

Supporting the Ukrainian community often begins with food

Food is at the centre of everything for most Ukrainians. Many of them have somewhere to grow food at home where “even a window box is used for growing vegetables and not flowers”.



Hannah Beaton-Hawryluk Chair of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter
Hannah Beaton-Hawryluk Chairman of the Association of

Ukrainians Great Britain in Edinburgh (AUGB Edinburgh) working from the Ukrainian Club on Royal Terrace has used this focus on food in many different ways in the last eighteen months.

Ever since the war in Ukraine began again in 2022, AUGB Edinburgh has played a massive role in helping displaced people who have arrived in the capital to make this their home in truly difficult circumstances.

Hannah said that when it started she and others involved were pretty naive. She said: "The big difference is at the beginning, we were firefighting. None of us, nobody in the city had ever come across a war before. We didn't know what to expect. We didn't know the numbers that would arrive. And we all naively thought, because we were so far away from Ukraine we wouldn't get the numbers.

"But then The Scottish Government (and rightly so) started the Super Sponsorship scheme, and people arrived – sometimes 200 a day, which was massive.

"Now, we are very much a settled community that is trying to listen to the Ukrainians in Edinburgh and listen to what people want, because before we didn't know what to do. We were sort of throwing everything out there and hopefully, something would be good. But now we listen."

And listening means that the support offered often hinges on food. Some of the Ukrainians who now live here require food parcels to get by, and community meals are also a key part of their new lives.



In December AUGB will organise two community lunches for around 80 people on each occasion with funding from [National Lottery Community Fund](#). So far Hannah estimates that they will have fed around 1,000 people with the grant monies.



The voluntary group will also organise the St Nicholas Day event at Hibs Foundation on 10 December when each child will receive a lunch bag as well as a gift from St Nicholas himself. Last year around 100 children celebrated the traditional festival in their new home city.

And in a relatively new project called Gardening With Love AUGB will make use of their large garden to the rear of their premises both to grow vegetables and also as a means of helping with mental wellbeing. Hannah said: "We have a group of older people in our community who just want to come together. I keep saying this but Ukrainians are not very good at speaking about their feelings. In this project they will grow, cook and then eat the produce together."

In an ongoing arrangement AUGB receive supplies of fresh fruit and tinned goods from the charity, Edinburgh Community Food which they then distribute on Tuesdays at their coffee mornings. The coffee mornings are an important way of giving

people who may need it a quiet place – perhaps to be away from their temporary accommodation, or alternatively deal with social isolation by having a coffee and a chat. The charity also provides a sandwich lunch for parents and children who attend the playgroup, Stay and Play.

Edinburgh Community Food have delivered ongoing support to the Ukrainian Community since last year. “Households receive a weekly food box from Edinburgh Community Food, specially adapted for Ukrainian cultural preferences, containing food and toiletries provided by charity [Fresh Start](#). Boxes also contain health promotion signposting materials and recipes, kindly translated by members of the refugee community who have now been integrated into the benefits system.”

Five Ukrainian women who came to the community centre in the last year and a half are now trained in Food Hygiene and production and they cook for community meals and at special occasions such as the Leith Chooses event in October. This was an opportunity to bring a little bit of Ukraine to Leith and bring people together – and it worked – with around 300 people attending and AUGB winning the most votes and an award of some financial help from the Leith Chooses participative budgeting funding.



Leith Chooses event

In a scheme which is almost complete, the kitchen located in the basement at Royal Terrace is undergoing a complete refurbishment again with help from Lottery funding. Hannah said: "As our community grew, we knew that the space downstairs wasn't adequate so we've actually gutted it. Hopefully that'll be finished the week before Christmas. So that's been a massive project, although only to have the one space as it were, trying and accommodate everybody has been a challenge in the meantime."

Hannah reflected on the last year or so when so much has happened and picked out the best day out she could think of. She said: "One of the most successful trips were the outings to Craigies Farm near South Queensferry where everyone picked their own fruit. They loved the fact that they could go in and pick their own fruit, because the majority of them back home have their own gardens. They're not like us, they don't plant

the flowers, per se, they plant fruit trees and the plant vegetables. The mothers were each given a sunflower grown at Craigies to take home – the national flower of Ukraine. But we have also gone to places like Inchcolm Island and the Falkirk Wheel.”

Even though a lot has already been done Hannah believes there is much more to do – particularly for elderly people who have left everything behind them and for the older teenagers who are two groups she feels are overlooked. She said: “The older ones, and the the teenagers, between about the age of 17 and about 20, around university age, they’re the two groups that are very much forgotten, in all of this, because we all look after working people to make sure they’re getting into work and children made sure they’re okay at school, but the older people, who have retired and left everything that they’ve known all of their lives and the teenagers. But we’re trying our hardest.”

[You can find out about past and present projects on the AUGB Facebook page here.](#)



Photos of events courtesy of AUGB Edinburgh

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