



Herts Welcomes Syrian Families (HWSF)

Welcoming, supporting, integrating

Information Note

How did HWSF start?

In response to widespread public support for the UK to do more to help Syrian refugees displaced by the Syrian Civil War, in September 2015 the UK Government launched the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (SVPR) Scheme aiming to bring 20,000 Syrian refugees to the UK over a five year period (2015-2019).

With the success of the scheme being dependent on the participation and support of local councils, Herts Welcomes Syrian Families (HWSF) was formed to encourage local councils to participate in the SVPR Scheme. Working collaboratively with other organisations, HWSF's lobbying and public speaking efforts were successful – nine of Hertfordshire's ten District and Borough Councils committed to receiving Syrian families through the Scheme. Broxbourne District Council (Hoddesdon, Broxbourne, Cheshunt and Waltham Cross) chose not to participate in the SVPR Scheme.

By August 2016 it had become apparent that HWSF's effectiveness and ability to raise funds would be enhanced if it were formally registered with the Charity Commission. HWSF achieved its charitable status in April 2017 and its Registered Charity No. 1172687 with the Charity Commission.

HWSF now (following the GDPR re-consent process) has a network of over 320 Supporters, Members and Volunteers providing support to the families in Hertfordshire. HWSF works with other voluntary groups supporting refugees in Hertfordshire and is working to improve coordination amongst them. In March 2018 HWSF's work was recognised in the Hertfordshire High Sheriff's Annual Awards where we were Runner-Up in the Social Justice category.

What are our objectives?

To provide support to refugees and asylum seekers in Hertfordshire, particularly Syrian refugees, by operating as a co-ordination and action network, that will:

- (1) Encourage local councils and the County Council to accept refugees under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme;
- (2) Work with local councils, the County Council and relevant organisations to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers have access to, and are provided with, appropriate services;
- (3) Welcome refugees and asylum seekers to our area and offer ongoing practical support;
- (4) Connect organisations and individuals wishing to support refugees and asylum seekers to create a supportive and enabling environment for integrating them into the local community;
- (5) Advance the education of the public in all aspects of the refugee situation, with particular reference to refugees of Syrian origin.

How do Syrian Refugee Families come to Hertfordshire?

Families go through a rigorous selection and vetting procedure overseen by the UK Home Office. They are granted five years' Refugee Status. If after five years in the UK, a stable peace has been achieved in Syria, the families can return to Syria. Alternatively, they may choose to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

Accommodation is found mainly through private landlords and housing associations. The first family to come to Hertfordshire through the SVPR Scheme arrived in Stevenage in March 2016. Currently (June 2018) there are 39 SVPR families in Hertfordshire plus one family that came via a family reunion. Additional families are due to arrive during 2018 and 2019.

How are the families supported?

Eight of the nine councils participating in the SVPR Scheme in Hertfordshire commissioned the British Refugee Council (BRC) to support them and the arriving families for their initial 12 months. The BRC provides advice and

support to help newly arrived Syrian families to access services and mainstream provision, and establish community links. HWSF works closely with the BRC's Hertfordshire Resettlement Team. During the families' second year local authorities have commissioned a reduced level of support from the BRC and consequently in these areas HWSF's role becomes more important to the families from month 13 onwards.

The ninth council participating in the SVPR Scheme - Dacorum Borough Council – did not join in the commissioning of the BRC. Here HWSF's Dacorum Branch is providing significant and direct support to the families and to the council support team from an earlier stage in the process.

Where are the families? (As at February 2018)

District/Borough Council	Main towns	No. Families (June 2018)
Dacorum	Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted, Tring	5
East Herts	Ware, Hertford, Bishops Stortford, Buntingford	5
Hertsmere	Borehamwood, Bushey, Radlett, Potters Bar	1
North Herts	Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston, Knebworth	4
St Albans	St Albans, Harpenden, Redbourn	12 +1 reunion
Stevenage	Stevenage	4
Three Rivers	Rickmansworth, Abbots Langley, Chorleywood	2
Watford	Watford	4
Welwyn Hatfield	Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield	2

What does HWSF do?

HWSF provides a range of assistance to arriving families that complements the assistance and support provided by the local councils and the BRC's Hertfordshire Project. Typically the support provided by HWSF to families includes:

- Providing a welcome meal on the day of their arrival
- Provision of items of furniture and home furnishings that may not be present in their allocated property, such as children's toys, school uniforms, dictionaries and information on the UK; radios, TVs and TV licences; kitchen equipment; books, clothes and gardening equipment. In 2017 HWSF established a Bike Scheme to provide families with bikes and safety equipment and so far over 60 bikes have been provided.
- Linking arriving families to supportive communities and providing support to the BRC and local council case workers
- Organising events to bring the families together
- Giving talks to local groups and communities to raise awareness of the global refugee crisis and on the situation of refugees and asylum seekers coming to the UK

A key concern of HWSF is to ensure that the families are provided with sufficient ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) support. HWSF is working with the local councils, the BRC and ESOL providers to achieve this. An informal training network for volunteer ESOL tutors was established in 2017 and a part-time paid ESOL Volunteer Coordinator began work in February 2018.

Key HWSF contacts

Irene Austin – Chair of HWSF - email: chair@hwsf.org.uk

Veronica Raymond – HWSF Membership Secretary - email: membership@hwsf.org.uk

Mick Hayter – HWSF Treasurer - email: treasurer@hwsf.org.uk

Donations towards HWSF's work would be greatly appreciated. The most preferred method is by BACS transfer. Payment details can be obtained from Mick Hayter. Alternatively cheques made out to 'Herts Welcomes Syrian Families' may be posted to Mick Hayter 'Hollybank', Common Lane, Kings Langley, Hertfordshire. WD4 8BL.

Further information on HWSF is available on the website www.hwsf.org.uk and via the HWSF Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HertsWelcomesSyrianFamilies>