



Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network

Minutes of meeting on Monday 13th February 2023
at 7pm at Ukrainian Hub, Global House, Epsom

Present:

Jo Sherring, Nina Kaye, Alan Avis, Julie Upson, Laurence Impey, Su Kingsley, Rachel Crew, Richard Leighton, Irina Wallis, James and Eileen Close, Barry Reeve, Alan Mornement, Teresa Lax-Pericall, Evelyn Wight, Edward Clay, Geoff Andrew, Oksanna Lee, Inna Wearn, Dora King, Sue Ayling, Liz Newhouse, Laryssa Kabachenko, Denise Chandy, May Aoun, Anita Kibble, Smita Bhayai, Barbara Cairns, Laura Taylor, Alison McLeod,

The meeting opened with a welcome from Jo and Nina.

1. Apologies for Absence

Penny Brooks, Norman and Marilyn Cameron, Diana Pinchin, Angie Prowse, Ashley Beckett, Andrew Scott, Hazel Jump, Olha Zatytyk, Bronwyn Crowther, Ann and Richard Wylde, Dawn Moriarty,

2. Acceptance of the minutes

Minutes of meeting on 19th April 2022 were accepted.

3. Matters arising from minutes.

- i) Dorking Refugee Support. Due to the workload since April 2022 we had to step back from helping the group in Dorking. We helped St Pauls in Dorking set up a weekly drop in for Ukrainians in that area and have been on call for any complex issues they needed help with. Angela Benny has continued to run the Facebook group in Dorking.
- ii) Home visits for sponsors. This did not go ahead as anticipated, the work has been carried out by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council but they are funding a new role under EERN (details later in the meeting).
- iii) Grant to look at better support for refugees. We were given a grant from the Community Foundation for Surrey to look in to better practices to support refugees. From this research we have used the findings to frame our work around Adult English teaching and support for children. It helped frame the Summer School plans and our current programme of English language support. We are very thankful to the Community Foundation for their continued support.
- iv) Apologies from EERN that the meeting scheduled for September 2022 did not go ahead and it has taken us so long to pull this one together. A year ago we supported around 12 families, we now have over 180 families registered with us.

4. Update on Ukraine situation

We now have over 160 Ukrainian families registered with us. Most are staying with host families, some have come via the family scheme. Last year we were fire fighting as new arrivals were coming every day and faced the challenges of :

- Finding school places for children
- Finding English language lessons for adults who had to care for children and when colleges were already over-subscribed.

At the end of April we started a help desk within the Surrey Stands with Ukraine (SSWU) shop and started running English classes with space for children at the back of the shop. We also extended our English classes at the Methodist Church to keep pace with demand.

In July and August 2022 we ran the Summer Language School at St Johns in Leatherhead with 70 adults and 106 children attending for 4 weeks intensive English support. It was a HUGE success, we raised the money to fund this from three organisations: James Jar of Gifts, YuLife Insurance and Silicon Valley Bank. Thank you to them for their incredible support. We were supported by over 80 teachers giving their time as well as 30 general volunteers, it was a great example of a community coming together to offer really practical support and we are very grateful to St John's School who gave us the premises free of charge.

At the end of September 2022 SSWU had to vacate the shop and were offered space at Global House in Epsom. With NESCOL offering no English classes we moved in and started English five days a week. We now offer 42 hours of English lessons per week for different levels and with 111 students currently attending. Last week we were successful in getting a grant from the Community Foundation for Surrey to support our work at the Ukrainian hub for another 6 months. Thank you, Surrey Stands with Ukraine and your brilliant volunteers, for all the practical support you give to enable these classes to run each week.

Within Global House the English is just part of our Pathway to Hope plan. We also offer the following here :

- Help Desk twice a week with Citizens Advice on a Tuesday (thank you Ruma from CAB).
- Job Support with our own team of volunteers (thank you Oksanna, Inna and Vera) and working with the Skills Hub. Also, partnering with Optima job agency in Leatherhead who are providing practical support, many thanks Optima.
- Driving Theory language lessons.
- Access to clothing through Surrey Stands with Ukraine.
- Social space to meet others at no cost (free tea and coffee here at all times).
- Extra support like Work Skills Workshop and Drama sessions.
- Advice on finding your own property to rent. We have a new volunteer dedicated to this, thank you Sam Hall for your amazing support.
- Social activities. Self Defence on a Saturday, we are hoping to start a sewing group.

As Ukrainians approach the first anniversary of the war and realise that they will not be going home for a while we are doing our best to support them. We are desperate for more sponsors as some families have to move on and we are desperate to find landlords to work with us. Our new volunteer Sam Hall has created some excellent videos to try and recruit new sponsors and landlords, please share if you can. Here is the video link to reach out to potential landlords: [Landlords needed](#)

We are aware that the children are really struggling in school, particularly the older ones who are schooling in England and Ukraine. We have arranged some social activities in the past (Bowling, Hampton Court, Zoo Trips) and plan to offer more. We are also talking to a charity called Buddy Up about a possible collaboration, they go in to schools and meet with children who are struggling. City of London Freeman's School are working with us and started a Peer Mentoring group on a Tuesday after school. Two sessions have been completed so far and we hope this will develop.

This week 20 Ukrainian families (45 people) are taking a break on a farm in Devon thanks to Farms for City Children. A massive thanks to volunteer Oksanna Lee who has pulled this all together.

On 7th January the local Rotary Clubs (Epsom, Ewell and Ashted) organised an amazing Christmas celebration for the Ukrainian families at St Josephs in Epsom which was an amazing success. We continue to get great support from the local Rotary Clubs, we are now working with Ashted Rotary Club on creating a Community Choir.

We are planning some focus groups later this month to check in with those we support and see if there are other areas they are struggling with.

5. Update on Afghan situation

On January 9th EERN welcomed it's fifth family from Afghanistan. To do this we had to find private landlords to work with us, furnish the properties and provide integration support. It was originally thought it would take us 3 years to find landlords, in fact it was less than 1 year. There are still 9,000 Afghans living in hotels in the UK but we are pleased to be doing our bit to support these families in to our area. These families are supported for 3 years by our Support Workers whose positions are funded by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

6. New staff positions at EERN.

EERN is part of the new trust The Good Company (Surrey) alongside the Epsom & Ewell Food Bank.

The new EERN structure includes the following :

2 x Part Time Support Workers for Syrian and Afghan families funded by the Council.

1 x Full time Ukrainian Support Worker funded by the Council.

1 x Part Time Ukrainian Host Supervisor funded by the Council.

A new post being advertised for a part time Coordinator funded by Good Company.

Volunteers : We have expanded our volunteer numbers and Dora King has been acting as Volunteer Coordinator for the past year, working 4 – 5 hours a week as a Freelancer. We are pleased that we have a new volunteer Peter Butterworth to help with this. Peter was formerly a Volunteer Coordinator for Barnados. Peter will be happy to volunteer for a full day each week so this will make a huge difference to the support we can give through volunteers. We are also migrating volunteer information on to a new system called Assemble. We hope this extra support will help us maximise on the many volunteer offers we receive.

English lessons :

Janice Baker (Epsom School of English) has done an amazing job of recruiting and expanding the English classes at Global House, she works tirelessly for us and we are so grateful for the many, many hours she devotes to this as a volunteer. We pay two of the English teachers from Ukraine thanks to support from Rotary, St Giles and St Georges in Ashted and now the Community Foundation for Surrey. The grant from Community Foundation for Surrey will ensure these lessons can continue until July.

Kate Dove continues to be our ESOL Lead, meeting and assessing new families with their English requirements and supporting tutors with resources where needed.

7. Fundraising

Although we get some job positions funded by EEBC, we still need to focus on fundraising as a priority to help support our other activities. We get no funding for central costs and items such as :

- Volunteer expenses.
- Extra activities for children. Swimming, gym, clubs, etc.
- Social events
- Central costs such as ink, printing, wi fi, tea and coffee.
- School uniform.
- Transport support for those who need it.

- Translation support where needed . Generally we use volunteers but if they are not free we have to pay for this support.

We continue to work with local organisations like Rotary and do talks at Churches and Community Groups to try and encourage extra financial support. Local Churches have been an amazing support over the past 12 months. We are hoping to run some events during 2023 to help fundraising. There are some grants we can apply for but many of these are restricted to certain activities.

8. Social Media and website

We have 741 followers on Facebook and 223 followers on Twitter.

9. Financial position

We currently have £41,512 in the bank with another £26,000 to be transferred over from an old bank account. This sounds healthy, however, the following amounts are ring fenced funds :

- £45,000 for Council supported job roles.
- £2,500 for English classes and materials.

This leaves us around £20,000 general funds available for general expenses and charitable expenditure.

10. Membership

We currently have 700 members.

11. AOB

- i. Support for Asylum Seekers in Epsom. We now support approx. 50 people who are staying in a hotel in our area. We are partnering with Stoneleigh Baptist Church to offer English classes on a Monday and for higher level students we offer transport support for them to come to the Hub to access English. They get only £8 per week so are unable to fund their own transport.
- ii. Edward Clay asked about the Syrians. We continue to support the families that came over on the VPRS which was designed to take vulnerable people from the borders of Syria. Many of them were displaced for at least 6 years. May Aoun said the boys are working hard and trying to make a go of things.
- iii. ERN are organising some focus groups to check with refugee families if we are providing the right services and doing things the right way for them.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be around June and the exact date will be confirmed