

## **Former Liberal Premier & Boston philanthropist support local refugee efforts with \$275,000 pledge**

When former New South Wales Premier Nick Greiner AC first heard about the opportunity for local groups to 'sponsor' refugee newcomers into local communities through the CRISP program, he wanted to get involved in a personal capacity and use his resources to encourage other Sydneysiders to do the same.

On the other side of the world, Ed Shapiro, a successful Boston-based investment manager turned philanthropist, felt a similar inclination. In recent years the Shapiro Foundation has helped thousands of refugees to be welcomed to the US by private sponsor groups under a similar US scheme. The two donors are now teaming up with Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) to offer grants of \$5,000 for up to 55 local groups around Australia. The 'seed funding' will then be used by local groups to welcome and support refugee newcomers through the government-backed Community Refugee Integration and Settlement and Pilot (CRISP) in the first half of 2025.

"When I first heard about CRISP, I thought this is such a common-sense approach and something I'd like to support. I'm looking forward to meeting some of the local groups who put their hands up and see how I can join with them to help newcomer families in practical ways." says Mr Greiner.

"This is a generous but time-bound offer" says Lisa Button, CEO of CRSA, a national non-profit organisation that delivers the program. "This will really assist local groups inclined to be involved in this successful, community-led approach."

Originally inspired by Canada's long-standing community sponsorship experience, the pilot program has enjoyed strong bi-partisan support. The program was launched in May 2022 under the then Coalition-led government, and since continued by the Albanese government, with local communities in metropolitan and regional areas across the country getting involved.

Assistant Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Julian Hill MP appreciates the community efforts:

"It's been wonderful to see how the CRISP program has engaged everyday Australians who volunteer to help connect newly arrived refugee households with community groups, providing local knowledge and practical support.

"These generous donations are invaluable, particularly as the world is witnessing the highest levels of forcible displacement on record.

"In light of its early benefits to refugee integration and community cohesion more broadly the Albanese Labor government extended the CRISP pilot program as further evaluations are completed of this cost-effective program."

For refugee newcomers, a warm reception and support from locals makes a huge difference. Former Venezuelan refugee, Juan Santamaria Suarez, now 32 years old, arrived with his family in Australia in 2023 and was supported in a variety of ways by his CRISP group comprising members of Melbourne's Jewish community. Now working in a Melbourne auction house, Juan is keen to encourage other Australians to get involved: "The support of CRSA and, in particular, the group of volunteers who supported my family, has been fundamental to our integration process. Through them, we have learned how to navigate different aspects of life in Australia, providing us with the support to face the future and start making our own contributions to Australia. We are very grateful for the support we have received; this experience has changed our lives."

Interested members of the public should visit CRSA's website to find out how to take advantage of this seed funding opportunity: [www.refugeesponsorship.org.au](http://www.refugeesponsorship.org.au)

- END -

### **Additional quotes**

Quote attributable to Ed Shapiro of the Shapiro Foundation: “We know from our work in the United States and Canada that if everyday people are invited to step into this role, given an opportunity to take on such a rewarding and life-changing project, there is support out there. If we can help make that happen by contributing financially to local group initiatives, whether in the US, Australia or elsewhere, that’s a great outcome for us.”

Quote attributable to local Australian Hobart-based community supporter group member Rebecca Sevagan: “Last year a group of us at Grace Church in Hobart formed a community support group to welcome a refugee family through the CRISP program into what we think is the best part of Australia. We have been fundraising towards our goal since late last year. We are thrilled that this additional \$5,000 will push our budget up enough so that we can complete our training and be ready to be matched by the end of March and welcome a family in the middle of this year. We are grateful to the donor for their commitment in helping us help those needing the support of this worthwhile programme.”

### **More about the CRISP**

Since its launch in mid 2022, the CRISP has seen more than 120 local groups in all Australian states and territories support the arrival of more than 530 individual refugees, mostly family groups.

Under the CRISP, everyday Australians from all walks of life are invited to form local ‘groups of five’ and put up their hands to welcome a refugee household settling in Australia, providing them with 12 months of practical, hands-on settlement and integration support. This includes meeting the family at the airport, assisting with essential tasks like opening a bank account and enrolling in Medicare, helping kids enrol in school and join extracurricular activities and adults engage in work and further education.

Refugee newcomers are selected initially by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the basis of need, and then issued humanitarian visas by the Australian government. So far, local community supporter groups have proven to be highly successful in helping more than 530 newcomers get off to a successful start in Australia with things like enrolling kids in school, finding employment, securing long term housing and building their social networks in Australia.

For more information on the CRISP please see CRSA’s website: [www.refugeesponsorship.org.au](http://www.refugeesponsorship.org.au) or contact: [media@refugeesponsorship.org.au](mailto:media@refugeesponsorship.org.au)