night. I ask whether they’re collecting as much as they expected and she tells me that it’s more than they ever imagined. Nataliya emphasises just how supportive the local community has been, just how many locals have been willing to give up their possessions, and even their time, to help the people of Ukraine.

“It started independently”, she says, when I ask about the genesis of the idea. Nataliya tells me that it was just her, speaking with her family on the phone and sending them money for vital medical supplies, that were then being given to hospitals in Lviv. Nataliya began to reach out to friends and organise couriers to deliver supplies directly to the Polish-Ukrainian border with assistance from her local gym, FitnessTheory, who provided a vital place to store the items before they were sent off. What started as 4 people looking to make a small difference to the humanitarian effort, has expanded to a 350-strong group, with a committee and community hub, generously given by the Ashley Centre in Epsom, organising donation efforts on a much larger scale. Locally based registered charity Harrop HR Missions Ltd was able to step up and provide the legal entity to facilitate the operation. To have achieved all this, while worrying about her family in Ukraine, all a person can do is admire the strength and bravery of Nataliya and the many other Ukrainians working with her.

The charity has raised over £80,000 and sent over £450,000 worth of supplies to Ukraine in 11 van runs.

At the Drop-Off point in the centre, boxes upon boxes of supplies are piled high, but the spirits of the volunteers are higher. I was lucky enough to be able to spend a little bit of time observing the operation during one of its few quiet moments, and I was blown away by the compassion, focus and drive that pushes these selfless volunteers to go above and beyond for a country that most of them have never been to. They’re laughing together; they’re supporting each other mentally, physically and spiritually, drawn together and emboldened by a shared sense of duty, to deliver the help that Ukrainians dearly need right now. The whole time I was there, one word kept going through my head: Community, and that’s what I saw; a united community, together for a common purpose, selflessly working together to achieve it.

Many individuals have made what Nataliya and her fellow volunteers are doing possible. David Barnes, the lead volunteer, sits at the front desk all day greeting all those who wish to help with a smile. The volunteers I spoke with all told me that David’s work is above and beyond, and his contributions are truly vital. David Meadows, the general manager of the Ashley Centre, has also enormously supported them, allowing the group to use an unused unit of the centre, as their operations hub and donation point. Other individuals that gave both resources and time to help this cause are numerous: Councillor Neil Dallen facilitated contacts, Steve Moore’s guidance on marketing allowed them to tap into social media, James Brook, an architect also working out of the Ashley Centre, provided vital organisational support.

The team members I spoke to were full of appreciation for one another, people like Roy and Kim Deadman, Jess and Pinch Tarrant, Zoe, Ross and Luda, among many others. On top of each and every local Ukrainian who set aside time to help their country get the vital supplies it needs. This appreciation should also be applied to every single person who has donated food, money or any other item to this cause, their help is invaluable and is making a positive difference in the lives of people in need. Epsom should be truly proud of how it’s come together in a time of great melancholy for Europe and the world, to provide hope and more crucially material aid, for the citizens of Ukraine who are unable, or unwilling, to leave their homes.

Care home residents get vaccine

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Care home residents have celebrated getting their Covid-19 vaccinations with banners and some bubbly.

All Surrey care homes which support older people have now been visited by vaccination teams offering the first dose of the Covid-19 jab.

At Greys Residential Home, in Woking, residents enjoyed a glass of fizz and posed with placards after getting their jabs last month.

As older care home residents, they were the top priority group in the national roll-out of the vaccine, along with the staff who look after them.

Roving vaccination teams have worked intensively over the last few weeks to visit Surrey care homes administering the jabs, with high levels of take-up. The vast majority of homes had been visited by the end of January, and now even homes which couldn't be called on previously due to cases of the virus have been visited.

The vaccine roll-out in Surrey is being spearheaded by the Surrey Heartlands Partnership and Frimley Health and Care which bring together partners including local NHS services and Surrey County Council.

Sinead Mooney, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, said: "Celebrations like these are a joy to see after the difficult months we've had.

"Thanks to the diligence of vaccination teams on the ground, we've been able to visit every care home for older people in Surrey in the space of just a few weeks.

"We're now working hard to vaccinate other vulnerable groups and frontline health and social care workers and I'd encourage everyone who is offered the jab to get it.

"I'd like to take this opportunity to thank care workers across Surrey for the incredible dedication and compassion they've shown throughout the pandemic.

"This vaccine milestone gives us hope but we can't let our guard down. Care homes are continuing to follow the public health advice and we must all, even after we've received our vaccine, stick to the rules so we don't let up on beating the virus."

Erica Lockhart, chief executive of the Surrey Care Association, said: "This is such welcome news. Not only have older people in care settings been vaccinated, but care staff across all settings, who have been so heroic throughout the pandemic, are also receiving their jabs.

"There's a great sense of relief across the Surrey care sector and beyond. The vaccine has given us hope that the overall risks will be greatly reduced in the not-too-distant future and I'd like to thank all those involved in the vaccine rollout for their tireless work."

Support for Afghan Refugees

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Following the British and allies' humiliation in Afghanistan in August this year the UK Government has urged local Councils to participate in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme. The urgent need is to provide homes to those refugees who fled from the Taliban takeover and are currently in temporary accommodation in the UK. Funds are promised to local authorities willing to support the resettlement of Afghan interpreters and others (and their families), who worked for UK Forces, the UK Embassy and other official British interests.

The scheme supports rent and other housing costs, local authority support staff salaries and "integration support" (e.g., English language, education and health). The funds promised by the Government range over a three year period from £22,340 for one adult in a one bedroom property to £134,040 for a 2 adult 4 children family in a 4 bedroom property.

The Council Officers recommended that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council undertake support for 2 families but an amendment moved by Court Ward Councillor Kate Chinn (Labour) was accepted by all Councillors and 5 families will be supported. The greatest challenge to the programme will be identifying landlords willing to provide suitable properties.

Nina Kaye of the Epsom Refugee Network responded to the decision We are pleased to hear that the Council has voted to take up to five Afghan families being re-settled under the LES (Locally Employed Staff) scheme. These families have risked so much to support our troops in Afghanistan and as a result have had to flee their homes and their country. There are many highly skilled individuals in this group who will be a real asset to our Community. Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network will be working with the Council to support these families when they arrive, helping them to learn English and settle into life in the UK".

Joanna Sherring of Epsom Community Sponsorship stated: "Our Charity is applying to be a Community Sponsorship group in Epsom & Ewell and it's great to see such support for refugees in our community. Hopefully we will never know what it feels like to lose everything and have to start a new life in a different country. I am so proud to be part of a such a passionate group of people who want to offer the chance of a new life to a refugee family"

Epsom and Ewell is by no means alone in the County in supporting the scheme with all the other 10 District Councils supporting between 2 (Mole Valley) and 5 to 10 (Waverley).

Full details of the scheme and Government explanations are available [HERE](#)