

Sylwia is so grateful for an avalanche of aid from a supportive community

by Carol Miller

THE HUMAN tragedy unfolding in war-torn Ukraine has seen one Woking woman leading an outpouring of support to help people seeking refuge in Poland and those still living under the Russian bombardment.

Sylwia Wityńska, president of the Polish Saturday School in Woking, set up an Aid Ukraine and Refugee campaign – and in just one week saw an overwhelming response to her campaign with collection points at three locations, including St John the Baptist School in Elmbridge Lane, Old Woking, where the Saturday school has been run since October.

Sylwia put out a notice on the school's Facebook page. No sooner had she posted it, she says it spread "like a virus" throughout Surrey.

"Donations have been flowing like an avalanche," said Sylwia, who was assisted by her friends Anna, Agnieszka and Józef.

On Saturday alone, so many people came to donate items that they had to turn people away after 10am because there was no more storage space. More than 150 cars had to turn back.

"Helping others probably lies in the nature of us Poles, and in the face of human tragedies, decisions about the need to help are made immediately," says Sylwia. "In this case it was seeing the tragedies of people who suddenly, hour by hour, lose their belongings, who witness the killing of their loved ones. Probably none of us really believed that Russia would



ALL WANTING TO HELP – Volunteers at the Polish Saturday School loading up boxes of vital supplies for those in need in Poland and Ukraine

attack Ukraine in such a brutal and barbaric way.

"Ukraine has a direct border with Poland and, although I don't have a family in Ukraine, I have friends who live there. But it doesn't matter at this point whether you have a family there or not. The important thing is that these are human beings. It is natural that in such circumstances that there is an enormous willingness to support and help as seen by the general commotion in the UK and around the world."

In a real show of a community pulling together, she said that in addition to the help she received from the Polish School headteacher, Beata, as well as Polish school parents, they were helped by SJB employees and parents of pupils at the Woking Chinese School,



which also uses the SJB campus on Saturdays.

"Seeing how much work there was, they immediately started to help us without hesitation," said Sylwia. "Another member of the Polish community, Mr. Wojtek, lent his van, and my husband Sebastian was loaned the use of a large van by the company where he works – I am very grateful to all these people!"

The deliveries are being made to Bydgoszcz in Poland, where they will be handed over to the "Thanks to you" Association.

Sylwia said: "Some donations will remain there so that they can be distributed by the association among the refugees who found refuge in Poland while fleeing the war.

"The rest will be taken on into Ukraine.

"We will continue to follow the situation in Ukraine and on the border with Poland. If there is such a need, we will organise more help."

Meanwhile, Sylwia is also planning to set up a Polish Diaspora Center at the school, aimed at people, not only Poles, who have been forced to leave their homeland.

Leave donations at St Mary's Church

DONATIONS for the people of Ukraine can be dropped off at the porch of St Mary's Church, Horsell, from 10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Please do not leave donations outside when the church is not open.

Medical supplies such as bandages, plasters and painkillers, for adults and children, are required. Also soup powders, tinned food (with a ring pull), energy bars, coffee, tea and toiletries. No more clothes are requested.

St Mary's is also asking for something more personal on behalf of its vicar, the Rev Dmitry Lutsenko, originally from Ukraine – prayers for his mother, Larysa.

A note from the parish administrator says: "We are asking you to pray for Dmitry's mum Larysa for her safe journey to the UK.

"She is no longer safe in her city in Ukraine and she is on a bus travelling to the border with Poland to the city of Rzeszow, where she will try to get a UK visa to be reunited with Dmitry and family.

"Please pray for her and for Dmitry, who might be going to meet her in Poland to help with the visa and to bring her back to Horsell. A very trying time for the whole family."

To donate money to the Ukrainian appeal, visit dec.org.uk, the website for the Disasters Emergency Committee, an umbrella group of UK charities which coordinates and launches collective appeals to raise funds to provide emergency aid and rapid relief to people caught up in disasters and humanitarian crises around the world.

Woking Borough Council is happy to provide information about collections being carried out in the borough through its website.

Details of local appeals and organised collections will be added to its webpage. To advertise an organised public event, please email marketing.communications@woking.gov.uk.

Virtually all constituents writing to MP support a strong stance against invasion

WOKING MP Jonathan Lord has spoken of the "anger and disgust" at the Russian invasion of Ukraine expressed by constituents.

"I have been overwhelmed by the huge number of emails I've received from constituents expressing anger, disgust and dismay at the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, in particular, the indiscriminate Russian bombing and shelling of civilian areas of Ukrainian towns and cities, including hospitals and schools," Mr Lord said.

"Virtually everyone who has written to me supports the UK's strong stance in support of Ukraine, including the provision of military hardware to Ukraine and the imposition of tough and wide-ranging sanctions on Russia.

"Most people want more military hardware to be provided as a matter of urgency, and for the sanctions against Russia to be even tougher and to be imposed even faster, even if that entails a negative knock-on effect on our own economy and our own standard of living. I support the immediate freezing of all assets of close associates of Putin and I note that the Government can't go far enough in this regard so far as many constituents are concerned.

"A number of people writing to me want the UK and NATO to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine,

even if that runs the risk of getting more involved in a widening conflict once we start to shoot down Russian planes.

"However, a slightly larger number of my correspondents draw the line at active British military involvement of that sort.

"A common thread of a majority of emails is that people also want the UK to provide generous humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and for us, as a country, to welcome our fair share of Ukrainian refugees.

"I support that, and I thank everyone locally who has been making donations to appropriate charities and to humanitarian assistance efforts.

"In addition to almost £400 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine, the Government is match-funding individual donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine Appeal. A link to this can be found on the gov.uk website.

"I am pleased to see Woking Borough Council and so many other local and national organisations taking a strong line in support of a free and democratic Ukraine, and it is fitting that the Ukraine flag will be flying over our civic offices over these coming difficult days as a sign of our solidarity with brave Ukrainians."

Standing in solidarity with the people of Ukraine



WOKING'S First Citizen has said the residents of the borough stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

The Mayor of Woking, Cllr Liam Lyons, pictured, said: "Like most people in the world who live in free, elected democracies, the people of Woking are stunned and appalled at the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces, and in particular, the media reports of such barbaric attacks on civilian areas and installations in some of Ukraine's cities.

"Whilst the impact is undoubtedly felt most acutely by the people of Ukraine, whether

they are killed or injured in the attacks, or displaced many miles from their homes as refugees, this action threatens the peace and stability which most of Europe and the rest of the world has enjoyed and benefited from for decades.

"The people of Woking stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, and urge all governments, at all levels, to step up the support they can offer to those affected by conflict, and our thoughts are with those who face a frightening and uncertain time ahead, as we wish for a swift and peaceful resolution."

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