



Azita Azimi

'I was born and grew up in Iran but my parents were from Afghanistan. I lost the right to work because I was from a migrant family. Political pressure brought more changes to the law in Iran: I lost my right to study. Because of increasing restrictions for migrants and refugees in Iran, we decided to seek refuge to Australia. It took two and a half years to be granted a visa.

My mum's uncle had been living in Australia for more than 30 years. He was always telling us about its warm and welcoming people. We arrived in Wollongong in 2012, and it was the beginning of our journey of knowing and living among its kind people who accept us as their own.

I loved the beauty of the landscape, but it was so hard doing everything in another language. I kept trying and I am so proud to be able to study midwifery now and work for the improvement of the country that is my country!'

به طور مداوم به خودم میگم که اینجا دیگه
آخر خطه و کار دیگه ای نمی تونم انجام
بدم ولی هر بار خودم را در حال انجام
دادن تلاشی دیگر برای رسیدن به هدفم
پیدا میکنم (Persian)

'I constantly tell myself i'm done but I find myself trying again'



Burhan Zangana

'I was born in Northern-Iraq. When the civil war broke out my town was bombed and many friends and family were killed. There was no hope in Iraq and so in 1993 I decided to leave.

The refugee journey is many journeys, one step forward and five steps back. I ran from place to place, town to town for months and years. I made two attempts to escape to Turkey. On the first night we were ambushed and six people died. I again tried the next night and got through. From there I made four attempts to get to Greece where I was granted a refugee visa to Australia.

I arrived in Sydney in 1995 and moved to Wollongong with my wife and children in 2015. Wollongong is the home that I've been looking for. I can't ask for more: people, mountains, ocean and green. Most cities have one aspect, but Wollongong has all four!'

جریو هی بالنده لهخه هه آدهسم نهک بۆردومان، خۆم به بهخته وهرترین هاو لاتی
(Kurdish) استرالی دهزانم به دهنگی

'I wake up to the sound of birds not bombs. I am the happiest Australian.'



Dejan Piljevic

'I came to Wollongong in the mid-1990s from a war-torn, former Yugoslavia. The prospect of living in Australia sounded appealing compared to dealing with issues such as bomb shelling and lack of food. As opposed to some of my childhood friends, who were either killed or had their future taken away from them, I was given an opportunity to start a new life and focus on building a brighter and more promising future.

After attending English language classes at the University of Wollongong, I secured a job in the fitness industry, allowing me to instil a positive change in other people's lives and to improve their quality of life. My integration into the local community started through my involvement in sport and over the years has seen me build lifelong friendships with many locals. Wollongong is an ideal place to live a secure and comfortable life and to raise a family. I was fortunate to be introduced to this beautiful city at the start of my new journey.'

Ponosan sam na sve sto sam ostvario ovdje i osjecam se kao da sam odrastao u Wollongong-u. (Serbian)

'I am proud of the life I have built for my family. I feel like a local.'



Elizabeth Jowanie

'My family are Karenni people from the Kayah State in Burma. My parents left their home on foot, and walked for weeks through the jungle till they reached Thailand. I was born in Refugee Camp two in Thailand, near the Burmese border. I lived in the refugee camp for 12 years. My parents spent four years applying for a visa to come to Australia. We came to Wollongong in 2008. It was the first time I'd been to the beach.

I had limited English, I felt embarrassed and shy, but I kept on trying. I started high school in the middle of Year 8, I had good ESL teachers, but I felt lonely and depressed. My parents relied on me to interpret for them, and my brother had trouble settling in.

I graduated from high school and I am now studying Nursing at Uni.

Living in Wollongong has given me many possibilities, I can pursue my dreams and contribute positively to my community.'

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'Living in Wollongong has given me many possibilities, I can pursue my dreams and contribute positively to my community.'



Emmanuel Bakenga

'I spent seven years in a refugee camp in Uganda.

My entire family had been murdered in the civil war. Camp life was extremely harsh. I saw children die of malnutrition and disease, and there was very little food and water. I learnt to speak English during my years in the camp but I also speak French and Swahili. I arrived in Wollongong in 2012.

I have completed a Diploma in Community and Welfare Studies and have two beautiful Australian-born children. I am also a lay preacher in a local church. I also currently work at Green Connect as a support worker and volunteer coordinator. I count myself lucky to live in this beautiful, peaceful city'.

Nafurahia kuwa mkaaji wa Wollongong (Swahili)

'I am happy to be a resident of Wollongong.'



Eugenia Pyne

'I am originally from West Africa, Liberia and belong to one of the 16 tribes called Kru. Language spoken is also called Kru.'

I fled my home country in 1996 due to the Liberian civil war which started late 1989. I was in Liberia between 1989 and 1996 then escaped to the Republic of Guinea where I lived in a refugee camp from July 1996 to April 2005. I arrived in Wollongong on 27 April 2005.

Wollongong has been truly like home. I had no idea how life was going to be when I accepted to be resettled in Australia. There was doubts and mixed feelings about what our family's future could look like in Australia. However, since arriving in this beautiful city of Wollongong, the people have been very kind beyond my expectation. This is why it feels really like home.'

Wollongong monti kha bleer sierteh (dialect of Kru)

'Wollongong has been truly like home.'



Marwa Shaban

'I was born in Saudi Arabia, but was raised in Alexandria (Egypt), a city on the Mediterranean Sea similar to Wollongong.'

We left to study and look for a better future for our kids. We arrived in February 2013.

Wollongong is a wonderful multicultural, family friendly suburb. It felt like an ongoing holiday, I was easily able to study, work and take care of my children.

I studied Master of Public Health at UOW. I enjoy my work as an interpreter and receive pleasure in being able to help refugees.

I arrived with three little daughters and had a little boy, a little Wollongong citizen. It was not easy but I feel happy and lucky to settle in this amazing city, my beautiful Wollongong.'

بدایه جدیده (Arabic)

'A new start.'



Sako Dermenjian

'I am Armenian but I was born and lived in Syria. We left Syria because of the war and I arrived in Wollongong in November 2014 with my sister and parents.'

The life here has been calm and enjoyable and the people have been friendly. In the short time I have been here life has been busy. In 2016 I did TEDx Wollongong but a highlight for me was playing in the Wollongong Stadium for the New Year's Eve celebration with the Hawks.

Music is very important to me, I have been accepted to the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. I hope one day to be famous and use my music to change the world.'

Վեց լարեր կարող է փոխել աշխարհը (Armenian)

'Six strings can change the world.'



Teresa Tran

'I was born in Vietnam. My life changed forever after the Communist Government took power in South Vietnam in 1975. When my father was released from a 're-education camp', my family realised we had no future in Vietnam. We began a dangerous journey.

My father and one brother escaped by boat, but my mother and two younger brothers were left behind. I was caught and put into prison. I was 14. My mother, brothers and I made four attempts to escape and finally reached the refugee camp in Singapore. The Australian government granted us a humanitarian visa.

It was hard building a new life. I studied hard, and eventually graduated with a Bachelor and Masters in Commerce. I am now a qualified accountant and run my own practice in Wollongong.

My husband, Phong Le, and I chose Australia Day as our wedding day - to celebrate each other and to celebrate being Australian. I value the freedom of my new home.'

Một cây làm chẳng nên non Ba cây chụm lại nên hòn núi cao. (Vietnamese)

'Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.' Helen Keller



Jelena Savija

Jelena Savija, or better known as “Baba Jela” - “Grandma Yella”- is 84 years old. She arrived in Australia in 1996 from the former Yugoslavia.

A devoted mother to five children, grandmother to eleven, and great grandmother to fourteen children.

Jelena survived World War II and the civil war in former Yugoslavia. She used to tell stories of hiding in the fields in World War II when her village was bombed. She couldn't believe that the time would come when her grandchildren would have a similar fate.

Despite her children being separated on different sides of the world, Jelena's spirit is immensely positive.

Jelena mastered the art of knitting when she was a little girl. She can knit with her eyes closed! The slippers she is knitting in the photos are called “Priglavke”. She used to sell them at the markets to help her family survive.