



Settlement
Council
of Australia

AT A GLANCE



Target Participants

Individual and
Community Groups



Aim

To develop 'Group
Mentorship' programs
and provide support to
newly arrived refugee
households to assist
with education,
employment, health
and social services.



Organisations Involved

CRSI



Location

National



Funding

CASE STUDY

Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (CRSI)

In 2020 CRSI initiated, led and coordinated the implementation of a pilot 'Group Mentorship' program along with a range of collaborating organisations. The program aimed to harness the energies of local community groups to provide self-directed and holistic support for refugee households who arrived in Australia prior to the pandemic drawing on key features of Canada's successful and long-standing community sponsorship program for refugees.

About the program

CRSI aims to encourage and support the establishment of a community refugee sponsorship program in Australia that:

- Empowers local volunteer groups to play a lead role in welcoming and supporting the settlement of newly arrived refugees in their first 12 months in Australia (though provision of financial, emotional and settlement support)
- Provides a model for expanding resettlement as a complementary pathway to traditional government-funded resettlement
- Changes the relationship between refugee newcomers and the broader Australian community through greater opportunities for connection



The opportunity to pilot a new community sponsored visa pathway was halted by COVID-19. CRSI developed a way to pilot aspects of sponsorship model by pairing trained local volunteers 'mentor groups' with newly arrived refugee households already living in Australia and in need of additional settlement support and greater opportunities for community connection, leading to the following outcomes:

- Demonstrating the viability and benefits of holistic community-led support
- Maintaining and further building community enthusiasm for sponsorship
- Preparing 21 local mentor groups, 172 individual members
- Testing and refining training and other tools
- Further refining the civil society vision for such a program
- Providing support to a number of refugees who could benefit from this approach
- Developing best practice from experienced local groups working with refugees

The program is a collaboration of key groups who undertake the following roles:

- CRSI: Coordinates the project and engagement with collaborating organisations, resource development, recruitment, vetting, training and monitoring of groups and coordinating independent evaluation of pilot
- Mentor Groups: Apply, undertake training, develop internal groups, mentor support plans, holistic support to refugee households for 6 months, participate in program mentoring and evaluation processes
- Front-line agencies: Contribute to training and online resources, mentee referral, ad hoc settlement advice to groups and case management liaison with mentor groups
- Mentees: Complete informed consent to participate in program, engages with mentor group for 6-month period

All of the above stakeholders are also involved in the evaluation of the program.

CRSI lead the program with assistance from the front-line agencies who referred the refugees and provided support and from the mentor groups who provided direct practical support to the refugee households. 21 groups in five states across Australia were mobilised, screened and trained and 12 of those groups were paired with refugee households, offering free support to their mentees each week on employment, education, assistance with language, health access, and social connectivity.

Challenges

1. Recruiting more diverse groups from different ages, genders and cultural and linguistic backgrounds
2. In providing support to community groups, access to local translation services is difficult in some areas & may require a tailored solution



Outcomes

Some examples of early outcomes of the program are:

- New employment opportunities for refugee participants who have been able to leverage extended social and professional networks
- Improved access and enrolment in education for adults and children
- Participants being supported with English language and qualification recognition
- Improved social connections through sports groups and children's playgroups
- Improved access to local services
- Heightened community awareness about the role community groups can play in supporting refugees
- CRSI has gained further understanding of the Australian context for localised settlement support and the importance of this

Key Learnings

1. There is strong community appetite for involvement in providing practical support to refugees
2. Comprehensive and universal training is important, with different delivery methods
3. Having support for community groups increased confidence, developed knowledge and skills, and facilitated a connection to peers
4. Clear up-front articulation of program, including genuine informed consent process, is essential for refugee engagement and agency
5. Successful matching of refugees to groups requires knowing features of local community/mentor group and information about the refugee participants

More information

You can view more information at the CRSI website at:

[Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative \(ausrefugeesponsorship.com.au\)](http://ausrefugeesponsorship.com.au)

Or for information on how you can help visit:

[How you can help – Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative \(ausrefugeesponsorship.com.au\)](http://ausrefugeesponsorship.com.au)

