

MEDIA RELEASE

The Federal Government's announcement of plans to introduce the 'Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot' (CRISP) marks a watershed moment for refugee settlement in Australia, Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) said today.

The four year pilot program is scheduled to be launched in 2022 following a co-design process involving CRSA.

"CRISP is inspired by the successful Canadian refugee sponsorship program and will provide significant benefits to refugees and Australian communities. This program will enable everyday Australians to be leading participants in welcoming and supporting the integration of new refugees. This approach offers great outcomes for refugees and a positive, rewarding experience for the community members who wish to welcome them. It will also give everyday Australians a greater sense of buy-in to our country's refugee resettlement program, helping to maintain and further build strong public support for that program into the future." Lisa Button, CEO of CRSA, said.

"In launching this pilot Australia joins a growing number of countries who are implementing community sponsorship programs for refugees. Canada has undoubtedly set the pace, helping settle more than 325,000 refugees through community sponsorship since the late 1970s through community sponsorship. Around a dozen other countries have since adopted similar programs including, most recently, the United States.

"As Australia starts to reopen its borders to migrants, we are looking forward to working with the Government and members of the Australian community in designing this new model of refugee settlement. Once established, it could be readily scaled-up and help to significantly supplement Australia's current annual humanitarian intake, which remains an important goal for our organisation."

Throughout the pandemic CRSA has led in piloting a precursor program (referred to as the 'Group Mentorship Program') to demonstrate the viability of community-led settlement support in Australia. It has already created the networks and ecosystems required at a community level to support a successful community sponsorship program, with approximately 600 trained volunteers (80 groups) now mobilised across the country. The pilot program was very well received by refugee participants and Australian volunteers alike.

Nayereh Norzahi, a young woman who came to Australia as a refugee from Afghanistan, was a beneficiary of this pilot program and reports "Having a community group supporting me has given me a whole team of people behind me, when before I was just on my own, without any family here. The group has helped me with plans and connections to get my dream job and so many other things, like getting set up in a flat with donated furniture and

appliances. We've also had a lot of fun together - sharing meals and picnics and trips to interesting places. I would need a day or even a month to list all of the things that they have done for me. The support the groups offered me was like being part of a family in Australia. The knowledge they shared helped me to get set up in my new life."

CRSA's chair Libby Lloyd AM says: "I witnessed the power of the Australian community pulling together to support Indochinese refugees during the late 1970s and 1980s where community groups enthusiastically formed and welcomed refugees into their communities to help them settle. Many lifelong friendships were established that continue to this day, with sponsors and former refugees now attending the weddings of one another's children and grandchildren."

This new program will be open to refugees from any background who are referred to Australia from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or others who do not have identified links to Australia.

"CRSA's work has revealed the compassion of Australians, particularly in the aftermath of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan which saw an outpouring of support from community members, including many veterans," according to CRSA director Ali Reza Yunespour, who is also a prominent leader within the Australian Afghan community."

"CRSA is working with hundreds of trained volunteers across the country ready to step up to the opportunity presented by this program, many of whom now have practical experience supporting Afghan evacuees or other refugees who arrived prior to the pandemic."

This program will also support Federal, State and Local Government efforts to help refugees settle in regional communities.

"This program presents an exciting opportunity for regional communities. Through this program, refugees will be given the opportunity to migrate directly from overseas into different Australian communities that put their hands up and be assisted by a ready-made support network of locals who are deeply invested in their success as new Australians," Ms Button said.

"While the CRISP program won't commence until the co-design process is completed in 2022, members of the Australian community members who are interested in being part of this program can lodge an expression of interest via CRSA's website at www.refugeesponsorship.org.au."

CRSA will also closely follow the implementation of the announced reforms to the current Community Support Program (CSP) in 2022/23 and consider how we might support the organisations who will be leading in the implementation of that program and the community groups who engage with it.

End of release

Notes:

For media inquiries contact media@refugeesponsorship.org.au

CRSA is an independent Australian charity working at a national level to promote and support the implementation of community refugee sponsorship as a common practice in Australian communities, inspired by the successful Canadian program that has operated since the late 1970s. Find out more on our website [here](#).

Canada's refugee sponsorship program has enabled everyday Canadians to sponsor more than 325,000 refugees to resettle in Canada, supplementing the numbers who are resettled each year under the government-assisted program there. Other countries who have introduced or are introducing community sponsorship programs for refugees include the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, Germany, Argentina, Spain and, most recently, the United States.

CRSA, together with a range of collaborating organisations, piloted a 'Group Mentorship Program' in 2020 to demonstrate the viability of a community-led settlement program in Australia. A video featuring participants in this program can be viewed [here](#) and the evaluation report for this program can be found [here](#).

Since relaunching the Group Mentorship Program in August 2021, CRSA has mobilised, screened and trained approximately 600 everyday Australians as volunteers to provide individualised wrap-around welcome and support to approximately 200 newly arrived refugees across 40 households. These volunteers belong to approximately 80 local groups in dozens of locations across six states and territories, with more in the pipeline.

The new CRISP program will enable community groups to provide welcome and settlement support to refugees referred to Australia by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and will not carry any visa charges. This compares with the Community Support Program (CSP) which enables Australians to nominate the refugee whom they wish to help migrate to Australia and requires the payment of visa fees and other intermediary charges. In July 2022 the CSP visa fees will be significantly reduced for primary applicants (and eliminated for secondary applicants) according to the Government's announcements this week.