



Herts Welcomes Refugees - Minutes of Annual General Meeting 30th April 2025

Held at the Verso Church, St Albans, and preceded by a period of socialising, with delicious refreshments provided by some of our refugee partners and volunteers.

Present:

113 members and supporters including:

His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Robert Voss

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of St Albans City and District, Councillor Jamie Day

Irene Austin, Chair of Herts Welcomes Refugees

Adrian Ball, Treasurer

Other Trustees: John Borton, Amani Al-Shami, Veronica Raymond, Kate Scott

Members of the Herts Welcomes Refugees Advisory Group and other refugee and asylum seeker partners

65 HWR members

Supporters included representatives from Amnesty International, Communities First, St. Albans City & District Council, Dacorum Borough Council. Herts Help, Refugee Council.

Apologies:

Andy Gregg, Trustee, and a number of other members and supporters.

1. His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Robert Voss.

Irene Austin welcomed everyone and introduced the charity's patron of seven years, His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Robert Voss.

Robert Voss expressed what a great honour and privilege it is to be a patron of Herts Welcomes Refugees. He went on to say that Hertfordshire is one of the most diverse counties in the UK – not just in terms of ethnicity, but also religion, and wealth. He believes it is this diversity which gives the county its strength. People come here with history and culture which filters into our culture.

Robert Voss gave thanks to Herts Welcomes Refugee's volunteers and acknowledged Hertfordshire's proud tradition of volunteering. He also gave thanks and welcomed refugees and asylum seekers for bringing their culture to Hertfordshire.

2. AGM approvals and actions – Irene Austin

- The minutes of the 2024 AGM were approved.
- There were no objections to the updated objects in the constitution.
- Irene gave thanks to trustee Veronica Raymond who has stepped down.
- Amani Al-Shami was approved as a new trustee.
- John Borton and Adrian Ball stepped down and were re-elected as trustees.
- Irene gave a summary of the trustee's and treasurer's reports, both of which were approved.

Irene thanked all of the volunteers for their hard work, volunteers are at the heart of the charity. Irene acknowledged the importance of the Advisory Group of refugees and asylum seekers in helping to steer how the charity offers ongoing support. Irene also thanked all of the generous donors, the charity would not be able to do the work it does without them.

3. Refugee and volunteer voices

Violet – 'My journey to being granted Leave to Remain together with my two sons'

Violet spoke movingly about her experience of claiming asylum with her children and thanked the volunteers for their support in her journey to gaining her leave to remain status.

Dania – 'How it feels to be a Syrian in the UK now that the Assad regime has been replaced'

In a pre-recorded video, Dania reflected on her time in the UK and what the future holds now that the Assad regime has been deposed.

Kate – 'Volunteering with HWR: My winding path'

Kate spoke about her experience as a befriender supporting two Syrian families and the different challenges and rewards this gave her.

Henry – 'Supporting, and now leading, ESOL classes for asylum seekers in Dacorum'

Henry explained how looking for a volunteer role for his daughter prompted him to volunteer himself. He and his fellow teaching volunteer, Sue Dilks, reflected on his evolving role with HWR from class assistant to lead teacher in Dacorum.

Steph – ‘Using my professional background to support HWR in improving its monitoring and impact assessment’

Steph talked with Helen Singer about the importance of case studies and data analysis in assessing the impact our volunteers have on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers and how this helps with funding for HWR.

Jamshaid – ‘Reflections on my three years in the UK and why I am now volunteering with HWR’

Jamshaid talked with John Borton about his background in Afghanistan and his experience of claiming asylum in the UK. He spoke about the challenges of entering the UK workforce as well as his HWR volunteer roles in IT support and with the Advisory Group.

Jamshaid expressed the desire to help other refugees navigating their own journeys with dignity and hope.

Irene closed the meeting reiterated her thanks to our patron, His Majesty’s Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Robert Voss. Thanks were also given to all of the HWR volunteers and to the many organisations, including the evening’s host, Verso Church, who support the charity.

The AGM closed at 9:15pm.