

Refugee Voices - Mohammad's Story

This is Mohammad's story of being a refugee in Australia, told in his own authentic voice.

This resource was developed in conjunction with www.refugeevoices.org.au.



A child of no country.

At the age of 9, the world was not in my vision. It was not complicated, nor was it something to think about. However, this all changed as I entered into the dark ages of trying to fit in a new school and a new country, trying to make new friends and learn a new language.

I can never forget my first day at school. My parents trying to get me dressed, me trying to fight the nervousness that was tangled with my soul, and the freshly painted school fences. The principal was standing in the front welcoming the children back to school, but her face was uninviting towards me.

The usual meet and greet, a simple "Hello and how are you?" was a tremendous hurdle for me. Hello was my ultimate word. The only word that I had learned and the only word that I could express myself with.

The initial barrier that completely secluded and isolated my existence as a discrete child was the unfortunate language barrier. I can never forget the constant nodding when the teachers were teaching, as a sign of agreement and understanding, however, it was completely false. Because all I knew was a simple "Hello" and nothing more.

Recess and lunch were a time that the children could play, talk and express themselves. But there I was, shoved in a corner, isolated like a lone island surrounded by the sea. I knew nothing and I could not connect. The difficulty of finding a friend, a person that you can connect with, someone to share your childish secrets, was not present, all because of the simple English wording that was unfamiliar to my tongue.

My inability to connect with the children and the desperate need to be normal meant a perfect chance for the childish devils to strike me. Bullying became a norm. "You're different, you're an import," the students laughed and loudly repeated. School, an environment that was supposed to heal students, especially me, a surviving refugee, instead tore me down.

After great difficulty and constant reading, writing and speaking the native language, English, I felt empowered. I felt like I had conquered the impossible. I was finally able to find friends.

After conquering the battle of language, I thought that I can finally be a normal student. But no. I can't forget the bright orange day. I was so excited. My dad had just given me a haircut and cut with the letter 'M' on the side, representing my name. I never thought that me wanting to join the childhood that the children of this nation get to enjoy, meant me getting in trouble. The principal harshly shouted "Mohammad, come into my office!". My heart was pounding and my head filled with questions. What have I done wrong? Did I not do my homework? Did I do something?

That day, I was forced to cut my hair completely in order to get rid of the letter M that was cut into the hair on the side of my head.

While this was a simple act, it meant much more. It meant that to connect you must conform. Conform to the standards that they want you to. Being yourself and having an identity was not an option.

