

**Sir Robert Jones
Refugee Daughters Scholarships
2017**



Amani Irengé



I come from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I arrived with my family in New Zealand as refugees on 6 November, 2009.

My father was killed by highway robbers and my mother, who was a primary school teacher, decided to go to university in Goma, where we lived, to complete her teaching degree. She was forced to leave the country when she wrote a paper that criticized the government for arming students. She fled with my youngest brother when she heard that soldiers were at our house searching for her and found her way to Uganda as a refugee.

My older brother Prince and I, then aged 12 and 9, arrived home from school, saw the soldiers around our house, and decided to go to our uncle's house. Sadly, there, we were emotionally and physically abused. As a result, my brother decided we should escape from DR Congo and go to Uganda, because we had heard that many students, and probably our mother, had sought refuge there.

We had a frightening journey to Uganda, but eventually found our way to the capital, Kampala. Luckily, there we were reunited with our mother and brother in 2007, then accepted as refugees and sent to New Zealand as a family in 2009.

Being refugees was not an easy journey for any of us, but the experience made us grow stronger as a family and we learned that adversity can be overcome. Resettling in New Zealand wasn't easy, either, as none of us was fluent in English. It is the fourth language for my brothers and me, and the seventh language for my mother, so it took us a while to adapt to our new environment.

I started studying in Year 9 at St Dominic's Catholic College in 2010. It was very challenging for me to fit in because of the language barrier. I was also racially abused and finances were very tight at home. Facing challenging experiences in my life opened my eyes to the world. I try to see most things from a positive angle and the unpleasant and dangerous experiences I have gone through have given me a strong determination and will to work and study hard. I also hold my head up and take pride in my colour and culture.

Currently, I'm studying for a Bachelor of Nursing degree at UNITEC because my experiences have inspired me to serve those who are unwell and less fortunate than me.

My hope and dream for the future is therefore to work as a registered nurse within New Zealand and perhaps further my education as a gynaecological or paediatric nurse. I am already learning to assist patients and to work with families in a partnership to achieve the best health care. I have a passion to care for people and I believe I can make a difference in the world that we are living in. Perhaps one day I might even be able to go back home and help my people in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

I am very grateful to Sir Robert Jones and those who administer the scholarships for this opportunity. I will do my very best to achieve at a high level so you can all be proud of my efforts.



Thi Aung

Mingalabar. This translates as 'Hello' or, to be more precise, 'May you be fortunate and prosperous.' My name is Thi Thi Aung, Thi Aung for short, and I am a Burmese/Kiwi with the honour of being awarded a Sir Robert Jones Scholarship.

My family were forced to become refugees due to a widespread pro-democracy uprising in Burma in 1988 known as the 8888 protests. These arose because the country was oppressed by the military government. During the protests, thousands were killed by the military. Since Burma was no longer safe, my parents fled, facing many life-threatening hardships to get to the present day. For this alone I am forever thankful to my parents, who endured not only an escape, but the challenge of adjusting to a new country which they can recognise as a second home. Their efforts provided an opportunity for my two brothers and me to thrive in a safe environment where we could dream instead of worrying about our survival. My parents' stories and their efforts have always served as my motivation to work hard at everything I do. They gave me an irreplaceable gift: a future.

Adjusting to life in New Zealand was hardly difficult for my brothers and me, as we arrived when we were quite young so grew up as true Kiwis. However, this was also a challenge. I often found myself with an internal conflict in trying to find a balance in my cultural identity. My parents, being the traditionalists they are, helped maintain my Burmese identity but often struggled to understand me – at times to the point where I felt suffocated and depressed. The same could be said for my brothers, as the expectations to always perform at your very best were overwhelming.

However, expectations weren't always a bad thing as they helped me to push through any challenges I faced. I'm proud of my efforts and resolve to stay optimistic and to never give up, as they have led to me to the person I am today.

Words cannot describe what this scholarship means to me and my family. It has confirmed my efforts to work hard in order to have the better life that my parents have wished for me. In addition, for my financially struggling family, it relieves the weight of supporting my education at Auckland University, where I am studying Environmental Science. I have the opportunity to be someone my parents can be proud of, knowing that their struggles and tears weren't for nothing.



Chandra Chhouk

My family comes from a small country called Cambodia. In 1967, a civil war started between the Communist Party of Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge) and the government forces of Cambodia. It ended in 1975. During 1975 the Khmer Rouge regime was formed, killing millions of people. Pol Pot began an attempt to create an agrarian utopia inspired by Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, which he had witnessed during a visit to China. The regime usually singled out monks, doctors, teachers and anyone with an education.

In 1973, the Khmer Rouge bombed the market in Phnom Penh. My dad was close by. His instant reaction was to bike away from the bomb towards his grandmother's house. He was already lucky to be alive. When he was 11, the Khmer Rouge had taken over and forced everyone to clear the central city. He was separated from his parents and family and put to work in farmlands in the countryside. During that time, he was put in jail, beaten up and starved. It wasn't until his mid-twenties that he crossed the border to Khao I Dang Refugee Camp in Thailand. In 1992, my dad had the chance to come to New Zealand after spending several years working at the refugee camp in Thailand. When he arrived, he stayed in the New Zealand Mangere Refugee Camp for six weeks. My mum immigrated to New Zealand in 1994.

Growing up wasn't always easy. My parents would work long hours just for us to get by. There would be days where I would only see my parents in the evening. My grandmother looked after us during the day, cooking and cleaning. When I was younger, I didn't really understand why my parents worked so hard or why I was always pushed to excel at everything. Now that I am a young adult, I can grasp a better understanding of my parents and their perspective on things. I understand the stress they lived with. They came to this country with little to nothing so they could have a better life for themselves and their children. I respect their hardships and admire their hard work. With all their hard work, they were able to put their two daughters through college. I am grateful for having such an amazing family who support me in accomplishing my dreams.

They have instilled in me the importance of hard work and never forgetting to give back. A large portion of the little money my parents made went to taking care of family in Cambodia. During our trips there, we would bring necessities such as clothes and toiletries to our extended family. Growing up with immigrant parents made me realise the true importance and meaning of family. My parents always stressed that family is one of the main priorities in life. They have also made me realise the importance of school. Although my parents never attended university, they always stressed the importance of my sisters and me getting an education and all the possibilities it can lead to. Realising my parents' challenges and their hard work to get to where they are now, motivated me more to do well in school and push myself beyond what I thought could be possible.

This scholarship means the hard work has paid off. For me it is just the beginning; it has given me a push in the right direction towards what I want to achieve. My scholarship allows me to have an excellent education, studying for a Bachelor of Science majoring in Medical Chemistry at the University of Auckland. My scholarship allows me to approach my education with confidence. Because of it, I can focus on being a student and think about school without worrying about student debt. It has also helped my parents a lot, with the financial burden lifted off their shoulders. I am so thankful to have received the scholarship and will continue to work hard to make my family proud.

Khatima Mohammadi



There are eight people in total in my family: my parents, two brothers, three sisters and me. We fled Afghanistan because it was no longer safe for us due to our ethnicity and religious views. We are from the minority Hazara ethnic community, which has been the subject of genocide for decades. Due to the threat to our lives and my dad's determination to give us a better future, we moved here to New Zealand and were taken in as refugees.

We were one of the lucky families who didn't have to make the dangerous journey across the oceans to get to safety. My brave Uncle Esmatullah was one of the 400 asylum seekers rescued by the Norwegian freighter MV Tampa on August 26, 2001. One hundred and thirty one people (including 40 'Tampa Boys', of which my uncle was one) were accepted by New Zealand – a decision Helen Clark labelled as one of the proudest moments of her time as prime minister. Through my uncle, my family and I were able to come to New Zealand.

Beginning a new life in New Zealand was very difficult. No one in my family could speak English, which made it really hard, especially for my parents. I still remember the times my father would walk to Pak 'n Save in Henderson to get groceries for our family of eight and walk back to our home with all the bags, because he didn't know how to use public transport and couldn't drive because he didn't have a New Zealand driving licence. I still remember my mother struggling to use the oven because in our country we used to cook over an open fire. The first few years we felt so lonely as we did not know any other Afghans living here and those Afghans we had met in the camp had all been separated to different places in Auckland.

The most important thing for me would be family. Without my family by my side cheering and supporting me, I would never be where I am right now. I would have given up a long time ago as I wouldn't have been able to face the hardships alone.

The second most important thing to me is my education. In my homeland, girls' education was denied. I am lucky to have had the opportunity to be able to study not just to high school level, but right through to university.

My hopes and dreams are to be able to get into medicine and become a GP. I want to become a doctor who can find the best treatment for my patients; to make them feel better and back to their ordinary lives in no time.

I plan to study towards a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery. I want to become a GP because I really enjoy studying the human body and find it fascinating. I want to give back to my community and repay the people of New Zealand by helping them to stay healthy and by showing the kindness that they have shown to me, my family and all the other refugees here in New Zealand. There are not many female Afghans in this area so I feel I will be able to help culturally, where a woman may find it hard to talk to a male doctor.

Having the Sir Robert Jones scholarship means so much to me and all of my family and is helping me to achieve my goal of becoming a doctor. Thank you.



Sediqa Mohibi

I am 22 years old and was born in Afghanistan. I escaped from that country some ten years ago to Pakistan, where I lived until July 2014. Things improved for me and my family after we escaped, but we still faced many challenges. My siblings and I could not study in school, but my mother taught me the importance of education. Many people would despair in this situation but that's not what we were taught. I started self-teaching during the time when we could not afford to have a tutor. I also started teaching my siblings as I learnt things myself. Later on, we luckily got a tutor and were home schooled for two years.

Having arrived here in July 2014, I undertook a course at Victoria University in the English Proficiency Programme (EPP) and then completed a Foundation Course at Victoria. On the EPP course I passed the Certificate of Proficiency in English with distinction and gained an A average in my Foundation Course studies. I was successful to be the top student of this course and was awarded the Foundation Studies Prize.

Currently I am starting the second year of my degree at Victoria University and very much wish to complete my degree and make my career here in New Zealand. I am working hard to achieve this goal and have passed my courses well.

The Sir Robert Jones Scholarship has been absolutely life-changing for me. Getting an education and being able to study at university is a onetime opportunity, which I do not want to lose. I was also selected to be in the 2016 Victoria University Dean's List for achieving academic excellence. These achievements are making me more passionate about working hard to proudly serve and contribute to my home country, New Zealand.

In addition to my university studies, I enjoy volunteering for different university activities and am currently working to get a certificate for the Victoria Plus service and leadership programme and the Victoria International Leadership Programme. I love to help others who have been through a similar situation to me. I want to make a difference in other's lives by improving my abilities, which I can only do by getting a higher education. I wish to do a PhD in future.

I believe that not being able to go to school like other children made me extremely determined to learn. Being at university and having the opportunity to get a degree is like a dream for me, especially coming from a country where it is almost impossible for women to get an education. I am the first woman in my family to get to university and it is very important for me to be successful and be a role model for my siblings.



Aya Metlek

I was born in Baghdad, Iraq and fled with my family when I was just three years old. I remember fragments of my childhood, which was filled with the civil defence alarm blaring in the background, followed by loud explosions when bombs fell from the sky. I remember the series of events that led to the funerals of my neighbours, as well as my Uncle Ahmed, my cousin Mariam and my childhood friend Rawan. Every day I sat for hours with my family under the staircase while my mother and father prayed that we would survive. Life became unbearable in Iraq; instead of waking up to the sounds of birds we woke to the sound of bombs.

On arrival in New Zealand, I was very confused and shocked. I would often ask my mum why it was so green and cold here. We lived in the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, where I had my first can of baked beans and my first bowl of Weet-Bix. During my time in New Zealand I have met so many wonderful individuals who have been extremely kind, but I have also witnessed some racism because I am Muslim and from Iraq. However, this has only made me want to further excel and prove to everyone that I am not like the men you see on television. For many people, I am the first Muslim and the first Iraqi they have met, so I represent their first impression of my people and my religion. That is why I have strived so hard to do the opposite of that stereotype and change their prejudgement.

When I was old enough to watch the news I began to see the broadcasts about Iraq with hundreds of people dying. Every day, I saw the blood and tears of my people, crying homeless children and people starving on the streets. I understood that I could have easily been one of those kids, so I needed to make sure that I didn't waste this golden opportunity I'd been granted. That is why I strive to prove myself to those in Iraq and those in New Zealand that I can make somehow make a difference.

Since I was a small child, I always had a fascination with buildings. Growing up in Iraq I was lucky to be able to see buildings that were thousands of years old; buildings that had housed generations of people and witnessed so much – both good and bad – like the Ziggurat of Dur-Kurigalzu and the remains of the city of Babylon. To me, these buildings are a testament of how much we, as a society, have accomplished. But it was not only the beauty that fascinated me but the practical side. How could these buildings stand? How were they built? What materials were used? These questions led me to civil engineering.

What I like about this career is that it focuses on the progress of society. Lack of shelter, to me, is like a curable disease that many people don't have the medicine for. It's something I want to help cure. Building schools and colleges provides people with the opportunity to get an education, which is undeniably one of the best things anyone can have the chance to experience. Engineering is often perceived as a 'man's job', especially in the Middle East. Therefore, I want to take the opportunity of living in a country which not only embraces but encourages women to be engineers, and allows them to help build our future.

This scholarship is as significant and life-changing as the day I found out that New Zealand would be my new home. Once I graduate I plan to stay here and hope to get involved in building projects around Hamilton so that we can further develop its potential. Building homes for people provides them with safety and security, and I understand the importance of that. In addition, I know many people who have lost their homes due to war and one day I would like to offer my services to them. Iraq has been slowly pushing out ISIS and when the day comes that they are a thing of the past, I am determined to be a part of rebuilding what they have destroyed. Thank you to Sir Robert Jones for his kindness and generosity. I know that all recipients of this award are very grateful for this gift.



Habiba Safi

Salaam Alaikum. My name is Habiba Safi and I was born and raised in New Zealand. Although I was born here, my parents were not. My parents come from a province called Kunar, located in the mountain regions of Afghanistan. They were forced to become refugees when the war broke out. My mother was born when the Russians invaded Afghanistan and her family became refugees in Pakistan where they were treated as outsiders. My father's family remained in Afghanistan and my grandfathers both fought in the war with Russia.

The impact of the refugee journey has been tough on my family. My father came to New Zealand in 1995, a couple of years before my mother, with nothing. He could barely speak English and had no job. But he stood on his two feet and enrolled himself in English courses, studied and got a job, and now 20 years later he's one of the best English speakers you will ever meet and has his own business. My mother was also not familiar with New Zealand at all. It was a huge adjustment for her. I am extremely grateful to my parents because if they hadn't come to New Zealand, I wouldn't be where I am today. I look at their hardship and use that as a motivation to drive me to work harder.

My family consists of myself, my parents, two younger sisters and five younger brothers. I am the eldest and with that comes a lot of responsibility. I have to help out a lot and be my mother's right-hand girl.

One of the challenges I faced growing up in New Zealand was people asking questions regarding my hijab. Throughout my life I've been asked the same question: 'Why do you wear that "thing" on your head?' Hijab is my identity, it speaks about me, who I am and what I believe in as a Muslim woman. It is a symbol of my modesty and dignity. In my senior years of high school most of my English work concerned my religion and my hijab. Not only did I inform the students around me, I also informed myself, to be more aware of who I am and have the confidence to speak up for myself.

I love school! I love to go to school, meet up and see my friends, and learn something new every day. English and biology are my favourite subjects. I also love to read and listen to music. I love K-pop and K-drama. I listen to all kinds of groups but my favourite music comes from EXO. I also love speaking the language and hope to visit South Korea one day. The most important thing to me right now is balancing my home and university life.

I really want to study midwifery. I want to do work that is practical, hands-on learning and actually makes a difference in a person's life. I want to empower women, especially Muslim women, to make choices about their bodies and bring them health, confidence and strength. My hopes and dreams right now are for me to work hard in the next three years and push myself to become a registered midwife. I hope my siblings are inspired by my journey so they, too, will want to study and go to university and make their dreams come true, inshallah.

Finally, I am so grateful to have this Sir Robert Jones Scholarship. It provides me with the means of getting a tertiary education and has taken a huge burden off my father's shoulders. I will try my best to get all the way through my degree and come out on top, inshallah.



Nida Fiazi

My mother was in her late teens and I was just a toddler when she decided that staying in Afghanistan was not an option for us as we were surrounded by war and suffering. My mother somehow managed to get a hold of plane tickets to Malaysia, where we and 14 other people were smuggled in a flimsy fishing boat to Indonesia. Then from Indonesia my mother and I climbed aboard a small ship. On the tenth day of this leg of our journey, an Australian coastal patrol stopped the ship. My mother and I, alongside the other passengers, were evacuated and placed on two more ships for a total of 30 more days and nights. Our destination after being at sea for so long was a detention centre on the remote Pacific island called Nauru. At the detention centre there, people were diagnosed with depression and/or anxiety every day. However, there were no proper doctors to help them cope. After two-and-a-half years in the detention centre we were offered asylum by New Zealand.

One of the things that has brought, and continues to bring me, copious amounts of joy in life is reading. One of the most poignant moments in my life was when I was given a book called 'The Glory Garage'. This book discussed the many issues that Lebanese Muslim youth faced growing up in Australia and I remember feeling for the first time in my entire life that I wasn't alone in the issues that I struggled with – whether it be financial, to do with my identity, or concerning my mother, who suffers from depression and anxiety as well as other medical issues, despite being offered asylum and escaping physical danger. My mother's health issues are amongst the more difficult problems I've had to deal with, growing up in New Zealand. There are no physical symptoms to warn either of us as to when she might have another panic attack or feel extremely depressed and/or anxious, so it was extremely difficult to comprehend why my mum would suddenly become so ill and it's difficult to see my mother in such a vulnerable state.

As a female Afghan, a Muslim and a refugee growing up in New Zealand, I faced many struggles and this book helped me to come to terms with a lot of those and figure out who I was as a person. My current goal in life is to learn how to write professionally so one day I can write stories that help other people to heal. The first book I want to write and publish is my mother's story, because through this, I want to recognise all the struggles she had to face and still faces to provide me with a better future. I hope that other refugees find solace in the stories I aspire to write, in the same way that I found solace in 'The Glory Garage'.

When I arrived in New Zealand, there weren't many programs set up to help refugee youth, as they were mostly designed to aid the older generation and help them transition to life in New Zealand. I am currently working with the Red Cross, where the majority of my efforts are focused on helping to provide refugee youth (especially females) with opportunities. The Red Cross and I are working on a project where we hope to create something similar to 'The Glory Garage', but with a wider variety of refugees from different backgrounds, so other young refugees can realise that they are not alone in the struggles they face.

My mother never attended school or university and I will be the first female in my entire family to attend university. This scholarship is an incredible blessing as it means that I will be able to pursue my tertiary education without constantly worrying about my family's financial issues.



Ansa Mohamud

I am a Somali female, born in Kenya and raised in Hamilton. When the ongoing civil war took a turn for the worse in Somalia, my parents had no option but to flee to neighbouring Kenya, where my siblings and I were born. We eventually came to New Zealand, where my hardworking and determined mother has raised nine of us.

My favourite hobbies include spending quality time with my family when I can and going on new adventures. One thing that has always been important to me throughout my life is my religion and culture, as it has given me a sense of fulfilment, belonging and identity. I feel empowered to overcome any obstacles that are placed in my way. Being brought up in a family and community that lives by the golden rule of 'love for your brother what you love for yourself' is what has influenced my interest in social work and helping others unconditionally.

The journey my family and I took as refugees to come to New Zealand impacted us in a variety of ways. When we arrived, the only language I spoke was Somali. Due to this language barrier communication was difficult, but over time I learned English which helped with the transition.

The fact that my mother left her family and her country behind to pursue another life for the sake of her children is what motivates me in the face of adversities. Growing up as a Muslim Somali refugee, the comments of 'Go back to your own country' and other negative remarks caused me during most of my childhood to not adjust and integrate with people different from me unless there was a need. As I grew, I was able to understand that not all people can be painted with the same brush, and eventually I learned to focus only on those individuals who want to get to know me and are nothing but genuine, empathetic and approachable. Although there have been challenges along the way, growing up in New Zealand has been an opportunity I am thankful for each and every day.

As I have always had a passion for helping people, I knew, deep in my heart, the criteria for my career choice. I am into my third year of a Bachelor in Social Science: Social Work. I had the most memorable experience in my last year of high school that led me to this degree. I was discussing it with the careers advisor and remember saying, 'I want a job where it's all about the people, a job that can open different doors for me and allow me to work in different environments.' After further discussion, she said: 'Have you considered social work?' Right there was the triggering statement in deciding that this was where I saw myself.

I hope to gain experience in all types of fields once I am a social work practitioner. One dream I have is to build a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that bridges the gap between parents and their children. By providing services that allow both parents and children to work together, it would create a strong bond, allowing them to communicate freely, without hostility.

Being a recipient of the Sir Robert Jones Scholarship has eased the financial restraints of studying,

allowing me to achieve my goal and aspirations. I am now able to commit myself to being effectively diligent and making education my priority, whilst giving back to the community.



Aishah Oziullah

I arrived in New Zealand at the age of 13 from Malaysia. My family are Rohingya refugees from Myanmar/Burma (the Rohingya minority have been called the most oppressed people on Earth). Before coming to New Zealand, I only had only two partial years of schooling, mainly games. But since I came to New Zealand in August 2010 I have worked hard to get where I am today, both academically and personally.

As a young girl, I was always told to follow my dreams. Coming from a family whose parents did not themselves have the opportunity to study, I have worked hard to reach my goals – like my secondary school's motto, 'Seek the Heights'.

In school, I loved math (calculus) and science (chemistry and physics). What I loved about these subjects is that I could apply all the laws and theories that we learned in class to real-world situations, which helped me to understand the world. Because of this, I hope to become an engineer. I would like to generate innovative ideas; to power the dreams of young refugees and change their perspective of the world. I wish to help those who are a younger image of myself achieve their goals in life and, later on, help other parents who are also experiencing financial struggles. I have chosen engineering as my career pathway because I have always had an interest in the way things work, since I was young. The group Women in Engineering continues to highlight that girls are under-represented in this field. Only about 18 percent of engineering students are women.

I was honoured to be awarded the Refugee Daughters Scholarship. It will provide me with access to the educational resources that are required to reach my intermediate and long-term educational goals. I believe that education is a key to success and by having a decent education our life can improve the lives of others. The great Nelson Mandela once said, 'Education is the powerful weapon that we can use to change the world.' Thank you to Sir Robert Jones for the opportunity given to me, as I intend to 'pay it forward'.



Shekiba Maqsoodi

I came to New Zealand in 2007 as a refugee when I was seven to eight years old. I found it difficult to adapt to a different society where everything was new and I had no knowledge about New Zealand. I started school from Year 4. It was difficult to learn English and hard to communicate with your friends and teachers, especially teachers, because you cannot explain your problems or ask for any

help if there is a language barrier between the two.

I had to be independent from a young age because there was less help provided. I had to study on my own, even though I did not understand the things that were being taught to me. I had to write my homework in my language, Farsi, and later translate that into English, which was not that easy. Fortunately, I got the hang of it and got a better understanding of the things I had learnt.

Finding friends involves communicating and interacting with them. This happened for me once I was able to communicate in English and my speaking skills improved every day.

My father came to New Zealand on the Tampa ship, which was a survival battle for him. He was stuck in the middle of the ocean hoping to make it alive to see his family for the very last time. He came here for a better life, a new opportunity for his wife and kids, and for a success in the future.

From a very young age we have always been taught to seek for knowledge and to study hard at school for our own sakes. My parents have always motivated me to study hard and have fun in life in the same time. It was particularly hard for my parents to raise us here in New Zealand as it is completely different from where we lived before. There was always that fear inside them and they worried about their kids in a new society and how we would adjust to a new place and culture. It took us time to settle and adapt, but we managed to overcome barriers and this is where we call home now.

My parents do not have paid jobs that could support my education; therefore this Sir Robert Jones Scholarship really means the world to us. It is now one of my greatest motivations in life. It really motivates me to study hard and do well at uni and outside of uni. My parents' hard work has finally paid off, after all they went through just to provide me with the best education they could afford and doing it all with their best of their ability. This scholarship is a beautiful, joyful and amazing reward to me and my family, which will always be remembered.



Zainab Mohibi

I am 21 years old and I was born in Afghanistan. I escaped from that war-torn country to Pakistan some ten years ago, where I lived until July 2014. Things improved for me and my family after this change but we still faced many inevitable difficulties. Pakistani laws didn't allow us to study in school, but my mother, who didn't get an education herself, taught me and my siblings the importance of education. I value this knowledge that has been passed on to me.

For many, it would be easy to feel despair but that's not what I was taught. I and my siblings started self-teaching and got the help of my elder sister who also had a lot of self-learning. Later on we got a tutor and were home schooled.

Since arriving here I have attended Wellington East Girls' College and graduated high school in 2016. I am currently doing a foundation course at ACG International College which is under Victoria University. I have found my studies challenging, given that I had never attended school before and the huge jump in the level of study, but have been successful so far.

In addition to my secondary studies I have taken a keen interest in Save the Children, where I am a youth ambassador. I attended their course at Mistletoe Bay last year which inspired me greatly. This year I was asked to return as a mentor, which I found a great honour, and felt I made a strong contribution. I was the first person from my school to attend this programme, which is now on their annual calendar. Following this I was asked to represent Save the Children at their parliamentary event where I was a youth ambassador at a table of dignitaries. I also contributed to the UNICEF report 'Our Voices. Our Rights', coordinated by Save the Children NZ.

I very much wish to pursue a degree course in New Zealand and make my career here. Such opportunities are not available to women where I have come from and I am determined to gain a tertiary qualification and establish a career. I would very much like to study medicine.

This scholarship means a lot to me. I want to get the opportunity to contribute to this country and be a part of a positive change. My aim is to serve this country for all the things that I have received here when I had nothing to offer.



Fatumo Mohamud

Hello, my name is Fatumo Mohamud. I have four sisters and one brother. I was born in Somalia but fled as a child with my family due to an ongoing civil war. I moved to the neighbouring country of Kenya where I lived with my mum and two younger siblings. We came to New Zealand at the end of 2009.

I started at Peachgrove Intermediate School in 2010. The biggest challenge I faced in school was the language barrier, as I knew only a handful of English words with a strong accent that made it near impossible to understand what I was saying. Due to my inability to communicate, I struggled to make friends or ask for help when I needed it. However, I was very determined to succeed. I came to the realisation that I had to learn English to start with, so I attended ESOL classes a couple of times a week. I then dedicated my interval breaks and lunchtimes to attempting to read the books in the library.

The two years of intermediate school were a frustrating time for me. As well as the language barrier I struggled with cultural shock, but I persevered, knowing that I wanted to make the most of the opportunities I had. Someone who influenced me the most is my mum, who despite not having formal education herself encouraged us to work hard and get a good education.

In high school, I found that I had a passion for science and took it all through my five years of high school. A career gateway programme I attended sparked my interest in midwifery. I was paired up with a midwife and had the opportunity to see the job at first hand. What attracted me to midwifery was supporting women and their families at a special time of their lives. I loved how much midwives empowered the women they worked with.

I am currently studying for a Bachelor of Midwifery at Wintec, a three-year programme. After completing my degree, I want to work as a lead maternity carer in the community. After gaining some experience, I want to pursue my Master's to further enhance my knowledge. This scholarship has allowed me to pursue my dream of becoming a midwife.



Kasaye Terefe

I am originally from Ethiopia. In 2005, at six years old, I arrived here with my solo mother and siblings as refugees, leaving behind an uneducated and uncertain future. Being chosen as one of the recipients of the Sir Robert Jones Refugee Daughters Scholarship is still a shock to me. I can't believe that I am one of the numerous amazing girls who, against the odds, have overcome the various obstacles that come with being not only a refugee, but also a woman. Being able to further our education and achieve things otherwise impossible if not for being in New Zealand, is a real privilege I don't take for granted.

I am currently studying for a Bachelor of Nursing degree at AUT University, with the goal of becoming a registered nurse. Throughout my life, I have always been passionate about the need to help those around me and have always grasped every opportunity granted to me in New Zealand. Now, for me, success is possible and achievable as I am more than willing to put in the effort and hard yards. Coming from a refugee background has taught me to value and cherish education as I understand first-hand that not everyone is lucky to be given such an opportunity.

As one of four children, I am the first to have completed high school and the first child to be able to further my education. I believe that expanding my knowledge through tertiary studies will continue to help me succeed in life. My mum reminds me of how she was never given the opportunity to get an education because she was a woman in a male-dominated society and her family could not afford to send her to school, which led to an arranged marriage at a young age. It was considered normal. This set her up for a life of poverty in which she had complete financial reliance on her husband, and when the marriage didn't work she was left stranded as a solo mother caring for four young children. This put a lot of physical, mental and emotional strain on my mother's well-being. She was constantly doing labour-intensive work to support us. She dreamed of sending us all to school so we could avoid arranged marriages, a lack of education and a life of poverty. Essentially, she still holds the same goal for each of us in that that she wants us to be educated, go to university and contribute our fair share to society.

The experiences my mother has gone through and the sacrifices she has made to ensure that each of her children is educated have added to my determination to attend university, graduate as a registered nurse and use my nursing skills to make a positive difference in people's lives. This scholarship not only means a lot to me, but also to my family and community. It eases the emotional and financial burden, and it's really comforting to know that because of this scholarship I will not have to worry about student loans.

I would like to convey a huge thank you to Sir Robert Jones and the organizers for setting up this scholarship fund and giving this opportunity to girls of refugee backgrounds. I promise to always remain resilient and proactive towards my tertiary studies. I'm more than prepared to work hard, achieve my goals, succeed and contribute back to my community.



Maryam Mohseni

I was born in Kabul, Afghanistan on 5 May, 1998. Due to the conflict at the time in Afghanistan, my parents, Mohammad Sadeq and Nadia, decided to travel to Iran when I was about two years old. I grew up in different cities in Iran, such as Tehran and Mashad. While going to secret schools for Afghan immigrants in Tehran, I learnt how to read and write.

My two younger brothers, Mohammad Amin and Ali Asghar, were born in Iran. We travelled back to Afghanistan after about ten years because honestly, life for Afghans in Iran was, and still is, a living hell. My father was a taxi driver in Afghanistan. After our return, I studied English for about seven months and went to school for a year, but then for some personal reasons we had to flee and travel to Pakistan, and that was the start to our

two-year journey to New Zealand.

Following a few weeks in Pakistan and a four-week stop in Malaysia, we made our way to Indonesia. We stayed there for 19 months with no school or education except for an English course two days a week. We were covered by the UNHCR and were finally chosen to come to New Zealand by the NZ Immigration Office. We arrived here on 6 November, 2012 and stayed in Mangere Refugee Centre for three weeks.

I returned to school after two years and started high school from Year 10 at Kelston Girls' College. At first, things were difficult and it was hard for me to settle in. But shortly I got used to the learning method and got back on track. I became first in Social Studies and Business Studies, and second in English, Maths and Science in Year 10. I finished Year 11 by gaining an overall Excellence endorsement and the Top Scholar Cup for NCEA Level 1. I gained overall Merit endorsements for NCEA Levels 2 and 3.

Now I am studying a double degree of Law and Business at AUT. I can say I have settled in pretty well, have made so many good friends and am well on my way to achieve my goal, thanks to all who helped me get here so far.



Mohadeseh Akhlaqi

Kia Ora and Sallam Alaikum. My name is Mohadeseh Akhlaqi and I come from Afghanistan. My parents left our home country at a very young age because of the war happening in Afghanistan. They moved to Iran, where I was born, I arrived here in New Zealand as a former refugee in 2006. Things were not easy but I always say to myself, 'I can't change the past but I can change the future' and this is what keeps me going.

Since childhood, having a career in medicine has always been my dream. I lived in a small village, where I witnessed people unable to access medical help due to lack of money or having to wait long periods as they had to travel to bigger cities. After arriving in New Zealand, we were given the opportunity to access proper education, something that wasn't offered to us back in Iran. I have been motivated to make my childhood dream into a reality, as I feel blessed and privileged to be studying in New Zealand.

I believe my chosen profession will enable me to fulfill all my desires to help others, either here or in more deprived countries, and to continuously expand my knowledge base and skills. I have strived for academic excellence, always wishing to make the most of my education.

Being one of the winners of the Sir Robert Jones undergraduate scholarships has been a miracle to me. This scholarship has given me the chance and support for me to follow my dream. This is one highlight of my life that I will never forget. I strongly believe that education is the key to the success.

I hope to become a GP after 11 years of study and training. I am committed to this goal, as is evident by my record of academic accomplishments and community service. Being a very committed person, I am prepared for anything that may come along. I promise to push through to get to my destination.