

PRESS RELEASE – Embargo until Thursday 5th May 2022

Taunton-area volunteer-run community group deliver first Ukrainian language laptops to locally-hosted refugees

On Thursday, 5th May, SCHol Tech delivered what it hopes to be just the first 3 community-refurbished Ukrainian language laptops, to refugees who have arrived in our area, after having been forced to leave their native homeland.

The group, run by 3 locally based IT professionals, supported by a small team of enthusiastic volunteers, have been refurbishing locally-donated laptops since the start of 2021. Taking in freely offered laptops that members of the public, and local companies, no longer need, the group refurbish and completely reinstall the machines, ready to donate back to those in qualifying circumstances, who apply for a free computer.

The initiative was started by Bridgwater father of 3, Dan Taylor, and is now run by Tim Finch, Carl Molyneux and Brian Tagg – who all live in the Taunton and Wellington area. The original aim was to provide laptops to children doing schoolwork at home during the last pandemic lockdown.

Having collected, processed, and then delivered over 210 free laptops, in a little over a year, the group have recently added dual English and foreign language machines to their roster. Recognising that those coming from Ukraine often are mothers and children, probably needing to continue education away from their homeland, SCHol.Tech spoke to local community host groups who are taking in refugees and started work on laptops that would display their native languages on screen, and with keyboards laid out with both the Roman and Cyrillic alphabets.

“Although none of us speak Ukrainian,” local IT professional Tim Finch said, “my colleague, Carl, researched what we would need to prepare laptops that will switch to a refugee’s native language, at a click of the mouse.”

Carl Molyneux, who also works in IT by day, prepared a laptop which was shown to Anna, a Ukrainian who is a local resident. With her British partner, Jon, who live near Ilminster, they were able to give detailed feedback on ways to improve the language display on the laptops.

Carl continued, “With their feedback, we have been able to prepare two styles of laptops – specific to the respective needs of Western Ukrainians and Eastern Ukrainians, when they arrive in the area. We hope this is just the start of our ability to provide native language machines to refugees from other nations who come here, often with very little.”

Even without advertising their impending availability, 10 host families already have applied, via the group’s website, <https://schol.tech>, for laptops for the Ukrainian families they are hosting in the area.

Speaking about how SCHol Tech CIC is run, Brian Tagg, the company’s back-office manager said, “It is only with the generous support of locals, companies, and grant-making bodies, that we have been able to do so much this last 15 months. It’s because we’ve been donated so many high-quality laptops, and received generous financial donations, that our all-volunteer team has been able to do what we have done so far.”

Tim, also one of the volunteer Directors of the non-profit Community Interest company SCHol Tech, went on to say “We did wonder, after helping something like 150 families in the area during the 2021 pandemic lockdown, whether our initiative would be short-lived. However, the new cost of living crisis across our area, and now the refugee situation, raised the importance of continuing to help those in our area most in need.”

SCHol Tech still supply refurbished computers for school children, adults and non-profit organisations, covering the Wellington, Taunton and Bridgwater area and surrounding villages. Those in qualifying circumstances can apply for machines via the <https://schol.tech> website. SCHol Tech are now able to also provide English/foreign language computers, for locally-hosted refugees.

When asked about the experience as a volunteer driver for SCHol Tech, Heather Hawley from Cannington, who has been with SCHol Tech since the beginning, said, “I have the best job in the team! I get to meet the recipients – the parents & children – across the community when we do our delivery runs. The smiles on the faces and the feedback we get, makes it worth all the effort the team put in. We always need good quality laptops & financial gifts, so we can keep going.”

END

NOTES FOR PRESS AGENCIES:

Radio & Press may contact SCHol Tech CIC with queries and for additional comments by contacting **Tim Finch on 07514 059313**. **Please note** this is Tim’s *commercial* business mobile number, not SCHol Tech’s – but it is the best way for media to get in touch.

Please do not publicise this mobile number in any SCHol Tech news package you produce, thank you).

Radio/TV : On Thursday May 5th, you can interview or film Carl Molyneux and his wife as they drive around the area delivering laptops. SCHol Tech may be able to arrange for a Ukrainian recipient to be interviewed also. Tim Finch can also provide video/audio pre-recorded soundbites to cut into your package.

Tim Finch is available for radio interview – either live or pre-record. Tim has pro quality audio kit at home to do live link into your studio, if needed.

Photos to accompany this press release and can be downloaded from <https://schol.tech/pressreleases>

At the time of writing this press release we have not yet delivered the first Ukrainian laptop, so we don’t yet have photos of the handover. These can be acquired on Thu May 5th when we do our first delivery run of Ukrainian language laptops.

Please note the brand **SCHol Tech CIC** (or Community Interest Company) is written with three capital letters at the start, and has no dot in the middle.

The web address <https://schol.tech> is all lower case and has the required dot in the middle.

The origin of the name ‘SCHol’ has a funny story to it. If interviewing Tim Finch, do ask about that!

Please note: Some of the laptops we produce for Ukrainians are *Russian* language on screen and *Russian* keyboard layout. Eastern Ukrainian refugees are more likely to want Russian language rather than Ukrainian language. However, for ease of communication, we are only saying ‘Ukrainian Computers’ or ‘Computers for Ukrainians’ in our publicity - to prevent people confusing the mention of the language ‘Russian’, with the wrong notion that we are somehow giving laptops to Russians in our community.

Please avoid the use of the word ‘Russian’ therefore in any package, thank you.

We are also wanting to be ready to support other genuine refugees who come and live in our area. We have started with Ukrainian machines, for obvious reasons, but wish to be inclusive of other refugees, as they come to our attention.