

# ‘Community support in Education is crucial to our successful settlement’ - Former refugee young people find their voice.

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## Introduction

Community support in Education for young people with a refugee background plays a crucial role in their settlement in Lismore, regional New South Wales. In spite of having gone through very difficult times, young people with a refugee background bring with them immense strengths and are ready to work hard and capable to succeed in their choice of study.

“Restricting someone’s perception of how high they can reach is killing people’s dreams. Some teachers have the assumption that because of the experiences we have had we will not necessarily be able to cope with a lot of things, but you came through war and lived being a refugee person, literally you ask yourself, what can I not overcome?”

Nyadol Nyuon

## Background

This study collaborated with four young people with a refugee background who originated from South Sudan, The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sierra Leone and Rwanda. It was influenced by my own learning experience, having a refugee background myself and studied for my first degree in Australia. Totally new to the Australian system of education, I struggled a lot with my studies and felt really out of place. However, through the amazing support I received from my community, both in and out of university, I found my place, studied hard and completed my Bachelor of Media with Honours degree. Then I began to wonder how young people from a similar background were faring on.



Fig. 1 Volunteer teachers help students at the homework centre

## Methodology

This research project was carried out within a qualitative approach incorporating Participatory Action Research (PAR), given that the main participants shaped and steered the whole process.

It carried out Semi-structured interviews with all stakeholders in friendly discussions with a debrief at end of each session. This was to cross check outcomes with participants. PAR was also adopted in the production of the video, with participants consultations during editing of the video. The core methodology used for developing the theories and concepts incorporated into the video is a participatory process with myself as the researcher, and the young people as participants.

### References

Cassidy, E & Gow, G 2005, *Making Up for Lost Time*, Youth Studies Australia  
*Still Waiting*, 2010, Anne Harris, Youtube Video.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlqwNA8-AE4> Viewed on 05/05/12

## Wings: Video Documentary

### Results

The strong support network in the Lismore community enhanced study effort among young people with a refugee background. For example, they developed confidence in asking questions which enhanced their comprehension of study topics.

The young participants value and respond positively to community/friendly tuition which comes as informal learning to assist mainstream education in spite of negative portrayal of refugees, there is evidence of resilience and capability of the students to attain higher learning.

There are mutual benefits; such as the creation of friendships and the learning of new cultures for both community volunteers and participants.

Community support brings a feeling of belonging and aid growing confidence in the young people’s school work and other aspects of their lives.

Recurrent themes of this community collaboration: friendship, resilience, self-sacrifice and determination.



Fig. 2 Student seeking extra help from volunteer teacher

### Conclusion

Young people with a refugee background possess remarkable strengths and resilience, despite having experiences of trauma, hardship and loss. A strong inclusive community support can greatly assist them for a successful educational outcome.

Recurring themes: a sense of community, self-sacrifice, resilience, generosity of spirit and commitment, , friendship and mutual gains.

Young people with refugee backgrounds usually do not have the opportunity to share their settlement experiences, especially in education. This participatory media project, using predominantly non-verbal visual narrative, has given them such a space to provide a window into their lives for others to peruse and understand.

The visual communication of the young people’s experiences in *Wings* has a greater capacity to inform and educate a wider audience by annihilating language barriers.