

Refugees invite their hosts into Ukraine

REFUGEES Olha and Dasha are already planning to welcome their British hosts Judy and Andrew to their home in Ukraine when the war is over.

Olha Mazer and her daughter Dasha Makovetska have got on so well with their host family that they describe it as a lifelong friendship. Being part of each other's lives will have a massive effect.

They fled from Lviv in Ukraine to Poland soon after the conflict began last year. Dasha returned to her home city for a couple of months, but when they were matched with Andrew and Judy Walker, she joined her mother and they travelled to Portsmouth together.

They've now been living with the Walkers since last summer. And they have nothing but praise for the welcome they've received from everyone they've met.

"It has been life-changing and a privilege to meet these two women, and we're creating relationships that will last for the rest of our lives," said Judy. "They have invited us to visit them in Ukraine and we can't wait for that to happen."

The couple were matched with Olha and Dasha via our diocese's project to find hosts for refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Kind families across the diocese have opened their homes to 51 Ukrainian refugees so far, and the diocese is looking for another 50 hosts.

Olha said: "When the war started,



Judy Walker with (centre) Dasha Makovetska and her mum Olha Mazer

the politicians were saying it would be over in a couple of weeks. But after a few days, Dasha and I felt we had to travel to Poland to feel safe. I stayed there for five months, and found a house and a job there."

Dasha, who is 17, returned to live with her sister in Lviv for two months. She found it difficult to study at school in Poland because her grasp of the language wasn't good enough, so went back to Ukraine until she and her mum were matched with Judy and Andrew.

"Those two months were difficult," she said. "There were a lot of alerts at night, which was awful, as it made it difficult to sleep.

"Once we had met Judy online, I bought a ticket and joined my mother in Poland and then we travelled from there. My English is better than my Polish, so I thought it would be better to be at school in England.

"It was quite frightening to travel by myself back to Ukraine and then by myself to Poland again. I'd never actually left the country before the war, but I was determined."

Andrew and Judy welcomed them at the airport and drove them back to their Southsea home. They offered them two rooms on the top floor of their house, and allowed them as much independence as they needed. They also helped them to access work, school, GP, bank and other services.

"We have an amazing host family and they have helped us with everything," said Olha. "We want to say thank you to them for making things much easier for us. We eat with Judy and Andrew every day, and they ask us about our days, which helps my English."

To find out more or to offer to be a host family, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/ukraine.