

# Community spirit recognised

By EMMAMANSER

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SWAN Hill Uniting Church Community Issues Group (SHUCCIG) will receive a top award for their work with refugees at an awards night next week.

Regional business organisation Champions of the Bush will bring their Spirit of Entrepreneurship awards to Swan Hill on October 18, with the local group receiving the Community Spirit award.

SHUCCIG convener Jill Pattenden and secretary Jan Ellemor said their work with refugees ranged from finding them a suitable home, to gathering furniture and whitegoods, to food drops.

Ms Pattenden said when many refugees arrived in the local community they did not have any belongings and very little money.

Although there were now more families living in the local community, Ms Pattenden said many of the refugees in Swan Hill were single men with hopes to one day be able to afford to bring their families to Australia.

Some of these families must spend several years apart before they can be reunited.

"I don't think people in Swan Hill really understand that...families have never experienced that separation — how can you live without your family?" Ms Pattenden said.

"For people to understand — that is very hard for people here.

"They have no idea about leaving family members in the middle of the night, family members may have even been killed."

Both Ms Pattenden and Ms Ellemor said the refugees usually held bridging visas and, under the visa conditions, often were not allowed to work, making it difficult to find accommodation — in particular a rental property — clothes and food.

*For more of this story see Friday's Guardian, (October 11).*