

By Gareth Butterfield

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A UKRAINIAN teenager who has spent time living in the Ashbourne area has been telling the story of her escape from her home town in a series of short podcasts.

Ksenia Yakutina, 17, from Poltava in western Ukraine, was helped by children's charity Theotrust to come to the UK in 2017 and she spent a year studying at Repton School.

Her family, including her mother and father and her three brothers, were forced to flee their homes after Russian forces invaded and they began a perilous journey across Ukraine to Poland.

After having safely crossed the Polish border in the early hours of Friday, Ksenia and her family are now waiting for visas in an empty apartment in Wroclaw, and throughout their journey her friends in Ashbourne have been busy preparing a welcome for them.

Theotrust volunteers have not only been helping the family to leave the Ukraine, but back in Ashbourne a house has already been found for them in Compton, and countless hours are now being spent completing the complex applications required to fly a family of six to safety.

While Polish native Paulina Lewandowska, who now lives in Ashbourne, has been out in Poland helping the family with their journey, Theotrust chairman James Archer, who lives in Ellastone, has been filling out visa forms.

He said: "It's really snow-balled. A property in Compton has been offered to them at a very reasonable rate, which will be covered by the money the government gives to families. But we need some money to help them, while they get up and running, so we've started fundraising just over a week ago, and we've been blown away by the support.

"We have had so many people from the Ashbourne area who have read the blog posts and who want to help, and it's all going to make a big difference."

Theotrust, which is based in Penrith, can trace its roots back to 1992 when volunteers began helping Russian orphanages in the wake of the USSR being disbanded.

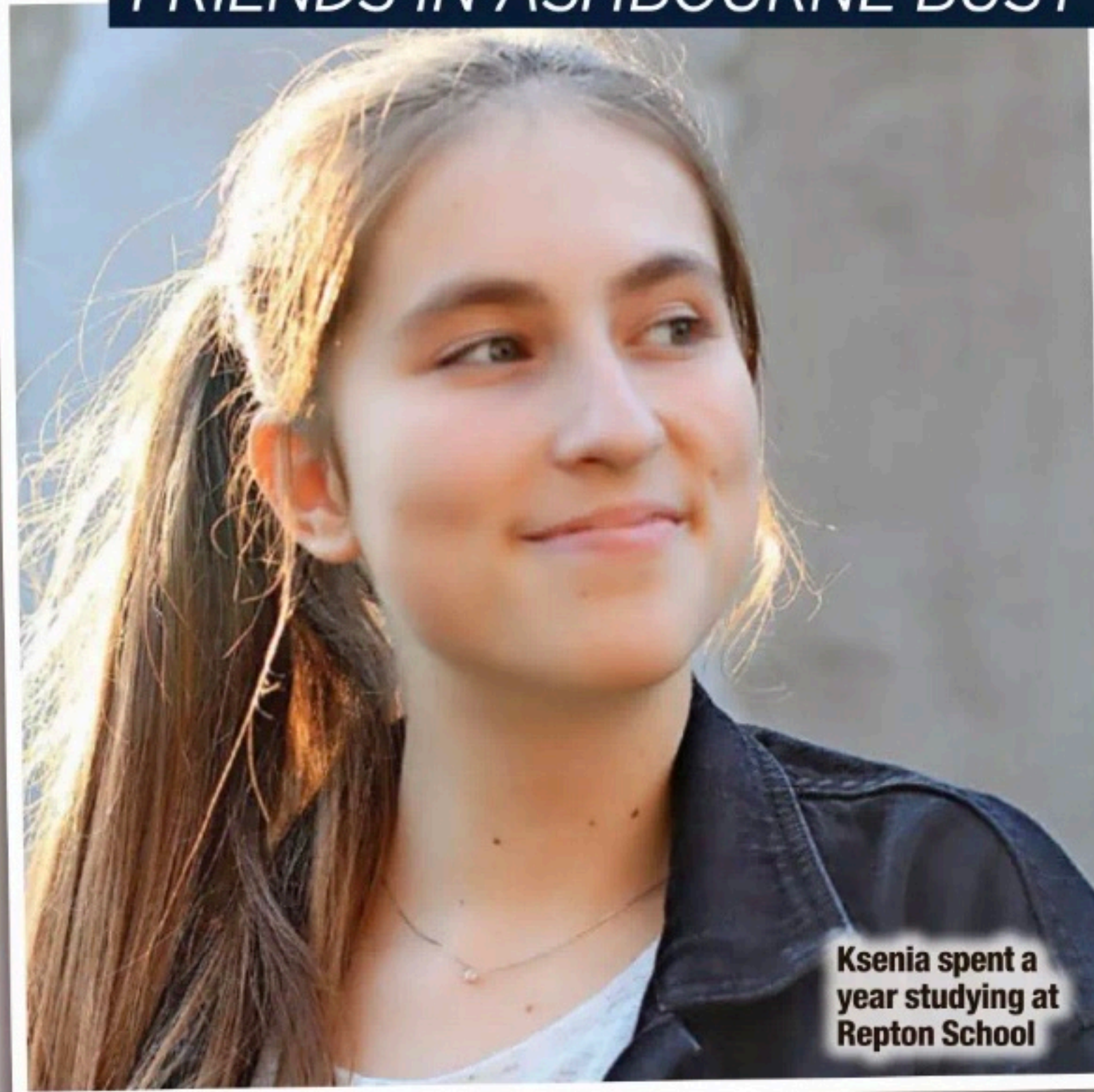
The charity provided a link between boarding schools and Russian children and in 2014 its focus shifted to helping families in Ukraine in the aftermath

A safe haven from war as home is found for Ksenia and family escaping horrors of Ukraine



Ksenia Yakutina and her family have escaped from Ukraine, and are now in Poland, thanks to help from the charity Theotrust

FRIENDS IN ASHBOURNE BUSY PREPARING A WELCOME FOR THEM



Ksenia spent a year studying at Repton School

of the Ukrainian Revolution and Euro-maidan movement.

It was the trust's work that helped Ksenia and another Ukrainian teenager, Kirill, spend a year at Repton School in 2017, living and studying in safe surroundings under the care of Theotrust. The trust's links with the prestigious school, which counts Jeremy Clarkson among its alumni, are thanks to Theotrust founder member and retired head teacher Richard Theobald.

Kirill, a 16-year-old boy from Slavyansk, is now settled with his family in a village near Warsaw in a house provided with the help of Theotrust's Polish contacts, but efforts are continuing to get Ksenia and her family to Ashbourne. Meanwhile, Ksenia's inspiring podcasts are being updated daily on Theotrust's website, providing an insight into her perilous journey, but with her post yesterday reflecting on the relative comfort

of the flat they are currently staying in.

Meanwhile, people in Ashbourne have been mobilising further support for Ukrainian refugees, with Elim Church in Waterside Park leading a new group, Ashbourne4Ukraine, preparing to centralise the volunteers and donations that have been offered so far.

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James Archer

The group met on Sunday evening and individuals, businesses, charities and organisations keen on helping attended. To find out more visit ashelim.ch/together

Theotrust is now also appealing for support as it prepares to bring Ksenia back to England, and it aims to help Kirill and his family as the war rages just over the border.

To find out more about the trust, and to listen to Ksenia's daily updates, visit theotrust.org

Could you be a foster carer and give children in need a loving home?

DERBYSHIRE County Council is on the lookout for people who are interested in becoming foster carers for children of all ages.

The county's foster carers receive a package of financial support and there are different types of fostering opportunities which can fit around work or family commitments.

The council's cabinet member for Children's Services and Safeguarding, Councillor Julie Patten, said: "Fostering not only changes a local child's life but is also an opportunity to do something incredibly fulfilling and give back to your local community.

"We know that the last few

years have led people to think about doing something more rewarding and I'd encourage anyone who is looking to make a change to consider fostering with us.

"You'll be supported by our team every step of the way and once approved you'll receive benefits and financial support.

"If you're ready to do something more rewarding and could help us change a child's life - we'd love to hear from you."

Foster carers do not need any special qualifications, they just need to be aged 21 or over with no upper age limit, have a spare room - or space in their bedroom for a cot for children aged up to

two and to go through a few initial checks before they are assessed.

Carers must also have some experience of caring for children, for example through working with them, through family and friends or through volunteering.

All prospective foster carers receive training and support throughout their foster carer journey.

Anyone interested in fostering can find out more at the county council's next virtual Talk Fostering event on Thursday, March 31.

To find out more, visit www.derbyshire.gov.uk/fostering or call 0800 083 77 44.



Derbyshire County Council are looking for new foster carers