

CommuniTEA

Conversation starters

Best served to those who have an appetite for change.

NOTE: The answers to questions 1-8 have been pre-written and you can refer to them directly when hosting your dinner or event. However, answers to questions 9-20 are suggestions and prompts only. We encourage talking about your own experience of the program for these questions.



1. What is a refugee?

Defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone outside of their country of origin, unable to return to their country of origin out of legitimate fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

2. How is a refugee different from an asylum seeker?

An asylum-seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. All refugees start out as asylum-seekers, but not all asylum-seekers achieve refugee status.

3. Which countries do refugees come from?

Refugees can come from anywhere in the world. Generally, refugees come from countries marked by widespread persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. In 2023, the countries with the largest number of refugees were Afghanistan, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Syria.

4. How do refugees come to Australia?

Refugees come to Australia via a number of pathways, however, most arrive through Australian's Humanitarian Settlement Program. For the CRISP, the UNHCR refers refugees to the Department of Home Affairs for resettlement. The Department then selects refugees eligible for the CRISP and enlists the support of Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) to match the refugee with a local community supporter group (CSG) who will welcome and support them on arrival. The Department also engages the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to organise transport, pre-arrival information and health checks.

5. Who is CRSA?

Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) is an independent Australian charity leading civil society efforts to establish community sponsorship of refugees as a common practice throughout Australia.

6. What is the CRISP?

CRISP stands for the Community Refugee Integration & Settlement Pilot. It enables community members to support the practical settlement of refugees who are identified by the UNHCR. The program enlists the help of everyday Australians in communities all around the country (including those in regional communities) to welcome refugees into their local area and provide them with practical resettlement and integration support. The program, launched in the first half of 2022, will support up to 1,500 refugees over the pilot period (mid 2022 to mid 2025).



7. Is there proof that community sponsorship works?

Yes. Community refugee sponsorship has been working successfully in Canada for more than 40 years. Ordinary community members in Canada have sponsored and welcomed more than 325,000 refugees since the late 1970s. This number is in addition to those entering under the government-funded resettlement program. The practice of community sponsorship is now spreading around the world with countries including the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, New Zealand, Spain, and Argentina. According to the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, since 2021, almost 700,000 refugees globally have been welcomed via a broad range of refugee sponsorship initiatives in many different countries.

8. Why is community important to the settlement of a refugee household?

Imagine relocating to a country where you don't know the language, the culture, or anyone at all for that matter. It makes a world of difference having someone waiting at the other end. Refugees greatly benefit from a strong personal network of people to help them find their feet in a new community. This more individualised support can lessen the acculturation stress and isolation that refugees experience in their early stages of settlement. Beyond this, community sponsorship can enrich civic life, foster social cohesion, and cultivate full economic independence of humanitarian migrants in Australia. Sponsorship can also help regional communities attract and retain migrants to boost their populations and expand their workforces.

9. How did you get involved in a Community Supporter Group?

Discuss what led you to join or start a group. Were you the organiser or did someone ask you to sign up? Did you join with friends or strangers? Did you encounter any challenges when forming the group? Talk about your experience with your guests.

10. Why would someone give up their time to help a group of people they don't know?

Give your own reasons and motivations for wanting to get involved. It could be that you saw the program as an opportunity to do something that would make a real difference, to work with others in your community and build relationships. Maybe you became aware of how dire the current global refugee situation is and wanted to act. Let your guests know your drive behind joining a CSG.

11. Do you need a particular skillset to join or start a group?

Talk about the different skillsets of people in the group. Touch on not needing any specific experience or qualifications to form a CSG. You might want to discuss the training you engaged in before matching with the household and how your personal or professional knowledge came into play.

12. How do you communicate with someone who doesn't speak the same language as you?

There are a variety of ways in which you can speak with someone who doesn't speak English. In the CRISP program all groups have access to free interpretation via phone and in person via TIS National, a government funded service. Groups can also access online tools such as google translate and other apps that can support incidental conversation.

13. How much fundraising was needed to support the household?

Tell the group how much was raised for the family or individual. You can note that this differs depending on the size and needs of the household. Reference their ability to access government services. You might want to explain how you went about raising funds, discussing things that were challenging, what worked and what didn't. Consider how you may have done things differently or what was particularly successful.

14. What was it like meeting the refugee household?

Talk about your first encounter; meeting the household online/via phone or at the airport, greeting them after months of planning and organising, how you felt seeing them arrive safely. Were you relieved? Proud? Overjoyed? Anxious? Share this with your guests.

15. Why is the initiative something you believe is worth committing to?

Let the table know why you care about the initiative and want to see it through. If you feel comfortable to, share your involvement and level of commitment. You may discuss times when you or another person in the group lacked the capacity to contribute fully because of unforeseen circumstances and other life priorities. The great thing about the support group is that you can rely on one another, and sometimes that means taking on more or less of the load.

16. Who did you go to when you needed support?

You can mention CRSA, Supporting Community Organisations (SCOs) and other relevant organisations that helped guide you through the process. Also consider the people in your community and networks who supported you and the group along the way – it could be a friend who works in real estate, the local librarian who gave you advice or guidance. Did you connect with another local group to find out more? You're the best person to speak to when it comes to navigating these different networks. Pass on this knowledge to a potential member. If they later consider signing up as part of a CSG, they'll know they have the backing of a range of individuals and organisations.

17. Was there anything you were surprised or confronted by?

Discuss anything that was not what you had expected. This could be small or big. You might also talk about how you set expectations about the program and what was gained from the experience.

18. Has the experience changed you?

Reflect on your involvement in the program and which parts had the biggest impact on you.

19. What's the end goal for the refugee household?

Talk about the household your CSG were matched with and their own goals and aspirations. What do they hope for in this new chapter of their lives? What do you hope for them?

20. What would you tell someone thinking of getting involved?

This is when you can give your golden nuggets of advice. Maybe it's something you wish you knew at the beginning of your involvement with CRISP, or something that you would do over. It could also be why you would recommend others to give their time, like you have, to support a refugee household to build a safer life in Australia.

