



Our Lives Our Experiences

Stories & Artwork From The Students
Of River Nile School



River
Nile
School

River Nile School is located in North Melbourne. At the school, we learn VCAL. There is a good opportunity for women who are from refugee backgrounds to study English there. At the school, there are students from all over the world. I am very happy to study English at River Nile School. I've been studying there for two years. All of the teachers and students are extremely friendly and incredibly nice to me.

This year at school, we learned about powerful women in the world such as Malala Yousafzai. After this, the teachers gave their students a chance to share their stories to their classmates. Before we wrote the story, we did a timeline about our lives to summarise our stories. Second, we did pre-writing and editing. Third, we presented our stories to our class.

These stories were our own experiences. We wanted to share a bit of what went on in our lives, our countries and cultures to different people in Australia. In our experiences, some parts were depressing and some parts were the best lessons for us to keep and remember. We have faced a lot of problems in our life. At times, we felt our lives were like hell but maybe our experiences have made us stronger so that we can face any problem and become courageous young women. So, we don't give up and we keep going until we reach our dreams.

I hope the reader will learn some lessons from each story. Thanks for giving your time to read our life stories. I hope you will enjoy the stories. Know that no matter how hard the past is you can always begin again wherever you are.

Julianna Nyunt

Introduction.

Contents

Africa

Alice.....	01
Allier.....	02
Arishfa.....	02
Asho.....	03
Ayan.....	04
Biftu.....	04
Caltu.....	05
Dangashe.....	06
Darartu.....	07
Faiza.....	07
Fatima.....	08
Fayo.....	09
Feven.....	10
Hana.....	12
Hanan.....	12
Hildana.....	13
James.....	14
Khadra.....	15
Layla.....	15
Luley.....	16
Lubaba.....	17
Monica.....	18
Natasha.....	19
NS.....	19
Oromia.....	20
Qubee.....	21
Sabontu.....	22
Shame.....	22
Shukuru.....	23
Zandra.....	24
Zuzu.....	24

Asia

Angia.....	25
Anna.....	26
Diana.....	28
Elijah.....	29
Grace.....	30
Jasmine.....	31
Jessi.....	32
Joyce.....	33
Julianna.....	34
Marry.....	36
May.....	37
Merry.....	38
Prae Moh.....	39
Pretty KP.....	39
Som.....	40
Sona.....	41
Sui.....	42

Middle East

Anahtia.....	43
Firdows.....	46
Jessika.....	47
Salma.....	48
Setarah.....	49

First published Dec 2020

To protect their identity some students have chosen to change their name and any very specific details of their story.



Student Stories

Africa

Alice

Once upon a time there was a girl who loved to sing. She was born in Congo in December 2000. When she was six years old, she started at a new school for the first time. The school was a crowded classroom. She went to school for 10 years before she moved to another country.

There was time when she had to be very brave because her country was in war. She had to stop going to school and stay in the house to help her family. She felt lonely and isolated, but she had to be strong for her family. Everything was not ok, but she helped at home and started going to choir practice. Sometime later she left her parents in Congo and moved to Kenya for her future. It was an important time in her life.

She left her country and moved to Kenya

and then Australia. It took a long time to arrive in Australia.

Shortly after she arrived in Australia she started at her new School, River Nile school. She was scared because she met new students but, in a few days, she started to feel more comfortable because she started making new friends. She studies VCAL and make up. It makes her feel good to study at River Nile school because her teacher teaches very well, and she has friends in Australia.

At this moment, she is a student. Her life is calm, and she is living a new life in Australia.

She feels like Australia is her new home. In the future, she wants to be a famous musician, a nurse, and a hotel manager. After reading her story she wants you to know that her advice is study first because that is important for life in a new country.

Allier

Once there was a girl who lived in the forest. Her name was Allier. She was from a small town which was surrounded by a river. She was born in 2001 and grew up in the very beautiful village. Allier was patient, kind and shy, but she was also powerful. She liked helping others.

When she was fifteen years old, she started school for the first time. She was so scared to meet the students and teachers. The school was inside. They sat on the chair and had many books. One day, some bad women came to the house and they told everyone they had to leave. Allier and her two siblings left the town. They went to the forest. It had such a big tree, and it was a quiet place so close to the town. Allier felt scared and cold but also happy to start a new life.

When Allier her grandmother died, she felt afraid and lonely. It was hard to leave without her grandmother. A month later she came back where her grandmother died. She missed her grandmother, and she did not have family or friends, and she did not study anything before or after her grandmother died. Her grandmother was everything to her.

After studying at Melbourne Polytechnic, Allier wanted to change her school. She was not learning many subjects, so she decided to start another school and she found River Nile School. She started this year, and she did not know the students and teachers in River Nile School. Everyone spoke different languages. She did not meet them because of COVID, but she thought they were nice people. Her favorite activity was reading because she did not learn about many subjects before. She liked practicing new things with her friends. Allier felt excited about her new school.

Currently, Allier likes being in Australia. She feels safe and happy. In the future, she wants to be a teacher. She knows, she has to study hard, but she is super excited about her life in Australia. Allier has told herself “look how far I have come, I am a strong woman.”



Arishfa

Once there was a girl who was very kind and friendly. Her name was Arishfa. She loved playing basketball when she was five years old. She started school at Mogadishu Primary School in Somalia. She loved to make new friends at school. Her teachers were really nice and helpful to the students. The school had a large area but her classroom was the smallest one with 45 students.

After eight years, she finished school. Then her family decided to move to Ethiopia but she felt upset because she left her friends and family members in Somalia. “We need

to move to Ethiopia because Somalia is not safe for children,” said her aunty.

Arishfa, her older sister and her aunty made the journey to Ethiopia by car. The very cold weather in Addis Abba and the language in Ethiopia was hard for them but luckily a few months later, Arishfa and her sister started school in Addis Abba. Arishfa was really excited to learn a new language. She also made new friends at school. She liked the city because it was safer than Somalia. She wanted to join the basketball team but her aunty wasn't happy for her to join a team. One day, Arishfa asked her teacher, "If I want to become a famous basketball player, what should I do?" He said, "You must achieve your goal and don't listen to what other people think of you."

The day she found out she got an Australia visa, she was sad because she left her aunty. When she came to Australia, she felt excited but nervous. It was hard to communicate with people because she didn't speak English very well. The weather was too hot in Australia because in Ethiopia at that time, it was very cold. On her first day in Australia, she lived with her uncle's family in Heidelberg. After one year, she moved to Reservoir with her sister. She liked to live in Melbourne because it is a multicultural city.

One month after arriving in Australia, she studied English Language at the Melbourne Polytechnic Epping campus. It was scary at first because nobody could understand her, but lucky her sister was in the same class as her. Then, her sister had her first child so she stopped school. Then Arishfa made new friends speaking English and this helped her more than before. In 2020, Arishfa started at River Nile School in North Melbourne.

Currently, she still studies at school. She feels happy and safe in Australia. In the

future she wants to be a flight attendant or cabin crew. She will have study hard but also, she is enthusiastic about her new life in Australia. She wants you to know, "Appreciate yourself and never give up."



Asho

There was a girl called Asho who lived in Somalia. She was from a big, beautiful city. She was born in 2002 and grew up in the quiet and peaceful city. Asho was a shy girl but she was also a strong girl. She loved to learn new things.

When she was four years old, she started learning about religious things. The first day of school, she was so afraid because everything was so new. There were many students. After that, she started learning new things but one day a group of men came to the city. Asho and her family escaped the city at night.

After they left, they came to Australia. After she arrived, she went to language

school. That was first time she started studying English. It was so difficult because she did not know how to speak English. Asho started studying at River Nile School. There were a lot of student and everyone spoke different languages. She enjoyed it a lot.

Asho likes being at school and she feels happy and safe. When she finishes school in the future, she would like to be a nurse. She knows how to do hard work.

Ayan

Once upon a time there was a girl who loved to dance. Her name was Ayan, and she was born in Somalia on the 13th of March 1998. When she was six years old, she started at a new school for the first time. The school was very nice, and she went there for two years before she moved to another country. She left Somalia and moved to Ethiopia, and then Australia. It took a long time to arrive in Australia.

There was a time when Amina had to be a very brave girl. Her country was in war and it made her feel worried and scared for her

family and for her future. She knew that she had to be very determined if she wanted to start a new life in Australia.

Soon after she arrived in Australia, she started school for the first time. She studied English at Epping Polytechnic Language School. She thought it was hard because everything was new and strange. After some time had passed, she began to feel more comfortable and relaxed. In 2020 she started studying VCAL at River Nile School. She is so happy to be at her new school because she has made some new friends.

Biftu

My name is Biftu Mohammed Abdalla, I was born and raised in Ethiopia. I came to Australia in March 2019. After I came to Adelaide life wasn't simple for me, I faced many difficulties. Everything was the opposite of what I expected before. I came here with my siblings and dad. We started living with our step mum but that was hard for us as she didn't like us - she only wanted our dad not us, so my siblings and I decided to leave the house.

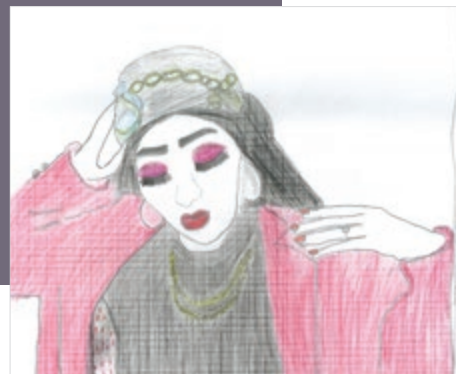


After we left the house, my siblings and I started living with one of our friends, we knew her from back home. This didn't work out for me because I was not their biological sister, so they didn't include me in anything. I felt lonely and depressed, so I called my friend who lived in Melbourne and I told her about my bad situation in Adelaide.

She invited me to come to Melbourne as she said there were many opportunities for me but after I arrived in Melbourne, it failed because of my visa type. Every school I went to asked me to pay fees which was very expensive, but I kept trying to find a place in a school.

I went to a public school to study Year 11 and they said I was over age. That was the lowest stage of my life but I didn't give up, my friend advised me to see a social worker. That was when the good times started for me, step by step my problems began to be resolved. Centrelink now pays me I am studying what I want, and I am very happy with life. My only problem right now is housing, I hope it will be resolved one day.

Life is full of ups and downs I believe in struggling for our own life and to never give up. Which means, we always have to fight for our own success even if we face difficulties. All can be solved through hard work and patience.



Caltu

Once there was a girl who loved school. Her name was Caltu. Caltu was born in August 1997 and she was a shy and caring person. Caltu lived in a small city Machata, Ethiopia. When she left her country, it was war and still now it is a very bad country – not only for Oromo people. Ethiopia is not a free country – no freedom and no peace. The Ethiopian government killed a lot of people. This country is not safe to live in.

When she was seven years old, she started school at Michata Primary School. She did year 1 to year 8. She used to love school because she loved reading and being at school. She wanted to improve her education and study hard. She played with friends as there were a lot of students in her school. Sometimes, her parents didn't let her go to school. They wanted her to stay home to help them. She cried a lot because she didn't want to stay at home and sometimes she used to sneak out of the house to go to school.

In the school, she didn't have equipment to use like chairs and tables and there was no water. It was just not comfortable in the class. There were a lot of students in one room – more than sixty students in one classroom! In our school, the rules were very strict. If you were late, the punishment was to hit you with the stick on the hand and they made you push the wall. They forced you to walk on your knees for a long way until your knees hurt.

I have been to three different schools in Australia. First, she went to the English Language School for one year. And she felt very nervous and shy because she didn't speak English. It was hard to ask where the toilet was. She didn't even know where to stay and eat her lunch and where to go during break. That time was difficult. She

didn't know any friends in that school. When she went to school, she was worried about her English – maybe she was going to say the wrong thing because she was not confident about her English. If she speaks now, she is still worried about her English!

After that, she met Oromo students at the school and met many other students from different countries. One day, when she had an appointment with her doctor, she didn't go to school. The next day when she went to school, her teacher asked her why she didn't come to school. She just told her, "Okay." It was so funny. One of the Oromo students in the class explained it to her, then she understood!

Then she went to another school which was Collingwood College. She spent two years at that school. When I went to this school, she wasn't scared like the English Language School. She was learning English and understood a lot of thing. She had a lot of friends in Collingwood and she had a good time with her friends in that school.

After that, she moved to River Nile School and she was more motivated to learn a lot of things. She really enjoys River Nile School – it is a helpful and friendly school. She thinks the best way for her future is to do nursing. First, she would like to do a Certificate III in Allied Health. She wants to keep studying this until she has some work experience and so that she will learn more special training. She also wants to have more new skills and to apply for jobs.

At the moment, she would like to continue to improve her study because for a while this year, she was not feeling well. So she doesn't have any options – she has to continue to achieve her goals. If you are focused and gain understanding, you can share your knowledge with others!



Dangashe

Once upon a time there was a girl who loved to cook. Her name was Dangashe and she was born in Ethiopia on the 25th of November 1996. When she was six years old, she started school in Ethiopia. The school had a new classroom, and she went to school for one year and one month before she moved to another country. Dangashe left Ethiopia and moved to Egypt and then Australia. It took a long time to arrive in Australia.

A few later she had to be brave and courageous because in her country there was no freedom, no justice, and no peace. There were many problems with the government, and she had to leave. That was a hard time in her life, but she was determined to find a community that had human rights, freedom, and safety.

Soon after she arrived in Australia. She started school for the first time in a new country. She started VCAL at River Nile School. She felt it was very hard because

she did not understand anything, and she had never learnt English before. After some time, she enrolled in a makeup and kitchen operation Certificate at River Nile school and now she feels more confident.

She liked making new friends, she liked her teacher and she liked learning English. Right now, her life is hopeful and optimistic because she is a student at River Nile school. She dreams to be a nurse and she feels like Australia is her new home. She wants you to understand that everything works out in the end.

Darartu

Once upon a time there was a girl who dreamed of becoming a nurse. She was born in Ethiopia on September 11th ,2001. When she was seven years old, she started at a new school for the first time. She lived in Ethiopia and the school was very old but clean. She stayed at this school for a year before she had stop.

A few years later Darartu`s mum died. She had to be very brave during this time, but she felt very scared. She asked her sister for help, and her sister said everything would be ok. They supported each other. It was an important time in her life.

Another time when Darartu had to be brave was when she lived in her country in Ethiopia. It was very hard. She felt worried for her future. She had to be determined to make it to a new country to start her new life. She left Ethiopia and then moved to Australia, on the way she stayed in Dubai for three days. When she arrived in Australia, she stayed at home for months. Soon after she enrolled in an English course at the Western English language school.



She enrolled in the afternoon and after the school holidays she started. She thought the school was very good, but there was a new teacher and new people, so she was nervous. Speaking and math were hard for her.

Sometime later, she started at another new school, River Nile School. She had another new teacher and there were new people. She felt nervous and happy. Now she is working hard to make her dreams come true.

Faiza

Once upon a time there was a girl name Faiza. She was born in Somalia in 2001. When she was seven years old, she went to primary school, but the school was very crowded. Soon after she started school, she left her country and made the big move to Australia.

There was a time in her life where she had to be brave. It was when she had to move to a new country. It was so hard because she did not know what people were talking about and she did not know who anyone was.

Finally, after some time she started to understand what people were saying. Coming to Australia was an important time in her life because when she arrived, she did not always have to worry that something bad would happen to her or to anyone she loved.

In Australia, the first school she went to was AMES in Footscray. She liked it there, but she was excited to be a VCAL student at River Nile School. Right now, she feels like Australia is her home, and she feels optimistic living her new life. In her future she dreams to be a nurse, she would love that job and everyday she hopes that her dream will come true.

Fatima

Once open time there was a girl who live in Somalia. Her name was Fatima. She was from a town which was very hot. She was born in 2000 and grew up there. She was a brave girl and had many goals in her life. When she was five years old, she started learning Holy Quran for the first time. She also started school. The first time she went to school, she did not have any idea what the learning was, the only thing it seemed was playing with the other kids. The school had a big playground. She liked playing with the kids and singing the alphabet song. When she became a big girl, she learned what life was about. She started thinking about her future. She wanted to finish high school and go to university so she could become an independent woman.

At the end of her graduation in high school, Fatima left her country. At that time Fatima

was so excited and feeling happy. She liked to go to new countries she had never been to before. But when she arrived everything was different. She missed a lot of things she had before. She felt anxious and scared when she had to do simple things like ordering food and asking people for directions. But arriving Australia was exciting.

Fatima started school when she arrived in Australia. It was a great time in her life. She started at AMES in Footscray and she also started a Certificate III in early Childhood Education and soon after she was excited to start VCAL at River Nile School.

Right now, she feels it is her home. She is optimistic about her new life. In the future she dreams that she will be a business manager. She would love to do that job and sheopes that one day her dreams will come true. She tells herself “every dream comes true if you use your time wisely”.



Fayo

Once there was a shy girl who spent her childhood in Oromia, Ethiopia with her lovely grandma. She loved her so much. They lived in small town in Oromia. She thinks Ethiopia is big county but there is no democracy. Ethiopia is home to many nations but to her, it is the most violent country in east African. When she was there, she was worried for her life because the army killed people without committing any crime.

The school in Ethiopia was very horrible, violent and sometimes including killing university students. Even now, it is so frustrating and makes her feel heart broken. The school was small in some places but inside is not small not big. Some teachers were very strict and used violence against the students - even if you were late for only a few minutes! She felt very scared and sometimes she didn't go to school. Her favourite subject was science because her science teacher was very kind and taught very well. She loved her friends. Even though the school was violent, she enjoyed playing with her friends and laughing together. She had a lot of friends and they made her happy when she was down.

When she came to Australia, she felt scared at first because it was a new country. But after some time, she was happy to be in safe country. She came to Australia with her family and she was frightened on the plane. When she arrived in Australia, she had warm welcome and she had a really good meal with her family and friends. She remembered that the weather changed from hot to cold every minute! The times also changed and made her confused. Sometimes she could not sleep at night. It took her too long to get used to it. She lived with her family at first then moved to her friend's house. She felt nervous and scared.



Two months after arriving in Australia, Fayo went to study for one year at the Western English Language School in Werribee. It was scary on the first day because she didn't know any English. She was very nervous because none of the teachers understood her and no one spoke her language. After studying at the Western English Language School, she started studying a Certificate III in EAL at Footscray TAFE. After she finished her Cert III, she went to school at the River Nile School in North Melbourne. At her school, there are a lot of students from around the world. Fayo enjoys studying in a different school and has made a lot of friends.

Today, she plans to continue to study at the River Nile School. She feels safe in Australian schools because there is no violence. In the future, she wants to be a nurse. Fayo is very excited living in Australia, even though she misses her family back home. "To all the students who have been through violence, be strong and never give up."

Feven

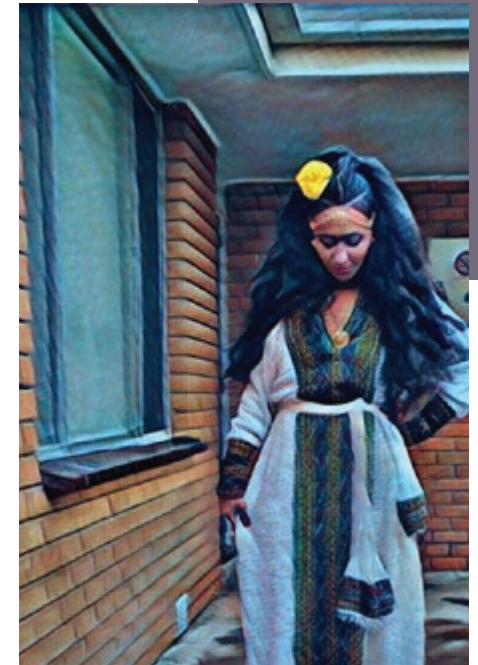
Once there was a courageous girl. Her name was Feven. She lived in a small city in Sudan called Kassla. She loved school and she was the top of her class. But circumstances didn't allow her to continue.

She was born in 1995 in Sudan, Kassla. In 1997, she went with her family to Eritrea. At first, she was happy and excited however a few months later, the war started between Eritrea and Ethiopia. It was dangerous to live there. She worried and felt unsafe. She saw the fire everywhere and the shops burning. She said to her mother, "Let's go back to Sudan mum," and all agreed. She farewelled her grandfather and other relatives. That was last day she saw them.

After that, they started travelling to Sudan. The journey was unsafe; half of the way was walking and the other half they rented a donkey and a camel. They paid a lot of money to the owner. Finally, Feven and her family arrived in Sudan. She was ecstatic because she survived.

She arrived at the refugee camp in Sudan called Kilo 26 Refugee Camp. It was hard time for her because there was no clean water and no school, however the people in the camp were kind and happy, helped each other and lived happily even though their children didn't go school and there was not enough food. However, the UNHCR helped them too. After few years, Feven and her family decided move to the city to start school.

When she was seven years old, she started school at Khadija Bnt Khuyld Elementary School. It was a Catholic school. She was excited and felt happy because her father helped her to write her homework. She loved learning everything and her teachers were so kind. The school had large classes



of about 60 students in one room and had amazing green grass and trees. Her favourite part of school was recess because she loved to play with her friends.

Suddenly, one day her dad decided to go Eritrea to see his family and he couldn't come back again. Her mum was working, and she raised her children herself. Life became difficult for Feven and her family. She had to help her mum by looking after her brothers.

When she was in grade seven, she left school and went back to the refugee camp, away from the city, with her family. She made lovely new friends in the camp. The best time in the camp was when the moon came out and everyone sat together outside and had fun. They started to sing and dance. The following year, she went back to the city to try to continue her schooling. She continued school and started

work as a baker at the same time. Even though she was far from her family, she was courageous. She thought this was a good experience because she learned a lot about making sweets.

One day, her relatives told her mum, "Girls are not allowed to stay away from families. That is not our culture. She needs to get married and sit in her house." Mum agreed. After she came home, everything was ready for the wedding. She did not want to get married but they forced her. She got married and after one year she had a baby. Unfortunately, the marriage was comfortless. So, she decided to move on, and she got a divorce. Feven liked freedom. She liked to do anything she liked without someone saying to her, "Girls are not allowed to do this."

She was happy when she had a son because she felt that to be a girl was hard in her country. When her son turned one, she started work as shop assistant. She learned a lot of skills. Her manager was good man. Not a lot of women worked in the shops in Sudan but he gave her the opportunity to grow. He travelled a lot to China and America and she was managing the shop by herself. It was difficult to work and have a child with you however, she never felt hopeless. She always encouraged herself.

A few years later, she got a call from UNHCR. They said, "Congratulations, Australia accepted you and your visa is ready!" She cried with joy. Feven and her family flew to Australia. It was the first time she had been in an airplane! After two days, they arrived in Australia, Melbourne and the next day they flew to Tasmania. She remembered that day. It was afternoon time and the community welcomed them at the airport. She felt ecstatic to start a new life, but also fearful because everything was new for her. Australia was different to the places she grew up in.



She started English Language School. It was hard for her and she didn't like it, because she didn't understand what the teacher said. But she studied hard and soon she started to write, read and listen. She also started learning how to drive a car.

One year later she moved to Melbourne with her family. Feven started studying VCAL at the River Nile school. She enjoyed studying and her teachers were really kind and helpful. Feven moved out of the home with her family and into a separate house with her son. A few months later, she got her licence and she was glad. She really thanked GOD from the bottom of her heart because her life became better.

Currently, Feven is happy with her new life and she feels safe. In the future, she plans to study accounting. She knows she will have to study hard, but it is the dream she would like to become true. She wants you to know "Problems are not reasons to give up, but a challenge to improve ourselves. You can start all over again. There is still hope as long as you are alive."

Hana

My name is Hanamariam Bekele, I came from Ethiopia. I was born in Gondar one of the historical cities in Ethiopia, which has historical churches of trinity and the castles of King Fasil. I grew up in a big family of 6 and I am the oldest of all, I attended my elementary and secondary school in Gondar.

I got married to Asch and we moved to Adelaide in 2013 because my husband got a scholarship to study at Flinders University.

I was so fortunate to have my first baby girl, Christina, in Adelaide in the year 2014. After my husband finished his study in 2015, we moved to Melbourne, and ever since I have been studying English and high school subjects at River Nile School - VCAL.

I am aspiring to become a nurse.

Hanan

Once there was a girl who lived in Ethiopia. Her name was Hanan and she was from a small village which was surrounded by a gigantic, dry desert. She was born in 2000 and grew up in a quiet, peaceful village. She was a pretty and brave girl. She loved exploring new places and learning new things. When she was 8 years old, she started school for the first time. She was happy and excited to meet the teachers and the students. The school was old, and the classroom was messy. They sat on broken chairs and stone. Also, they did not have enough books and a playground.

One day, a lovely girl came to the village and she told everyone they had to leave. Samiya and her brothers were able to go to Australia. Australia was such a beautiful and free country. They were happy to start



a new life. When she decided to leave, she felt sad. She started thinking about being separated from her family and started to cry before arriving in Australia. It was a hard time for her. When she was on the plane with her brothers, she cried a lot, and her face was red. The next day they arrived in Australia. It was a rainy day. Her sister was waiting for them at Melbourne airport and took them home. But everything was difficult for her and her brothers. She did not know how to speak English. She did not know anything.

One day her sister took her to Brunswick Language School. She met the teacher and she walked around the classroom and started to compare her school in her home country and her new school. The school in her home country and her Australian school were very different. Her school in her home country was very small, messy, and crowded. The Australian school was very beautiful and had everything. The teacher said to her "you are welcome, you can start tomorrow". She felt nervous on the first day and she felt lonely. She did not have any confidence but one day she made new friends. She started to feel better and build confidence.

After one year she knew everything about Australian rules. Then she went to Mount

Alexander College and she started year nine but after one year, she moved to River Nile School. River Nile School was very nice and very comfortable, she loved school. At the school, there were students from different countries, and everyone spoke different languages, but they were happy. At school she enjoyed group work, reading, brain break and culture day.

At the moment, she wants to finish school because she wants to get a job. In the future, she would like to be a fashion designer. She is interested in sewing but she needs experience and more study. This is what she hopes for. She always tells herself "I am a brave girl".

Hildana

Once there was a strong, thankful and lovely girl who wanted to travel to many countries. Her name was Hildana. She lived in the modern city of Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea. She was the first daughter of her family.

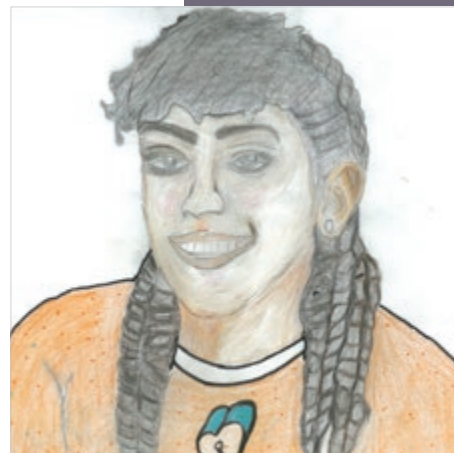
When she was 4 years old, she started school in pre-unit. After a few years, she started school at Model Primary School in grade 1. The school had many rooms, large classes and her teacher was strict if there was disobedience during the class. Eight years later, she completed her primary school grade 8.

The following year, Hildana and her brother suddenly wanted to go to their loving parents, who were abroad in Kenya. Her brother told her, "We need to run from this country with a guide to showing us the way and go to Kenya to see our parents." So, then they started their journey to Ethiopia by foot as there was no other option. After the long journey of a few weeks, they arrived in Ethiopia. They moved to an Ethiopian

Refugee Camp. After a few months, they moved to their cousin's house who lived in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. A whole year later without schooling, we booked a flight to Kenya where she met her parents. She was excited to meet her family after a long time of seven years and she continued schooling in Kenya.

After a few years, the UN announced that she had got a visa to Australia. She felt ecstatic to travel to Australia with her family as she knew it will be a better journey than the one she had with her brother. The flight was booked and they had one-hour transit in Dubai to Australia. After a long time of travel, they arrived in Australia. On the first day, they were confused as they were welcomed in a guest house. The time had changed and the weather was cold because they came winter time. She remembers on her first day they took busses that made her confused about which way it is to go to Centrelink.

A few weeks later, she started studying VCAL at River Nile School. On the first day, she was scared and so shy to ask teachers because she thought her English was not good. At school, many students spoke



different languages. The teachers were very helpful and they taught them how to practice improving their English. Her home was far from the school, but the school provided a free transport card which helped her travel more.

At the moment, she feels more confident and content. In the future, she would like to be an engineer. She knows that she will have to try hard to be creative and do her best in mathematics. When she completes her studies, she hopes to lead a better life and have a good experience. Her mother always says, "Lose hope, lose everything." And that is true.

James

I arrived Melbourne 2017 in July. I used to live with my grandparents in Ethiopia and we lived in big green house with a big garden and wild lands.

I have a lot of family, friends, cousins, aunties, uncles and they all came to had come to say farewell to me me. It was sad to separate from my whole family, my elementary and high school friends, I had spent childhood with them.

It was unbelievable for me when I arrived at the airport in Melbourne, it was exciting. I had never seen an airport so elegant and great. I was full of curiosity and my heart was a beating fast thinking of my new life. The next day I got up and I couldn't wait to go out, even though my English wasn't good. I looked at my new surroundings - it was clean, quiet and beautiful and everything was different. Everywhere, everyone was new for me. I thought I couldn't live here and I was scared but the important thing was that I could be secure and happy to live in Australia and it slowly it started to feel like my new sweet home.



Though it was tough for me, I was so happy to see my new family. I came to live with my dad for the first time in my life and I was so excited to see my sister and brother, they are both younger than me.

When I came to Australia the first week was a challenge. The taste of the food, the sleeping time, people, language, and the cold weather. I missed my family.

On my first day of school, my sister dropped me off. I learned many things and about different cultures and I made friends. I noted that Australian people were kind, and that they would help me to understand and by understood.

I felt I shouldn't be afraid because I have a lot of good friends and we could learn from each other. I was struggling and I was kind of shy. In Australia peoples look at a person directly when they are speaking with them, you have to look at their eyes when speaking and talk louder. This was very new for me.

I never thought I would experience living abroad in my life. However, I made a special journey, actually, it was my new life.

When started my new life in a different country, I needed to know about the culture and how to take care of myself. This was a good chance to get my own independence.

Australia taught me to have a positive mind and to be happy wherever you are. If you really want to be happy then you need to stop wishing your life away and accept where you are in life right now.

Enjoy what you have and forget about what you don't have or what for now, is out of reach. Don't worry about what others have, you can't control that.

It's hard, but once you focus on what you are actually blessed with, you will truly start to be happy. I am very happy and glad that I came here, to a new country, a new life and new challenges.

Khadra

Once there was a girl whose name was Khadra. She was born in 1997, in the capital city of Somalia. When she was five years old, she started at the Islamic school in her country. She completed primary school in Somalia. After a few years, her family decided to move to Ethiopia because Somalia had a war, so it was not safe for younger children.

The day she found out that she was going to Australia, she felt excited but also nervous she left her friends and family.

In 2017 she started at Melbourne Polytechnic and started studying English. She completed a certificate 1 in English and then a certificate 3 in Aged Care. In 2020, she started studying at the River Nile School.

In the future, she wants to be a social worker and help new people in Australia and the homeless. When she first came to Australia, a social worker really helped her and that is why she would like to be one in the future.



Layla

Once was a girl who lived in Somalia, her name was Layla. She was from capital city of Somalia. She was born in 2002 in her country. Layla was a shy girl, but she was thoughtful too. She loved fixing things, inspecting new places and learning new things.

When Layla was six years old, she did not go to school, but she did go to the Quran school. Layla was excited to meet her Quran teacher and the students. The Quran school was next to a mosque. They sat on a rug that was in the Quran school and they had many Quran books.

One day Layla's uncle decided to bring Layla and her aunt to Australia but first, they had to go to Uganda so that he could bring them to Australia's Migration centre. So, Layla and her aunts planned to move to Uganda. After they moved to Uganda, they had to stay with some of their relatives who lived there for a while so Layla and her aunt could find a house. Then Layla's aunt found a house and they moved in and they were happy.

After a while, Layla and her aunt had to go to Kenya because Australia's migration was not in Uganda. Layla and her aunt had

to get there and stay for a while but then Layla's aunt came back Uganda. Layla had a duty to stay in Kenya because one of her aunts was having a baby. She had to stay and help her out until she could help herself but that took a year.

After a year, Layla and aunt came back together to Uganda. Following that year, the Australian migration called and told Layla that she had to get ready because she would go to Australia soon. Layla and her aunt went shopping and had to prepare to move to Australia, but her aunt was rejected. So, Layla had to come to Australia by herself.

There were a lot of times Layla had to be brave. Once, she slept in a mosque because it was Ramadan, and she was a bit tired. The prayer was long, and she could not stand up, so Layla finished it and went to sit in a corner of the mosque and then she fell asleep.

After she woke up everything was dark, and nobody was there. Layla woke up and she checked her watch, and it was at midnight. She had to stand up and walk in the dark to find the door so she could get out and go home.

Another time when Layla had to be brave was when she got lost in the airport in Dubai while she was waiting for the Australian aeroplane to come. She went to the toilet and got lost in Dubai's airport. She could speak a little bit of English, so she asked the people where the flight attendants were. There was a flight attendant who was with her and took her to the Australian pilot because Layla was fifteen years old and the flight attendant had to look after her.

When Layla came to Australia, she went to English language centre and studied for two years. After the two years, Layla wanted to go to high school, but it was hard for her to



go because she year 10 so she did not have any options, so she went to TAFE.

While Layla was in TAFE, she finished certificate 2 and started studying a certificate 3. One of her teachers came to her and informed her that she might have to repeat her certificate 3. Layla did not want to study another 2 years thus Layla changed to a different school and now she studies at the River Nile School.

In the future, Layla would like to go university and would like to become an architect or a business analyst. Also, Layla would like to go on an adventure with her family and friends that she has not seen in a long time because of the coronavirus. Layla always says, "be a respectful woman and smile to other people so they can help you when if you need help from them".

Luley

Once upon a time, there was a girl called Luley. She lived in the capital city of Kenya. She was born in 2005 and grew up in a big and peaceful family. Luley was a powerful and calm girl. She loved to help homeless people and know about their past and what they went through.

She started school when she was 10 years old with her niece. Luley and her niece were very nervous for the first time at school. The school was very big and peaceful. One day, she was in the class and it was almost lunch time. Her big sister came to the school and told the teacher that Luley needed to go to the airport. Luley said goodbye to the teachers and students. She packed her stuff and left the country. She was very happy to see her siblings and her mum for the first time.

The time that she felt brave was when she cut her foot with glass and did not cry because she was very nervous. She tried to hide somewhere and covered her foot so no one could see her, but her blood could not be stopped. Her aunt saw her and screamed. Her aunt called the ambulance. Luley was very scared about the operation because she never had an operation before. A few weeks later, the doctor said that she needed to use crutches otherwise her foot will not improve properly. Luley felt embarrassed to use the crutches because the student would make fun of her. After two months, she started walking normally. She was happy when the doctor said, "your foot is good, you can go back to school."

After she finished at Collingwood English Language school, Luley started studying at River Nile School. Luley liked the teachers because they were friendly and supportive. Her favourite activity was planting seeds and working in a group. She liked to communicate with others and to learn new things about them.

When she completes her studies, she would like to be a netball player or a soccer player. She knows that it is hard for a girl who wears a hijab to play sports however she will never listen to what others say about it. Luley repeats to herself "I am a confident girl and I can do whatever my mind and heart says."



Lubaba

One day, there was a lovely and kind girl who lived in Bale Robe-a small village in Ethiopia. Her name was Lubaba. She was born in 1996.

In 2003, she started Academic and Religious school. When she was 8 years old, she finished the holy Quran! That made her incredibly happy and from then on, it was easier to learn everything. One day she was sitting on the grass and looking at her classroom. The class was very old and four students had to sit at one desk. That made her uncomfortable. But the school was very big and had a garden.

She liked her school. She had also a lot of friends. At school, she learned 10 subjects and it was very hard for her because some teachers did not explain well. But she liked maths very much and the teacher also helped her. Her teacher said to her, "Don't stop your school be strong."

After that, she took the Minstrie which was an exam and she passed the exam! One year later, she was in year 10. It was stressful because she had to prepare for exams again. In her country, the school rules were very strict and it was hard.

She had a lot of memories from her school. One day she remembers that she came without uniform, so the security beat her. She would never forget that memory.

One year later, she moved to Australia. When she came to Australia, she didn't like it. The country was new for her and she didn't have any friends. In 2017, she started English language at Ames Flagstaff and she made a friend. Her friend was a nice and kind person.

A few months later, she decided to go back to her country. When she went back, she enjoyed the time with her partner. She stayed for six months, then came back to Australia. But when she came back she was pregnant. In 2018, she gave birth to her son. It was hard for a beginning mum but she enjoyed it. She loved her son so much and she was grateful to have him. Her son was beautiful and handsome.

In 2019, she started study at the River Nile School. The school was very nice and also the teacher was very nice and kind. They were a lot of nationalities at school and they loved and respected each other. That made her more comfortable. There were a lot of differences between my country school and here. In my country, the school was very hard. I think they didn't explain as much as they wanted students to do it by themselves so that made it difficult for a lot of students. In Ethiopia there is no equality.

A lot of people and students die because there is no freedom to say whatever you want. So, the students didn't focus on school because they were fighting for freedom.



In Australia, you have freedom to do whatever you want, so that gives you more chances to reach your goals. Now, I'm studying VCAL and Business so I'm happy. In the future, I will be a business woman - that is my dream.

I just want to say, "Women must be strong and patient with all their challenges."

Monica

My name is Monica. I come from the Horn of Africa.

My life back there was really tough because my country is a poor country and there were wars all the time. My mother was a businesswoman and she used to travel with my little sister and me, because my sister was still a baby and I had to look after her while mum was busy working.

In 2013 the whole family went to a nearby city and that's when a war broke out again. One day my sister and I were sleeping in our room and my parents were in their room. We woke up the next morning to find out that mum and dad were gone, at this point we thought that they went somewhere and they would be back, which never happened.

There were gunshots everywhere and people were just running while I was holding my sister's hand, confused about what was going on because I didn't even know where

to run, I was thinking that mum and dad would appear, especially my mother because she was so caring but they never appeared. Instead fifteen soldiers came and took us with them while treating us like prisoners and they were just shooting people as they were walking.

I was thirteen at the time and my sister was five years old, I had to be brave so I would make her feel like I was there for her, which I was. They were going to kill us, luckily their leader decided to let us go.

We were homeless for about a year and half, finally we found someone related to us, so he took us with him and we called my older sister the next day. She decided to bring us to Australia and that's when we found peace when we finally arrived in 2017.

My mum and dad are still missing, it been almost eight years now and we still haven't heard from them. Maybe they're still alive being held in prison somewhere or dead.

I am just really glad and proud of myself for fighting all that time to protect my little sister and we finally made it even though we are still heartbroken about our parents.

Natasha

Once upon a time there was a girl who dreamed of becoming a nurse. Her name was Natasha, and she was born in Somalia in April 2001. When she was a young girl, she started at school for the first time. The school was old and dusty. She went to school for one year before she left Somalia. She left her country because of war and moved to South Africa. After some time there, she moved to Australia. It took a long time to arrive.

A few years later her dad became very sick and this was a challenging time in her life. She had to be very brave. Natasha felt



scared but she needed to stay strong for her family. Everything was bad, and her dad died. It was an important time in her life.

In 2018 she started learning English for the first time. She enrolled in the VCAL course at the River Nile School. She felt nervous to start school in Australia. But she was happy to make new friends and learn.

Right now she is a VET and VCAL student at the River Nile School. Her new life in Australia is very calm and it feels like home. In the future she dreams of being a nurse and then a doctor. After reading her story she wants you to remember that if you move country you will feel more comfortable in time too.

NS

Once there was a girl who lived in Eritrea. Her name was NS. She was from a small city which was surrounded by big trees. She was born in 1999 and grew up in the very cold and peaceful city. She was a kind and shy girl, but she was also very powerful. She loved helping people.

When she was five years old, she started school for the first time. She was crying and felt shy to meet the teachers and the students. The school was so crowded. It was all women; it was a Muslim school. One day she was thinking about leaving the school because in her country, there was no freedom. Then she left the country and escaped to Sudan.

After that, she came to Australia. She felt sad and happy to meet new weather and people, but she also felt scared.

When she left her country, she felt scared and alone. It was very hard to leave without her family. She missed the school, her family, and her friends. Australia was very different to her country. It had a different culture, and everyone spoke English. When she first arrived in Tasmania, she felt scared and anxious. For example, when she had to do something like get a bus and go to a doctor. After that, she started going to English classes. She went to English Language TAFE in Tasmania for two months. It was very different from her school in Eritrea and she felt very nervous and shy on the first day. The classroom was big and different from her country. She understood some words, but she was shy to speak. After that, she made some friends from other countries. Learning and speaking English became easier. After a few months she moved to Melbourne.

After studying a few months at VIC University Footscray, she started studying at River Nile School. At River Nile School the students were from different countries and different cultures. Everyone spoke different languages, but they were really nice, and she loved them. She enjoyed studying English the most because she could improve speaking and listening to her friends and teachers. Her favourite activity was reading a book. She knew a lot of new words when she read with her teacher. Her



next favourite activity was working with a group. It was really good because she got confidence to work and share ideas with other students. She felt so happy at River Nile School.

At the moment, she likes being at River Nile School. She feels safe, free, and happy. Currently, she likes to do hair dressing sometimes. In the future, she would like to be a nurse. When she completes her studies, she would like to take a course in Allied Health. She knows she will have to study hard, but she is excited about her new life in Australia. She repeats to herself everyday "I am a confident girl."

Oromia

Once there was a girl who lived in Ethiopia, her name was Oromia. She was from a small city called Aweday. She was born in 1998 and grew up in the busy and crowded city. Oromia was a strong and brave person. She loved exploring new places and learning new things.

When she was six years old, she started learning about Islam at home. As she got

older, she started going to the mosque to study the Holy Quran. After that, at age seven she started going to school for the first time. She was not excited about going to school, but she was excited to meet the students and play with them. She studied at different schools and she met many teachers and students.

When she was ten years old her family decided to change her school, she was not happy about that. But she went to the new school and met the new teachers and students. She liked her new school. The school was big and beautiful, they sat on the chairs, but they did not have a library. However, she could get books from the shop. One day her father decided to leave the country because the government was on strike.

She moved to Egypt and after four years, in 2018, she came to Australia. She started a new life in Australia, but she was feeling lonely and scared because she did not have any friends. Nonetheless, she was very happy to start a new life in Australia. Australia is the most beautiful country in the world.

When she left her country, she felt very scared and sad. After a few months in Egypt she made many friends and she started working. She had a lot of sad memories in Egypt because it was too hard to live without her family. When she left Egypt, she was nervous and scared but she was happy and sad at the same time. She was happy because she was going to the city. She could change her future there and she was sad because she left her friends who were living with her when she arrived.

She felt like she was overthinking things, she thought about her family and about starting a new life. However, things got easier and she started going to English classes. She went to TAS TAFE for one year and seven



months. On the first day she was nervous but after that she started learning English and she making friends.

In 2020, she moved to Melbourne and she started studying at RNS. She started in the middle of term one and she met new teachers and students. The teachers were very friendly and helpful. Her favorite activity was planting the seeds. Unfortunately, she did not attend the classes a lot because of COVID-19. She is doing online classes.

At the moment, she likes being at school and she really likes to focus on her study but sometimes she feels weak. Although she feels weak, she never gives up. She knows she will have to study hard. She would like to be a nurse in the future. She is doing her best and she is trying to be a good woman. She always tells herself "You can do it, there is nothing that is impossible".

Qubee

Once upon a time, there was a girl who loved to play football and her name was Qubee. She was born in Ethiopia on January the 1st, 2000. When she was six years old, she started school in Ethiopia for the first time. The classroom she went to was new and she went to school for one year and one month.

A few year later she had to be brave because she had to flee her country, there was a problem in Ethiopia with the government and it was not safe to be there. It was an important time in her life. Before she moved to Australia, she left Ethiopia and first arrived in Cairo, Egypt. In the end it took a long time to get from her country to Australia.

Soon after she arrived in Australia, she started school for first time in a new country, she started studying VCAL at River Nile School. At first, she felt it was very hard because she did not understand anything. She had never learnt English before.

After some time, she enrolled in a make-up and kitchen operations certificate at River Nile School and now she feels more confident. She likes making new friends and learning English.

Now she is a student and enjoys her new life in Australia. She thinks her new country is great and, in her future, she wants to be a famous football player and social media star because she has the right confidence.

She dreams to one day visit England because they have the premier league, and she loves Manchester United. After reading her story she wants you to remember to never give up or lose faith because God has a place for you in life. So, be patient and remember there is a time for everything.

Thank you for reading my story.

Sabontu

Once upon a time there was a girl who loved to play soccer. She was born in Ethiopia on October 12th, 1999. She went to school for seven years in Ethiopia before she had to move to another country. The classroom was old and dusty.



There was a time when Sabontu had to be very brave because her country was at war and she felt scared about her future. She knew she had to find freedom from her country. It was an important time in her life. She left Ethiopia and moved to Kenya and then Australia. It took a long time to arrive in Australia.

Shortly after she arrived, she started school at Brunswick Language School. Then in 2018 she enrolled in a Certificate 3 in English at Victoria University. In 2020 she started studying VCAL at the River Nile School, she felt happy but on the first day she was scared.

Now she likes to help her family at home, and she plays soccer. In the future she wants to be a dental nurse. After reading her story she wants you to know that everything gets easier.

Shame

Once upon a time there was a girl who loved to sing. Her name was Shame, and she was born in Ethiopia on March 7th, 2004. When she was six years old, she started school in her country, Ethiopia. The school was old and dusty, and she went to school for 8 years.

A few years later she had to be brave because her mum and dad died in a car accident. It was a sad time in her life, and she had to be very courageous. It was also an important time in her life because she had to get a job. She worked in the biscuit factory and it was very hard because she was so young. There was a lot of poor people in Ethiopia, but she was determined to look after herself.

Sometime later, she left her country because of war. She went directly to Australia. In May 2019 she enrolled in an English course at Brunswick Language Centre. She thought it was very hard and she felt scared and overwhelmed.

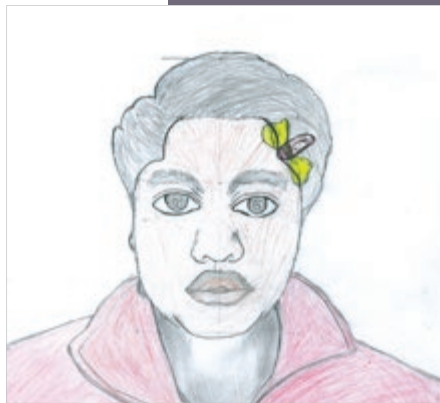
Soon after she enrolled in VCAL at River Nile School. She felt happy and excited. At this moment, she is a student, and she lives at home with her uncle and his wife.

She helps her family at home, and she works hard at school. In the future she dreams of being a famous political leader.

Shukuru

Once upon a time, there was a girl who lived in the refugee camp in Burundi. Her name was Shukuru. She was born in 2002 and grew up to be a strong woman in a refugee camp in Burundi. Shukuru was a shy girl but she was also very happy. She loved going to school because she wanted to learn new things.

When, she was six years old she started school for the first time. She was very happy to meet some friends from school. The school was inside the house. They sat on the desk and they had some books but not many. One day, some good men came to the refugee camp and they told everyone they had to leave. Shukuru and her family



were able to go to Australia. Australia was such a big country and so far away from her country. Shukuru felt happy to start a new life with her family. When Shukuru came to Australia she went to the city with her family and case manager. She felt so excited because she saw many buildings. Two weeks later, she went to the supermarket with her Aunty and she could find salt and meat. Finally, she went to the park with her family. They were excited to go to the park for the first time.

When Shukuru left her country, she was sad and happy because she left her friends in her country. For the first time she went to school in Australia, she was very happy to meet new teachers and other people from different religions. She thought, Australia is so good because everyone is going to school and they are doing different jobs. Shukuru felt excited because the schools in Australia were very good. Australian schools and African schools are different because the schools in Australia were better than the schools in her country. Australia was a very wonderful country.

After studying at Western English Language School, she went to River Nile School. Her favorite subjects are maths, science, and music. River Nile School was a good school because they had great teachers and

students. Shukuru liked River Nile School because they had different activities. Her favorite activities were excursions and music.

At the moment, Shukuru feels happy because she is going to school and also feels powerful because she knows she can help people. When she finishes school, she wants to be a mum because she likes to take care of children. Shukuru wants the world to know “stop punishing children and women.”

Zandra

When I went to Kenya from Ethiopia, I was eight years old. I went there with my family and it was a little bit different than my country however they were quite similar.

I stayed in Nairobi for about six years, I felt I belonged there I made friends and the people were nice and we got along. I came to Melbourne six years later and I felt good at first, but I realised after that I couldn't see my friends and the lifestyle in Melbourne was not the same.

I was mad at first and I talked with my friends over the phone. They told me to not lose hope and that we could still visit each other and we could talk on the phone regularly, they told me to be patient. So, be mindful of the things making you impatient.

Zuzu

One upon a time there was a girl named Zuzu who lived in a small house with her family with so much love. She was born in Eritrea on June 10 in 1999. When she was a young girl, she started a new school for first time in Eritrea.



There was a time in her life when she had to be very brave because she left her family behind. She had to leave her country. She felt scared, and worried for her family. She felt lonely and isolated, but she had no choice but to be brave. Her family needed her to be supportive and caring.

It was an important time in her life, and she knew that she had to be determined and resilient if she wanted to start a new life with her family.

She was a young girl when she moved countries by herself. She first moved to Egypt and she started to study Sewing. Soon after she had to stop school because she moved to Australia. When she first arrived in Australia, she started learning English at Victoria University. She stayed for three months and after that she moved to a new school called the River Nile School. She enrolled in VCAL and Beauty. She felt scared but also happy and excited when she started school. She felt like this because it was a new life and a new language. She is now comfortable and relaxed at school.

Now she is a student at River Nile School, and she wants finish VCAL because she dreams of being a nurse in the future. After reading her story she wants to understand that time you will feel comfortable in life too.



Student Stories

Asia

Angia

Once there was a strong and funny girl. Her name was Angia. She was born in 1999 in Myanmar when there was no freedom and peace.

When she was six, the family moved to India. When she was in India, she started to plan to go back to school because in her country she couldn't finish her school. She loved her new school and her teacher because they were so nice and helpful. She used to stay in boarding school to get more support for her study. She completed class 12 in school. Her parents worked in a restaurant to provide materials for their children.

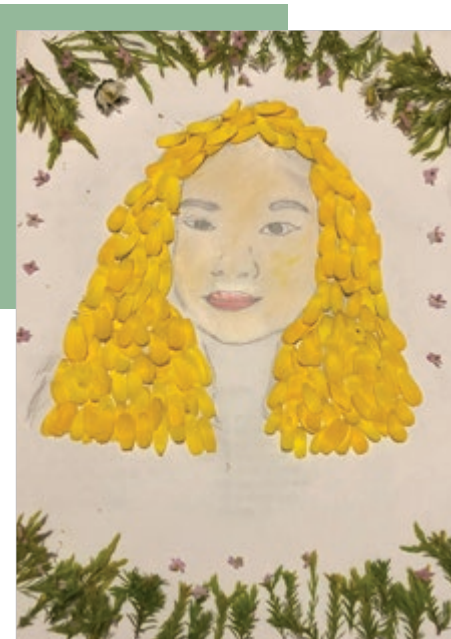
She shook with happiness when she found out she could go to Australia. When she came to Australia, she felt excited and

happy because she got to see her old friends. She came to Australia with her family and it was the first time she travelled with her family. On the first day, family and friends came to welcome them and prepare dinner for her and her family and some people brought a gift for them. She realised that the weather did not change, it was as hot as where she came from, but she couldn't have imagined how cold it could be. At first, they lived with her mother's friend and then moved to Sunshine. In Australia, she felt confused, nervous and shy initially.

One month after arriving in Australia, Angia studied at River Nile School in North Melbourne. At the school, there were students from different countries. Everyone spoke different languages. Angia started VCAL. On my first day, I was so shy and I didn't even talk to anyone. To avoid

the people who were going to talk to me, I pretended to read a book all the time so I didn't need to talk to them. I only talked to the teacher when they talked to me or asked me questions. One day, I told one of the teachers that I wanted to be a nurse and asked her, "What do I need to study?" She gave me advice.

At the moment, Angia is still studying at the River Nile School and she enjoys being at school. She feels very comfortable and happy. She started taking a course to be an Allied Health Assistant at ACU. In the future, she would like to study nursing. She knows she will need to study hard, but she is excited about her new life in Australia. She wants you to know, "If you believe in yourself, even if you get knocked down, you can get up, do it again and you can do it!"



Anna

I was born in Chin state. My village was beautiful, surrounded by mountains and I could get fresh air from them. My village has organic orchids, sakura flowers, and organic farms. I was very happy to live in my village and I loved it. In my village, everything was not too modern like the city but it was peaceful and silent.

When I was young, I always followed my grandmother around the farm and I helped her with daily life such as feeding the pigs, chickens and goats, getting the fresh milk from the cows, and picking fruit from the various fruit trees.

I studied in Chin State, I was 14 years old and I was in Year 9. One day, when I came back from school, I saw that my parents were not happy because some soldiers came to my village and wanted to force my brother to be a child soldier. They threatened us, that if my brother did not become a soldier, they would burn down our house. The Myanmar government, soldiers and my country were under military rule.

My family ran away from our village and I heard that the soldiers came to my house and burned it. We escaped from the soldiers and my brother went to Malaysia to a refugee camp. I could not go with my brother because we couldn't afford to go to Malaysia. We stayed somewhere else for safety. I don't remember the place because I was afraid, and I was always hiding from the soldiers. At that time, my uncle helped us and we went to a refugee camp in Malaysia.

My brother had UN protection because he had gone to a refugee camp first and it was a bit safer for him when the Malaysian police checked. But for my parents and I, it was more difficult and dangerous because we didn't have passports or UN cards.

It was very hard for us to live in Malaysia. I needed to find work because we could not survive or buy food without money. When I went to work my boss gave me bicycle and I went to work by bicycle. When the police saw me they always checked me and asked me for money. If I gave them money, they would let me go and they didn't arrest me.

In Malaysia, most of time the police made 'Operacy, this means they they made money from people who did not have passports. They asked one person for RM6000 and if people could pay money they would let them go but if people could not pay the police they put them inside jail. It was very hard for people who were refugees or had overstayed their visas. My goal was to study and have freedom one day. I believed that

life would change and hardship would be gone.

In October 2018, the Australian government accepted us as refugees into Australia and my life started to change. I had a chance to study and my family was supported with everything. I am very thankful to God that we could escaped from that nightmare.

But in March 2019, we started lockdown in Australia because all around the world there is pandemic disease that spread. I believe that everyone will fight this disease and that we will all escape from this nightmare. Life is time change all the time but we don't need to give up our goal, a positive mind helps us to achieve our goals and dreams.



Diana

Once there was a girl, who lived in a small village in Hakha township and her name was Diana. Her father went to Malaysia when she was six months and she lived with her mother, her brother and her sister. She loved school, drawing, helping family and others. When she finished school, she always helped her mother with everything she could - cooking, cleaning, going to the forest, carrying the wood, chopping the wood and finding food. Her friends told her, "Your legs are so muscly like a boy!"

When she was six years old, she started school in grade 1 at the Basic Education High School in Hakha Township. She loved travel and learning new things. She had many friends and when she went to school, she felt glad and lucky. Her school was big and overcrowded because they didn't have enough space for classrooms, and they didn't have enough teachers. Also, her teachers were extremely strict because they wanted them to be good students. Eight years later, she completed year 9 at the same school. One day, she almost started year 10 but Diana's mother said, "We have to move with your father," so she left school and they went to Malaysia as a refugee.

When they arrived in Malaysia, they lived in a beautiful place and a peaceful, democratic country. But they had to be careful wherever they went because refugees were not allowed to work. If they worked, they could be put in a jail for a month. But if they didn't work, they wouldn't have money to buy food and pay their bills. A few months later, Diana decided to work because she wanted to know how she could help and have new experiences. She started working at a Digital Camera Shop for two years. When she first started working, she always got scolded because she didn't know their



language and what they asked her to do. But Diana was hardworking. If anything happened to her, she kept smiling, trying her best and loving her job. It was a hard time for her because she didn't know how to speak their language and also, she was afraid of the police.

Time past little by little, and she understood and spoke their language so that helped her a lot. Then, Diana changed her job to selling clothes at the shopping mall. Six years later, she decided to learn to sew so she quit her job and learned to sew clothes.

After five months, Diana and her family moved to Australia. She remembered the day she found out that she could go to Australia. She looked at the visa and shook with happiness. When she came to Australia, she and her family were joyful with tears because they felt relaxed and

excited. On the first week, their family and friends came to welcome them with food. Three months later, she started school at the River Nile School and she also started to learn a Certificate II in Business.

The first day of school in Australia, Diana felt nervous and shy because she thought that her English was not good and she was thinking, "How do I speak with others?" The teachers were helpful, supportive and kind and they also introduced her to friends and others students so she felt better and more comfortable. One thing she really liked about that way they teach in Australia is that when we learn, we don't only do it on paper, we also do in practical activities. That was a really good and easy way to remember.

When she will completes her studies, she wants to find a job and get married. In the future, she would like to be own a small business because when she is successful, she would like to help other people and share her happiness with them. She knows it will not be easy, she knows she has to study hard, but she believes and hopes that one day it will happen. She wants you to know that, "If you start your days with good intentions and hope, you are going to be happy no matter what happens. The chances are there."

Elijah

Once there was a girl who loved going to school and to the forest. Her name was Elijah. She was born in a small town in 1999 in Thailand Refugee camp. She lived on the hill with her family. She had three sisters and one brother. Day by day, she tried to make her life better by raising animals and planting vegetables to sell. She is a helpful, sensitive and caring woman. In her village, there was a beautiful, tall and green

mountain, and clean air with cold water from the cave. When she was living in a refugee camp, once a month, she received food such as rice, fish paste, salt, chilli, cooking oil and pulses.

When she was 6 years old, she started at nursery school inside the refugee camp. She loved going to school and liked to read history, but she did not like maths. Her teachers were helpful, kind and virtuous. The school was old and noisy, and the school was a big space for all the kids. But she didn't have a class. All students had to stay together in one room and the teacher put them in three groups. The school was made with wood, leaves, and bamboo.

Three years later, when she studied at primary school, she had to go to school by herself. She needed to wear a uniform when she went to school. She felt excited and hopeful on the first day she went to primary school. After the school, she and her friends went to play next to the school. They had fun and were happy. After that, when she studied at high school, she needed to buy new uniform and she also had to pay for school. The subjects were hard and then she didn't like maths anymore. She was embarrassed by the maths teacher because she made her write the answer on black board in front of everyone. When she didn't finish her homework, she had to go and fill up the toilet water and she had to stand up



for one leg. When she had a school day off, she went to work on a farm. Just 120 baht for the whole day!

A few years later when she was in year 9, she did just half of the year and then she left the school. She had to help her mum in the house. A few months later, she visited her cousin in Burma. She thought she would stay there. Suddenly, her mum found out that they could go to Australia. And then her mum rang her and said, "You have two choices: to choose to be Burmese slaves or to live in peace." She felt extremely happy because she had waited for this for a long time.

When it was time to go to Australia, she was happy, so ecstatic but she also cried for having to leave her best friends and say goodbye to them. When she came to Australia, she felt tired and frightened but also excited and hopeful. She came with her family. On the first day, her cousins came to welcome her with their family. The country was amazing, but every house was so quiet that it was like no one lived there! When she first came to Australia, she lived in her mum's sister's house in Werribee. After a few months, she moved to her own house with her family. In Australia, she felt nervous, and shaky when people asked her something.

Two months after arriving in Australia, she studied English for 1 year at Wyndham Community and Education Centre in Werribee. When she first went to school in Australia, she felt worried, nervous, and shy. Some of the students spoke her language but there were not many young people in her class. She had to study with old people, but they were kind and nice to her. The teacher was so nice and helpful. After studying at the Wyndham Community and Education Centre, she moved to the River Nile School in North Melbourne to learn more English. At the school, there were

students from every country. Everyone spoke different languages but they were very nice and caring. She enjoyed studying English the most because she could practice speaking, listening and writing, so then she could start looking for work.

At the moment, she likes learning English at school. She feels ecstatic and free living in Australia. Now she can drive and do whatever she wants to. She is hopeful about her new life in Australia. In the future she wants to try any job that she can do, but she really loves working outside. She wants you to know that, if you are a girl "Don't let anyone look down on you."

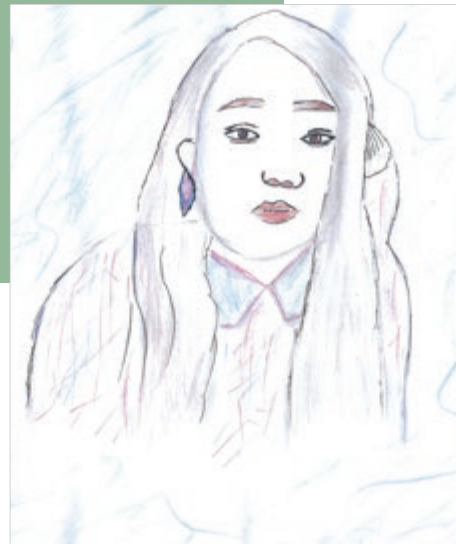
Grace

I was born in a very small village in Myanmar, so small that I knew all the villagers and they were like a part of my family. In my village, there was no electricity nor running water. Each family in the village owned a farm to plant crops and other vegetables to provide food for themselves. Without the farm there was no food for us to survive. Even though we were poor we had a happy life. When I was five, my father passed away but I had a strong and lovely mother and two younger brothers. After my father passed away, we moved to Hakha where our relatives lived. My mother did every job that was available to provide for our daily needs, as well as for school. I learned how to speak and write in Hakha while living in Hakha. After I finished primary school, my mum sent me to an orphanage in Yangon.

Yangon was totally strange for me because I didn't know how to speak Burmese and I was alone without any friends or relatives. But the good thing was that the people in the orphanage are all were all from the

same tribe as mine, so they knew how to speak in Lautu. They were very friendly and cared for me like I was their sibling. They helped me to go school and paid for everything that I needed like school fees, tuition fees, clothes, books and many other things. I spent five years at the orphanage in Yangon and experienced many ups and downs. Thanks to my time in Yangon I learned to be independent, able to speak and write in Burmese.

In 2014, my mom took me and my siblings to Malaysia because she had to run to Malaysia as a refugee. In Malaysia we rented small apartment with a friend of my mother's and shared the rooms. Malaysia was like hell, we had to hide from the police and at the same time my mother had to work to support us. I went to a refugee school in Malaysia and as long as I wore the school uniform the police wouldn't bother me. After I studied for three years, I worked at a camera shop as a sales assistant to help my mother. It was my first job and I experienced difficulties like not able being to speak in Malay as well as Chinese. Some staff even looked down on



me because I didn't have Malay citizenship but still, I survived.

In 2019 the UN called and told us that we were going to Australia which was good news for our family. Our family arrived Australia in March 2019 as refugees. Australia is very peaceful and I had a chance to go to school and study. The government provided us with everything that we needed and we could even rent a house for ourselves. Compared to the village that I was born in, it's like heaven and hell.

Jasmine

Once there was a girl who lived in Thailand. Her name was Jasmine. She was from a small refugee camp which was surrounded by a big river and green hills. She was born in 1997 and grew up in a crowded and loud camp. She was a shy girl but she wanted to help people and be a good person for others. She wanted to be a confident woman. She loved going to school and learning new things.

When she was six years old, she started school inside the refugee camp. She started school for the first time. She was so excited, happy but also shy to meet the students. The school was old, overcrowded, and noisy. The school was made of bamboo and leaves. It was not very safe, and this made it hard for her to learn. When she was in the camp, she just went to school and then came back home and did nothing. Day after day she just lived in the camp. She had no chance to go out and find out what was outside of the camp. One day, Jasmine's father told her family "we have to leave, because we do not have a job, we need money to buy things. Also, we do not have enough food, and the food isn't healthy". Jasmine and her family were able to go to Australia to start

a new life. When she came to Australia, she felt excited and very happy. Australia was a freezing, beautiful, and safe country.

When she came to Australia, she was so excited and very happy. She first lived with her aunty. The weather changed a lot in Australia. It was rainy in her country and Australia was very was not. After a few months, she started going to English classes at Wyndham Community and Education Centre in Werribee. She felt very scared and so nervous on the first day. She did not know anyone and she did not understand the teacher because she didn't speak English.

After studying at Wyndham Community and Education Centre in Werribee, she started studying VCAL at the River Nile School in North Melbourne. The school was big and looked beautiful and clean. At the school, there were students from all over the world. Everyone spoke different languages, but they were really nice and also all of the teachers were really kind. She enjoyed studying English because she could practice speaking and listening to her friends. Jasmine's favourite thing was reading with the teachers and her friends. She also liked working in a group. Her favourite activity was planting seeds into boxes. She felt happy at school.

At the moment, she likes being at school and she wants to study more to improve her English skills. In the future, she wants to be a confident woman and she also wants to help people and be a good person for others. She knows she will have to study hard, but she is happy about her new life and she wants to take care of her parent in the future. She wants girls to know "you need to be strong and you should be confident in yourself."



Jessi

Once upon a time there was a girl who loved to travel the world. She was born Myanmar on December 15, 1999. When she was a young girl, she started at a new school in Myanmar for the first time.

There was one time when Jessi had to be a very brave young girl. It was when Cyclone Nokat damaged her country in Myanmar. She was so young, and she left so scared. It was important time of her life because she and her family had to support and care for each other.

One day, she wanted to be closer to her family, so she left Myanmar and moved to Australia. In 2018 she started learning English for the first time in Australia. She studied English at AMES. She thought it was a little bit boring because there were a lot of old people in the class.

She decided she wanted a change, and in 2019 she started at a new school, the River Nile School. She felt that it was hard at the

start but it was lovely to make new friends and she felt happy to be at her new school.

Right now, she is studying VCAL at River Nile School. She has made so many lovely friendships and she likes learning in Australia. In the future she wants to travel the world.

After reading her story, she wants you to understand that her life has not been easy so far, but she has never given up hope, everyone can feel happy.

Joyce

There was a girl who lived in Papua New Guinea. Her name was Joyce. She was from a small village called Mendi and there were not a lot of people who lived there. She was born in 1998 and grew up in a peaceful village surrounded by mountains, rivers and there were a lot of hills. Joyce was a quiet girl, and she did not like to talk a lot. She loved to visit new places and learn new cultures and things.

When she was 13 years old, she started her first primary school in her village. She enjoyed school and started to attend every day. At the school she met new friends from different villages. Then, because of some family problems, she moved to the biggest capital city of Papua New Guinea called Port Moresby. She moved there with her nice uncle and aunty. In 2014 she moved to Australia with her uncle's family and enrolled in Brisbane TAFE College.

While in Australia she recalled home and thought about her friends and families. She missed her fresh food, fresh water, freedom, and the beautiful natural environment. At first, she felt confused and anxious. Then, as days passed, she made a lot of good friends in the school and was in a



good mood and happy. She learned a lot of new things in her school and became excited.

After she finished studying at Brisbane TAFE English course, she moved to Melbourne and she started school again at River Nile School. At the school, there were students from different countries, and they were kind and helpful. They all spoke different languages. The teachers were nice and lovely. Joyce enjoyed studying English because she was able to communicate with friends at school and the teachers. Joyce really enjoyed working in groups and leaned how to plant rice in the box with her classmates. She also loved reading and communicating in groups. She became very happy.

At the moment, Joyce likes learning English and reading. She feels really happy. In the future, she would like to become a hairdresser. She knows at the first it will be hard, but she says to herself "trust yourself, be a brave girl and everything will be ok".

Julianna

Once, there was enthusiastic, sensitive, and quite girl who spent her life living in the grassy, small, beautiful place in Thailand refugee camp. It was ruled by the Thai government. She loved going school so much but she learned slowly. She also wanted to learn new things. Her name was Julianna.

When she was six years old, she started in nursery school inside the refugee camp in Thailand. The school was on a flatland next to the long, shallow and clean river. The school was made with bamboo and hard woods. The first time she went to school the teacher was kind and nice to her. They showed her how to write a Karen alphabet. The school was old, noisy and overcrowded and this made it hard for her to learn. After a few days, she made new lovely friends. That was why she liked going school.

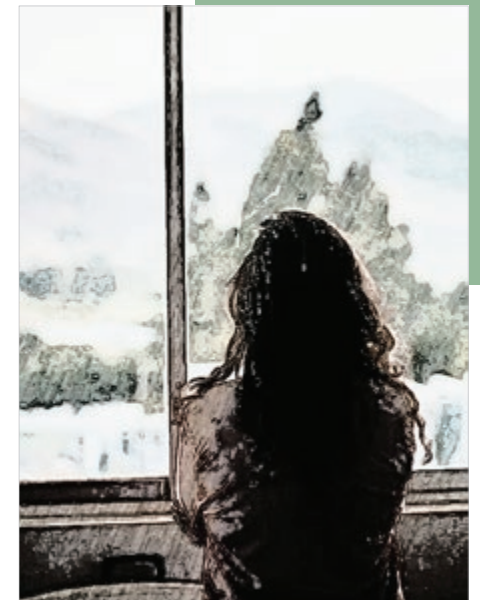
One day, there was light raining and she didn't expect anything to happen but when she arrived at school the teachers sadly told students, "You should go back home and stay with your family together." Then every Student quickly went home. A few hours later, the rain came down more and more and some lands were destroyed. Suddenly, they fled to saving their lives. Luckily, her grandmother still had house and she welcomed her family into her poor house but there was too much water, mud under the house so....

A few weeks later, she moved to another place in the camp with her family. The new place was not as good as the old place because every time someone wanted to visit her, they had to climb a big mountain. When it rained, it was dangerous because they could fall over. In the new place, she moved schools and she learned better because it wasn't so crowded. One year

later, Thai team worker told people in camp. "You should leave and go to another safe place in camp." She didn't know anything but she thought the places that she used to live weren't her own places so she has to follow why they told her."

A few weeks later, she moved to another place in the camp with her family again. The new place was called (Mae La Oon) camp. It is built on the hilly area around the banks of the Yuam River. It was a grassy place. She started primary school with her elder brother. even if she had brother or friends in her school. sometime she didn't like school because She didn't like her teacher much they were strict teachers. That was why she wanted to stay home and play with her litter brothers.

Two years later, she moved to middle school grades 5 to 9. She enjoyed study in middle school so much even though some teachers were harsh. She had many lovely and nice class mates there. Her mother said," don't



give up if you want to do something.” During those years, she learned how to sew flowers from her friendly teacher and how to weave from her friends and mother. She tried her best because she wanted to. She thought this was a good experience from middle school and she learned a lot.

After that, she went to beautiful high school for years 10 to 12. It sat next to the long, clear, Yuam river. The river made loud sounds when small boats came near the school. Sometimes it was hard for her to concentrate on her studies. When she moved to high school, she felt sad and alone. She needed new friends because some of her old friend got married, some didn't pass the exam and some went to another high school. Even if she had old friend, she had a different class to them because there were a lot of students in the new school. High school teachers were the same as the middle school.

One day, she felt embarrassed when her and her new friends were hit by the teacher with a long, smooth stick in front of her classmates because they didn't do their homework. After that, she took every responsibility that the teacher gave her. she went to school every morning. She sometimes walked with her new friends and sometimes she happily walked alone. It took 50 minutes to walk to school. However, she felt lucky to be able to study. She thought about some young people who sadly wanted to study but they couldn't because they did not have enough money to afford the school fee and some didn't have the opportunity to study because they had to take care their family by going to work.

She remembered the day she found out that she could go to Australia. She felt surprised and excited. “ why is it so quick?” she said. She wanted to have a party with her friends and say good bye for the last time.



However, when she left her camp, she felt tired and fearful but also happy and hopeful. She came with her family and her father's aunty. It was the first time they travelled to Australia. She felt exhausted when she was on the flight because it was hard for her to smell new foods. She remembered that the weather changed from rain in her camp to freezing in Australia and also extremely windy. On the first day, her grandmother, aunty and cousins welcomed her with Karen foods and invited her to stay in their home for a few months. Then she moved to her rental house with her family in Laverton. Australia was different to her camp and every one spoke English. Every time she went outside, she felt afraid and nervous. She still felt scared but she was happy and grateful that she could start a new life.

Three months after she arrived in Australia, she studied for one year at the Wyndham Community and Education Centre in Werribee. It was confusing at first because every teacher spoke English but she felt happy that she made new friends who spoke the same language as her. She took class one day a week for a term. Her teacher looked so scary every time she came into the class all the students were silent. She felt worried when her teacher talked to her because she didn't know how to respond the questions. Instead she just smiled.

She remembered that she used to study in the camp in Thailand and from here the teachers were quite different and also the rules. She thought she could pass.

After one year studied at WCEC. She started studying VCAL at the River Nile Learning Centre in North Melbourne. at the school, there were students from over the world. Every one spoke different languages but they were very kind and friendly and the teachers were too. She enjoyed studying English at the new school. She tried to speak to her lovely friends as much as she could. She believed that the new school teachers were extremely good and the nicest she had ever seen in her life.

Currently, she likes being at school. She feels safe and comfortable. In the future, she would like to have a job. She knows she will have to study hard but she is excited about her new life in Australia. She wants you to know, “If you believe in yourself anything is possible.”

Marry

Once upon a time there was a girl who was born in 1999 at Karenni Refugee Camp # 1 Mae Hong Son in Thailand. Her name is Marry Htwa. She came from Karenni Refugee Camp # 1 in Thailand. She has six people in her family. She has one older brother and two beautiful young sisters. Her parents came from Karenni State to Thailand from Myanmar in 1996. She grew up in the quiet, camp village and had a simple life. She was a kind girl and loved all people. She watched funny movies or listened to happy songs when she was bored. She loved learning new things and was happy in her present life.

When she was six years old, she started grade one in primary school at the camp.



The school was the first school she attended and had grade one to four. She was so sad at that times because she did not have friends. One day, she found a new friend. Her friend's name was Marry Nga. Her friend was a beautiful and smart girl. She went with her friend, Marry Nga, to school every day. When she was ten years old, she went to middle school with her friend Marry Nga.

This school had grade five to eight. Marry Nga left her when she was in grade seven. Her friend moved to America. She was so sad at that time.

After that, she found many friends in high school. She learned many subjects in high school which were: Mathematics, Science, Geography, Karenni History, Burmese and English. This high school had grade nine to ten and she finished high school in March 2016. When she was seventeen years old, she started school in Karenni National College in Karenni Refugee Camp # 1 in Thailand. This school had first year, second year and third year. She was so happy to meet new students and teachers.

The school had four majors to choose from, which were Science, Social Science, Information Technology and Community Management. At that time, she studied Community Management and she finished in March 2019. Finally, her and her family

were able to go to Australia on the 25th of September 2019. She was so excited to start a new life and meet new friends in Australia.

The first day when she arrived in Australia, she was very happy and excited because she met all her relatives. She was proud of herself because this was the first time she saw an Australia city. She had liked Australia for a long time. She heard about Australia when she studied in the camp. She said, "Australia is a really amazing place and the most beautiful place in the world because Australia is a continent and an island located in the ocean". Although she liked Australia, she was worried and scared to go to her appointments because she could not speak English very well. Many people and doctors spoke English. She was shy and embarrassed when she went to the River Nile School because this was the first time she studied school in Australia. But she tried to learn new thing and made friends with new students. She went to school with her friends and ate with them. She was happy in school.

Marry Htwa and her friends shared experiences with each other. Afterwards, she knew more about her friends' experiences and backgrounds and where they came from. Many of her friends came from different countries and spoke different languages. Her favorite thing when she studied at River Nile School was reading with students and teachers. She liked to listen more and more. She said, "the biggest challenge for me is learning listening skills". She also liked to travel with students and teachers. She wanted to spend time with students to practice speaking English.

Currently, she feels happy and excited studying her VCAL course in River Nile School. She is learning many new things in her school. She has a plan to be an aged care worker and a waitress. After, she

finishes her VCAL course at River Nile School, she will continue to study to be successful with her dreams. She will never give up on her dreams. She says to herself, "Nothing is impossible. If you try, you can do it".



May

One upon a time there was a girl who dream of becoming make- up artist. She was born in Myanmar on May 13th 1999.

When she was five years old, she started at a new school for the first time in Myanmar. The school was very crowded. She stayed school for a year and a half before she moved to Malaysia and then Australian. It took a very long time.

A few years later her mum become very sick and her father did not have a good job. May had to be brave for her family. She felt scared but she found a new job to help support her family.

She felt so scared but after some time everything was ok. It was an important time in her life.

In 2019 she started learning English for the first time. She enrolled at Community Plus Language School. She felt nervous about school in Australia because everything was new for her. She was happy to make new friends and she started to feel more comfortable and relaxed. She was really happy to learn at a school.

At this moment she is a VCAL student, but she dreams that one day she can study a diploma so that she can be a make-up artist and work in an office. She is happy now and she has made many new friendships in Australia, it feels like home.

After reading her story, she wants you to understand that in time you will feel comfortable in your new life too.

Merry

Once there was a curious girl who loved to learn English. Her name was Merry. She wanted to speak and write English well. She lived in a small village. She was born in a country called Burma in 1997.

When she was 6 years old, she started school. She loved school because she made a lot of friends. She loved learning about English and Mathematics. She thought the school was awesome. One day, she left her country at the age of thirteen. It was because her mother told that it's not a safe place to live for the family.

She moved to Malaysia with her mother and siblings. The family lived as refugees for many years. Seven years later, her family had the chance to move to Australia from the help of UNHCR. She felt the new country was fantastic. The new country had a lot of freedom unlike her country. In the new country, she lived in Victoria in a suburb called Sunshine West.



When she came to Australia, she felt happy and joyful. She came to Australia with her family. The weather was so cold when she arrived to Australia. The next day, she had an appointment to go to Centrelink. She felt that the country was clean and beautiful. She met with kind people and they were willing to help the family.

A few months later, she studied AMEP to learn English. She felt scared at first because it was her first time meeting with new people. After studying the AMEP, she started studying VCAL at the River Nile School in North Melbourne. At that school, she met new students who were from all different countries. They had the same goals - to learn English. Each of the students spoke different languages and they were from different cultures. She felt that the students and teachers were kind and friendly.

At the moment, I'm studying at the River Nile School. At the River Nile school, teachers are really nice. They understand our students' feelings. They don't yell at students nor beat students. They teach us until we understand. They always make sure that each of our students come from different backgrounds and they value each of us. I feel safe, secure and happy when

I study at the River Nile school. They are not like my country's teachers. Also, I'm studying a Certificate III in Allied Health at ACU. It's hard but I am trying my best.

In my future, I want to become a hotel owner or beauty blogger. I am not sure which path I should take yet. But I will decide what I really want to become in the future. "Our life will change but we must not stop our hope. We must always hope that the best thing will come. We must never give up if our life's circumstances change. We must look forward and walk on for our future. One day our dreams will come true if we still have hope."



Prae Moh

Once upon a time there was a girl who lived in Thailand. She was born on July 13, 1999. When she was a young girl, she started at a new school in her village. The school was crowded and there were a lot of people. She went to school for thirteen years.

A few later, she had to be courageous because her country was in war. She had to be brave and leave her home. She had no choice and moved to another country, Australia. It was an important time in her life because she had to take care of her family and her future.

Soon after she arrived in Australia, she started studying VCAL at River Nile School. She thought it was scary because she had only been to school once before and everything was new. She learnt new things in the English class and, she started kitchen operations.

At this moment, she is student, and she likes to spend her free time going shopping. She is focusing on her new life and home in Australia. She dreams that one day she will be an interrupter so that she can help other people in her community.

Pretty KP

Once there was a girl who lived in Karenni Refugee Camp (2). Her name was Pretty KP. She was from Thailand. She was born in 1995 and grew up in the beautiful place. She did not have confidence in herself because she was a shy girl. She was friendly with other people. She loved to learn new things.

When she was five years old, she started school in Karenni Refugee Camp (2). When she went to school for the first time, she was so scared, shy, excited, and happy. She was shy to talk to the teachers. After she settled in, she started to communicate with other students. The school was smallish, and it was hilly. The classroom was crowded. Around the school there were flowers, trees, and bamboo. When Pretty KP finished the school in the camp, she went to other places to start at a new school. When she finished school in the new place, she came back to her camp. She helped her family, she liked to work with the church leaders and church members. She asked her mother to come to Australia, but her mother did not want to go. Her mother eventually let her, and her only brother come to Australia. When she came to

Australia, she felt happy, safe, and excited. She felt Australia was nice and beautiful.

When she came to Australia, she was so excited to meet her Aunties family and new friends in Australia. She lived with her Aunties family. She felt the weather is not the same as her country. Australia's weather was very cold for her. After two months she started going to school at River Nile School. she was very scared and shy, because she did not know anyone, and she did not speak English.

She started studying at River Nile School. There were many students from different places. Everyone spoke different languages, but they were friendly and nice. Pretty KP loved to study English the most because she needed to improve her speaking and listening. She liked going to school. The River Nile School was very nice, beautiful, and clean. She liked school very much. Her favourite thing at school was reading with teachers and friends. She liked to play games with students and teachers. Her favourite activity was planting seeds, colouring pictures, and going camping with the teachers and students. The best activity was working in a team and working with the teachers. She felt very good and happy at school.

At the moment, Pretty KP likes being at school. She feels good and happy. She likes to study more and study harder. She wants to achieve her goals. She would like to be an aged care worker and work at a hotel. She will have to study more English. She is worried and excited for her new life in Australia. She is a helpful and patient girl. After she finishes her VCAL course in River Nile School, Pretty KP believes she will have more confidence and she will be able to do what she wants. She will never give up on her life or her study.



Som

My name is Som, I was born in Thailand in 2002 on February. I lived with my grandparents in a small city because I was 2 months old my parents had to work in another city. When I was 2 years old, my parents got divorced. I never saw my dad again after the divorce, but my mother came back to visit me.

When I turned 10, I was learning to be a farmer like my grandparents. I slipped in the water and almost drowned when I tried to bring water from the river for my cows in the farm. I nearly drowned because I didn't know how to swim. Fortunately my cousin was in the water, he helped me get out of the water with his foot, and he kicked me very hard. After that my Grandma told me to not go to that place again. But the next day I snuck out to go swimming but this time I went to another place so my grandma wouldn't know. I went with my older friends to learn how to swim. In 2 weeks, they had taught me how to swim.

In February 2016, it looked like life was playing with me. I've never asked about my dad however this year on my birthday he came to visit me. I was confused I didn't know how I should act.

Why did he come back? Why has he never come before? However, I was happy when I saw his face and I found out about his life and where he was living with his new family.

2017, I was studying in high school in Thailand, I was a little unruly to my grandparents, and I skipped school to go home to the garden to feed the animals at my family farm. I often skipped school to do this thing.

After I did this for a week, my grandma begged me to go back to school to study again. So, I went back to study as my grandma wanted, even though I didn't want to. Two weeks later my school held a band contest, and I was in the band with my classmates and because no one wanted to sing, I was the singer. It was so challenging for me, but my team won and beat the other class.

On October 2018, I moved to Australia to stay with my mother, it was the first time that I would stay with my mother. I didn't want to leave my grandparents, but my mother wanted me to be with her and to give me a better life.

In 2019, I was studying at CELS a language school in Melbourne, I was there for almost 1 year. In Feb 2020 I began studying at RNS, I'm hoping to complete my intermediate VCAL certificate this year. I planned to go back to Thailand but this year, but everyone on this earth is having the same issue- the Covid-19 pandemic.

All around the world there have been 1.11 million deaths. In Melbourne right now I can't go anywhere, I can't go to school, I have to study online at home. But this virus



is helping me to know more about myself, to know what I love and what I want to be in the future. Sometimes I can't let other people tell me what to do. Sometimes I just need more time to understand myself and to know exactly what I wanted.

DON'T RUSH, SLOW DOWN TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE

Sona

Once there was a girl, her name was Sona. Her first school was in Myanmar. She studied year one to year three there. The most important subject at school was Myanmar language and the history of Myanmar. She had three teachers in her classroom, and she studied very hard. Her school had a uniform which was white and black. All the students and the teachers had to wear that uniform. In her country, students could not go to school without a uniform.

After her year third year at school in Myanmar, she went to Malaysia. She did not really like Malaysia when she arrived there. She had to learn about her mum's culture and language. It was really new and challenging for her.



She went to Australia in 2016 when she was 19 years old with mum and one brother. Her first job was packing in Footscray for 6 months, and then she started school at Victoria University. However, after one year, she went back to work in 2017. She thought about learning more English, so she asked her sister about River Nile School. After that, she started River Nile School in North Melbourne.

At the moment, Sona likes to learn new things at school. She feels safe and happy. In the future she would to be a makeup artist and a barber manger. She knows she will have to study but she excited about her new life in Australia. Sona always tell herself and her family look "how far I have come, I am certainly a powerful woman".

Sui

Once upon a time there was a girl who loved to music. Her name was Sui. She was born in Myanmar on July 10th, 2000. When she was five years old, she started at a new school in Myanmar. The school was big and crowed. She went to school for thirteen years before she moved to another country.

One day her grandmother and grandfather said to her "You must leave the country and live with your family." She felt unhappy to leave her grandmother and grandfather, but she knew she had to. She left her country with her little brother and moved to Australia. She took a long time to be happy in her new life.

A few years later Sui's grandmother became very sick. She had to be brave and strong for her family. She prayed every day for her grandmother to recover and thankfully everything was ok. An important time in Sui's life was when she found safety and freedom. It was important to her because she could start a new life here in Australia.

In 2019, she started studying at a new school, the River Nile School. She is learning VCAL, Foundation, English, and Numeracy. She thought it was going to be easy, but it was not easy at all. Everything was strange and new, but it felt ok.

Right now, she is still a student, and she is working with her family at home. Her life is hopeful and optimistic. She is living a new life in Australia and hopes in the future, she will find an administration job. Her message to you is that in time you will feel comfortable too.





Student Stories

Middle East

Anahita

In February 2013, my uncle and I celebrated our birthday's on a same day. After the party we gathered and my parents and my uncle decided that it was time for a better life, so the decision was to come to Australia. After just two months we were ready, we said our goodbyes to family and told them to not come to the airport. At the time I did not have any idea what was going to happen. It was so exciting for me and a little scary at the same time, because it was my first time travelling to another country.

We had a flight to Indonesia. We had fun at first but everything began to change and we lost all the money we had and there was no one to help us; the smuggler took the money and ran away. We were devastated and lost in a strange country.

After so many challenges and hardships, we found another way to continue our journey to Australia.

While we were getting ready for the most exciting and scariest part of our journey, I accidentally got injured on my right foot. It was a big wound, and it was bleeding for hours, but we couldn't go to the doctor as we did not have time nor the appropriate identification documents. So, I just put some bandages on and got ready to go.

We were placed in a small fishing boat, there were at least 90 people on the boat. We were lucky it just took three days to enter the Timor sea waters; for most people it took a few weeks, or they drowned, and their boat sunk. One night whilst in middle of ocean, we came across a huge school of flying fish. They were jumping out of water and jumping into the boat and people threw them back to

the water. They were so beautiful and sky was shining with thousand stars; it was mesmerising like in fairy tales.

I had heard that when people arrived in Australia everyone greeted them, brought them flowers and felt happy to have us as part of their country. At same time we also heard that the government had passed new laws, we did not believe it at first. Unfortunately, it was true; when the Australian navy came to rescue us from the water they looked so scary, they shouted at us and treated us like we were criminals. I was so scared and I cried for the entire boat ride.

They took us to Christmas Island and began to do all the paperwork, medical examinations and interviews. After two days they transferred us to a place called Nauru Island which no one had ever heard of in their life. It was an eight-hour flight and we could not believe that such a small place could be a country.

The wound on my right feet got swollen and it was very painful. When we got to the detention camp I immediately asked for a doctor, my friend whom I had met in Indonesia helped me to walk through to the medical tents. We found a doctor and he said "I'm not allowed to give you any medication but your wound is badly infected." I'm giving you some just do not tell anyone, otherwise I'll get fired." That doctor saved my life, I have never forgotten his kindness.

There were only plastic tents to live in and the weather could not have been worse, it was very humid and horribly hot and we had only a small fan for whole family. For the first six months it felt like actual hell, we could not breath and we could hardly move. We used to shower with our clothes on and by the time we got back to the tents we were completely dry. There were rocks all around and we only had a very thin pair of flip flops, it was impossible to walk on those burning rocks.



We spent two years in the detention camps, in the hottest spot on the island with one-minute showers that had cold freezing water, without enough drinking water and horrible health care.

Eventually Australian lawyers and judges processed our cases and profiles and issued us refugee acceptance certification and moved us to a small container house in Nauru community areas with other local people.

At the beginning we used to walk everywhere, after a while my father managed to get a second-hand motor bike. It had always been my dream to drive a motor bike, so I tried to learn. Very soon I was very good at it, even better than the other boys. I have had a few bad accidents with my motor bike but I was never scared or deterred from riding because it was my biggest dream and nothing could take it away from me.

After a while I managed to get a volunteer job at the community service centre for refugees which was organised by Australian immigration. I always loved to paint and there was nothing else to do. I started to spend lot of time painting every day for at least 8 hours a day. People started getting interested in my art work on social media and asked me if they were for sale and if I could post them to Australia. It was an amazing opportunity for me to start to be independent. I worked hard and I bought my very first smart phone with my own money.

Then my father suggested that if I wanted to be more independent, I did not need to share money with them and my mother said "if you want to do anything different to us, like the food, buying clothes and etc.... you should do it by yourself".

I accepted their suggestion because I always felt I could do this and I worked hard to



show them that I was responsible, capable and trustworthy.

Even though he does not talk much, my father always supported me in all my decisions. Once he told me "You are like the son I never had"; it had such a huge impact on my personality and made me feel courageous to keep up my hard work.

During all these events there were a lot of horrible things happening around me. When we were inside the detention camp I saw people who felt devastated and hopeless and went crazy.

I have witnessed people suicide, harm themselves by sewing their lips together, cutting their bodies, burning themselves and poisoning themselves with chemicals.

Once our friend, who was so devastated, depressed and hopeless and was saying how tired he was and that he was thinking about killing himself. We didn't believe him.

The next day UNSDR was supposed to visit to our community camp to hear about our problems, when they arrived all of sudden our friend came forwards, he poured petrol all over his clothes and set himself on fire. We were shocked for a moment, everyone froze, then people in the neighbourhood ran out to help him.

They took him to hospital but after twenty-four hours he passed away because of

the lack of medical equipment, and the Australian immigration authorities refused to transfer him to Australia.

There were many unfortunate and sad events like this that I could tell you about. I had such a hard time trying to understand why these things were happening to us, why me, why these people? why now? why.. ?

I was full of questions to ask God, I always tried to be my best, to be faithful, hopeful and trustworthy.

Many times, I sit next to the ocean watching flocks of birds fly freely and think about all these things I have gone through, trying to understand what may be the reason, maybe God wants to teach me something.

Since I was a little girl I always believed that God spoke to us through the things that were happening around and in our lives with hardships and difficult choices put in our way. To show us the right way; make us think and wonder about our existence and where we belong in this world.

"There is always a reason, a lesson to learn and a better life to live. Just have some faith and trust."

Firdows

Once there was a girl who wanted to be a doctor. Her name was Firdows. She lived in peaceful city named Makkah in Saudi Arabia. Firdows loved reading and she was curious and love people. She was friendly, modest and ambitious. Her mom told her, "I want to see you achieve your goal soon and that my wish."

When she was seven years old, she started school at Salhia. Her family were so kind and they encouraged her education. Her father was an educated man, so he shared



his knowledge with his daughter. Every time Firdows got a good mark at school, her father hugged her and was happy for her. Even when she was not satisfied with her mark, he would say, "You did what you should do. Don't be upset. This mark is good and great. I am proud of you." After eleven years, Firdows completed her secondary school and she had a party with her friends. Firdows started to think about her next step where she planned to travel to Turkey for education.

A few months later, someone asked her for her hand in marriage and she agreed to marry him. Her fiancé was from Australia. The following month, they got married and they had a wedding party. One month later, they travelled to Ethiopia together to meet some relatives. After one year, she travelled to Australia.

When she came to Australia, she felt scared because she came by herself for first time. When she arrived, she felt ecstatic to see her partner. Her first day was very nice.

She travelled to Geelong. They also boarded a ship and crossed to another small city and they spent a lovely time together. One week later, they came back to Melbourne. Her husband's friends were so happy, they invited them to have dinner and they gave her gifts.

Three months later, she got lost in the city. She forgot her phone in her husband's car, so she couldn't even use her map. She tried to call her husband but she couldn't because she hadn't memorised the number. Then, she caught the taxi and came back to her home.

Soon after, she started school at C.A.E. language centre. She felt a bit nervous in the first week, but after one-week, Firdows adapted fast to the school. At the school, Firdows made a lot of friends, who spoke her language. She was happy and she spent enjoyable time with them.

After seven months, Firdows stopped school because she was pregnant and her tummy got bigger. When she was pregnant, she felt uncomfortable! But after she gave birth, she started feel happy. She loved Australia. She loved the people. After she gave birth, she started schooling at River Nile, where she met a lovely student and a nice and kind teacher.

Now, Firdows loves her school. She is planning to complete her study and aspires to be a great doctor. But at the moment, Firdows feels yearning, so she wants to travel to see her family after this pandemic. "The contentment is a treasure, so if you want to live rich, make yourself content.

You must love yourself before others can love you."



Jessika

My name Jessika Halwi, I was born in Syria 24 years ago, I am part of a small family which consists of my parents, my sister and my brother. We are from a village called Wadi AL- Nasara. My childhood was very beautiful, I never stopped playing and dancing with my girlfriend Jeana, but when the war began everything changed and the beautiful life I knew became a dark one.

Even though there was a war, we didn't leave our home. We became accustomed to it, the sound of bullets, war planes and explosions, we learnt to live our lives as normally as we could despite of our surrounding.

On 22/03/2017 as usual Jeana and I were walking when we heard heavy gunfire, a lot of bullets were coming down like rain it was close to us, people were screaming and running to find a safe place to hide in.

My girlfriend and I were stuck to the school wall, we couldn't move because of the intensity of fear at the time, I had a flame of fire inside me, I felt death close to me, I started praying and I only asked my God to be able see my family again.

While my eyes were closed, I was praying to God, Jeana told me to hold hands and run toward the bakery, because if we stayed it would be dangerous. I felt she was right, our site was very dangerous, she held my hand and said "when I say three we will run".

We ran very quickly between the victims. When we got to the bakery, the terrorist threw a shell that hit the wall we were on, when we saw that, we started laughing and crying at the same time. Then I felt I would be able to see my family again, God saved us from death.

Finally, after hiding in the bakery for eight hours I was able to make my way home. From that day onwards, I started doing everything without fear of war or bullets. Because death was around me and I didn't die at the same time a lot of people had, that to me means no one dies except by God's will. God had kept me alive.

I wanted to write about this particular event because I want everyone to live in peace, joy and near God at every moment of their life, because death is a moment that comes and takes us with it.

Salma

Once upon a time, there was a girl who lived in Yemen. Her name was Salma. She was from Mukalla City which had beaches, mountains, and hot weather. She was born in 1994 and grew up in the crowded city. She loved boxing, community, and education.

Her mother could not afford to pay the school fees for her two girls, so Salma's sister went to school and then taught Salma how to read the Koran in Arabic when she got home. When Salma was about 5 years old, she started at the Islamic school for the first time. She saw the teachers and they were covered everywhere in black and she could not see their face or even their hands, not even one finger and she was very scared. They did not look like people. My mother asked the teachers if her sister could stay in the class for the first 30 minutes and the teachers said "OK". One day the teacher said at lunchtime "Salma, would you like to join me?". When the teacher took her face covering off to eat, she saw that she was a real person, and she was not scared any more.

After that, she was so happy to meet new friends and teachers. The school was large, and she was very happy. One day, bad things happened to her sister. After that, she stopped going to school. Her mum said to her "You have to go back to Somalia." She was confused and told her mum "I



just lost my sister. How can I go back to a country I have never seen?" Her mum said, "I can't handle your sister's baby and you're traumatized". Her mum wished that Salma would have a good life in the future. Eventually Salma accepted and went back to the home where she had never lived before...Somalia. Then, Salma started her new life but after a while her life got worse.

When she left Yemen, she left heartbroken, scared, and worried. It was hard to leave her family and the neighbourhood. She missed the city she grew up in, the culture, the food, her school friends, and the teachers. Living in Somalia was difficult because Salma only spoke Arabic and everyone else spoke Somali. That was very hard for her. After a while, she moved to Australia hoping to have a good life, but she had a hard life again. She was sent to a camp. She did not like the life she had in the camp and she wished for a good life. But she did what she could to help those around her. She stayed in the camp for a long time and learned how to speak English. She did not go to school, but she improved her spoken English by speaking to the staff who worked in the camp.

When she got her freedom back, she studied a coffee course in Brisbane. Then she started studying at River Nile School. She was still trying to do the best she can and have the life that she wanted. At the school there were students from all over the world. Everyone spoke different languages, but they were nice. She enjoyed studying English the most because she could practice speaking, writing, and reading with other students and the teachers.

Her favourite activity was VCAL because the class gave her life skills which she always found interesting. For example, she learnt about women's body systems. She is happy to be a part of the River Nile School and she feels lucky to study there.



At the moment, she likes being at school. She feels safe and happy. In the future, she would like to be an aged care nurse. She knows she will have to wait until she has the right to study in Australia or in another country. She always tells herself "Look how many bad things you have survived. Good things will come. You have been strong enough". Her mum always said to her "Hard working women can lift the world".

Setarah

Once there was a kind and helpful girl. Her name was Setarah. She loved freedom, peace and education. She lived in a mountainous, calm and lovely village in Afghantistan.

When she was seven years old, she started school in the village. The school was very large - three thousand students were studying from first grade to twelfth grade and there were large classes of about 50 students in one room. The school didn't have enough chairs and equipment. She

loved learning, but the teachers were violent and strict. When she was late or she didn't do her homework, the teacher didn't let her in the classroom, hit her and embarrassed her in front of other students. It was the same for everyone.

Six or seven years later, some new professional and educated teachers came into the school. They brought really excellent changes to the school. They were more dutiful, experienced and kind. Then, school became much enjoyable and interesting.

After she completed her schooling, Setarah moved to Pakistan with her family. She lived there for a few years. That country was dangerous, scary and insecure. Lots of Taliban, Daish and different groups of terrorists were active everywhere. She was feeling afraid and unsafe, especially when she went outside.

One day, she found out that she could go to Australia. She looked at the visa and shook with happiness. She became hopeful and ecstatic that she will go to a peaceful and improved country. After one month, she came to Australia with her family. It was her first flight and she was scared of the plane but happy at the same time.

When she arrived, at the airport her father and her father's friend and his wife were in the waiting room with beautiful bouquets of flowers. Her father's friend took them to his house. Setarah and her family lived there for two weeks, then moved to the rental house in St Albans.

She was so excited that she could start a new life. When she saw everywhere was spotless, immaculate and secure, she felt joyful and glad. With happiness, there also came many problems and challenges, that made her confused and worried. Everything were change from Afganistan



and Pakistan to Australia. When she had to go to appointments or elsewhere, she didn't know how to get there, how to talk and understand, which train or bus she should catch and she sometimes got lost.

One month after arriving in Australia, Setarah started studying at the AMES English Language Centre. She went there for just a month. It was boring for her because the class level was high and hard but her English was low. She left that learning centre. Her case manager found for her the River Nile School in North Melbourne. Then she started studying VCAL at River Nile School. At this new School, the teachers were really kind and friendly and reading, writing and different activities made the school enjoyable and pleasant for her.

At the moment, Setarah loves being at school. She feels happy, safe and comfortable. She is grateful to the teachers, the staff and the school principal for material, spiritual and educational supports and helps. In the future, she would like to be a teacher assistant. She knows she will have to study hard, but she is excited and hopeful about her new life in Australia. She says, "Nothing can be achieved without effort, you have to work hard to achieve your goals and dreams."



Acknowledgments

Thanks go to the teachers: Lauren Fry, Kristina Pinti, Lauren Piovesan, Susan Kent and Analia Solis who supported student learning in the creation of these stories and Jane Kanizay, artist and RNS Board Chairperson who provided training and support in the creation of student art works.

Also, thanks to the Principal – Lisa Wilson, the Assistant Principal – Joanne Goodman, the Engagement Coordinator – Nadia Faagaab who facilitated these stories being shared in book form.

Production costs made possible by a Lynne Kosky Memorial VCAL Grant, facilitated by VCAA.

Educate – Empower – Inspire

Every refugee and asylum seeker who comes through our door brings with them a story of resilience, courage and hope. They have shown immense bravery and resolve to flee harm and persecution in their birth country. They want what we all want – a safe and peaceful future, the opportunity to gain an education, the chance to be part of a community and to get a decent job so they can live independently and provide for themselves and their children.

At RNS we change student's lives through a personalised approach to learning, using specialist English as an Additional Language (EAL), applied-learning pedagogy. Our professional team take on an authentic mentoring approach, empowering students to address the complex challenges and trauma in their lives and build healthy and respectful relationships which strengthen their wellbeing, engagement and learning achievements. Each student is supported to plan a career pathway, specific to their aspirations and goals, as they transition from our school.

Our mission is to empower young refugee and asylum seeker women through education, to successfully integrate and thrive in our community. In pursuing our mission, we believe we are not only changing our students lives, but making an important contribution to help secure a thriving, harmonious multicultural society – which benefits all in our community.

Can you give a tax-deductible gift?

Help us bring change through education. River Nile School is a registered charitable organisation as well as being a registered school. We provide all our programs, resources and services to our students completely for free, as they are among the most disadvantaged in our community and unable to contribute to the costs of their education. Our support includes notebook computers, MYKI public transport cards, free childcare for our young mums with pre-school age children and significant welfare, wellbeing and learning supports.

Please email admin@rivernileschool.vic.edu.au or visit www.rivernileschool.vic.edu.au/donate

All donations of \$2 and above are tax-deductible.

Donate.

Empowering Women through Education


The River Nile School is a specialist senior-secondary school, addressing the unique educational needs of young Refugee and Asylum Seeker women.


All services are free.




River Nile School
Level 1, 117 Capel Street
North Melbourne VIC 3051

admin@rivernileschool.vic.edu.au
rivernileschool.vic.edu.au

 /rivernileschool

 @rivernileschool

 @rivernileschool