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For immediate release

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**United Way of Hampshire County Announces the Welcome Home Northampton Fund
with \$20,000 lead gift from Smith College**

Fund to support long-term refugee transition and integration

NORTHAMPTON –James Ayres, Executive Director of United Way of Hampshire County, has announced the creation of the Welcome Home Northampton Fund to assist the refugees who will be resettled in Northampton by Catholic Charities with community support from the Welcome Home Steering Committee— an advisory group of stakeholder organizations, clergy and individuals from Northampton. United Way will oversee the fund to ease the transition of the 51 refugees into Northampton over the next few years. Smith College helped to launch the fund, pledging \$20,000 to it over two years

The Welcome Home Northampton Fund will assist refugees who are moving here from war-torn and persecuted regions including Syria, Iraq, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. “Smith College sees the need and is acting now to step up and help, which is much appreciated,” Ayres said. Smith College has pledged \$10,000 in both 2017 and 2018.

Smith College President Kathleen McCartney said, “As a college with a long history of international engagement and a legacy of welcoming refugee scholars and academics, Smith is proud to support United Way of Hampshire County as we welcome our new neighbors.”

Ayres explained that Catholic Charities, a Springfield-based social service and resettlement agency, is the contracted Reception and Placement agency for the refugees, and federal funds granted to it will support the new residents in their first year here. The Welcome Home Northampton Fund is intended to ensure a stable and sustainable transition during and beyond this 12-month period.

Each of the families were on track to settle in Northampton earlier this year; President Trump’s travel ban has delayed—but not permanently derailed—their arrival. Jasimiyah Hussein and her



two sons, natives of Iraq, arrived in February, and additional families are expected in the coming months.

United Way became involved in the resettlement efforts last year, after Mayor David Narkewicz called faith and social service organizations together in hopes of creating the sturdiest support network possible. In November 2016, the fund was established to support the Welcome Home Northampton initiative.

At the request of this group, United Way proudly stepped up to manage the account and has created a funding structure separate from its general campaign fund. Donations are welcome from those who have wanted a way to help.

Ayres said hundreds of people have signed up to volunteer to offer assistance to the new city residents, but many have also been seeking a way to offer financial support. “We see tremendous good will in the community around welcoming these newcomers, and we’ve been thrilled to do our part to assemble and nurture the necessary network of support,” he said.

Financial assistance is critical to ensuring long-term success because the federal government, via Catholic Charities, supports the resettlement for less than 12 months, then the funding is done, but the work isn’t done, Ayres said.

“We need to look at what these new residents need in order to get fully on their feet and integrated into the community,” he added. “They will need more support.”

He added that studies indicate that refugee resettlement has been most successful in communities where ongoing—but finite—support has been made available.

Carolyn Gear, executive director of the International Language Institute in Northampton and a member of the Welcome Home Northampton Steering Committee, said most refugees seeking safety in the United States arrive with few funds and very limited English language skills.

“It is overly optimistic to assume they will find gainful employment and become fully conversant in English within the short span of one year,” she said. “Just imagine all of the daily tasks they face in addition to finding suitable housing and a source of income—things like taking public transportation, enrolling in schools, going to the grocery store or post office—that native English speakers take for granted.”

No matter how welcoming a community is, Gear said, “It is likely to require more than one year of support to help refugees move from crisis to a stable or self-sustaining condition.”

“The idea is really to have a longer-term source of money that’s as flexible as possible to respond to our new residents’ needs as they present themselves,” Ayres said.



Funds could be used, for instance, for English language instruction, job skills, long-term trauma recovery, support for housing or for very tangible basic needs—food, winter coats or activities enrollment fees for children in these families.

To make a donation online, visit WelcomeHomeNorthampton.org. Checks can be sent to United Way, 71 King St., Northampton, MA 01060, with Welcome Home Northampton or “Refugee Fund” in the memo line or in an accompanying letter.

The Executive Committee of the Welcome Home Northampton Steering Committee will be charged with disbursement of the funds

Members of that committee are: Ayres, The Rev. Janet C. Bush of the Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence; Alisa Klein, Ward 7 City Councilor for Northampton; Carolyn Gear, Executive Director of the International Language Institute in Northampton; and Kathryn Buckley-Brawner, the executive director for Catholic Charities Agency of Springfield.

Members of the larger steering committee are: Brawner (ex-officio), Ayres, Bush, Gear, Klein, and the Rev. Andrea Ayvazian; Lindsay Bennett-Jacobs, RSVP of Hampshire and Franklin counties; Denys Candy, Smith College; Patricia Crosby, the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board; Peg Keller, City of Northampton; Laurie Millman, Center for New Americans; Northampton School Superintendent John Provost; and community members Cynthia Monahon, Jo Comerford and Yamila Irizarry-Gerould.

For general information on the resettlement project, visit WelcomeHomeNorthampton.org.

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