**Notes Accompanying Irene Austin’s Presentation from Herts Welcomes Refugees to**

**SI St Albans and District, 14/3/22.**

Slide 1 Logo, name + Patron: Robert Voss CBE CStJ HM Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire

Slide 2 HWR previously Herts Welcomes Syrian families started to support and lobby Hertfordshire to accept refugees on the resettlement schemes in response to the war in Syrain Volunteer organisation

Slide 3 The organisation changed as numbers grew as we cover the whole of Hertfordshire. Developed into having Area Convenors St Albans took 50 individuals about12 families under this scheme. Overall Hertfordshire took about 50 families. Changed our name as we were supporting a wider range of nationalities and asylum seekers. As we grew others referred refugees to us so last year supported about 400 individuals not all on resettlement schemes.

 Provided and still provide a welcome package and ongoing support to refugees and asylum seekers however we do not do Case Work. In Hertfordshire it was the Refugee Council who became the main case workers.

Slide 4 Volunteer body. Refugee Council main case workers Work closely with them. IT QUICKLY BECAME APPARENT THAT ENGLISH WAS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION– EVERYTHING COMES BACK TO ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH SO THAT BECAME A MAJOR FOCUS FOR us Now have a volunteer Coordinator in the region of 70 volunteers delivering a range of Language support to about 90 refugees and asylum seekers across Hertfordshire. For the resettled families Syrians and others community we are also helping their children. Up to A Level standard and have provided support to one adult refugee at University.

 Befriender network is at the heart of our organisation. Now have one paid post - a volunteer coordinator (hosted by CDA Herts). Link with local communities - work with Church groups and community groups.

Slide 5 The majority of our social activities are done in conjunction with other groups and local communities. Have done events with churches, synagogues, mosques. Example of an activity we ran in the summer was done through FACE Faith and Culural Enterprise group. Joint event with HAWA and Active Lifestyles. Vineyard church have hosted our AGM We also work with other refugee organisations, Herts Young Homeless and with the Disability Sports Foundation for our bike scheme. CDA Community Development Agency host our post and we have run a women’s group project with them before COVID.

Slide 6 Involve refugees in what we do. Our AGM always has a focus on Refugee Voices and we have run Advisory sessions. Focus on work with children came from one of these meetings.

Slide 7 Changing picture in Hertfordshire. Afghan situation - 3 Bridging hotels housing 400 Afghans Also a real increase in asylum seekers living in contingency hotels Three in Hertfordshire (as from this week 4) about 250. Has made us think about how we work and which groups we work with.

Slide 8 We work and have a SLA with Herts County Council to provide support to the Afghan hotel in Dacorum. At first it was organising goods. Many didn’t have phones so through our contacts we provided phones and sims. Worked with other organisations and HCC to make sure appropriate clothes delivered. Provided presents and books and some Chrome books for the Afghans . Now providing individual support and group Language sessions for those at the hotel. Are at the hotel four days a week. In terms of the asylum seekers there are again three hotels housing asylum seekers. We have focused on the one in Hemel. We do however work with Herts Welcomes Refugees to support the one in St Albans and Herts For Refugees who support the one in Borehamwood. As our focus is our Befriender / Language Support network we have helped a local church group in setting up a Conversation class for the asylum seekers at the St Albans hotel. In terms of those Afghans in the hotels, very few have been resettled in Hertfordshire and many want to be. So far none in St Albans but 9 families across Hertfordshire. Dacorum, Stevenage Three Rivers Hatfield and more arriving this week. North Herts. 1 family pledged for St Albans. Would like to see more houses pledged for Afghans and other refugees still languishing in places like Lebanon.

Now looking at how we might help with the crisis in Ukraine.

Slide 9 Contacts for Herts Welcomes Refugees
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