



AGM Report March 2022 to September 2023

OASISS Open Arms in Shelford and Stapleford Community Group

In the beginning

Just over 17 months ago, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a group of villagers formed OASISS as a community initiative encompassing the three villages of Great Shelford, Little Shelford, and Stapleford. It sought to match Ukrainians seeking refuge in the UK with hosts in the three South Cambridgeshire villages. It focused on helping those seeking refuge through the Government's Homes for Ukraine (HfU) Scheme. Initially its goal was to identify extended families or those from the same community in Ukraine (village, neighbourhood) etc., and pair them with our community here in South Cambridgeshire. We hoped to build a strong self-supporting, integrated community with a cohesive identity. There was enthusiastic support for this approach from the three local Parish Councils, as well as SCDC/CCC, local churches/organisations/societies and a host of individuals.

Our initial call for potential hosts resulted in an amazing 69 offers of accommodation totalling 96 beds enough for 177 individuals. Other offers of help included the provision of language skills, an offer to host events, and the provision of educational classes, general activities, help to set up a website (oasiss.uk) and design a logo, offers of transport, legal advice, bicycles, toys, and equipment.

A year ago - in August 2022, 83 Ukrainian OASISS guests were living with their matched hosts. The ratio of adults to children was roughly 2/3 to 1/3, with the majority of the older guests being female. Most children in need of a school place had found one, and adults were beginning to secure employment. Over the following months more guests continued to arrive, and we eventually had an OASISS guest list of 107 individuals.

Early events and highlights

- A coffee morning was held twice a week: one at the Free Church in Great Shelford and one in the North Building of All Saints Little Shelford. The Wednesday coffee morning at The North Building, All Saints, was run until mid-November, when it was felt they were no longer needed. In their place occasional similar events were held on Saturday mornings when more guests were able to attend as many were now working.
- OASISS launched weekly language classes for different groups: adults including 11-15s (4 separate classes) and children under 11. These were held in the community room at St Mary's and the Great Shelford Library respectively over the 2022 summer holidays. Initially, over 50 Ukrainian



guests embraced this opportunity, which was most generously supported by St Mary's who gave free use of the Community Room. These classes continued to run with great success until February 2023 when they were taken over by SCDC.

- A fundraiser held at the Cricket Pavilion, Little Shelford on the evening of 22nd July helped to pay for the fees of the 5 qualified TEFL teachers as well as library rental charges. The event successfully raised just over £2900; in addition, OASISS were awarded a community grant of £300.
- A number of enormously successful clothes hubs events were organised and presented at Shelford Rugby Club, by Sandie Roberts, wife of the club President. These were well attended by our guests with the last event being held on 26th August 2022. The remaining contents of the hub were transferred to Sawston Free Church, where the local Ukrainian community now continues to run the hub.
- Yoga classes offered free to attendees on a Monday evening in Little Shelford Village Hall.
- Tennis lessons over the summer in Great Shelford on a Tuesday evening and Saturday afternoon.
- Friends and neighbours have been extremely generous in their donation of bicycles and equipment. These were serviced before being given to our guests. Financial donations helped to raise bicycle helmets, high visibility vests, padlocks, and lights. In all 39 bicycles were reconditioned and provided to guests.
- We established a Facebook page and associated closed groups for 'OASISS Hosts' and 'OASISS Guests', to share information; keep people connected and support communication in general.

Over the past 12 months

October 2022

- A successful Ukrainian Defenders Day lunch was held on Saturday 15th October with over 80 in attendance. The event began with a wonderful and moving presentation about the history of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Defenders Day created by Liubov Mykhailova and lunch was followed by a set of songs by Gio Dara, both with OASISS at the time.
- A second trip to deliver key medical supplies to Ukraine and return with more refugees was planned but not carried out as new refugees could not be identified. The medical supplies were sent out by courier.

December 2022



- A Christmas coffee morning was held in the North Building All Saints attended by 70+ hosts and guests. Wrapped presents were given for the Ukrainian children from members of All Saints Church.

January 2023

- A hugely enjoyable New Year's Party was held at Stapleford village hall. Over 120 hosts and guests ate and danced the night away to both live music and a disco.

April 2023

- OASISS began to source household furniture and fittings to support guests moving into independent living.
- OASISS warmly welcomed two new members to its committee: Maryna Mykhailova and Eugene Shevchuk.
- Generous financial support was given by several individuals in the community to pay for two job-sharing English-speaking Ukrainian teaching assistants at Great Shelford Primary School. The funds provided classroom support for a Ukrainian child until the beginning of the summer holidays.

May 2023

- 45 guests gamely took part in the Sawston fun run.
- Guests sang and danced at the community celebration of the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla on the Wale recreation ground.

June 2023

- 59 Ukrainian guests visited Wells-next-the-Sea, for some a first ever trip to the seaside, accompanied by four members of the OASISS Committee. The weather was just perfect, and much fun was had by all.

July 2023

- Attendance at the Great Shelford feast with an OASISS stall. We hoped to encourage new hosts to come forward. The Corn Sacs game was also played with Ukrainian guests helping run the stall throughout the day.
- 2 teenage guests were offered places at English Universities starting in September 2023. One has a place at Sheffield to study Dentistry and the other at Kent to study International Law.
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The current position and looking forward

As of August 2023, 29 Ukrainian families (62 OASISS guests) are living in their own accommodation. A further 3 families are awaiting final confirmation of a property. 36 guests are still with hosts and a further 8 guests have returned to Ukraine.

OASISS has both existing guests searching for a new host and a small but needy list of new refugees seeking their first host accommodation. Both OASISS and



SCDC/CCC have made several attempts over the past few months to find new hosts but have met with little success. Appeals are being made through the local churches and OASISS is considering a leaflet drop to all homes within the three villages as well as to Duxford and Sawston.

Future events

- A social event to raise additional funds
- Attendance with the OASISS stall at the Little Shelford Weekend – 15th to 17th September.
- A party to celebrate Defenders Day (October 1st) is planned for Hauxton Village Hall on 21st October

And finally

People have continued to support OASISS in many ways including generous financial donation. As of September 7th, 2023, the balance of funds is £1631.76. Total funds raised to March 31, 2023 were £13,633; expenses for the same period were £8,190.

It is with sadness that the committee accepted the resignation of Robin Haines as Vice Chairman and member of the OASISS committee. We will miss his extraordinary support, energy and enthusiasm. The whole committee wishes to record its thanks to Robin for his significant contribution and for his original call to arms which resulted in the formation of OASISS.

The committee would like to thank our amazing hosts who opened their homes and hearts to guests and to the army of volunteers and supporters who have helped with the provision of goods, transport, the redecoration of homes, and countless other acts of kindness and generosity large and small.

The Committee would also like to express its gratitude to ITAC for its ongoing management of the financial side of OASISS.

Two particular committee members also deserve special recognition for their endless, but quiet support of so many OASISS guests; they were the mainstay of the coffee mornings, have organised bicycles, house moves, stored and distributed furniture, and have been there in challenging times for many of our guests – thank you Susie and Gaby.

The OASISS team – Gaby Barnard, Ali Burd, Susie Everett, Robin and Diana Haines, Joanna Jasiewicz, Maryna Mykhailova, Charles and Caroline Kingdon, Eugene Shevchuk and Magda Syposz,

4th September 2023