

More Refugees Welcome: Australian community groups pledge their support during Global Refugee Forum

Melbourne, 8 December 2023

Geneva hosts the second-ever 'Global Refugee Forum' from 13-15 December, bringing together global government leaders and civil society representatives to reflect on the current challenges and find new approaches to respond to the global refugee crisis.

There is a growing global 'community sponsorship' movement that provides a way for refugees to safely rebuild their lives, and to contribute their creativity and skills to the success of a new country, with the help of a local group of active citizens. It will be one of the key initiatives spotlighted at the Geneva forum.

In Australia, community sponsorship is gaining momentum. Everyday Aussies are putting up their hand to help refugees with the support of Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA), a national charity leading this work. In mid 2022, CRSA partnered with the federal government in designing and launching the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP), which has already seen more than 80 refugee households successfully welcomed by community groups across Australia, with rewarding outcomes for all involved. And it's not just individuals who are getting involved. Organisations, ranging from grassroots community clubs to large-scale enterprises, are offering their time and resources to help grow this movement of local people power.

For over a year, Cassinia Environmental, a land management and protection company, has worked with local communities in Victoria's Macedon Ranges region to welcome and support the settlement of refugee households in the area. Ross Kelly, CEO of Cassinia Community, recounts the "deeply rewarding" experience of being involved in CRISP: "Witnessing the arrival of these families and aiding their settlement in the Kyneton area has been profoundly fulfilling. Our partnership with the initiative exemplifies the remarkable outcomes achievable when communities unite to support refugee resettlement in Australia."

Pride Foundation Australia has also been part of the movement. Chairperson Dr. Ruth McNair AM explains: "We are involved as we believe in the power of small groups of friends to welcome refugees and help with their settlement. In our case, we are also strongly committed to enabling more LGBTIQ people to find safety and community in Australia. LGBTIQ persecution is a common reason to seek asylum and the settlement needs can be very specific, requiring good connections with LGBTIQ communities. We offer this and with support from CRISP have learned so much about what it takes to be there when it counts."

In November this year, CRSA launched a pledge to build the community sponsorship movement in Australia. The pledge has now been endorsed by more than 70 organisations and groups, with more expected to sign in the coming months. By signing the pledge, these organisations have signalled their willingness to help further develop and scale community sponsorship of refugees. Of these organisations, 20 have gone one step further and formalised their work with CRSA as a Supporting Community Organisation (SCO), committing to helping grow the community sponsorship movement around the country. James Harris, Director of Strategic Projects at faith-led initiative NAYBA, shared his perspective on becoming a Supporting Community Organisation: "it provides a practical and tangible way for organisations to provide support for refugees... We strongly encourage other organisations to consider how they can use their unique role to mobilise their networks and join this movement."

"The response to the pledge and our SCO initiative has been wonderful and reminds us all that there is an enormous amount of local community support for welcoming those who have been forced to flee into our communities. Community sponsorship provides an opportunity for Australians to help address the global needs through human-to-human interaction, rather than seeing refugees as an overwhelming geopolitical issue. In doing so, they join a growing global community of everyday people from more than a dozen countries who are making a crucial difference to the lives of hundreds of thousands of refugees each year" said Lisa Button, CEO of CRSA.

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For media enquiries, please contact media@refugeesponsorship.org.au.

What is the GRF and the 2023 Community Sponsorship Pledge?

The [Global Refugee Forum](#) is the largest global gathering on refugees. Held every four years, it brings together UN Member States, civil society organisations, and relevant stakeholders to announce concrete pledges, assess progress, and share insights aligning with the Global Compact on Refugees.

At the last Global Refugee Forum in 2019, CRSA and Settlement Services International (SSI) launched a civil society pledge, supporting the introduction of a well-designed community sponsorship program. This Pledge was endorsed by approximately 200 Australian organisations (Read pledge and view list of endorsing organisations [here](#)). Following this, CRISP was launched in mid-2022.

The 2023 Community Sponsorship Pledge, announced by CRSA in November 2023, highlights the continued and widespread support for community sponsorship to become a successful, permanent, and significant part of Australia's response to global refugee challenges. Since its launch, more than 70 organisations and community supporter groups have [endorsed the pledge](#). Organisations can show their support and sign the pledge at any time, by completing this form.

Supporting Community Organisations (SCOs)

Partnering with CRSA as an SCO empowers organisations to:

- Mobilise and support local CSGs, who will provide a warm welcome and practical support to refugees from their very first day in Australia.
- Collaborate with other like-minded organisations to build knowledge and foster partnerships that enhance community-led efforts in refugee settlement.
- Contribute to greater social cohesion, diversity, and inclusion within local communities.

More on the SCO initiative can be found here: <https://refugeesponsorship.org.au/supporting-community-organisations/>

Current SCOs are named below. Organisations interested in signing up or learning more about the SCO initiative can contact Blaise Itabelo, National Manager -Community Partnerships and Engagement, at blaise.itabelo@refugeesponsorship.org.au.

CRISP Factsheet

What is the CRISP and why is it needed?

- Globally, there are now more than 32.5 million refugees, and the UNHCR predicts that more than 2 million refugees will be in urgent need of resettlement in 2023. The number of available global resettlement opportunities is grossly inadequate to meet this need, but community sponsorship programs are helping to increase this number.
- The Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot – known as the CRISP – is Australia's **new refugee sponsorship program**.
- The program's **first refugees arrived in August 2022** following the launch of the CRISP in mid 2022.
- CRSA is funded by the Commonwealth Government to deliver the CRISP around Australia.
- The CRISP is inspired by the successful Canadian community refugee sponsorship program which has been in operation since the late 1970s and has enabled **more than 325,000 refugees** to build a new life in Canada. Similar programs are now being implemented in a dozen countries around the world, including in the UK, US, NZ, and Ireland.

Who benefits from the program?

- The Australian government selects refugees to participate in the program, drawing on those identified by the **UNHCR** as being in most **urgent need of resettlement**.

- Refugees **arrive as permanent residents** eligible for government-funded English classes, Centrelink support, Medicare, and most other federal, state, and local services.

What CRISP has achieved so far:

- More than 320 refugees have arrived in Australia, welcomed by Community Support Groups (CSGs) across Australia.
- A high level of satisfaction has been reported among refugee newcomers on the support received, and a high level of satisfaction from CSG members regarding their own experience.
- Refugee newcomers are developing positive social connections with the CSG and the broader community.
- Strong settlement and employment outcomes.
- Settlement 'clusters' forming around the country.
- New CSGs being created, inspired by the example of other households getting involved in welcoming others.

An independent evaluation by the University of Queensland of the CRISP outcomes reveals, so far, that:

- 98% of refugees have reported that their culture is valued by others.
- 88% of refugees reported that they find it easy to get help from their community.
- 92% of community volunteers feel that supporting a refugee household has provided them with a sense of purpose.

How do volunteers get involved?

- To participate, Australians need to:
 - form a local Community Supporter Group (CSG) of **five or more adults**;
 - provide clear police and working with children **checks**;
 - undergo some initial **training**; and
 - commit to **12 months** of practical hands-on support, including some fundraising.
- CSGs can be based in a community **anywhere in Australia**.

What does the CSG do?

CSGs offer 12 months of practical, hands-on support to the new arrivals. This includes:

- **Fundraising** for income support for the first 1-2 weeks.
- Providing **temporary accommodation** for 4-6 weeks.
- Meeting the new arrivals at the **airport**.
- Helping the new arrivals to:
 - Apply for a bank account;
 - Register for Centrelink support and other government services;
 - Enrol children in school; and
 - Access language classes.
- Local orientation including using public transport.
- Providing access to social opportunities and emotional support.
- Helping the new arrivals to secure long-term housing.

Further support is driven by the new arrivals' aspirations and could include help with getting a driver's license, finding a job or starting a business, with an overall aim of self-sufficiency.

Where is the program active?

(For clickable maps, please visit: <https://refugeesponsorship.org.au/crisp-factsheet/>)