

## **Vera Tytova describes how she came to East Hertfordshire and her experience of life here.**

When I was a student, I was here studying English and I lived in London for some time. Back then I made friends with a wonderful girl, Julia, she's Ukrainian also but she has been in England since then and she is the godmother of Denis and when we were in France, because French language that is something I was struggling with, she called me and... she said to me, *"Look, I cannot take you over because I have my family, my mother and my sister are coming over, but I know somebody nice, some people, they are very nice, and they live in Stanstead Abbots and they want to help..."*

And we had a phone call with Abi and Anton who are our hosts. And we spoke and I could understand straight away that the people are very good, very nice, they are supportive... So, we applied for permission under Homes for Ukrainians, so we did come here.

Here, everything is thought of what to do next. You know, by the government, by the council, by the social services. So, you understand what to do next.

And also, I was surprised how nice people are, even at, you know, like at Job Centre, for the first time I was going for the interview and I was thinking there would be some person who would be very strict with me and, like, interrogation, ask me questions, but the lady was so nice, helpful, and I understand that I can ask questions back and she would explain anything she can. And because the language for me is easier than the French one, I felt more independent because I could go places. Our hosts, they provided us with bikes and we can have nice rides and trips along the canal which is very nice; we do it for hours on weekend.

Denis is now able to work at Mudlarks Café, where they welcome people with special needs and there is supervision. And that is something that was very important to me because in France he was indoors only communicating with group of Ukrainians, and there were no children of his age and he was isolated in a way and I wanted badly for him to get to know other people, to do something which he would be proud of and he would feel that he is needed. So that was a good reason for me.

*Are there differences that you've noticed between here and life in Ukraine before the War?*

Yes, people are smiley and very polite and, you know, sometimes I go in the morning, go running along the canal, and people, I don't know them, they smile at me, *"Good Morning", "Hello", "Hiya"* and that is something that is not completely the same in Ukraine. In Ukraine people are more held back, you know before they knew a person they would be, like not unfriendly, just... *"What do you want?"*

As I said to Max, even dogs are very polite, they don't bark, they don't run after you! And I feel, I don't know, is it specific of the place or of the area of Hertfordshire, but I feel safe going, even when there is nobody around in the fields, Denis and myself, you know, doing walks, and I feel safe, I feel calm and reassured that everything is fine...

You know, I used to live in a very big city, Kyiv is four and a half million people, and, I don't know, it's high speed, nervous and always running style of living. And I am used to that but

now I am enjoying, maybe there is more time for yourself, like for contemplating or understanding and even making time to speak to each other. That is precious because in big cities and, I don't know, in different countries you don't get this. People speak to each other actually; they stop and have a little chat... I like the nature here because there are lots of Nature Reserves, and I never thought that birdwatching would be interesting to me but actually it is. We saw the white owl, now I just take my time sometimes to sit and to look and to observe...

We are still hoping to go back as soon as possible but being that long away from home, now I understand I must make plans, to enrol my child to the college, and then see what happens. Because being just waiting, it's impossible for that long time... So, I decided that we have to live our lives now, in the given circumstances, to make the most of it... but we can do what we can do for our country. At the moment it is to support people, our people, sometimes I have very long phone-calls with those people staying there just to listen. They have to speak out, you know, just to listen to them. What we can do is to believe in victory, you know, that we will win and then we will rebuild our country and we will make it even better.