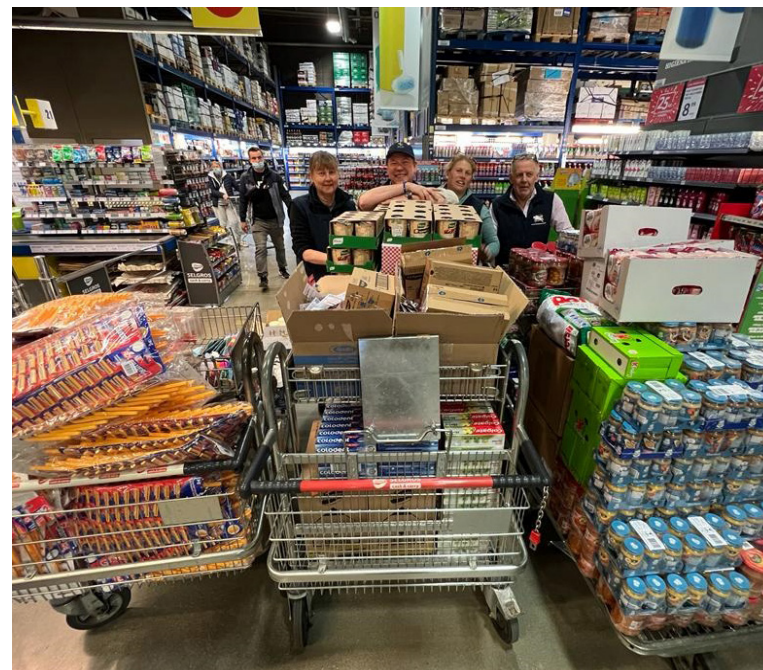


# Horsebox relief aid team send stampede of help to Ukraine



The team which delivered the supplies with one horsebox. Below, Stephen and Ruth



Stocking up on essential goods to be donated

By Lauren Barclay  
News reporter

A FLEET of horseboxes packed with vital aid for those fleeing Ukraine has made a 2,000-mile round trip amid the Russian invasion – in a mission organised by a man who grew up in Oldham.

Former Blue Coat School pupil Stephen Barnes arranged the incredible support mission to help Ukrainian families who have fled the fighting.

Stephen, 44, and his team made the journey from the North West to the Poland and Ukraine border to deliver the much-needed goods.

He said: “About three weeks ago, I was watching the 10 o’clock news and it showed a picture of the bodies of two young girls.

“They were face down and had been struck in a blast.

“What hit me was that they were dressed in the same way I dressed my daughters, and I knew I had to do something to help.”

Looking out of his window, Stephen was reminded of the horse truck his family use to transport his daughters and horses to competitions over the country, which gave him an idea.

Stephen planned to fill his horsebox with as many supplies as his could afford and drive to the Poland Ukraine border to help.

He contacted the equestrian community to help and soon his plan, which started off with just one truck, grew.

By the time it came to leave on March 17, nine full horse wagons complete with two drivers each, and a convey of support workers sent off to Chelm on the Polish bor-



der.

The trucks were packed full of items to help those who had left Ukraine, including items such as medical supplies, personal care goods and clothing.

Once at the border in Poland, the team spoke to centres about what items they were most in need of, and quickly used fundraising money to provide essentials.

Stephen said: “When we arrived, we spoke to the centres about how we could help.

“They didn’t know we had nine trucks and gave us a handwritten shopping list asking for as many of the items as we could manage.

“We took the trucks, and quickly filled them with every item on the list. Soon we had three full trucks.

“When we told the centres this they sent us a police escort, and the fire brigade and army came to help.”

Stephen and his wife Ruth, who met as pupils at Blue Coat School, were both a key part of the endeavour.

While Stephen was one of the convoy team travelling in the trucks, his wife stayed at home as part of the UK team to manage administration matters around the clock.

The Ukraine Equestrian Relief group as it is now known, continue to fundraise to supply support centres for refugees in Poland with essentials.

Their GoFundMe page has surpassed £50,000 with more of the community pulling together where they can.

Stephen, who is also the grandson of a Polish refugee, was joined by his mother Irena on the trip.

Irena travelled as part of the support team, speaking to women from many Polish towns and cities.

She believes the story has come full circle.

Irena said: “It all started at Christmas when Stephen didn’t know what to get me.

“He ended up contacting a man from Poland to help me find out more about his grandad, my dad, who was a Polish refugee.

“The man who Stephen contacted ended up joining the aid mission as a translator for the team when in Poland.”

The team returned to the UK in the early hours on March 26 but are working to continue to aid those in need on the border.

Stephen added: “What started with one truck has now grown to us registering as a charity and planning more trips.

“They told us it is the biggest supply of aid they have received so far.

“I’ve got a business to run here in the UK, but this is important, and I enjoy helping where I can.”

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