



The Rev Jenny Gaffin with Ukrainians Katya (left) and Anna outside the vicarage; (right) with their families on Hayling beach

The vicarage hosting Ukrainian refugees

HAYLING Island vicar Jenny Gaffin comes from a family that knows what it's like to be refugees – so she was happy to welcome two Ukrainian families to share her vicarage.

Her grandparents fled from Hungary after the Second World War and settled in the UK. So she has a particular heart for supporting Ukrainians as they flee the conflict. She's just one of dozens of worshippers in our churches who have thrown open their homes over the past year to Ukrainians who have left their homes, families and possessions behind.

Jenny has welcomed Kateryna Hluhan and her daughter Nelya, aged 7, as well as Anna Borodulina, and her five-year-old son Leonid. Having lived alone, the influx of four new faces has made vicarage life feel very different. Katya and Anna arrived in late December, so they've already experienced the difference between English and Ukrainian customs over Christmas and New Year. The children have also had to settle into new schools.

Anna, who comes from Kharkiv,

said: "When the bombing started, we stayed in our house for 11 days and didn't leave. When a shell landed near our house, Leonid became very frightened. We thought the next time, the shell would hit our house and we'd die.

"I didn't sleep much the night before we left. It was scary in our house, but it felt even scarier to leave, because I thought the road would be dangerous. I could only take one backpack, so I put all the important documents in there, and a neighbour took us to Dnipropetrovsk.

"I have left my mother and father, my sister and her husband and children in Kharkiv. They didn't want to leave their homes and travel, but they have no light, no water. They are coping only because they have got used to the war. It is insanely hard, and we want to return to Ukraine."

Anna left her home in March 2022 and spent 10 months in a hotel in Bulgaria before being matched with Jenny as part of our diocesan scheme. During that time, she met Kateryna and Nelya, who had left

Odessa in March too. They decided to join forces.

"We had no light, no water and no heat for two months in Odessa," said Kateryna. "The windows were rattling with the rockets being fired on the city, and there were cars and sirens screaming. There were times when rockets hit kindergartens and schools, and every time you were worried that it was the school where your child was.

"Every day was very tense for us. In the first few weeks of the war, we wouldn't take our phones out of our hands, because we'd be phoning all our friends and relatives to see how they are. My stepfather is in the army, but we don't know where he is serving.

"Hayling Island is beautiful, and people have been very welcoming. There has been no problem with school, although in Ukraine you don't start school until you are six. The children are learning English very well. There are also a few Ukrainians living in Hayling Island, so we've met others. We are very grateful to Jenny, who has been very kind to us, and introduced us to



different customs at Christmas. So many people bought us Christmas presents – I have never seen so many around a tree!"

Both mums are keen to find work, as well as learning the language. Anna has continued to teach online, but Kateryna's job in Ukraine was with a grocery business which she can't do from the UK.

Jenny offered to host refugees for six months through our diocesan scheme, which has already found hosts for more than 50 Ukrainians coming to the UK as part of the government's Homes for Ukraine programme. She said: "Because my grandparents were refugees, I was quite motivated to help. My family was welcomed, and we've settled here and have thrived.

"The Christmas story tells us that Mary and Joseph were first of all welcomed by the innkeeper, and then they welcomed the shepherds and kings. They were guests who became hosts. And there's something of that in this situation. Anna and Katya are my guests, but they are also hosts: they share their traditions with me and my friends, they cook their amazing food, help with the housework and they welcome others here, as hospitality is built into their culture.

"I have been living on my own, so things are very different at the moment. But we're getting to the point where I can be honest if the children are being too noisy for me to concentrate. I know I'll benefit from them being here."

Seeing refugees in Poland was eye-opener

SHE has been matching Ukrainian refugees with hosts in our diocese for almost a year – but a trip to Poland brought home what it feels like to be displaced from home.

Maricar Jagger (pictured below) shares the job of refugee co-ordinator for Portsmouth and Winchester dioceses with Jo West. They work alongside the charities CitizensUK and USPUK (Ukrainians Sponsorship Pathway UK), and have placed 51 refugees with 22 families in our diocese. She visited two refugee centres in Warsaw, Poland, last November to see for herself the conditions refugees endure before they reach us.

"It was such an unforgettable experience," she said. "The centres are in large exhibition arenas outside the city centre, making access to jobs and amenities difficult. In one they were lucky to have a supermarket nearby. At the other, they have only a McDonald's and a petrol station. There were no places to sit outside, just a big car park. While people are safe and warm, there is still more to be done.

"Buses still arrive daily with fresh groups of refugees. When I visited, there were around 1,500 'residents' of one centre, all waiting for a home. Charity staff said at the height of the refugee influx in the spring, they had as many as 15,000 people. I couldn't imagine that many people packed into the centre. They must have used every inch of the floor.

"On arrival, you can choose any unoccupied camp bed. They are lined up closely to each other and there's no space to put your things. There's nothing to keep you private and above you is a vast

convention hall ceiling. Clothes are spread out on door handles and a few makeshift lines to dry. They have washing machines, but toilets and showers are housed in a couple of container-like boxes.

"There's a kitchen and twice a day everyone is given a hot meal. There are strict rules however for using the space so they can manage the numbers. There is no fridge or food storage area. If you have a severe allergy, there's a small fridge for your food. Everybody else can only keep food by their camp bed.

"There were rooms for a makeshift hospital ward for those having medical treatment. There

are classes for children, with volunteer teachers or a place they can go for their learning online. There's even a piano and a pool table. Volunteers came in the summer who were able to entertain the children with singing and dancing or take them to visit a park.

"We were shown makeshift walls the staff were trying to slowly build. They receive donations for clothes and toiletries, but need to buy these wood planks themselves. The privacy they give is very important for people's sense of dignity.

"I was shaken after my visit and couldn't take the picture of the camp bed out of my mind. On my way home, I read where Winnie the Pooh tells Piglet he can come to live with him if Piglet's house is destroyed, and I was sobbing silently in a crowded tube."

Our diocese now wants to host 100 more refugees, and we want to find 50 more hosts willing to open their homes. If you can help, find out more details on www.portsmouth.anglican.org/ukraine.

