William Mude and Sally Baker

POSSIBILITIES OF EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS TO REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

A Personal Journey from Kakuma Refugee Camp to Australia

Forced Migration Studies

Collection Editors
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&
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Abstract

This book recounts the experiences of childhood in armed conflict settings in the Sudan, now known as South Sudan. It discusses the displacements and disruptions caused by war, including the necessity to flee and seek refuge in exile. The book focuses on the interruptions to early education and the challenges of accessing education in a refugee context. It explores the difficulties that refugees face in attaining education and the role of complementary educational pathways that allow them to pursue higher education. The book begins by examining how complementary education pathways provide vital opportunities for refugee students to complete higher education. It then recounts William's journey as a child in his village before and during the war, which led to his fleeing to a refugee camp in Uganda with his grandmother. William shares a narrative of challenges, but also highlights resilience in the face of adversity. He discusses his experience of relocating to Canada to pursue higher education through the World University Service of Canada (WUSC). The book addresses the challenges that he faced in finding employment as a student and the financial hardships he encountered. William later moved to Australia to complete a master's degree and subsequently earned a PhD. He started a family and actively contributed to his community, just like other people who have not experienced armed conflict. Throughout the book, recurring themes of hardship, resilience, and a sincere commitment to education and societal contribution are emphasised.

Key words

Refugees, Education, Resilience, Displacement, Conflict, Forced Migration, Community

Acknowledgements

William

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all those who have supported me throughout this incredible journey of writing this book. To my family, your unwavering love, encouragement, and belief in my abilities have been my greatest motivation. I am incredibly thankful to my wife, who has taken on the role of putting our four beautiful children to bed while I write this book. I am also grateful to Sally, my mentor, who challenged me to think critically and pushed me to write my part. Your guidance has been instrumental in shaping this work. To the readers of this book, thank you for your enthusiasm and interest in refugee education; your passion and desire fuel the writing of this book, a story which wouldn't have been told. This book is dedicated to all of you, and I hope it resonates with your hearts as much as it does with mine.

Sally

I want to thank my ever-patient family for giving me the time and space to co-write this book; thanks to my lovely and super-tolerant husband, Shane, and special gratitude to sweet Micah, who had to share me on a holiday in Japan with this manuscript. I also want to thank the ever-excellent Tim McLennan for his editorial support. And I want to thank my friends and colleagues on the Global Task Force for Third Country Education Pathways,

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Contents

Glossary of abbreviations

JRS	Jesuit Refugee Services
SRP	Student Refugee Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WUSC	World University Service of Canada
U of T	University of Toronto

List of figures

Preface

In a world marked by conflict and displacement, the stories of refugees often remain untold. The journey from crisis to opportunity can be obscured by the overwhelming statistics of suffering and loss. It is within this context that ***Possibilities of Educational Pathways to Refugee Resettlement*** emerges—a poignant narrative that personalises the experience of displacement through the lens of education and resilience.

This book is not just a story of survival; it is a testament to the transformative power of education in the lives of those who have been forced to flee their homes. William's journey from refugee camps in Uganda and Kenya to his successful education in Canada and Australia encapsulates the struggles and triumphs faced by countless refugees. His experiences reflect a broader narrative—a story shared by many who seek solace, stability, and a future amid uncertainty.

As we navigate the themes of hardship, resilience, and community contribution, we invite readers to recognise the unique potential of refugees to enrich societies. Education is a critical component of this potential. It can serve as a bridge from displacement to empowerment, enabling individuals to rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to their new communities.

This book is dedicated not only to those who have experienced the traumatic realities of conflict but also to those who support and advocate for their right to education and a brighter future.

It serves as a call to action, urging policymakers, educators, and communities to embrace and enhance complementary educational pathways that can lead refugees toward successful resettlement.

Through the intertwining stories of William, we hope to spark compassion, inspire change, and transform the narrative surrounding refugees. It is our sincere hope that this book resonates with your heart and ignites a collective commitment to support the resilience of refugees striving for education and a better life.

We thank you for joining us on this journey, and we trust that you will find inspiration and insight within these pages.

William Mude

Sally Baker

Learning objectives

By the end of this book, readers should be able to:

- Define who is a refugee, and what instruments, rights, and processes determine that status.
- Distinguish between state resettlement programs and complementary pathways.
- Identify a range of complementary pathways that are being developed to help create more durable solutions for refugees.
- Articulate the opportunities and challenges that are associated with complementary education pathways.

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The need for complementary education pathways for the growing numbers of refugees

Introduction

This book highlights the promise that education can offer to people who, through no fault of their own, are displaced by the threat of violence, persecution, or instability caused by armed conflicts. Education is a major and often unrealised source of security, capacity-building, future nation-rebuilding, and – most importantly – hope. Having access to schooling is a significant social determinant of health, and a key to unlocking opportunities. Having the possibility of accessing tertiary education, possibly with the chance of moving to another country, is a significant "pull factor" (World University Service Canada, 2024, *in personal communication*) for investment in education, both as a development aid strategy, and for families living in displacement contexts in which education is hard to come by.

Our intention in this book is to tell a story – specifically, William's story – about how being a refugee from Sudan and accessing a higher education "complementary pathway" to Canada, radically transformed his life and his future opportunities, which led to him saving thousands of lives as the only epidemiologist during COVID-19 in Northern Queensland (Australia). William's autobiography is a story of great sadness, violence, and seemingly insurmountable challenges, but also a love of learning and teaching, persistence, and community development, all underpinned by the emancipatory possibility of education.

Therefore, in this book, we offer a critical reflection on William's experience of seeking a safe and settled future through education. Our intention for you, the reader, is to be inspired to learn more and perhaps get involved in a refugee education program near you. While we write from an "Australia perspective", as both of us are based in Australia, we take a global perspective on the topic of refugee education and complementary resettlement pathways

An "unprecedented crisis": The global context of forced migration and displacement

This book is written at a time of unprecedented displacement and a growing number of crises. While migration is a consistent human characteristic, forced migration refers to the movement of people "who have been displaced by environmental disasters, conflict, famine, or large-scale development projects" (UNHCR, 2016, n.p.), and is therefore distinguishable from economic or voluntary migration.

In 2024, the number of forcibly displaced people has reached an unbelievable 120 million, and almost 40 million are refugees (UNHCR, 2024a). This does not mean that the remaining 80 million internally displaced persons do not want to seek refuge; instead, it reflects the scale of the challenge, and the complexity of assessing people's claims for protection.

Who is a refugee?

According to the definition set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention (hitherto referred to as "the Convention"), a refugee is a person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (United Nations General Assembly, 1951, p. 153). As of now, 149 countries have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, but 45 countries are not signatories to the Convention. This Convention establishes the rights of refugees and the legal obligations of states to protect them. Each country that has signed the Convention is bound to protect refugees on its territory and maintain the standards set out in international refugee law. In terms of providing education, for example, states that are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention are responsible for providing equitable access to education for refugees, ensuring non-discrimination, and the integration of refugee students into national educational systems. They must also protect the rights of refugee children, offer necessary support services, and collaborate with organisations to allocate resources effectively for quality education.

Who is an asylum seeker?

Seeking asylum is a human right enshrined in the Convention, and in international refugee law. An asylum seeker is someone who has sought refuge and who has lodged, or intends to lodge, an application for protection, but who hasn't been assessed or legally recognised yet as a refugee.

Who is responsible for assisting refugees?

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the global organisation that partners with states and other stakeholders, with the task of "saving lives, protecting rights, and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people" (UNHCR, n.d.-a). The UNHCR was created and established by statute by the UN General Assembly in 1950 (UNHCR, n.d.-a). In addition to providing global advocacy, assistance, and monitoring to displaced peoples, the UNHCR also works to find solutions for refugees to move out of what can be protracted and lengthy displacement contexts.

What are protection needs?

Protection needs refer to a person's need for access to the rights and responsibilities outlined in the Convention. The Convention includes established processes for determining whether a person is a refugee (according to the definition). Signatory states must meet the tenets of international refugee law, including ensuring that refugees can access a country to seek protection, and adhering to the principle of non-refoulement (or forcible return).

What is a country of asylum?

A country of asylum is a nation that grants refuge to people who are fleeing persecution, conflict, or violence in their home countries. Asylum provides individuals with protection against being returned to a place where they may face serious threats to their safety or freedom. The process typically involves an application for asylum, where individuals must demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution based on factors such as race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. At the time of writing, there are active violent conflicts in Sudan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Gaza, while the impacts of climate change, and a heating world, are also wreaking havoc and forcing people to move to seek safety. According to a report, these crises are, in turn, placing severe strain on the neighbouring countries to these conflicts, which include Uganda and Ethiopia in Africa; Turkey and Lebanon in the Middle East; and Pakistan and Iran in Asia (UNHCR, 2024a). In the same report, the UNHCR speculates that 75 per cent of refugees (approximately 30 million) live in states neighbouring these countries, and the majority of these states are low- and middle-income countries. With the size of the global displaced community, these numbers mean that neighbouring countries need to divert scarce resources from their citizens, all of which can build resentment and negativity towards asylum seekers and refugees. Further, the challenges of so many people seeking asylum, especially in countries that are not signatories to the Convention, mean that many people seeking asylum live in insecure conditions and with limited legal rights, and even in some countries that are signatories to the Convention, refugees

are excluded from services, such as healthcare, education, and employment.

The remaining 22 per cent of refugees live in camps or temporary shelters. Camps are established to meet the basic needs of people as they flee, including food and water, shelter, and medical treatment (UNHCR, 2024b). In longer-term contexts, camps may develop the infrastructure to deliver education and work opportunities. In protracted conflict situations, generations of refugees may live in camps. One of the oldest refugee camps, Kakuma in Kenya, is the camp from which William applied to study in Canada (see Chapter 3).

Responding to the increasing scale of displacement

Violent conflict and natural disasters are, sadly, an increasing feature of contemporary life. The impacts of climate change have also created predictable regional instability, which will also create forced migration as people's homes become unliveable. Awareness of displacement and refugee issues has also gained attention, in ways that raise awareness of the need to do more, but also in ways that demonise and fuel divisive rhetoric and discourse.

Since the war in Syria escalated in 2012, there has been a concurrent oppositional narrative playing out in the media. On the one hand, the far-right, populist politics of the decade – which saw Trump first elected in the USA, and Britain's departure from the European Union – relied heavily on anti-immigration rhetoric. The divisive messages that were used by right-wing politicians

described "swarms" of refugees and other dehumanising words or imagery that portray an infestation or a flooding. On the other hand, the enhanced visibility of crises through the distribution of stories, videos, and images via social media has also helped to raise awareness of refugees and forced displacement. The media frenzy and heightened awareness of forced migration because of the Syrian "refugee crisis" peaked in 2015 with the global publication of the image of the body of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Kurdish refugee who had drowned off the coast of Turkey. The sight of his body, which had washed up on a Turkish beach, seemed to shock the world into renewed action.

There were many, varied responses to the "crisis", at different levels of government and institutional governance. At the global level, a leaders' summit was hosted in New York to encourage more coordinated action and global responsibility sharing for refugees. Over 50 leaders attended and pledged an additional $4.5 billion of assistance (United Nations, 2016). Other levels of response echoed this urgency, with resettlement states like Australia creating additional humanitarian intakes specifically for Syrians. Similar patterns are observable with Afghans following the fall of Kabul in 2021. Likewise, institutions with a connection to immigration, like universities, were also able to practically assist by offering pathways and programs to facilitate access to higher education (see below).

While reactive, such responses to "new" crises can help to meaningfully shift the dial with regard to raising awareness of the global humanitarian situation, as well as increasing ongoing durable solutions. This renewed engagement was followed in December 2018 by the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR;

UNGA, 2018), which aimed to create "more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing" between states (UNHCR, 2024c). This affirmation established new coordination and forums to sustain expanded responsibility-sharing. Embedded within the GCR is the commitment to host a Global Refugee Forum (GRF) every four years to check progress and renew pledges. The first GRF was held in December 2019, and a second was held in 2023.

The pledges shared in both GRFs have created momentum for creative modes of working with states, agencies, host communities, private sectors, higher education institutions, and refugees themselves. Recent analysis shows an increasing trend in commitments to both complementary pathways (new modes of protection/solutions to migration pathways to safe third countries), as well as the apparatus and logics that are needed to facilitate more movement of refugees, such as travel documents, recognition of prior learning, pre-departure language development (and flexibility with language proficiency testing tools), and access to education.

Refugee education: What's the global state of the need?

Education is widely known to be a source of capacity-building, personal development, and hope for people who are forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2024d). And yet, access to education in displacement contexts is enduringly difficult for asylum-seekers and refugees, especially for those living in countries of asylum that are not signatories to the Convention. There is, globally, a blocked pipeline for educational opportunities; around two-thirds of refugee children have access to primary education, and this drops

to just over a third for secondary education. While there is variability at state levels, these figures have long remained stubbornly stable, although there were several state-based pledges on opening access to education at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (Global Compact on Refugees, 2024).

Issues with access to education are myriad, not least the challenges of studying when focused on survival, as well as being excluded from national education systems, adapting to new systems and languages, and a lack of teachers, and other resources in displacement contexts. While there have been increased national commitments to educational issues on the global stage, the uptake by individual states remains variable.

Schooling provision in countries of asylum

Access to schooling for refugees is highly variable. As the UNHCR clearly outlines, challenges arise from the high numbers of refugees being hosted in the least developed countries that struggle to provide good-quality, free/affordable education to their own citizens. In low-resourced states/education systems, providing education to unexpected new arrivals can be burdensome; as the UNHCR (2023a, p. 5) describes, these countries

> *need predictable, multi-year support from global and regional financial institutions, high-income states, and the private sector – money, technology, expertise, training – creating a broader base of support. We cannot expect overstretched countries with scarce resources to take the task on by themselves.*

The UNHCR estimates that in 2023/24, 51 per cent of refugee children are not able to access education. As we wrote above,

access rates for refugees accessing primary education (65%) are much higher than for pre-primary (38%) and secondary (41%) education (UNHCR, 2023a).

However, access rates vary significantly, depending on the country of asylum, and by gender. For example, primary education access rates are almost 100 per cent in Angola and Gabon, compared with around 40 to 45 per cent in Senegal and Cameroon. Within these four countries, gender gaps exist: Angola has a 10-percentage-point difference between girls and boys (93% and 103%, respectively); Gabon has a much wider gap (22% points); likewise, Cameroon has an 11-percentage-point difference (41% to 52%), Conversely, in Senegal, the trend is reversed, with 53 per cent of girls accessing primary education, compared to 36 per cent of boys. With high schooling, there has been a recent increase in access – from 37% to 41% – but, similar to primary education, there are regional differences. For example, in Türkiye, enrolments have grown from 27 to over 60 per cent; however, there have been downward trends in other major asylum countries, such as Pakistan (from 5% to 3%) and Colombia (from 30% to 22%; all UNHCR, 2024d).

Tertiary education access for refugees

With higher education access there has been some relative success, with access climbing from 1 per cent in 2016 to 7 per cent in recent UNHCR reports (2023a; 2024d). While this increase is heartening, it is likely due to shifts in methodology and reflects higher education qualifications, as opposed to enrolments. The educational background of people who are displaced in more recent conflicts is likely to have contributed to the sharp increase

from 1 per cent to 6 per cent; for example, it is estimated that Syrian refugees include over 2,000 academics and over 100,000 university graduates who had a tertiary-level education prior to fleeing (Cara, 2019), which reflects the massification of the higher education sector, and increased participation in university education before the war (Tozan, 2023), and likewise for many Ukrainian refugees. However, as Sarah Dryden-Peterson commented back in 2010, there are widespread inequities in who gains access to higher education, with disproportionate rates of access among group of higher socio-economic status. This remains a concern 14 years later.

Tertiary education access is impeded by the many state- and institutional-level barriers that block enrolment, in both countries of asylum and resettlement contexts. In addition to lacking legal migration pathways to education, other admissions challenges include missing documentation, insufficient evidence of prior study, unrecognised qualifications, as well as language and academic literacy proficiency. Other more tacit challenges include a lack of available and verifiable information, navigation of systems, and inflexible program rules. This creates many issues, as summarised by Pherali and Moghi (2021, p. 2161):

> *Depriving young refugees of opportunities to access HE can potentially fuel frustrations, negate their potential to be self-reliant and potentially risk stability in host communities, with wider consequences of debilitating effects on their aspirations to rebuild their country of origin if/when they decide to or can return. Hence, the opportunity cost of neglecting tertiary education in contexts of mass displacement is high politically, socially and economically.*

The importance of access to higher education opportunities cannot be understated, especially at a time of growing displacement.

15/30: A mandate for a greater focus on opening access to higher education to refugees

In response to the dire situation of only one per cent of refugees having access to higher education, in 2019 the UNHCR launched its "15/30 campaign", with an ambition for raising the rate of refugee participation in higher education to 15 per cent by 2030 (UNHCR, 2023b). The UNHCR outlines five areas of focus to help achieve this target (see the 15 by 30 Roadmap with recommended actions) focus on advocacy with different state actors and educational institutions and are underpinned by a need for international aid and development funding in education in countries of asylum. It stresses the need for access to digital technology.

Increasing participation in country-of-asylum higher education

For the first pillar, the advocacy is focused on the country where refugees are temporarily and/or precariously living and involves advocacy at the state level to legally permit access to tertiary education.

Scholarships in countries of asylum

For the second pillar, the UNHCR provides "DAFI" scholarships for displaced people to cover the costs of studying in their country of asylum, and so the focus is on getting educational institutions to accept refugees.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

The third pillar focuses on opening access to training opportunities to enhance refugees' employability and livelihood prospects in countries of asylum, as well as opening opportunities for labour mobility pathways. A key protective factor for such programs is the enhancement of educational provision that supports both refugees and citizens; for example, Ethiopia pledged to provide "quality and accredited training to 20,000 host community members and refugees on an equitable basis" through the Qualifications and Employment Perspectives (QEP) for Refugees and Host Communities in Ethiopia Programme, which is funded by the German government (Tamrat, 2022).

Connected Learning

The fourth pillar focuses on opening access to tertiary education programs through accredited distance learning, allowing refugees to take courses in situ, rather than requiring students to move for study or physically attend campus. The focus for this pillar is on leveraging access directly with higher education institutions.

Complementary education pathways

The fifth pillar focuses on facilitating access to international education opportunities in third countries, often using international student visas for a legal pathway. In some of these countries, there are pathways to claiming asylum after or during the completing the program of study; in other countries, the completion of a program of study may require refugee to move or secure another pathway to durable legal status through postgraduate study or labour mobility.

What are durable solutions for refugees?

The UNHCR has traditionally worked towards finding one of three main avenues for resolving refugees' state of legal displacement: voluntary return (to their own country when it is safe to do so), local integration (in the country of asylum), and resettlement to a host country. However, as this book will explain, there is a new option: migrating through complementary pathways.

Safe return

The idea of safe and voluntary return is one of the three tenets of the UNHCR's work. When it is safe to return, people who have been forced to flee often return home – albeit often after a long period living away. The UNHCR and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) facilitate repatriation, and work "to ensure any returns are voluntary, safe, and dignified" (UNHCR, 2024e).

Local integration

The idea of local integration involves ongoing advocacy with host countries to provide access to the local systems and services that are offered to other residents and citizens. This is often a "complex and gradual process" (UNHCR, 2024f), but is estimated to have led to over 1 million refugees receiving citizenship and permanent residence status from a country of asylum over the last decade.

Resettlement

The third prong of UNHCR's work is to support the movement of refugees to voluntarily move to one of 23 countries

that offer resettlement pathways (Parliament of Australia, 2022). To be accepted, refugees need to be referred by the UNHCR to state-assisted humanitarian programs; however, fewer than one per cent of refugees (the per cent of total at the time of writing was 0.08%) referred for resettlement are resettled each year. Resettlement is often reserved for persons with particular vulnerabilities or urgent protection needs, which may skew some resettlement outcomes following immigration. Some countries (particularly in Europe) accept refugees who arrive without being referred to the state by the UNHCR. The top five resettlement countries in the world are the United States, Canada, Australia, Sweden, and Norway (Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA], 2024), although the US's intake dropped significantly during the Trump presidency (2017–2021). Per capita, the most generous resettlement countries are Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland, and Canada (RCOA, 2024).

Responsibility for welcoming and integrating refugees rests with the receiving state. For example, Australia provides a generous suite of supports for resettled refugees, including:

- The Humanitarian Support Program (HSP), which provides immediate support for newly arrived refugees, including pick-up from the airport, short-term accommodation, referral to services (such as Centrelink, Medicare, medical practice, school), connections to local community, access to language classes, and cultural orientation.
- The Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program, which provides longer-term supports focused around the "3Es" of English, education, and employment.

- Specialised and Intensive Services (SIS) provides complex case support and requires a referral from the Department of Social Services.
- The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) offers free English language classes (including free childcare) until new arrivals have reached a "vocational level" of English.

Resettlement in countries such as Australia is not without its challenges. The literature tells many stories of issues resulting from new languages, new cultural practices, culturally unsafe systems, limited understandings of forced migration and trauma, expectations of speedy assimilation (as opposed to slower integration), and the pressures of becoming independent and autonomous community members. We know that people with forced migration experience (first generation) have poorer employment outcomes than other migrants (Hugo, 2011) – possibly due to the nature of selecting people with particular vulnerabilities or urgent protection needs –, although this tends to be corrected for future generations (Cheng, Wang and Taksa, 2021). Additionally, we also know that demographic factors, such as trauma, health, educational level, can intersect to create significant integration hurdles (e.g., Khawaja and Hebbani, 2018).

We also know that the area where refugees are resettled can also impact their integration, with people who are placed in regional areas generally experiencing more challenges with accessing services (such as targeted healthcare and education; e.g., Colvin, 2017) and resources (such as ethnic food, diaspora communities, faith institutions) needed to help resettlement (Hugo, 2011; Joyce and Liamputtong, 2017), which often leads to secondary migration, where migrants move to urban centres to be closer to

those services and supports that are (perceived to be) missing (Boese and Moran, 2023).

What are complementary pathways?

Complementary pathways are "safe and regulated avenues for persons in need of international protection that provide for a lawful stay in a third country where the international protection needs of the beneficiaries are met" (UNHCR, 2024g). Complementary pathways are intended to be additional to, not replace, existing state efforts/government resettlement programs, and create opportunities for civil society actors to be actively involved in the resettlement of refugees. A complementary pathway may not itself be a durable solution, but it can lead to one. Current models of complementary pathways that exist for refugees include community sponsorship, skilled refugee labour mobility, family reunion, and education. Other pathways that are currently being developed include train-to-hire/hire-to-train, and future pathways could leverage sports and arts clubs, as well as affinity clusters (such as groups based on faith, sexuality, or discipline)

Community/private sponsorship

Community Sponsorship (CS) is a form of place-based private sponsorship that permits community members to come together to support the immigration of a refugee/family in their local area. CS programs have existed in various forms and in several countries for nearly five decades. Countries like Australia and Canada created CS models in the late 1970s in response

to the large-scale displacement of Indochinese refugees. In Canada, the number of refugees resettled via private sponsorship are additional to the government-assisted program, and far exceed the number resettled by government (Van Haren, 2021). In Canada there are two primary ways of privately sponsoring a refugee; firstly, via a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH), which is an organisation (faith-based, community-based, affinity grouping) that has a formal arrangement with the Canadian government to do repeat sponsorships, or secondly via a Group of Five, which is a group of local community members. Private sponsorship in Canada usually permits the group (either a SAH or community group) to name/identify the refugees that are resettled this way.

Community Sponsorship in Australia

In Australia, CS has had a more turbulent history. Although a CS program was developed in the late 1970s, like in Canada, it has gone through several iterations since then, with interventions from different governments shifting its shape and costs. Community sponsorship – problematically – has never been additional to the Australian government's humanitarian program, leading to criticism about Australia utilising community goodwill and funds to do the work it has already committed and budgeted to do. Consequently, CS has been more challenging to sustain in Australia, with difficulties emanating from unresolved questions about whether naming sponsored refugees should be permitted, and a discrediting of community sponsors' expertise, which led to the outsourcing of resettlement services to private/for-profit organisations. The Community Refugee Integration

Sponsorship Pilot was made a permanent part of Australia's humanitarian migration program in March 2025.

Family reunification

The opportunity to reunite with family members who are still experiencing displacement is a significant source of hope; research tells us that anxiety about relatives who remain living in unsafe and precarious circumstances is a major barrier to successful resettlement and integration in a new country (UNICEF, 2022). Family reunification and unity is a fundamental human right (Article 16, paragraph 3, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights; United Nations, 1948); however, family reunification is a state-managed procedure, with pathways that are often complex and costly (UNHCR, 2024h). In response to the challenges of achieving family reunification, the Global Family Reunification Network was established in 2020 with the aim of reuniting one million families by 2030.

Skills complementary pathways

Skills-based pathways are avenues to protection in a third country where refugees can temporarily leverage their skills, qualifications, and/or experience to find pathways to security via existing visa pathways. These include labour, education, and training pathways.

Labour mobility

A clear avenue for refugees to be able to leverage their pre- and during-displacement skills and experience is via employment or skilled visa pathways. Although dominant narratives about refugees cast them as needy and dependent (Peterie, 2017), a

significant proportion of the millions of displaced people have professional expertise, which could be utilised by countries that have significant skills gaps. Since the GCR and the increased commitment to developing more durable solutions, several countries have established refugee labour mobility pathways, such as the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot in Australia, the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) in Canada, and the Refugee Employability Programme (REP) in the UK.

Many of these new labour mobility pathways use a global organisation, Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), to match refugees to potential employers. TBB utilise a Talent Catalog – a database that includes the profiles of almost 115,000 refugees worldwide, and this number is growing significantly every week (TBB, 2024, *in personal communication*). The Australia refugee labour mobility pathway offers important concessions to recognise the constraints faced by displaced people, such as no need for labour market testing (as for positions occupied by other skilled migrants); no minimum work experience; a concession on the income threshold; reduced English language proficiency; and an increased age limit (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2024).

To date, TBB has helped to move 206 primary applicants through 151 employers globally. With family members, a total of 337 people have secured a permanent skilled visa and relocated to Australia, with a further 120 people in the visa preparation and application stages (Baker *et al.*, forthcoming). The current version of the Australian Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot (2023–2025) has set a target of recruiting 500 primary applicants and their families into work opportunities (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2024).

Education

Education is a second complementary pathway to help refugees move to other countries using their skills. A complementary education pathway (EP) is where refugees are admitted to a third country to study, based on their academic potential and their protection needs. EPs may include immediate permanent legal status, using a humanitarian visa, or a scholarship, that might offer a pathway to durable protection via further study or a labour mobility pathway. There are now approximately 33 EPs operating across 26 countries (Nyce, 2022), with a new EP under development in Australia at the time of writing (Refugee Education Australia, 2024). Most of these use study visa pathways, which are complementary to a country's humanitarian program (if one exists), but these use temporary visas, meaning students often need to find another visa pathway once they have graduated. Examples of countries that use study visa pathways include Japan, Mexico, and the Philippines. Three EPs adopt a private sponsorship model: the WUSC SRP, the EU-Passworld project that helped establish three distinct initiatives, with each using a distinct legal pathway in Belgium, Ireland, and Italy (see EU-Password, 2023), and the new-in-2023 *Welcome Corps on Campus* program in America (Welcome Corps, 2023).

World University Service Canada (WUSC) Student Refugee Program (SRP)

The EP that we discuss in this book is also the longest-established and the largest in the world (at the time of writing). Operated by the WUSC, the SRP, provides resettlement to around 150 refugees a year through over 100 Canadian universities and vocational

colleges (WUSC, 2023). WUSC has been providing educational pathways to refugees since 1978 and is a key actor in global advocacy efforts to open and sustain more EPs across the globe. The WUSC SRP operates as an SAH under Canada's private sponsorship scheme, meaning it has a relationship with the Canadian government that permits ongoing sponsorship of refugees. WUSC works in partnership with tertiary education providers, which are represented by Local Committees (LCs), which are often solely comprised of currently enrolled students. A member of the LC is the actual proposer of each refugee, and the LC is responsible for raising and administering the funds to cover the costs associated with supporting a refugee student over their first 12 months, from arrival. These costs include a monthly stipend, including basic items, clothing allowance, food, transport, and a phone plan. Each educational institution covers at least the first year of tuition and accommodation costs. The provision of additional support (such as further years of tuition subsidising) differs by institution.

WUSC fulfils several roles in the SRP. The primary responsibility is to be a SAH and trusted partner with the Canadian government. Secondly, WUSC is responsible for the recruitment, identification, selection, and matching of potential students with educational institutions (programs and courses) and LCs. WUSC operates in four countries – Kenya, Uganda, Lebanon, and Jordan – and works with local partners to provide academic preparation before selected students make their way to Canada. WUSC also liaises with each LC, supporting their training and development as sponsor groups, as well as assisting with administrative issues. WUSC also provides an advocacy voice to help institutions to grow their intake.

Scholars in exile

Another education-related pathway is available to academics and scholars (including journalists, writers, human rights advocates, and lawyers), who are often subject to persecution because of their work. Between 2020 and 2021, 332 scholars (academics and students) were estimated to have been attacked in 65 countries (MacGregor, 2021). Given the risks, several organisations have emerged. One such organisations is the Scholars at Risk (SAR) network, which advocates for and supports scholars whose lives have been threatened, supporting placements for academics at universities worldwide. At the time of writing, such hosting opportunities had been offered via SAR to 111 scholars at 72 universities in 16 countries (SAR, 2024).

What do we know about how refugee students have experienced existing educational pathways?

There is a small body of literature that speaks to the experiences of refugee students who have experienced an educational pathway. A significant example is McKee *et al*.'s (2019) report on an impact study of the WUSC SRP, which examined the impacts on refugee students ("beneficiaries") and LC members. McKee *et al*. (2019) found that 94 per cent of the beneficiaries completed their studies, which compares favourably with an average rate of approximately 70 per cent completion rate of the Canadian population (Macleans Education, 2024). Of these, 55 per cent had completed or were undertaking further study,

and many highlighted the connection between education, and employment outcomes. For LC members, 77 per cent indicated that their overall student experience was improved by serving on the committee and being involved in the SRP, and the same proportion of students reported remaining connected to their LC. Almost all of the LC members (98%) indicated that their involvement in the SRP impacted on their voting preferences. In summary, McKee *et al.* argue that the SRP "program model contributes to the creation of more welcoming communities, through awareness-raising activities and the trickle-down effect from LC members' broader networks" (2019, p. 82). Other benefits of the WUSC SRP are noted by Agrawal (2019), who reports that WUSC networks help to raise awareness of Canada's Private Sponsorship program.

Although WUSC has gender parity for several years, challenges have been noted in the academic literature, such as uneven access for women, compared to men in recent years (Peterson, 2010), and the collapse of WUSC students with other international students (Brunner, Streitwieser and Bhandari, 2023). In other work, Ferede (2014) explored the experiences of 25 students (15 men, and 9 women) who arrived in Canada via the WUSC SRP. Ferede reports that the students' experiences were "varied and complicated, a patchwork of struggles and triumphs" (2014, p. 220). While Ferede notes that "the process of gaining an education provides refugee adolescents with a sense of control in a life that has been mainly defined by chaos" (p. 223), they also identified challenges for students such as mismatches in expectations and realities, difficulties with specialising on enrolment (rather than being able to access general education), and issues

emerging from accents (struggling to understand lecturers and other students).

Despite several decades of experience, we know relatively little about how refugee students experience educational pathways, how they transition through their studies, and what they are doing or where they are living now. We also do not know how local students experience their roles in campus supporter groups, nor do we have empirical data that tell us about the impact of refugee education pathways on campus culture, or on teaching and learning. There is, therefore, a great need for more research to help fill this lacuna in our knowledge, and this book offers one such account.

Orientation to this book

In this book, William offers an autobiographical reflection on his experience of becoming a refugee, and then becoming a student, an epidemiologist, a Canadian, a husband, an Australian, a PhD holder, a father, and a professional in public health and academic. William's life in Australia would not have been possible without receiving an offer to study at the University of Toronto as a WUSC SRP student in the early 2000s. This is a story of how education can provide skills, opportunities, and hope in dark and desperate situations.

In addition to telling this incredible story – a tale of loss, self-sustenance, and scholarly commitment, from camp to campus (and beyond) – we provide a critical commentary on the opportunities and challenges that come with educational pathways for people who experience forced migration and displacement.

In Chapter 2, William navigates the complexities of life in his village before the war, where subsistence farming and small-scale animal husbandry defined the community's lifestyle. As William witnessed the disruption caused by the arrival of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army in 1986, he grappled with the confusion and fear that his family faced, particularly in the absence of his father. William assumed responsibilities in the absence of his father and witnessed his mother's resilience in the wake of his father's loss. His experiences of displacement led him to a refugee camp in Uganda, where he was confronted with challenges such as malnutrition, disease, and the emotional toll of trauma, while striving for education and hope for a better future. Through William's eyes, this chapter reveals experience of loss, vulnerability, and also the enduring spirit of those affected by war, and their quest for safety amid chaos.

In Chapter 3, William narrates his multifaceted educational journey as he grappling with the impacts of war and displacement. The chapter begins by examining William's early education during the turmoil of the Second Sudanese Civil War, highlighting the limited resources and makeshift schooling in conflict setting. The narrative progresses to his time in a refugee settlement camp in Uganda, where themes of resilience and hope in education emerge, despite challenging conditions. The chapter also recounts William's quest for better educational opportunities, and his disappointment at not being selected for an international baccalaureate program. This led to his daring decision to embark on a journey to northern Kenya, setting the stage for his subsequent educational opportunities in Canada through WUSC. The chapter offers insights into the determination to

overcome adversity, the significance of community support, and the unwavering pursuit of knowledge as a pathway to a brighter future. These narratives illustrate the transformative power of education, and the indomitable spirit of refugee students in the face of enormous challenges.

In Chapter 4 offers a poignant narrative of William's journey in Canada, centred on themes of migration, education, community, and settlement. The chapter begins with a glimpse into William's experiences and reflections on navigating a new life in Canada, highlighting both cultural contrast and similarities. The narrative delves into William's experiences with winter, his first Christmas experience in Canada, and the significance of connections with the LC at Victoria College, University of Toronto while also recounting the challenges faced while adapting to life and education in Canada as a WUSC student. The story illustrates a profound transformation through education, highlighting the essential role that the WUSC educational pathway in William's life journey.

In Chapter 5, readers are invited to navigate through William's remarkable life journey, starting from his experiences in Canada and his decision to move to Australia to pursue an Master's in Public Health in 2010. This chapter serves as a guide through his process of adjusting to a new environment, highlighting the cultural adjustments he made while settling in Australia. Readers will discover how community service became a significant means for William to forge connections and positively impact his surroundings. The chapter also explores the challenges he faced juggling personal relationships with societal expectations, including funding cuts to his jobs, family tragedies, and the complexities of

married life and fatherhood. William also discusses the pressures of job security and parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic, ultimately leading to him relocating his family. The story discusses themes of education, community involvement, relationship dynamics, and the intertwined aspects of career and civic responsibility.

Introducing William

My lived experience is characterised by numerous significant encounters, notably during my tenure as a lecturer in 2019, when I sought to explore advocacy opportunities in refugee education within Australia. This inquiry led me to an officer at WUSC, who subsequently introduced me to a network of individuals that were engaged in similar endeavours, including the Refugee Education Special Interest Group (RESIG) in Australia. Through the RESIG, I got to know Sally, the chair of RESIG, alongside many other dedicated individuals. For over five years, we have collaboratively advocated for the opportunity of educational pathways for refugees in Australia.

This book presents a firsthand narrative of my experiences as a refugee, intricately woven into the fabric of my identity. Although my journey does not start with my refugee experience, the formative years I spent as a refugee have profoundly shaped my self-concept. My story begins in a serene and traditional village, a tranquillity shattered by conflict that initiated a cascade of displacements. My quest for refuge took me first to Uganda, and subsequently to Kenya.

In reflecting on the multifaceted nature of the refugee experience, I find it encapsulated by a spectrum of emotions: uncertainty,

restriction, vulnerability, and hopelessness, juxtaposed with resilience, determination, and fortitude. The adverse sentiments largely stemmed from the constrained opportunities within the refugee camp, particularly the inadequate access to arable land, which resulted in reliance on insufficient food rations. Despite efforts to provide education, the resources and personnel that were available were grossly inadequate. The myriad restrictions we encountered engendered a profound sense of confinement. This reality has persisted as a defining aspect of my early life, a truth shared by countless individuals residing in refugee camps for extended periods.

I was fortunate to be selected for the WUSC refugee education pathway, a program that fundamentally transformed my life trajectory. Upon my arrival in Canada, I was provided with essential support, including assistance in obtaining a social insurance number, healthcare card, accommodation, stipend, and the establishment of a bank account. The program also enabled me to connect with a diverse array of individuals, including university students and professors, who generously volunteered their time and expertise to assist me. This experience reinvigorated my belief in the inherent kindness of humanity and rekindled my hope for the future.

During my academic years at the University of Toronto, I cultivated enduring friendships through my involvement in the WUSC program, which significantly altered my perception of my identity from that of a mere statistic reliant on humanitarian aid to that of an independent individual capable of contributing meaningfully to society. After my first year, I actively volunteered with the local WUSC committee to support refugee students

from various backgrounds. Throughout my undergraduate studies, I engaged with multiple charitable organisations, driven by a desire to give back to the community. I ultimately graduated with a degree in life sciences and relocated to Australia to pursue further academic and professional aspirations in epidemiology, advocacy, and academia.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, I was redeployed from my instructional roles to serve as a senior epidemiologist in Far North Queensland, where my contributions informed data-driven public health interventions that undoubtedly saved numerous lives. Additionally, I remain actively engaged in local sports, educational institutions, and church communities. This journey has profoundly elucidated the pivotal role of education in shaping societal outcomes. Without the instrumental support of the WUSC program, my capacity to achieve professional success and contribute substantively to my community would have been significantly diminished.

It is crucial to allocate increased resources towards the development of refugee education pathways. I assert that such educational avenues represent the most durable and cost-effective solutions, delivering substantial societal impact. Many refugee students exemplify remarkable resilience, and an unwavering commitment to achieving positive outcomes, despite significant adversity. Much like the potential of notable figures such as Einstein, there exists the possibility that a refugee child within a camp possesses the ability to alter the trajectory of humanity. It is incumbent upon all of us to contribute, no matter how modestly, to the quest for sustainable solutions addressing the dearth of opportunities for tertiary education among refugee populations.

Introducing Sally

My entry point to the field of refugee education comes from my profession as an English Language teacher (to adults) rather than from lived experience. I am a migrant, but my choice to move to Australia was voluntary, and I carried with me the privilege of being a British citizen (English-language speaking, familiar with the systems, structures, laws, education, and rights because they were imported through colonisation). My resettlement was, therefore, reasonably smooth, although I vividly remember and feel the frustration of my first interactions with Centrelink and Medicare[1] and how difficult I found the process to navigate.

My experience as a language teacher was the beginning of my trajectory into this space of refugee education activism and advocacy. I have always worked with migrants and refugees, and as a trained educator, linguistic, and sociologist, I have long been interested in questions how and why language and literacy act as such immovable barriers to equitable access to higher education. In 2014, I married my teaching background with my research experience, borrowing from my PhD methodology of longitudinal qualitative inquiry to explore how refugees navigate their pathways into, and through, university study.

Through presenting on this research, it became apparent that there was an absence of national coordination around issues relating to education and forced migration, and so we began the Refugee Education Special Interest Group (RESIG; now Refugee Education Australia)[2], which is a grassroots network of refugee students, educators, academics, settlement advisors, support staff, and advocates working across the educational

and settlement sectors. Our remit is to develop information-sharing mechanisms, develop useful resources, and advocate for better educational opportunities and outcomes for students with forced migration experience. Our collective advocacy efforts have led to outcomes such as the increased establishment of scholarships for people seeking asylum; our collective resource development efforts have centred around a "liberation bibliography" mission to make powerful knowledges about refugee research more accessible; and our information-sharing efforts are evident in our national network of over 400 members.

In 2023, because of our advocacy around refugee education and asking the question of why Australia does not have a Student Refugee Program like the one run in Canada by WUSC (Evans, Baker and Wood, 2022), RESIG was integral to the establishment of the Refugee Student Settlement Pathway (RSSP)[3]. A blueprint for the RSSP was co-designed with the federal Department of Home Affairs and Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia, and the higher education sector was represented by the newly formed Australian Refugee Welcome University Sponsorship Consortium (ARWUSC). The RSSP was also co-designed in consultation with WUSC, and a wide range of refugee advocacy stakeholders, such as the UNHCR, the Refugee Council of Australia, the Settlement Council of Australia, Amnesty International, and Talent Beyond Boundaries, refugee students and alumni, as well as key higher education actors, such as Universities Australia, English Australia, and student accommodation associations. The RSSP will welcome its first 20 students in late 2025, to commence their studies in 2026.

Key takeaways from this book

In William's narrative, several key takeaways stand out, that provide valuable insights into resilience, education, community support, hope, cultural context, and the overall commitment to impact. Firstly, William's journey exemplifies the power of resilience in the face of adversity. Despite encountering numerous challenges, he demonstrates that perseverance and determination can help overcome even the toughest obstacles. His tenacity serves as a powerful reminder that difficulties can be surmounted with the right mindset and grit, inspiring others to strive for their own goals, no matter how daunting they may seem.

The importance of education is a central theme in William's life story, serving as a crucial turning point that transformed his circumstances. His quest for knowledge underscores how access to education can empower individuals, paving the way for personal and professional growth. Education becomes a tool through which William not only enhances his own life but also aims to uplift others in his community, emphasising its role in fostering positive change.

Moreover, community and support systems emerge as vital elements in William's narrative. His experiences highlight the significant impact of encouragement and assistance from others. The local WUSC volunteers play a pivotal role in helping William navigate the challenges of daily life, such as setting up bank accounts, and budgeting. This support eases the transition into a new environment, reinforcing the idea that collective efforts, and solidarity are instrumental in fostering personal growth and success.

William's journey is also a beacon of hope and inspiration. His experiences remind readers that change is possible and that perseverance, combined with a clear vision, can lead to extraordinary outcomes. His story serves as a motivating force, encouraging others to remain steadfast in the pursuit of their dreams and aspirations, reinforcing the belief that resilience can yield significant rewards.

Furthermore, the narrative provides valuable insights into the cultural and social context that shapes individuals' lives. It prompts readers to reflect on the broader implications of these dynamics within their own communities. Understanding the interplay of cultural and social factors can foster greater empathy and awareness, encouraging a more inclusive approach to addressing challenges faced by diverse populations.

Lastly, William's overall commitment to making a positive impact in the community stands out as a powerful takeaway. His dedication to education, volunteering, and supporting marginalised groups illustrates his desire to contribute to societal betterment. Through his actions and initiatives, he seeks to create a lasting legacy of kindness and support, demonstrating that individual efforts can, collectively, lead to meaningful change in the lives of others.

Framing questions for Chapters 2–5.

While you are reading William's story in Chapters 2–5, you might want to consider the following questions:

- What surprises you about William's childhood and his early educational experiences?

- How would you characterise William's trajectory to university study?
- What aspects of resettlement are most impacted by also engaging in higher education study?
- How do you think modern technology might change contemporary refugee students' experiences?

2
Becoming a refugee

In this chapter, William presents information regarding the circumstances leading to becoming a refugee. The chapter starts with a depiction of his early days in his home village prior to the onset of the Second Sudanese Civil War. He then transitions into the narrative of the outbreak of war in his village, its consequential impact, the remarkable acts of sacrifice he observed among ordinary individuals amid adversity, and the living conditions within the refugee camps.

Life in the village before the war

I was born in what was then called Sudan, now South Sudan – specifically, in Ma'di land, in Opari. We lived in a village on the border between Ma'di and Acholi land, called Owiny-Kibul, near the now South Sudan and Uganda border (see Figure 1). I had five other siblings, so there were eight of us in total, including my parents. During the farming season, we lived on the farm outside the main local township of Owiny-Kibul where my father had a quarter, and during the dry season, we lived in the main local township. Although many people in this village commonly spoke Acholi, they also spoke Ma'di. Nonetheless, the village was peaceful, and most people were happily involved in subsistence farming, and small-scale animal husbandry, including my parents.

As a farming community, people had enough food throughout the year to feed their families and give some away to help the widows and orphans in the village. Every home had granaries to store their family's food, keeping it dry and safe from termites. People had all sorts of foods to sustain themselves – groundnuts, maize, cassava, peas, sesame, sorghum, sweet potatoes, and many more. People in the village also reared goats and sheep, which were tended to by young boys. We had a river that flowed all year round which we used for drinking water and fishing.

Our small village had a unique way of life that was different from what I am accustomed to today. Rather than buying food from the markets as I do now,, we had a self-sustaining system. We produced everything we needed to survive, from vegetables and grains, to livestock and poultry. Our community had a deep connection to nature, and we took pride in our ability to live off the land.

Despite our self-sufficiency, there were a few essential items that we had to buy from the market – soap and salt being the most important, as they were not something we could produce ourselves, so we relied on Ugandan merchants to bring these goods to our village. Occasionally, second-hand clothing and shoes were also sold, but they were not a necessity, except during Christmas when people bought new clothing and shoes for themselves. As most people didn't have hard currency, most of the exchanges of goods and services in the village were in the form of barter trade – people directly exchanged goods for other goods or services, for example, exchanging ten kilograms of grains for a bar of soap.

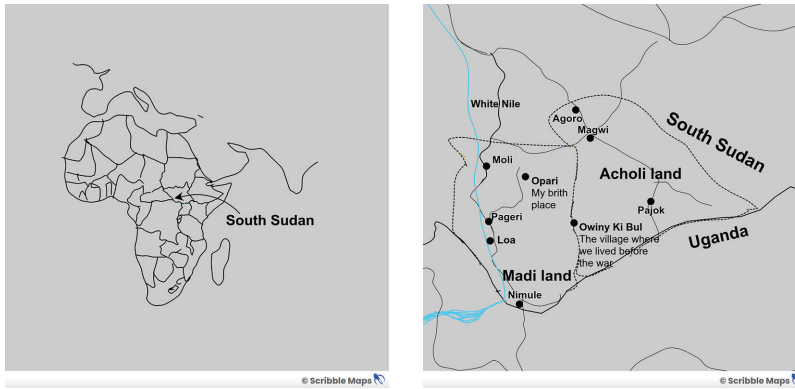

Figure 1: Geographic position of my village (Source: Google Maps)

Our village's unique way of life was not without its challenges, but we took pride in our self-sufficiency and our ability to produce everything we needed to survive. We were a close-knit community who worked together to overcome any difficulties that came our way. For example, people made their own soap from shea nut or sesame oil when the Ugandan merchants were unable to bring goods to our village. We crystallised salt from patches of salty soils and ashes from specific trees. This process was time-consuming and required a lot of effort, but we did it when necessary.

In the village, everyone had a designated responsibilities. The parents were responsible for working and providing food for their families. Young boys who were not yet able to perform heavy tasks, such as cultivating, were given the duty of looking after the animals. The younger boys and girls were either required to accompany their parents to the garden or to stay at home and take care of the babies. I happened to fall into the latter category and was responsible for babysitting my younger

sibling while my mother was busy with her work. Fathers showed their sons how to build houses, make arrows, bows, and spears, hunt, till the land to feed their families, and help find good girls to marry. Fathers were also responsible for paying a dowry when their sons got married. In our village, people rarely used their goats and sheep for meat; instead, the animals were primarily reserved for use as dowry payment by the family of a boy seeking marriage.

Every morning, young boys would take their goats and sheep to the pastures by the riverbank and spend the day in the bush, caring for their animals. As a result, I started rearing goats at the age of six. I used to wake up early and follow the older boys who were driving goats and sheep to the pastures. Upon reaching the pastures by the riverside, the older boys would engage in wrestling, and various other activities, including swimming, hunting, and fishing. However, as younger boys, we were not allowed to engage in any of these activities. Instead, the older boys made us look after the animals while they grazed by the river. As we got more opportunities to go goat-rearing as young boys aged around six to seven years, we became confident and began competing with some of the older boys. We competed in many things, ranging from running, target shooting with bows and arrows, distance shooting, and many other things that young boys do. We also shot fish with bows and arrows from the river.

In our village, gender roles were clearly defined as they had been for generations. Boys were mentored by their fathers to fulfil their roles as providers and caretakers of the land, while girls were guided by their mothers to prepare them for their future roles as nurturing and caring mothers. We all learned

together. This intergenerational transmission of societal roles and responsibilities was integral to the fabric of our community. We engaged in the collection of firewood during the day to facilitate the creation of an evening fire, mirroring the practices of our forebears. Each evening, we gathered around the fire, where our elders regaled us with stories about the stars and the fundamental questions of existence. As young individuals, we were recipients of narratives that had been transmitted across generations. Within our cultural milieu, the mode of knowledge preservation centred on oral tradition and musical expression, rather than script-based mediums. Our ambitions focused on maturing into individuals who would perpetuate our traditional lifestyle, characterised by its perceived purity, unadulterated nature, and inherent virtue.

People from different tribes lived together, including non-Sudanese people who had been in our village for generations, such as families of Greek origin, Middle Eastern heritage, and Ugandans. Our people were kind-hearted and shared land for cultivation. There were intermarriages among the different tribes, and people respected each another's beliefs and practices, irrespective of religion. Women were held in high regard and seen as the foundation of the family. Our village was secular, and our people did not discriminate against others based on their tribes, gender, race, or beliefs. We had rainmakers and fortune tellers, who were allowed to practice their ways of life, provided they did not intend to harm anyone. Fortune tellers gave people amulets made of cowry shells to protect against bad spirits. Rainmakers had a special status in the village because they had been used for generations to forecast rainfalls.

Our village market opened only on Saturdays in the afternoon after people returned from working in their gardens. At the market, women sold traditional beer known as *kwete* or *malwa,* and distilled alcohol. The market was a popular spot for people to catch up with one other and to meet people from other nearby villages. Market day was also popular for courting among the single, mature-aged boys and girls in our village. Courting a girl was a competitive affair, with different groups of boys often vying for a girl's attention. Girls could date as many boys at a time as they wished, and would eventually choose one to marry.

Courting could last for several months, or even years, with several boys coming to the girl's home to get to know her better. When a boy came to the home, he would stop at the edge of the compound and wait for the girl to welcome him inside. Sometimes, the girl would ignore the boy, and he could wait for three or four hours before being seated. Sometimes, the girl's mother would provide the boys with water as they waited for a welcome from their daughter. These were the activities that we looked forward to when we came of age, but war robbed us of that life.

War in our village

In the early days of 1986, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) made an unexpected appearance in Owiny-Kibul, a village devoid of any Sudanese Government presence. We did not have any police or government administration in the area. Despite the absence of conflict, the SPLA insisted that the residents leave the area immediately. As it was farming season, my father had

already moved us to live on the farm. On that day, as I sat in our house on the farm, people – including children and the elderly – started pouring into our home with luggage on their heads and water jerrycans in their hands. I was six years old at the time.

I was surprised by the influx of people into our home, and I wanted to find out what was happening. I turned to my mother and asked, "*Mama*, a Ma'di word for 'mother', why are people gathering in our home?" But my mother did not respond. The number of people congregating in our home continued to increase. There were people under all the tree shade in our compound, granaries, and veranda. We had a goat pen at the edge of our compound, and those people who could not find shade occupied the goat pen. I was uneasy with strangers filling all the available shades in our home. I again sought information from my mother, but again, she did not respond. That afternoon, my *"Baba"*, a Ma'di word for "dad", was not home. He had gone hunting. "Has something happened to *Baba*?" I asked myself quietly. I left my mother, who was panting heavily and headed towards my grandmother's place. When I reached there, my grandmother interrupted me before I could ask her anything. She instructed me to wake up my uncle, who was sleeping under the veranda. Despite the noise around us, my uncle continued to sleep soundly, which surprised me.

In our village, there is a procedure for waking people from their sleep. To wake someone, you must say their name and then gently touch them. If you do this three times and the person does not wake up, you leave them to continue sleeping. However, if the matter is urgent, after three attempts to wake the person up, you shake them vigorously and call their name louder until they wake up. When my grandmother asked me to wake up my uncle,

I called his name and touched him three times, but he did not wake up. I returned to my grandmother and said that my uncle must be feeling exhausted. I suggested that we should allow him to complete his sleep. However, she insisted that I should shake him vigorously until he woke up. I went back and woke my uncle up by nudging him vigorously.

As I shook my uncle awake, I noticed an uneasy look on his face. A small stream of fresh saliva flowed down his cheek, and his eyes were bloodshot and tired. His legs were covered in dirt, forming rough, scaly clay stockings, and his shirt was soaked with sweat, leaving cloudy patterns throughout. The collar was darkened with thick sweat and dirt, which weighing heavily on his shoulders. When my uncle woke up, he looked around the crowded room as if he was lost for a moment. "*Dada* says I should wake you up", I informed him. "*Dada"* is a Ma'di word for grandmother. My uncle didn't say anything to me but sat there with his hands wrapped around his knees, looking confused too. He suddenly got up and headed to my grandmother.

As soon as my uncle walked away to see my grandmother, I caught sight of my father returning from his hunting trip that afternoon. However, shortly before he entered the compound, a loud noise rang out. People who were sitting under the shades quickly dispersed and started running. My mother shouted at me to run as well, but I was confused and didn't know what was going on. I thought the sound was coming from a bridge in the village that was built by the British during their governance of the Sudan (see Figure 2). As children, we crossed the bridge frequently. However, because the bridge was built using steel with certain sections in a state of disrepair,

Figure 2: The bridge in our village built by the British in about early 1900s. (Source Google Image: Photo by Luo Prince in December 2021)

it made a lot of loud noise that echoed the loud sound that rang out. As a result, when I saw people start running away, I was confused, and I asked why they were running from the sound of the bridge.

I saw my grandmother run with all her might, holding her walking stick in her right hand, while her left hand supported her hips. My father dropped the bushmeat that he had hunted, and immediately grabbed my younger sister, making me realise that something was wrong. I followed the others and started running as fast as I could. When we used to herd goats, we were taught to recite a particular song in our minds and run without looking back whenever being chased by wild animals. The song we sang literally translates to: "*the backs of my head watch over me, my face is not watching me*". Metaphorically, this song is intended to invoke a sense of feeling unwatched and vulnerable, while also

conveying the sentiment that those expected to look out for you are unable to do so. I sang that song in my mind, repeating the same line again and again. When I stopped, my knees shook, and I was all alone. My heart was racing and beating hard in my chest. I did not know where I was, or how I had become separated from the rest of the people. After a while, I started seeing other people coming past, and walking deeper into the bush. I waited for my parents until they arrived, and joined them to walk deeper into the bush.

Since that day, we experienced a constant disruption. Despite the efforts of everyone, the danger of war was still present and eventually caught up with us, causing great harm to our people. Armed militias, mainly from Parajok, Magwi, and Polataka, which were supported by the government, raided our hiding places frequently because they assumed that the people in our village supported the SPLA, forcing us to move constantly. We were defenceless, and the people in our village did not have any weapons to protect themselves. In our village, there were three men, including my father, who possessed arms with limited ammunition. They used their ammunition sparingly, reserving it for exceptional circumstances, such as strategically diverting attacking militias away from our hideouts. Despite their efforts, there were instances when our hideouts were burnt down, children were kidnapped, and animal stocks were taken during raids.

Unfortunately, these raids became a constant event that would define the lives of people in our village for decades to come. My grandmother and uncle decided to return to Ma'di land, which was relatively peaceful then. Due to the losses experienced,

many people fled to refugee camps in Uganda in 1989, where they remain today, but my family, and a handful of families stayed back. I was not sure why my father decided to stay despite the risk to our family. There were numerous instances when local militias attacked our hiding places because of supporting the SPLA, sparking fear among the children in our village, including myself. It was a constant state of apprehension and uncertainty about when the next attack would occur. On one occasion, I became disoriented in the bush for several days during an attack, leading my parents to believe I had perished or been taken captive. Fortunately, I accidentally stumbled upon a neighbouring village, whose inhabitants assisted me in returning to our village.

The war situation in our village was evolving quickly. Soon, men who remained in our village started to join the SPLA, including my father, to protect the village against militia attacks. Women watched their men vanish on the horizon as if they were just going for a short stroll, some without letting their wives/mothers know. That was the last time some of them would see their beloved husbands or sons. As children, we would ask our mothers about our fathers, but not a single mother answered. The only time we knew where the men had been was when some of them returned to the village, armed, after several months of being away from home.

My father, as I would later learn, never wanted to join the SPLA rebels. However, the relentless attacks on our hideouts, and the torture that was perpetrated by the returning SPLA soldiers forced my father to make the fateful decision to join the SPLA. Just like that, the war took my father away from me. Every evening, we

waited with our eyes on the road, hoping that he would come home, but he never did. We held onto hope, but it was false. The dreaded fate we feared most came to pass. Our mother received information from the returning SPLA soldiers that our father was killed in a battle somewhere at the Sudan-Ethiopian border. I was about eight years old at the time.

Life without a father

In our traditional society, the absence of a father figure can pose significant challenges for young boys, as paternal guidance plays a pivotal role in their development and mentorship. Similarly, the absence of a mother can have a similar impact on the lives of young girls. Personally, I found myself in a difficult situation and faced several challenges due to the death of my father. During that period, I found myself having to make independent choices and decisions. I observed and absorbed valuable insights by listening to the advice that fathers gave their children, and I thoughtfully considered how this wisdom could apply to my own life. Additionally, I observed fathers imparting practical skills to their sons, such as the construction of makeshift houses, and other traditional male roles within our society. I undertook tasks that were typically reserved for older boys, such as cutting poles and erecting temporary shelters. Moreover, I took on the responsibility of looking after my father's goats, until they were gradually consumed by the SPLA.

Following the news of my father's passing, my mother would wake me and my two older siblings – an elder sister and a brother

whom I followed – at 4:00 a.m. to go to the garden. During the planting season, the grasses were tall and heavily laden with the early morning dew. By the time we reached the garden, we were drenched, cold, and shivering. However, when the sun rose, we gradually became dry and warm once again. We did not have breakfast, but we had water to drink. Our collective effort for the day was worth our father's daily work. On our return from the garden, our mother would proceed to the riverbank to distil alcohol. Some men would commission specific quantities of alcohol and reimburse her through labour in our garden. On some occasions, my mother enlisted a group of men to work in our garden in exchange for "*kwete*". Consequently, despite my father being deceased, we did not experience frequent famine because of our mother's efforts.

However, because of the constant attacks on our hideouts by the riverbank, I got lost again in the bush. In the absence of my father, my mother encountered considerable difficulties, eventually leading to a collective effort by village inhabitants to locate and retrieve me following a three-day search. But in late 1990, when I was ten years old, I was wounded on my right leg in one of the attacks on our hideouts by the riverbank and taken captive. In captivity, I experienced challenging and traumatic experiences, including physical and psychological abuse, deprivation of basic needs such as proper medical treatment for my wound, food, water, and confinement in a small room.

These experiences have had an impact on my psychological and emotional well-being. During and after my captivity, I started having some strange dreams that I never had before. In one of the

dreams, I was being chased, but I was unsure why people were after me or what I had done to be in such a situation. Whenever people came to chase me, I would spread my wings and fly away from them. Flying like a human bird high up in the sky, away from trouble, felt amazing. However, whenever I landed by a riverbank, people found me, and I had to fly away again. In 1991, I escaped captivity, fled to my maternal grandmother in Ma'di land, and became completely separated from the rest of my immediate family. Consumed by war, I never saw them again. I continued to have this dream regularly, even when I was in a refugee camp in Uganda and Kenya until I went to Canada when I was 21 years old. I will return to discuss my experience in Uganda, Kenya, and Canada later.

Nevertheless, I lived with my grandmother for over a year after I escaped from captivity until the war uprooted us in 1992. During my time with my grandmother, she enrolled me in a school for unaccompanied children, although for a brief period (I will discuss this further in Chapter 3).

An incredible act of humanity

I witnessed incredible acts of sacrifice after my grandmother's township was attacked. It was not just the soldiers who made sacrifices but also ordinary people who performed extraordinary deeds. One particular event stands out in my memory – the day we fled my grandmother's township. It was an early morning, the grass still wet with dew and the air chilly. I woke up earlier than usual, feeling something was not quite right. I asked my grandmother if I could fetch some water, but she refused, saying it was still too early, and the sun had not yet risen.

I went back to the house that I shared with many other children. I still felt unsettled, so I came out and began sweeping our compound. After finishing the sweeping, I gathered all the rubbish and set it on fire. When the other kids saw the fire, they came out and joined me by the fire site. Suddenly, I noticed an unusual movement of people along the main road. I alerted the other kids, and we all crouched to the ground to avoid being seen. We instinctively concluded that the township was being invaded and was going to be attacked. We scattered, and each one of us ran into the house where our parents or guardians were sleeping.

I ran to my grandmother and woke her again. I told her about an unusual movement of people that looked like an attack on the township. This reminded her of a rumour she had heard earlier from one of the mothers about an imminent attack on the township. As she peeped outside carefully, she heard footsteps that sounded like military boots. Quickly, she recoiled her head and signalled me to keep quiet. As it began to drizzle, my grandmother looked outside once more but saw nothing. It was eerily quiet, as though the entire township was deserted. Fear began to overwhelm me, and I felt terrible that I could not run away. In the past, whenever things got scary, I would always run away. But this time was different. My grandmother blocked the door and told me to stay quiet as I hid under the bed. Even from my hiding spot, I was restless and anxious. All I wanted was to escape far away from the war that threatened to consume us.

A gunfight broke out 30 minutes after it started drizzling. I was not sure why it took so long for the fighting to start this time. Suddenly, the township was filled with the sound of crackling

gunshots. The battle lasted for two to three hours before the township was finally taken over, and the SPLA soldiers retreated. As a result, many civilians left the area and fled to the next township.

The next township was about three-days walk. There were many children and women with loads on their heads walking in groups towards the next township. Some individuals appeared to be tired and had fallen behind, walking at their own pace. Likewise, the elderly men and women were walking slowly but steadily, making sure to keep up with the weaker members of the group. They all held tightly onto their walking sticks to support their weight and alleviate some of the stress on their bodies. The elderly women used long walking sticks in their right hands and supported their waists with their left hands, while the elderly men had shorter sticks. As the group was walking, a rebel commander drove past them in a military jeep on his way to the next township.

As we were travelling away from the town we had escaped, my grandmother suddenly realised that she had left behind the family heirloom which had been passed down through generations. Despite the distance, she decided to go back and retrieve the item. The family heirloom was a symbol of social status and was traditionally inherited by the firstborn, regardless of their gender. My grandmother said she could not continue the journey with us without the family heirloom. Before she went back, she asked me to wait for her under a big tree where most people passed and rested. She instructed me not to go anywhere or follow anybody. She was the only person close to me in my bloodline, and I was living with her at that time. I nodded, and off she went.

I was waiting for my grandmother, and my eyes were constantly directed towards the path, eagerly anticipating her arrival. The six hours I spent under the tree felt like an entire week without any sleep. Gradually, most people left, and only a few arrived, and most of them looked very weak. Two hours after my grandmother had left, I saw a wounded SPLA soldier being carried on a donkey with two other soldiers beside him. I was all alone, and fear gripped me. My one heart was urging me to run away while the other was saying to wait for my grandmother. I made up my mind to wait for my grandmother and not leave her behind. As the SPLA soldiers approached, I stayed put and remained calm.

As they approached the tree, the two soldiers assisted the wounded soldier to the ground. I observed him clenching his teeth in agony. He had been injured in his leg and was struggling to remain upright. He was gasping for breath, exhausted, and perspiring. The weather was starting to heat up. When they requested water, I provided them with some. Water was an incredibly important and valuable resource. People always stored water in containers that could be easily retrieved in case of any unexpected attacks. One hour after the wounded soldier arrived, I spotted a family in the distance. As they approached, I noticed a woman with a child strapped to her back and two young children walking in front of her. All of them were limping and struggling to move forward. The woman carried a small piece of luggage on her head, wrapped in a cover sheet. I assumed they were exhausted and looking forward to reaching the big tree for some rest. However, I was confused as to why they appeared so tired after only walking for three hours.

As soon as the wounded soldier saw the woman and her children seeking shelter under the tree, he quickly hopped on one leg to help them. He carried one of the youngest children and placed him under the tree before going to the woman to help her with her luggage. From his pocket, he drew thick biscuits and gave one to each of the two children. The wounded soldier didn't say a word to the woman or her children, but the woman greatly appreciated his kindness. I was so moved by his speed to react and assist the woman. *Humanity is alive*, I thought to myself. When the woman and her children asked for water, I gave them what little I had, but we all realised that we were running low.

After resting for another two hours, the wounded soldier instructed the two soldiers to assist the woman to reach safety. He asked them to load the woman's luggage and the children onto the donkey, and take them to the next town. I overheard him telling the other soldiers that he would be fine, as he was used to such situations, but that it was not the same for the children. The woman was very grateful and seemed relieved. She spoke of how exhausted she and her children were, having walked for seven days from a distant town that they faced hunger. She mentioned that as soon as they arrived in our township, it came under attack, and they had not eat for two days. The man comforted her, saying, "It's okay. You'll be fine. Keep going and you'll find food for the children. Everything will be alright."

The wounded soldier asked me to go with the woman and her children, but I declined, stating that I was waiting for my grandmother. However, he insisted on staying with me until my grandmother arrived, calling me "*Jesh Ahmer*", a Juba Arabic term meaning "*Red Army*", which the SPLA often used for

unaccompanied minors of my age. The presence of that soldier under that tree made me feel secure, and his act of kindness towards the woman showed that he valued others more than himself. I compared this to the commander who had passed by the fleeing people in his jeep without offering help to those who were weak. This taught me that ordinary people can touch the lives of others in ways that those in power often do not.

Upon my grandmother's return, I told her the events that had taken place and how the man had helped me feel safe. My grandmother spoke to the wounded soldier in our dialect to express her gratitude, but he did not understand due to his limited knowledge of the language. As my grandmother did not speak the locally spoken Juba Arabic, I helped her interpret her gratitude to the man. My grandmother then informed the man that she would take him to safety, but he initially refused, telling us to go ahead without him. However, my grandmother rejected his excuse, citing concerns over his lack of water and food. The little water that we had brought was not going to last long, and the man would certainly die. Even though he insisted that my grandmother take me to safety, she refused, determined to help him.

With a swollen leg and limping on one foot, the soldier came to my grandmother and told her that he was willing to walk with us. We started a slow but long walk towards the next township. Instead of following the main path, my grandmother told the man that we had to go into the mountains to find water. We walked slowly with some food baggage that my grandmother had managed to salvage when she went back. We slept one night on the way before we could reach the foot of the mountains and found

a small spring of water. We made a camp with twigs and leaves to give us shelter.

My grandmother nursed that man and tended to his wounds every morning and evening. We ate wild fruits and plant tubers. We experimented with different leaves from known and unknown plants before boiling them. If, after a week, the leaves that we removed from a plant did not change its colour to yellow, or change colour, we did not eat them because it was considered poisonous. However, when the leaves changed colour, we boiled and ate them. We stayed at the foot of the mountains for about three months until the man was able to walk better again.

When it was time for us to leave the mountains and go to the next township, the man had conducted several secret observations of the town to ensure that the township was still in the hands of the SPLA. There had been a gun battle just two weeks before we left the mountains. When we observed that it was safe for us to go into the township, we entered at around noon. Early morning was not a good time, as we could easily be mistaken for enemies and fired upon. It was in that township that we separated from the man. He told us that he was going to find his family in another township.

Life in refugee camps

In December 1992, my grandmother and I fled to a refugee camp in Uganda. It took us three days to walk from Pageri to Agojo refugee settlement camp (see Figure 3). In the refugee camp, we were registered by the United Nations High

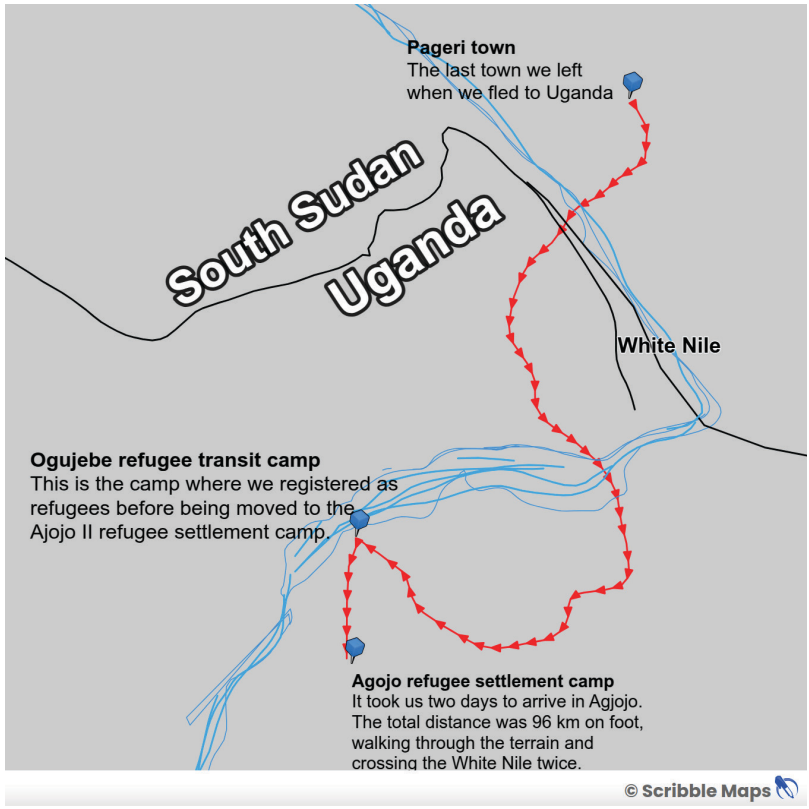

Figure 3: Google map showing the routes we travelled on foot from Pageri to Agojo refugee settlement camp in Uganda

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Ogujebe Settlement Camp and transported in a lorry to the Agojo refugee camp. In Agojo refugee camp, we were provided with basic items such as a tent, utensils, and emergency food. Life in the camp was vastly different from that which we had known in our homeland. Each person was given a piece of land measuring 5 m × 10 m to construct their own shelter. Unfortunately, we did not have any land to cultivate and grow our own food. People depended on food rations, which lasted only for some days. To

conserve the little that was distributed, people ate food once a day and still ran out of food. It would be days before the next food rations were distributed.

Due to the lack of income for my grandmother and me, I took the initiative to gather papyrus reeds, weave them into mats, and sell them to generate some income. I ventured deep into the papyrus swamps along the River Nile near the Ogujebe refugee settlement camp to collect the reeds. Despite the weight of the bundles, I transported them to the shore, where I split and dried them before bringing them home to weave into mats. I continued doing this job every school holiday until I completed primary school. However, there were also other life challenges in the camp including limited access to clean water, proper sanitation, and necessities such as food and clothing. The lack of adequate living conditions led to a variety of health issues, including the spread of diseases and malnutrition. Malnutrition was prevalent in the camp, and communicable diseases and infections were a daily occurrence that often led to death.

As a result of our conditions in the refugee camp, I frequently got sick with diarrhoea and malaria, lost significant weight and became extremely thin. One day, while I was sweeping our compound, my grandmother noticed a swelling on my knee. She thought I had tried to hide it from her. She called me over and asked with a weary voice, what had happened. I told her nothing was wrong. She pressed on the protruding skin, but I felt no sensation. It wasn't a swelling, but rather my bone pushing against the skin. As I lay on the ground, she asked me if I felt any pain. I responded that I wasn't feeling any pain, but

I could hear the sorrow in her voice as she told me that my bones were protruding. Before this question from my grandmother, I had no idea I was wasting away. I began worrying about my health. I started to pay closer attention to my body, noticing that my ribs were all visible and my leg bones hardly had any flesh on them. It was difficult to determine just how much weight I had lost because everyone looked the same – skinny and malnourished.

Moreover, future uncertainty and the past trauma from witnessing conflict and violence to being displaced from our homes led to a profound impact on the mental and emotional well-being of many people in the camp. Many people who did not drink alcohol or smoke started doing so. Faced with prolonged uncertainty and limited educational opportunities, the issue of teenage pregnancies was particularly high among youths. However, despite these immense challenges, many young people, including me, exhibited remarkable resilience and strength to pursue a better life for themselves and their families, showcasing the enduring human spirit in the face of adversity.

Summary

I have recounted my personal experiences of growing up in a peaceful village in what was then Sudan, now South Sudan, and the circumstances that led to my becoming a refugee. I described the close-knit community, self-sufficiency, and daily life in the village, including farming, barter trade, and traditional practices. However, the arrival of the SPLA in 1986 abruptly disrupted our lives. I vividly remember the chaos and

urgency as my family and villagers fled our village to escape the militia's raid. Living through the war in our village was harrowing. My family endured constant danger and loss as armed militias terrorised our community. My father joined the SPLA to protect our village but tragically lost his life in battle, leaving me without a father figure. I was forced to take on adult responsibilities and was eventually taken captive during a conflict. Despite the hardships, I held on to the kindness shown by others during those difficult times. One poignant memory is that of fleeing with my grandmother from a township under attack. Our escape showcased acts of sacrifice and bravery, including my grandmother's decision to retrieve a family heirloom despite the danger. Throughout the journey, the resilience and compassion of the civilians, especially towards the elderly, women, and children, were incredibly moving. These experiences captured the indomitable human spirit, and selflessness in the face of adversity.

In 1992, my grandmother and I fled to a refugee camp in Uganda, where we encountered numerous challenges such as food scarcity, health issues, and limited access to clean water and education. Despite these hardships, I persevered and pursued education, eventually moving to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya for further opportunities. Kakuma camp, which was initially established for unaccompanied minors from Sudan, faced extreme weather conditions and environmental challenges. My personal account provides insight into the devastating impact of war and conflict on families and individuals. It sheds light on the challenges faced by a young person growing up without a father in a traditional society, as well as the

resilience and determination exhibited in the face of extreme hardship. My journey from a peaceful village to becoming a refugee encompasses the profound impact of war, loss, and displacement, but also highlights the strength, and compassion found in the mid of adversity.

3
How did seeking refuge and education come together

In this chapter, William shares his educational journey and the opportunities that came with it. He begins by talking about schooling in his village before the war, which he was considered too young to attend, and his first formal education experience. Following that, he will discuss his schooling in the refugee camp, his experience attending high school, and eventually finding himself in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.

The place of education before the war

Traditionally, in our village, education was not a top priority, and there was no need for it other than being able to read and write a letter. A handful of people in the village had elementary-level education, but most were pre-literate. My parents' generation had spent their childhoods in refugee camps in Uganda during the first Sudanese Civil War in the 1970s. As a result, most of them

never went to school. When our parents returned home to what was then Sudan (now South Sudan), they resumed their traditional way of life.

Before the second Sudanese Civil War, our village had a primary school for children that taught grades one through six. The school was held in the afternoon, after people had finished working the land, so education could be integrated into our traditional way of life. Perhaps, after returning from Uganda, our people realised they needed a school for their children to learn to read and write, as communication through written letters was becoming common practice in the village among the refugee returnees from the camps in Uganda. Before written communication, our people relayed messages through different means, such as sending messengers, blowing horns, flutes, howling, or drumming.

Education in the village

When our village was burnt down during the second Sudanese civil war (see Chapter 2), volunteer teachers started to teach children under trees in our hideout places. During this time, my sister and brother started school. I was about six years old and was considered too young to start school. Whenever my siblings did their homework, I sat next to them, and my sister taught me how to recite the alphabet in the Acholi dialect, and to write my name on the ground. However, before I could start schooling, the volunteer teachers stopped providing education because of the constant attacks in our hideouts. My sister kept teaching me some basic numeracy skills while we were hiding in the bushes. This little and playful teaching helped me with some basic skills.

When I lived with my grandmother in 1992, she sent me to a school for unaccompanied children – children who were separated from their parents during the war and were looked after by the Sudanese Liberation Army, which was fighting the Sudanese Government. There were thousands of children who became separated from their parents and were too young to care for themselves alone. Some of these children became known as Lost Boys, and many were eventually resettled in the United States of America. The school for the unaccompanied children was located outside of the townships, and hundreds of children my age from different parts of the south lived at the school. I was placed in grade one, and most of our teachers were untrained military officers. We didn't have any books, pencils, desks, or buildings. We were taught under the trees, and the teachers had to improvise iron sheets as boards, and writing on them with charcoal. It was a difficult, challenging environment in which to learn.

Life in the township was not easy. We were constantly under attack from Russian-made Antonov fighter jets used by the Sudanese Government, and people had to hide in temporary trenches to avoid getting bombed. The damage caused by the fighter jets was all around us: houses were burnt, and big trees scorched, branches were felled and thrown far away from their bases. The trees in the township lost all their leaves in the bombing raids. It had not occur to the rebel officers that our schools would be bombed, as they were locatedoutside the township.

Despite the constant bombing in the township, we continued to learn. However, my time at the school was short-lived, as it was bombed only two weeks after I arrived. It was around noon, and we were on a recess. I was playing with some children my

age when we heard a fighter jet approaching. We immediately lay flat on the ground, and two bombs were dropped on our school. One bomb hit a building that was used as a store, and the other fell on the outskirts of the school compound. Two people were hurt, but not life-threateningly. It was a traumatic experience that I will never forget. I then realised how vulnerable we were and how difficult it was to get an education in our war-torn country. Apart from those two weeks, I do not remember attending formal school in then Sudan.

Education in the refugee camps

Once I arrived at the Agojo II refugee settlement camp in Uganda in December 1992, I was able to start my education in 1993. There were several refugee settlement camps for Sudanese refugees in the host community, some of which were established in 1989. Schooling in displacement contexts varies significantly, depending on how long a camp has existed, if/how the local community welcomes refugees, how a refugee community organises itself, where the school was located (country, camp), and school grade. When I started my education in 1993, it was common practice that the lower the grade, the fewer resources allocated to the class. It was also common practice for lower grades to be assigned less-educated teachers and have poorer facilities. Lower grade classes were held under trees with children sitting on the ground for lessons, while more senior grade classes tended to sit on wooden logs or take place in locally built shelters if they existed.

Although I couldn't write when I arrived in the refugee camp, I had already developed good skills in basic mathematics from

my sister, so I was placed in a third-grade class after the teachers found that I could solve a third grade level mathematics, which was appropriate for my age. I was thirteen years old then. I have good memories of my first teacher. He was a grade three leaver from the then-Sudan education system, who had little English, but was very caring. Every evening, he gathered the school-aged children at his home to teach them basic numeracy skills. I don't know if he did this because there was not much to do in the refugee camp, if he really wanted to equip us with knowledge, or if he was looking for an employment opportunity by creating one. Whatever his intention was, his efforts helped to establish a school in our refugee camp. Classes were held under trees, and we sat on the ground or on rocks, as we had done in our bombed school back home. Similarly, there were no blackboards, chalk, books, pens, or pencils. Instead, every child had a section of the dusty ground to write in, copying what the teacher had written on a rock with charcoals. Our teacher taught us to use a stick for writing on the ground with the hope that if we were given the resources, we would develop the necessary skill of holding a pen or pencil.

When we finished writing and copying on the ground, he marked and commented on our schoolwork. He would write things such as "excellent, keep up the good work" next to our work on the ground if we answered all the questions right. He would then ask us to erase our work, which I found heartbreaking because I always wanted to show my good work to my grandmother, even though she couldn't read or write. I thought seeing that I was doing well in school might give my grandmother some hope that I would grow up and become a useful person in society. But

this was impossible, and we went for over a year before we had pencils or pens to write with and exercise books to write in.

As we switched from one lesson to another, the rock was wiped with a dampened cloth to remove the charcoal. We would wait for about 30 minutes for the rock to dry and then be ready for the next lesson. As time went by and services to refugees started to trickle in, the school received blackboards, exercise books, pens, and pencils. I remember my first pen was from New Zealand, which immediately became a popular country among us. We all wanted to establish contact with schoolchildren in New Zealand so that they could keep sending us things for school. As children, we treasured the pens we were given by the New Zealand people. Then, Jesuit Refugees Services (JRS) started to take over the school's administration. JRS staffed our schools and provided teachers with resources to run the school. They paid our teachers and appointed school head teachers, all while we were still learning under trees.

Educational expectations in the camps

The developments in the school system meant that pupils were also expected to behave and meet educational standards. In the school, our home languages were not allowed, and whenever we spoke in our languages, we would get some punishment. The punishment for not speaking English was a good incentive to focus on learning the language. Each class had a tortoiseshell which was used to shame children who spoke their first language in class. Whether the teacher overheard us, or a fellow pupil accused us, if we were heard speaking a language other than English, we were forced to wear the tortoiseshell around

our neck. It was passed to another child if they were later heard speaking in their first language. When the school closed for the day, whichever child was still in possession of the tortoiseshell was given five floggings.

Although not an official directive from JRS, our local teachers were attempting to ensure we became proficient in English language, because it is the formal medium of education in Uganda. I was lucky because we were given a plot next to my uncle's, and my aunt spoke basic English. Every evening, she taught her daughter some English phrases, and I would join her in learning new English words. I only left when it was time to sleep, and I slept in a tent that had been set up on the plot next to my uncle's.

Our teachers were happy when they heard us try to speak in English, even if it was inaccurate. It was not uncommon to hear broken English phrases, such as: "You are no good", "You insulting me", and "You thief my pencil", as well as short English phrases like "Come here", "Go there", and many others. The only good English I remember being taught was how to greet our teachers when they entered the classroom. Whenever a teacher came in, all the students would stand up, on their feet, and the endless greetings would begin:

Teacher: *Good morning, class.*

Pupils: *Good morning, teacher.*

Teacher: *How are you?*

Pupils: *We are very well. Thank you, teacher.*

Teacher: *Sit down.*

Pupils: *Thank you, teacher.*

Very early in the morning, the school timekeeper, who was also a student, rang the school bell, which was made from an old truck rim. It was usually rung three times. On the second ring, pupils would start running to school. If a pupil arrived after the third bell had rang, the school prefects flogged that child. Male pupils were flogged on their buttocks, while female pupils were flogged on their hands. The second ring of the bell was also a signal to clean the school compound, which we swept every morning. Pupils were asked to bring brooms from home to school every two weeks. These were inspected during a school assembly, and if a pupil didn't bring a broom, the child was flogged in front of the school assembly. Usually, such punishment carried more lashes than the usual five for coming late or speaking our language.

There were general cleanliness days in the school. On such a day, we were asked to cut the grass around the school with donated grass slashers. The slashers were double-edged, springy tools, ideal for clearing long grass and weeds, without excessive bending. Pupils in lower classes were asked to make arts and crafts as part of the end-of-year examinations. Parents were asked to construct school shelters when there were enough reeds and poles. It was a mandatory community participation event. Those who didn't participate were fined to pay some money, or their children were kicked out of the school.

My primary schooling journey in the camps

I finished third grade at the top of the class. When I went to register for the fourth grade, a thought came to my mind that the opportunity for a scholarship to attend high school might cease

if I didn't skip a grade. I then thought that if I skipped the fourth grade, I could still have the chance to continue to high school under a scholarship, provided I performed well in my final primary school exams. I asked our headteacher if he would allow me to go directly to the fifth grade, as I performed well in the third grade. He refused, but my biology teacher advocated for me to skip the fourth grade because he felt I was ready for the fifth grade. We reached a compromise the headteacher said that if I placed among the top five students in the first term of the fourth grade, he would allow me to move up in the following term. I was keen to progress quickly because I was scared that I would miss out on the camp's scholarship opportunity to study in high school if I didn't jump ahead. I was convinced that this would be catastrophic to my education.

In the first term of the fourth grade, I placed first in the class. I went to the headteacher and asked him to honour our deal, and the headteacher agreed for me to join the fifth grade. In the final term of the fifth grade, I placed 14th in a class of over 80 school children, which allowed me to go to the sixth grade. However, because our camp was relatively new and lacked facilities, I decided on my own that I needed to transfer to a school in another settlement camp. The camp was located about an hour and a half walk from ours, so, I walked three hours a day to attend the sixth grade.

Due to a lack of facilities in the school I transferred to, pupils from the fifth grades to sixth grades attended school in the afternoon. I placed first in the sixth grade and was accepted into the seventh grade, which was the final year of primary school in Uganda. All seventh graders in the country sat for the same examination.

Completing seventh grade with good grades was an important milestone as it determined which high school the leavers would attend after primary school.

In the camp, we had limited opportunities to compete with non-refugee students for top grades because we lacked the resources, including adequate facilities and trained teachers. Nevertheless, this was no excuse for not working hard to achieve good grades. In the final year of the seventh grade, I dedicated myself to helping my classmates do well in the national examination, which was officially called the Primary Leaving Examination. When morning school sessions ended, I stayed behind at school with an older student to coach students who needed extra help, mostly in mathematics.

A group of students started staying back after school so that they could receive this help from us. They began bringing us pastries so we would not go hungry while we tutored them. During this time, I learned that my coaching colleague had also faced many struggles in his life. Sadly, he was denied a scholarship despite performing excellently in his Primary Leaving Examination, simply because he was considered too old. I was lucky to achieve a high distinction in the seventh grade in 1996 and received a scholarship to attend a boarding high school outside the refugee camp.

High schooling

In 1997, at the age of sixteen, through the scholarship I received, I joined a boarding high school that only accepted the best and brightest students in the district. My grandmother was elated

when she learned that I had passed the primary school exams and was given a scholarship to study in one of the best high schools in the district. I didn't have much with me when I left for school, and I didn't have any money. All I had was a tiny tuckbox, made locally, which I bought using the money I earned from selling papyrus mats. Inside, I had a blanket, a cover sheet, exercise books, a pair of flip flops, a pair of school shoes, and one set of school uniforms. I also carried a hurricane lamp to help me study at night because the school didn't have electricity despite being the best in the district. I could see the joy and pride on my grandmother's face, despite the limited resources I had to take to the boarding school with me.

Since I didn't have any transportation, I had to walk on foot to the school (Figure 4). It took me an entire day to get there, and I walked nonstop until I reached the Nile crossing around noon. Luckily, a ferry was transporting World Food Program trucks across the Nile that day, and I was able to use it to cross the river. After crossing the Nile, I had to walk for another half-day to reach the school, constantly asking people for directions along the way and arriving there at around 5 p.m. that evening.

When I arrived at the school, I didn't know anyone. Many of the students at the school were Ugandan nationals, although there was also a relatively large number of refugee students. I was directed to a head boy, who then showed me to my dormitory house. Unfortunately, I was four weeks late, and the dormitory was full, so they showed me a space with no bed next to the door. I placed my tuckbox against the wall and spread my blankets on the floor. There was no orientation regarding food, classes, or

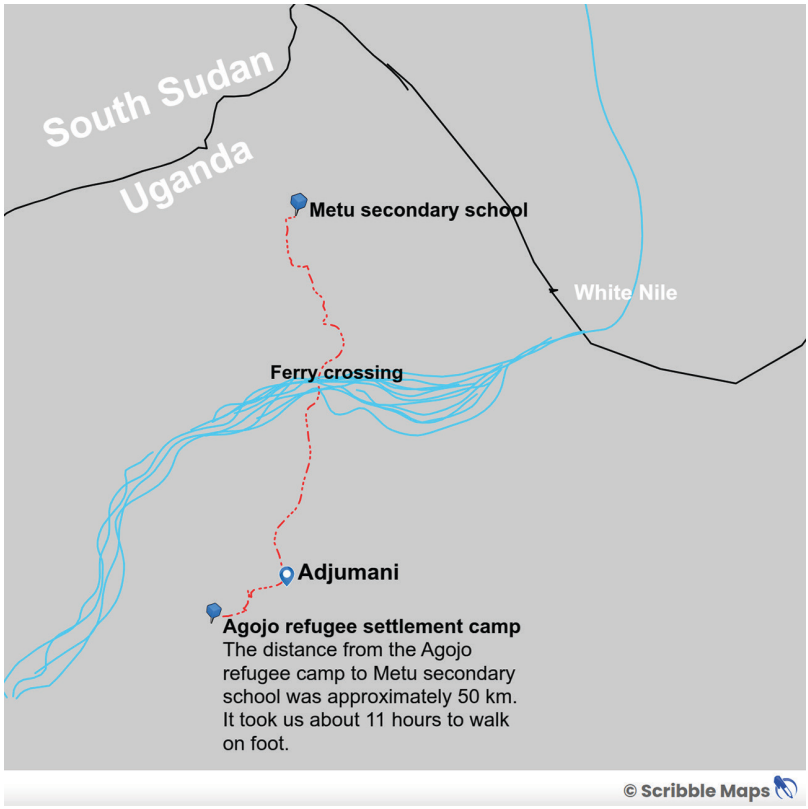

Figure 4: A google map showing the path I walked from the refugee camp to my boarding high school

school activities. I felt lost and confused, but I didn't want to draw attention to myself by asking other students for help. I decided to follow the crowd and hope for the best. Despite the initial challenges, I managed to make it through the first few days until I became acquainted with the school calendar and expectations.

Bullying and other torments

During my first term at the school, I became the target of bullies. I looked poor and rugged, and I slept on a blanket on the

floor while other students had beds and mattresses. Many students would wipe their feet on my blankets when it rained, and I wasn't in the dormitory. I was called names like rat, pig, and dog, and students would make animal noises when referring to me. When I passed by, they would grunt, oink, bark, and squeak at me. I didn't have any pocket money, and my only pair of flip-flops were stolen. When I confronted the boy who took them, many students ganged up on me. I reported the incident to the headmaster, but he didn't take any action. I was unsure why the school headmaster did not respond to my complaint, so I decided to leave following the matter.

The bullying continued when it came to bathing. Although the school didn't have enough water for showering, there was a nearby stream where students went to bathe. Other students would throw my shoes into the water, they would throw me back into the water while rubbing my back with stones, saying that my back was dirty. They did this because I didn't have a towel, I had to stand on a rock to wait for my body to dry before putting my clothes on. They would also rub soap on my head, saying I hadn't bathed properly, even after I had finished bathing. This bullying made me avoid other students whenever I went to wash.

Overcoming challenges

I had to work hard to make myself known during my first term to stop the bullying. I placed at the top of my class in my first term despite arriving four weeks late. I joined the school drama club during my second term and made friends with students from different backgrounds, including people who came from families with high-ranking positions in the local government. I joined

the school charity association and began to help students who were in wheelchairs by volunteering to serve them food. Despite having nothing, I drew many students within my circle of friends and eventually got the fair treatment I deserved.

One of my best friends was a girl whose father was a senior government official. She first introduced me to her father as "the boy who helps me with my maths and chemistry." At that time, her father had come to give her some pocket money. Although we were offered food in school, it was often infested with weevils, so some students preferred not to eat it if they could, and instead buying food from local women. The experience of meeting my friend's father for the first time was a defining moment in my life. I felt a sense of pride that I was able to offer my help to others, and his generosity and kindness towards me touched my heart. I was grateful when he bought me a new pair of flip-flops to replace the one that had been stolen, and his encouragement to continue studying hard resonates with me to this day. The memory of this experience fills me with a deep sense of appreciation for the people who have helped me along the way and have inspired me to be a better person and to help others however I can.

Although our high school was considered one of the best schools in the district, it lacked a reliable source of electricity. The school relied on a generator that would work up until 10 p.m. every night, after which it would be turned off. This meant that students who wished to study after 10 p.m. had to use their own lamps. It was a challenging situation, especially because almost half of the students in our high school were refugees and were on scholarships. As a result, we had to work extremely hard to perform

well in the Uganda Certificate of Education national examination (senior four national qualifications, also called "O-Level" or Ordinary level) to secure a scholarship for our Advanced Uganda Certificate of Education (senior six national qualifications, also called "A-Level" or "Advanced level"). Despite all the challenges, it was amazing to see how determined and hardworking we were as refugee students; we never let our circumstances get in the way of our dreams.

I used to study with my friend every evening until 10 p.m. After that, she would go to sleep, but I would continue studying until midnight. Then, I would wake up at 4 a.m. every morning to study more. Sometimes, I would struggle to stay awake due to fatigue, so I would immerse my feet in cold water to help me stay alert. It was tough, but I was driven by my desire to achieve a top grade in my O-Levels to secure a scholarship for A-Level. Despite the challenges, I was confident my hard work would pay off in the end.

Heartbreak for refugee students

During my second term at the school, I was heartbroken when all the refugee students were sent home due to a disagreement between the refugee student leadership team and the school administration. Every year, refugee students received 60,000 Uganda shillings (approximately AUD $24) as pocket money. This was back in 1997 when I joined high school. Unfortunately, the year I joined the school, the school administration decided to use all the pocket money to buy food while waiting for the refugee students' school fees to arrive. The school consulted with the refugee student leadership body regarding the use of the

money, but the local students objected. They cited instances in the past where the school had used their pocket money and failed to refund them. As first-year students, we had no say in the matter and had to follow whatever the students in higher classes decided. It was frustrating to see that we were not given a chance to express our opinions or have a say in the matter, and it felt like our voices were not being heard.

When the refugee students refused to let the school use their pocket money, we were all expelled. The police were called in to ensure that we left the school immediately with all our belongings, and we were instructed not to leave anything behind. At that time, I had some first-year friends who were training to become Catholic priests and lived in a monastery near the school. Thinking the suspension was temporary, I took my tuck-box to them. The camp commandant was furious with what the school had done. He immediately distributed notices throughout the refugee camps and called all the refugee students at the school to meet with him. In that meeting, the refugee students and the camp commandants concluded that there was a cynical jealousy about refugee students' high performance at the school. The camp commandant gave a letter of support to each refugee student, encouraging them to seek admission to any high school in northern Uganda. However, this meant that we needed to find a school that would allow us to start our second year of secondary education despite not finishing the first year.

I didn't want to attend school in the area where our refugee camp was located. I had a gut feeling that the local community was attempting to prevent refugees from opportunities, such as education. It appeared to me that the local high schools were

attempting to undermine our top-performing school by forcing high-achieving refugee students to transfer to the nearby high schools located within the boundaries of the refugee camps. Their goal seemed to be to boost the standards and reputation of their own schools. I suspected that the headteacher expelled us to gain political support from his local community because he came from the areas around the refugee camps. My feeling was prophetic. It soon became apparent that the high-performing refugee students weren't returning to the school they had been expelled from, and the Ugandan government immediately appointed the former headteacher as the resident district commissioner for the areas around the refugee camps.

It was disheartening to see the struggles that other refugee students faced in their pursuit of education. I was dismayed to see that some schools were unwilling to accept and support these students, but it was also inspiring to see the resilience and determination of these students to continue their education despite the obstacles in their way.

Trying again

I decided to try another district for admission. It was a difficult decision for me, but I had no other option. After searching for days, I found a school in the poorest area in that district. The school's buildings were dilapidated, and the facilities were substandard. The buildings and dormitories were in poor condition, with broken windows, bare fluorescent tubes, and faulty electrical wiring. The school had a bad reputation within the local community and didn't perform well in the O-Level National Examinations. As I looked around, I couldn't help but feel a sense of despair.

Nevertheless, when the school agreed to give me admission after seeing the letter of support from the camp commandant, I was overjoyed and realised how fortunate I was to have the chance to continue my secondary education because many other students didn't have the same privilege. I felt like I had a chance at life.

When I started attending the new school, I was filled with a sense of excitement and nervousness. However, my fears quickly dissipated as I found the quality of teaching to be good. Despite the school's reputation and lack of resources, I was determined to get an education. I knew I had to do whatever it took to succeed. I was confident that I could perform well in the O-Level National Examination with hard work. There were also other refugee students from a different region who were on the same scholarship as me. Given my experience, I was passionate about being involved in discussions with my school on anything relating to our scholarship and education. The refugee students at the school elected me as their representative leader. I communicated with the headmistress and the scholarship office on matters relating to our school fees. I held this position for three years and successfully petitioned the headmistress not to expel us despite our late fees until I completed my O-Level. I was so relieved and grateful to have a headmistress who understood our situation and always went above and beyond to support refugee students. It was such a contrast to my previous school, where I had felt like we were constantly fighting for recognition and acceptance.

I was among the top ten students in the district for the year 2000 O-Level National Examination results/Ugandan Certificate of Education (UCE). This came as a surprise to many local people and the media, who couldn't believe that my

school could produce such a high-performing student. On the day I received my results, reporters were present to capture my reaction. The headmistress greeted me with enthusiasm and took me to her office, where she congratulated me on my success and shared her pride in my accomplishment with the other teachers. The media were eager to interview me, but I declined as I didn't want to draw more attention to my results. Despite this, my achievements and pictures still made it to the local media outlets.

Looking beyond high schooling for more educational opportunities

When I returned to the refugee camp, the camp commandant invited the top-performing refugee students, including me, to go to Kampala for an opportunity to study the international baccalaureate overseas. This opportunity was made available through the Hugh Pilkington Charitable Trust. There were 18 students from various refugee camps who attended the invitation. Four of us were Ma'di speakers, and the rest were Bari speakers, but we were all Sudanese nationals. We were all excited about the opportunity to study overseas. Sadly, the four of us who were Ma'di speakers were not selected for the international baccalaureate opportunity. As compensation, we were given 500,000 Ugandan shillings (about AUD $200) to get back to our refugee camps. It was a lot of money to give for transport to return to the camp.

I was disappointed about missing out and couldn't help but feel that the study opportunity had been bought by powerful people

for their children. Before returning to the camp, I spoke with a friend who had also been invited to Kampala. We decided to go to the Nuba Mountains, which are located in Darfur, in western Sudan, to teach in primary schools so we could save money to pay for A-Level study. To go to the Nuba Mountains, we had to go through Kenya. We had heard that there were United Nations flights from northern Kenya to the Nuba Mountains delivering humanitarian aid, and sometimes, they helped to transport people too.

Although he was keen to join me, my friend felt that his money was insufficient, and he said he was going back to the refugee camp to sell some goats to top up his money and he asked me to wait for him for two weeks. I waited, but he never came. I felt like he used the selling of goats as an excuse to not come with me. I was uncertain about what to do, but I had an instinct that told me returning to the camp would not lead to any future. Instead, I decided to leave to Kenya on my own.

Unfortunately, I didn't know how to get to northern Kenya. I spent a day at one of the popular bus stations in Kampala, asking different people which route to take to northern Kenya. I was lucky to find a former truck driver who worked for the SPLA rebels transporting their goods from Kenya to the then Sudan. He corroborated all the information I gathered from the different people, and I felt confident to get started (Figure 5). I took a bus from Kampala to Nairobi and planned to change bus after crossing the border. I didn't have a suitcase, but a small carry-on folded in a 1m x 1m cover sheet. I didn't have a travel document from the refugee camp, apart from the letter from the camp commandant, which I had used to travel to Kampala. I was unsure what the customs officials would do to me without a travel document to cross the borders.

Despite my doubts, I pushed on and made it through the Uganda and Kenya customs. When I went through customs, the officers looked at me and waved me through. I was unsure why they let me go without asking for documents. Maybe they thought I was a local person in the area, or my carry-on suggested to them that I was not travelling on the Kampala to Nairobi bus. While at the border, I took the opportunity to exchange my Ugandan currency for Kenyan shillings. After passing through customs, I boarded a bus and relied on the notes I had taken to navigate my public transport options. At the time, many of the public transport vehicles in Kenya were minibuses, which had seating capacities of either eight or twelve. These minibuses were often overcrowded, as drivers struggled to make ends meet. There was little room to move around on these minibuses. I had to constantly keep track of my surroundings to ensure I got off at the right town. The Kenyan police frequently stopped our minibuses and requested identification from passengers. I didn't have any documents to present, and each time, I had to pay a fine. This continued until I arrived at the Kakuma refugee camp. The journey lasted a gruelling two days from the Uganda–Kenya border. Beyond the Kakuma refugee camp was the Northern Kenyan town where the United Nations used to fly food to the Nuba Mountains.

Making it to Kakuma refugee camp

Upon arrival at the Kakuma refugee camp, I experienced a mix of emotions, including relief and anxiety. I didn't intend to stop in Kakuma, but I was fortunate enough to encounter someone from our village in the then Sudan who recognised me and

informed me that my paternal uncle, along with his family, was also at the camp. I was overjoyed to hear this news and felt a sense of relief when they took me to my uncle's house. We had a heartwarming conversation about my plans to continue my journey to the Nuba Mountains. Although my uncle seemed hesitant, I could sense his love and concern for me. Instead of discouraging me outright, he advised me to wait for a few days while he inquired about the process of booking United Nations flights.

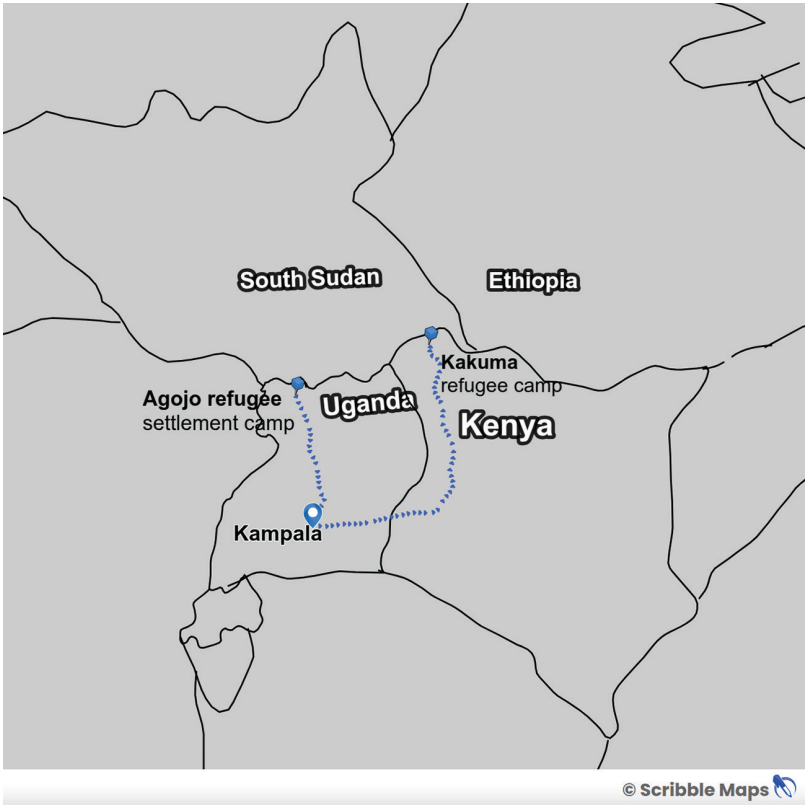

Figure 5: Google map showing the routes I travelled from Agojo refugee camp to Kampala and to Kakuma refugee settlement camp in Kenya

My uncle invited community elders to his home to discuss my journey. I was initially hesitant to share my plans, but I listened respectfully as they advised me on my education and future. I explained what had happened with my education and my aspirations to teach in the Nuba Mountains so that I could earn money to help me complete my A-Level. The elders recognised my good grades and informed me about opportunities available through the WUSC SRP, which could allow me to go from the Kakuma refugee camp to study overseas. They helped me register as a refugee at the camp, and I felt grateful to have a supportive community after such a disappointing time, and difficult journey. I ended up living in the Kakuma refugee camp, in far northwestern Kenya, because of the available opportunity at the time, which was the possibility of continuing further education.

Kakuma refugee camp was established in 1992 to host the fleeing unaccompanied minors from Sudan, commonly known as the "Lost Boys". It is located about 800 kilometres from Nairobi, and 100 kilometres from the Kenya-South Sudan border. The area experienced limited rainfall, frequent droughts, and dust storms, and was hot and dry throughout the year. The average daytime temperature was about 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit), making Kakuma refugee camp experience extremely scorching heat during the day. Additionally, due to its desert and hot climate, the region was home to a significant number of scorpions and poisonous snakes, causing several hospitalisations and deaths.

Although initially established to host the "Lost Boys", Kakuma refugee camp eventually became one of the largest refugee camps in the world, with over 160,000 refugees from different countries, including Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Democratic

Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Rwanda, and Uganda. Refugees were provided with tents and iron sheets to make shelters. There was no electricity or running water. People drank water from wells pumped by the United Nations to communal tap points in the refugee camp. There were numerous cases of cholera, malaria, and fluoride poisoning due to the high levels of fluoride in the well water. Additionally, there were other contributing factors, such as malnutrition, inadequate food, poor sanitation, overcrowding, and insufficient healthcare services. Moreover, in the Kakuma refugee camp, refugees did not have the freedom to move freely outside the camps. To travel outside the camp, they needed to obtain travel documents from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Kenyan government.

We depended on food rations every month. At those food distributions, people would line up on a caged ramp used to load cattle onto a truck. The line was often crowded and hot, and people felt uncomfortable and stressed. In those conditions, people would normally wait for a long time without access to water or bathroom facilities. The experience was stressful and dehumanising, to say the least, as people were often treated like objects rather than individuals. Despite these challenges, people lined up for food as they had no other choice but to make basic ends meet.

Unlike in Uganda, where food rations were distributed in open compounds through a roll call, in Kakuma refugee camp, we had to go through an arduous process of punching the ration cards to receive our daily food supplies. The foods were distributed in a gallon, which was equivalent to about 5 kilograms by weight. The food rations we received were mostly dried corn for meals

and lentils or beans. On a few rare occasions, we were fortunate enough to receive 500 ml of oil to cook our food.

During my first year at the Kakuma refugee camp in 2001, I would have been around 20 years old, I applied to become a primary school teacher at the World Food Program (WFP), which provided basic education in the camp. I worked as a teacher for middle school students, teaching maths and science to seventh and eighth graders. I was paid 3,000 Kenyan Shillings (about $35 AUD in 2024 exchange rate) a month. I also took some courses over the weekends with the United Nations to become a "Peace Facilitator". After completing the United Nations Peace Building Course, I became a "Peace Facilitator". In the two years I was in Kakuma, I worked as a schoolteacher during the day and attended advanced English course training provided by the Windle Charitable Trust – a branch of the Hugh Pilkington Charitable Trust in Uganda – in the evening. On weekends, I worked as a Peace Facilitator and attended computer courses delivered by Don Bosco Catholic priests. I was paid 3,000 Kenyan shillings (about AUD $34) monthly form my Peace Facilitator role, which I used to buy food to supplement my living in the Kakuma refugee camp.

As a Peace Facilitator, my role involved providing community education and workshops on the importance of harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence with different communities. At the time, Kakuma refugee camp experienced frequent interethnic communal fighting. Some of the interethnic fighting was because of competition over who controlled the limited resources such as water and food. However, some of the conflicts could also be attributed to other underlying factors in which people find themselves,

including, but not limited to, high unemployment, a feeling of hopelessness, disillusionment and helplessness, and the impacts of conflicts on psychological and mental well-being. I became more interested in furthering my education to make a meaningful contribution to the community, given my O-Level education was inadequate for impactful outcomes. I started saving some of the money I earned to return to do A-Level in Uganda. Before I could save enough money to return to complete A-Level, an opportunity to apply for WUSC has become available in Kakuma refugee camp. This passion for education provided me the opportunity to escape the difficult situations in the refugee camp to take charge of my own life destiny.

Applying for the World University Service Canada Student Refugee Program

The following year, in 2002, I applied for the WUSC SRP through the Windle Charitable Trust. This programwas an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many refugee students in the Kakuma refugee camps, as it provided a pathway to higher education. Like the refugee camps in Uganda, no scholarships were available for refugee students in Kakuma refugee camps for higher education study. More than 500 people applied for the WUSC program in my year. The selection process was perhaps the most transparent I have ever seen, given my experience in Uganda. All 500 students were screened based on several written English tests. Each time, the bottom 25 per cent of applicants with the lowest grades were eliminated. This process continued until only 47 of us were left. This screening process took about nine

months (March–November 2002). We were then subjected to oral interviews that involved immigration officers and a WUSC officer from Canada. Only 25 of us were selected for the WUSC program that year. This was the proudest moment of my life as I knew I would have the opportunity to continue my education and have a shot at life. The WUSC selection process taught me the importance of hard work, perseverance, and never giving up on my dreams.

The Windle Charitable Trust was instrumental in helping us prepare for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) after the WUSC screening process. After six months of rigorous preparation, I was thrilled to learn that I had passed the TOEFL and was admitted to the prestigious University of Toronto to study Bachelor of Life Sciences. While I was still in Kakuma, I received a package from the university, which contained valuable information about Victoria College at the University of Toronto, and the people in the group who would support me when I arrived in Canada. I was overjoyed and couldn't believe that my dream of pursuing higher education was finally becoming a reality. I felt a sense of awe knowing that I would be studying at such a prestigious institution, and I was grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow. Around the same time, my uncle and his family received a humanitarian visa to migrate to Australia. I was included in my uncle's visa, but I chose not to go to Australia. Instead, I decided to pursue my university education in Canada.

Goodbye Kakuma, hello Canada

As I prepared to leave the refugee camp and embark on this new chapter of my life, I felt a mix of tensions. I knew the journey

ahead would be challenging, but I was determined to make the most of this opportunity and to honour the silent wisdom of my grandmother, who was deceased in the refugee camp in Uganda. I could sense her wise words, and the wisdom of many other people who helped me along the way, urging me to embrace the opportunity. Life as a refugee student in Canada would not be easy, but it was clearly a life-changing experience. It offered a chance to break the cycle of dependence on international food rations for survival. Most importantly, I had the opportunity to take charge of my education without relying on others, so I could become someone useful to society.

I cannot express how grateful I am to have had the chance to take charge of my own education. It was an experience that filled me with a sense of independence and self-reliance that I had never felt before. I remember how scared I was when I first started this journey, but the possibility of making a difference in my life and those around me kept me going. I knew I would have to put in a lot of hard work and dedication, but it would all be worth it in the end. Now, I am proud of the person I have become, and the contribution I make to society.

4
Life in Canada as a recipient of the Student Refugee Program

This chapter discusses William's experiences of settling in Canada and navigating the initial challenges and opportunities encountered as a refugee student through the WUSC SRP. The chapter narrates his journey from the moment of arrival at Victoria College, University of Toronto (UofT), to cautiously embracing a new educational and social environment. The chapter offers insights into the support he received from the WUSC "local committee" (comprising UofT student volunteers), the process of acclimatising to Canadian life, and the significant learning curves he encountered during his undergraduate studies in Canada. The chapter aims to provide insight into life as a WUSC student in Canada, and the pivotal role of the WUSC program in shaping his educational journey.

Settling in Canada and navigating a new life

I arrived in Canada on 9 September 2003, with several other SRP students. When I came out of customs, several students

from different universities in Ontario were at Toronto Pearson International Airport to receive us. Several groups of people were standing with posters displaying the names of their students, while others held balloons with "Welcome to Canada" written on them. I was received by a LC at Victoria College, and a Sudanese WUSC student from Kakuma refugee camp who had arrived the year before me.

When we got to Victoria College, they showed me my room. The WUSC local committee had arranged for me to stay in one of the student accommodation houses on campus. I lived in a single bedroom in the Upper Burwash Residence in North House. North House was mostly occupied by first-year students and was overseen by a don, an upper-year student. After I was shown my room, the don gave me an orientation regarding the routines that house members followed and the shared space. We shared a kitchenette, a small eating area, and a common area with cable TV, toilets, and a bathroom.

I received a lot of support during the first few weeks and the first year I was in Canada. For the first few weeks, the local WUSC volunteers took turns taking me to the dining hall or showing me around the campus. There was a lot to get used to. Navigating financial tasks was a priority. College campus student coordinators helped me with setting up a bank account, budgeting, grocery shopping, applying for financial assistance from the university, and organising alternative accommodation while the university was closed. Communication was next; even though I had good English proficiency, I found that Canadians speak fast (and they thought the same about me), so we often had to ask each other to slow down in order to understand each

other. Eventually, I became accustomed to the speed at which Canadians spoke, and *vice versa*, but taking the time to get used to the way Canadians spoke helped me to settle in and integrate into university life. I purposefully interacted with students and friends from Canada and other countries to improve my communication, despite the comfort of spending time with other Sudanese students at UofT.

Members of the LC took me out to explore Toronto in the early days; we went on the Sky Ride in Toronto, and we watched a baseball game between the Toronto Blue Jays and the Cleveland Guardians (formerly called the Cleveland Indians). While I enjoyed the excitement around me and the popcorn, I didn't understand anything about baseball at the time other than seeing grown-up men hitting a ball and running to the next base, while the other side tried to catch the ball and throw it back to the base. It was a classic "Welcome to Canada" moment for me.

Apart from taking me around the campus and the city, the WUSC LC also supported me three months after our arrival in Canada to attend the WUSC general conference in Ottawa in November 2003, which is held once a year. The conference attracted advocates, scholars, human rights lawyers, humanitarian workers, and WUSC alumni to share their knowledge, views, and experiences on refugee education. During that conference, I met several other WUSC students with whom I had travelled to Canada. It allowed me to re-establish contact with some WUSC students I knew from the Kakuma refugee camp who were from other universities, which was vital to feeling a sense of social network and support, albeit remotely.

In the year that I was supported by Victoria College, I had full access to the student dining hall. There was breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There was so much food that I couldn't eat all my planned meals. I wasn't used to eating three times a day, as I ate once a day in the refugee camp. Therefore, although the LC bought me full meal plans (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), I ate only twice daily, either breakfast and lunch, lunch and dinner or breakfast and dinner. I was concerned about my inability to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner, so I donated my meals to "Students Against Hunger" at Victoria College, which was an initiative run by students at the time to help save food from going to waste by donating it to homeless shelters. We developed a signup sheet for students to donate their food if they felt they couldn't eat their planned meals. We had students donating their breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The management at the dining hall was very supportive of the idea, and they saved the donated food. After all the students had eaten, the donated foods and whatever foods were left were delivered to a Homeless Shelter. I was actively involved in this program until I moved out of my residence after my first year.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time living in North House in the Upper Burwash Residence. I was pleased to meet many friendly and helpful students who made me feel truly welcome. The common area was a great place to connect with other students in the residence, and I used it frequently, especially during the first few days when I was feeling a bit lonely. The location of the accommodation was ideal for me, as it was close to all the amenities I needed. It saved me money on transportation to and from the university, and I could study in the library for as

long as I needed without worrying about catching the last bus home.

The only drawback of living on campus was that the residence was closed during the holidays, and students returned home. I had nowhere to go back to when the residence closed during the school holidays, making it challenging for the local WUSC committees to find me alternative accommodation. One LC member and his family were kind enough to accommodate me during the holidays at their home in Kincardine, which was about 222 kilometres west of Toronto and was located by the beautiful coast of Lake Huron. It took over three hours to drive from Toronto to their home, mostly driven by his father.

I was given another place to stay when North House closed, such as another student accommodation building, Rowell Jackman Hall, at Victoria College during one of the holidays. But the same LC member and his parents hosted me at their home again. His parents became like godparents to me, providing advice, guidance, and food throughout my time at the University of Toronto and they hosted me at their home many other times. On those occasions, his mom used to take me for walks along Lake Huron's beach every morning. During these walks, she shared stories about her husband's initial struggles when he arrived in Canada as a migrant in the 1960s. She emphasised that even though life was difficult, her husband persevered and eventually became a successful engineer, taking a senior leadership role after working at the local nuclear power plant for over 30 years. Her words gave me hope and motivation that I, too, could complete my education and find employment if I worked hard. Both were present at my graduation, and they generously organised and paid for a

graduation dinner for me. We have kept in touch ever since and have shared Christmas and Diwali wishes every year for the last 20 years.

A memorable winter experience in Canada

This section discusses my new experience of the changing seasons and the transition to winter in Canada as a WUSC student. The section narrates how I prepared for the cold weather, my first encounter with snow, and the festivities and activities I experienced during the winter. I also share observations of how Christmas is celebrated in Canada compared to my home village.

I arrived in Canada in September, a time of year when the grass and trees were still green. However, not long after I arrived, I started seeing the leaves turn golden into beautiful leaves. And soon, they started to fall off, and all the trees became bare, with no leaves left on them. The days became shorter, with the sun setting earlier than usual. I was told winter was coming, and that I needed to prepare to live through the cold winter weather. This included acquiring things I had never had to think about before: warm clothing, shoes, mittens, toques (commonly known in Australia as beanies), scarves; people even changed their car tyres, bought shovels to clear their driveways, and stocked up for emergency winter storms.

Through talking to other students, I learnt that listening to weather forecasts was important whenever I planned to go out. I didn't have a television in my room then, so I was worried about the weather catching me off guard without being properly

prepared for it. Luckily, the LC had bought me a small alarm radio which I kept by my bedside, and I learnt to tune the radio into the local weather stations every morning at 6 am.

I was also worried about winter partly because of what I had been taught about Canada in high school. While studying for my O-Level in Uganda, we were taught that the people of Canada built igloos and went ice fishing during the winter. My worry was exacerbated by my understanding of ice; in my village, the only ice we knew came from hailstones during rainstorms, which significantly destroyed crops and livestock that were vital to the community's survival. Crops, such as fruits, vegetables, and grains were often severely battered, leading to substantial crop losses. The aftermath was often accompanied by severe famine due to the destruction of crops, so you can understand my fear of ice.

One early Tuesday morning –25 November 2003 – I was startled to see a white, powdery, ash-like substance covering the grounds and plants outside my room window. It was my first encounter with snow. Probably sensing that I would be confused, a LC member called and advised me to dress warmly if I planned to go out. I could almost feel the chill as I peered through my room window. Then, it began to snow again. I pulled my study chair closer to the window and watched the fluffy snowfall, amazed at its softness. It was a far cry from the hard, icy image that had been lurking in my mind and causing anxiety.

Even though the LC had helped me buy a jacket, mitten, toque, scarf, and winter boots to prepare for the winter, I was unsure how to dress appropriately, given that it was my first snow. I watched through my room window to see how other people dressed. But

like the leaves on the trees, the once bustling streets became bare, with only those who truly needed to be going out. And confusingly, while some of them seemed to dress warmly, others only wore a sweater, and one even wore thongs. I was unsure if mimicking others' dress was a good idea, as they might be accustomed to the weather. I was worried about cold burns, a condition where the skin is damaged due to exposure to extreme cold, so I needed advice from someone who had experienced winter as an immigrant. I called the Sudanese WUSC student who arrived a year before me to come to my place so we could go out together. When we went outside, the weather was much better than I expected. I fell in love with winter and everything about it.

Although I assumed winter would make life miserable, I was wrong. Winter brought a lot of wonderful joy, especially with the festivities and activities that people do during this season. Living in winter and walking on the snow felt like living on the moon. Experiencing the changing seasons from flowers blooming, green to golden leaves, to bare trees in the fall, the juxtaposition of the white winter and the vibrant life of nature in autumn was truly amazing. Although life at first seemed like it was limited to only people playing with kids in the snow, making snow people, or snowball fights, the season was also soon full of bustling activities such as ice skating, sledding, and skiing.

As soon as winter started, it felt like the Christmas holiday season also started. I was awestruck with how the streets, shopping centres, and buildings were decorated with colourful lights, Christmas trees, and festive ribbons. I was surprised at how people put up decorations outside their homes, such as lights, wreaths, and Christmas trees. These decorations contrasted massively with

the Christmas decorations in our village, where people smeared their walls and floors with sledges, drawing newts, snakes, birds, cows, and animals on the walls with ash. The differences couldn't have been starker.

Many of the families we visited had been planning and preparing their Christmas meals for weeks. They sourced ingredients well in advance to make dishes such as roasted turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, and gingerbread cookies, ensuring every item they needed was ready for Christmas Day. In Toronto, the Sudanese WUSC student who arrived a year before introduced me to the Sudanese community church, from where I met many Sudanese community members who had migrated to Canada.

During the Christmas season, some Sudanese families invited me and the other Sudanese WUSC students into their homes to join them for dinner. It was interesting to see that the Sudanese community incorporated dishes from the Western culture and also maintained their traditional dishes, such as dried meat cooked with peanut butter, Kira (Sorghum Crepes), and molokhia leaves (Jews mallows) cooked with fresh meat into their Christmas feasts. The warmth and hospitality of the many Sudanese families made me feel truly welcomed and part of the festive season. It helped me feel at home.

During the weeks leading up to Christmas, we travelled with a LC to their family home in Kincardine by the coast of Lake Huron. It was a special time for the LC member to spend with his family and friends. I realised that Canadians are obsessed with spending time with their family. Many people travel long distances to be with their loved ones and celebrate the holiday together.

My Christmas time in Kincardine was a true taste of Canadian Christmas culture, which reminded me of how we celebrated Christmas before the war. In peace times, people shared food, drinks, and cultural dance festivities during the Christmas season in our village. During my Christmas with the family of the LC, we exchanged gifts, shared meals, and visited temples. His mother took us to the temple.

Also, while in Kincardine during Christmas, the LC arranged for me to meet a woman I had met before Christmas in Toronto because she was travelling to the Kakuma refugee camp to collect data for her doctoral studies. I sent information to the people I left behind through her, as I didn't have any way of contacting them then. These connections made me feel an affinity with the local community, but in truth, I was a stranger welcomed by a generous family. Although I enjoyed my Christmas festivities in Kincardine, I was also worried about my sister and where she could be during the festive season. I couldn't help but reflect on the fact that if the war hadn't uprooted us from our village, we could also be celebrating Christmas like the people in Kincardine.

Getting used to Canada

As the years passed, I became more acculturated to the Canadian weather. This was a far cry from the scorching heat I experienced while living in the Kakuma refugee camp. Canadian winters made the world feel slightly different, but in a good way. For example, the cold air breeze made it smell fresh, crisp, rejuvenating, and energising. I always felt walking on snow was like walking on the moon. Also, for whatever reason, Canadian snow made Christmas feel magical, with all the lights and activities that come

with it. And the people, too, became more generous. The season brings relief to nature. Everything, like the sky, looks beautiful, serene, and blue, and even nature looks and sounds more pleasant. That was when I knew there was life to live in this world – a life of peace, love, and happiness. I felt complete peace without the fear of being killed or kidnapped. The frequent nightmares of flying like a bird away from people attempting to catch or kidnap me, and landing by the riverbanks. I used to experience dissipated, and occasionally, I experienced them.

Studying in a bridging program

I faced numerous challenges as a WUSC student in Canada. I arrived two weeks after classes had begun, which meant I had to juggle many competing priorities, such as adjusting to a new country, culture, and educational environment – all while studying and attending classes. It all felt initially overwhelming at first; however, with the right support and resources, and by maintaining the perspective that my situation was an improvement from life in the refugee camp, I stayed optimistic.

When I arrived in Canada, I thought I would start my undergraduate program immediately. However, my education took a detour via an academic bridging program. I was placed in an academic bridging program at Woodsworth College, one of the seven colleges at the University of Toronto. This was a surprise – I hadn't been told about this. With me in the bridging class were two other WUSC students, a woman from South Sudan and a woman from Myanmar. We were all frustrated at being placed in the bridging program, but we found strength in our common identity as WUSC students. We supported each other in a class of

about 35 to 40 students, most of whom were Canadian students attempting to enter undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto.

On reflection, I didn't mind starting from the academic bridging program because I believed it would give me a better chance of filling the gaps in my education. Having only completed O-Level education, I thought that the program would help me catch up on Advanced Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, and Physics, which students typically learn in A-Levels in Uganda. By completing the bridging program, I felt I would be better prepared to start my degree and participate like my peers.

But when I joined the academic bridging program, I didn't have the option to choose which subjects I wanted to study so I ended up studying contemporary Canadian history, which I wasn't happy with this, even though I found it interesting. I felt like I was wasting my time learning about a subject that would not be useful for my future degree. I was passionate about science, so being distracted by History felt pointless. In order to pass the bridging program and enter the undergraduate program, a student needed to achieve a mark of over 70 per cent. I was concerned about this condition, and there were a few reasons for that concern.

First, I felt my educational background hadn't prepare me to take subjects in the Arts and Humanities streams. In Uganda, students know what streams they would like to take in their education right from their third year of high school. I had already chosen the Science stream in my education and was pressing forward in that direction. All my formative years in high school were spent

in science classes. While I had studied Geography and History, that was only during the first three years of high school. This meant that I wasn't prepared to grasp the art of writing essays and the critical thinking needed to be demonstrated when writing essays. Therefore, I felt my university education could cease if I didn't achieve the required mark, especially in an Art subject.

Second, I didn't feel that the university trusted my academic capability, and therefore, it wanted to assess me further – in addition to my high school transcripts and TOEFL results I had already passed. The other two WUSC students in my class also shared this view. I had initially assumed it was because I had only completed O-Levels but the other two WUSC students had finished high school. The South Sudanese woman had completed Form Four in Kenya, and the woman from Myanmar had completed "Mattayom 6" (the final year of high school) in Thailand, and both passed exams to go to the university.

I was also frustrated with the academic bridging program because I struggled to explain what I was studying to other first-year students in my residence. I felt that their interest in bonding eventually ebbed because they didn't understand what I was studying, and this potentially contributed to the challenges of making friends with other students in my first year in Canada. We – the three of us WUSC students in the bridging class – frequently talked about our frustrations and came to the conclusion that our respective colleges must have made the decision to place us in the bridging program.

Despite my initial frustration, I eventually accepted that being enrolled in the academic bridging program was a good decision.

The History class introduced me to Canada's past and helped me see myself in the context of the country's historical lens. It also provided a soft start for me to cope with the challenges of resettling in a new country as a WUSC student. In our village, there was a saying that "you can't eat two coconuts in your mouth simultaneously" – meaning it was difficult to focus on many priorities simultaneously. I could have struggled even more if I had been thrown into full undergraduate studies while adapting to life in Canada.

Part of my adaptation to life in Canada involved paying for my own living expenses after first year as opposed to growing my own food, which meant I had to juggle education and work to pay for my groceries, accommodation, transportation, and bills. These conflicting priorities created competing demands at a critical time, especially because of the challenges associated with being new to Canada. Like many immigrants, I didn't have a social network or family support in Canada, and I was concerned about finding a job and a place to live after the one-year support from the local WUSC committee ended. The academic bridging program allowed me to take it easy by taking only one subject. I used the rest of my time working part-time at the registrar's office as a receptionist, getting used to my new surroundings, exploring Toronto, and building the social support and networks I needed to feel at home. Therefore, I really felt ready when I started my undergraduate program at the University of Toronto.

Starting undergraduate studies

I spent the whole academic year (September 2003–May 2004) studying in the bridging program. After completing the

bridging program, I enrolled in a Life Science undergraduate program at the University of Toronto. At the time, students who wanted to study Science at the university would start with a Life Science program before specialising in their specific area after their first year. Despite having spending a year in the bridging program, I still didn't understand how the undergraduate education system worked. This differed significantly from the education system in Uganda, where undergraduate course selection was based on what a student did in their A-Level courses. I didn't understand the course structure and requirements, the academic expectations, or how to access academic and career support services during my undergraduate studies.

My first experience of a Calculus class was like learning a foreign language. I didn't understand anything that was being taught in class. I also took classes in Chemistry, Psychology, and Biology. Likely due to the inadequate preparation of my O-Levels, everything was new to me, and I struggled to understand any of them. I found the education system in Canada to be a lot more self-driven than what I was used to in school in Uganda. Back in high school, my teachers had provided me with all the necessary materials and information I needed to learn. Adapting to using online and library resources to learn in Canada was brand new for me. Even though I purchased the textbooks, I struggled to then connect them with other resources, like books, journals, and educational films.

Furthermore, being in a class with over 1,000 students, where it was difficult to interact and ask questions, during lectures was quite surprising for me. Back then, lectures were only delivered in person, and while I could print the lecture slides, there was

no recording available, so I had to rest on my memory. Some students had audio recorders by the lectern to capture the audio during the lectures, but I didn't have a recorder, so I couldn't do that. I truly believed that I wouldn't be able to compete with other students in my large classes. The lecture hall had around 1,500 students, and the tutorial classes had about 35 students. It was difficult to interact with my lecturers in such a big class, so I used my tutors in the tutorial to ask questions about concepts and seek further clarification on areas I found confusing. Besides interacting with my tutors and seeking career support counselling once in my subject selection, I received no other academic support.

As a result, I dedicated many hours to studying, practising, and memorising key concepts from my classes, but I struggled a lot during my first and second years because of my lack of foundational knowledge in certain subjects. When I wasn't doing my paid job in the evenings at the Pratt Library, I spent hours practising Organic Chemistry synthesis on blackboards in the library basement. But despite these efforts, I failed my Physical Chemistry and had to repeat it. I also received low grades in Calculus, Organic Chemistry, and Molecular Biology, barely passing them despite putting in a lot of effort. This made me more frustrated that I had spent a whole year studying contemporary Canadian history instead of focusing on subjects that would have helped me better, but at the same time, I knew I had done well, considering my lack of knowledge in those advanced topics.

Despite these initial struggles, I remained optimistic that my grades would improve in my third and fourth years, as these subjects would build upon the foundational knowledge from the

first two years. I was determined to progress my education at all costs. Quitting was never an option for me. My grades improved in my third and fourth years. I was satisfied with my achievement, although I barely met the grade point average (GPA) requirement for my honours bachelor's degree. I ultimately graduated with double majors in Human Biology and Pharmaceutical Chemistry.

Lack of settlement support

Although the WUSC program provided pathways to both university education and permanent residency, we – the Sudanese WUSC students I knew – didn't receive any support outside of the university. The WUSC local committee support was limited to the educational aspect only, apart from the initial support in obtaining documents like the social security number, and healthcare card. Due to the limited support that the local WUSC committee provided for resettlement, we didn't know how to apply to bring our family to Canada. Some students, especially those from Myanmar and Afghanistan, managed to bring their family members with strong community support. However, some of these Burmese and Afghani WUSC students dropped out because they wanted to work to bring their families to Canada, with the plan of returning to university once their families arrived in Canada. While some of these Afghani and Burmese students succeeded in bringing their families, others didn't, and are still trying to bring their family members to Canada after being in the country for over twenty years.

Family and network support was perhaps the most difficult to develop. Like most Sudanese students, I was unable to access support for bringing family members from refugee camps

to Canada because of the lack of community support in this regard. If the LC had been able to connect WUSC students with resettlement services beyond those offered by the university, it could have helped relieve the pressure on students trying to bring their family members to Canada. Providing support for WUSC students to apply for family reunion settlement could have simplified the settlement process, but this was beyond their remit.

Financial challenges

Other financial concerns created significant issues for me. I faced difficulties covering my living expenses and accessing financial aid after the year of support ended. After one year of arrival to Canada, I was asked to repay the transportation cost paid by the Canadian government for my flight to Canada. This is part of an agreement between all privately sponsored refugees and the Canadian government, where the government pays for students' flights and travel costs upfront, and then WUSC students reimburse the money once they are settled. I had to find approximately $800 CAD to reimburse my flight costs from Kenya to Toronto. I had to balance work at the Pratt Library and study to make ends meet, which was stressful and distracted me from my studies because I didn't receive any welfare money, which led to financial hardship. The part-time work I did in the library was only enough to pay for rent and bills. Sometimes, I ran out of money for food and necessities like soap, so I had to take on extra casual work. When I finished work at midnight at the Pratt Library, I went to Robert Library to study, which was open 24 hours. I would study from 12:30 a.m. to 3:00 a.m., and then run home to sleep.

I slept from 4:00 a.m. to 7:30 a.m., and then rushed to laboratory practicals, which used to run from 8:30 a.m. to about 12:30 p.m.

Because of my busy schedule, I had limited time to take care of my hygiene and went for days without showering because I had to rush from laboratory practicals to lectures, from lectures to tutorials, and from tutorials to work in the Pratt library. And because of my hard work, I had become proficient in Chemistry, and other students started seeking my help with some advanced concepts they were struggling with. Often, the table I studied at was full of other students in chemistry taking the same course as me. However, in the process of regaining my academic prowess, I neglected my personal hygiene. I didn't realise how bad my hygiene had gotten until it started to bother the people around me.

I used to study a lot with a friend of mine from a Nigerian background who was born and raised in Toronto. One day, while we were studying together in the library with her, she pulled me aside from our study table to tell me that I smelt and asked if I could go and change. I quickly ran to my residence, showered, and changed into clean cloths. Having left my books in the library, I had to return to the library rather than being embarrassed. I was grateful to my friend for telling me I smelt instead of starting to avoid me because of it. From then on, I started paying more attention to my hygiene.

Navigating culture shocks and adapting to life in Canada

During my first year, students at North House used to go to a local pub on the campus every Friday evening to socialise. Some

students took me once to the pub. In the pub, most students drank beer and alcohol, and some smoked. The pub was noisy, and it was difficult to hear the conversation. I wasn't used to a pub and hadn't been to one before. Where I come from, few of my generation drank beer and alcohol or smoked. I was surprised to see that many Canadian students did so. I excluded myself from these social activities, and as a result, I experienced some social isolation because of it.

Moreover, I found that most Canadian students had a relaxed attitude towards life and tended to take things as they came without feeling stressed. This conflicted with my culture because I come from an agrarian community where life is not taken for granted, and we survived by tilling the land with our hands. Also, I imagined they had families who could support them if life alone became hard. As I have already discussed, I didn't have any family support that I could fall back on when I struggled with my living expenses. Therefore, I couldn't live the relaxed life of a Canadian student, which further contributed to my social isolation. When my Canadian friends invited me to a pub on the weekends, which they often did, I would always decline.

Moreover, I faced conflicting views about what was appropriate. Unlike me, most of my friends were open to various ideas and were typically flexible in their approach to situations. There were instances where some students encouraged me to try eating seafood such as prawns, lobsters, and oysters. However, I refused to taste any of these foods because we never ate them in our village. There were several types of meat that I didn't eat, including pork, meat from animals without hooves, fish without scales, birds with webbed feet, or animals that had died of

natural causes. I didn't drink tea or coffee, except when the tea was prepared with caramelising sugar. My views about what food to eat and what not to eat were difficult to change, which created a significant difference from many Canadian students. I clearly remember several events where my views conflicted significantly with those of the people who were helping me. These were some nuances that were not loudly talked out, but one can sense by how people around responded. Some of these nonverbal cues included facial expressions, such as frowns, narrowing of the eyes, moving eyebrows downward, twitching the mouth, turning the face away, or changing the topic immediately. Although nobody spoke about these non-verbal cues, I perceived disapproval or disinterest.

For example, an incident occurred when two student coordinators took me grocery shopping in the evening. At that time, I had only been in Toronto for a few weeks. On our way to the shopping centre, as we walked along Charles Street West towards Bloor Street, we crossed paths with a man in a motorised wheelchair. It was dusk, and the gentleman had his lights on. It was my first time seeing a motorised wheelchair. I couldn't help but speak to the man, and I told him that I liked his wheelchair and that it was cool. I saw the two students' coordinators hide their faces, and put their hands over their mouths. They didn't speak but continued as if they felt embarrassed by what I said. I couldn't understand their reactions, which seemed to suggest that I had done something wrong when all I felt I had done was compliment the man on his wheelchair. I didn't realise that compliments such as mine were viewed as stigmatising people who living with disabilities in Canadian society at that time.

After I caught up with two students' coordinators, I asked them about their reactions when they saw me talking to the man in the wheelchair. They explained that the man might have thought I was mocking him. Although I didn't completely agree with their assumptions, I understood their point of view. I realised that people in Canada are more mindful of their words and how they might impact others. Over time, I became more careful about my actions to avoid unintentionally hurting anyone. However, this meant I had to change some of my cultural habits, such as greeting strangers, and conversing with people I didn't know. For instance, I stopped greeting strangers and refrained from casual physical contact, such as shaking hands when meeting someone new after moving to Canada.

Another clash with Canadian culture happened with how social friendships are practised. When I first arrived in Canada, we – the male Sudanese WUSC students – used to walk down the street holding each other's hands, as boys often do in our culture. However, I soon learned that this gesture was interpreted as a display of romantic affection in Canadian society. Because we were boys, it was assumed that we were a gay couple, which was a total misinterpretation. In our culture, it is common for girls to hold hands with other girls and for boys to do the same with other boys, but the interpretation of this in Canada led us to stop this practice. This shifted the ways we practised friendships and created distance.

Another example of the cultural disconnections is with food; my food habits were completely different from most of my Canadian friends. When I got to Toronto, I was introduced to Chinatown because the LC felt it might be an appropriate market where

I could find some familiar food. It took about 30 minutes to walk one way from my residence to Chinatown. The LC were right; Chinatown was where I bought most of my food because it had produce that reminded me of our cuisine. I frequently went to Chinatown to buy cabbage, which I cooked mixed with beans, which was my go-to meal. Many of my friends were surprised to see that I ate just cabbage and beans because meat is a big part of the Canadian diet. One day, we were walking with some of the LC members to Chinatown to get some food for me. There were a lot of people who were homeless in Chinatown, and I was surprised by it. I couldn't believe Canadians didn't want to give rooms, food, or money to support these people experiencing homelessness because it was a rich country. Shopping in Chinatown showed me that some people struggled to survive in Canada, which was a far cry from my perception of the stress-free life I had imagined when dreaming about leaving Kakuma. I had assumed there was no worry or struggle in Canada, and everything was available to sustain life, so seeing people living on the streets was a shock. Whenever I saw someone begging for money, I gave them a Loonie (one dollar coin), but didn't know the LC members accompanying me to do groceries disapproved of my actions. On one occasion, a LC member spoke to me, expressing concerns that giving money could potentially worsen the person's situation by enabling harmful behaviours such as drug or alcohol use. While I didn't argue with their reasoning, I internally disagreed with the notion that all people experiencing homelessness would use donations to pay for drugs or alcohol. I thought I could have easily been in their position if I hadn't received help.

This experience made me realise the impact of societal perceptions on people in need in Canadian society. Before the war, it was common for people in our village to share their homes and food with strangers in need without being asked for assistance. The Canadian approach was jarring; I was dismayed that some Canadians disapproved of giving money to people experiencing homelessness. From then on, I was more cautious when giving money to a person experiencing homelessness, especially when in the company of others. But I believed that I could have been one of those people experiencing homelessness if others hadn't shown me generosity. I felt their story was mine, making it difficult for me to desist from giving a Loonie.

Volunteering in Canada as a student

After my first year living on campus, I moved to Stephenson House, a co-ed residence in Victoria College, in September 2004. Stephenson House accommodated about 12 students, most of whom had financial difficulties but who were resourceful and took the initiative to give back to their community. Almost all of the students we lived with in Stephenson House were involved in campus clubs and student-driven advocacies. Living in this residence also had some requirements. Firstly, we had to live together as a family, meaning we were responsible for maintaining the general cleanliness of the house, planning meals, buying groceries, and taking turns cooking. We held a weekly meeting to plan our meals and developed a weekly roster. Whoever was rostered on kitchen duty cooked for the whole house. We were

all responsible for managing costs associated with bills and other expenses.

Secondly, community engagement was strongly encouraged. While living in Stephenson house, volunteering became an important part of my life. At the time, it was a common practice among students at the University of Toronto to volunteer in the community. I volunteered at a homeless shelter and a harm reduction centre in Toronto. I also actively got involved in the LC, supporting other WUSC students from diverse backgrounds who arrived after me. I provided support and guidance that local Canadian students couldn't relate to but that made sense to WUSC students.

I also informally supported other WUSC students from other universities in Ontario who needed help. Given the central location of Toronto, I became a contact and support person for some of the students who went to smaller regional universities in Ontario because many of these students felt lonely or their university didn't have a course that they wanted to study. They contacted me for support if they decided to transfer to the University of Toronto, and if they couldn't afford accommodation, I connected them to other Sudanese families and friends in Toronto for somewhere to live until they could find a place to rent.

In my third year, I became the president of the Sudanese Student Association at the University of Toronto. Most of the Sudanese students studying at the University of Toronto were there through the WUSC Program, but a few Sudanese students had migrated with their parents through the Canadian government resettlement program. As I lived on campus, my place became a central

hub for Sudanese students to meet. Although Stephenson House could fit 12 students, most would go home over the weekend. We used this opportunity to bond and develop social networks and support between the Sudanese students. As WUSC students, we struggled financially, but we supported each other through our social network. These volunteering opportunities and participation in the student campus life provided me with a rich educational experience at the University of Toronto.

Working in Canada as a student

Regarding employment, during my first year in Canada, the local WUSC committee at Victoria College provided a small stipend and arranged part-time employment for me at the registrar's office to help me pay for my living expenses. When my one-year part-time employment at the registrar's office ended – because it was reserved only for new WUSC students – the local WUSC committee helped me find a part-time job at the Pratt Library. I worked at the library until I finished my undergraduate degree.

Due to a lack of finances, I couldn't afford to learn how to drive until after I graduated from university. Not being able to drive and not having a car made it extremely difficult for me to hold summer jobs when I couldn't get a full-time summer job at the library, and I had to do odd jobs, such as painting houses, packaging products in processing plants, and operating factory machinery. Commuting was a perennial problem; Canada is a big country, meaning some of these jobs were a great distance away, and public transport was poor outside of metropolitan Toronto. My financial challenges also made me vulnerable to exploitation. For example, one contractor who

hired me to paint houses never paid me and disappeared after I had completed the work. Sometimes, contractors paid me less than what was agreed or underpaid me because they charged me money towards transportation costs if they picked me up to get to a job.

Postgraduate outcomes

The days of low-paid, exploitative work ended after graduating. I got a job at a pharmaceutical company in Toronto and joined a post-graduate diploma program in Pharmaceutical Research and Development at the Toronto Institute of Pharmaceutical Technology. Although I was happy with my situation after working for a year, I also felt conflicted about working for a pharmaceutical company as it created tension with my personal values because while pharmaceutical products are crucial for human health, they often require people to have money to access them. I struggled with the concept of working for a profit-driven company and knew I needed to find a way out of the industry, but I knew I needed to plan carefully to avoid disrupting my life again.

As I was going through the conflict of considering a career change, I would regularly call my uncle (my father's younger brother), who lived in a refugee camp in Uganda with his family. I wanted his advice, but I held back from discussing my plan for a long time; knowing the difficulties in the refugee camp, I reasoned my uncle would discourage me from my plan. Instead, I turned to self-help books and tried to make the decision on my own.

However, one day, when I called my uncle and without speaking to him about my plan, he asked me directly how my job

at the pharmaceutical company would benefit my community back home. It was then that I spoke to him about my plan for further study in a different field if I got the opportunity. This question provided a turning point, making it even more urgent for me to pursue a job that could make a local impact. More than that, my uncle's question invoked more of a desire for further education in me. I didn't need any more signs to show that my decision to change careers was right. Through reading self-help books and my uncle's unsolicited questions, I decided that I would change my career when the right opportunity came along.

I didn't have to wait long for that opportunity. In 2008–2009, Canada started to experience a severe economic recession, and in response, the Canadian government created a program to offer scholarships to young people with full-time jobs in exchange for vacating their positions to make room for older employees who had lost their jobs and couldn't change careers due to age. During this time, I visited Robert's Library at the University of Toronto to meet a friend, and while there, I met an education agent recruiting Canadian students to study in Australia. This was the epiphany moment. I realised that I could quit my job and use the government scholarship program to study in Australia. This was my pathway to further study, to living in a different country, and to moving in a more community-impact direction.

One month after applying, I was accepted by three Australian universities to pursue a Master of Public Health. I decided to attend the University of Adelaide because I knew people who had moved there from the Kakuma refugee camps. Because

I had already become a Canadian citizen, I had privileges that made obtaining a student visa for Australia easier. I received my visa within 24 hours, a much quicker process than for students from other countries. I flew to Australia in 2010 to start my Master of Public Health.

5
My life in Australia

This chapter offers insights into William's life in Australia and his commitment to making a positive impact on the community. He discusses how his past experiences have shaped his life, values, and experiences in Australia, including his educational journey, professional career, relationships, and fatherhood. Additionally, William talks about his life goals, passions, volunteering, and activism.

Moving to Australia

While studying in a refugee camp, I didn't know about Australia. Back then, I was familiar with New Zealand because they donated pens and other educational resources to us in the primary schools in the camp. The other children and I were curious about New Zealand, so we would read any books we could find about the country. However, I didn't know New Zealand was a small island off the coast of Australia. I first learned about Australia when I went to Kenya in 2001. Australia had begun actively assisting in humanitarian refugee programs in Kenya, resettling many refugees from the Kakuma refugee camp. However, I knew very little about Australia and its people compared to what I knew about New Zealand and Canada. At the start of 2003, I was given the opportunity to resettle in Australia with my uncle, but I declined

and chose to go to Canada through the WUSC program. This was partly because of my lack of knowledge about Australia, but I was mainly motivated by the opportunity to study at university.

Before I travelled to Canada, my uncle's family and other people I knew from the Kakuma refugee camp were resettled in Australia. I reconnected with my uncle and others who had resettled from Kakuma in Australia when I got to Canada. During this time, I started to read more about Australia, its people, culture, geography, and wildlife. I was fascinated by the history of Australia's first peoples and the unique wildlife on the continent. My uncle and other Sudanese people I knew from the Kakuma refugee camp who were resettled in Australia also spoke highly about Australia. However, when I first landed at Adelaide Airport in 2010 to start my Master's in Public Health, Adelaide felt very small and modestly developed. The airport looked as if it was situated in the middle of a desert, surrounded by dry and reddish ground. I was taken aback – this was not like the images I had imagined.

In Adelaide, I initially lived with my "aunt", my father's first cousin. I soon found Adelaide to be a lovely place. On my first day at the university, I went to a bus stop to wait for a bus. A bus came and passed without stopping, and I thought it was not meant to stop there, so I kept waiting. Then another bus came and also passed by. Four buses went by without stopping, and no one else arrived at the bus stop while I was waiting. A postman came by and said, "G'day". I didn't know this was a greeting in Australia, so I replied, "You too, sir, have a good day". I was surprised that people in Australia would wish someone they didn't know a good day. In Toronto, where I lived, people rarely said "good morning" to strangers, let alone wished each other a good day. This experience

at the bus stop made me feel that Australians are open to talking to people they don't know, like how we interacted in our village before the war. When another person approached, I quickly said "good morning" to him, and they replied without hesitation. I then asked if they knew where I could catch a bus since four had just passed without stopping. The person informed me that I needed to hail the bus. I looked around for a sign indicating that I needed to do so, and there it was, "hail the bus", perched on top of a pole high above the bus stop. In Toronto, buses would stop at every assigned location without being hailed. I was used to catching a bus without that extra step. After that, I caught buses every day without any issues.

Postgraduate study in Australia (and a romance)

In the Master's in Public Health program, I was surprised to find that most of my classmates were international students. There were only about three domestic students, and they seemed disinterested in the international students. However, many of the international students engaged with one another, and developed strong connections. All the international students in the program were from Asia, and I had classmates from Indonesia, China, Nepal, Singapore, and Malaysia. We spent our Friday nights doing karaoke, and participating in typical university social activities.

While doing my Master of Public Health, I joined a student club that mentored young refugee high school students in Adelaide, particularly from the Elizabeth area. Elizabeth was one of the most disadvantaged local government areas and had a high

population of humanitarian migrants, due to the affordability of housing. Unfortunately, many residents in this area faced issues such as unemployment, overcrowding, and various other social challenges. I felt a genuine sense of responsibility to support these young people by being available to answer any questions they might have about university life, and what it's like to be a student. I also volunteered for the African Community Council in South Australia on an older persons' research project being conducted in the community. Through this volunteer work, I made networks with and connections to several community-based organisations.

The same year I started my Master's program at the University of Adelaide, I met Suzan. She was studying for an undergraduate degree at the University of South Australia. Talking to Suzan, I realised that she did not like makeup, wearing high heels, partying, and spending time away from home. She wanted a unique and simple life that would not be defined by "the model" of this world but by her character and values. She had a vision of how she wanted to live her life, what she valued and the kind of education she wanted. I fell in love and started a relationship with Suzan. Although Suzan's family and my close relatives knew about our relationship, we did not want the wider Sudanese community to know about it so that our relationship would not become a topic of discussion within the community. We limited the time we spent together to keep our relationship a secret from the community.

Making ends meet: Fruit picking in Queensland

During the December 2010 to March 2011 holidays, I went to Brisbane and worked as a fruit picker with my uncle's wife and

others. I found it difficult to drive every morning from Brisbane to work on the farm and come back to Brisbane every evening. I realised that I could backpack and work in the local farming community without having to commute every day from my uncle's home in Brisbane. I proposed the idea of backpacking to other men with whom we worked with, and they agreed as it saved money on petrol and time from the daily commute. We bought camping gear, work shoes, work clothing, and knee pads, and set off across Australia, going fruit picking. We took turns driving and contributed money for petrol. We worked in many farming towns across Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. We set up tents in caravan parks and paid for using the caravan site, water and hot shower facilities. We worked from 6:30 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. every day, except Saturday and Sunday. In a day, one could fill three bins. For pears and oranges, filling a bin was paid $90. For onions, if one worked fast, they could fill four bins a day at $120 per bin. Some experienced workers used to fill more than four bins a day.

Fruit picking was dangerous, especially when it involved working at heights using a ladder. I witnessed workers fall and get injured while rushing to work fast and earn more money. But, due to the casual nature of fruit picking, there was no sick leave, insurance cover, or accountability for workplace injuries. Despite this, we travelled to Tasmania for cherry picking after finishing work in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria. Unfortunately, when we arrived in Tasmania, heavy rain fell and damaged all the cherries. I backpacked around Australia until I travelled to Adelaide at the beginning of March 2011 for the second year of my Master's program. During this time, I felt

a connection to nature and sometimes lived off the grid, just as I did in our village.

Completing my Master's and working in rural public health

I completed and graduated from my Master's program in 2011. On my graduation day, Suzan could not attend my graduation event because doing so would expose our relationship. I had to sneak away from the many community members who were at my graduation to take a photo with her in a secret place we had previously agreed to. We could not walk together or hold hands. We didn't go out for dinner together like other people. I discreetly went with Suzan for dinner once when my classmates from Singapore, Nepal, and Indonesia were going back home after finishing their graduate program.

After graduating, I worked as a community health coordinator in Adelaide with one of the community-based organisation. While working in this position, I completed a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which is necessary to be able to work in the vocational education and training sector in Australia. Splitting my community work time into two, I started teaching community services and health promotion programs at Australia's Institute of Social Relations. I liked what I was doing in health promotion and decided to seek an opportunity to work part-time with the country Health South Australia in mid-north South Australia as a health promotion coordinator. I worked with the Rural Health Team in Booleroo Centre, a small farming town outside Port Pirie. Although I was based in Booleroo Centre, my work areas spanned across mid-north South Australia, including

Peterborough, Orroroo, Jamestown, and Gladstone. I would work three days one week and two days the next, splitting my time between my role at Booleroo Centre and the community work in Adelaide. Working in Adelaide allowed me to visit Suzan at their home and be close to her. I liked what I was doing in the mid-north and my balanced career life. Mid-north South Australia is an important agricultural region. I was told then that the region experienced a severe drought several years ago, which resulted in failed crops and livestock losses. Additionally, there had been a notable demographic shift as the younger generation had chosen to relocate to urban areas, leaving older family members to carry on the family legacy. This generational migration, combined with the detrimental effects of the drought, had had a substantial impact on the social and mental well-being of the community.

Our rural health program was funded by the Australian federal government to revitalise the community and contribute to preventative health. We adopted an all-hands-on-deck approach, focusing not only on health promotion but also on community development. Our work included creating opportunities for older people, farmers, and the general community to reconnect with each other. We organised a community triathlon event with the local schools. We sought government grants to build community gyms and men's sheds, established community cycling programs, provided bicycles for community use, offered dietetics programs for older persons in aged care facilities, conducted diabetes prevention and prostate cancer awareness information and testing programs in partnership with the local clinical team, collaborated with Breast Screen services to promote breast

screening among women in the region, provided information and awareness on healthy eating, collaborated with the local grocery store to improve fresh produce inventory in the region, offered mental health services and counselling, worked with schools to ensure healthy canteens and reduce the sale of sugary drinks, and collaborated with the local hospital to support local workforce development through participation in the graduate program.

However, when the Australian Government cut funding for health promotion programs across the country at the time, it had a big impact on our community work. We were informed that our rural health promotion program would not receive further funding once the then-funding period ended in about 12 months. This caused a lot of anxiety and concern about the future of our program, especially considering the structure of the Australian healthcare system, in which primary and preventative healthcare falls under federal government responsibility.

Returning to Canada: The end of the Australian dream?

The news about the discontinuation of our program's funding came when I had already scheduled to go on leave to Canada in March 2013. Before travelling to Canada for my annual leave, I asked the management team to continue providing me with updates regarding the Australian Federal Government's announcement of discontinuing funding for our program.

Before I went back to Canada, I informed my uncle about my relationship with Suzan, and he even spoke with her on the

phone a couple of times. I also introduced Suzan to my aunt in Adelaide. The day I left for Canada, Suzan and her siblings came to the airport so that community members would not suspect our relationship. There were also other Sudanese community members who accompanied me to the airport. I took pictures together with Suzan and her siblings and shook hands, but there was no hugging and no expressions of emotions. Suzan and I had a 14-hour time difference. When I was supposed to be at work, Suzan was awake and often wanted to keep chatting. It was difficult for me, but I would tell her that my work hours were up and that I needed to go. Reluctantly, she would agree and ask me to let her know when I got back from work. However, due to the time difference, I often didn't follow through on my promise because I didn't want to wake her up. Sensing that I might not call, Suzan would sometimes reach out to me early in the morning on my phone.

While in Canada, I received news that there was also no funding from the state government to continue what we were doing. Considering this development, I decided not to return to Australia and resigned from my work. There were moments of uncertainty about what would happen to my relationship with Suzan. We had heard people talk about the difficulty of long-distance relationships, but we agreed to continue talking on Skype regularly. Since we know each other so well, we talked like siblings. Sometimes, we would spend the whole conversation talking about things that didn't even have anything to do with our relationship. Once it became clear that I was not returning to Australia, I phoned my former employer in the pharmaceutical company in April 2013 to ask for a temporary position. Luckily,

they had a night-time position in quality assurance, which I started immediately. I would work at night and search for a role in health promotion during the day.

In May 2013, I left my temporary work with the pharmaceutical company and started working as a health promotion coordinator in the Niagara region of Canada. I worked in the areas of blood-borne viruses such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B virus, and hepatitis C virus, but our team used a holistic approach. We provided supported accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness and living with HIV, assisting them with transportation to their clinical appointments and helping them collect their anti-retroviral drugs. We also referred clients to government-funded employment agencies to assist them in finding jobs. Many of the people we assisted had difficulty finding and keeping jobs due to their lifestyle choices, but with our support, they were able to do so.

We offered needle exchange programs, where individuals who inject drugs could come and exchange their used needles for clean ones. Due to the criminalised nature of drug use, we established a specific phone line exclusively for people who inject drugs. People who inject drugs would call between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m., requesting our van to deliver clean needles. A clinical nurse joined our team to provide on-the-spot blood tests and other health-preventative clinical services after people who inject drugs trusted our services. Additionally, we collaborated with local government environmental health offices to set up syringe disposal boxes, allowing individuals to safely dispose of their used needles. During this time, there was a rise in opioid

overdose deaths in the region. To prevent these deaths, we provided free naloxone to people who inject drugs and trained them to administer it to their friends in case of overdose. As injecting drug use is a social activity, individuals were able to save lives within their social network by preventing opioid-related overdose deaths.

As the Niagara region is a popular tourist destination, we provided free condoms to sex workers to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Additionally, we offered integrated social services to our clients, including counselling, case management, and referrals to other social services in the community. Our services were considered a model for health promotion in the region and received strong support from the local government and community. I loved my job in the Niagara region and was committed to continue doing it despite the challenge of different time zones between Suzan and me.

Keeping the flames of romance burning

While I was in Canada, I sent Suzan postcards showcasing its beautiful landscapes. I also took pictures during one of the heavy snowstorms and sent them to her. She was surprised by how people live in Canada. One day, she asked why, if life in Canada was so miserable, I couldn't just come to Australia. I told her that snow has its own charm and is one of the wonders of the world that only a few places can offer. I explained how snow can bring families together – building snowmen/snowwomen, engaging in snowball fights, or enjoying winter sports. I would go outside so Suzan could see the snow when we FaceTimed each other.

During that year in Canada, we spent a lot of time discussing the weather and how it affected life.

We didn't know when we would meet again. The most likely scenario was that I would visit Australia. Traditionally, a girl would not leave her father's home to visit a boy at his home. In our traditional culture, there were clear guidelines and boundaries regarding what boys and girls could do in a relationship. While some of these have been relaxed due to the influence of Western cultures, there are still boundaries to observe, especially when a boy and a girl are in a serious relationship. In this context, a serious relationship means that both individuals and their extended families are acquainted with one another.

However, I was fortunate to receive an offer from La Trobe University in January 2014 stating that I had been given a scholarship for my PhD. When I shared the news with Suzan, she was elated and advised that I should accept the offer and return to Australia. However, I weighed the options between employment and studying again with much thought and reflection through reading self-help books. I chose to study. Although La Trobe University was based in Melbourne, I negotiated to live in Adelaide if I were to accept the offer. I calculated that due to the community-based nature of my research project and my established connections with community-based organisations and members in South Australian communities, it would be easier for me to collect my data. It was a gamble that paid off. Also, Suzan lived in Adelaide, so returning to Adelaide made perfect sense. La Trobe University agreed for me to live in Adelaide while doing my PhD. I accepted the offer letter and returned to Australia in February 2014.

Getting married

Upon returning to Australia from Canada for my PhD, I sought a visit with my uncle and his wife in Brisbane to share my intention to marry Suzan and to seek their blessing. In our culture, my uncle and his wife have taken on parental roles in my life, meaning that any significant decision I make must be presented to them for their approval. They were thrilled by my choice, expressing their happiness as they had been worried about my singular focus on my education. My uncle's wife particularly conveyed her joy at the prospect of me starting a family. In our culture, a house without a woman is not regarded as a true home, and a man is often perceived as lacking a genuine home, regardless of his societal status, if he does not have a partner. Among the Madi people, there are three primary forms of marriage:

1. Elopement: This occurs when the groom arrives at night to elope with the bride after they have mutually agreed to be together. He brings along friends, and they make a swift escape with the bride.
2. Pregnancy Before Marriage: In this circumstance, if a woman becomes pregnant prior to marriage, she is escorted by her friends and relatives to the man's home. The woman is then regarded as the wife of the man who is responsible for the pregnancy; and
3. Formal Proposal: The most accepted and traditional method entails the man visiting the woman's parents to request permission to marry their daughter. This approach requires careful planning and preparation, serving as a symbolic gesture of respect for the bride's family, which in turn earns the groom their respect.

Many parents prefer that their daughters introduce potential partners at home for formal marriage discussions when they feel ready. Although my uncle and his wife consented to my request to marry Suzan, I needed to secure employment before getting engaged, all while pursuing my PhD. Fortunately, I found a position as a public health officer in disease surveillance and investigation with the Department of Health in South Australia in August 2014. In December 2014, Suzan and I got engaged in a traditional manner. Unlike in Western culture, where proposals typically involve just the couple, our engagement included both families coming together to discuss our commitment to each other. This involved an extensive night-long discussion, and the payment of a bride price to Suzan's family.

Traditionally, the meeting of the two families and the bride price would suffice for our marriage. However, we chose to blend our cultural traditions with Western customs. After the traditional discussions, I placed an engagement ring on Suzan's finger in front of community members who came to witness our commitment as a symbol of my dedication to her. The celebration included food, drinks, and dancing, making our relationship public. Despite this, Suzan continued living at her family home while we planned our wedding, allowing her to complete her undergraduate degree while I finished my PhD. I frequently visited Suzan, and she would also come to my apartment, which I shared with two of my first cousins. Between 2015 and 2017, while working on my PhD, I also served as a sessional lecturer in public health at Flinders University and worked part-time with the Department of Health. We got married in December 2016, before completing our studies.

After six months of marriage, I moved to Canberra to take up a full-time public health officer role in July 2017. I submitted my thesis in September 2018, and Suzan relocated to Canberra in December 2018. In Canberra, Suzan got a job in the same office where I worked but in a different team. Soon, we were expecting our first child. In May 2019, we attended Suzan's graduation and then travelled to Melbourne the same month to attend my graduation. It was a proud moment for both of us to graduate as a couple in the presence of my uncle and Suzan's parents. I was fortunate to secure a two-year contract as a public health lecturer at Central Queensland University on the Sydney campus in July 2019. We relocated to Sydney from Canberra. This opportunity allowed me to realise my dreams of contributing to society through teaching and learning.

Managing a family tragedy and a stressful new arrival

However, one month after our relocation to Sydney from Canberra, there was a tragedy in the family that made us rush to it in South Australia. With many people coming to the house in South Australia over several days, Suzan worked all day to help serve them while being heavily pregnant. After more than a week in Adelaide, we returned to Sydney. That same evening, Suzan's water broke. I rushed her to the hospital, but they sent us home because she wasn't showing any signs of labour. We were advised to return after 24 hours if labour hadn't started. Although the baby was full term, it was still expected to be four weeks before the actual birth.

Since we hadn't fully prepared for the arrival of our baby – only having the crib and a few essentials – we realised we needed

linen, clothes, soap, and all the necessary items for a newborn. That night, we went shopping together. By the time we returned home to our apartment, it was around 4 a.m. I spent that night and the following day setting up the baby's bed and ensuring we had everything ready for the arrival of our baby. In the evening, I took Suzan back to the hospital because her labour still hadn't started.

When we arrived at the hospital, Suzan was induced. By around 2 p.m., she was struggling to tolerate the pain, and the baby still hadn't arrived. They administered an epidural to help with the discomfort. We waited until 5 p.m., but the baby still hadn't arrived. At that point, the doctors became concerned about the baby's oxygen levels. They made an incision on the baby's head to test the oxygen levels. Afterwards, the doctors proposed using a vacuum to assist in delivering the baby. I encouraged Suzan to make her own decision, as she understood her body best at that moment. She ultimately refused the vacuum procedure. I suggested that she try pushing the baby out by moving her stomach in a wave-like motion. After she waved her stomach twice, the baby was delivered. However, the baby was not breathing. A senior doctor rushed in, quickly picked up the baby, turned him upside down, and gently patted his back. After several attempts, the baby showed signs of life. The doctor placed the baby on a tray and rushed to the infant intensive care unit. I followed the doctor there. Suzan was not in the intensive care unit; she was in the birthing unit, being attended to by other nurses.

The baby's head had swollen. It was unclear whether the swelling on his head was due to the incision made to draw blood for testing oxygen levels or if it was related to a health condition. I was

more concerned about the swelling than about the baby being in the intensive care unit. Given my background in epidemiology and studying human diseases, I suspected it might be subgaleal haemorrhage – a rare but serious accumulation of blood in the space between the scalp and the skull. I asked a nurse if the baby had a subgaleal haemorrhage, and she expressed her concern about it as well. However, a senior nurse arrived, examined the baby, and said it was not a subgaleal haemorrhage. She explained that the swelling in the baby's head might be due to the birthing process. While this explanation provided me with some comfort, I was still worried. I had planned to spend the entire night by the baby's side in the intensive care unit, but the nurse asked me to leave when she noticed I wasn't going to go home that night.

When they asked me to leave, I returned to find Suzan and inform her that the baby was okay, despite being monitored with vital signs and receiving intravenous fluids. However, I expressed my concern about the swelling of the baby's head. I took some photos of the swollen head and showed them to Suzan. She requested that I not send any of the photos to anyone, including her parents, to prevent them from panicking. Whenever people called to check on us, we assured them that both Suzan and the baby were okay. However, when Suzan's mother arrived the next day, she discovered that the baby was still in the intensive care unit. The baby spent four days there. During that time, I remained at the hospital, regularly feeding and visiting the baby from Suzan's ward. Fortunately, the swelling in the baby's head had reduced by the time he was moved to a regular ward. After a few days there, we were finally discharged and sent home. Our baby was healthy, which was a big relief for us both.

Stressful events

After the traumatic beginning, we were hopeful for a relaxing time adjusting to our new family situation. However, this was not to be. Soon after that, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, leading to strict travel restrictions. Most of the students I was teaching at that time were pursuing a Master's degree in Public Health, and they were all international students from Asia. With the restrictions on international travel and the closure of borders due to COVID-19, our program saw a significant decline in student enrolment, raising concerns about its viability without international students. I began to worry about the implications this would have for the renewal of my contract and how it would affect my ability to support my family. In the past, when I was on my own, I wouldn't have worried about such issues because I managed to get by. However, as I now had a family, the situation was more complicated, and I could not afford to be without a job.

In 2021, a colleague who previously taught epidemiology for the undergraduate public health program at Central Queensland University in Cairns changed jobs. The position was advertised as a continuing role, and I applied for it and ultimately emerged successful. I relocated my family to Cairns in February 2021 while expecting our second child in mid-July 2021. During her pregnancy with our second child, Suzan gained a lot of weight, which made everyone concerned about the delivery, and there were more regular visits to the doctor's office than would normally required in routine maternity care. Luckily, the birth went smoothly, which was a big relief for me after the trauma of our first child's delivery. Suzan started labour around 9 a.m., and when

I took her to the hospital while our first child was in childcare, a nurse checked her and said she wasn't ready and wanted to send us home. Fortunately, a senior nurse intervened and determined that Suzan was indeed ready for labour. They set up a bed and admitted us to a birth suite. Two hours later, at around 11 a.m., Suzan gave birth to our second child. By that evening, both Suzan and the baby were discharged, and we returned home.

In the middle of the pandemic, many childcare centres stopped operating. We hired a babysitter to help babysit our two children while Suzan and I worked. Suzan worked as a scientist in a pathology laboratory, and during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was asked to assist Queensland Health as a senior epidemiologist. For about eight months, I contributed to epidemiological data analysis while maintaining a reduced teaching workload. This arrangement allowed me to network with individuals from the health department and secure collaborative research grants. I employed a post-doctoral research fellow to work on my research grants and mentored several research students.

In November 2022, we had our third child. While Suzan didn't gain as much weight as was the case with our second child, the birth was more challenging. Suzan started feeling labour pains in the morning, and I took her to the hospital around 10 a.m. However, we waited for some time, and there were no signs that she was ready for delivery. When it was time for me to pick up the other children from childcare around 5 p.m., I asked the nurse to break Suzan's water to expedite the process. After that, I left to collect our two children from childcare. I was confident that Suzan wouldn't have the baby before I returned, especially since

her water had just been broken. However, when we got back, our third child had already been born, and the umbilical cord had been cut. I was saddened because I missed the chance to cut my baby's cord, but I was relieved that both Suzan and the baby were safe. The two children were thrilled to meet their new sibling. Suzan and the baby were discharged home the same day. After Suzan's maternity leave ended, we enrolled our three children in full-time childcare.

A developing academic career

In 2023, I received a Quiet Achiever award and was promoted to a Senior Lecturer position. Although I loved my job, the beautiful nature around Cairns, and the convenient location of everything, I found the heat unbearable. After two years in my role there, I could no longer tolerate it. I started feeling increasingly paranoid about the risk of cyclones and the global geopolitical situation, which worried me regarding the safety of my family. I also considered what raising my children in Cairns would mean for their access to quality education and career opportunities. On 13 December 2023, Ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper hit Cairns, leading to flooding and transportation disruptions in the area. Although our house was not flooded, and there was no damage from the winds, we lost power. The humidity was unbearable without air conditioning.

Following the cyclone, I decided that it was time for me to leave Cairns and relocate to Canberra. When a senior lecturer position became available at the University of Canberra, I applied and was fortunate enough to be successful. I then moved my family to Canberra in February 2024, and we were expecting our fourth

child. Suzan and I enrolled all three children in full-time childcare, while we both worked. However, to suit my family situation, the workload of lecturing was untenable, and I had to change jobs after one semester at the University of Canberra. I moved to work for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government Department of Health as an Assistant Director in health services planning.

Shortly after, while finishing the writing of this book, we welcomed our fourth child. Like our third child, I missed cutting the cord. I had to return with the other three children at home after rushing Suzan to the hospital when the time came to have our fourth baby. Although I didn't get to experience our fourth baby's birth, I was relieved that both Suzan and the baby separated safely. They were discharged home after the birth.

Balancing family, work, and academic life

With four children and no support from other family members, Suzan and I shoulder everything. And as there are no relatives, wherever we go, we go with our children. My children are everything to me. Despite the lack of family support, we live happily together. They are loving, and caring children. They know about my background and have begun asking a lot of questions about my life as a child. They are my priority right now so that they can have a life I didn't have – that is the least I can give them. Through the WUSC program, I've managed to break the cycle of dependency on humanitarian rations in a refugee camp. I now need to instill strong values and virtues in my children to help them make positive contributions to society when they grow up.

Since seeking solace in education in the Agojo Refugee Camp in Uganda, my journey has been marked by significant achievements that reflect resilience, dedication, commitment, and milestones that have shaped my life and aspirations. After completing my primary education in the refugee camp, I was fortunate to secure a scholarship for a place in a boarding high school, which allowed me to further my academic ambitions. This opportunity was a turning point in my life. I dedicated myself to my studies, often staying up late to complete assignments and prepare for exams. My hard work paid off, and I graduated with commendable grades, which opened doors for further educational opportunities.

Upon finishing my O-Level studies in Uganda, I decided to travel to Kenya, with the goal of seeking opportunity to pursue higher education. Arriving in Kakuma refugee camp presented its own challenges, but I embraced them. The environment was harsh, with extreme heat and limited access to resources, but I remained committed to my education. I enrolled in advanced English course within the camp and while teaching in a primary school. This not only helped me to develop written English skills but also fostered a sense of community empowerment, as I contributed to education and learning for refugee students who shared similar experiences of displacement.

Realising the significance of education as a tool for empowerment, I sought scholarship opportunities to continue my studies beyond high school. Through perseverance, I was selected through the WUSC program that allowed me to attend a university in Canada, where I pursued a degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences and Human Biology. My academic journey at the

University of Toronto enriched my understanding of human diseases and health issues facing displaced populations, which fuelled my passion for further education and interest in public health.

In addition to my academic achievements, I became involved in various community initiatives aimed at supporting other refugees. I volunteered with the WUSC local committee that provided mentorship and educational support to younger refugee students at the University of Toronto. This experience not only helped me give back to my community but also inspired many to believe in their potential, despite adverse circumstances.

Over the years, I have also worked with several NGOs focusing on community health, advocating for better living conditions and access to healthcare. My experiences have equipped me with the knowledge and skills needed to engage in meaningful dialogue about the challenges refugees face, and to connect with broader audiences on these issues as I have done through my advocacy work.

Through hard work, resilience, and a commitment to my goals, I have built a life that reflects hope and determination. From the struggles in Uganda, to Kenya, and Canada, I have transformed my experiences into powerful stories that not only speak to my journey but also serve as a source of inspiration for others who face similar challenges.

In 2010, I embarked on a transformative journey from Canada to Australia to do Master's program in Public Health at the University of Adelaide, motivated by a strong desire to create positive change in the community. Graduating in 2011, my

academic journey was deeply influenced by my commitment to improving health outcomes, particularly in communities that often face significant challenges. This experience not only shaped my professional aspirations, but also instilled in me a profound understanding of the importance of accessible healthcare for underserved populations.

Following my graduation, I took on the role of community health coordinator, where I played a pivotal role in health promotion and community development. I expanded my qualifications by obtaining a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, equipping me with the skills necessary to teach vocational courses for aspiring health promotion professionals. My professional journey led me to the Mid-North region of South Australia, where I worked as a health promotion coordinator. In this role, I contributed to addressing critical health issues arising from the social and environmental context of the Mid-North region, successfully implementing health initiatives that benefited the local community.

Throughout my academic and professional pursuits, I maintained a significant relationship with Suzan, navigating the complexities of cultural courtship. Also, I received a scholarship to pursue a PhD at La Trobe University, marking a pivotal moment in my academic career. This opportunity allowed me to advance knowledge in public health, while remaining close to Suzan in Adelaide. My engagement and plans for marriage showcased my ability to balance traditional values with contemporary practices.

While I made a significant leap in my education and career, my personal life was shaped by both joy and sorrow, including the birth of our children and the tragic loss of a family member.

Despite these challenges, I demonstrated unwavering support for my family, particularly during critical moments like the hospitalisation of our newborn child. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, I was faced with the experience of balancing my professional responsibilities with family life.

Recognising the need for a fresh start during the pandemic, I made the significant decision to relocate my family to Cairns. This move was motivated by a desire for job security and the opportunity enhance my academic career. While in Cairns, I remained committed to supporting communities and contributed to COVID-19 epidemiological data analysis and reporting in the Far North Queensland. I advocated for public health protection and appeared on several media outlets to disseminate information to the community about the pandemic, fostering a sense of community contribution and civic participation.

Today, I am proud to be an advocate for health equity as I have done through the World Health Organisation's research agenda on migration and health, sharing my story to raise awareness and promote action toward improving health outcomes of displaced individuals around the world. I am committed to continuing my health equity advocacy, empowering others, and contributing to the creation of a more just and compassionate society.

As I reflect on my journey from the refugee camp to Canada and to Australia, I realise how each experience, challenge, and connection has woven together to shape who I am today. My life experience has cultivated a passion for community impact, no matter how small it may be. Embracing friendships forged along the way has not only enriched my understanding of the world

but has also instilled in me a deep human spirit. As I continue to navigate fatherhood, commitment to my wife, and pursue my professional goals, I remain dedicated to making a meaningful difference – not just in my life but in the lives of those around me. This journey is just the beginning, and I look forward to what lies ahead, fuelled by the lessons of my past and the human spirit that has carried me along the way.

6
Lessons from William

Educational pathways can change lives; William's story is a testament to this. Education for people experiencing forced migration and (protracted) displacement offers hope: for independence, for self-determination, for capacity building, for helping others, and – for a few – a chance of resettlement (Dryden-Peterson, 2010, 2017; Pherali and Moghli, 2021). As part of a suite of pathways that are complementary to government resettlement programs, skill-based pathways, including education, offer the opportunity for displaced peoples to leverage their skills and capability so that they can follow their interests and realise migration opportunities open to other people. Furthermore, like other complementary pathways, student programs share the benefits and responsibilities with civil society, and institutions like universities, increasing a country's ability to respond to humanitarian needs. Moreover, education pathways can also open resettlement opportunities that are additional to a country's humanitarian program.

However, there is lack of studies about how students who access programs like the WUSC SRP, cope with their studies, integrate in their universities, settle in their host communities, and transition out as graduates and future professionals. William's narrative, therefore,

offers a compelling account of the challenges of forced migration and the struggle to survive, of the hope-full possibilities of education as a means of resettlement, and of his professional and academic journey towards becoming a public health expert. Because he was able to access the SRP, William is now not only helping others to leverage the power of education, but he is also part of the research community, and an important contributor to Australia's healthcare system. The WUSC's SRP initiative, and support by the University of Toronto local committee, have paid dividends, and Australia is now the lucky beneficiary of that investment in William.

In this final chapter, we examine what William's narrative can tell us about the need for education in displacement contexts, about the value of education pathways, and about the role of community (campus) sponsorship. We also explore the challenges that William describes, and consider the implications of his experience for developing better supports for students accessing programs like the SRP nowadays. Finally, we explore the advocacy and activities that are striving to create more programs like the SRP around the world.

The need for educational aid as a humanitarian response in countries of asylum

Access to quality education is a basic human right (Article 26, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights). While few people dispute this, the practical reality of providing equitable, universal, and quality education to people who are displaced and seeking asylum is growing in complexity and scale. While there

have been significant gains in access to schooling for refugees in many countries of asylum (UNHCR, 2024d), there is significantly lower parity in tertiary education access.

Higher education plays a vital role in empowering refugee students in displacement contexts. By equipping them with essential knowledge and skills, higher education fosters self-reliance, hope, and can facilitate better employment opportunities. Higher education is, according to Sarah Dryden-Peterson (2010), "an instrument of protection in refugee contexts, a protective role for youth engagement, peace building, and counter terrorism, provides opportunities for employment and self-sufficiency" (p. 14). Such empowerment allows refugees to support themselves and their families while also contributing positively to the economies of their host communities. This is the clear and consistent narrative that the UNHCR, and many others, have been promoting for years in an effort to get more governments to provide access to schooling and tertiary education for the refugees they are hosting (UNHCR, 2024d). However, it is important to note, that in, many countries of asylum, tertiary education access for citizens is lower than in settlement countries like Australia and Canada. This makes the challenge of providing access to higher education in displacement contexts even harder; as Pherali and Moghi (2021) note, "[higher education] is still considered a luxury rather than a part of the educational continuum and as a means to transform conditions in which refugees and conflict-affected populations live" (p. 2160; see also Kamyab, 2017).

As we outlined in Chapter 1, the gains in educational access for refugees cannot match the growing numbers of people who are living in protracted displacement contexts, whether in camps or in

urban settings. The literature offers many lessons about providing higher education, particularly from the case of Syrians who fled the conflict in the mid-2010s and sought asylum in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan (e.g., see Avery and Said, 2017; Kamyab, 2017; Pherali and Moghli, 2021) as well as in other countries such as Germany (Berg, 2023). This literature highlights the challenges of providing higher education to newly arrived refugees, not least because higher education is not considered an urgent or basic need (Dryden-Peterson, 2017) and therefore does not feature prominently (if at all) in refugee response programming. The case of Syrian arrivals in neighbouring countries highlights how providing higher education is complicated in countries that are themselves unstable (such as Lebanon) and generally hostile to refugees. As Avery and Said (2017) report, where there are gains in educational access, these can come with the cost of segregation, as was the case for Syrians in Lebanon who were prevented from attending classes with local students, and instead had to attend classes in the evening. Without the hope of accessing further education (whether vocational or academic), there are limited motivators for refugees to remain in school. This in turn creates a toxic hopelessness, which is "often rooted in a lack of viable alternatives for the future in a context of political repression and rising socio-economic injustice", which can fuel radicalisation and resentment (Avery and Said, 2017, p. 106).

Without long-term higher education planning for refugees, educational aid initiatives have stepped in to provide higher education access to displaced people. According to Pherali and Moghli's (2021) review of literature that focuses on lessons from supporting Syrians in Lebanon with higher education, there are benefits

to providing digital access to higher education, through leveraging the resources of multidimensional partnerships, and through considered information-sharing practices. However, these are not without their challenges. These authors note how online provision can conceal the needs and scale of the access issue, and how the widespread provision of digital access without careful evaluation and monitoring can squander goodwill and opportunity. Moreover, Pherali and Moghli (2021, p. 2166) warn that

> *the involvement of external/non-state actors in educational delivery may fuel a reactive process of subcontracting educational responsibility to external/non-state actors without necessarily ensuring sustainability or accountability of the provision or even the quality of that provision.*

Further, without opportunities like work placements, educational aid is restricted in the livelihoods opportunities for displaced peoples. Therefore, while educational aid is important for developing pipelines of tertiary-ready students and providing a "pull factor" for students to complete schooling, the need for skills-based pathways that lead to durable resettlement solutions, such as the WUSC SRP, which William was accepted into, remain an important and growing part of the story.

William's story: A testimony to the benefits of higher education

As William's story shows, accessing higher education was a pathway to independence, breaking the cycle of aid dependence, and offering a brighter future – not only for him but also for his family. Moreover, his higher education qualification significantly enhanced his economic stability. As William's story shows, with

advanced qualifications refugee students are better able to attain well-paying jobs, which can lead to an improved standard of living. For William, training to become a pharmaceutical scientist, epidemiologist, public health worker, and later an academic and researcher was just not an option in any of the refugee camps he lived in as a boy and then young man. Such professional opportunities require years of dedicated study, certification, professional practice, and support; these are almost impossible in situations of mass displacement. Even for those refugees who are professionally qualified/highly skilled, the likelihood of being able to use those skills and experiences is also minimal (Kaushik and Walsh, 2018; Ganassin and Young, 2020; Sandoz, 2020; Baker *et al.*, 2022). This reminds us of the socioeconomic injustice that Avery and Said (2017) wrote about in connection with the hopelessness that limited higher education access offers.

The economic uplift that higher education, especially higher education resettlement pathways, provides not only helps individuals escape the grip of poverty but also strengthens the economic fabric of the host community, demonstrating the broad impact of educating refugees. William's contributions to Canada and Australia have far outweighed the investments made in his resettlement journey and the WUSC SRP contributions. Sadly, while William is one of thousands of WUSC students, there is little long-term tracking and economic analysis of the impact that the SRP has on Canada (and other) economies and societies. We can thus only speculate the cost-benefit analysis, but we can surmise that the WUSC SRP has yielded profound economic benefits for Canada and elsewhere, including South Sudan.

In addition to economic payback, investment in higher education opportunities facilitates social integration for refugee students and enhances the social inclusion of host communities and societies (Abamosa, 2023). Educational institutions provide an environment where refugees can build networks and foster relationships with local students (Anderson *et al.*, 2021). Interaction on and off campus promotes understanding and tolerance, creating a sense of belonging while mitigating social isolation that many refugees face whether in a displacement context (e.g., Crea, 2016) or a resettlement context (Berg, 2023). Through higher education, refugees can bridge cultural divides, enriching both their own experiences and those of their host communities.

Furthermore, pursuing higher education can profoundly affect the psychosocial well-being of refugee students (Crea, 2016; Jack, Chase and Warwick, 2018), although we note Steinhilber's (2019) argument that gender and nationality can impact significantly on the effectiveness of psychosocial supports while studying in displacement contexts. The pursuit of academic goals gives individuals a sense of purpose and achievement, which is crucial for mental health, especially after the trauma associated with displacement. Conversely, limited or no access to the possibility of higher education can significantly impede a person's mental health (Bajwa *et al*., 2017; Jack, Chase and Warwick, 2018). Engaging in a learning environment can serve as a therapeutic outlet, helping students cope with their past experiences while fostering resilience for the future. William's story has attests to these therapeutic mental health outcomes as he described the

nightmares experienced and how it dissipated when he got to Canada.

Lastly, another benefit is the opportunity for leadership development. Crea and Sampson (2017) observed this in their observations of developing the Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM) program in refugee camps in Kenya, Malawi, and Jordan. Educated refugees can be positioned to take on roles as leaders and advocates within their communities (Nwosu and Barnes, 2014; Whelan *et al.*, 2023). With an enriched understanding of social issues and critical thinking, these individuals can raise awareness about the challenges faced by refugees (Abdo and Craven, 2018; Abamosa, 2023), influence policy changes, and drive initiatives for positive development, both locally and globally. By harnessing their education, they can challenge narratives surrounding refugees and push for reforms that ensure their rights and needs are addressed (Dryden-Peterson, Dahya and Adelman, 2017). William has more than demonstrated his leadership, both professionally (as Northern Queensland's chief epidemiologist during COVID), and in his advocating for more refugee access to higher education. This book is a clear example of that strong commitment.

The role of community sponsorship: A win-win for everyone

Refugees are not the only beneficiaries of higher education pathways. As William's experiences with the WUSC SRP show, the benefits are shared between refugee students and the local

communities that support them. Receiving a year of personalised support is a key feature of the WUSC SRP, and this has been replicated in the US' Welcome Corps on Campus program (Welcome Corps, 2023) and in the Australian Refugee Student Settlement Pathway (Refugee Education Australia, 2024). Campus sponsors provide tailored assistance, which can include helping students enrol in their courses, offering academic support, and navigating the education system. This individualised support plays a crucial role in enhancing refugee students' academic success and facilitating their integration into the community. The evidence from the literature attests to the value of such community support. Ferede's (2014) study of 25 SRP students at one Canadian university suggests that SRP students found their LC's help invaluable, especially after many expressed surprise at how "hands off" their lecturers were (p. 231). Furthermore, SRP students receive access to essential resources such as school supplies, accommodation, and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities in their first year of support from community sponsors. These resources help to remove barriers to education, allowing students to engage fully in their university experience (McKee *et al.*, 2019).

The emotional and social support that a targeted community of supporters can offer is vital for refugee students' success, helping refugee students like William feel valued and included. This network of support is especially important for refugee students' mental health and well-being; as William's narration demonstrates, many refugees have experienced traumatic events, persecution, and hardship. While resettlement brings a sense of relief, the consequences of trauma can last for many years (Jack,

Chase and Warwick, 2018), and this can negatively impact on a student's capacity to focus and learn (Avery and Said, 2017), with universities found to actively trigger trauma through unsupportive systems and structures (Maringe *et al.*, 2017). Receiving the support of a group of committed volunteers can provide a sense of security that is vital for being able to process trauma and engage with studies; however, this requires specific responses that are trauma-informed (Bajwa *et al.*, 2017; Baker and Naidoo, 2024), thus necessitating the kinds of careful training and consistent support for campus supporters that WUSC has designed and provides.

For the campus supporters, the benefits extend beyond the individual to the wider student, university, and local communities. Peterson (2010) describes WUSC SRP as providing a transformational personal experience that connects refugees to the civic and citizenship model of Canada. Long-term volunteerism is a difficult commitment, especially for students, many of whom are themselves living in situational precarity as they balance work, study, and personal commitments (Forner *et al.*, 2022). As Reyes-Soto's (2023) account of volunteers participating in the UK Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) illustrates, volunteers reported motivating factors to remain in a CSS group as including personal gratification and friendship, as well as a sense of empowerment and agency. Beyond the individual benefits, Reyes-Soto reports that CSS volunteers are spreading values of inclusion and educating their own communities on acceptance of diversity. Likewise for higher education pathways, the activities of campus supporters, and learning with and from refugee students, provides institutional knowledge, and understandings

that can uplift the whole university community. Campus sponsorship has the potential to facilitate the kind of whole-of-university approach that Jack, Chase and Warwick, (2018) propose, involving "a system-level analysis of the needs of its students and thinking about a whole-system approach to its response to such needs", through embedding support into course spaces, so as to "raise the profile of the service within the modules throughout the university, thus helping to break down those barriers that students perceive (trust, stigma and so on)" (p. 62).

Furthermore, having local contacts through a campus supporter group aids short-term and longer-term employment prospects, offering an immediate social network – the lack of which prevents many other refugees (such as those who arrive through government resettlement programs; see Agrawal, 2019) from gaining meaningful employment for many years after arrival (Hugo, 2011; Sandoz, 2020). McKee and colleagues (2019) describe this from their impact study of WUSC alumni:

> *A common theme among the SRP beneficiary interviews is the importance of networking and social and professional connections for their integration. Local committees connecting SRP beneficiaries with jobs on campus, helpful references from professors when applying to postgraduate education programs, and the sponsoring community's role in contributing to a strong sense of belonging were some of the examples provided by interview respondents.*
>
> (p. 79)

Through building networks of support and cooperation, campus supporter networks can be for universities, creating important

connections between and in their local communities, importantly including alumni and diaspora networks. Moreover, in times of conflict – as has been the case with campus protests about the conflict in Gaza in 2024 as we have written this book – refugee student sponsorship can be advantageous for addressing political and reputational challenges faced by universities. Lastly, there is a positive economic impact associated with integrating refugee students into the education systems and encouraging student volunteerism. Socially aware students are more likely to contribute positively to the local economy and society, be more socially and politically aware (and vote accordingly), leading to long-term benefits for the community as a whole (McKee *et al.*, 2019).

However, CS is not without its challenges. As Korteweg *et al.* (2023) outline from their study of community (non-university) sponsors, volunteers evaluate sponsorship by reference to a set of expectations and judgements about sponsored refugees, their fellow sponsors, and the state. Although there may be few conscious expectations about the behaviours or attitudes of others (sponsees, other volunteers), over time Korteweg *et al.*'s participants undertook a cost-benefit analysis of their investment in CS and realised that humanitarianism is neither benign nor easy to maintain, although this would not necessarily stop volunteers from persisting with or repeating sponsorship. Likewise, Agrawal's (2019) comparison of government sponsorship and CS in Canada identified an initial investment of goodwill, which was eroded over time by a lack of information about refugees or real knowledge of what they were committing to was a noted challenge (what one participant described as a "crap-shoot", p. 955).

The commitment was generally more than volunteers expected, which was reflected in the accounts of sponsored refugees:

> *Interviewees also suggested that sponsors must be better informed and prepared about the people they are sponsoring, which go beyond learning about their historical, cultural, and societal contexts. The refugees found that sponsors' information was flawed, with many holding the impression that Syria was a backward and undeveloped country. This was reflected in how they viewed and treated the people they sponsored, doubting their capability and skills—with the result that they did not offer them sufficient opportunities to become independent.*
>
> (p. 954)

The quote here offers an important reminder that while sponsorship offers undoubtable benefits, it requires more than goodwill; community sponsors need information, curiosity, reflexivity, and training and resources.

Responding to the challenges that refugee students face with their pathways to higher education

William's story of migrating to Canada via the WUSC SRP has many positive elements, leading to his "happy right now" even though this is not an ending. However, despite the unquestionable opportunity, William's recount of his experience of the WUSC SRP highlights areas that require careful evaluation and potential amendments to the program (although we note as William described in Chapter 4, he experienced many challenges with

adapting to, transitioning into and through, and navigating both higher education (academic expectations and practices), and resettlement in Canada (cultural knowledge and familiarity). In what follows, we explore both sets of challenges, pointing to where more resources might need to be developed for new educational pathways, like the RSSP in Australia. However, we would also like to note that William settled in Canada 25 years ago and things have evolved over those years.

Academic expectations and practices

Host language proficiency and academic readiness are undoubtedly crucial for success in higher education; indeed, this is rightly built into the recruitment, selection, and matching criteria employed by educational pathway providers like WUSC. William easily met the English language threshold; as a bright student, he completed his exams with high grades, and he was easily able to master the format for exams and demonstrate his proficiency through the narrow criteria of a language test. However, academic readiness cannot be measured alone by exams and tests; the practices and conventions of demonstrating learning at university level in a Western higher education institution. William's experience of struggling to catch up on missed "core knowledge", to get through the reading, and to pass his assignments illustrate the challenges of designing programs for students who have had fragmented education prior to arriving in a resettlement context.

What counts as "academic readiness" is a highly contested debate, meaning questions of what counts as "readiness" for students who have experienced forced migration and disruption

to their education are difficult to define. While William experienced some pre-arrival academic preparation from local learning partners who do incredible work in difficult conditions, via organisations like the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Windle Charitable Trust, if the content is not created in dialogue with the level of study *and* discipline of study, students will arrive at an educational disadvantage. In this case, students like William can take a bridging course – although you will note from William's narrative that he was initially not happy about that decision, because he felt like he was wasting his time. This notion of wasting time is common with refugee students (Baker *et al.*, 2020), especially if they have spent time in protracted displacement as William had. However, receiving a "soft landing" in a bridging course is arguably better than starting undergraduate studies too quickly and failing modules. Even with the wraparound support of a LC, failing coursework is a powerful demotivator, and can lead to students withdrawing from their studies. For WUSC SRP students like William, this is not the end of the world, as they arrive with permanent protection; however, for students who receive a scholarship to study (such as the France and Italy education pathways), failing is a significant issue.

Developing academic language and literacies is also a significant hurdle, although this is not unique to refugees and many students switching to the western education system struggle with this challenge as well. As William describes it in Chapter 4, "the art of writing essays", and the underpinning critical thinking that facilitates the development of a position or an argument, was difficult to pick up. And the Uganda and Kenyan education systems are very different – no wonder, when we remember that William

first learnt to write in the dust with a stick. While the heart was unquestionably there in the teaching he received in the Ugandan curriculum, the educational experience and technologies were totally different from what he was expected to know (how to take a stance, make an argument), do (read and use evidence to support his argument, written in academic English), and use (libraries, computers). Such gulfs between one context and another require careful training and preparation. This should be a core part of any student's learning options (because not every student will have the same needs, of course) when taking an educational pathway. But we also acknowledge that students from camps in Kenya and Uganda tend to excel in mathematics. It is important to consider that the education systems in these countries may have evolved over time, especially given William's experiences from 25 years ago.

Another barrier to William's learning was his trauma. Recognising and responding to the psychological and emotional challenges that many refugee students face is an important part of academic readiness. While support services such as counselling services can play a vital role in addressing needs of especially people who are resettled due to high needs, SRP students often report challenges, with expectations not meeting reality. The culture shock can exacerbate existing mental health issues, which can be compounded by cultural attitudes towards help-seeking. Counselling carries stigma and must be culturally appropriate. WUSC students often prefer religious counsellors, family or elders, as William did. Moreover, formal counselling requires staff to be trauma-informed and knowledgeable about the kinds of experiences that students might bring with them to their studies. Indeed, this should be a whole-of-institution concern (Baker

and Naidoo, 2024). Mentoring can also be a powerful support for developing readiness and preparing for study (Whelan *et al.*, 2023). By pairing local students or faculty members with refugee students, mentorship programs can help them navigate both the academic landscape and the social aspects of university life, fostering a sense of belonging and support. Moreover, much like CS, mentoring can have significant benefits for local students who provide the mentorship (Vickers *et al.*, 2017). A mix of local mentors and those from their diaspora is important as in William's examples of seeking advice from fellow Sudanese students.

Lastly, policy advocacy and institutional support are critical components in ensuring equitable access to higher education for refugee students (Molla, 2023). Efforts to remove legal barriers, provide comprehensive financial aid, and create inclusive campus environments are essential for enabling these students to thrive. Collaborating with NGOs and international organisations can further enhance the development of comprehensive support programs, ensuring that refugee students receive the assistance they need to succeed academically.

Resettlement expectations

William's challenges were not restricted to his academic engagement; he also found life in Canada confusing and confronting at times, although positive overall. His experience of hailing a bus or navigating the social expectations of campus life are likely shared by many WUSC SRP alumni, and while none of these experiences prevented William from progressing, they were bumps in the road for his resettlement. There are, of course, limits to what you can learn from reading books or watching videos or form cultural

orientations now provided by many educational pathway program about life elsewhere (and remembering that William's story was pre-web 2.0); it is not until you are living an experience that you find out where the sharp edges are. Luckily for William, his LC and friends were able to provide cultural translation and support for the many micro adaptations (and occasional aggression) that he faced. However, William's story does point to the need for more cultural orientation, both pre- and post-arrival, and more awareness for pathway organisations like WUSC of the minor, tacit, or assumed knowledge that they could include in their training materials, such as how to hail a bus, although much more guidance is now incorporated into these training materials.

The financial challenges that William experienced are arguably more significant and insidious than the cultural adaptations. While no student should have to work, it is a reasonable expectation that SRP recipients will find light work on campus. William's story tells a harder tale, sleeping only a couple of hours a night so he could work hard to pay his bills while managing his study. It's a wonder that William didn't make himself seriously ill with that schedule, and this is not something that any university would endorse. There need to be financing systems that allow students to manage their responsibilities without having to work so punishingly hard. At this current time of a global cost-of-living crisis, this is even more necessary to think through.

How to grow more educational pathways

Expanding higher educational pathways that bring protection and opportunity into dialogue is not merely an educational

challenge, it is a humanitarian imperative that requires a multi-faceted approach. As the work of the Global Taskforce on Third Country Education Pathways can attest, expansion starts with political and policy advocacy, involving championing existing programs like the WUSC SRP, and encouraging governments, universities, and communities to implement inclusive policies that dismantle barriers to educational access. Complementary education pathways, whether through scholarship, connected learning, resettlement pathways, or a combination of options, can only grow if there is a common goal for increasing higher education for refugee students. In the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, there were 107 pledges on expanding higher education access through a range of options, including new educational resettlement programs modelled on the WUSC SRP.

The major sticking point, however, for expanding the number of student pathway programs is funding. When scholarships are used as the mechanism, this often comes with an imagined cost to universities, unless a costs-foregone argument can be made. While philanthropy has a part to play, it is risky to rest on charitable work and donations to fund such programs and ensure that they remain a durable component of a country's migration program. Questions need to be asked of who the major beneficiaries are of resettling academically able refugees, who will likely proceed to work in highly skilled professions and therefore pay higher taxes, and to what extent these beneficiaries should fund the costs of administering such programs, as well as paying for the academic and resettlement support that students receive. One set of beneficiaries are future employers who will receive employees, especially those experiencing key skills gaps, such as

green energy, nursing, and construction trades. Another set of beneficiaries is universities, as they receive reputational currency from their participation in education pathways. Governments are another beneficiary; community-sponsored refugees have better integration outcomes, including employment and independence (Agrawal, 2019). Finally, the refugee students themselves, and to a lesser extent their family members and communities, are key beneficiaries. All of these parties could contribute to the costs if a clear memorandum of understanding is negotiated.

Local students also have a role to play in funding educational pathways. The WUSC SRP has been maintained for nearly 50 years by the democratic participation of students and student unions in setting a student levy (the amount differs, depending on the university) that covers the personal allowance and other costs, while the university covers the first year of tuition and a year of accommodation. Implementing a student levy typically requires a referendum of the voting student body, which is no small task, but this is key to the ongoing sustainability of the WUSC SRP and ensures that this program remains a youth-to-youth model. Other CS models require/encourage community members to fundraise (e.g., the Community Refugee Integration Settlement Pilot in Australia) on the basis that fundraising increases the buy-in of sponsor groups.

Pushing the thorny issue of funding to one side, complementary pathways – whether community, training, employment, or education – rely on connections, relationships, and collaboration. For education pathways, creating partnerships among universities is an essential strategy to enhance support for refugee students. Initiatives like the Australian Refugee Welcome University

Sponsorship Consortium (ARWUSC) exemplify how universities can collaborate to co-design educational pathways and support systems that are tailored to the needs of refugees. Such partnerships allow for the sharing of resources and expertise, as well as sharing the resolving challenges and barriers, which can result in comprehensive support programs. Moreover, joint degree offerings or credit transfer systems can provide flexible learning options that accommodate the unique situations of refugee students, allowing them to navigate their educational journeys more effectively.

Finally, raising awareness about the opportunities available for refugee students is paramount. Conducting outreach campaigns can inform potential students of their educational options while establishing support networks that include educational institutions, NGOs, and community organisations, which can create a robust system of assistance. By implementing these strategies, other countries can rise to the challenge of expanding higher educational pathways for refugees, helping them achieve their full potential and positively contribute to their new communities as productive members of society.

Conclusions

As I reflect on my journey through various educational pathways, I have shared with you the multitude of experiences that have shaped my understanding and perspective on learning. My story is not just a personal narrative, but also a tapestry woven with the threads of ambition, resilience, and the pursuit of knowledge. Throughout this book, I have emphasised how my experiences mirror the complexities of the educational landscape that refugee and displaced children face in armed conflict settings.

I have shared that from my early days, grappling with the foundational concepts in school to the pivotal moments that defined my academic trajectory, my education has been more than just formal schooling. It has been an evolving process influenced by mentors, peers, good Samaritans, and, perhaps most importantly, invisible hands of people I didn't know. I find my determination to face challenges head-on, adapting to changes and pushing through obstacles that many would have found daunting. My ability to embrace both successes and failures has provided me with valuable insights into the importance of maintaining a positive mindset, even though sometimes this was not possible. Moreover, my experience of education in diverse educational contexts highlights the importance of adaptability in an ever-changing world. My experiences across varying

environments – from traditional classrooms to more innovative learning settings – demonstrate that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to education, reinforcing the necessity for educational systems that continue to evolve and cater to the diverse needs of all learners.

As someone who grew up in a refugee camp, I understand how it feels to lack the necessities. I have seen children forced to drop out of school because their parents couldn't afford the fees. It always made me wonder why there were no alternative pathways to education for them. I have witnessed many of my generation waste their lives, and now, in their forties, their children were born in refugee camps, continuing the same life trajectory as their parents. The lack of alternative pathways to education led many of these children astray, even those who aspired to leave school. I believe access to education is the most durable solution to the refugee situations in the world. Through my experience in Canada, I learned that education changes lives, regardless of where it is achieved. Complementary alternative pathways to education not only give hope but also serve as an investment and empowerment in communities.

It breaks my heart that many of my refugee friends didn't get the opportunity to realise their dreams. The strict scholarship selection criteria denied them the chance to get an education. It is frustrating to think that in a world where we are supposed to help each other, we haven't established more ways to empower young refugee children to dream of a bigger world. Just like other people around the world, young refugee children come into this world like the petals of a flower; they are beautiful but vulnerable. It is our responsibility as a society to ensure that we develop

these children to contribute positively to our society. After all, Einstein, one of history's most influential minds, was once a refugee boy who grew up to change the world's understanding of relativity and the trajectory of physics. This foregrounds the need and potential for more supportive pathways for refugee education.

As I conclude, I am left with a profound respect for those doing their best to address issues of educational inequity faced by refugee students. My story is a reminder that education is not merely about acquiring information, but about growing individuals who would contribute to our communities. The path I have journeyed serves as a beacon to the many refugee and displaced children in armed conflict settings navigating their educational journeys. This story encourages them to seek out opportunities, learn from their experiences, and ultimately, chart their own courses in the pursuit of knowledge. But it is also a reminder that higher education institutions and educational providers play an important role in helping refugee students achieve their dreams through education. I hope that by this story, I can inspire other refugee students to continue dreaming while higher education institutions take a hard look into their policies to assess how they provide equitable access to education and how they achieve social impacts through equity lens. Starting this journey is as significant as reaching its destination, which is why creating educational pathways for refugees in more countries should not be delayed.

Recommended student projects and assignments

These recommended student projects and assignments are designed to deepen students' understanding of the multifaceted issues surrounding refugees and their access to education, while fostering critical thinking, collaborative skills, and community engagement.

1. Research assignment: Understanding refugee status

Objective: To develop a comprehensive understanding of who qualifies as a refugee under international law.

Task: Students will conduct extensive research to define the term "refugee", focusing on international legal frameworks such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocols. They will be required to summarise key instruments, rights, and processes that establish refugee status, including definitions of other related terms such as asylum seekers and displaced people; and

Output: Submit a detailed report (3–5 pages) or deliver a presentation (10–15 minutes) summarising their findings, including references to academic articles and legal texts.

2. Comparative analysis: Resettlement programs vs. complementary pathways

Objective: To critically analyse and differentiate between various methods of refugee support.

Task: Students will research and create a comparative chart that examines at least three state resettlement programs alongside various complementary pathways available for refugees in their country or a country of their choice. They should explore criteria for eligibility, processes involved, and the outcomes for refugees who utilise these pathways; and

Output: A detailed essay (5–7 pages) discussing the benefits and challenges of each approach, supported by case studies or statistical data.

3. Case study: Educational impact on refugee lives

Objective: To illustrate the transformative role of education in the lives of refugees.

Task: Students will select a specific refugee case study, such as William's journey to higher education, and analyse how access to education has played a pivotal role in shaping that individual's life and future opportunities. They will examine educational barriers, personal determination, and the larger social context; and

Output: A multimedia project (which could include a PowerPoint presentation, a short documentary film, or an infographic) showcasing their findings, with an emphasis on storytelling to highlight the emotional and social aspects of the case study.

4. Community engagement project proposal: Raising awareness

Objective: To foster community understanding and support for refugee issues.

Task: Students will create and implement a community awareness campaign that addresses the challenges faced by refugees and highlights the importance of education as a pathway to stability. This may involve organising an informational event, developing outreach materials, or using social media platforms to reach a broader audience; and

Output: A detailed campaign plan that includes goals, target audiences, key messages, and metrics for success, along with any materials developed (e.g., flyers, social media posts).

5. Policy proposal: Improving refugee education pathways

Objective: To develop advocacy skills and propose evidence-based solutions for enhancing refugee education.

Task: Students will research existing policies and practices regarding refugee education and identify gaps or challenges. They will then propose specific improvements or new initiatives aimed at enhancing access to complementary education pathways for refugees; and

Output: A comprehensive policy proposal, including an executive summary, background information, proposed solutions, anticipated outcomes, and implementation strategies, which they will present as a formal report (5–8 pages) or presentation to a panel of classmates or educators.

6. Reflection essay: Personal connection to refugee stories

Objective: To encourage personal reflection and connections to broader themes of empathy and action.

Task: Students will write a reflective essay discussing the importance of individual stories in shaping perceptions of refugees. They will reflect on what they learned about stories like William's, how these narratives can inspire empathy, and the lessons that can be drawn for their own lives and communities; and

Output: A reflective essay (3–4 pages) that includes personal anecdotes or observations, analysis of the narratives studied, and suggestions for actionable steps individuals might take to support refugee education.

7. Group discussion: Addressing challenges of education for refugees

Objective: To foster collaborative critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Task: Organise a facilitated group discussion where students are encouraged to brainstorm the various challenges refugees encounter in accessing education, such as language barriers, financial constraints, and bureaucratic obstacles. Groups should actively listen to each other and build upon the ideas discussed; and

Output: Following the discussion, students will collaboratively write a reflection piece summarising the key points, proposed

solutions, and group consensus on how to address identified challenges.

8. Creative writing assignment: A day in the life of a refugee

Objective: To encourage empathy and a deeper understanding of the refugee experience through creative expression.

Task: Students will craft a creative piece – such as a short story, a diary entry, or a poem – from the perspective of a refugee navigating the complexities of displacement and the quest for education. They should aim to capture emotional depth and realism in their writing; and

Output: A creative writing piece (2–5 pages) that conveys a rich narrative about the character's experiences, challenges, and hopes, with a brief reflection on the writing process and what they learned about the refugee experience.

Notes

1. Centrelink is the named Australia's welfare system; Medicare is the public healthcare system.
2. www.refugee-education.org
3. https://refugee-education.org/co-designing-a-blueprint-for-the-refugee-student-settlement-pathway-rssp

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