



“Welcoming and Supporting Refugees in Hertfordshire”

<https://www.hertswelcomes.org.uk/>

Patron: Robert Voss CBE CStJ HM Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire

Herts Welcomes Refugees Trustee Report January to December 23

Executive summary

This has been a year of change and development for Herts Welcomes Refugees as we responded to the challenge of supporting increasing numbers of asylum seekers of many different nationalities and with a wide range of needs, whilst continuing to welcome and support refugees who have settled in the county.

We have spent time considering how we can most effectively organise ourselves and how we can ensure the growth and sustainability of the charity, reviewing our objectives, the support we are offering, our means of communication and methods of measuring our impact.

This activity was prompted by:

- the need to continue to develop our support for asylum seekers, who come from a wide range of nationalities, have different needs to, and do not have access to the services offered to, refugees
- the increase in numbers of people we support, both asylum seekers and refugees
- the need to demonstrate the impact of our services to potential and actual funders
- the need to capture the voice of those we support in order to ensure that our resources are most effectively used and that we address actual rather than perceived needs
- the need to ensure that the charity is sustainable: we will remain volunteer led but the increased scope of our offering requires more paid support if we are to continue to operate effectively

This report gives an overview of our work during the year. The Trustees have reviewed last year’s objectives against this year’s achievements and, while further work is needed in some areas, we are encouraged by our progress.

Here are some of the key points for 2023:

- advisory group made up of refugees and asylum seekers established
- 47 new volunteers recruited to bring us to a total of 130 active volunteers at the end of year
- asylum accommodation facilities supported increased from 3 to 8
- more than 100 Afghan evacuees welcomed as permanent Hertfordshire residents
- support for Afghan evacuees in the Dacorum hotel continued until the hotel closed in August
- review of our structure and objectives
- development of systems and processes to record volunteer contribution, improvement of our website, social media and communications
- successful bids for grants from the Hilden Charitable Fund, Herts Community Foundation, Cosaraf and HCC locality funds

- 140 bikes, locks and helmets provided
- nine training and discussion sessions for volunteers
- strengthened relationships with existing partners and development of new relationships in response to emerging needs
- established an advisory group made up of refugees and asylum seekers to ensure that our offering is relevant

Please read on for further information.

Trustees

The Trustees meet on a regular basis and most of us attend the monthly management meetings. At Trustees' meetings, we consider matters of policy in line with the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit, receive financial reports and take decisions regarding the strategic direction of the charity according to the constitution, objectives for the year and the need to adapt as new challenges arise. We will bring to the AGM a resolution to amend the Objectives of the charity to reflect that our primary focus is no longer Syrian refugees but refugees and asylum seekers of all nationalities.

Catherine Henderson resigned as a trustee at the end of December and Vicky Woodcraft will resign at the AGM. Catherine and Vicky were founder members of the charity and we will miss their wise contribution.

Andy Gregg joined us as a trustee in May. Andy brings a wealth of experience as he has worked with, and still has links with, other charities concerned with refugees and asylum seekers. He is also a trustee of the Hertfordshire Equalities Advisory Board.

An objective for this year was to recruit a trustee with lived experience and we have started our search for a suitable candidate. Our current Trustees are Irene Austin (Chair), Adrian Ball (Treasurer), Veronica Raymond, Kate Scott, Samah Alrahabi, John Borton, Andy Gregg and Vicky Woodcraft.

According to our constitution, Andy Gregg who was appointed as a trustee during the year will have his appointment formally endorsed at the AGM. Kate Scott and Samah Alrahabi will stand down and have offered themselves for reelection at the AGM.

The Management Team

This team continues to meet on a monthly basis. There have been a number of changes during the year: some retirements but also new members and redeployment of existing members to address emerging needs.

Karen Cleaver has moved from being a St Albans and Hertsmere Area Convenor to lead on support for asylum seekers in a Hatfield hotel and is now part of the Welwyn Hatfield team. Birim Karakas has taken

over supporting the London Colney families as well as those in Hertsmere. In East Herts, Catherine Henderson resigned at the end of the year as both Area Convenor and Trustee but we were very pleased to welcome Carolyn Breheny to that team, working with Denise Beardshaw on supporting asylum seekers in a large hotel and in the community. Some areas still do not have strong enough teams to support local demand and recruiting more volunteers in those areas is a priority.

In terms of paid support, we were very sorry to see Caroline Herring retire in February as Volunteer Coordinator but were pleased to welcome Ruhena Akhtar to that role from the end of March. Ruhena is a registered counsellor and psychotherapist and brings a wealth of experience to her role. Annabel Kirk continues to work as our Administrator and covered for the Volunteer Coordinator post whilst we were recruiting.

We are very pleased to welcome Lucile Bertolaso-Scarlett as our Safeguarding Lead, succeeding Vicky Woodcraft who has led on safeguarding for many years. We thank Vicky for all her help.

Advisory Group

The Trustees are aware that the charity needs not only to have a means of receiving feedback on the support we provide but also to involve those we support to ensure we are effective. We have therefore invited representatives from the communities we support to join an Advisory Group.

Andy Gregg chairs this group and John Borton has taken administrative responsibility. The first meeting took place in October when we shared information about how the charity works and asked the members to identify their key concerns. After this meeting a WhatsApp group was set up for participants. Concerns emerging from the group are the difficulties of finding suitable employment for those able to work, lack of legal aid lawyers for asylum seekers and the cost of living. One success story is that after the first meeting one of the members who was having difficulty finding work was able to gain employment through our volunteer network contacts.

Our volunteer network

We are a volunteer led organisation and volunteers deliver the great majority of the support we provide. Our volunteer network is the heart of our organisation and has grown significantly during the year. It remains a strong network, strengthened further by the recruitment of 47 new volunteers, giving us a total of 130 active volunteers. We are so grateful to all our volunteers for the time and commitment they give to the charity. We are constantly amazed by their enthusiasm, flexibility and compassion.

However we still need more volunteers to address local needs, particularly in Stevenage and North Herts and in Watford and Three Rivers.

Our new Volunteer Coordinator has introduced 'Table Talk' sessions to give volunteers a chance to meet each other (mostly on Zoom) and discuss their activities. These sessions – of which we had four in 2023 - have proved very popular. Topics included health and wellbeing and cultural differences. In November and December we arranged two face to face meetings, one in Stevenage and one in St Albans which were really well attended and gave our volunteers a chance to share their experiences and learn about activities in other areas of the county. There will be more face to face meetings in 2024.

We have developed our volunteer training this year, starting with a face to face meeting looking at language awareness and resources. We also signposted new volunteers to an online course to help with language support.

Judy Kirsh, our ESOL specialist, ran face-to-face and Zoom training sessions in February, April, May, June, July and September but we recognise that this area requires further development. Judy is available to answer individual queries, to recommend resources and training opportunities and to signpost to other sources of support. We have created an ESOL resources area, including self-access resources, on our website so that our volunteers can find suitable materials to support ESOL teaching and learning more easily.

Our work during the year

Refugees

Many of the Syrian refugee families do not need our support in the same way as they did a few years ago. We continue to support those who do. We are pleased to report that more of them now have British Citizenship.

We continue to provide opportunities for refugees to meet in lunch clubs, women's groups and other gatherings, in addition to providing befriender and language support. Now that we are working with a wider range of people, we are keen to open up these sessions to all the groups we support in the interests of integration and sharing experiences.

Afghan evacuees

The bridging hotels for Afghan evacuees all closed during the year. Most of the people from the hotel in Dacorum that we supported have settled in the county and have been joined by others from hotels elsewhere.

The number of Afghan evacuees supported in the community has risen by more than 100.

The needs of these families and individuals vary and, while they have the benefit of having been in the UK for up to two years before leaving the hotels, moving into the wider community presents its own challenges. We are working closely with their caseworkers at the Refugee Council and Dacorum Borough Council to support them and we know that Christ First Watford has maintained contact with those who were housed in the hotel in Borehamwood who have settled locally. We are still able to offer welcome packages tailored to needs and some welcome events. Where possible, we continue to offer these families and individuals the range of support we offered those who settled in Hertfordshire earlier.

We have also supported Ukrainian refugees by providing financial help and donated goods and by welcoming them to language classes at our drop in sessions.

Supporting asylum seekers

At the start of 2023 we were supporting asylum seekers living in three facilities (two hotels and self-catering accommodation). By the end of the year we were providing support in eight locations as well as more “dispersed” asylum seekers i.e. those living in accommodation in the community. Other charities and faith groups lead on support at most of the other hotels.

There were 13 asylum facilities in Hertfordshire in 2023. One closed in January 2024 and other closures are planned in accordance with government policy to reduce the number of hotels and house asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation. This change will present fresh challenges to Herts Welcomes Refugees.

We can only support people who are willing to engage with us: we do not claim to have reached all asylum seekers living in the locations we support but we consider that we have had a significant impact on many of those who have engaged with us. It should also be remembered that we are not dealing with a static population as the Home Office can move people at very short notice. This brings its own challenges and makes it difficult to record how many people we have supported.

We acknowledge and regret that we cannot provide the same level of support across all eight facilities because we do not have enough volunteers. We need quite a large group of volunteers to provide a range of support to asylum seekers with complex needs and ideally a team of people to coordinate their activities.

After a long period when a minimal number of asylum seekers were receiving decisions on their claims, the government has introduced a fast track process for asylum seekers of specific nationalities and we are now seeing a significant increase in decisions, mostly positive for those on this process. This has taken the charity in yet another direction as the euphoria of achieving refugee status is quickly overtaken by concerns about housing, the complexities of opening bank accounts and claiming Universal Credit and the prospect of being evicted from Home Office accommodation at short notice. This group do not have the support of caseworkers to guide them through the moving on process and so our volunteers are doing what we can to help.

In terms of the scope of support provided, we offer at some but not all locations:

- English classes – open to all, with different classes to address different levels where possible
- childcare so that mums with young children, who are unable to attend college because of this, can attend classes
- opportunities to cook – most asylum seekers don't have the facilities to cook for themselves
- free shops for clothes sourced from donations from supporters, Goods for Good and One Impossible Thing
- art and craft sessions
- education support: liaising with Herts County Council Admissions team, colleges and schools, accompanying families to inductions, sourcing school uniform, shoes and equipment
- a testimony project which gives asylum seekers the opportunity to record their story so that they can make best use of their time when they get to see a solicitor

- introductions to Legal Aid immigration solicitors: Hertfordshire is a legal aid immigration advice desert but we have identified some firms outside the county who are prepared to take on asylum seekers whom we refer to them
- homework clubs
- outings to local places of interest
- SIM cards provided by Vodafone – essential for connecting with Migrant Help, solicitors and friends and family
- clothing vouchers for new arrivals and for school uniform provided by the Church of Latter-Day Saints and in part by HCC Hardship Fund
- listening and advice: this may take the form of helping people to contact Migrant Help, school or college or simply passing the time of day with someone who feels isolated

In most of the eight locations we operate, we engage with asylum seekers inside the hotels using communal areas. In Dacorum we operate from drop ins made available to us by the Alexandra Road Congregational Church and the South Hill Centre – a new departure for us which has opened up new opportunities for collaborating with other organisations. We may have to introduce more drop ins to address the needs of dispersed asylum seekers.

These activities help the asylum seekers who take part to improve their English, to meet others in a safe environment, get a better understanding of British culture, reduce their isolation and help integration by demonstrating that there are people who welcome them and provide opportunities for them to demonstrate their talents.

Notwithstanding the challenges we are encouraged by the appreciation shown by those we support and by seeing the impact our work is having. Here is an example:

‘Sometimes a little help means life for those who have been disappointed in the estrangement and harshness of life’

Supporting asylum seekers has caused us to change and expand the support we provide and made us seek out new organisations to work with. Here are some examples:

The cooking project

This started in Dacorum with the aim of giving those who did not have facilities to cook the chance to do so. The project is funded by Mind Hertfordshire - Flourish. In Dacorum the Sunnyside Rural Trust welcomes us to their kitchen facilities. The project revealed that we had several talented chefs in our midst – four of whom cooked Iranian Ash Reshteh soup for more than 70 guests at a Sunnyside celebratory event. The cooking project is now up and running in Welwyn and Hatfield and we are grateful to Christchurch Baptist church for the use of their kitchen facilities. This project has achieved its aim of improving wellbeing and has also given participants opportunities to meet members of the wider community, to get an idea of the cost of living as they shop for ingredients and the chance to share their culture and that of others through food. Our volunteers have also commented on how enjoyable they find taking part.

Thanks to the support of Daler Rowney, Cass Art and Artscape Harpenden, who have supplied materials, we have been able to run art and craft sessions for both adults and children in the Welwyn Hatfield hotels. This has really helped with wellbeing, especially for the adults, and has given the children enjoyable recreational time. We have some very talented artists and Ghazal, who now has refugee status, has kindly come back and helped with some sessions. We used the pictures from these sessions on 'Donotsendmeacard' in December.

Summer School for Young Asylum Seekers in Dacorum

The arrival of a large group of asylum seekers into new Home Office accommodation in Dacorum at the end of 2022 created many challenges for all local services. HWR identified that there was one cohort at particular risk of isolation and exclusion: around 20 young people aged 15-19 who would be unable to start college until September 2023. For many of this group, this would mean a whole year out of education.

HWR created and organised a Summer School for this cohort, convening meetings with local partners to create a broad programme of activities to support the academic and emotional needs of the young people.

Many thanks to the following partners for supporting this Summer School initiative:

- **Community Action Dacorum** provided intensive ESOL lessons
- **West Herts College** provided ESOL lessons and bespoke sign-up support for courses starting in September 2023
- **Dacorum Services for Young People** ran sessions on personal resilience, cooking and music studio mixing; and hosted an end-of-programme party at the request of the young people
- **The Boxmoor Trust** ran outdoor sessions focused on understanding the environment – pond dipping and nature walks
- **The Waterways Experience** provided a canal boat trip
- **The Nuffield Trust** organised a fitness session
- **HWR volunteers:** individual volunteers provided science lessons, art lessons and support for further education opportunities

Many of the external organisations involved in the Summer School, and the HWR volunteers who supported every activity, commented very positively on the attitude and approach of the group. They changed the hearts and minds of everyone they met.

The HWR area team is proud of what was achieved for a very vulnerable cohort. The qualitative and quantitative evaluation feedback was positive and every young person who participated is now in Further Education at local colleges.

Bike scheme

Thanks to funding from Herts Community Foundation, we were able to deliver 140 bikes, locks and helmets to refugees and asylum seekers. A real achievement. Our bike coordinator, Andy Brocklehurst, saw this project through until it ended in November and has since retired. Our thanks to Andy for this. We have recruited a new volunteer who is undertaking training so that he can service bikes. The Herts

Disability Sports Foundation has also worked with us in servicing and delivering bikes. We are grateful to Annabel Kirk who took over the administration and some of the coordination for this project and to a group of Welwyn Hatfield County Councillors who funded bike stands and locks through their locality budgets.

Working with other organisations

Herts Welcomes Refugees works collaboratively with many organisations to provide support to refugees and asylum seekers. As our offering develops, so do relationships with others.

We are recognised as an effective force for supporting refugees and asylum seekers. This is demonstrated by our participation in a number of groups and meetings at local, county and regional level. We find that we are increasingly consulted by others on the development of support they are trying to provide.

In terms of established relationships, we continue to work closely with:

- the East of England Local Government Association on resettlement and asylum seeker related issues
- the Refugee Council who are the contracted caseworkers for many of the Afghan evacuees and some of the original Syrian resettled families
- the Humanitarian team at Dacorum Borough Council who are the caseworkers for some of the resettled Afghan evacuees and are stepping up to support former asylum seekers to make a positive move on to permanent accommodation once leave to remain is granted
- the Humanitarian team and others at Herts County Council: initially our relationship was focused on Afghan evacuees in bridging hotels but is increasingly asylum seeker focused.
- the Red Cross
- Migrant Help
- Flourish who have funded our cookery project and to whom we have referred those in need of mental health support
- the Hertfordshire New Migration Partnership which we Co-Chair
- The South Hill Centre and Alexandra Road Congregational Church, both in Hemel Hempstead, who provide the venues for our drop ins and a range of other support
- Goods for Good who have generously provided clothing, toiletries and SIM cards
- Alternatives who provide baby boxes
- One Impossible Thing who provide trainers
- Community Action Dacorum and West Herts College with whom we have collaborated on various ESOL related projects
- Beauty Banks for toiletries
- The Vineyard Verso Church St Albans
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Communities 1st
- GoVolHerts
- Hertfordshire Asian Women's Association

- Herts Help
- Hertfordshire Services for Young People
- Herts Young Homeless
- Herts Sports Partnership

Our new partners include:

- The Sunnyside Rural Trust in Dacorum and the churches of St Mary Magdalene and Peartree Christchurch in Welwyn Garden City with whom we work on the asylum seekers' cooking project and St John's Church in Hatfield
- the Box Moor Trust, Waterways Experience, the Nuffield Trust who supported young asylum seekers on the summer school
- The Hospice of St Francis for wellbeing walks

Funding

We are extremely grateful to the churches, organisations and individuals who have donated funds to us this past year. We would like to thank everyone for their contributions to our Warm Welcome appeal.

It was a year of hardship and we were able to do a lot to help refugees and asylum seekers thanks to the HCC Financial Hardship fund which we received through Herts Community Foundation. Through this we were able to help over 500 individuals, both refugees and particularly the children living in the asylum hotels with shoes and school clothes. Most recently we have received short term funding for our volunteer coordinator post to start in January 2024. We continued to receive invaluable support from the humanitarian arm of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints towards school uniforms and we are most grateful for their contribution. Redmill Solutions nominated us as their charity of the year and jointly with them we were able to distribute Eid gifts to families with children. We worked with several Rotary Clubs across the county to support newly resettled families. Thanks to Sue Johnson who wrote bids for us last year and with her help, we were successful with a grant from the Hilden Charitable Fund and Herts Community Foundation towards our administrative costs.

We were able to continue with the Arabic school thanks to a further grant from Cosaraf who also provided us with dates for families during Ramadan.

Evaluating our work and showing the impact

We are very grateful to Stephanie Cash who has been working with us for the past year to look at the best way of evaluating the services we offer.

We introduced a range of methods to gather this data. These include using qualitative methods through the gathering of case studies from those we support and our volunteers, which provides rich evidence of the impact of the charity on individuals. We also introduced some quantitative tools to gather numerical data on the performance of the learners in their English classes and through their 1-1 English sessions. All this data was included in the final report to the Lottery Fund. [Click here](#) to read the report.

The rapid increase in people needing our support during 2023 meant that the charity had to look for a more robust way of collecting, managing, analysing and reporting data on what we do and who we support. This will help us to demonstrate our impact to funders, to share best practice across the county and to celebrate all the amazing work that volunteers do every day.

In September, Dacorum piloted the use of Monday.com to capture support provided by volunteers. Volunteers add information about activities via a simple web form which is collected centrally in a secure database. By the end of 2023, the system was being used by volunteers in Dacorum and by volunteers supporting a hotel in Welwyn Garden City. The plan is to roll out across the County by summer 2024.

Grateful thanks to Marcus Karia for researching software options and developing the HWR system, and the Dacorum Area Convenor Team for championing this initiative.

Here is a snapshot of volunteer support in Dacorum during December:

Name	Type of Support Offered	Volunteer Hours
Childcare to support parents in ESOL classes	Childrens' wellbeing	2
Care and play for children of asylum seekers while parents attend ESOL classes	Childrens' wellbeing	3
Shopping, transport and facilitation of cooking session	Cooking	20
Drop-in session	ESOL/Language Support	18
ESOL children's lesson	ESOL/Language Support	2
ESOL lesson on making appointments	ESOL/Language Support	3
Befriending arrangements	ESOL/Language Support	1
Ordering and collecting goods from Goods For Good	Goods - Sourcing and Providing	3
Organising storage unit	Goods - Sourcing and Providing	3

Management Meeting	HWR - Internal Meetings	26
Volunteer lunch	HWR - Internal Meetings	7
Testimony project	Legal	5
Drop-in session	Listening and Advice	2
Advice and support	Listening and Advice	5
Drop in session	Listening and Advice	2.5
School admissions support	Schools Support	1
Meeting with HCC/DBC re Positive Move On Planning	Working with Other Agencies	7
Refugee Council Meeting	Working with Other Agencies	5
Support for Afghan women's group	Working with Other Agencies	5
SMSG meeting	Working with Other Agencies	1
	Totals	121.5 hours

Safeguarding

We take safeguarding of both those we support and our volunteers very seriously. We are still part of Thirtyone:eight. One of our objectives for this year relates to safeguarding. We are making good progress with the review of our policies and procedures and will then move onto increasing awareness amongst our volunteers. Our new Safeguarding Lead, Lucile Bartolaso-Scarlett will be ensuring we adhere to best practices.

Communications

We recognise the need to raise the profile of Herts Welcomes Refugees in order to raise awareness of the situation of asylum seekers and refugees, to encourage donations and to recruit more volunteers.

Helen Singer took over social media from Lauren Frankel in January. Lauren was a hard act to follow but gave a very helpful handover to Helen who has also been mentored by Naomi Mellor.

We are extremely grateful to Helen, who has transformed our social media platform by her posts on the charity's weekly activities and her work is certainly bringing HWR to life on social media. Our website now has a link to our Instagram account so that visitors to our site can see the broad range of work our volunteers undertake.

Our Facebook page followers grew from 200 to 360, Twitter from 300 to 430 and we have also set up a Threads account. Our Instagram account has over 240 followers.

The Twitter post with the most engagement - and over 6.8 thousand impressions - related to colouring books distributed to asylum seekers in North Hertfordshire. This was designed by cartoonists in response to the demand from the then Immigration Minister that cartoons in an immigration facility should be painted over.

Website and enquiries

We have changed our website address to www.hertswelcomes.org.uk to better reflect our work. We are very grateful to Adam Ahmed-Keyte for making the transition happen. We will be changing our email addresses to reflect our new domain.

During 2023 the HWR website had just over ten thousand unique visits and over twenty five thousand page views, slightly up from the same period in 2022.

Moving feedback from refugees and asylum seekers has been added to a new page on the website, along with more volunteer and refugee stories particularly for Refugee Week and Volunteer Week.

The website has a new fundraising page for the Warm Welcome Fundraising Appeal which has raised over £3,000 of unrestricted funding. Thanks to Helen Singer, Kate Scott and Jane Collis for their help with this.

Our contact line received 200 enquiries over the last year. Over three quarters of these were in relation to asylum seekers, many of them contacting us directly, but we also received referrals from a broad range of partner organisations including the NHS, Herts County Council, local schools and other charities.

Newsletter

Mark Kendall continues to manage our Mailchimp list of members and supporters who receive our newsletter.

We are very grateful to have a comms professional, Anna Cotton, to write the newsletter and contribute to the work of the team. Anna has made the newsletters really engaging and visual and they have had a good response.

Raising the profile of Herts Welcomes Refugees has been helped by volunteers getting letters in the local and national press. In addition Joyce Farnsworth gave an inspiring interview on BBC 3CR about the art club run at one of the hotels. The art work has also been donated so that it can be used to create charity greetings cards at <https://www.dontsendmeacard.com/ecards/charities/herts-welcomes-refugees>

Have we met our objectives for the year?

Our objectives for 2023 were:

- to strengthen the Area Convenor teams and our volunteer base and to work with other charities and groups to support the increasing needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the county
- to increase the diversity of our trustee body to include one trustee who can provide independent oversight of the charity and one with lived experience of being a refugee / asylum seeker and/or links with other support agencies
- to continue to support our refugee partners as their circumstances change whilst responding, according to local needs and our capacity, to the significant increase throughout the county, in numbers of asylum seekers accommodated in hotels and dispersed accommodation
- to continue to work with organisations such as the Refugee Council and to explore closer working relationships with other organisations to support the growing number of asylum seekers as well as refugees who do not arrive via government schemes
- to continue to help with access into employment by support and signposting
- to continue to work with and encourage local councils to accept more families under government resettlement and other schemes
- to continue to develop our support for children's education and integration
- to obtain feedback on our work and opinions on possible future activities via focus groups and an online survey with refugee partners, asylum seekers and our volunteers
- to revise the structure of our Safeguarding team and raise awareness among our refugee partners of safeguarding issues and ways of reporting concerns
- to improve our reporting procedures to better capture the organisation's impact

How did we do? We have described in this report how we have worked toward achieving our objectives. In summary:

- in some areas we have managed to strengthen our teams but we still need more volunteers in the other areas
- we are working to recruit a trustee with lived experience, but we have appointed a new trustee with a great deal of expertise in working with refugees and asylum seekers
- the Advisory Group will also help us involve refugees and asylum seekers in guiding the work of our charity
- we have widened the organisations we work with and have strengthened existing relationships.
- we continue to support and signpost refugees and asylum seekers to volunteering and employment but this is an area our Advisory Group have asked us to work on by finding

appropriate work placements. We were very grateful to Redmill Solutions for providing a placement for an Afghan postgraduate student.

- our homework clubs have helped refugee and asylum seeker children and we try as far as possible to respond to all requests for 1:1 tuition.
- our Table Talk sessions with our volunteers have given us helpful feedback on what we have done and what else needs doing and our surveys of refugees and asylum seekers have helped us gather further feedback, as will our Advisory group. We now have a new Safeguarding Lead, are revising our policy and making safeguarding a topic for our Table Talk sessions.
- thanks to the work of Stephanie Cash and Marcus Karia, our methods of capturing information and measuring impact are improving

Given the growth of our work over the year, we have also been exploring what changes are needed in terms of posts to make the charity sustainable. We will be looking to apply to the Community Lottery and other organisations to increase our paid posts.

Our priorities for 2024

1. Work to increase the sustainability of the Charity including:

- strengthening the volunteer workforce teams, based on changing and increasing needs in local areas
- recognising the differing needs of those we support and ensuring that we offer the best fit for each group
- securing future long term funding based on our projected work programme, to meet the local growing needs of all those we support, alongside our partners
- identifying the gaps in local provision and working with partners to provide the best multi-agency response within the resources available

2. Work to increase Diversity and Inclusion throughout the Charity including:

- recruiting at least one Trustee with lived experience
- ensuring that the Advisory Board activity informs the work of the Charity in a demonstrable manner
- ensuring that the voices of service users and partners inform the work of the Charity in a demonstrable manner
- supporting some refugees or asylum seekers to become volunteers

3. To continue to support refugees and asylum seekers, whilst responding to changing circumstances, working with our partners including:

- delivering support as appropriate through one to one tuition, group sessions or drop ins
- providing goods and signposting support as appropriate
- embedding the use of Monday.com to record confidential data on individuals/ families in order to make the work with individual families more effective

4. To develop our volunteer workforce including:

- increasing the number of volunteers to match the increasing demands in targeted areas of the County
- delivering high quality training to our volunteers, including English language support, safeguarding awareness and any specific training as identified by the needs of those we support
- implementing and embedding the use of Monday.com for both the onboarding of new volunteers and to record consistent data on our volunteers to allow the Charity to hold accurate records

5. To establish robust methods to evaluate the impact of the Charity including:

- implementing and embedding the use of Monday.com for recording qualitative data on "what" and "how much" is delivered by the Charity
- developing and implementing tools to gather evidence of impact
- developing and implementing tools to gather the impact of any refugee or asylum seekers' involvement in the Charity.

On behalf of Herts Welcomes Refugees we would like to thank all our wonderful volunteers and others who have supported the charity during 2023.

Treasurer's Report

In 2023 HWR saw two significant changes in its financial activity. Our payments in support of asylum seekers in temporary accommodation grew considerably as a proportion of our total charitable payments, to the same level as our support for families, and our salary costs increased as for the first time we had two part-time posts for the full year. Our overall payments for the year were £96,612 (2022: £96,310), with charitable payments of £61,678 (2022: £72,529) and core salary and related costs of £31,295 (2022: £21,884.)

Our receipts for the year were £70,679, down from £106,188 in 2022. In the restricted funds, we used up the significant balance carried forward from 2022, supplemented by £27,578 in new restricted grants. The balance of restricted funds remaining at year-end was significantly lower than in 2022, at £9,875 (2022: £40,415.) However, in 2023 we saw a significant increase in unrestricted donations and grants to £41,087 (2022: £24,724.)

The year saw a further increase in volunteer activity, particularly in support of asylum seekers, much of which does not involve charitable payments and is not reflected in our financial results except by the increase in the cost of volunteer coordination and administration. We rely on the time, effort and expertise given so generously by our volunteers, including the management group. This generosity is fundamental to the charity's character and operations, and we don't believe it is appropriate to assign a monetary value to it for the purposes of the accounts.

Support from the broader community is also fundamental to HWR, both from our members and registered supporters and from the general public. This includes significant financial support, and we would particularly like to thank all those who have contributed to our appeals and donated so generously in 2023. We receive many direct individual donations as well as donations from congregations and members of community organisations and contributions through fundraising events. This generosity has allowed us to finish the year with slightly increased unrestricted reserves: excluding the unrestricted grant received for salary costs, unrestricted reserves at the end of the year were £27,148 (2022; £24,794.)

2023 Payments

c) Charitable payments (64% of total payments)

We are very grateful to all the organisations and individual donors who have provided funds for 2023 to support our charitable payments:

- A grant from the Hertfordshire County Council household support fund, provided through Hertfordshire Community Foundation (HCF), grants from the Church of Latter-day Saints and our own Uniform appeal enabled us to provide hardship support, food vouchers and clothing to both refugee families and asylum seekers. This activity accounted for almost a third of our charitable payments in this difficult year. We are grateful also for the strong response to our Warm Welcome appeal later in the year.
- A grant from Mind Hertfordshire which continues into 2024 funded a very successful cooking project for asylum seekers in hotels in Welwyn and Dacorum.
- A further grant from COSARAF allowed us to continue the Arabic school through 2023.
- We continued the expansion of our bike scheme begun in 2022, funded by a grant from the HCF Life Chances fund, and with additional grants received in 2023 from HCC councillors for asylum seeker hotels in their areas.
- A donation from Redmill Solutions with some of our own funds allowed us to provide an Eid gift this year for refugee families with children.

b) Payments for volunteer coordination and administrative support, including salaries and related costs (32% of total payments)

These core costs were funded in 2023 principally from three grants, and we are grateful to these institutions for their support:

- The volunteer coordinator position, associated costs and volunteer support were funded for the first half of the year under the two-year grant from the National Lottery Community Fund.
- The administrator position was funded by the grant from the Postcode Lottery received in 2022 to cover the full term of the contract.
- We received the first instalment of a two-year unrestricted grant from the Hilden Charitable Fund to help meet salaries and related costs.

The volunteer coordinator and administrator are employed through Community Development Agency Hertfordshire, and we maintain a reserve with CDA for this purpose.

c) General administration (4% of total payments)

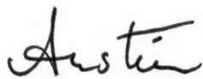
General administration and governance costs were £3,639 in 2023 (2022: £1,897). The increase reflects higher direct costs as a result of our growth as well as some website charges from prior years. It also includes the cost of the AGM which we were able to hold as a live meeting with a strong social element after the virtual meetings during the pandemic. We are very grateful for the time and effort given so generously by the unpaid volunteers in our management group.

Reserves Policy

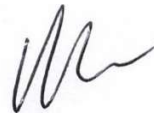
Our policy is to have a minimum level of available reserves equal to three months' operating costs for the charity.

The Annual Accounts for 2023 and the Examiner's letter are attached. We are grateful as ever to Geoff Harper, our examiner, for all his support and professional expertise.

On behalf of all the trustees of Herts Welcomes Refugees we would like to thank you all for your continued support.



Irene Austin Chair



Adrian Ball, Treasurer

25th March 2024

