

KSENIA'S JOURNEY

Last week we heard the story of Ksenia Yakutina and her family, who had to flee their house in Western Ukraine when the Russians invaded and are now waiting for visas in Wroclaw, Poland. As the 17-year-old, her parents and her three brothers sit in a borrowed apartment a charity called Theotrust has been hard at work securing them a house in Ashbourne, and the family is now hoping to be able to move in soon. In the meantime, Ksenia has offered to update News Telegraph readers on her story as she prepares to move to Ashbourne and start a new life. This week she begins by introducing herself and telling her story from primary school, and her first taste of living in a warzone.



Ksenia and her family who are now in Poland waiting to come to Ashbourne

Snowmen, picnics and swimming in the fresh Donetsk lakes... then war came to our city

HELLO everyone! I am from Ukraine and my name is Ksenia. Today I want to tell you my story.

I was born in Gorlivka, Ukraine. This is the city of Donetsk region, a really nice town.

There my three brothers and I went to the kindergarten and then school. We had really nice church there and lots of friends.

I remember myself as a "leader" of a class in my school. I was inspiring my classmates to help children that were bullied because I did not feel like they deserve it. I had perfect marks at school. Also I attended piano lessons which I really liked. Life was perfect to me as for a child. My brothers were my really good friends. We were playing all the time with them. I remember our great family tradition for our birthdays. Each of us could choose any cake they want. I usually chose jelly.

Also the great thing that I remember is our walks with dad



Happy days in the Donetsk region for Ksenia and her brothers

at any season. In winter we used to do a huge snowman and do a snowball fight. In spring we went to see all the beautiful flowers and fresh lakes.

In summer we went to swim in these lakes. We rode bicycles, had picnics and visited our grandparents a lot!

In autumn we played with all the leaves which had fallen down from the trees and walked under the rain with an umbrella.

Even now we have a huge album of photos from funny and memorable moments of our lives.

When I turned 10 years old the war came to our

city. My dad worked on the TV and that's why we knew all the situation from the inside. He saw and understood that the things happening in our region was NOT the civil war as it was said to people who lived there and all the other world. It was the special operation of Russia which was hidden really good and prepared in advance. I don't remember the military details of those times, my dad can tell about these, but here are some things that I do remember really well...

People started to prepare basements in these houses, buy foods and others. In our city lots of people were stolen. Once when we played on the playground a car coming was across us. Then it stopped. Some men in black masks with weapons came out and dragged a person which was just walking on the street into the car. We ran quickly to our house to our mum. We were so scared.

Next day we saw how Ukrainian helicopter was shot in the sky and it fell down with people inside.

As I said, because my dad worked on TV he knew all the situation from the inside. Our city was seized, transport began to work badly, roads were blocked and bridges exploded. Every day it became more and more dangerous to stay in our hometown.

So, my parents made a decision that we needed to leave our place of leaving and move to safer place.

It was necessary to make a decision quickly, since the railway station would stop their worked because of the military movement around. We left with nearly the last train.

The rest of my story you are going to be able to read next week. We are so thankful for your support and everything that you do for the Ukraine now.

'People in the UK do not know the fear refugees have gone through'

AN ASHBOURNE man now living in Poland has opened up his heart and his family home to shelter dozens of Ukrainian refugees fleeing from the war.

Stephen Hart, 41, now lives with his wife Anna, 34, in Krakow, Poland.

The pair have been providing Ukrainian refugees with essentials such as food, clothes and "a peaceful safe haven" to rest since the country was invaded by Russia on February 24.

Stephen has said that the couple aims to help as many innocent refugees as possible, and to make "today better than yesterday" by helping them relocate or find any means of support during the crisis.

He said that many of the refugees, in particular women and children, "have witnessed and seen things they shouldn't have". Many have been forced to sleep rough in streets or

train stations, carrying nothing more than a few possessions.

He said: "The situation happening in Ukraine is getting worse day by day and we're at a point where we are struggling to find space. People genuinely don't know what it is like until it's at their front door."

"People in the UK do not know the fear these people have gone through, and need to be encouraged to help these poor people in need. This is a humanitarian crisis and we need good humans to fix it."

Of the refugees that the couple have helped, one woman had not slept for more than an hour a night for more than 10 days when she arrived at Stephen's house on March 17 with three children. Two of the children were not her own, after



Stephen Hart with some of the refugees he has sheltered at his home in Krakow, Poland, after they fled from Ukraine

their mother had died trying to escape Donbas, in the east of Ukraine.

The United Nations say more than 3 million people have fled from Ukraine as the conflict escalates, with hundreds of thousands travelling to Poland, Moldova and Romania.

Stephen has now urged people in his home county to take in those who are affected by the crisis, and says he has received huge support from authorities in Poland as part of a nationwide effort to help those affected, including setting up schools in Poland for Ukrainian children. The refugees have expressed gratitude to the couple for their generosity, with one woman giving her only item - a Parker pen - to Anna.