Title of Event: SCOA CEO Forum: A Conversation about CRISP
Notetaker: Mahmoud Elmasry, uOttawa Refugee Hub
Host of Event: Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA)
Date: 06-August-2026

Toplines:

- CRISP successfully transitioned from a 2022 pilot into a permanent component of Australia's humanitarian program with an annual admissions allocation of 200 spots after demonstrating that community sponsorship accelerates social and economic integration.
- The program mobilizes trained groups of 5+ local volunteers part of Community Supporter Groups to provide 12 months of wraparound settlement support, while preserving full refugee entitlements and maintaining HSP safety nets if needed.
- Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia oversees the complete sponsorship process from pre-arrival training and tailored household matching to ongoing operational support through a wide variety of services and quality assurance monitoring.
- By engaging over 1,670 volunteers across 180+ Community Supporter Groups to welcome 950+ refugees nationwide, CRISP consistently outperformed standard government benchmarks in housing stability, language acquisition, and job placement, with regional placements showing remarkable strengths.

Fundraising and community events give everyday Australians a flexible way to support arriving families, building broad public engagement alongside the dedicated, individual guidance offered by Community Supporter Groups.

Presenter(s):

- Maria Dimopoulos, CEO, SCOA - Moderator
- Lisa Button, CEO, Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA)
- Romy Vitalien, Director of CRISP Program, CRSA
- Alison Pitt, Volunteer, Community Supporter Group (CSG)

Circulated Materials:

1. **Event recording**: SCOA CEO Forum A Conversation about Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Program

Key Points:

Maria Dimopoulos – Introduction

- True belonging is created through personal relationships, shared responsibilities, and everyday hospitality rather than institutions alone. We must also acknowledge that settlement came at a significant cost to Australia's First Peoples.
- Effective settlement requires active collaboration across an ecosystem that connects specialist providers, local institutions, community organizations, sponsors, and refugee communities.
- Following a successful pilot that resettled over 900 refugees across all Australian states and territories through more than 180 CSGs, the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Program (CRISP) became a permanent component of the national humanitarian program.

Lisa Button – CRISP in Context

CRISP program timeline

- CRSA was founded in 2017 as an advocacy coalition (including Save the Children, Refugee Council, Amnesty International, Welcoming Australia, Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, and Rural Australians for Refugees) to address government cost barriers and expand Australia's refugee intake through community sponsorship.
- CRSA tested community sponsorship via the Group Mentor Program alongside Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) providers during early COVID-19 and the Afghan withdrawal crisis, pairing volunteer groups with refugee arrivals benefiting from additional support.
- Following success with the mentor program and drawing on Canadian evidence showing social capital drives integration, the Department of Home Affairs invited CRSA to co-design and deliver the CRISP pilot in 2022.

Community Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways

- CRISP involves a politically broad and diverse network of communities working collaboratively across Australia. It comprised part of Australia's 2024–2025 humanitarian intake (20,000 total spots) by pairing UNHCR-referred refugees with CSGs, running alongside programs like the Community Support Program (CSP) and Special Humanitarian Program (SHP).
- CRISP also intersects with emerging, complementary pathways, including student education pathways via Skill Path, LGBTQI+ resettlement pathways via Bridge to Safety, and skilled labour mobility pathways through Talent Beyond Boundaries.
- The program drives community-led advantages, such as increasing resettlement spots, lowering participation barriers, diversifying regional resettlement, and countering negative stereotypes by fostering powerful intercultural connections.
- Long-term sustainability relies on building broad public awareness, care, and active participation to safely expand refugee arrivals and strengthen the settlement sector.

Romy Vitalien – CRISP Program Features and Outcomes

- CRISP matches UNHCR-referred refugees who lack existing Australian ties with CSGs of 5+ local volunteers following selection by the Department of Home Affairs. The CRISP model replaces standard HSP caseworkers with volunteer CSGs while preserving full refugee entitlements.
- CSGs provide 12 months of dedicated guidance and support, covering initial arrival logistics (airport reception, temporary housing, welcome packs), financial and administrative setup (2 weeks income support, bank accounts, Medicare registration), long-term housing and furniture, healthcare connections, and school or English language enrollments.
- CRSA facilitates group formation, screening, training, and pre-arrival contact, aligning refugee household aspirations and needs with appropriate regional support groups.
- CRSA also supports participants with dedicated coaching, guidebooks, a community hub, a dedicated hotline, a 1,600+ member Community of Practice, and newcomer feedback channels.
- CRSA additionally incorporates continuous monitoring and quality assurance throughout the sponsorship period, retaining referrals to standard HSP services as a safety net if matching challenges or complex needs arise pre- or post-arrival.
- CRISP mobilized 1,670+ volunteers across 180+ CSGs (40% in regional/rural areas) to settle 950+ refugees across 235+ households from 22 countries of origin nationwide.
- CRISP consistently outperformed standard settlement benchmarks across housing, employment, and social integration, with regional communities demonstrating particularly strong local connection, faster job placement, and high volunteer satisfaction.

Alison Pitt – Firsthand Volunteer & CSG Experience

- Alison transitioned from running school education campaigns to dispel refugee myths and volunteering with HSP programs to forming a regional mentor group in 2020, directly assisting HSP providers with accommodation shortages.
- Everyday Australians eagerly participate in supporting refugee families outside formal CSG structures. Pre-arrival fundraising events serve as a proven, low-barrier mechanism to mobilize the broader public.
- CRISP's single group focus provides intensive, personalized support that accelerates community integration while fostering independence, representing a level of care that high-volume HSP caseworkers managing multiple clients cannot match.
- Volunteer groups operate under strict checks and balances to carefully monitor interactions and protect vulnerable families, and the 12-month program serves as a foundation for authentic relationships, consistently evolving into long-term friendships that last well past the formal support period.

Q&A

1. **Could you elaborate more about the Canadian sponsorship model and its relationship to CRISP?**

   Lisa Button

   a. Canada's model includes named sponsorship, allowing citizens to sponsor specific individuals known through personal or community networks through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program, alongside the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program, which mirrors CRISP by matching UNHCR-referred refugees with local sponsors.
   b. CRSA hopes that Australia's Community Support Program (CSP) adopts learnings from Canada's named sponsorship to simplify onerous requirements and high costs, enabling broader community backing beyond diaspora groups taking on the entire burden.
   c. The term newcomer was similarly adopted as a descriptive alternative to traditional refugee labels to avoid political polarization and reduce negative stereotypes.

2. **Beyond baseline screening offered by police and working with children checks, what kinds of wraparound protection are there?**

   Lisa Button

   a. CSGs operate within a defined, specific role rather than serving as the sole support system, ensuring volunteers are not expected to handle complex trauma independently.
   b. The program is structured around pairing an entire group with a household rather than establishing one-on-one relationships, providing built-in peer oversight and collective accountability.
   c. CRSA also conducts ongoing monitoring and quality assurance to identify emerging concerns early, connecting families or groups directly to professional specialized services as needed.
   d. Pre-arrival, groups conduct advance mapping of local community resources and emergency services, so groups and families know exactly where to access targeted support.

3. **What factors might impact the long-term sustainability of this program?**

   Lisa Button

   a. CRSA can tap into the broader Australian society by appealing to individuals seeking stronger local community connections, rather than relying solely on traditional refugee advocate networks.

b. CRSA tries to leverage media campaigns to increase public awareness and build sustained interest, reducing reliance on crisis events to prompt community action.
c. Community members can also contact CRSA directly for guidance through available resources and participation options.

4. **Considering that certain refugee groups are disproportionately not registered with UNHCR and would thus not be able to be referred through CRISP, is there a way for those who have immediate family in Australia to be supported through CRISP?**

Lisa Button

a. Extending CRISP to include unregistered refugees or those with immediate family ties in Australia depends entirely on federal policy decisions. Supporting those cohorts would require formal government adjustments to existing visa mechanisms, either by broadening CRISP eligibility or reforming the Community Support Program (CSP).

5. **What are some approaches to overcoming housing challenges?**

Lisa Button

a. CRSA tries to amplify innovative housing search strategies across networks, noting that housing shortages affect both CRISP and traditional HSP providers. They also try to build direct relationships with real estate agents who have previously supported refugees, leveraging their active involvement to help secure accommodation.

Alison Pitt

a. Volunteers and CSGs try to pursue new local housing developments, advocating for designated refugee spaces within social housing, and connecting with local community members for long-term rental opportunities, including with Airbnb hosts.

6. **What would the costs be of the commitments as part of the CSGs?**

Lisa Button

a. Most of the costs center around immediate arrival, including temporary accommodation, cash for the first week or two, and basic household goods.
b. CRSA does not provide a set amount of funding that is required but instead gives CSGs a budget template that is personalized based on individual household needs.
c. Groups tended to raise anywhere between $5000 to $20,000 depending on household size and needs, and they utilize creative fundraising tactics and local council grants to raise these funds.