



Herts Welcomes Syrian Families/Herts Welcomes Refugees.

Reg Charity 1172687 www.hwsf.org.uk

Patron: Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire Robert Voss CBE CStJ

Welcoming, Supporting, Integrating

Trustees' Report for 2019

2109 has been another busy year for us all and we were delighted when Robert Voss, Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, agreed to become our patron. We also have a new logo and are very grateful to Enas Barakat for designing this for us.

Major change came when our members agreed unanimously to the proposal that we should change our name to Herts Welcomes Refugees (HWR) in order to more accurately reflect our work, since we now support families and individuals from Sudan, Iraq, Iran and Eritrea as well as Syria. The majority of these have come through the resettlement scheme. Hertfordshire now has a higher number of resettled refugees than any other area in the East of England and HWR are supporting at least 260 individuals.

Having conducted a review of our organisation, we decided that all our Local Convenors should be trustees and we would like to welcome Kate Scott Local Convenor (Dacorum) and Veronica Raymond (North Herts and Stevenage) to our board of trustees. Also in line with our constitution, two of our trustees will stand down at this AGM - Vicky Woodcraft and Catherine Henderson will be standing down but have agreed to stand for re-election.

Befriender Network and Projects

This year, through our successful partnership with Community Development Action who secured funding through the Tampon Tax from Herts Community Foundation, we were able to deliver a Women's Project, funding for which has now ended. Thanks to the hard work of a number of our volunteers and supported by our Volunteer Co-ordinator, Caroline Herring, groups ran in North and East Herts, Stevenage, St Albans and Watford as well as a group for young women called 'Future Leaders', set up in partnership with the Refugee Council. An informal men's group, meeting fortnightly, has also started in North Herts. We hope to be able to continue these groups.

Our Befriender /Language support network continues to grow and we now have 76 volunteers befriending or providing language support to adults and to children in primary and secondary schools. Supporting children is a new area for us but we are delighted that parents are so keen for their children to progress. In 2019 we were able to support 57 adults and 10 children and this area of work continues to grow. Caroline, our Volunteer Co-ordinator, has carried out 56 inductions during the year – an excellent way of raising awareness of the situation of refugees in Hertfordshire. Some volunteers become Language supporters, while others help with a variety of tasks including running or helping at events, fund-raising, driving refugee family members to appointments, running our Mailchimp, managing our bike scheme and delivering bikes.

We remain responsive to changing needs and will be looking to combine these projects into a Community Integration Project if sufficient funding can be secured. In the meantime Caroline will continue to support existing volunteers, organise training and induct and place new volunteers.

Bike Scheme We are very grateful to Vicky Woodcraft who has managed this scheme for us for the last four years. She has now handed this over to Chris Rigby who continues to respond to requests. Since the scheme began we have been able to give out more than 250 bikes, together with helmets, locks and lights, which has helped families become more independent.

Activities

We continue to organise events throughout the year, most of which are now run by our volunteers and partners, such as local churches and other faith groups, helping to bring communities together.

During 2019 13 such events took place, 4 in St Albans area, 3 in Watford, 2 in Welwyn Hatfield and 4 in North Herts, 1 Dacorum and, in the words of one volunteer, *'It was just wonderful to witness the coming together of our different cultures, backgrounds, languages.'* We have also organised a number of outings, including trips to the seaside, a visit to Cambridge, visits to the countryside and we hope to involve volunteers in still more of these in future.

Fundraising

We are very grateful to COSARAF for their vital support to our Befriender network and this year we took part in two other major fund-raising activities.

In October we bid to The Funding Network, which involved two rounds of bidding and a final 'pitch' at the Abbey Theatre, where Inam Khouliani and Kate Scott brought HWR's work vividly to life, raising £3800 which was increased to £5202 in early January 2020.

Towards the end of the year, two of our trustees and a young volunteer set up a Crowdfunder project to provide money for laptop computers for children at, or about to move to, secondary school – an exciting but stressful task which proved to be very successful, raising almost £9,000. This will be shown in our 2020 accounts. . We are very grateful to our members and supporters who contributed to this and who persuaded others to do so.

Many thanks also to those members and supporters who contributed to our previous laptop appeal and to those who ran events such as cake sales during the year, raising vital funds for Herts Welcomes Refugees.

Website

Continued thanks to Lauren Frankel who manages our website, ensuring that there are always interesting stories about our work and reaching out to new supporters around the county.

Reviewing our 2019 priorities and priorities for 2020

In the main, we have achieved our 2019 priorities, continuing to welcome and support families and working with other networks and organisations. Our befriender network has strengthened and we have worked with the Refugee Council and local councils in helping with employment.

The needs of the families are changing as time passes and we attempt to respond to their requests, for example by contributing towards driving lessons, helping them to become more independent. We would like, however, to involve more refugees in the running of the organisation and are actively seeking ways to do this. We are also still considering how best to organise a volunteer driver network.

Our priorities for 2020 remain roughly the same:-

- To continue to support the families and other refugees and to respond to changing needs.
- To continue to run events that support wellbeing and integration into local communities.
- To be open to supporting asylum seekers and refugees not coming through the Government scheme.
- To continue helping with access to employment.
- To consult with the families on how they can be more involved with our organisation.
- To consider different models for our cross-county Volunteer Driver network.
- To explore other fundraising strategies sometimes in partnership with other organisations.

As before, we will continue to need your support and involvement to achieve all of this.

Once again we thank those individuals and organisations who have given their support by volunteering, fundraising, making donations, offering their premises and helping us to organise and run events. Please do keep working with us.

Irene Austin (Chair), Samah Alrahabi, John Borton, Michael Hayter (Treasurer), Catherine Henderson, Veronica Raymond, Kate Scott and Vicky Woodcraft.