

Hobby to volunteer

Meanwhile, Agata Betlej, who lives in Robertstown, has turned her hobby of sewing into a volunteering role with the Masks 4 All Ireland — Sewists Against Covid-19 Facebook group, which she joined around three weeks ago.

So far she has made around 100 masks which have been donated to local GPs, nurses, vulnerable people and those volunteering.

The group uses a standardised pattern to create reusable, comfortable cotton masks, to be used with a disposable filter such as a paper towel, which are free to those who need them. The group helps organise donations for volunteers to source fabric locally — although Agata says that “it’s easier to find pixie dust than elastic at the moment!”

The masks take a significant amount of time to make, as the cotton must be washed several times and the fabric cut, pleated and ironed in a certain way.

“I have a seven and a half year old helper, Alice, who is good at cutting and putting the elastic into masks,” said the proud mum.

Demand for the masks is high, and the group prioritises nursing homes as recipients. “People requesting them are extremely grateful,” said Agata. “I have dropped them to surgeries in Clane and to nurses and to the pharmacy, and got the message that they love them because they are so much more comfortable than what they were wearing before.”

Donations of cotton fabric would help the group, and Agata is asking people to check sewing boxes, spare rooms and attics for any spare fabric which could be repurposed.

Other locals involved in the initiative include Veronica Moran in Robertstown, Agnes Howard in Derrinturn, Catherine Henvey in Kill and Yvonne Winters in Allenwood. Polish native Agata, who has lived in Ireland since the end of 2006, sees making masks as a way to give back to her local community.

She remembers the friendliness of neighbours who welcomed the family to Robertstown almost six years ago and enjoys the local sense of community. “Home is here,” she said.

If anyone in the community wishes to help out, you might have some spare material or elastic you wish to give to the ladies or you can donate to the masks 4 All Ireland fundraising page, link attached below:

https://www.gofundme.com/f/masks4allireland?utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=customer&utm_campaign=p_lico+share-sheet