



(Registered charity No 1172687)

Patron: Robert Voss CBE HM Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire

How Herts Welcomes Refugees started

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 (2015-2020).

With the success of the scheme being dependent on the participation and support of local councils, a group was formed initially known as Herts Welcomes Syrian Families (HWSF) 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.

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 as Registered Charity No. 1172687 with the Charity Commission. In October 2019 members approved a change of name from Herts Welcomes Syrian Families to **Herts Welcomes Refugees** to reflect the reality that an increasing number of refugees from other countries were being supported and that the new Refugee Resettlement Scheme starting in 2020 would be resettling refugees from a broader range of countries. The change of name was agreed by the Charity Commission. The new name is used throughout the remainder of this Handbook.

Objectives of Herts Welcomes Refugees

Herts Welcomes Refugees' objectives are 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 any Government 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; 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;
4. Advance the education of the public in all aspects of the refugee situation, with particular reference to refugees of Syrian origin.

How do refugee families come to Hertfordshire?

Families come to the UK through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPR) and its successors. They undergo a rigorous selection and vetting procedure overseen by the Home Office. They are granted five years' Refugee Status.

The first family arrived in Stevenage in 2016. By February 2020 HWR were supporting more than 50 families and other individuals across Hertfordshire.

How are the families supported?

Eight of the nine councils participating in the SVPR Scheme in Hertfordshire commissioned the Refugee Council (RC) to support the arriving families. The RC helps newly arrived families to access services and mainstream provision and establish community links. Herts Welcomes Refugees works closely with the RC's Hertfordshire Resettlement Team. During the families' second year local authorities have commissioned a reduced level of support from the RC and consequently in these areas Herts Welcomes Refugees' role becomes more important.

Dacorum Borough Council did not join in the commissioning of the RC. Here, Herts Welcomes Refugees 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 2020)

| District/Borough Council | Main towns | No. Families |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Dacorum | Hemel Hempstead | 8 |
| East Herts | Ware, Hertford | 7 |
| Hertsmere | Shenley, Radlett | 2 |
| North Herts | Hitchin, Letchworth | 10 |
| St Albans | St Albans | 12 |
| Stevenage | Stevenage | 5 |
| Three Rivers | Rickmansworth, Abbots Langley | 2 |
| Watford | Watford | 6 |
| Welwyn Hatfield | Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield | 5 |

What does Herts Welcomes Refugees do?

Herts Welcomes Refugees provides a range of assistance to arriving families that complements the assistance and support provided by the local councils and the Refugee Council's Hertfordshire Project. Typically the support provided to families by Herts Welcomes Refugees includes:

- Providing a local welcome party.
- Provision of items of furniture and home furnishings as needed including TVs and TV licences, bikes and accessories where required.
- Linking arriving families to supportive communities and providing support to the Refugee Council and local council case workers.
- Organising events to bring the families together.
- Giving talks to raise awareness of the global refugee crisis and HWR's role.
- Provide ongoing practical and language support and friendship.

A key concern of Herts Welcomes Refugees is ensuring that the families are provided with sufficient ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) support. Since 2017 the charity has been able to fund a (part time) ESOL Volunteer Coordinator whose role is to help establish and support a network of volunteers working with individuals in the home and in small groups across Hertfordshire.