

Housing strategies



Strategies to secure local housing



- Finding housing is one of the most important steps in preparing to welcome a refugee household. It can also be one of the most challenging!
- This resource aims to help your Community Supporter Group source safe, clean, and affordable housing by using resources that may already be available to you in your local community.
- Community capacity to secure housing for refugee newcomers is at the heart of what is being tested under the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP).
- Most groups find that once they start spreading the word in their local community about their involvement in the CRISP, people get excited and want to contribute - this includes real estate agents and property owners.

Information provided in this resource is collated from CRSA staff experience and that which has been shared with us by community supporter groups. All efforts have been made to ensure this advice is accurate, however groups are encouraged to conduct their own local research alongside what is contained herein.

The housing challenge



The rental market in Australia can be very challenging not only for refugees but for the wider Australian population. It is increasingly difficult to secure affordable housing in metropolitan areas, while regional areas are often only marginally better.

Refugees can face a number of barriers when navigating the housing market, including:

- Lack of English making it difficult to navigate the private rental market.
- Discrimination in the rental market - while illegal, this still happens.
- Lack of rental history as newcomers to Australia.
- Lack of information on housing options.
- Lack of social and community networks and capital.
- Lack of knowledge around social systems and rental application processes.

How Community Supporter Groups help



Community supporter groups (CSG) in the CRISP commit to:

- Providing safe and suitable on-arrival accommodation for the newcomers, at the cost of the CSG until the newcomers' income support payments are established; and
- Assisting the newcomers to secure affordable and appropriate long-term housing.

The greatest support you can provide to the refugee household you're preparing to welcome is your local knowledge, networks, and ingenuity.

How Community Supporter Groups can help



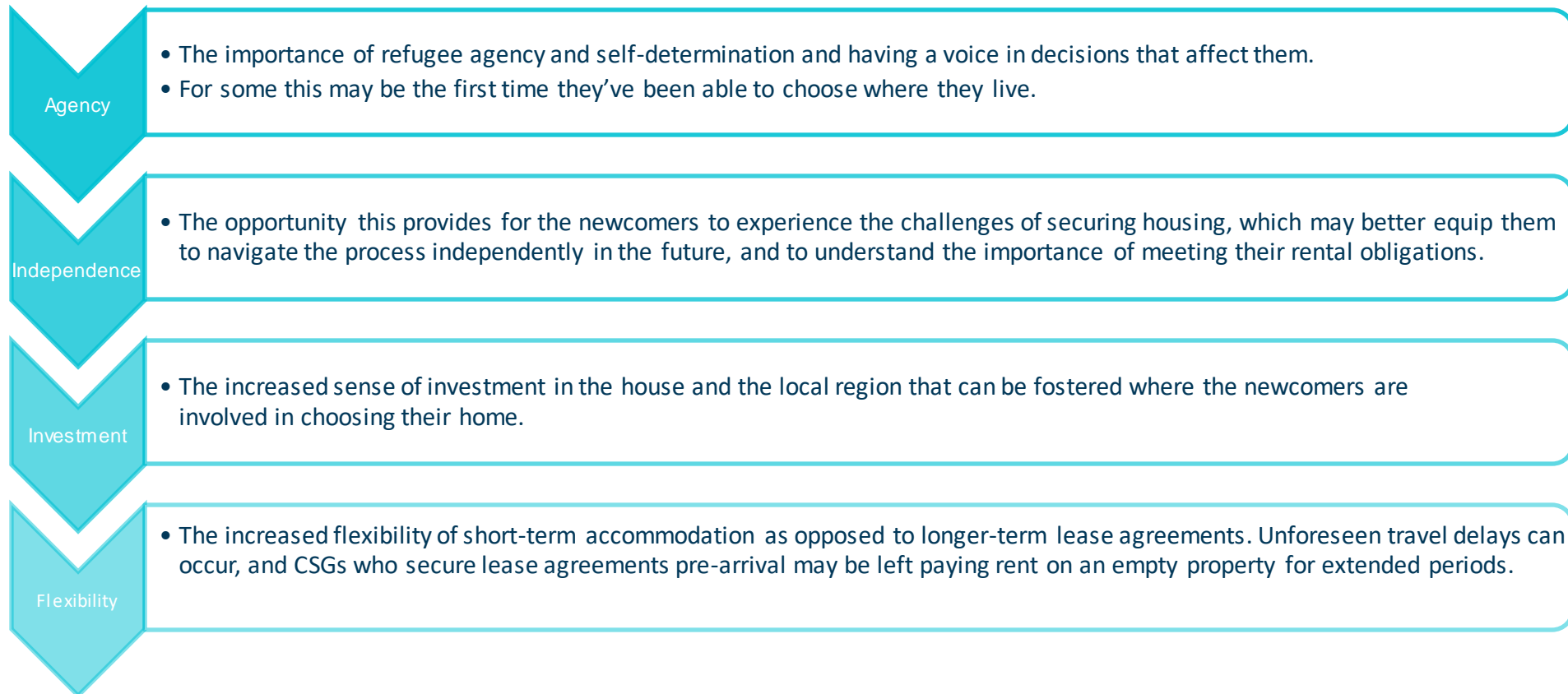
When connecting with housing providers remember to share the benefits of supporting refugees to secure housing:

- While some refugee visa types are temporary, refugees arriving in Australia under the CRISP have permanent visa status in Australia.
- Refugee newcomers are typically seeking stability and often become long-term tenants.
- Refugees arriving in Australia are eligible for ongoing government income support.
- Refugees arriving in Australia under the CRISP receive 12 months of intensive guidance and support from a community supporter group comprised of long-standing local residents that are invested in their successful settlement and integration.
- Renting to a newly arrived refugee household means the rental provider is supporting diversity, multiculturalism, and tolerance in Australia.
- Renting to a newly arrived refugee household means you are part of a growing national and global movement to support and welcome refugees and to contribute to alleviating the global refugee crisis.
- Below are some tips and ideas around securing housing, but ultimately, the biggest factor will be your group's tenacity and adaptive approach to housing.

'[We found] a lot of agents and landlords don't understand the refugee cohort. Many of them think they are transient and won't stay so we needed to explain to them about the permanency of their visa'

Short-term vs long-term on arrival

It is generally recommended that CSGs arrange short-term, on-arrival accommodation for the refugee household they plan to welcome, and then involve them in the process of securing long-term housing once they're here. This recommendation is made for the following reasons:



Some CSGs will choose to arrange long-term housing (such as a 6- or 12-month lease) pre-arrival, due to local considerations and an increased sense of confidence for the CSG and sense of stability for the newcomers on arrival.

We encourage each CSG to consider which approach they want to take, noting that housing considerations will be different between groups, regions and refugee households.

Short-term housing



Community Supporter Groups (CSGs) are responsible for providing accommodation from the newcomers' date of arrival until long-term housing is secured. Where this short-term housing can be provided in-kind, the overall cost of the sponsorship is significantly reduced.

When looking at short-term housing options, consider:

Whether the short-term housing option can be extended, or alternative arrangements made, if long-term housing is not secured within 6 weeks (noting that newcomers are usually expected to start paying or contributing to the rent approximately four weeks post-arrival, even if they remain in short-term accommodation).

Where initial accommodation can be provided at no cost to the newcomers beyond the first month, we encourage CSGs to consider whether having the newcomers make some contributions to the rent may still be useful in fostering a sense of dignity and independence, establishing realistic expectations about affordability, and establishing a rental history, which is likely to assist them when they apply for their next home.

Short-term housing options



Hotels

(with accessible kitchens)

Some properties may offer a reduced nightly rate for extended stays.

Serviced apartments

Serviced apartments are furnished and ready to live in which can be great for a short-term option. Serviced apartments may offer extra services, so be sure to avoid incurring additional costs for services that are not needed, for example, daily cleaning or laundry services.

Short-term rentals

Consider platforms like Airbnb and Stayz where you can book entire homes/apartments. If you find accommodation that would be suitable, try reaching out directly to the owners who have properties on these platforms. People are often willing to help when they know they are supporting people in need.

Granny flats/loft apartments

Granny flats are self-contained accommodation attached to or near the main house. Some homes also have a loft apartment or room and ensuite above the garage. These can be a great option for short-term housing, provided there are appropriate amenities. These types of accommodation are less likely to be advertised, so you would need to reach out to your networks to see if anyone has a suitable option.

Holiday homes

You may know someone in your community who owns a holiday home that may be vacant for portions of the year. This may be particularly true for the low season or winter months. Explore if they would be willing to have the refugee household stay for a discounted rate.

Accommodation owned and managed by churches

It is common for church institutions to have vacant properties that can be made available to people in need, often at a more affordable rate and with more flexible duration – church properties may be available for the newcomers to reside in for as long as it takes them to secure appropriate long-term housing, so they can be a good option for on-arrival accommodation.

Private home/home stay

Perhaps one of your group members or someone from your community has a couple of spare bedrooms that they wish to offer up. It is important that the home has enough space to allow for privacy and autonomy (i.e. enough bedrooms, a separate living space, bathroom and entrance/exit). Read through this [Homestay Booklet](#) developed by Ballina Region for Refugees, or this [hosting good practice guidebook](#) developed in the UK, for some tips and considerations. Where on-arrival accommodation is being provided in a CSG or community member's home, we recommend advising the refugee household pre-arrival to ensure they are aware and comfortable with the arrangement.

When transitioning from short-term accommodation:

Consider what evidence or support you could garner from the short-term accommodation, to act as a rental reference for the purpose of applying for long-term accommodation. It could be helpful for the provider or manager of the accommodation to provide a support or reference letter regarding the refugee household and how they were as short-term tenants. Additionally, if the initial accommodation option is for a few months, you could explore a short-term lease being signed so that the refugee household can start to build a rental history in Australia.

Long-term housing



Long-term housing should be of a quality and size that would likely be acceptable to an average Australian family, considering the size and composition of the family. Housing affordability and availability are challenges faced by many across Australia, and your group can be helpful in a range of ways including:

Collaborating with the refugee household

Avoid making assumptions and remember to keep refugee agency front of mind in all aspects of securing a rental property. Help the refugee household understand the challenges of securing housing by explaining this pre-arrival. This can help them to set realistic expectations. It can also help to steer the housing search to ask questions about their preferred sleeping arrangements, including how many bedrooms and beds they require.

Get to know the property market in your area and beyond

While your group may aspire to secure housing for the newcomers within your town or suburb, this may not be realistic. Groups are encouraged to think beyond their own suburb if required; the only limit is how far group members are willing to travel to the newcomers' residence to provide support.

Booking and attending property inspections

This process can be demanding on CSGs' time, but it is an important step in the overall process. If you can, secure a private viewing. This can help you and the family stand out. Some groups find it helpful to create a roster, where each group member takes ownership of inspections that are scheduled on their day each week.

Getting ready to apply

Check what's required for the application and consider support letters the group and others may be able to provide to assist the process.

Don't forget the [CRSA Housing Letter Template](#) as a helpful introduction to the real estate.

CRSA can also supply a letter to support an application on request

Making an application

Online applications can be restrictive in what is included, so where possible ensure you share the unique circumstances of the household and the support being provided

Consider sending an email or making a follow up phone call after applying as an additional opportunity to advocate for the household.

Further strategies to consider

'The hardest part was getting our foot in the door with agents, if we could get past the initial screening or application process then we could explain the circumstances and get them onboard'

- **Word of mouth**
 - Share what you are doing both online and in conversation – opportunities for support can be found in the most unlikely places!
- **Visit a local real estate to make a direct introduction**
 - Introducing yourself and the CRISP program can be a great way to break the ice and encourage real estate agents to get on board with supporting the endeavour. Don't forget we have a [template letter](#) to use to introduce yourselves too!
- **Negotiate the rental amount**
 - Landlords can only say no, so it can be worth checking if there is flexibility with the rental amount – people have big hearts and want to help where they can!
- **Connect with faith-based networks and diaspora communities**
 - Explore possible connections and resources from existing networks - both formal and informal. The refugee household could take the lead on this approach.
- **Explore informal community networks via social media**
 - 'Lease-breaker' groups and 'good karma networks' can be a source of housing opportunities too.

'As soon as we walked in the door of a real estate agency, they were so keen to help us. We should've done that from the start. The online application process didn't allow us to explain what we were doing.'

Further strategies to consider

'I decided to become a guarantor for the lease but I asked questions about having myself and the refugee household on there and we also talked about when we could transfer the lease so it was just in their names later'

- **Consider becoming a guarantor for the refugee household**
 - Ensure you and group members understand the responsibilities this will incur prior to co-signing a lease, e.g.
 - ▶ What level of risk do we take on as guarantor? What level of risk do we take on if co-signing?
 - ▶ Is there an opportunity to co-sign the lease for a portion of the tenancy, to be transferred in full to the household?
 - ▶ What are the responsibilities of co-signing or becoming a guarantor in my state?
- **Consider 'topping up' the rent**
 - Groups need to consider how this may impact on a household's independence in the long-term. Groups need to be clear on how long any top up payments will be in place and how much will be provided from the outset. Groups should also be aware that rental subsidies or 'top ups' may need to be reported as income to Services Australia
 - Groups considering subsidising rent are encouraged to clarify:
 - ▶ What is an appropriate amount of rental 'top up' to pay?
 - ▶ Has the refugee household been made aware of the 'top up' being provided?
 - ▶ Who will we pay the 'top up' to? The household or directly to the rental provider?
 - ▶ What time frame will the rental 'top up' be provided for?
 - ▶ What changes in circumstances would affect the rental 'top up' amount?
 - ▶ When will we review this arrangement? Have we made this clear to the refugee household?
 - ▶ Would a sliding scale of support be appropriate, with 'top ups' reducing over time?

Learnings

Feedback from current Community Supporter Groups on what has worked for them and the household's they're supporting

'When we discussed and decided on the rent subsidy with the family, it was a good thing we mentioned that we would review it in 3 months, or if they started working sooner, right from the outset'

'We had the lease explained by an interpreter before it was signed, but a couple months later we went over it again at the request of the family so they could understand it further once things had calmed down'

'Searching for housing took a lot of man hours, we coordinated within our group to visit different inspections and take the family along'

'We had to have a couple of difficult conversations with the refugee family. They had high expectations and wanted a lot for their rental. We talked about the rental climate and about what was possible and reasonable. We agreed on what things they wanted their home to have that were deal breakers, while compromising on other aspects'

State/Territory based resources



State	Tenant information	Bond assistance programs
Australian Capital Territory	Information for tenants and occupants (English)	ACT Government Rental bond help
New South Wales	New tenant and landlord fact sheet in other languages	NSW Government: Rentstart bond loan
Northern Territory	‘Easy English’ fact sheets Tenants advice service	Northern Territory Government: Help with bond assistance
Queensland	Pocket guide for tenants – other languages	Queensland Government: Bond loan
South Australia	Tenancy information in languages other than English	Government of South Australia: Help with bond
Tasmania	Beginning tenancy (English) Tenants union of Tasmania fact sheets	Homes Tasmania: Housing connect
Victoria	Tenants Victoria language resources	Housing Victoria: RentAssistance bond loans
Western Australia	Multilingual videos on renting	Government of Western Australia: Bond Assistance loans

Additional resources



Template letter for agents / landlords:

We have developed a letter that your group can send to rental providers to introduce the CRISP program and explain that you are looking for suitable, affordable housing for newly arrived refugees.

- [Template letter for agents / landlords](#)

Detailed furniture and basic household goods list:

Taken from the CRISP Settlement Guidebook, this list outlines the items that constitute a 'full household package' for newly arrived refugee households. We strongly encourage you to speak with the household you are matched with to ensure that key items meet their preferences and needs and remind them that the interiors can be modified where necessary.

- [Furniture and basic household goods list](#)

Printable furniture and household goods checklist:

After discussing the specific requirements of the household with them (where possible) and with your group, you may choose to use this checklist to keep track of what you've sourced.

- [Furniture and household goods checklist](#)

You can also use your networks and resourcefulness to [source household items](#), like key pieces of furniture and whitegoods. Places like Gumtree and Facebook Marketplace are a good place to begin.

Global refugee sponsorship resources

- [Understanding discrimination effects in private rental housing](#) – Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
- [Working with landlords](#) – RESET (UK)
- [Housing Issues for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia](#) – Refugee Council of Australia
- [Managing financial disappointment](#) – RESET (UK)
- [Newcomer Housing Tips: Four Steps for Outreach to Landlords](#) – Refugee Housing Solutions (US)
- [Hosting good practice guidebook](#) – The No Accommodation Network (UK)