

# GROUP MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Evaluation Report

August 2021

Prepared  
for:



Formerly Community Refugee  
Sponsorship Initiative

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I would like to thank the stakeholders who gave their time to participate in the evaluation and share their experiences and insights on the Group Mentorship Program.

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## List of shortened forms

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
CRSA	Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia
CRSI	Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative
GMP	Group Mentorship Program
GRSI	Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative
HSP	Humanitarian Settlement Program
LGA	Local government area
PSR	Private Sponsorship of Refugees
SETS	Settlement Engagement and Transition Support
SHEV	Safe Haven Enterprise visa
ToC	Theory of Change
WWCC	Working With Children Check

## Executive Summary

### Background to the Group Mentorship Program

The Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (CRSI) was formed in early 2018 and since that time has worked to develop and promote a model for community refugee sponsorship in Australia. In 2019 CRSI, together with partner organisations, developed a proposal for a small pilot sponsorship program, which was put to the federal government for consideration in early 2020.

Before the program was fully considered, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic began and Australia's international borders were closed, making implementation of the original proposal impossible. In response, CRSI developed the Group Mentorship Program (GMP), an adaptation of the pilot sponsorship program, whereby volunteer groups provided practical support to refugees already in Australia, as opposed to refugees arriving from overseas. The GMP was launched mid-2020 by CRSI with support from partner organisations.

In July 2021 Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA), a new independent charity, was launched by the original members of CRSI to carry the work of CRSI into the future.

### Description of the GMP

The role of mentor groups was to walk alongside their mentee households over a 6-month period and assist all members of the mentee household in an integrated manner to meet personal settlement goals in a holistic manner.

The role of mentor groups was underpinned by the following key principles:

1. **Groups of volunteers:** Mentorship support was provided by organised groups of volunteers (minimum 5 people), with the emphasis on individual mentors coming together around a shared purpose of providing support to one or more refugee households.
2. **Self-directed innovators:** Mentor groups were encouraged to engage in innovation and problem solving using the available resources in their local context.
3. **Screened, trained and trusted:** Mentors were screened for good character, then trained by CRSI and entrusted to provide appropriate settlement support in close collaboration with professional case managers (where involved) and the mentee household itself.
4. **Well supported:** Mentor groups were given a point of contact to access ad hoc advice from settlement professionals when required.

Embedded throughout the program were the understandings that the autonomy and agency of refugees in the program were to be respected at all times, and that support was to be given that recognised and built on their strengths and aspirations.

## GMP participants

CRSI was assisted by settlement agencies and other partner organisations to identify refugee participants for the GMP. Agencies made referrals into the program and worked with CRSI to ensure informed consent of refugee participants. A total of 26 refugees (with 11 dependent children) across 15 households became mentees in the program.

CRSI sought applications from community members across Australia interested in being mentors in the GMP. A total of 172 individuals across 21 groups completed the screening processes (for example, police and Working With Children checks) and GMP training to become mentors in the program. Of the 21 groups, 14 were matched with a mentee household (i.e. an individual or a family group).<sup>1</sup> Only 12 of these groups are included in this evaluation as others commenced their work as mentors too late in the program to be included.

The first of the 6-month mentorships commenced in November 2020 with all mentorships formally concluded by July 2021, though most groups continued to support their mentee household beyond 6-month program.

## About the evaluation

This evaluation covers the operations of the pilot GMP from its launch in July 2020 through to the conclusion of the 6-month mentorships in July 2021. It did not look at mentoring support provided beyond the initial 6-month mentoring period, nor at operations undertaken by CRSA to extend the GMP or recruit and train a second round of mentees and mentors.

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach involving interviews with key stakeholders (mentors, mentees, CRSI staff and staff from settlement agencies), an online survey of mentors, and examination of key project documentation, including Integration Star<sup>2</sup> data.

The evaluation answered the following key questions:

1. How was the GMP implemented?
2. What impacts did the GMP have on mentees?
3. What impacts did the GMP have on mentors?
4. How appropriate was the program's design in meeting mentees' needs, addressing risk and empowering mentors to support mentee settlement?
5. What were the observations and/or recommendations to inform future community refugee sponsorship programs and/or other community-led settlement approaches?

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<sup>1</sup> Two mentor groups mentored more than one mentee household.

<sup>2</sup> The Integration Star is an assessment tool for refugees that explores 8 key outcome areas in the settlement journey where practical support may be needed to integrate into a new country and culture. The GMP used this tool to help understand the needs of refugee mentees and observe changes. (See Appendix A for more details.)

## Impact of the GMP on mentees

Every mentee who participated in the evaluation reported that their involvement in the GMP had positive impacts on their quality of life.

Mentees were provided a range of practical assistance tailored to their needs, as well as social and cultural experiences. Importantly, mentees received support in the areas they indicated they most needed help, including developing their English language skills, accessing education and employment opportunities, driving lessons and making social connections in their new community.

They are very good people; they help me with everything. It would have been harder if not for their help. We were not working because of COVID, we sat at home. They helped us get jobs and beds and household goods. We didn't move [here] with anything, so they helped us a lot. (Mentee, interview)

Mentees described that assistance from their mentor group helped them feel supported and provided a sense of security. This helped increase their confidence in themselves and their future in Australia.

They help to teach me how I can be if they are not with me in the future, how I can finish my problems myself. (Mentee, interview)

Several mentees described that the support they received from their mentor group had exceeded their expectations and had helped them transform aspects of their lives.

I didn't have family here. When I arrived I was alone. I was just kind of lost, just working, I didn't know what to do. So when I get people around me and they have been here, they are Australians, so they know everything. I learn from them and they mentor me so I change my mindset. I know more than before now. I know what I need to do. I feel more confident about where to go. (Mentee, interview)

Many mentees advised that a longer mentorship arrangement (for example, 12 months) to further help them settle in their new communities would be valued, and many groups have continued to support their mentees beyond the 6 months of the formal mentorship under the GMP.

## Impact of the GMP on mentors

Individual mentors reported that during the formal mentoring program they spent an average of 2.3 hours per week on mentoring (range: 0 hours, 5 hours; mode: 2 hours). For groups with the minimum recommended membership of 5 individuals this equates to 11.5 hours of support per week for mentee households.

The evaluation found that all mentors who were matched with a mentee had positive experiences through the mentorship.

These included:

- learning about another culture
- developing new friendships (with mentees, other mentors, or both)
- experiencing joy in and reward from making a difference to the life of a refugee
- gaining a deeper understanding of the refugee experience.

We feel deeply connected to 2 beautiful young people who enrich our lives and family's experiences.  
(Mentor, online survey)

It's a really positive experience. It's really nice to know that we as a group have helped a member of our community feel more a member of their and our community... And knowing that now she has all these resources at her hands you know, social resources, church groups, friends, people she can contact, knowing that we've been able to raise [money] that might help her get a car and more driving lessons, which will just open up their world and where they live, education, future employment... that it might just have been a bit more of a struggle... being able to help in those things has been really rewarding. And it's good to know that our community cares and wants to help other people. (Mentor, interview)

Almost every mentor (94% of those who participated in the evaluation) reported that they enjoyed being part of their mentor group and would recommend refugee mentoring to friends.

Two-thirds (66% of mentors surveyed) reported that their engagement in the mentorship program influenced others in their community to show more favourable or compassionate responses to refugees.

The evaluation found that most mentors experienced only minor challenges in mentoring and, overall, those challenges were outweighed by positive experiences. Where challenges were reported, they primarily focused on:

- finding enough time for mentoring activities, particularly where the mentor and/or their mentee was working full-time
- documenting mentoring activities as requested by CRSI in the digital logbook provided.

CRSI provided a range of supports through the GMP to help mentors in their work with mentees. Most mentors (75%) reported that they felt well-equipped by the GMP to undertake their role as a mentor. By the end of the program, almost all (91%) reported that their group was able to problem-solve to meet their mentees' needs.

Five tools and processes were particularly valued, rated by mentors as 'very useful' or 'very helpful':

- receiving the mentee's background information from CRSI before meeting them (60%)
- direct engagement with the CRSI team (57%)
- training prior to the mentorship (50%)
- Mentor Group Code of Conduct template (40%)
- developing a Mentorship Support Plan (37%)

Several stakeholders highlighted the importance of the Mentor Group Code of Conduct template in helping groups outline a clear, safe and ethical mentoring approach.

Just over half of mentors (57%) reported that the digital logbook to record mentoring activities was either unhelpful or they chose not to use it.

Feedback from mentors involved in the Integration Star process was mixed. Some mentors reported that it was very useful for understanding their mentee's situation and support needs, while others reported that it was either more burdensome than beneficial, or they had no strong feelings either way about the process. The main criticisms about the Integration Star were that the interview took too long to complete, the mentee found it confusing and most of the mentor group did not engage with the process or results.

There was feedback from mentors whose groups were not matched with a mentee during the pilot GMP that the training they received and participating in the Peer-to-Peer Forums were nonetheless useful. They reported that those supports helped the development of their group and helped prepare them for work they hope to do in the future.

## Learnings about the GMP model

### Model of volunteering

The GMP utilised a relatively unusual volunteering model that did not have a central organisation overseeing and bearing responsibility for the day-to-day activities of the volunteers (the mentors) involved. While CRSI connected mentees and mentors, and provided training and ongoing supports to mentors, it was mentors themselves who were responsible for shaping and driving the mentorship activities and for the governance of their group.

The evaluation found that the model helped empower mentor groups to be self-directed while effectively safeguarding mentees. There were no incidents of concern reported during the pilot GMP and mentees who participated in the evaluation all reported that their privacy was respected by their mentor group and that they felt safe throughout the program. Almost all mentors (91% of survey respondents) reported that their group was able to independently problem-solve to meet their mentees' needs.

### Filling gaps in services for refugees

While it was not the intention of the program to become a permanent feature in the Australian settlement arena, the evaluation found that the GMP filled some gaps in the current settlement support landscape by facilitating assistance that was both qualitatively and practically different from what is formally available to refugees through current programs.

The GMP's model of volunteering affords mentors the flexibility to provide support as and when needed. They can assist outside of business hours and can provide holistic support, such that a mentor might help a refugee with English language practice, while taking them shopping and then picking the refugee's children up from school on the way home. This is in contrast to traditional volunteer assistance provided through large settlement agencies that is usually structured around and limited to a single task or outcome, delivered at a particular time and location.

The type of support provided by mentors was often akin to what a friend or neighbour may provide, such as sharing meals, giving advice on buying a car, or showing mentees around local facilities and attractions. Professional settlement services are not typically able to provide these types of organic and flexible supports and connections, which are important for refugees to gain local knowledge, develop relationships in their community, and feel a sense of belonging.

Settlement agency stakeholders described that the assistance provided by mentor groups supplemented the work of agencies and enhanced the overall support to refugees.

### Matching mentors and mentees

The matching process involved weighing up how the different needs, capacities and lives of participants in the GMP might align. CRSI used information about mentors from their application and initial survey, and information about mentees from their initial survey.

The evaluation found that 4 key factors influenced the extent to which mentors and mentees were a good match:

1. Range of skills and experience across the mentor group, especially in the areas mentees most need support.
2. Mentor group members between them having enough time available and at times that suit mentees who may have busy work/study schedules.
3. Compatible age and stage of life of mentors and mentees, with mentor groups including younger members, or connections with young people, well suited to supporting younger mentees.
4. Mentors and mentees living near each other or having ready access to reliable transport between their areas.

### Factors that support effective mentoring

The evaluation identified aspects of mentor groups that supported the group in bringing about positive benefits. A range of personal qualities of individual mentors and group approaches to mentoring were found to support effective mentoring.

The personal qualities valuable for individual mentors to possess were:

- able to support without fostering dependence
- able to understand and respond to the needs and goals of mentees without expectation or judgement
- accepting of differences
- aware of own strengths and weaknesses
- authentic
- calm
- compassionate
- flexible and adaptable
- passionate about supporting refugees
- patient
- open to different ways of doing things.

The following group approaches were identified as key to effective mentoring:

- collaborate and communicate regularly with any caseworkers supporting the mentee
- develop the Mentorship Support Plan with the mentee as the relationship develops, and mentors and mentees better understand one another
- tailor the Mentorship Support Plan to match the mentee's needs with the mentors' different capacities
- maintain good communication channels within the group
- work as a group and draw on the different strengths and offerings of each member.

The evaluation found the following factors supported the mentors in having a positive mentoring experience:

- mentors are realistic about the support they can offer, including mindful of individual time availability, skills and other commitments
- relaxed and flexible approach
- non-judgmental attitude
- supportive family and/or friends
- understand that support is intended to be short-term
- understand that while friendships may develop, that is not the main aim
- aware of incidental costs (such as eating out and transport) and have the ability to bear them
- mentor groups consist of members with mixed skills and a range of different time availability
- good communication within the group
- understand and respect for each other's skills and availability within the group.

## Summary of recommendations

The evaluation offers the following recommendations. (See main report for full recommendations.)

- i. Diversify referral pathways for identifying refugee participants for future iterations of the program.
- ii. Review and strengthen refugee recruitment and onboarding processes.
- iii. Provide mentors with more information about the settlement landscape and guidance about how to collaborate with settlement agencies.
- iv. Require all mentor groups to adopt minimum behavioural standards in a code of conduct.
- v. Strengthen the matching process through collecting additional information about mentees and mentors.
- vi. Review CRSA's supports for mentor groups and refine how they are offered and promoted.
- vii. Extend the standard mentorship period from 6 months to 12 months.
- viii. Cease use of the digital logbook.
- ix. Offer the Integration Star tool as optional.
- x. CRSA to further develop its approach for increasing awareness and understanding of the GMP model among staff at settlement agencies.
- xi. CRSA to facilitate initial meetings between mentor groups and caseworkers at the commencement of mentorships.

## Conclusion

Like so many organisations in 2020, CRSI suddenly found itself unable to implement its planned work and had to rapidly develop new ways of operating. The pilot GMP was thus created and, by way of it, CRSI was able to test elements of its proposed community refugee sponsorship program (for example, approaches to mobilising, screening, training and supporting volunteer groups) and gain insights that will strengthen the program at such time as it is possible to implement.

All stakeholders involved in the GMP benefitted: mentees experienced improvements to their quality of life; mentors had rewarding experiences; and, the support from settlement agencies to refugees was enhanced by the program. CRSA learned that there may be a need for, and value in, a mentorship program that is separate from a sponsorship program.

Overall, the pilot GMP proved to be a valuable endeavour that created meaningful changes in participants' lives. It also proved to expand and strengthen CRSA's future capacity in helping members of the Australian community effectively support refugees in Australia.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Context and background to the Group Mentorship Project

Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) began as Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (CRSI), which was formed in April 2018. CSRI was initiated as an unincorporated joint project of the Refugee Council of Australia, Save the Children Australia, Amnesty International Australia, Welcoming Australia and Rural Australians for Refugees. Since that time, CRSI has worked to develop and promote a model for a future community refugee sponsorship program in Australia. Its work has been inspired by the successful Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program, operating in Canada since the late 1970s, and a similar Australian program that operated on a smaller scale in the 1980s and 1990s.

The motivation of CSRI was to implement a community sponsorship program to expand and improve refugee resettlement in Australia. It also aimed to harness public support for Australia's humanitarian migration program by providing ordinary Australians with a meaningful way to help welcome and support refugee newcomers.

CRSI was funded by philanthropic donations, led by the Sidney Myer Fund, and employed a small team who worked on a national agenda. From 2018 to 2020 it established itself as the leading civil society voice on community refugee sponsorship in Australia, recognised by government and civil society stakeholders for its unparalleled subject matter expertise on community sponsorship in the Australian context. During these years it made significant inroads in securing stakeholder engagement for a shared vision for a future Australian program.

In late 2019 the federal government reviewed its private refugee sponsorship policies in response to an independent report on refugee settlement and integration, led by Professor Peter Shergold. In the context of this planned review, CRSI, together with partner organisations, developed a proposal for a small pilot sponsorship program. The proposal was put to the federal government for consideration in early 2020.

In March 2020, Australia's international borders closed in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), making implementation of the proposal impossible. In response, CRSI adapted the model of the pilot program where volunteer groups would provide practical support to refugees already in Australia, as opposed to refugees arriving from overseas. The resulting program, the Group Mentorship Program (GMP), was launched mid-2020 by CRSI with collaborative support from partner organisations.

In late 2020, the founding members of CRSI incorporated a new non-profit company, Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) Ltd., and from July 2021, CRSA has carried the work of CSRI forward.<sup>3</sup> CRSA is registered as a public benevolent institution by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

## 1.2. GMP aim and objectives

The GMP was designed to support preparations for implementation of a successful future community refugee sponsored visa pathway and to encourage community participation in that pathway. The program aimed to achieve these objectives by:

- demonstrating the viability and benefits of holistic community-led support
- maintaining and further building community enthusiasm for sponsorship
- preparing local groups to become sponsors under a new sponsorship program
- testing and refining training and other tools for a future sponsorship program
- further refining the civil society vision for such a program
- providing support to a number of refugees who could benefit from this approach
- developing best practice from experienced local groups already working with refugees.



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<sup>3</sup> In this document, CRSI is referred to for events up until 30 June 2021 and CRSA for events from 1 July 2021.

### 1.3. GMP Theory of Change

The GMP Theory of Change (ToC) summarises the program’s main activities. These include the intended short-, medium- and long-term outcomes for participating refugees and community members (mentees and mentors) and for the refugee settlement landscape in Australia.

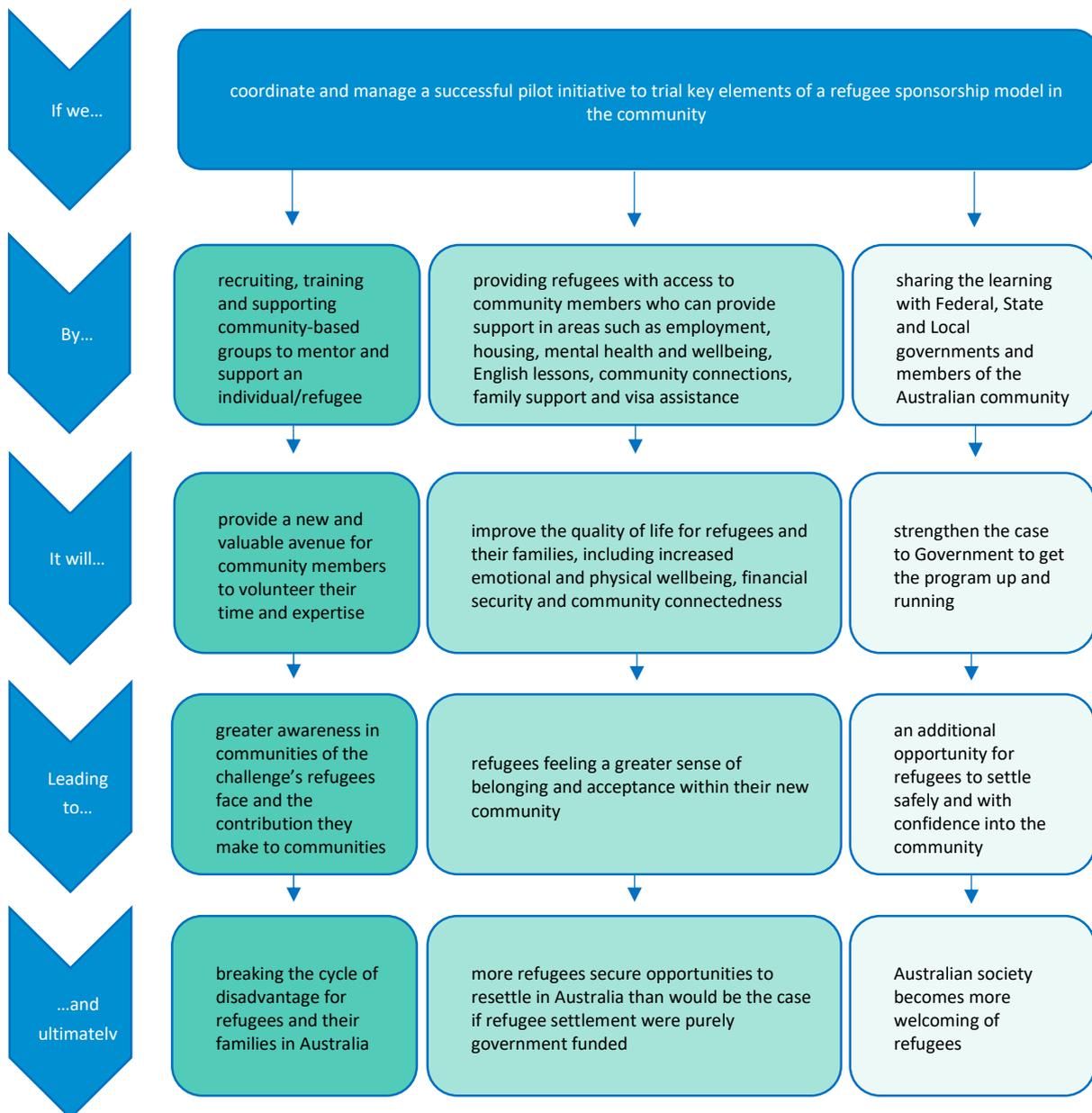


Figure 1: GMP Theory of Change (ToC)

## 1.4. Key differences between GMP and full sponsorship model

While the GMP was designed to pave the way for the introduction of a future community refugee sponsorship program, similar to the one that exists in Canada, there are some important distinctions between the GMP and the future sponsorship program that CRSA is envisaging for Australia. It is important to understand these differences when reflecting on how the learnings from the GMP apply to a future sponsorship program.

- Beneficiaries of the GMP were refugees who had arrived in Australia through various circumstances, not through ‘sponsorship’ by a local group. When they were introduced to the mentor group, they had been in Australia for an average of 10 months and were therefore already somewhat established in their new lives in Australia.<sup>4</sup> This would not be the case for refugees arriving directly from overseas under a ‘sponsorship’ model.
- For the majority of mentee households, participation in this program did not occur in the process of relocating or moving into new housing.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, under a sponsorship program, groups would need to help refugee households identify and secure both short- and longer-term accommodation.
- Mentees were largely financially self-sufficient prior to commencement in the program, receiving either income from employment or Centrelink. They also had bank accounts set up and were registered with key services such as Medicare, primary and secondary education and the Adult Migrant English Program. Under a sponsorship program, it is likely groups would need to assist refugee households with these matters upon arrival in Australia.
- Half of the mentees (13 out of 26) were beneficiaries of government-funded case management support, through either the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) or Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program. This resulted in limiting the role of mentor groups to supplementing this support by filling any gaps. Under a future sponsorship program, groups would likely take on primary responsibility for supporting the settlement of refugees from their first day of arrival in Australia, with professional settlement agencies only involved as advisors to the mentor group.
- Because the program involved mentor groups working with mentees already in Australia, for the most part ‘activated’ mentor groups were located in or near areas that were already home to the mentee households, or who were able to identify (with the help of CRSI) refugee households who were keen to move into the local area of the group. By contrast, under a future sponsorship program, the location of sponsor groups would determine the initial settlement location for a sponsored refugee household upon arrival in Australia.
- Mentor groups were not required to raise large amounts of money in order to participate in the program. It was recommended, but not enforced, that they raise from \$1,000 to \$3,000 to give their group a budget for their work with the mentee household. Under a future sponsorship program, groups would likely have to raise and administer a significantly larger pool of funds.

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<sup>4</sup> Range: 3 months, 6 years and 11 months.

<sup>5</sup> Two of the refugee households were supported by mentor groups as part of a relocation to a new part of Australia. At least one of the mentees moved to a new house within their existing city with the support of the mentor group.

## 1.5. Scope of the evaluation

This evaluation was commissioned by CRSA to learn what worked and didn't work during the pilot GMP. It highlights lessons the pilot program provides to Australian policy makers and civil society about the desired features of a future community refugee sponsorship program and/or other community-led settlement approaches.

The evaluation was designed to answer the following key questions:

1. How was the GMP implemented?
2. What impacts did the GMP have on mentees?
3. What impacts did the GMP have on mentors?
4. How appropriate was the program's design in meeting mentees' needs, addressing risk and empowering mentors to support mentee settlement?
5. What were the observations and/or recommendations to inform future community refugee sponsorship programs and/or other community-led settlement approaches?

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach and involved interviews with key stakeholders (mentors, mentees, CRSI staff and staff from settlement agencies), an online survey of mentors, and examination of key project documentation, including Integration Star data. Full details of the methodology are described in section 7.

The evaluation covered the operations of the pilot GMP. It ran from its launch in July 2020 to July 2021 when the last of the 6-month mentorships concluded.<sup>6</sup>

The evaluation did not look at operations undertaken to extend the GMP, nor the recruiting and training of a second round of mentees and mentors.

## 1.6. Limitations of the evaluation

The following limitations should be taken into account when considering the findings and recommendations in this report:

- No face-to-face interviews with GMP participants were possible due to restrictions associated with COVID-19. All interviews were conducted by videoconference or phone. In some instances, it was difficult to build rapport, especially when internet or phone connections were poor.
- Logbooks were not as widely completed by mentors as anticipated in the original program design. Consequently, detailed information about activities undertaken by groups and time spent on activities was not available. The mentor survey collected this information retrospectively but was not completed by all mentors.

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<sup>6</sup> Some mentor groups and mentees elected to continue the mentorship for a further 6 months; however, this additional time was not within the scope of this evaluation.

- The response rate for the mentor survey was low – 33% for mentors who were matched with a mentee and 13% for those who were not matched with a mentee (unmatched mentors).
  - For data collected from matched mentors, this resulted in a margin of error of 14% at the 95% confidence level, and 10% at the 85% confidence level. (This means that for every percentage reported, it is 85% likely that the true value lies within +/- 10 of that percentage.) The evaluation was aiming for a margin of error <10% at the 95% confidence level. While the survey results do not provide as much precision as aimed for, and should be read with some caution, they nonetheless provide a helpful indication of the experience of matched mentors.
  - For unmatched mentors, the very small sample and low response rate mean the survey results should be considered to represent the experience of only those respondents.



## 2. Description of project implementation

### 2.1. Key features of GMP

#### 2.1.1. Principles

Embedded throughout the program were the understandings that the autonomy and agency of refugees in the program were to be respected at all times, and that support was to be given that recognised and built on their strengths and aspirations.

The role of mentor groups was underpinned by the following key principles:

- 1. Groups of volunteers:** Mentorship support was provided by organised groups of volunteers, rather than through individual mentor/mentee relationships. The emphasis was on individual mentors coming together around a shared purpose of providing support to one or more refugee households. Each group had a minimum of 5 individuals who were self-assessed as being well-established in their local communities and not related to the relevant refugee(s).
- 2. Self-directed innovators:** Mentor groups supported refugee newcomers and were encouraged to engage in innovation and problem solving using the available resources in their local context.
- 3. Screened, trained and trusted:** Mentors were screened for good character, then trained by CRSI and entrusted to provide appropriate settlement support, in close collaboration with professional case managers (where involved) and the mentee household itself.
- 4. Well supported:** Mentor groups were given a point of contact to access ad hoc advice from settlement professionals when required.

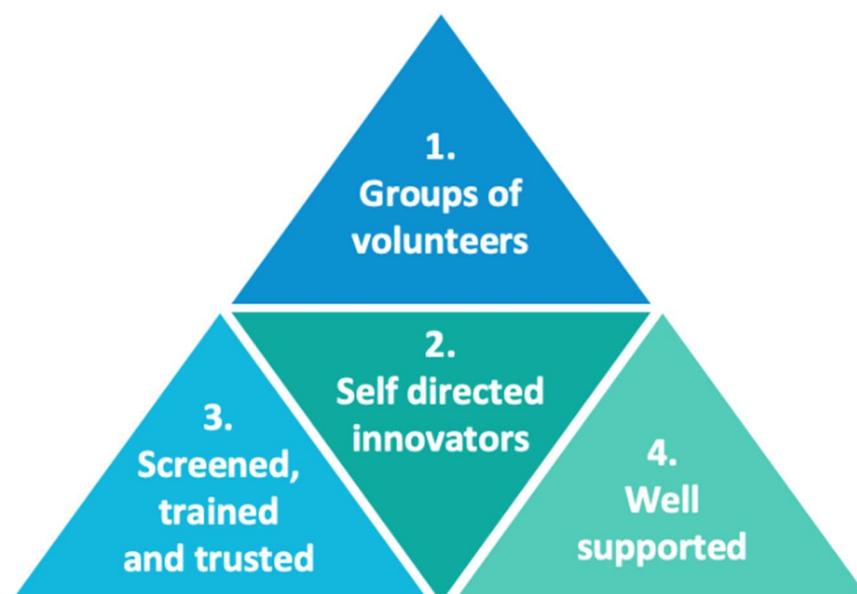


Figure 2: Key principles informing design of mentor group support

### 2.1.2. Roles, responsibility and risk

- Mentor groups were asked to get to know their mentee households, walk alongside them over a 6-month period, and assist all members of the mentee household in an integrated manner to meet personal settlement goals in a holistic manner.
- Mentees were referred into the program through various agencies and processes, including through organisations contracted by the federal government under the HSP and SETS program.
- Where refugee households were already receiving assistance from a professional settlement case worker, the mentor group's support was designed to supplement and complement this pre-existing assistance. Mentor groups were encouraged to work collaboratively with case managers.
- CRSI screened and trained each mentor group. It encouraged the groups to adopt codes of conduct but did not seek to direct their day-to-day activities. The objective was to give the mentor groups the freedom to innovate in their work and for mentee households to get maximum benefit from the knowledge and skills of the mentor groups.

### 2.1.3. Program process and key tools

There were 4 phases to the planning and program roll-out.

1. Initial Planning Phase from June to July 2020.
2. Implementation Phase 1 from August to October 2020.
3. Implementation Phase 2 from September 2020 to January 2021.
4. Implementation Phase 3 from November 2020 to July 2021.

#### **In the Initial Planning Phase, from June to July 2020, CRSI:**

- developed a general concept for the program and began convening fortnightly meetings with partner organisations to refine program design, key tools and processes, including:
  - Mentor Group Information Pack and Application Form
  - Mentor Group Training Package (adapted from a training packaged developed by the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative)
  - Mentor Group Code of Conduct
  - confirmation letters and Getting Started Pack for Mentor Groups
  - information for agencies referring refugees
  - mentee information and consent form
  - template for the Mentorship Support Plan
  - initial surveys for mentees and mentors
- emailed a database of community members and civil society organisations who had previously expressed interest in an Australian refugee sponsorship program, inviting them to a public information session on program participation, supplemented by social media and CRSI member newsletters.

**In Implementation Phase 1 (preparing groups), from August to October 2020, the following occurred:**

- a public information session was held, attended by pre-existing volunteer groups and ‘singleton’ individuals
- ‘singleton’ individuals formed groups through introductions made by CRSI
- individual mentors applied for police checks and Working With Children Checks (WWCC), assisted by CRSI
- mentor groups lodged applications to be involved in the program
- groups undertook training provided by CRSI (in person and on-line), completed the onboarding survey and gave feedback on training
- CRSI and the Social Impact Hub convened a Theory of Change workshop and began developing an evaluation strategy for the program, with support from independent experts.

**In Implementation Phase 2 (matching and resources for mentors), from September 2020 to January 2021, the following occurred:**

- partner organisations and networks referred mentees into the program and worked with CRSI to ensure informed consent of refugee participants (including completion of initial survey to collect background information on mentee households)
- CRSI contacted a wide range of community organisations and diaspora networks to facilitate matches with ‘hard to match’ groups (mostly those in regional areas outside of major cities with few residents from refugee backgrounds), leading to some, but not all, of these groups being matched<sup>7</sup>
- CRSI arranged contact points within settlement agencies to be available to advise groups on ad hoc settlement issues
- mentees were introduced to mentor groups and mentor groups commenced provision of support
- CRSI convened first in a series of bi-monthly Peer-to-Peer Forums to connect mentor groups with one another and provide additional training. The first forum involved sharing of insights by sponsor groups involved in New Zealand’s pilot program
- CRSI launched a WhatsApp chat group to provide a platform for mentor groups to communicate with one another as part of a community of practice
- CRSI launched a digital mentor resource hub
- evaluation plan was finalised.

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<sup>7</sup> Mentor groups that were not matched with a refugee are referred to as unmatched groups.

**In Implementation Phase 3 (active support and ongoing evaluation), from November 2020 to July 2021, the following occurred:**

- mentor groups were active in providing advice and support to mentee households
- implementation of full evaluation plan commenced:
  - initial mentor and mentee surveys
  - mentor feedback on training
  - mentor logbooks
  - Integration Star<sup>8</sup> interviews conducted at the end of the first and fifth months of each mentorship
  - final survey of mentor group members
  - interviews with a sample of mentor groups, mentees, program partners and CRSI staff
- storytelling strategy developed and launched
- initial 6-month mentorship period concluded, and the groups asked about their willingness to provide ongoing mentorship support to mentees.

## 2.2. GMP participants

A total of 198 adults participated in the pilot GMP – 26 adult refugees as mentees and 172 community members volunteered to be mentors.

### 2.2.1. Mentees

- 26 adults (with 11 dependent children who also benefitted from mentorship support):
  - 10 – females
  - 16 – males
- 15 households:<sup>9</sup>
  - 5 – singles
  - 5 – nuclear families
  - 2 – single mothers
  - 2 – sibling groups
  - 1 – couple
- Age:
  - Average age was 33 years (range: 17 years, 57 years)
  - Half of the mentees were under 32 years old



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<sup>8</sup> The Integration Star is an assessment tool for refugees that explores 8 key outcome areas in the settlement journey where practical support may be needed to integrate into a new country and culture. The GMP used this tool to help understand the needs of refugee mentees and observe changes. (See Appendix A for more details and section 3.1.4 for results.)

<sup>9</sup> The 26 mentees lived across 15 households.

- Countries of origin (see Figure 3):
  - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Myanmar, Syria and Tibet

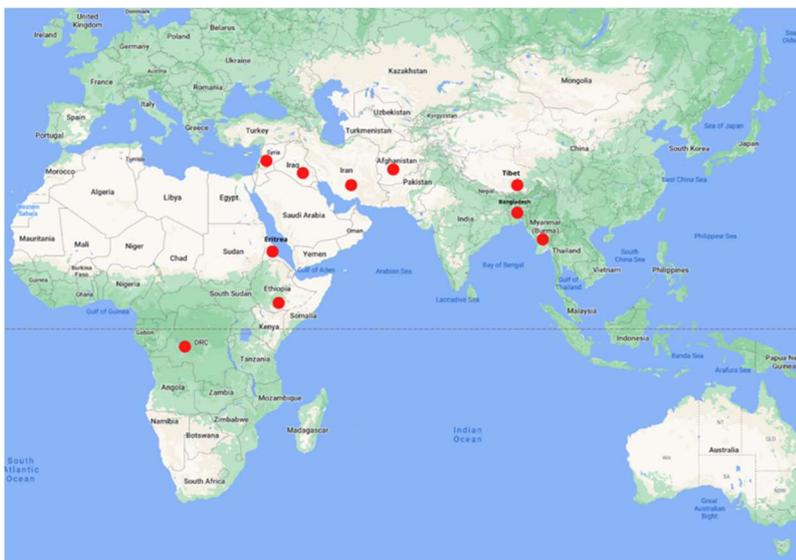


Figure 3: Country of origin of mentees

- Support programs:
  - 10 – Community Support Program
  - 6 – HSP
  - 4 – SETS
  - 3 – Try, Test and Learn<sup>10</sup>
  - 3 – no program
- English language proficiency<sup>11</sup>:
  - 10 – AMEP Level 1 (pre-beginner)
  - 8 – AMEP Level 2 (beginner)
  - 1 – AMEP Level 3 (post-beginner)
  - 2 – AMEP Level 4 (intermediate)
  - 3 – advanced/fluent
- Main areas of support sought by mentees:
  - learning English
  - career development or finding work
  - study assistance
  - social opportunities and making friends

<sup>10</sup> The Try, Test and Learn fund is an initiative that links migrants and refugees living in Melbourne who are having difficulty finding work, and who are willing to relocate to regional areas, with employers with vacancies in the Grampians and Loddon Mallee regions. The initiative supports migrants and refugees to find jobs, homes and social and educational networks.

<sup>11</sup> Information about language proficiency was available for 24 of the 26 mentees.

### 2.2.2. Mentors

- 172 individuals, across 21 groups, volunteered to become mentors and completed the screening processes and GMP training.
  - 14 groups were matched with a mentee household
  - 2 groups mentored 2 mentee households
- Locations:
  - Mentor groups were based in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria (see Figure 4)
  - 62% of mentors were based in regional areas
- Gender:
  - 68% female
  - 20% male
  - 12% unspecified
- Age:
  - More than two-thirds (69%) were over 54 years of age
  - Almost half (40%) of mentors were between 65 and 84 years of age
  - 5% were 18–34 years; 10% were 35–44 years; 16% were 45–54 years; 29% were 55–64 years; 40% were 65–84 years
- Occupation:
  - 24% educator
  - 16% retired
  - 16% health worker
  - 9% social services
  - 9% artist/musician
  - 9% management/administration
- Main motivations of mentors for involvement in GMP:
  - to support the successful resettlement of refugees in Australia
  - as an expression of concern for the plight of refugees
  - to prepare for a future sponsorship program that will assist refugees living overseas
  - to help change public attitudes towards refugees.
- Availability:
  - on average, mentor groups were willing to volunteer for 16 hours per week.



Figure 4: Locations of mentor groups across Australia

### 2.3. Implementation strengths

The evaluation received positive feedback from a range of stakeholders on the GMP's key tools and processes.

CRSI staff reported that through the pilot GMP they developed and refined tools, processes and policies that can be used or built upon by future mentorship or sponsorship programs (for example, application forms, information packs, online training and ongoing support). Several staff noted that the tools and processes provided structure and clarity and preserved the autonomy of mentor groups while allowing the program flexibility to adapt and evolve.

The systems... set up to receive and induct and train mentors has worked very well. We had to balance the nature of the program with being flexible and fluid and setting up a whole new approach and also as much as we could, having some detailed training and policies and procedures and plans going ahead. (CRSI staff)

I really liked the way it was set up. I think the structure of it was really good. I think that open line of communication between CRSI and the mentor group was really good. (Settlement agency staff)

**Positive feedback about the mentor training was provided by the range of stakeholders involved in the evaluation. CRSI staff reported strengths in the development process, noting that use of the online training package of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) as a starting point for developing the mentor training package enabled them to draw upon global expertise and experience. CRSI staff also described that the GMP training package was strengthened by input and feedback from Australian settlement agencies on both content and ways of working with volunteers.**

The GRSI training package was a really good starting point to get a feel for what works in this space for training, because it's a big topic to cover, there are lots of facets to it. So, it's really nice that there is that global network of people that have been involved in it elsewhere and know the ins and outs, that were really happy to share that with us. (CRSI staff)

We got some feedback from settlement agencies on the training package, and they just added a few things to it, like things around embedding a strengths-based approach and encouraging volunteers to set boundaries and, encouraging volunteers to not 'do for', but 'do with'. (CRSI staff)

**CRSI staff noted the importance of including content in the training to support mentors in understanding the impacts of torture and trauma, the importance of maintaining and respecting privacy and boundaries, and using a strengths-based approach in supporting refugees. For many mentors the training provided new information and insights.**

I think the strengths-based approach that the CRSI training outlined had a really profound impact on the mentor team. It helped form our code of conduct and our values base and we've looked back at that regularly in terms of what we're doing – is it leading them [the refugee mentee] or is it really doing the work with them? And so what we've sought to do is to have them [the refugee mentee] leading the program, but also to be there in partnership, standing beside them and not pushing or pulling too hard. That strengths-attribute approach has been a really good, a really profound, different approach to what I would have gone into the relationship with, without knowing that. And so that is a very nuanced part of the overall CRSI program and it gives latitude for the relationship to work on different levels as opposed to a guardian angel type thing, you know? So it's a much more adult-to-adult relationship than I really initially thought. (Mentor, interview)

The training was really good, that was really worthwhile and gave us a good springboard into the program. (Mentor, interview)

Most mentors (56, 93%) who completed the training feedback survey reported feeling more prepared and confident after the mentor training. Almost all reported feeling somewhat or very well equipped (30, 50% and 28, 47% respectively).

I definitely feel much more aware of what is expected of us as mentors and the boundaries that need to be adhered to by mentees and mentors. I also see the holes in what we are currently doing to support the refugees in our community and am determined to somehow find some order in at what times has felt like chaos!<sup>12</sup>  
(Mentor, training feedback survey)

Some of the information wasn't that new (e.g. privacy, confidentiality, communication) but appreciate why it needed to be included. More interesting to me was the specific information, content and discussions of the aspects of the training as applied to the refugee experience. It was also a great opportunity to explore some of our group's values and attitudes, as we haven't had much of a chance as a group to meet up.  
(Mentor, training feedback survey)

One settlement agency, who had worked previously with a group which then became a mentor group with the GMP, noted that the training increased the group's understanding of the settlement journey and improved the group's confidence and ability to support a refugee family.

[The group] helped us settle the first family that moved to [this town] under our program and they felt that they were just winging it and they made a few mistakes. So, they did say that they had really gained a lot from the CRSI training and then applied that with the family that they helped with this mentoring initiative. So I think that was really valuable for them to see their progress as a group... it definitely really helped in terms of the outcomes for the families and that's going to be ongoing for that area as well, because I'm sure they will in the future support other families moving to the area. (Settlement agency staff)

Several stakeholders also noted the importance of the Mentor Group Code of Conduct template designed by CRSI for groups to use to outline a clear, safe and ethical mentoring approach. CRSI staff described that mentor groups were encouraged during training to use the template to develop their behavioural standards. This was one of several ways the GMP encouraged and highlighted the autonomy of mentor groups, while at the same time addressing the risks of the program. Numerous mentor group members described the template as helpful, including 40% of mentors who completed the survey who rated it was 'very useful' (see section 3.2.5).

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<sup>12</sup> The mentor is referring here to support they had been providing to refugees in their community through other channels, prior to commencing a mentorship through the GMP.

I think that code of conduct process was really useful at the very beginning, just to think about how to maintain our own kind of safety and as well look after the safety of the refugee family. So that was really good actually. (Mentor, interview)



#### 2.4. Implementation challenges

CRSI staff described the challenges in obtaining referrals of refugees suitable to participate in the GMP. Two main reasons were reported.

1. The GMP relied mostly (but not exclusively) on settlement organisations for referrals of refugee participants into the program; however, some organisations found it difficult to identify potential participants or were hesitant to make referrals. The staff of settlement organisations explained how the approach of the GMP involved thinking differently about the role of volunteers and community in refugee settlement. Although allies at several settlement organisations were members of the GMP Coordination Group and contributed to the program's design, some people and organisations were not ready to support this different approach.

We and our existing allies in those organisations had to sell the GMP internally. It meant cutting through how things were ordinarily done. There was some fear and some philosophical resistance. (CRSI staff)

This was a new experience for us, because what we've been used to is that very prescriptive volunteer exchange... there is a lot of structure and a process around that. So this was quite different. (Settlement agency)

- 2. Some mentor groups were established in regional areas where there are few or no residents from refugee backgrounds, due in part to policy factors as well as an absence of settlement/migrant services. While CRSI sought to identify refugees interested in moving to such areas, the scarcity of affordable housing and the time it can take to line up employment opportunities made it difficult to find refugees prepared to relocate there within the short timeframe of the program.**

Housing and employment are a bit of a chicken and egg situation. It's hard to find those for people if they don't live there, but people are reluctant to move if those things are not available. (CRSI staff)

Additional issues described by staff included challenges delivering training to mentors for the GMP. Due to the varied and changing restrictions of movement within and between states caused by COVID-19 during 2020 most training had to be delivered remotely. The intended face-to-face training modules required modification for online delivery with ongoing refinement, and while it was well-received and valued by mentors (see section 3.2.5), the roll out of the training was challenging for CRSI staff.

The evaluation found that in some cases the GMP added at least 5 people (i.e. the mentor group) plus another organisation (i.e. CRSI) to what can be an already busy network of helpers for refugees. CRSI was conscious of this and allocated one staff member as the main contact for refugees. Nonetheless, several stakeholders reported that on occasion some refugees found the additional interactions and information provided through the GMP confusing and potentially overwhelming.

There can be information overload for refugees... We are adding to an already busy ecosystem of well-meaning people trying to help people on their way. This would not be the case if local groups were given full responsibility for settlement support from day one of the settlement journey – as would be the case if the Federal Government introduced a new sponsorship program – but what we can do is communicate our role clearly from the outset. (CRSI staff)

It was a bit overwhelming, I guess, because a lot of people were helping, and also you're working and you're studying, and sometimes you just don't have time. (Mentee, interview)

Some mentor groups and settlement agencies experienced challenges in the initial stages of mentorships that affected their mutual support of refugees. This was due to differing and sometimes incorrect understandings of their respective roles. Some mentor groups did not understand the contractual obligations of settlement agencies vis-à-vis settlement of refugees (especially those still on the HSP) and in some situations, groups expected they would lead tasks that settlement agencies considered were their own responsibility. At the same time, case managers were unaccustomed to the more flexible and holistic volunteer support provided by the GMP.

One of the challenges was that the mentor group also wanted to provide a similar level of support, but given that the clients were on program, we were already doing that. So, it was initially quite hard to find that balance around what that support looked like and who was accountable, and who should be delegating or providing that support. (Settlement agency staff)

The biggest challenge was that normally our case managers will provide task-based or activity-based activities for our volunteers, and they're very prescriptive and they have to report back. Whereas the GMP was very much a model of what sponsorship looks like, so their [mentor's] understanding was that they would be doing all aspects of settlement, but because the clients were still on program, that was not the case. So it was it just about having those consultations, debriefs and just being really articulate, and specific about what those asks were. (Settlement agency staff)

To help address this issue, one settlement agency reported that they engaged the mentor group in the settlement agency's volunteer induction. This helped mentors understand the settlement agency's role, gave the agency's caseworkers greater confidence in the mentor group's capacity and supported better collaboration. (See also section 3.6)



## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Mentees' experiences of the GMP

#### 3.1.1. Support mentees received

The evaluation found that mentees were provided a wide range of help from mentor groups.

Mentees commonly reported that their mentors helped them improve their English language skills, be it through lessons or through conversation with feedback.

My English improved; practice with the group helped with that. (Mentee, interview)

[My mentor] is literally helping me whenever I talk to [them]... If I say something wrong, [they are] correcting me in the same spot. For me, the way I learn something is like, at the moment if I do a mistake, I want to learn the correct thing. (Mentee, interview)

Some mentees reported their mentors helped them access work opportunities in their preferred industries. One mentee was assisted in obtaining an ABN in order to undertake freelance work and was introduced to contacts of a mentor that led to an interview for an internship.<sup>13</sup> Another mentee who is an artist received help to sell their artwork. They also had an exhibition organised which was cancelled due to COVID-19 lockdowns.

They do try to help me to get a job. I want to be a graphic designer and I am studying graphic design now and they tried to get me the internship at [a large design company]. The interview will be very soon, so I am excited. (Mentee, interview)

Some mentees reported that they were given much needed household goods and other practical items. Some received help with administrative and practical tasks that they were unfamiliar with in Australia or were unable to do alone.

They helped us with everyday tasks, like paying bills. They sometimes helped with material aid like food or a voucher to purchase goods. (Mentee, interview)

When our car broke down, [our mentor] helped us fix it which was really helpful. (Mentee, interview)

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<sup>13</sup> Interview pending at the time of the evaluation.

They are very good people; they help me with everything. It would have been harder if not for their help. We were not working because of COVID, we sat at home. They helped us get jobs and beds and household goods. We didn't move [here] with anything, so they helped us a lot. (Mentee, interview)

**One mentee was helped to apply for a scholarship to attend TAFE. The mentee had been unaware they were eligible, but through the mentor group liaising with the mentee's caseworker, the group found out that scholarships were available. They helped the mentee successfully apply and then enrol in a TAFE course they are passionate about.**

I was living alone, just working, and because I didn't know about the scholarship that was available, I thought it was only for the uni student and also it was just hard alone, just working and I didn't really think about going to TAFE. I think I need to do something to get a career that I want to do. So they helped me with those things. (Mentee, interview)



Several mentees reported that the support they received from their mentors went beyond their expectations in having positive impacts on their lives.

I was surprised when they gave me the laptop. I did not expect that. I really needed that. I owe them gratitude. It is very helpful for my learning. I learned something about photo-editing program, and also at the moment I am learning Excel on the laptop. It has been helpful. (Mentee, interview)

I didn't expect them to teach my brothers to drive and that really helped with our lives. (Mentee, interview)

### 3.1.2. Impacts of support

All mentees interviewed for this evaluation described that their involvement in the GMP had positive impacts on their quality of life.

Most mentees described that assistance from their mentor group helped them feel supported and provided a sense of security, which in turn helped increase their confidence in themselves and their future in Australia.

You know when you want to make a house, you would need to have a strong bond. You know 4 things in the bottom that they need to be deep, deep in the ground, so if you build your house very, very high with the wind, it won't blow down. So they were that for me. (Mentee, interview)

They are someone we can rely on and [people outside our diaspora] who we can get support from. It boosted our confidence and peace of mind to know there is someone always there to support us. (Mentee, interview)

They help to teach me how I can be if they are not with me in the future, how I can finish my problems myself. (Mentee, interview)

Several mentees also specifically noted the positive impacts that support from their mentor group had on their mental health and well-being.

I like what they did in terms of encouragement and moral support. I came here as a refugee, we have a lot of low self-esteem, stress and they gave me a lot of encouragement, and also that improved my physical as well as my mental well-being, that's what I like. (Mentee, interview)

Spending time together, taking me to museums and concerts, things like that. We were going to parks, celebrating my birthday, so they helped with my mental health. (Mentee, interview)

**One mentee described the profound impact that support and encouragement from their mentor group had in helping them gain clarity about their career interests and confidence to pursue those goals.**

[The mentors] helped me to make that proper in my mind, more and more, because for me, coming from [refugee's country] and having [that] background, for me working in a movie, this is not for you. You're not that person – next job. And the next job would be just being waitress, getting married, having children, doing nothing, literally. But I knew something inside me wanted something different. And I talked about that in that mentorship group on the first day... And then in time we were talking about that and that's given me the power to try to think about it more and more... Each one of them was like a family for me to support for whatever I want. It's like a family standing at my back for whatever I want. And then they pushed me, they help. They put the connection there for me to do whatever I want, to be what I want to be. (Mentee, interview)

**Most of the mentees who participated in the evaluation described an enhanced sense of connection to community through friendships they had developed with mentor group members and/or valued social connections their mentor group had helped them make in the community.**

I really like the fact that [our mentor] bought us some shoes to play soccer with and she takes us to soccer. I really love that she helps us with that. When they take us to soccer games we get to meet new people. (Mentee, interview)

I liked how they give me their time to be with me and to connect me with other people. To introduce me to the other people. Now I'm good because I'm free to talk to them what I want. Hard thing before was to make conversation because of my language, but now a little bit we understand each other... because they gave me lesson in English. (Mentee, interview)

It has changed how connected I feel to people. I made new friends through the program. I mean, they are like a second family. (Mentee, interview)



Several mentees also described how the mentorship was of mutual benefit, noting ways in which they felt mentors valued them.

I believe they are happy because they are helping us. They have learned a lot about our culture, we have showed them how to make Ethiopian coffee from scratch – they like that and have learned that. (Mentee, interview)

[My mentor's] wife runs playgroup [which I join once a week] and she asked me to share my experience as a refugee to the group. So with my little English I shared my experience, I feel very good about it. (Mentee, interview)

I really enjoy spending time with them. Doesn't matter what we do, having normal dinner, or we go walking to the beach or anything. I really enjoy because I learn from them and they learn from me also. It's a win-win situation. (Mentee, interview)

### 3.1.3. Mentees' suggestions for improving the GMP

Mentees offered some suggestions for ways the GMP could be modified to improve its effectiveness, with the main recommendation being to extend the duration of the program. Several mentees reported that for them 6 months was not long enough to receive help in all the areas important for their settlement, especially where they were working and/or studying.

I would like this program [to] be longer... 6 months is alright, but it would have been better if it was one year. You can really improve everything... if we had a longer period it might be more effective... It depends. Every mentee has what they want to do. If they don't have much list to do, 6 months is alright. If the period is longer it would be good. (Mentee, interview)

Some mentees suggested that more could be done to address language barriers. One mentee noted that it would be ideal if one or more mentors spoke the mentee's main language. Others indicated that having access to interpreters more often would have improved communication with the mentor group and enabled faster progress on goals they were working towards with the mentor group.

Sometimes we can't tell the mentor directly but through interpreter we can share the things we want to share with them. Not saying I have a complaint or anything, just good to have a third person to help share our opinion about things we sometimes cannot say to them. (Mentee, interview)

There was feedback from one mentee that where the purpose of a meeting was to practice English, it would be preferable for just one mentor to attend. They described that for their level of English, 1:1 practice is most effective and that conversation between mentors during those meetings was not helpful for the mentee's practice.

There is no point 2 or more of them coming together if they talk together because then the hour goes so quickly, better for just one to come... then it would be more helpful for us. Also, then it is not a burden for them – just one person to come every [week]. If more come it is not so helpful. (Mentee, interview)

#### 3.1.4. Integration Star results and feedback

At the time of the evaluation, 16 out of 23 mentees had completed both the first and second Integration Star interviews. This included 8 mentees who identified as men or boys, 7 who identified as women or girls and 1 non-specified gender. The average age of mentees at the time they completed their second Integration Star interview was 34.6 years (range: 18.3 years, 57.5 years).

As can be seen in Figure 3, the Integration Stars results indicate that 10 of the 16 mentees made progress in housing and 8 made progress in every other outcome area except for money, where 5 mentees made progress. Money, and education and work, were the 2 areas where the least progress was made, with 10 and 6 out of 16 mentees respectively, indicating no progress from a point in the change journey where improvement was possible (i.e. not yet self-reliant). Integration Star results for 5 mentees showed a decline in 1 outcome area and 2 mentees reported a decline in 2 outcome areas, mainly health and well-being, and laws, systems and services. However, the extent to which this reflects actual change is uncertain (see point 2 below).

It is important to note the following 2 things when considering these results.

1. Any progress (or backwards movement) in a mentee's change journey cannot be attributed to the GMP. The Integration Star process measures change over time but does not indicate the causes of any change. The settlement journey of mentees participating in the GMP was influenced by a range of factors, including receiving support under the HSP program, and the GMP should be considered as only one potential contributing factor.
2. Feedback from mentees and mentors suggests that for some of them Integration Star results are likely not reliable. It was reported to the evaluation that some mentees did not fully understand the concepts discussed during the first Integration Star interview, and understanding them better at the second interview, rated their status differently and/or less favourably.

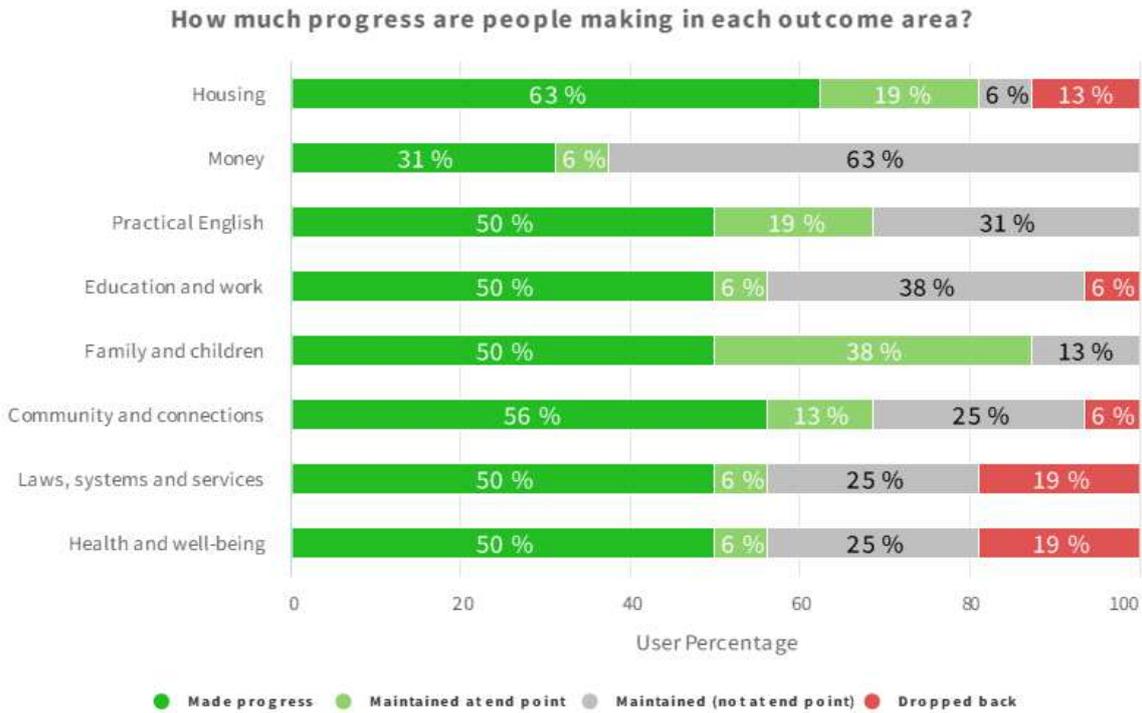


Figure 5: Progress of GMP mentees in 8 Integration Star outcome areas<sup>14</sup>

Feedback from mentees on the value for them of participating in the Integration Star process was mixed. Some mentees found it helpful for identifying their needs and communicating these to mentors. Some liked that that process helped them see and celebrate their progress. Other mentees reported that the process was of no benefit to them.

It was very good, I think. I was asked important questions in relation to different parts of everyday life. Yes, I understand this interview, the purpose was in order for [mentors] to be able to help me more effectively in the future. (Mentee, interview)

It's amazing because you see where you are in a path, so you will know which star parts you need to work out more. (Mentee, interview)

We did the interview, but I don't see how useful it would be for us. (Mentee, interview)

<sup>14</sup> This chart is produced by Outcomes Star software which provides a range of ways of reporting the Integration Star data.

## 3.2. Mentors' experiences of the GMP

The evaluation gathered feedback from mentors about their experience of the GMP via an online survey and through semi-structured interviews. In total, 40 mentors completed the survey, comprising of 32 who were matched with a mentee and 8 who were who were not. This section reports the feedback received from the 32 matched mentors who completed the online survey and 10 who were interviewed. (See section 3.5 for feedback provided by unmatched mentors.)

### 3.2.1. Activities undertaken by mentors

Mentors who completed the survey reported that individually they spent an average of 2.3 hours per week on mentoring through the GMP (range: 0 hours, 5 hours; mode<sup>15</sup>: 2 hours). For groups with the minimum recommended membership of 5 individuals, this equates to 11.5 hours of support per week for mentee households.

Through the survey, mentors reported undertaking a range of activities. The average number of different activities reported was 4 (range: 1, 11). Most mentors reported that they helped mentees form social and community connections and helped mentees with their English language skills (78% and 69% respectively, see Table 1). Other commonly reported activities included helping mentees access training or employment (47%) and supporting mentees with housing (41%).

Table 1: Main activities undertaken by mentors

Activities undertaken by mentors	N=32	
	n	%
Helped mentees form social and community connections	25	78
Helped mentees improve their English	22	69
Helped adult mentees with access to training or employment	15	47
Supported mentees in relation to housing	13	41
Coordinated the mentor group	10	31
Helped in areas related to mentees' health and well-being	10	31
Helped mentees understand laws relevant to them	8	25
Helped mentees access services they are entitled to	8	25
Supported mentees in relation to their finances and money	7	22
Fund-raised for mentees as required by the GMP	6	19

<sup>15</sup> Mode is the most frequently occurring response.

Through the survey and via interviews, mentors also described other supports they provided to their mentee, including assisting with driving lessons, obtaining a computer, household items and/or musical instrument, and helping mentees access dental services.

Initially there was just some help... getting into the house that they'd hired and some collection of furniture and things. We as a group were able to gather quite a number of items and stuff. So there was that physical move in, but since then it's mainly as a friend and visitor, and I am involved with the English sessions. I haven't been formally trained, but I've got a background as a teacher and I'm interested in that area. (Mentor, interview)

[The mentee] said I have basically never been to the dentist in my life. So I was asking around trying to find a dentist which proved to be harder than I thought. But I found a service operated by the Australian Dental Association... a clinic [that operates] once a month for people who are referred by charities. And so it took a bit of managing bureaucracy and filling in forms and then getting the charity... to vouch for them. And then taking [them] to the dentist which was on a Saturday. And then taking [them to] a follow-up appointment... so it's just kind of like being a parent. (Mentor, interview)



### 3.2.2. Mentors' understandings of responsibilities under the GMP

The mentor survey found a range of views among mentors regarding who was responsible for different aspects of the mentoring arrangement to do with risk and protection of mentors and mentees. For the most part, mentors thought they were either completely or mostly responsible for managing most aspects, either alone or equally with CRSI (see Table 2).

Most mentors (88%) thought it was the responsibility of their group to decide whether to allow new members to join. Most mentors also understood that ensuring the safety of mentees during mentorship activities, and establishing appropriate behavioural norms for group members, were the responsibility of the group (78% and 60% respectively). Approximately half (53%) thought it was the mentor group's role to monitor the well-being of mentees during the program.

Most mentors (66%) thought it was the responsibility of both CRSI and the mentor group to ensure the privacy of mentees was protected throughout the program.

The area in which there was the least consistent understanding was with regard to the protection of refugee children from potential abuse by mentor group members. Almost half (47%) thought this was equally the responsibility of CRSI and the mentor group. Just over one-third (37%) thought it was mostly or completely the responsibility of the mentor group, while one-sixth (16%) thought this was mostly or completely CRSI's responsibility.

Table 2: Mentors' understandings of distribution of responsibilities under the GMP

Area of responsibility	Understood to be the responsibility of					
	CRSI only		CRSI and mentor group equally		Mentor group only	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Deciding whether to allow a new member to join a mentor group	0	0	4	12	28	88
Safety of mentor group members while undertaking mentorship activities	0	0	7	22	25	78
Establishing appropriate behavioural norms for mentor group members	2	6	11	34	19	60
Monitoring mentees' well-being during the program	0	0	15	47	17	53
Protection of refugee children from potential abuse by mentor group members	5	16	15	47	12	37
Ensuring that the privacy of mentees is protected	0	0	21	66	11	34

### 3.2.3. Challenges experienced by mentors

Among mentors who completed the survey, most reported that they experienced few challenges during their mentorship, and where challenges were reported, they were most often described by as a small to moderate issue. The most commonly reported challenges of mentors who completed the survey were:

- The language barrier impeded our group's efforts (41%).
- The mentorship period was too short to get results. (38%).
- I felt I had limited time to mentor (28%).
- Our group was unclear about how best to help the mentee (28%).
- Our group was unclear about the mentee's needs (25%).

(See Table 6, Appendix B for further details).

Among mentors interviewed for the evaluation, the main challenges reported were finding enough time to dedicate to mentoring and that the program's administrative requirements were onerous.

Several mentors reported that supporting their mentees involved more time than they expected. For some, it was that the level of support needed was greater than anticipated or that different support activities were more time consuming than they estimated. Other reasons mentors reported were that the time they had available for mentoring (for example, due to their increased work commitments) or the size of their mentor group decreased during the mentorship.

I had fully expected and hoped that it would be very big, but it's even bigger than I thought, so there were moments where I just had to say, look I've got other things on as well. I think you'd want to do this in a time when you didn't have so many other things going on. (Mentor, interview)

It's really brought home to me the time commitment. I mean, I'm retired and although I have a number of volunteer gigs, I'm much more flexible and much more free with my time than everybody else who's working full-time or part-time. I reckon it would be very hard for a group of only full-time workers to support a newly arrived refugee. Maybe that's why many people who come onto these zoom meetings have white hair. (Mentor, interview)

I guess maybe our lack of people power as well. We started with five and [one] went to work [overseas] so I just feel a little like we are spread slightly too thin sometimes. But then in other ways I feel like if we had more people, it would be more difficult. That comes with its own challenges. (Mentor, interview)

All mentors interviewed reported that the administration side of the GMP was burdensome, particularly the logbook they were asked by CRSI to maintain. Some reported that they tried to complete it initially but gave up, while those who persisted noted that although they did their best, it was too difficult to record everything as requested. Numerous mentors acknowledged the value of this information for CRSI in developing future programs and orienting participants; however, the logbook process was not something mentors found they could readily incorporate into their activities.

I definitely have been probably one of the worst at using the log book... there's tens of hours that wouldn't have been logged from me spending on [setting up our fundraising]... the log book really makes it feel like another job and the amount of emails that come in, it really felt like a part-time job rather than something that I really enjoyed doing. (Mentor, interview)

There was also feedback from some mentors that meetings and support events (such as Peer-to-Peer Forums) set up by CRSI were all during business hours, making it challenging or impossible for full-time workers to attend.

Several mentors also described that mentees faced time constraints just as they did, particularly mentees who were working or studying, such that it was sometimes difficult to coordinate times to meet.

It was also reported by some mentors that supporting mentees could, at times, be stressful due to the nature of help required. For example, mentors reported that they felt out of their depth when mentees needed help with legal matters they either did not know about or could not help with.

There are times when it does get stressful... there's been some legal stuff that ... was way beyond the scope that any training could possibly have provided any insight. I guess it's just a consequence of getting to know the people or them knowing that you're around and then trusting you and coming to you as someone who might be able to provide the support or the direction that they need. (Mentor, interview)

#### 3.2.4. Mentors' positive mentoring experiences

All mentors reported that their involvement in the GMP provided them with a variety of positive experiences.

Nearly 25% of mentors who completed the survey reported that they gained new friendships through their participation in the GMP with mentees and/or other mentors.

I have made new friends, both the mentees and other mentors. I have thoroughly enjoyed the time with the mentees and other mentors. (Mentor, online survey)

We feel deeply connected to two beautiful young people who enrich our lives and family's experiences. (Mentor, online survey)

Approximately 20% of mentors who completed the survey noted that their mentoring experience had provided them with a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by refugees in departing their countries and settling in Australia. Several mentors also described that mentoring had provided them valued opportunities to learn about another culture.

I have a new appreciation for the difficulties faced by refugees settling into a new country at the end of the world, without family, language, a stable home and work. (Mentor, online survey)

The extension of that cultural experience that's been really rewarding for me is meeting other people outside of [mentees]. So they're introducing us to others... it's a lovely exponential growth of multi-cultural understanding because there's [4 countries] now and we're getting exposed to the food, the cultures, the difficulties, why are they here? What's driving the war and persecution in their countries? Very, very rewarding in that sense. (Mentor, interview)

I've got much more out of it than I put in. In particular I've been privileged to meet 2 awesome young people and learn about their culture and journey to Australia. (Mentor, online survey)

**Mentors reported a sense of joy and satisfaction from helping make a difference to the lives of mentees and feeling inspired and at times deeply moved by the experience.**

I believe the social connection we made with our mentees was hugely important as it alleviated the isolation and loneliness of being a new arrival with few friends. (Mentor, online survey)

We've had a remarkable, I would think lifelong, impact on [our mentees]. In [the mentee's] case his growth in confidence in only 6 months is really incredible. (Mentor, online survey)

We connected our mentees with training and employment opportunities that they were longing to experience. We've provided them opportunities to share experiences such as camping, family celebrations, going to the beach, museums etc. that they had never experienced. (Mentor, online survey)

[They're] fearless and they don't take for granted those freedoms. And so it's such a totally inspiring thing and a reflection back on what's important here and why we have to work hard to protect it and make sure it's available, you know, that sort of big picture stuff [has] been swirling around in my head a lot. (Mentor, interview)

Nearly all mentors who completed the survey said they enjoyed being part of their mentor group and that the mentoring experience was rewarding (94% and 84% respectively; see Table 3).

Table 3: Positive experiences reported by mentors

Positive experiences	n	%
I enjoyed being part of the mentor group	30	94
Our group was able to problem-solve to meet our mentee’s needs	29	91
Being a mentor was a rewarding experience	27	84
I felt like my contribution made a difference to the mentee’s progress	24	75
My engagement in mentorship influenced others in my own community to show more favourable or compassionate responses to refugees	21	66

It's a really positive experience. It's really nice to know that we as a group has helped a member of our community feel more a member of their, and our community... I can really see these differences. She seemed very relaxed and the kids are very relaxed. And knowing that now she has all these resources at her hands you know, social resources, church groups, friends, people she can contact, knowing that we've been able to raise [money] that might help her get a car and more driving lessons, which will just open up their world and where they live, education, future employment, you know, heaps of extra opportunities, that it might just have been a bit more of a struggle... just being able to help in those things has been really rewarding. And it's good to know that our community cares and wants to help other people. (Mentor, interview)

The vast majority of mentors surveyed (30, 94%) came away from their 6 months with the GMP saying they would recommend refugee mentoring to friends.

All but one surveyed mentor reported that they would continue to support their mentee household beyond the 6-month mentorship period, primarily as friendships had developed and they felt the mentee(s) still needed support.

[I] wouldn't dream of losing contact. Exchange is still valuable both ways. (Mentor, survey respondent)

I consider them as friends and their need for assistance does not simply end after 6 months.  
(Mentor, online survey)

Just to keep in touch as they are now part of the community.  
(Mentor, online survey)

Continuing with English and driving/car ownership support. I like the mentee and am able to continue the support. (Mentor, online survey)



The one mentor who reported they would not continue supporting their mentee household beyond the 6-month mentorship program stated they did not need further support.

... the assistance they got during the program has given them substantial help and empowered them to seek help if they need it. (Mentor, online survey)

#### Enabling factors for positive mentoring experiences

Mentors provided suggestions for people considering participating in any program like the GMP. The following recommendations are factors or approaches that support a positive experience mentoring a refugee.

- Be realistic about what you can offer
- Have a mix of skills and times of availability within the mentor group
- Form a group with people you have worked with before and whom you communicate well
- Be relaxed in the engagement and flexible with your expectations
- While friendships may develop, understand that your support is meant to be short-term
- Support from your family for you to do this work is invaluable
- Be aware that there are incidental costs to mentoring (for example, eating out and transport)
- Avoid judgement

#### 3.2.5. Mentors' experience of support from CRSI

CRSI provided a range of resources through the GMP to support mentors in their work with mentees. Most mentors surveyed (24, 75%) reported that they felt well-equipped by the GMP to undertake their role as a mentor.

### Most helpful supports

Mentors who completed the survey reported that each of the following tools and processes were 'very useful' or 'very helpful':

- receiving the mentee's background information from CRSI before meeting them (60%)
- direct engagement with the CRSI team (57%)
- training prior to the mentorship (50%)
- Mentor Group Code of Conduct template (40%)
- developing a Mentorship Support Plan (37%)

The survey asked mentors to indicate their 3 favourite tools or processes provided through the GMP. Largely aligning with the supports rated 'most useful' or 'helpful', the most popular supports overall were:

- CRSI training prior to mentorship (57%)
- direct engagement with the CRSI team (39%)
- receiving the mentee's background information from CRSI before meeting them (32%)
- WhatsApp group for mentors (32%)

Several mentors reported that they would have liked even more information from CRSI about their mentee(s) than was provided ahead of meeting them. They indicated that this would have helped them better understand their mentee's needs and how they could best utilise their skills to assist.

### Least helpful supports

Very few mentors described any of the resources provided by the GMP as unhelpful, with the exception of the digital logbook, which mentors were asked to use to record activities they undertook for or with mentees. Approximately one quarter (27%) of survey respondents said the digital logbook was not helpful and a further 30% of mentors chose not to use it at all. (See section 3.2.3 also.)

I stopped logging. The logbooks were just too much. It was painful and it was not user-friendly. (Mentor, interview)



Between 20% and 30% of mentors chose not to use the following resources provided through the GMP:

- completing the digital logbook (30%)
- CRSI's online answers to frequently asked questions (27%)
- professional presentations during Peer-to-Peer Forums (23%)
- CRSI's online resources for mentor groups (20%)
- WhatsApp group for mentors (20%)

Just over a quarter (27%) of survey respondents were not aware that there were answers to mentor's frequently asked questions on the CRSI website, and approximately one-fifth (20%, 17% and 17% respectively) did not know about the Mentorship Support Plan template, CRSI's online resources or the WhatsApp group. (See Tables 7 and 8, Appendix B for details.)

### 3.2.6. Integration Star – mentors' involvement and feedback

Among mentors who completed the online survey, 11 were involved in completing the Integration Star with their mentee. Feedback from these mentors about the process was mixed. Some mentors reported that it was very useful, while others reported that it was either more burdensome than beneficial, or they had no strong feelings either way about the Integration Star process.

The following positives about the Integration Star process were reported by more than half of the 11 mentors involved in the process:

- I got a better overview of the mentee's situation (7)
- I gained a better idea of the mentee's support needs (7)
- I found it easy to understand where the mentee was on the 'journey of change' (7)
- It helped open up conversations with the mentee (6).

We found it to be an invaluable tool to track our mentee's needs and progress. (Mentor, survey respondent)

The Integration Star interview uncovered some of the health issues my mentee family was facing. Apart from that I was already aware of most of their support needs, as we had done an initial interview and had regular meetings, online and face to face. (Mentor, survey respondent)

The main criticisms from those involved in the Integration Star process were:

- It took too long to complete (7)
- Most of our mentor group did not engage with the Integration Star (7)
- I believe the mentee found it confusing (6)
- Our own planning process with the mentee was more useful (6).

(See Table 9, Appendix B for more details.)

The need for each of the scale 1–5 to be explained for each separate question, and the fact that the answers changed every time made it very confusing. (Mentor, online survey)



Some mentors suggested that the tool would benefit from the question-and-answer categories being simplified, and one mentor group reported doing this. They developed a ‘thumbs up, thumbs down’ rating scale and used the adapted tool halfway through their engagement with their mentee (specifically, in between the first and second assessments conducted by CRSI). The group reported that the adapted tool, which they also translated into their mentee’s language, was easy to use and effective for gaining understanding of their mentee’s needs and progress.

Questions need to be simplified, [and] should be provided to the mentee, mentors and interpreters prior to the assessment. (Mentor, online survey)

I found the initial session with the Integration Star very onerous, the interpreting and everything. I really enjoyed when we did it the second time... and we simplified the questions and translated them via Google translate into [mentee's language]. It still took an hour or more, but it felt easier. We [made] a little visual, like a thumbs up and numbers next to it and [the mentee] could move the thumb. So, it was a bit of a tactile thing and [the mentee] enjoyed it. It was a bit like play, so that she was able to physically show us you know, whether it was a 5 or a 3 or a 1 and it just felt much easier. (Mentor, interview)

### **Other mentors suggested that more integrated ways of gathering information are preferable.**

I sat through the process for 2 of our mentees and found it to be a bit of a blunt instrument, and too formulaic. I think it is more effective for the mentors to have a list of information they need from the mentees and get the information at an appropriate time as part of the process of building trust. (Mentor, survey respondent)

#### **3.2.7. Interest in sponsoring or mentoring in the future**

All of the surveyed mentors indicated that they would be interested (12, 43%) or possibly interested (16, 57%) in mentoring another refugee already in Australia in the future depending on the circumstances, such as having a break between mentorships and being able to work in a group with diverse skills.

Similarly, just over one third (11, 39%) of surveyed mentors reported that they would be interested in sponsoring a refugee from overseas in the future. Approximately two thirds (17, 61%) indicated that they would possibly be interested in community sponsorship, depending on circumstances, such as whether they had adequate time to commit, were still mentoring a refugee, the financial obligations involved, and being able to have a break between mentoring or sponsoring different refugees.

It depends for me very much on what's going on with my family life, working life and home life, and for all of us, the time factor. I don't think I could commit any more time than I've committed with this and the sponsorship program's going to require a lot more time. So, I think it's going to be quite a challenge. We would probably have to have a bigger group. (Mentor, interview)

We know about isolation through COVID. We can relate to just how hard that is. And I think COVID made me realise even more how hard it is for these guys. So, I personally wouldn't sponsor yet, not because it's not a good idea, but I don't think we have room in ourselves, and I want what we've got going to complete itself before we take on anything else. (Mentor, interview)

Most mentors (78%) indicated that they still considered their area a suitable location for refugee settlement. The main reasons were:

- plentiful employment opportunities
- culturally diverse communities in the location
- presence of settlement services and other community services
- community that is supportive and welcoming of refugees
- refugee communities already living in the location.

Among mentors who reported that their area was not a suitable location for refugee settlement, the main reported hindrances were lack of affordable housing and limited health and community services.

### 3.3. Matching mentors and mentees

Nearly all surveyed mentors (25, 93%) reported that they felt their group was generally well suited to the mentee(s) with whom they were matched. Two mentors felt their group was not well suited; one for lack of experience in trauma counselling, and one because the mentees did not need the skills the group had to offer, mainly English tutoring.

#### 3.3.1. Factors to consider in matching

The matching process involved weighing up how the different needs, capacities and lives of participants in the GMP might align. It used information about mentors from their application and initial survey, and information about mentees gathered through an initial survey conducted by CRSI.

It's really looking into some of those smaller details... location is important, but it's not the be-all and end-all... it's about trying to consider all of those different elements to see what can work. (CRSI staff)

The following 4 factors emerged as key to influencing whether mentors and mentees were a good match.

#### 1. Range of relevant skills and experience

Feedback from mentees, mentors and CRSI staff indicated that it was most important that mentors had knowledge, skills and/or experience in the areas that mentees most needed support. For some matches it was beneficial that mentors had specific industry experience or connections. For others, it was valuable to have mentors who understood the housing sector or Centrelink and other social services' processes. For most, English language teaching skills were important. What was relevant depended on the individual needs of the mentee or mentee family.

With matching we've seen some really great successes when we've been able to match mentees with groups that have similar professional skills or interests. So, we've got a group that has connections with the film industry, and their mentee, that's their passion. They've been able to support them to get work in that field. (CRSI staff)

[One mentor] is a preschool teacher, so she passed on some of the books she had that I've been using for English reading [with the mentee's son]... and we have [another mentor] who had all her background in settlement and refugees and [another] had a background in housing... I think we were a really good team. (Mentor, interview)

### **Mentor groups had much to offer when there was a range of backgrounds, capacities and connections to different networks in the group.**

It is also good if they have specialised backgrounds so they can give good information about the specific things that refugees need assistance with, especially things like administrative matters, employment and legal. The more variety of skills there are in a group the better it is, the more they can help a refugee. It is good if they are knowledgeable about Australian heritage, culture and landmarks. If they have connections with art and cultural activities, these are strong factors that can help a refugee to settle. It educates them to be part of Australian culture. (Mentee, interview)

What I like most for my people [is] that have, every one of them, have a different life. Every one of them have a different history for me. And every one of them are different person to teach me something that I need to hear. So I see them as a teacher, as a leader. (Mentee, interview)



## 2. Time availability

It was key that mentees were matched with mentor groups that could properly support mentees at the times they were available. Approximately one-quarter (28%) of mentor survey respondents reported having limited time to mentor (see section 3.2.3) and several mentors described that it was sometimes difficult and stressful to juggle mentoring and their own employment, family and other obligations. Mentees also were often busy studying and/or working one or more jobs which left limited opportunities to coordinate schedules and meet with mentors. This was further evidenced by the evaluation process itself, with several mentees being too busy to participate or available out of business hours only.

It's always a challenge with everything else and babies and families and stuff to sort of keep this sort of thing going.  
(Mentor, interview)

Before I worked and also I have TAFE and I also have freelancing and stuff so I don't really have much time and also when they are free I'm not free, and also when I'm free they are not free. That's why it is mostly you have to get in touch online. (Mentee, interview)

What I've always found is it depends on the individual's capacities, in terms of their volunteer time, how well organised they are, how well connected they are to the local community, and how they are able to navigate systems themselves. So that's what really differentiates from one community group from another.  
(Settlement agency staff)

## 3. Compatible age and stage of life

The evaluation found that compatibility of age and stage of life can impact mentorships. There were some instances of mentors and mentees having children of similar ages which provided points of connection and shared experience and understanding.

We have a [child] the same age as [the mentees'] son and they're good friends. And so there's this opportunity to play and to involve them in playgroup. So that's been a fairly gentle way of providing them with access to people beyond the mentor group and also to a broader group of [similarly] life-staged individuals and families.  
(Mentor, interview)

It was amazing. The mentor group... let us engage with their kids. Because for me, is I am alone over here in Australia, being with their kids was like I'm with my own sister and brother, because I receive the same love and feeling from them. (Mentee, interview)

There were some groups of older mentors who became important parent-like guides for their younger mentees, while for other mentorships, age differences were a drawback.

I was just daydreaming about that [working in the film industry]. They help, they support the connection making in me, like 'why not? You're also human. If you all ready, you can do it.' And the feeling that I received from my mentorship, was like the kids having from the best mummy and dad, the best, like literally the best.  
(Mentee, interview)

My brother was engaged as well and he says I wish you could just have some younger people in this program, because their age is just a little bit more mature. They get tired, they couldn't walk a lot. Need someone who can play football and do some physical activities. My brother because of COVID stays at home all the time but if younger people get involved in this sort of program, I believe he can go out more with them. I think we can understand each other better. (Mentee, interview)

#### 4. Proximity

Proximity was also identified as important, with nearly two-thirds (61%) of mentor survey respondents reporting that mentors and mentees living close to each other should be a key consideration in matching process. Some mentors noted during interviews that they would have engaged with their mentee more often if they had lived closer. For those mentorships where distance did not present a barrier to interacting, it was further identified that the mentee either had a car and driver's licence or access to good public transport, or mentors were able to provide transport.

It was not super far, but it is far. I don't have a car, so it takes 2.5 hour to get there [on public transport], but that's alright, wherever you go takes time. Sometimes they help, like they pick me up from my place and go somewhere.  
(Mentee, interview)



### 3.4. Characteristics of successful mentor groups

The evaluation found a range of personal qualities valuable for individual mentors to possess:

- able to support without fostering dependence
- able to understand and respond to the needs and goals of mentees without expectation or judgement
- accepting of differences
- aware of their strengths and weaknesses
- authentic
- calm
- compassionate
- flexible and adaptable
- passionate about supporting refugees
- patient
- open to different ways of doing things.

You don't need to be an expert. You need to have a bit of compassion and you also need to be able to step back from it. What you're encouraging is independence, not reliance... and the only way that can happen is if you keep stepping back. Lots of the people who do this supporting role of refugees and anybody who's down-and-out, often they're people whose kids have flown the nest and they have a bit of an emptiness in their lives. So sometimes these people are filling that void. But you don't want them to fill the void. You want to temporarily support them to fly the nest, just like your own kids have. You don't want them to be there forever. A friendship might develop out of that contact, but it's not designed to be a long-term thing it's designed to be short-term... It's hard going with that mindset though. (Mentor, interview)

The following group approaches were identified as key to effective mentoring:

- collaborate and communicate regularly with caseworkers supporting the mentee (where relevant)
- develop the mentor support plan with the mentee as the relationship develops, and as mentors and mentees better understand one another
- maintain good communication channels within the group
- tailor the mentor support plan to match the mentees' needs with the mentors' different capacities
- work as a group and draw on the different strengths and offerings of each member.

The power of working together, not relying on just one person... provides a variety of ways of doing things and opens up new ideas, plus provides a larger network of support. It allows groups to maintain that support. It's more feasible and sustainable, less of a burden on people, it better matches their capacity. (CRSI staff)

In our very first meeting, we [asked the caseworker] 'what do they need?'... He told us what he thought they needed, and then we met them, and they told us what they thought they needed. And then it just grew from there because they didn't really know what they needed in the beginning. And they needed some things to be fixed before they had insight on the rest. It just evolved. And the closeness of the relationship means that we learned more and more about their needs as it went on. (Mentor, interview)

I think those that have been really successful have tailored their plan to the mentees, which is what it's supposed to be - sit down with the mentees and ask what are the things that they need. And being quite clear and upfront, 'these are things we can do, and these are things we can't do for you'... I feel like those [mentorships] that have unfolded more organically, that have given it some time to see what happens and not wanting to do everything in the first two months... over a period of five or six months it's... turned out to be good. (CRSI staff)



### 3.5. Unmatched mentors' experiences of the GMP

Of the 40 people surveyed, 8 were mentors from 5 different mentor groups who were not matched with a mentee. The online mentor survey included a section for mentors who were not matched. The following is a summary of survey responses from these 8 unmatched mentors.

#### 3.5.1. Perceived barriers to matching

Unmatched mentors reported a range of reasons they thought their group was not matched with a refugee mentee. While there were too few respondents to identify trends in the perceived barriers to matching, 3 broad categories did emerge.

- Lack of refugees based in certain areas of Australia (i.e. outside of capital cities).
- Environmental factors, including housing affordability and availability in mentor group area, lack of refugee services in mentor group area, and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Mentee factors, including reluctance to move away from established networks to new areas, and limited need for support.

Being in a regional part of Australia, we understand that most refugees who are already here [in Australia] ... are settled in cities, and keen to remain there rather than move to an unknown location. (Unmatched mentor)

#### 3.5.2. Action taken to identify refugees and/or address barriers to matching

Six unmatched mentors described the different approaches they took to identify refugees to mentor and/or to address barriers to being matched that their group was experiencing.

Examples included:

- supporting visits to the local area by refugees interested in relocating to that area
- liaising with community adult education centres to identify refugees who might be interested in relocating and being supported by the mentor group
- using personal networks to identify employment and accommodation opportunities for refugees and sharing that information with CRSI
- through local contacts, identifying refugees on Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) studying in the local government area (LGA) who might be interested in relocating to that area.

The group of potential mentees visited us... to help decide if this was the area they wanted to move to. They were also taken to a farm and given a tour to show them what could be achieved on similar land that was offered to them to farm. (Unmatched mentor, online survey)

Unmatched mentors from 2 of the 5 groups that responded reported that they would have liked CRSI to take a more active role in helping their group find a mentee (but did not describe how). It was apparent that not all members of unmatched groups were aware of the range of steps that CRSI had taken to help their group find a match.

Originally, we thought there would be a lot more help from CRSI to help us find a refugee family. We thought we'd be actively matched by CRSI. We felt a bit lost, to be honest. (Unmatched mentor, online survey)

### 3.5.3. Supports provided by CRSI

#### Training

All 8 unmatched mentors said they would recommend the training they received from CRSI to other groups. All reported that the training was useful to them notwithstanding that their group was not matched with a mentee. The main reasons given were, 'We found it helpful preparation for work we hope to do in the future,' and, 'It helped the development of our group,' (reported by 8 out of 8 and 5 out of 8 respectively; see Table 4).

Two unmatched mentors noted that the online format was particularly convenient for their group members and two found the interaction with other groups helpful.

I found it helpful, especially hearing the experiences of others around the country and to learn what a big movement it is around the world. (Unmatched mentor, online survey)

#### Peer-to-Peer Forums

All unmatched mentors reported that the Peer-to-Peer Forums were useful to them in some way, even though their group was not matched with a mentee. This was mainly because, 'We found it helpful preparation for work we hope to do in the future,' and, 'It helped the development of our group,' (reported by 7 out of 8 and 6 out of 8 respectively; see Table 4).

#### WhatsApp group

Six unmatched mentors reported that they did not use the WhatsApp group at all; one said it was not useful, one was not aware of the WhatsApp group, and another reported that some members of their group had difficulty accessing the WhatsApp group. Two unmatched mentors who did not use the WhatsApp group indicated that they might if matched with a mentee. Two unmatched mentors reported that they used the WhatsApp group and reported that, 'We found it helpful preparation for work we hope to do in the future.'

Table 4: Number of unmatched mentors who reported that CRSI supports were useful in different ways

	Training	Peer-to-Peer Forum	WhatsApp group
How support was useful	N=8	N=8	N=8
We found it helpful preparation for work we hope to do in the future	8	7	2
It helped the development of our group	5	6	0
It gave us a better understanding of refugee experiences and settlement changes	3	4	1
We used information/learnings obtained through this medium for other work we did in our community	2	2	1

#### 3.5.4. Sponsoring or mentoring in the future

Six unmatched mentors said they are interested in sponsoring a refugee from overseas in the future, and the same 6 indicated that they are interested in mentoring a refugee already in Australia in the future. Two unmatched mentors reported that they might be interested in sponsoring or mentoring a refugee in the future, depending on the circumstances, such as whether the housing crisis in their area abates.

Four unmatched mentors reported that they think their community is still a suitable location for refugee settlement. The other 4 indicated that while they believe local community members are open and accepting, accessible services, housing shortage and rental costs are barriers to people settling in that area.

Our rental housing has recently become more expensive than parts of Melbourne. (Unmatched mentor, online survey)

Our community has plenty of willing potential mentors as it is a relatively wealthy area, but distance is a consideration. (Unmatched mentor, online survey)

Several unmatched mentors had advice for other groups that might be seeking the opportunity to mentor a refugee in the future.

Suggestions included:

- find affordable accommodation first or raise enough money to support accommodation costs until the family or individual is established in the area
- be clear about what your group can and cannot provide
- ascertain the needs and expectations of mentees from the start and assess the extent to which those can be met within your community, for example, if there is suitable accommodation or cultural support
- encourage local networks to identify needs and solutions
- work with one family at a time as supporting multiple families can be very difficult
- be patient and keep trying.

### 3.6. Settlement agencies experiences of the GMP

#### 3.6.1. Working with CRSI

A number of Australia's leading settlement agencies were approached by CRSI and invited to participate in the GMP. They were consulted with in the initial design of the program and training. They were asked to identify and invite suitable refugees to participate in the GMP and were provided information and consent forms to complete with those refugees who agreed. Settlement agencies were the main source of referrals of refugees to the GMP.

Where a referral was made, a contact point at the settlement agency met regularly with CRSI staff during the program. Some settlement agency staff were also involved in ad hoc meetings with CRSI to discuss and resolve challenges that arose in some mentorships. Some settlement agency stakeholders provided input to the design of the training modules for mentors.

Stakeholders from settlement agencies who participated in the evaluation described a collaborative relationship and good communication between their organisation and CRSI.

CRSI... were really good about how we could work together to work through some of the issues. So, I had some separate consultation with the team, for them to identify the challenges they thought were important to address. CRSI did the same and then we came together and had a facilitated discussion, making sure everyone was heard, making sure that grievances or concerns were aired, but in a respectful and objective way.

(Settlement agency staff)

### 3.6.2. Working with mentor groups

The intention of the GMP was that where refugees were already receiving assistance from a professional settlement case worker, mentor groups would work collaboratively with that worker to supplement and complement the assistance already provided.

#### Benefits

Settlement agency stakeholders described that the assistance provided by mentor groups supplemented the work of agencies and enhanced the overall support to refugees. They reported that mentor groups filled gaps in the support to refugees through their ability to provide assistance outside business hours and their detailed knowledge of the local community.

I feel like the GMP showcased how important that community connection was and having that additional support, not just the HSP service provider. Like outside of that, who do they call after 5:00 pm or who do they contact for a simple thing like their internet's not working? It's not something that you would call the emergency caseworker for, that's something that you would ask your neighbour, and that kind of relationship was more closely emulated through that mentorship model. (Settlement agency staff)

[Mentors had] that intimate knowledge of where they live, you know, where's the best suburb to go shopping or which library has the most computers, things like that, that we just can't as an organisation be across that minutia of detail. That really comes from the people living in the community. (Settlement agency staff)

So when [the mentee] needed a language teacher and [the caseworker] said there was no one in the area, I said, 'well, actually I know there is because I taught with her.' So I contacted [the teacher and then the settlement agency engaged them], but I guess if it wasn't for me knowing that [the teacher] was here, I think there'd still not be English lessons. (Mentor, interview)

**Settlement agency stakeholders also described that the mentorship program provided valuable informal connections to community that enhanced mentees' sense of belonging.**

So there's been... social dinners and practicing English and, by all accounts, the clients seem quite happy and very grateful to have been matched with a mentor group and for the support that they've been receiving, because I think it's that social aspect that really contributes to that feeling of belonging and that feeling of being settled. There are all the... supports through our case management, but there's a difference with that real connection with someone in the community who you can just have dinner with or just have that conversation, and it doesn't have to result in an outcome... And I think that [informal connection] is really important because it's that missing piece, to that next step into really feeling like you're belonging or at least that's what's been, communicated by the clients that were involved. (Settlement agency staff)

The community mentorship stuff fits really nicely alongside the quite strict and regimented deliverables that we have for our program. It allows for the more fluffy and nurturing side of things to occur and that works really well. You know, they might just have someone that comes around and does a bit of reading with the kids. It might be a little bit of advocacy. Sometimes a family is not comfortable to speak up to a service, but they will tell their volunteer and their volunteer with then tell their case worker. (Settlement agency staff)

## Challenges

**Some settlement agencies experienced challenges when mentor groups expected and/or wanted to assist with requirements the settlement agency was responsible for addressing pursuant to their HSP contract. Discussions between the settlement agency and mentor group clarified respective roles and helped moderate expectations. Staff of CRSI were involved in some of these meetings, and mentees participated in others.**

One of the challenges was that the mentor group wanted to provide a similar level of support [to us], but given that the clients were on program, we were already doing that. So it was initially quite hard to find that balance around what that support looked like and who was accountable and who should be delegating or providing that support. (Settlement agency staff)

What we did was had a meeting all together, so [the agency] team, the clients, and representatives of the mentor group in the same room. And what we proposed was to have a [simple] one-page document. What we did was go over the case management plan and identify the goals of the clients, made some suggestions to the mentor group around some key activities that they could engage with to support the clients, and then talked about what the best way to communicate certain activities were... I think everyone was happy with [the agreed] weekly check-ins. It gave the case manager and the local team a bit more confidence that they knew what the mentor group was doing, that they weren't duplicating the work, that they could have some oversight around what that looked like. But it also gave enough freedom for the mentor group to feel like they were contributing in their way in how they wanted to contribute to the program. (Settlement agency staff)

**The model of volunteering used by the GMP (see section 3.7) was challenging for some settlement agency staff, who were accustomed to working with volunteers through very structured volunteer programs. Some caseworkers found it difficult or concerning that volunteers – who were not trained by the settlement agency, did not have clear job descriptions and whom they had no management or oversight of – were supporting their refugee clients in a self-directed (rather than agency-directed) way.**

Regarding sharing information, because it's outside of [our agency], even though we work together, sometimes we do have concerns around information sharing, because [the mentor group] are outside our system and sometimes they do and should have access to personal information on the clients. (Settlement agency staff)

We do have guidelines and we abide by them and this is how we deliver the service. And I think if our guidelines can be matched with CRSI's guidelines so that we can cross-check, what are we missing or what are CRSI missing from these... I think the mentor group need specific guidelines on how they should engage with [HSP] clients, and those guidelines should match the ones that the actual service provider is delivering.  
(Settlement agency staff)

**Some concerns from settlement agency staff appear to stem from limited awareness of the supports provided by CRSI to mentor groups, such as initial training, guidance on a code of conduct and ongoing support opportunities.**

**Despite reservations among some, all settlement agency staff who provided feedback to the evaluation reported that overall the GMP was worthwhile for a particular subset of clients, and they would be willing to be involved with the program in the future.**

I think [the mentors] did an amazing job on assisting clients with individual engagements and they did a pretty good job on giving end time feedback and updates to us and they're really good at working on micro tasks... more hands-on tasks... The program is suitable for some specific clients or cases, but it probably won't apply to everyone. I would say it's probably suitable for clients or cases that have high needs, but not complex or critical.  
(Settlement agency staff)

Everyone really likes the ideas of volunteers as part of this support thing that magically makes your funding go a little bit further. But the reality is that managing volunteers is a huge job, and the ability for them to have a little bit of autonomy about how they do things, it works really nicely. (Settlement agency staff)



### 3.7. GMP's volunteer model and risk management

The GMP utilised a relatively unusual volunteering model that does not have a central organisation overseeing and bearing responsibility for the day-to-day activities of the volunteers (the mentors) involved. The program was designed around an ethos of self-direction and self-regulation, such that while CRSI connected mentees and mentors, and provided training and ongoing supports to mentors, it was mentors themselves who were responsible for shaping and driving the mentorship activities and for the governance of their group.

The way to think about it is, how do you facilitate natural everyday human interactions as organically as possible? So the way that we basically have it is that CRSI sets up support for the mentor groups and matches them, but doesn't take the responsibility for the day-to-day interactions of the group... As soon as you start putting legal and policy requirements on groups and really make it feel like they are small cogs in a big machine and can't operate independently and with their own initiative and flexibility, naturally, like they would a neighbour down the road, then the whole benefit of the sponsorship approach is potentially lost. (CRSI staff)

CRSI staff described measures put in place to mitigate against inherent risks of a model in which volunteer groups self-regulate and operate independently.

- Mentors were each required to submit a valid police check and a valid WWCC to be eligible to participate in the GMP.
- Mentors were required to complete training delivered by CRSI on topics including privacy and confidentiality, trauma, and recognising power imbalances.
- Mentors were introduced to the Mentor Group Code of Conduct template during training and encouraged to complete and adopt it to set behavioural standards for how the group would work. This included principles such as always having 2 mentors present whenever mentors interacted with mentees' children and requiring new group members to submit police and working with children checks.

It was also described that the model itself mitigates against risk to an extent, because it is not an individual who is paired with a mentee, rather it is a group of volunteers working together, who thereby have visibility of each other's activities.

It's a group of volunteers... different people from different backgrounds who can check on each other as well. It's kind of a self-monitoring process. (CRSI staff)

No incidents of concern were reported during the pilot GMP. Mentees who participated in the evaluation all reported that their privacy was respected by the mentor group and that they felt safe throughout the program.

All the group members are very respectful and behave appropriately. I was never worried about that. (Mentee)

Yes, [my privacy] has been respected. I shared my experience with one of the mentors and they assured me they would not share the story with their family or anyone. (Mentee, interview)

There was very good privacy and policy because [one mentor] put me into [contact with] different jobs and anytime she wanted to do that, she would ask me, 'Is that all right with you to share your contact number with them?'... And anytime that we were doing the photos or video, they were saying, 'Is that all right, too, we put that in a WhatsApp group?' (Mentee, interview)

Settlement agencies who participated in the evaluation described how they worked with mentor groups who were supporting refugees who were their clients (for example, through the HSP) to ensure that the agencies continued to meet their obligations to the Federal Government regarding the support of those refugees. This included detailed conversations with mentor groups about what they could and could not support refugees with, and case workers checking-in with refugees after each interaction with the mentor group. One agency also described having mentors participate in the settlement organisation's volunteer induction program to provide assurance that they understood the scope and context of support they could provide.

Because the clients were on program, we have those contractual obligations and there are those boundaries that we have to be very mindful of crossing, but also the mentor group may not have been aware of, so communicating that. And the other thing that we did to help bridge that gap, was I ran them through [our] volunteer induction... to provide that context, and also that additional training that we thought that they could benefit from. That also, I think, provided some more confidence for the local team to know that we were on the same page and we were working toward the same goal (Settlement agency staff)



## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1. Impact of GMP on Mentees

Every mentee who participated in the evaluation reported that their mentorship was a positive experience and helpful in various ways. Mentees received a range of practical assistance from their mentor groups, tailored to their individual needs, which contributed to their well-being and helped them settle into their new community.

The GMP ToC (see Figure 6) describes the main outcomes that the program aims to bring about for mentees. The evaluation found that mentees experienced many of the program's intended outcomes.

- All mentees received support from community members in areas they needed help.
  - Support included English lessons, help accessing education and employment opportunities, help moving to a new house and furnishing their home.
  - Some mentees received support that went above and beyond their expectations.
  
- Most mentees experienced some improvements to their quality of life as a result of support from mentors.
  - Friendships that developed with mentor group members, and/or valued social connections in the community that mentors facilitated, gave mentees an increased sense of community connection.
  - Mentees felt supported by their mentors, which helped provide a sense of security and confidence about their future in their new community.
  - Encouragement from mentors helped increase mentees' confidence and mental well-being.
  
- There was evidence that some mentees were beginning to experience a greater sense of belonging and acceptance in their new community.
  - Some mentees, through the help of their mentors, became involved with other community groups, including a play group and a church group.

As all mentors indicated that they would continue to support their mentee household beyond the 6-month mentorship period, where needed, it is anticipated that mentees will experience further benefits from their group's support and are likely to experience a growing sense of belonging in their community.

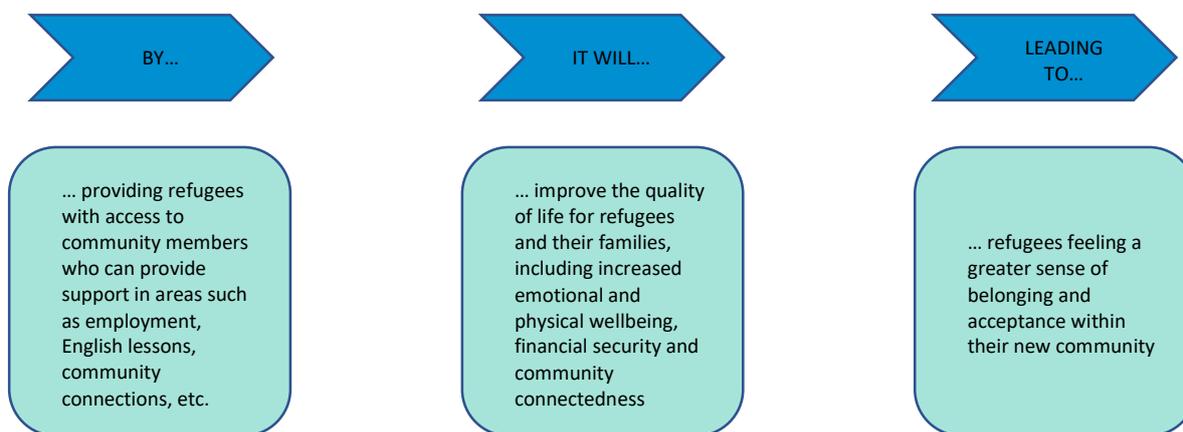


Figure 6: GMP ToC excerpt – intended outcomes for mentees

## 4.2. Impact of GMP on Mentors

The evaluation found that all mentors who were matched with a mentee had positive experiences through the mentorship.

These included:

- learning about another culture
- developing new friendships (with mentees, other mentors, or both)
- a sense of joy and reward from making a difference to the life of a refugee
- gaining a deeper understanding of the refugee experience.

The evaluation found that the GMP was successful in bringing about its intended effects, as outlined in the program’s ToC (see Figure 7), for mentors who participated in the program:

- All mentors received training and support from CRSI.
  - Most mentors (56, 93%) who completed the training feedback survey reported that they felt prepared and confident after the mentor training.
  - Most mentors (75% of survey respondents) reported that they felt well-equipped by the GMP to undertake their role as a mentor.
- All mentors valued their experience volunteering through the GMP.
  - Most (94% of survey respondents) reported that they enjoyed being part of their mentor group.
  - Most reported that mentoring was a rewarding experience and that they felt they made a difference to their mentee’s progress (84% and 75% of survey respondents respectively).

- Most mentors reported that their involvement in the GMP helped increase community awareness and acceptance of refugees.
  - Two-thirds (66% of mentors surveyed) reported that their engagement in the mentorship program influenced others in their community to show more favourable or compassionate responses to refugees.



Figure 7: GMP ToC excerpt – intended outcomes for mentors

The evaluation found that most mentors experienced only minor challenges. Where challenges were reported, they primarily focused on:

- finding enough time for mentoring activities, particularly where the mentor and/or their mentee was working full-time
- documenting mentoring activities as requested by CRSI in the digital logbook provided.

Overall, the challenges the mentors experienced in mentoring were outweighed by the valued positive experiences they had.



The evaluation found the following factors to be important for mentors to have a positive mentoring experience:

- mentors are realistic about the support they can offer, including mindful of individual time availability, skills and other commitments
- relaxed and flexible approach
- non-judgmental attitude
- supportive family and/or friends
- understanding that support is intended to be short-term
- understanding that while friendships may develop, that is not the main aim
- awareness of incidental costs (such as eating out and transport) and ability to bear them
- mentor groups consist of members with mixed skills and a range of different time availability
- good communication within the group
- understanding and respect within the group for each other's skills and availability.

### 4.3. Appropriateness of GMP

#### 4.3.1. Addressing risk

The GMP utilised an uncommon volunteering model, designed around an ethos of self-direction. CRSI connected mentees and mentors and provided training and ongoing supports to mentors. It did not, however, oversee or have responsibility for the mentor groups, as they operated independently.

CRSI employed a range of measures to mitigate risk, through recruitment and training processes.

- Mentors were required to complete a police check and obtain a WWCC to be eligible to participate in the GMP.
- Mentors were required to complete training delivered by CRSI, which covered topics including privacy and confidentiality, trauma and recognising power imbalances.
- Mentors were introduced to the Mentor Group Code of Conduct template during training and were encouraged to complete, and adopt it, to set behavioural standards for how the group would work.

Risk was also reduced through the design of the model, which paired a group of mentors with one mentee household, rather than pairing individual mentors with individual mentees. Group members then had visibility of each other's activities, providing protection to both mentors and mentees.

Some settlement agencies who referred refugees to the GMP described measures they took to ensure that refugees remained safe. Measures included:

- detailed conversations with mentor groups about the types of support they could provide
- case workers checking in with refugees after their interactions with mentors
- having mentors participate in the settlement organisation's volunteer induction program.

These agencies also continued to meet their obligations to the Federal Government regarding the support of those refugees.

The evaluation found that no incidents of concern were reported during the pilot GMP. Mentees who participated in the evaluation all reported that their privacy was respected by the mentor group and that they felt safe throughout the program. These findings indicate that the above measures together effectively mitigated risk.

#### 4.3.2. Empowering mentor groups

The evaluation found that most of the GMP processes and supports helped mentors feel empowered to independently problem solve and innovate to support the settlement of their mentees.

Between 40% and 60% of mentors who completed the survey reported that each of the following tools and processes provided by the program were 'very useful' or 'very helpful':

- receiving the mentee's background information from CRSI before meeting them (60%)
- direct engagement with the CRSI team (57%)
- training prior to the mentorship (50%)
- Mentor Group Code of Conduct template (40%)

The evaluation found that some elements of the program had the opposite effect and were experienced by some mentors as burdensome and even disempowering.

- The requirement to complete the digital logbook was found to be onerous.
- For several group coordinators, the administrative asks of CRSI were too much.

Indicative of an increasing sense of independence, many mentors chose not to complete the logbook and several coordinators declined requests from CRSI, such as to participate in their mentee's Integration Star interview.

The evaluation also found that some of the program's offerings designed to support and empower mentors were not accessed, either because mentors were not aware of them, or because they were not available at convenient times (such as Peer-to-Peer Forums which ran during business hours).

The evaluation found that with guidance and encouragement from CRSI staff, those mentor groups who were uncertain about or lacking confidence to make their own decisions early in the program became self-directed and independent. By the end of the program, almost all mentors (91% of survey respondents) reported that their group was able to problem-solve to meet their mentees' needs.

#### 4.3.3. Meeting the needs of refugees

Mentorships set up through the GMP were found to have helped participating refugees with many of their settlement needs, especially the need for social connections that build a feeling of belonging and acceptance for refugees in their new community. The evaluation also found that the program was effective for helping mentees improve their English language skills, which in turn enhanced employment opportunities and the ability to manage aspects of daily life in Australia (such as accessing health services, paying bills and obtaining a driver's licence).

The evaluation found that there was scope for the program to improve its onboarding and informed consent processes to ensure all participating refugees fully understand what the mentorship program entails, and the respective roles of CRSI and the mentor group within the existing network of people helping them.

The evaluation also found that while the Integration Star process was valued by some refugees participating in the program, who found it helpful for communicating their needs and seeing their progress, some found the exercise pointless and even confusing.



## 4.4. Learnings for future programming

### 4.4.1. What makes a successful mentor group?

The evaluation found that there were no criteria for assessing whether individual mentor groups were 'successful'; however, the consensus across stakeholders was that every mentorship was of benefit to the mentees and mentors involved. All mentees reported that the mentorship had a positive impact on their quality of life. Across the groups, the program also supported intended outcomes for mentors. Every mentorship then was successful in producing positive outcomes.

The evaluation, therefore, explored participants' insights to identify which aspects of the mentor group best supported the group in bringing about positive benefits. A range of personal qualities of individual mentors and group approaches to mentoring were found to support effective mentoring.

The personal qualities valuable for individual mentors to possess were:

- able to support without fostering dependence
- able to understand and respond to the needs and goals of mentees without expectation or judgement
- accepting of differences
- aware of own strengths and weaknesses
- authentic
- calm
- compassionate
- flexible and adaptable
- passionate about supporting refugees
- patient
- open to different ways of doing things.

The following group approaches were identified as key to effective mentoring:

- collaborate and communicate regularly with any caseworkers supporting the mentee
- develop the mentor support plan with the mentee as the relationship develops and mentors and mentees better understand one another
- maintain good communication channels within the group
- tailor the mentor support plan to match the mentee's needs with the mentors' different capacities
- work as a group and draw on the different strengths and offerings of each member.

#### 4.4.2. To what extent does the GMP fill service gaps?

While it was not the original intention of the program to become a permanent feature in the Australian settlement arena, the evaluation found that the GMP filled some gaps in the current settlement support landscape by facilitating assistance that was both qualitatively and practically different from what is formally available to refugees through current programs.

Mentors helped mentees in a range of small but valuable ways, akin to the type of support a friend or neighbour would provide, such as after-hours support, driving lessons, outings to local parks or facilities, lending books and sharing meals. Professional settlement services are not typically able to provide these types of organic and flexible supports and connections, which all stakeholders acknowledged are important for refugees to gain local knowledge, develop relationships in their community, and feel a sense of belonging.



The GMP's model of volunteering also affords mentors the flexibility to provide support as and when needed. For example, mentors can assist outside of business hours, which is something settlement agencies and volunteers operating through large agencies cannot do. Similarly, the GMP enables mentors to provide holistic assistance, such that a mentor might help a refugee with English language practice, while taking them shopping and then picking the refugee's children up from school on the way home. This is in contrast to traditional volunteer assistance provided through large settlement agencies that is usually structured around and limited to a single task or outcome, delivered at a particular time and location.

Overall, the evaluation found that the GMP enabled support that both supplemented and complemented the support provided by settlement agencies and enhanced the settlement journey for refugees.

#### 4.4.3. What learnings are there about referral pathways and how to match mentees and mentor groups?

CRSI's experience with the GMP provided 2 key learnings about referral pathways.

- To obtain enough referrals of refugees for every mentor group to be matched, it would be beneficial to expand the referral base further and not rely heavily on government-funded settlement agencies.
- For mentor groups in areas where housing and employment are difficult to obtain, it is important to provide clear communication to mentors about the work they will need to do to attract refugees to their community and allow enough time for preparatory work to be done with respect to securing housing and employment.

Four factors influenced the extent to which mentors and mentees were a good match.

1. Across the group, there were mentors with knowledge, skills or experience in the areas that mentees most needed support.
2. Mentors had sufficient time to assist mentees at the times mentees were available.
3. Compatibility of age and stage of life depended on the mentee's age and needs, either with mentors and mentees best closer in age, or with mentors being much older and able to provide more parent-like support.
4. The mentors live in close proximity to the mentee's home, and/or mentees have access to regular and reliable public transport.

## 5. Recommendations

The evaluation offers the following recommendations.

### Referral pathways

**xii. Diversify referral pathways for identifying refugee participants for future iterations of the program.**

(NB: This recommendation assumes stakeholders wish to see the GMP continue alongside, or in place of, CRSA's primary goal of a full community sponsorship program for refugees.)

Further diversifying referral pathways will enable the program to identify more refugees to participate in an expanded program. It will also enable CRSA to identify refugees who are not currently engaged in formal settlement support (or have limited formal support) but who require the informal support and social connections that a mentorship can provide.

Suggested referral sources include:

- grassroots organisations/networks
- refugee advocacy groups
- TAFEs
- informal networks
- current mentees.

Advertisements or articles in media accessed by refugees may also enable direct contact with suitable refugees.

Implementing this recommendation has resource implications. CRSA would likely need to invest additional time building and maintaining relationships in the identified networks.

## Onboarding refugees

### **xiii. Review and strengthen refugee recruitment and onboarding processes.**

It is recommended that CRSA take complete responsibility for onboarding refugees to the program and rely on other organisations only for receiving referrals of potential participants.

CRSA should be the organisation to explain the program to potential participants referred and to investigate whether individuals have needs that could be supported by a mentor group.

Recruitment should include a clear explanation (such as via an infographic) of where CRSA and the GMP sit in the network of assistance for refugees, and how the potential mentorship arrangement would fit with any existing supports the refugee has.

CRSA should be the organisation to obtain the informed consent of refugees who wish to participate.

The refugee background survey should be revised to gather qualitative information about support needs. For example, where a refugee indicates they would like help finding work or developing their career, information could be gathered about the sector or industry they would like to work in, types of work they are willing to do, and other relevant details like availability for work. Or where a refugee indicates they would like help with social opportunities, information could be gathered about what their interests are the type of connections they would like to make.

Interpreters should be engaged as needed for all communications between CRSA and refugees referred as potential participants in the GMP.

## Onboarding mentors

### **xiv. Provide mentors with more information about the settlement landscape and guidance about how to collaborate with settlement agencies.**

CRSA to provide mentors with an overview of the settlement landscape, so they understand the range of organisations and government departments a refugee may be interacting with and receiving support from. This communication should include a clear explanation (for example, via an infographic) of where CRSA and the GMP sit in the settlement landscape and how the potential mentorship arrangement would fit with existing supports the refugee has.

CRSA to provide to mentors matched with refugees receiving support from a settlement agency clear information about the nature of the agency's responsibilities to the refugee and the types of support the mentor group might provide to supplement the agency's support. CRSA to consider facilitating or arranging a meeting between the settlement agency and the mentor group, along with the mentee, at the commencement of the mentorship. From there, the mentor group and settlement agency can determine how to collaborate and communicate to best support the mentee.

**xv. Require all mentor groups to adopt minimum behavioural standards in a code of conduct.**

It is recommended that CRSA review the Mentor Group Code of Conduct template and revise it with a view to it being a requirement that all groups complete and adopt the code. Any mentor groups operating under another supporting organisation should either sign onto that organisation's code of conduct or that provided by CRSA.

Ensure the code of conduct includes guidance on areas of responsibility of mentors and pathways for reporting issues of concern (for example, about safety of mentees or mentors).

### Matching mentees and mentor groups

**xvi. Strengthen the matching process through collecting additional information about mentees and mentors.**

It is recommended that CRSA collect and use more background information about mentees and mentors to enhance the matching process. As noted in recommendation ii. more qualitative information should be collected from mentees about their needs and interests through the initial survey. For mentors, it is recommended that CRSA review completed Mentor Group Application Forms and assess the adequacy of information provided by applicants to questions that ask about their skills and networks. CRSA to consider whether interviews with mentor groups might provide more detailed and useful information for the matching process.

Any additions to the matching process will likely have resource and time implications that CRSA will need to consider.

### Ongoing support of mentors

**xvii. Review CRSA's supports for mentor groups and refine how they are offered and promoted.**

It is recommended that CRSA review and refine the supports it provides for mentors, with the aims of ensuring mentors are aware of the supports, find them accessible and consider them relevant.

Specifically:

- static resources (online resource hub for mentors, online answers to frequently asked questions)
  - Review and strengthen how these are promoted to mentors, to ensure all mentors are aware the resources exist and what information they contain. It is recommended that CRSA communicate directly with all mentors about resources and rely less heavily on group coordinators to share or promote information about resources.
- WhatsApp group
  - This has been used sporadically by only small number of mentors. It is recommended that CRSA either promote the group more or consider alternative platforms (including Peer-to-Peer Forums; see below) for supporting mentor groups to communicate as part of a community of practice.
- Peer-to-Peer Forums
  - It is recommended CRSA organise these events to run after business hours so that they are accessible to more mentors who work full- or part-time jobs.
  - It is recommended that CRSA consider modifying the format of the Peer-to-Peer Forums to promote more interaction among the developing community of practice (for example, dedicated time for question and answer sessions and sharing learnings among mentors).
  - It is recommended that CRSA include 'refresher training' via these forums, re-visiting selected topics covered in the initial mentor training. This would enable mentors the opportunity to re-visit topics at a time they are applying that information in practice and when specific questions arise.
  - It is recommended that CRSA explore the viability of uploading recordings and/or summaries of each Peer-to-Peer Forum to the online resource hub for mentors (consider with members-only access).
  - It is recommended that as the program continues, both current and past mentors be invited to these forums, enabling these different groups to connect and for knowledge exchange through experienced mentors sharing their learnings.

## Program design

### **xviii. Extend the standard mentorship period from 6 months to 12 months.**

It is recommended that the standard period for which mentor groups agree to support a mentee be extended to 12 months. This will allow more time for relationship and trust building, which in turn enable mentor groups to better understand the needs of mentees and how they can appropriately help. It will also help ensure that support is provided at a pace suitable to mentees, especially where they are working or studying and have limited time to engage with mentors. A longer mentorship period is particularly

recommended in the current context where people's interactions are periodically hampered by COVID-19 restrictions, impacting relationship building and support.

It is recommended that the option for 6-month mentorships should remain available, in recognition that for some mentees this shorter period may be more appropriate, depending on the stage in their settlement journey.

It is recommended that decisions about the duration of any mentorship be driven by the mentees involved, with mentees retaining (as they did under the pilot GMP) the option to withdraw at any time.

**xix. Cease use of the digital logbook.**

The digital logbook was designed to collect information about the type of activities mentors undertook and time spent, so that CRSA could understand the level of resources harnessed by the program and share more detail with future potential mentors about what mentoring entails. Mentors, however, found the logbook onerous and mostly it was not used. Future mentors should not be asked to complete the digital logbook.

CRSA should use data collected via the mentor survey for this evaluation to understand the amount of time mentors typically spent mentoring and activities undertaken. The survey could be repeated at the conclusion of each mentorship to gather once-off feedback from mentors.

**xx. Offer the Integration Star tool as optional.**

Feedback on the value to mentors and mentees of the Integration Star process was mixed. There was insufficient support from stakeholders to recommend continued use of the tool for all mentorships. It is recommended that a description of the Integration Star process and its benefits be included in the initial mentor training, with mentors then given the option to request to use it.

It is further recommended that use of the Integration Star should be contingent upon the process first being fully explained to the mentee through an interpreter, and the mentee agreeing if they wish to use the tool.

**xxi. CRSA to further develop its approach for increasing awareness and understanding of the GMP model among staff at settlement agencies.**

Understanding of the GMP among settlement agency staff was patchy and the concerns of some workers about the program stemmed from a lack of knowledge about the preparation and support provided to mentors.

It is recommended that CRSA develop the following strategies to promote better sharing with settlement agencies, particularly with staff referring refugees and supporting them while they are participating in the GMP:

- clear description of the role of CRSA and the mentor group
- clear explanation (for example, via an infographic) of where CRSA and the mentor group sit in the network of assistance for refugees, and how the potential mentorship arrangement fits with the refugee's existing supports
- information about the topics that mentors have been trained on
- a copy of the mentor group's code of conduct.

It is further recommended that settlement agencies continue to be consulted in the development of mentor training and that their input be sought on the Mentor Group Code of Conduct.

It is expected that further information about the program, and ongoing opportunities to contribute to its refinement, will increase confidence among caseworkers that the GMP is working toward the same goal of building independence among refugees.

**xxii. CRSA to facilitate initial meetings between mentor groups and caseworkers at the commencement of mentorships.**

It is recommended that at the commencement of the mentorship, CRSA facilitate or arrange a meeting between the mentor group, the mentee and the mentee's caseworker. The purpose of the meeting would be to develop relationships, clarify respective roles and responsibilities, and plan how to collaborate and communicate to best support the mentee.

## 6. Afterword

Like so many organisations in 2020, CRSI suddenly found itself unable to implement its planned work and had to rapidly develop new ways of operating. Within months of Australian borders being closed, CRSI adapted the planned sponsorship model and a new pilot, the GMP, was born.

Through the pilot GMP, CRSI was able to test elements of the proposed sponsorship model (for example, approaches to mobilising, screening, training and supporting volunteer groups, collaborating with settlement agencies, and matching participants) and gain insights that will strengthen that program at such time as it is possible to implement.

CRSA learned that there may be a need for, and value in, a mentorship program that is separate from a sponsorship program. All stakeholders involved in the GMP benefitted: mentees experienced improvements to their quality of life, mentors had rewarding experiences, and the support from settlement agencies to refugees was enhanced by the program.

Overall, the pilot GMP has helped expand and strengthen CRSA's capacity to help members of the Australian community effectively support refugees in Australia in the future.

## 7. Methodology

### 7.1. Evaluation Purpose

This evaluation was commissioned by CRSA to understand how well the GMP worked and what it can teach Australian policy makers and civil society about the desired features of a future community refugee sponsorship program and/or other community led settlement approaches.

The evaluation was designed to answer the following key evaluation questions and sub-questions:

1. How has the GMP been implemented?
  - a. What are the key features of the program?
  - b. What is not working well? What challenges have been experienced in implementation?
  - c. What is working well? What factors have supported successful implementation of the program?
2. What impacts has the GMP had on mentees?
  - a. To what extent have intended outcomes been realised?
  - b. What unexpected outcomes have there been for mentees (positive or negative)?
  - c. What are the critical success factors? What makes an effective mentor group?
  - d. What barriers have there been to achieving intended outcomes?
3. What impacts has the GMP had on mentors? What is the experience of mentors?
  - a. To what extent have intended outcomes been realised?
  - b. What challenges or barriers did mentors experience?
  - c. What are the critical success factors for positive mentor experiences?
4. Appropriateness of the program design
  - a. How well have the risks for different stakeholders been addressed?
  - b. To what extent did the various program processes and supports empower mentor groups to effectively and independently problem solve and innovate to support the successful settlement of their mentees?
  - c. How well does the program meet the needs of refugees?
5. What are the observations and/or recommendations for future community refugee sponsorship programs and/or other community led settlement approaches?
  - a. What makes a successful mentor group?
  - b. To what extent does the program fill service gaps?
  - c. What learnings are there about referral pathways and how to match mentees and mentor groups?
  - d. Scalability
  - e. Destining

## 7.2. Data collection methods

This evaluation employed qualitative methods and triangulated data from multiple sources in order to answer the key evaluation questions as fully and confidently as possible.

### 7.2.1. Document review

The evaluation reviewed the following key project and related documents:

- GMP ToC
- program overview
- mentee initial survey
- information pack to mentor groups
- mentor application form
- mentor training feedback
- Integration Star reports

### 7.2.2. Stakeholder interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 stakeholders:

- **CRSI staff x 4**
- **mentees x 8** – includes the mentees of the 4 selected mentor groups, and mentees with at least 1 of the following characteristics: family of refugees, individual refugee, metropolitan, regional, English speaking, non-English speaking, newer arrivals, older arrivals. Interpreters were used as needed/preferred. Mentees were compensated for their time by way of a \$50 supermarket voucher
- **mentor group representatives x 10 (from 4 groups)** – sample criteria as for mentees above, including a self-formed mentor group and a group developed with assistance from CRSI
- **settlement agency staff x 7 (from 3 agencies)**

Semi-structured interview questions for all stakeholders were designed by the program consultant, with technical input by the evaluator and reviewed and approved by CRSA.

Interviews were conducted by telephone or videoconference and detailed notes were taken. Where stakeholders consented, interviews were recorded and transcribed.

### 7.2.3. Mentor survey

A survey for mentors was designed by the program consultant, with technical input by the evaluator and reviewed and approved by CRSA. Administered via SurveyMonkey, the survey asked questions about mentors' experiences (positive impacts, challenges and feedback on support from the program) and how

they assisted mentees. A separate section of the survey contained questions for mentors who were not matched with a mentee during the pilot. These included questions about the usefulness of the training and perceived barriers to being matched with a mentee.

The online survey was completed by 32 of the 96 people who were matched with a mentee, giving a response rate of 33.3% among mentors. Those who completed the survey were members of 12 different mentor groups as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Numbers of mentors from each mentor group who completed the online survey

State or Territory	Mentor group	Number of respondents N = 32
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	Castle of Kindness Refugee Sponsorship Group	3
<b>New South Wales</b>	Armidale Sanctuary	1
	SASS	5
	St Vincent's Ashfield Social Justice Group	1
	WWelcome	8
<b>Queensland</b>	Cairns for Refugees Welcome Group	2
	Yuingin	2
<b>Tasmania</b>	Huon Valley Refugee Sponsor Group	1
<b>Victoria</b>	McNair Brown Group	1
	Melbourne North & West	2
	Montmorency Asylum Seeker Support Group	2
	RAR – Grampians/Gariwerd	4

The online survey was completed by 8 of the 61 people who were not matched with a mentee, giving a response rate of 13%. Unmatched mentors who completed the survey were from 5 different mentor groups.

### 7.3. Data analysis and report writing

Interview data were analysed for themes using NVivo 11 software<sup>16</sup>. These included themes from both the GMP ToC and emerging themes.

Survey data were analysed using Excel to produce descriptive statistics.

The evaluator prepared a draft evaluation report which was reviewed by CRSA's executive director, CRSA program staff and the program consultant. Feedback was incorporated into the final version of this report.

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<sup>16</sup> Specialist software for qualitative data analysis.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A – The Integration Star (Outcomes Star for refugees)

The Outcomes Stars are person-centred assessment tools designed by Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise to support and measure change when working with people. Using a collaborative assessment process the Outcomes Star approach brings together measurement and service delivery.

The Integration Star is an Outcome Star designed specifically for use with newly arrived refugees who need support to integrate and settle into their new communities. It explores 8 key outcome areas in the settlement journey where practical support may be needed to integrate into a new country and culture.

These outcome areas are:

1. Housing
2. Money
3. Practical English
4. Education and work
5. Community and social connections
6. Family and children
7. Laws, systems and services
8. Health and well-being<sup>17</sup>

Within the GMP, the Integration Star was used to help CRSI and mentor groups better understand the needs of refugee mentees in the program and enable measurement of progress in the 8 key outcome areas of their settlement journey over the course of the program (6 months).

CRSI staff were trained as lead practitioners in the use of the Integration Star. Interviews were conducted as collaborative conversations between the mentees, a CRSI staff member and 1 or 2 mentor group members at 2 points during the GMP – at the end of months 1 and 5 of a mentee's time in the program.

The first Integration Star interview was intended to help development of Mentorship Support Plans. The second interview was to assess progress in each of the 8 key outcome areas over the course of the 6-month program.

Results are discussed in section 3.1.4.

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<sup>17</sup> For more information visit <https://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/using-the-star/see-the-stars/integration-star/>

## Appendix B – Mentor survey results

Table 6: Challenges experienced by mentors

Challenge	Big problem		Small or moderate issue		Not an issue	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
	The language barrier impeded our group's efforts	4	13	9	28	19
The mentorship period was too short to get results	5	16	7	22	20	62
I felt I had limited time to mentor	3	9	6	19	23	72
Our group was unclear about the mentee's needs	1	3	7	22	24	75
Our mentee had limited time/interest in engaging with our group	2	6	4	13	26	81
Our mentee had unrealistic expectations in terms of what mentors could do/provide	2	6	3	9	27	84
I felt confused about my role	0	0	5	16	27	84
Our group did not have the right skill set or enough knowledge to help the mentee	0	0	4	13	28	87
Our group did not know where to go for advice when we needed it	0	0	1	3	31	97
Our mentor group experienced difficult group dynamics	0	0	0	0	32	100

Table 7: Mentors' ratings of usefulness of supports provided through the GMP

GMP support	Very useful		Somewhat useful		Not useful		Unaware of this		Aware but didn't use	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Direct engagement with the CRSI team	17	57	6	20	1	3	1	3	5	17
CRSI training prior to mentorship	15	50	10	33	3	10	2	7	0	0
The template Mentor Group Code of Conduct	12	40	14	47	0	0	3	10	1	3
Ad hoc advice and/or support from case officer at a refugee settlement agency	10	33	7	23	3	10	7	23	3	10
WhatsApp group for mentors	9	30	7	23	3	10	5	17	6	20
Peer-to-Peer Forums	8	27	12	40	3	10	1	3	6	20
The template Mentorship Support Plan	8	27	12	40	1	3	6	20	3	10
Professional presentations during Peer-to-Peer Forums	8	27	8	27	3	10	4	13	7	23
CRSI information pack about the program	7	23	20	67	1	3	2	7	0	0
CRSI's online resources for mentor groups	4	13	14	47	1	3	5	17	6	20
CRSI's online set of answers to frequently asked questions	3	10	9	30	2	7	8	27	8	27

Table 8: Mentors' ratings of helpfulness of key processes of the GMP

GMP process	Very useful		Somewhat useful		Not useful		Unaware of this		Aware but didn't use	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Receiving the background to the mentee from CRSI before meeting them	18	60	5	17	1	3	5	17	1	3
Developing a mentor support plan	11	37	10	33	2	7	3	10	4	13
Completing the application forms for mentorship	5	17	18	60	4	13	2	7	1	3
Participating in the Integration Star interviews	5	17	7	23	3	10	5	17	10	33
Completing the digital logbook for recording activities with/for mentees	2	7	8	27	8	27	3	10	9	30

Table 9: Mentors' views of the Integration Star process

Views of Integration Star		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Can't say
<b>Positive</b>	I got a better overview of the mentee's situation	7	2	2	0
	I gained a better idea of the mentee's support needs	7	1	2	1
	I found it easy to understand where the mentee was on the 'journey of change'	7	2	2	0
	It helped open up conversations with the mentee	6	2	3	1
	Our own planning process with the mentee was more useful	6	4	1	0
	It helped our group focus our support	5	3	3	0
	The mentee was able to be open and honest	5	1	2	3
<b>Negative</b>	It reflected well how much change the mentee made over the 6 months	4	3	1	3
	It took too long to complete	7	2	2	0
	Most of our mentor group did not engage with the Integration Star	7	0	3	1
	I believe the mentee found it confusing	6	2	1	2

