Refugee Week: Restoring Hope

This week is Refugee Week. Every year, at about this time, we, as Australians, dedicate some time to raising awareness about the issues affecting refugees. It is a time where we also recognise the positive contributions made by refugees to Australian society. The theme for this year is ‘Restoring Hope’ which reminds us, that while a refugee’s journey begins with danger, it also begins with hope. Refugees flee their homeland not only because they fear persecution, but also because they have hope: they hope to find freedom from persecution, they hope to find safety and security for themselves and their families, and they hope to be given a new life and recover from past trauma.

The theme ‘Restoring Hope’ also celebrates the role of Australia, as a country that offers protection to refugees, providing them with the opportunity to rebuild their lives and restore hope for a future free from fear, persecution, violence and insecurity.

‘Restoring Hope’ also highlights the situation of refugees whose hopes have not been fulfilled, those who remain in situations of uncertainty, with little hope for a resolution in the near future. It calls us to consider how we can provide solutions for these refugees and restore their hopes for a brighter future.

We as a school community are all affected by this in some way. As a school, we all have some connection to this theme. Some of us are sons, nephews or cousins of refugees, some of us are friends of refugees, and there are some amongst us who have had refugee experiences in their past.

In recognition of the theme ‘Restoring Hope’, this week will be spent on discussing refugee issues. You may hear some stories or engage in activities across subjects. We will also be having a Mufti Day fundraiser this Wednesday. Proceeds raised will be donated to the UNHCR who will pass on the money to one of our partner schools in Uganda, the Nakivale Refugee school.

We will now hear a reading of a story written by one of our past students.
Refugee Story

It was not my choice, but I had to leave anyway. When the civil war in my country broke out my family did not have any choice but to leave the country. I lived with my father, mother and 4 brothers. I am the second eldest son. Because the war was getting bigger and bigger my family decided to move to a place that would be safe. In my country, under a corrupt government, they would force children to be soldiers, and women would be raped.

When it was daytime, it seemed like everything was at peace, but at night time the war happened. We thought it would be easiest to escape death by going through the forest to get to the refugee camp. We had no time to prepare our belongings. In war, there is no time to prepare. We stayed in the forest for two weeks, day and night. We travelled until we got to the camp but the things that we saw in the forest are still in our heads. We saw dead people and animals. The dead people smelt bad, they stank. I was 14 years old.

It was the five of us alone and me and my older brother looked after our little brothers. When we arrived at the refugee camp everyone was tired, we did not have food to eat. Life in the refugee camp was extremely hard. Even though the UN was there, there was simply not enough food, water and doctors to heal people. Also we did not get clean water so many people got sick because of poor hygiene. Despite all of this we had nowhere else to go so we had to stay. The only things we thought was just to be strong until our last breath. At that time we even desired to die because of the difficulty of life. Some people who had the same thought committed suicide because life was extremely hard.

But we never gave up. We knew there was hope for us somewhere. This hope came true when we applied to go to Australia. It took us 2 years. We were lucky, for the average waiting time in a refugee camp is 20 years. Maybe because we were without parents, they processed our papers quickly.

School means a lot to me now. My mum tried to teach me English in my country, she told me to learn it and I always thought that I would never need to use it. My mum was right now. I have been through different experiences in Australia like a new culture. Living in a village is not like here. But I am still thankful and hopeful of the future. I am thankful to all the teachers who helped me, and to all the students at Liverpool Boys for being part of my journey towards a hopeful future.

Written by a former Liverpool Boys High School student.