



**Community Refugee
Sponsorship Initiative**



CRSI POSITION PAPER | MAY 2019

A New Model for Community Refugee Sponsorship in Australia



Save the Children



**Refugee Council
of Australia**



**Welcoming
Australia**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



**Australian Churches
Refugee Taskforce**



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Executive Summary

Members of the Australian community have repeatedly called for the opportunity to help resettle more refugees in Australia in order to do their bit in responding to the global refugee crisis. Australians from different backgrounds – ranging from rural communities to inner-city groups – are eager to raise funds, open their homes, offer jobs and volunteer their time to help those fleeing persecution to build a new life in Australia. A new community sponsorship model would harness the goodwill and compassion of Australians to increase the number of resettlement places offered by Australia and contribute to the successful settlement of refugees in active and cohesive Australian communities.

Australia has a long tradition and credible record of enabling communities to sponsor and help resettle refugees. Previous refugee sponsorship models, such as the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme started in 1979, have used a combination of government and private funding and involved community groups (including faith communities) volunteering their time and resources to help new refugees settle. Other community sponsorship responses, including our response to the Balkans refugee crisis in the 1990s, have demonstrated the Australian community's willingness to welcome refugees and to provide material and psychosocial support in the early settlement phase.

In early 2018, a number of concerned organisations joined together to form the Community Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (CRSI) – the Refugee Council of Australia, Save the Children Australia, Amnesty International Australia, the Welcome to Australia initiative, Rural Australians for Refugees and the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce.

We believe there is potential to build on Australia's proud history of community sponsorship to scale up our nation's response to the current global refugee crisis. We are calling on the Australian Government to adopt an inclusive, well-designed and community-led refugee sponsorship program that draws on the most successful aspects of the Canadian private sponsorship experience. Not only would this enable Australians to play a greater part in helping those fleeing conflict and persecution, it would also positively enhance Australia's international reputation on responding to forced migration. Community sponsorship can be the catalyst to enrich civic life in the communities in which it takes place and also foster social cohesion and the participation of humanitarian migrants in those communities.

Concerns with current Community Support Program

Australia's current private sponsorship program for refugees, the Community Support Program (CSP), is not designed to encourage widespread community participation in the welcoming and supporting of refugees. Instead, it essentially operates as a very expensive family reunion program that risks placing serious financial pressure on newly arrived refugee families who are desperate to reunite with loved ones still living in conflict or in limbo overseas. High government visa fees and other intermediary fees mean that sponsoring a family of five could cost over \$100,000, with only half of that money actually going to provide material support to the family involved.¹ The CSP engages criteria which risks excluding those refugees who are in most urgent and desperate need of resettlement, including criteria with respect to 'employability', English language proficiency, age, and country of origin.² Finally, places within the CSP are not in addition to the government-funded Refugee and Humanitarian Program, which means the 1,000 visa places made available under the CSP reduce the number of places for government-funded resettlement – places which should be reserved for the most vulnerable refugees in need of resettlement.

A better way – our proposed model

There is a better way to involve the Australian community in sponsoring and welcoming refugees to Australia. Drawing on best-practice from around the world, including Canada, we have designed a model for community refugee sponsorship which utilises the energy, resources and social capital of the wider community to successfully welcome more refugees to Australia each year.

¹ We estimate the cost could be as high as \$108,000 assuming that income support is required for the first 12 months post arrival.

² Refugees must come from certain priority countries and/or groups in order to access visas under this scheme in addition to having satisfied that they are indeed refugees and in need of international protection.

It builds on four key policy objectives:

- Expanding the number of refugees³ who can rebuild their lives in Australia each year beyond those who enter under the government-funded humanitarian migration program
- Ensuring that those most vulnerable and in need of resettlement as a durable solution (as determined by UNHCR) are prioritised for resettlement to Australia under this program
- Enabling diaspora communities to resettle particular individuals (including family members) in a way that is deeply supported by the involvement of members of the broader local community in which they live⁴
- Fostering connectedness, cohesion and community revitalisation within Australian communities

Our model eliminates exorbitant visa and intermediary fees and reduces the cost of sponsorship so that it reflects the actual cost of supporting the sponsored refugee(s) in their first year in Australia – making sponsorship more attractive and accessible to would-be sponsors from the Australian community.

Community members who would like to sponsor a refugee or refugee family would need to form a group of at least five people under the auspice of an approved and registered non-profit Supporting Community Organisation. The group must raise enough funds to support the basic needs of the sponsored refugee(s) during their first year in Australia (including income support, if needed) while also helping with the new arrivals settle in their new community. Professional settlement organisations would play a role in training and supporting sponsor groups, utilising training guides and resources developed at a national level.

³ The term 'refugee' in this paper refers to any person who would qualify for a visa under the existing Australian refugee and humanitarian program (visa subclasses 200, 201, 202 and 204)

⁴ This policy objective needs to be considered in the context of any future expansion of the Special Humanitarian Program and related policy settings



Our concerns with the current Community Support Program

CRSI has a number of concerns with respect to the current Community Support Program (CSP), a private refugee sponsorship scheme which commenced operation in early 2018.

Firstly, the program focuses on individuals or businesses being sponsors, rather than requiring the involvement of a group of individuals from the Australian community in the sponsorship. By only allowing lone individuals and/or businesses to act as sponsors, there is a risk of relationship breakdown, financial pressure and exploitation. In addition, this approach does not take advantage of the settlement and integration benefits entailed when there is broader community engagement with a newly arrived migrant or family.

Second, the costs associated with the scheme are prohibitively high. We estimate that the cost of sponsoring a family of five (two adults with three young children) could be more than \$100,000, including visa fees of around \$30,000, intermediary fees of up to \$20,000⁵ and an assurance of support of around \$35,000 to cover income support for the sponsored family, to the extent to which they rely on social security in the first 12 months of arrival.

Third, the CSP currently gives priority to applicants who are: (i) considered 'job ready'; (ii) are from certain priority countries; (iii) have 'adequate English'; and (iv) are willing to settle in regional areas of Australia. The 'job ready' and English requirements are likely to privilege those with the highest education and skill levels, rather than those in most desperate and urgent need of resettlement. The country-of-origin requirements also may function to preclude those in most urgent need of resettlement.

Finally, the CSP program currently sits within the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, which has a fixed annual visa quota, resulting in the privatisation of part of the government's pre-existing resettlement commitment. The 1,000 visa places made available under the CSP are deducted from the number of refugees who will be offered resettlement in Australia through the government-funded program, rather than enlarging the number of refugees who can rebuild their lives in safety in Australia each year.

What lessons can Australia learn from Canada?

Australia has much to learn from Canada's experience over the past 40 years with its community sponsorship program.⁶ In Canada, private sponsorship of refugees (PSR) has been part of the resettlement landscape since the Indochinese refugee crisis in the late 1970s and is estimated to have resettled more than 300,000 refugees since. Typically, this has occurred via religious, ethnic, community, or service organisations who are Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) or Groups of Five (five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents). All sponsors agree to give 'emotional and financial support to the refugee for the full sponsorship period' and raise the equivalent of one year of social security, which is held in a trust account and paid to the sponsored refugees to meet their settlement expenses. The required cash amount can be reduced by in-kind commitments of housing, clothing, furniture, household goods and food.

Canada's most effective and high-functioning Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) provide a good model for community sponsorship partnerships in Australia. These SAHs bring together:

- Trained and supported volunteers from the broader community
- Close connections with refugee communities
- Clear and effective settlement plans developed in partnership with local settlement agencies
- Partnerships with businesses to help refugees find employment
- Fundraising programs to gather the support required for their sponsorship work
- High standards of accountability, lodging high quality sponsorship applications with government and monitoring the work of partners and volunteers to ensure that sponsorship undertakings are met

A clear lesson from Canada is that members of the broader community who are contributing to, and engaged in, community sponsorship programs want their efforts to add to the government's existing commitments to refugee resettlement. They do not want governments to use their goodwill as a means of saving money on pre-existing commitments and will be less likely to engage with the program if their efforts do not add to the national refugee response.⁷

⁵ These are the fees charged by 'Approved Proposing Organisations', through which all applications must be made. APOs set their own fees for providing this service, with some charging up to \$20,000 for a family of five.

⁶ For a full outline of what Australia can learn from the Canadian community sponsorship program see <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/reports/canada-private-sponsorship/>

⁷ See <http://ccrweb.ca/en/private-sponsorship-refugees>



Parliament on King

Parliament on King

Parliament on King

A Better Way: The Proposed Model

We have developed an alternative model for community refugee sponsorship in Australia which draws upon the best aspects of the Canadian community sponsorship experience. Adoption of the below model could allow Australia to develop a world-renowned community refugee sponsorship program at minimal cost to the tax-payer. In doing so, Australia could enhance its humanitarian response to forced migration significantly and in a way which would facilitate the efficient and deep integration of refugees into the Australian community. It would also provide an opportunity to leverage the compassion and generosity of Australians to meet Australia's international responsibilities to support refugees in need of protection.

We urge policy makers to consult with interested community members and refugees in designing the more detailed features of Australia's community refugee sponsorship program and would be happy to facilitate such an exchange.

A better, fairer Community Refugee Sponsorship Program should focus on the following four key policy objectives:

- Expanding the number of refugees⁸ who can rebuild their lives in Australia each year beyond those who enter under the government-funded humanitarian migration program
- Ensuring that those most vulnerable and in need of resettlement as a durable solution (as determined by UNHCR) are prioritised for resettlement to Australia under this program
- Enabling diaspora communities to resettle particular individuals (including family members) in a way that is deeply supported by the involvement of members of the broader local community in which they live⁹
- Fostering connectedness, cohesion and community revitalisation within Australian communities

The below outlines the key feature of our proposed model for a truly community-led refugee sponsorship program in Australia.

1. Community sponsorship places are in addition to the Refugee and Humanitarian Program

We propose that a community refugee sponsorship program be developed outside of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program quota. Starting at 1,000 places, the program could grow over five years to allow the sponsorship of 10,000 people per annum.

2. Who can be sponsored?

Community sponsorship should provide resettlement opportunities for those in most urgent need of resettlement as identified by UNHCR, as well as those seeking family reunion in Australia and those who Australian employers may wish to sponsor.

Sponsored refugees should be required to meet the eligibility criteria for one of the existing visa subclasses in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, namely:

- Those found to be a refugee by UNHCR (*Refugee visa*, subclass 200)
- Those who are otherwise subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of their human rights in their home country (*Special Humanitarian Program*, subclass 202)
- Those who qualify for an *In-Country Special Humanitarian visa* (subclass 201)
- *Women at Risk* (subclass 204)

Sponsored refugees should not be selected based on their employability, English language ability, religion, age or any other characteristic unrelated to their protection needs or the nature of their relationship with their proposed sponsor. Priority should be given to those identified by UNHCR as in most urgent need of resettlement by quarantining at least half of the quota for this program for UNHCR-referred refugees.

⁸ The term 'refugee' in this paper refers to any person who would qualify for a visa under the existing Australian refugee and humanitarian program (visa subclasses 200, 201, 202 and 204)

⁹ This policy objective needs to be considered in the context of any future expansion of the Special Humanitarian Program and related policy settings

The remaining places would be available for ‘named’ refugees (those who are proposed by individuals in Australia, such as a family or community members, or in some cases, a business). There should be no restrictions on where a refugee is from or is currently residing, provided they can demonstrate their ongoing need for protection and resettlement, as per the existing visa criteria for the relevant subclass.

3. Who can sponsor?

Those individuals wishing to sponsor refugees would form a group (sponsor group) under the auspices of a registered non-profit organisation such as an incorporated community association, local council, religious organisation or other not for profit organisation). Such registered non-profit organisations are referred to in this paper as ‘Supporting Community Organisations’ or ‘SCOs’. The term ‘sponsor’ is used in this paper to refer to the sponsor group working under the auspices of an SCO.

SCOs should be non-profit associations registered in an Australian state or territory. Together the SCOs and sponsor group must be able to demonstrate capacity to raise funds and support settlement for the first year and must undergo training on refugee settlement before being approved. This training could be provided by experienced settlement service providers.

Each sponsorship group would require at least five members who live in the same geographic community and must also:

- include individuals who are not related to the refugee(s) to be sponsored and who are well-established members of their local community;
- be able to collectively demonstrate (through the details of a ‘sponsorship agreement’) an ability to provide practical support to the sponsored individual(s) upon arrival; and
- have raised sufficient funds to reimburse the government for income support provided to the beneficiary through Centrelink in first 12 months in Australia.

In view of the potential for a high level of interest in a well-constructed community refugee sponsorship program, the Australian Government should set high standards for organisations and individuals wishing to engage in community sponsorship of refugees. SCOs must be expected to meet clear benchmarks for financial accountability, screening and training of volunteers and staff, as well as integrity and support to the refugees they sponsor. This should be set out in a sponsorship agreement between the sponsor group, the SCO and the Government. A reputable organisation with experience in providing professional refugee settlement services would train and support sponsor groups and SCOs.

What about individuals?

Individuals are vital to a successful community sponsorship model. However, we believe that the responsibility of sponsoring refugees should not rest on a single individual alone. There is a risk that people may no longer be able to provide ongoing support, or that there may be a breakdown in the relationship between an individual sponsor and refugee. As such, individuals wishing to sponsor a refugee should do so as a member of a larger sponsorship group involving other volunteers working under the auspices of a Supporting Community Organisation.

Aside from the risk associated with reliance on individual sponsors, we believe that a successful community sponsorship model should involve the wider community in the settlement process. The current model of private sponsorship in Australia essentially operates as a de-facto family reunion program, placing significant pressure on family members (many of whom are newly settled refugees themselves) to raise the substantial funds and provide support on arrival. While family reunion for refugee families is an urgent issue that must be addressed, a community refugee sponsorship program should not be primarily about families simply sponsoring other family members without broader community involvement. A program that only engages family members as sponsors cannot offer refugees the access to the level of support and social capital that can be provided by a larger group of sponsors from the broader local community.

Former refugees wishing to sponsor the migration of their family members to Australia could do so within the program we propose under the auspices of an SCO with other volunteers from the broader community becoming involved in the sponsor group. By involving members of the broader local community in sponsorship groups, people in Australia wishing to sponsor their family members would not have to bear the entire financial or practical responsibilities of sponsorship. Under this model, former refugees in Australia can also help identify those in need of resettlement, supporting the community sponsors to connect with refugees overseas.

What about businesses?

Businesses also play a vital role in the sponsorship and settlement process. However, we believe that businesses working on their own are not well placed to provide ongoing settlement support and assistance for sponsored refugees. Where businesses can provide financial support and employment opportunities, they should partner with an SCO and a broader group of volunteers (which may include the employees of the business) to undertake the sponsorship and be required to fulfil the same criteria as other sponsorship groups. This will ensure that the sponsored individual/family receives the full range of settlement support they need, not just employment.

Businesses offering employment to sponsored refugees should be able to offer this employment as an offset to the costs which the sponsor group is expected to raise. Under this model, if a business employs a refugee, the sponsor group would not have to raise funds to cover the costs of government income support for the period in which the person is likely to be employed. However, if a person does not continue employment and requires income support through Centrelink in their first 12 months in Australia, the cost of this would be reimbursed by the sponsor group. Where a business provides employment to a sponsored refugee, the refugee employee should be afforded the same wages, conditions and rights as other employees in Australia.

Aside from being involved in sponsor groups, some businesses also wish to donate funds to help cover the costs of sponsorship by other sponsor groups – this should be permitted and encouraged.

4. Who pays for what and how much should it cost?

Our proposed model of community sponsorship contemplates the sponsor group covering the costs of airfares and medical checks prior to the sponsored refugee's arrival in Australia, as well as their basic needs in their first 12 months of living in Australia. This should include the cost of setting up a household, rent, food and other basic living expenses.

Our proposed model eliminates government visa fees and the fees currently charged by Approved Proposing Organisations under the CSP. Eliminating these fees would reduce the cost of sponsoring a family of five to between \$20,000 and \$50,000, depending on the extent to which income support is required in the first year after arrival. This compares with a potential cost of over \$100,000 under the current CSP. The cost of sponsoring an individual would be between \$7,000 and \$20,000, depending on the period of income support required. The cost of sponsorship could be further reduced if sponsors are able to provide in-kind support such as free accommodation or furniture. Our model anticipates the provision of government funding for the development of national sponsorship resources, community capacity building and localised training and support for sponsor groups.

Pre-arrival costs

Sponsors should be expected to cover the costs of airfares and medical checks required before arriving in Australia. This will vary depending on where the person is located and the cost of certain medical checks. On average, this will likely cost around \$2,000 per person.

On-arrival support

Once the sponsored individual/family arrives, the sponsors should be expected to provide initial short-term accommodation, furniture, appliances, basic essentials, and have funds available for other costs involved with establishing a home. This is likely to cost around \$5,000 per family group. Where sponsors are able to provide these items in-kind, this can offset the amount they are expected to raise for on-arrival support.

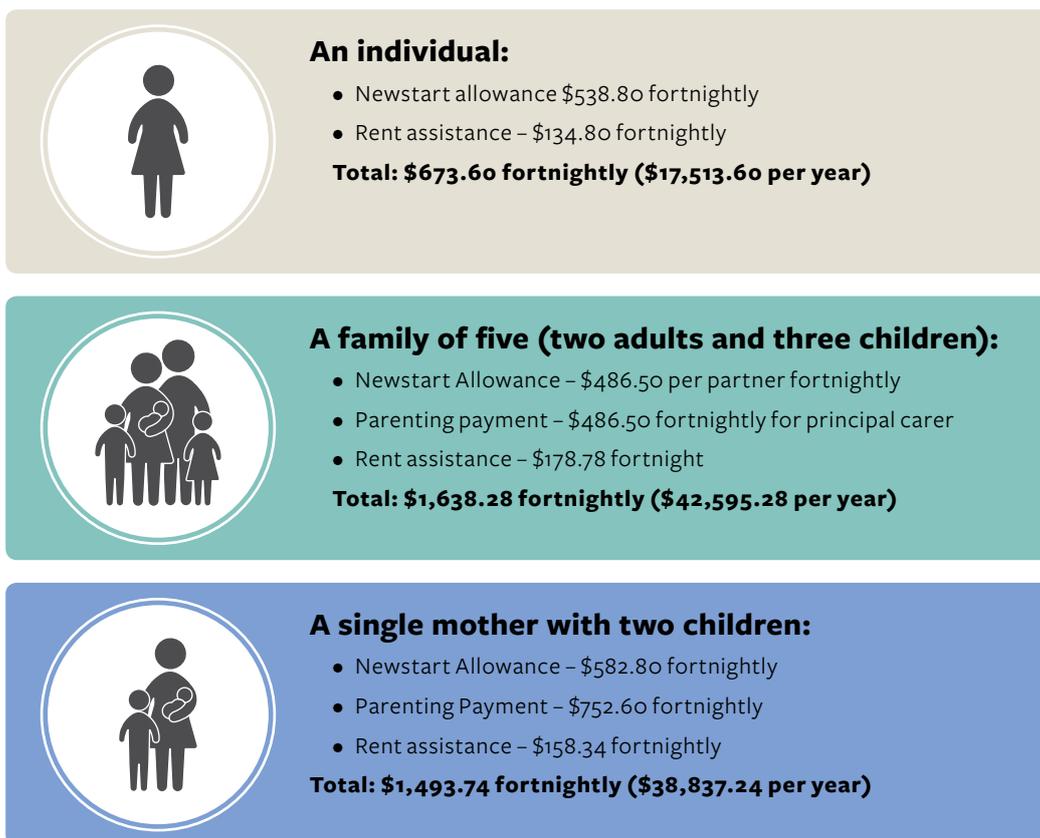
Income support

Sponsored refugees should have access to income support including rent assistance, on par with other permanent migrants and refugees. Income support payments would be paid to the sponsored refugee by the government through the usual Centrelink procedures.

However, the sponsor group would be expected to raise funds to cover the amount of income support that may be required by the refugee for the first 12 months. This money would be raised prior to the sponsorship being approved and would be held in trust by the SCO, with the Federal Government entitled to bill the SCO to recover these costs at the end of the 12-month sponsorship period.

This will ensure that sponsored refugees have reliable access to income support through a pre-existing and regulated national mechanism. It will also reduce the administrative burden on organisations and will help to minimise difficulties arising between sponsors and refugees with respect to income support, as well as minimising the potential for exploitation or fraud.

The following is an overview of the levels of income support that will likely be required for individuals and family groups:¹⁰



Where refugees do not require income support to the level of the funds held in trust (for example, because they are able to find full-time employment within the first year), any un-used remaining funds can be used by the sponsor group or Supporting Community Organisation to sponsor other refugees or repaid to the individual members of the sponsor group in proportion to their original contributions. This system would create an incentive for sponsor groups to help refugees become financially independent as soon as possible.

Accommodation

Sponsors should provide initial short-term accommodation and help refugees find long-term accommodation, preferably on arrival. At the very least, sponsors would need to raise funds to cover the cost of rent assistance provided to sponsored refugees through Centrelink (outlined above). However, if the sponsor group is able to provide suitable free accommodation acceptable to the sponsored individual/family and meeting minimum government requirements, the sponsor group would not be required to raise funds to cover Centrelink rent assistance payments.

Other social security supports

Sponsored refugees should have access to Medicare, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, primary and secondary education, the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), Federal employment services (DJSB), Commonwealth supported university places and the Higher Education Loan Program, on par with refugees resettled through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. These costs should be borne by the Australian Government.

After one year of settlement, sponsored refugees should continue to receive social security support from the government, on par with refugees resettled through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

¹⁰ These figures are estimates calculated in April 2018 based on income support entitlements as at that time.

5. Settlement support

Sponsors should be responsible for providing settlement support during the first 12 months after arrival. This should include, at a minimum, practical support on par with the services provided by settlement service providers to other resettled refugees under the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). This includes meeting families at the airport, providing short term accommodation and support to find long term accommodation, orientation support, enrolling in school and the AMEP program and eventually finding employment.

Settlement support may also include the following, depending on the needs of the individual(s) involved:

- Provision of an initial food and essential items package
- Assistance to register with Centrelink and Medicare and to open bank account(s)
- Addressing health needs
- Instructions on what to do in an emergency situation and how to access interpreting services
- Orientation to local services and public transport
- Awareness of Australian customs and cultural norms
- Support to access mainstream services, including health and family support services
- Connections to local community groups and activities
- Help to enroll in relevant education and training and recognise pre-arrival skills and qualifications
- Assistance to engage with employment services, implement employment strategies and access support services for establishing a business
- Weekly contact with opportunities for English language conversation
- Informal translating and interpreting services when not otherwise available

It is anticipated that sponsor groups will provide this support themselves through the efforts of their own members and other community volunteers where required. It is expected that sponsor groups and SCOs will have an array of personal networks which they are able to draw upon to support sponsored refugees in their settlement journey. As discussed above, sponsor groups and SCOs would be required to undergo training from a professional settlement service provider before being approved to engage in refugee sponsorship.

Sponsored refugees should also have access to the Translating and Interpreting Service and specialised torture and trauma counselling where needed, on par with other resettled refugees. This should be funded by the Australian Government.

After one year of settlement, sponsored refugees would be eligible to receive additional settlement support through the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support program and other services, on par with refugees resettled through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

6. Supporting Community Organisations (SCOs)

The Supporting Community Organisation (SCO) would play a crucial linking role between sponsor groups (comprising individuals) and the Australian Government. SCOs in effect underwrite the commitments made by sponsor groups, offering the government access to a registered legal entity in the community that can vouch for capacity of the sponsor group, assist the sponsor group where required and step in to assume the responsibilities of the sponsor group in the event that there is a breakdown in the sponsorship. Together the SCOs and members of the sponsor group must raise the necessary funds, undergo settlement training and demonstrate their capacity to support settlement for the first year. SCOs and sponsor groups would also need to establish a relationship with a professional settlement service provider in order to have a resource to approach for advice and assistance when they are unsure of how to handle certain issues during the 12 month sponsorship period.

SCOs could include registered not for profit organisations such as community associations, faith-based organisations, sporting clubs, schools or universities.

In the event that the sponsorship is driven by an employment opportunity in Australia, the employer would partner with individual volunteers and an SCO to ensure that the responsibilities of sponsorship are shared across a number of actors in the community.

7. Resources, training, and support for sponsors

Training materials and know-how resources should be developed by a single body at a national level, such as a government-funded not for profit organisation.

This body should be staffed by individuals with expertise in refugee settlement and related services in Australia, to ensure that the training materials and know-how resources are adequate to ensure that sponsor groups are well-prepared to meet the needs of those whom they sponsor and have a sound understanding of the relevant services available to sponsored refugees in the community.

These national training materials would be made available to professional settlement service providers (which might include organisations that are currently Approved Proposing Organisations under the CSP) in proximate locations to the sponsoring group. These local professionals would be tasked with providing pre-sponsorship training and related certification to sponsor groups and SCOs as well as supplementing the national training resources with local know-how.

These professional settlement service providers would also be a resource for sponsors and SCOs to call on as they prepare their sponsorship applications and in the event that advice is required during the first 12 months of settlement.

8. Application support and difference between UNHCR and named refugees

As mentioned above, both UNHCR referred refugees and 'named refugees' (refugees proposed by community members in Australia) will be eligible for community sponsorship. However, at least 50% of the program should be set aside for UNHCR referred refugees, in order to ensure priority for the most vulnerable refugees. UNHCR referred refugees also require less administrative processing, as UNHCR does their refugee status determination and assesses their need for resettlement. As such, the Australian Government does not need to re-assess the person's refugee claim (as is currently the practice with all UNHCR referred refugees). UNHCR referred refugees will simply need to be matched to a suitable sponsor (discussed in the following section).

However, many community members in Australia may also wish to sponsor a refugee whom they know or have a connection to, such as a family member, ethnic community member or similar relationship. For this process, the refugee would need to apply for and meet the criteria for one of the humanitarian visas set out above (as is currently the practice with any proposed refugee). Sponsors will need to support the refugee applicant to complete their required paperwork. A key element of this application is proving that they are a refugee or otherwise subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of their human rights in their home country. While a sponsor group may be able to complete this form with their nominated refugee relatively easily, they may wish to utilise the services of a migration agent. Guidelines on cost estimates and expected services should be provided to sponsors to avoid any unscrupulous migration agents taking advantage of sponsors.

9. Sponsor matching and approval

Sponsor groups and their applications would be vetted by the Australian Government before approval. Approved sponsorship applications would be recorded by the Australian Government (immigration office) in a database which identifies the characteristics of the sponsorship circumstances on offer. Named refugees proposed by a sponsor group will already be matched with their sponsors. However, refugees who are referred to the Government for resettlement by UNHCR can then be matched with appropriate sponsors, with sponsors given a short period of time in which to confirm their willingness to proceed with the sponsorship.

10. Sponsorship monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring of sponsorship arrangements would be conducted by the training organisation referred to above. Monitoring could involve separate discussions with both the sponsor group and the sponsored refugee(s) at two points in the sponsorship period – after one month and after six months – to identify and help the parties address any issues of concern.

The Australian Government would work with the full spectrum of stakeholders to evaluate the program after its first year and then on an ongoing basis.

11. Sponsorship promotion and development

The federal government would fund a single body to promote sponsorship across Australia and, through partnerships with settlement service providers and others, cultivate the creation of sponsor groups in Australian communities.

In the early stages a 'clustered' approach could be taken, which focuses on capacity building in key communities that have expressed an interest in settling refugees, though overseas experience suggests that clusters of sponsors are likely to develop organically in key locations (which may or not be the same as those which are targets for strategic capacity building).

12. Funding summary

Sponsor group:

- Pre arrival expenses (roughly \$2,000 per person plus migration agent fees, where required (allow up to \$5,000))
- On arrival support (roughly \$5,000 per family unit)
- Income support (repayment of any Centrelink support at the end of the first 12 months up to \$18,000 for an individual (including rent assistance), \$43,000 for a family of 5, or \$39,000 for a single parent with two children)

Note: Sponsors would not be required to pay any substantial government visa fees.

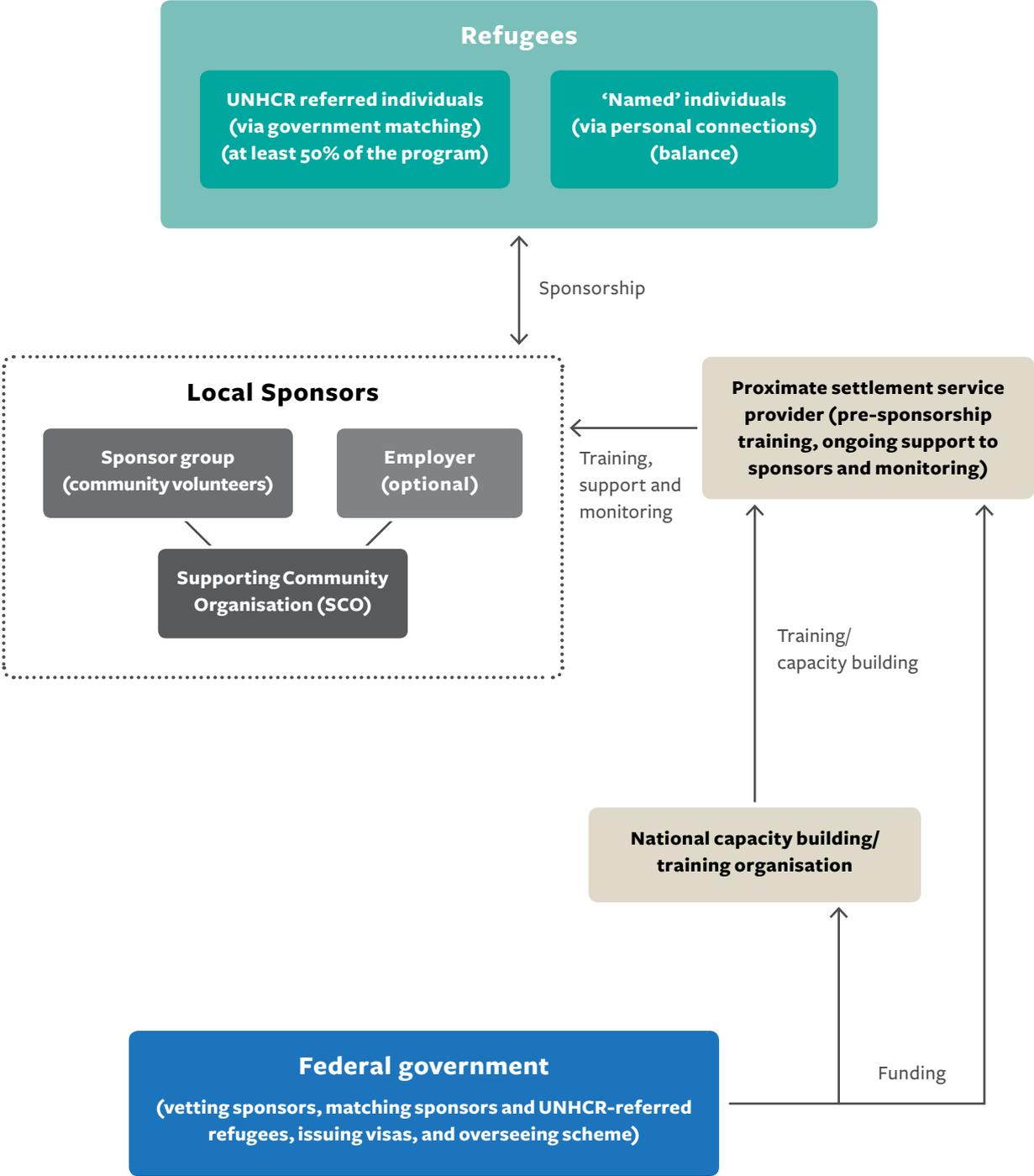
A small administrative fee could be used to prevent spurious applications.

Federal government:

- National body to engage in capacity building and develop national training materials
- Support for a network of settlement service providers to train, support and monitor sponsor groups in relevant communities
- Vetting of sponsorship groups/applications
- Participation of sponsored refugees in federally funded programs identified above (eg AMEP, Medicare, DJSB programs, NDIS, higher education support)



APPENDIX 1: Overview of sponsorship model proposed by CRSI



APPENDIX 2: Key features of sponsorship model proposed by CRSI

1. Who can be sponsored?

Individuals meeting eligibility criteria for under the existing Refugee and Humanitarian Program including:

- Those found to be refugees by UNHCR (the Refugee visa, subclass 200)
- Those who are otherwise subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of their human rights in their home country (the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP), subclass 202)
- Those who satisfy the criteria for related visa categories (ie subclass 201 (In-Country Special Humanitarian), and 204 (Women at Risk))

At least 50% of the quota for this program should be quarantined for UNHCR-referred refugees, with the balance available for 'named' refugees (primarily family reunion scenarios but also potentially employment-related sponsorships)

2. Who can be a sponsor?

Sponsorship would be undertaken by groups of individual volunteers under the auspices of a registered Australian not for profit organisation (a Supporting Community Organisation).

Each sponsorship group would require at least five members who live in the same geographic community and must also:

- include individuals who are not related to the refugee(s) to be sponsored and who are well-established members of their local community;
- be able to collectively demonstrate (through the details of a 'sponsorship agreement') an ability to provide practical support to the sponsored individual(s) upon arrival; and
- have raised sufficient funds to reimburse the government for income support provided to the beneficiary through Centrelink in their first 12 months in Australia.

In the case of businesses wishing to employ and sponsor a refugee, the above individual criteria would still need to be satisfied with the business acting as one member of the sponsorship group. This would mean the business working with individuals from its staff community or from outside the business to collectively meet the obligations of the sponsorship group.

3. What are the obligations of a sponsor?

To pay for expenses associated with migration and the first 12 months in Australia such as:

- pre-departure medical checks
- flights to Australia
- costs of establishing a home
- living expenses until employment and/or income support is in place (with any subsequent Centrelink support for the first 12 months to be reimbursed by the sponsorship group to the government)

Provide practical support to refugees in the first 12 months of arrival, which should be, at a minimum, on par with the support provided under the Humanitarian Settlement Program. This includes:

- airport reception
- on-arrival accommodation and property induction
- provision of an initial food and essential items package
- assistance to register with Centrelink, Medicare and open bank account(s)
- addressing health needs
- instructions of what to do in an emergency situation and how to access interpreting services
- orientation to local services and public transport
- awareness of Australian customs and cultural norms
- assistance to source long-term accommodation
- support to access mainstream services, including health and family support services
- connections to local community groups and activities
- support to register with the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and attend lessons
- help to enroll in relevant education and training and recognise pre-arrival skills and qualifications
- assistance to engage with employment services, implement employment strategies and access support services for establishing a business.
- weekly contact with opportunities for English language conversation
- informal translating and interpreting services when not otherwise available

4. What government-funded services would sponsored refugees be entitled to receive?

Sponsored refugees would have access to the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) as well as universal/mainstream services made available by the federal government including:

- Medicare
- Federal employment services (ie range of programs overseen by Department of Jobs and Small Business (DJSB))
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- Commonwealth supported university places and the Higher Education Loan Program

5. What is the role of the Supporting Community Organisation?

The Supporting Community Organisation (SCO) would play a crucial linking role between sponsor groups (comprising individuals) and the federal government. SCOs in effect underwrite the commitments made by sponsors, offering the government access to a registered legal entity in the community that can vouch for capacity of the sponsor group, assist the sponsor group where required and step in to assume the responsibilities of the sponsor group in the event that there is a breakdown in the sponsorship arrangements. Together the SCOs and members of the sponsor group must be able to demonstrate capacity to raise funds and support settlement for the first year, and would undergo training on refugee settlement before being approved. SCOs and sponsor groups would also need to establish a relationship with a professional settlement service provider in order to have a resource to approach for advice and assistance when they are unsure of how to handle certain issues during the 12 month sponsorship period.

SCOs could include organisations such as community associations, faith-based organisations, sporting clubs, schools or universities.

In the event that the sponsorship is driven by an employment opportunity in Australia, the employer would partner with an SCO to ensure that the responsibilities of sponsorship are shared across a number of actors in the community.

6. Who will develop the know-how resources for sponsors?

Training materials and know-how resources should be developed by a single body at a national level, such as a government-funded not for profit organisation.

This body should be staffed by individuals with expertise in refugee settlement and related services in Australia, to ensure that the training will result in sponsor groups being well-prepared to meet the needs of those whom they sponsor and have a sound understanding of the relevant services available to sponsored refugees in the community.

This central body would share training materials with settlement service providers within or proximate to the sponsoring group who would provide pre-sponsorship training and related certification to sponsor groups and SCOs.

7. Who will train and support sponsors?

Training would be provided in key locations by organisations with expertise in settlement of humanitarian migrants (such as settlement service providers or organisations that are currently Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs) under the CSP).

Training would draw on the nationally established resources, supplemented by the training providers who would supplement this national material with local know-how.

These organisations would also be a resource for sponsors and SCOs to call on as they prepare their sponsorship applications and in the event that advice is required during the first 12 months of settlement.

8. Who will vet sponsors and sponsorship applications?

Sponsor groups and their applications would be vetted by the federal government.

9. How will UNHCR-referred refugees be 'matched' with sponsors?

Approved sponsorship applications would be recorded by the federal government (immigration office) in a database which identifies the characteristics of the sponsorship circumstances on offer. As refugees are referred to the government for resettlement by UNHCR, they can then be matched with appropriate sponsors, with sponsors given a short period of time in which to confirm their willingness to proceed with the sponsorship.

10. How will sponsorship arrangements be monitored and the program evaluated?

Monitoring of sponsorship arrangements would be conducted by the training organisation referred to above. Monitoring could involve separate discussions with both the sponsor group and the sponsored refugee(s) at two points in the sponsorship period – after one month and after 6 months – to identify and help the parties address any issues of concern.

The federal government would work with the full spectrum of stakeholders to evaluate the program after its first year and then on an ongoing basis.

11. Who will promote sponsorship and develop sponsorship capacity in local communities?

The federal government should fund a single body to promote sponsorship across Australia and, through partnerships with settlement service providers and others, cultivate the creation of sponsor groups in Australian communities.

In the early stages a ‘clustered’ approach could be taken, which focuses on capacity building in key communities that have expressed an interest in settling refugees, though overseas experience suggests that clusters of sponsors are likely to develop organically in key locations (which may or not be the same as those which are targets for strategic capacity building).

12. Funding: Who pays for what?

Sponsor group:

- Pre arrival expenses (roughly \$2,000 per person plus migration agent fees, where required (allow up to \$5,000))
- On arrival support (roughly \$5,000 per family unit)
- Income support (repayment of any Centrelink support at the end of the first 12 months up to \$18,000 for an individual (including rent assistance), \$43,000 for a family of 5, or \$39,000 for a single parent with two children)

Note: Sponsors would not be required to pay any substantial government visa fees. A small administrative fee could be used to prevent spurious applications.

Federal government:

- National capacity building function and development of national training materials
- Support for a network of settlement service providers to train, support and monitor sponsor groups in relevant communities
- Vetting of sponsorship groups/applications
- Participation of sponsored refugees in federally funded programs identified above (eg AMEP, Medicare, DJSB programs, NDIS, higher education support)

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