

# Aid reaches front-line village

## GIFTS FROM PLYMOUTH ARE TAKEN TO UKRAINE

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SHOEBOXES donated by residents on both sides of the Tamar Bridge and collected in Plymouth have been given to children in a Ukrainian village which was hit by a Russian air strike last month.

The village of Hroza, near the city of Kupiansk, in Kharkiv province, was the site of one of the worst atrocities since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

A café was hit by a missile on October 5, killing more than 50 people. Reports in the aftermath suggested that almost every family in the village was affected in some way by the blast, which made international headlines.

Now, children and residents still living in the village in north-east Ukraine have been offered some cheer thanks to donations of warm clothing, food, medicines and Christmas shoeboxes which were taken out from Plymouth and delivered onwards by non-combatant volunteer soldiers.

The shoeboxes were part of a convoy of aid driven across Europe by Andreas Evangelou, a Plymouth businessman who has now made eight such trips, and Maksym Litvinov, a Ukrainian who is now living in the city.

Mr Litvinov is originally from the city of Kharkiv, not far from the front line of clashes between Ukrainian and Russian forces, and he still has contacts in the Ukrainian military.

Christmas shoeboxes were donated by residents both in Plymouth and around the region, with Sir Robert Geffery's School in Landrake also organising a collection. The boxes have now been delivered to Hroza together with a package of aid.

The pair drove out in two vehicles, each pulling a caravan loaded with supplies, and came back in just one vehicle - Mr Evangelou's own car. They left behind both caravans, one of which was expected to be taken to the front line for use by soldiers, and a 4x4 vehicle.

Mr Litvinov said he and Mr Evangelou went as far as Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, before donations were taken onward by volunteer soldiers who carry out aid trips across affected towns and villages.

"All the presents and shoeboxes and warm clothing are now in Hroza," said Mr Litvinov. "We wanted everything to go to Hroza because it is still memorable in Ukraine, and so many people were



Children from Hroza, eastern Ukraine, with Christmas shoeboxes from Plymouth delivered by Ukrainian volunteers  
ANDREAS EVANGELOU

attacked and are still living in very difficult conditions.

"It's a village and a lot of homes were damaged, plus temperatures are now between minus 5 and minus 15 and there is snow - we made our trip in the last week before the cold weather and snow."

Supplies taken from Plymouth also formed the bulk of donations which were delivered across Ukraine, including north of Kyiv and south-east to Bakhmut and Avdiivka. Among the Ukrainians delivering the aid is a soldier, Vasily, who is a personal friend of Mr Litvinov.

Mr Litvinov said it was not just children who have benefited from the aid. He said: "When I spoke with Vasily, when they came to Hroza, they told me that, when they delivered food, they found a very old Ukrainian woman who is more than 90 years old and she cried so much because she doesn't have anyone."

"Her grandson died six months ago, and her son died already a long time before the war, and she doesn't have any help. She was crying and saying thank you for the help as they delivered a lot of food," he added.

"She didn't need any warm clothes, just food, because she is afraid to walk around because she is always hearing shooting. So many of these stories are motivating me."

Mr Evangelou said they were able to liaise with a Ukrainian humanitarian group so the aid was delivered where it was needed most. He said: "I've worked with the church, a charity in Kyiv, and

with several other groups in my eight trips, but this is the organisation that I feel most connected to, because we are communicating from England as opposed to it getting organised when we get out there.

"With Maksym, who speaks Polish and Ukrainian and Russian, he is able to coordinate the logistics with the people that he knows personally."

He added that the donations collected in Devon and Cornwall were very gratefully received. "It was incredibly humbling, from what I've heard from these soldier volunteers," he said.

"Jaroslav is 64 and he is one of many hundreds of non-combatant volunteers that go to where there is fighting, but are only going to deliver aid to people or the soldiers who need it.

"The beautiful thing about it is that these volunteers don't go to one place, they did a round trip, so they took our supplies to Chernihiv, which is just below the Belarus border, north of Kyiv and from there they went to Kharkiv, Kupiansk, Avdiivka and Bakhmut, and that took eight days with three vans that were fully loaded with supplies."

A comedy night in Plymouth is being arranged which will help to raise money for the next trip, which is planned for March, as soon as the worst of the winter subsides. Mr Evangelou added: "Thank you to all our sponsors and everyone who is continuing to donate. We're already planning trip number nine."

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