

Sir Robert Jones Refugee Daughters' Scholarships 2018



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RASNZ



I am delighted to welcome aboard a fresh crop of young women to our refugee daughters' tertiary education funding scheme.

Most have harrowing background stories. While finding a haven in New Zealand provides relief from danger, it is still an alien land with an alien culture and language which confronts these girls at a young age. In many cases they are obliged to effectively become the head of the family dealing with the new order.

Having many daughters and thus aware of such matters, I take special pleasure in our supplementary provision over and above the fees and accommodation, of vouchers for two dresses.

I wish them all success in their studies and future lives.

Sir Robert Jones



Refugees as Survivors New Zealand congratulates the 2018 Sir Robert Jones scholars. The scholarship was established by Sir Robert in 2015 to assist young women from refugee backgrounds to complete a university degree or tertiary qualification from an approved tertiary institution. This generous philanthropic gift presents an opportunity for young women who aspire to a tertiary qualification but who may be denied the opportunity because of their circumstances as former refugees. Tuition is paid in full through to degree attainment, subject to satisfactory examination results. Hostel accommodation is paid for the first two years of study if the student attends a tertiary institution outside their home town.

RASNZ thanks Sir Robert for his vision for a New Zealand where all members of society have the chance to fulfil their educational dreams. Many people give generously of their time to ensure the scholarship process runs smoothly. I would like to thank Greg Loveridge and Craig Parks from Robt. Jones Holdings for their support. I also thank the selection panels in Auckland and Wellington - Tracy Bowell, Pro Vice Chancellor Teaching and Learning at the University of Waikato, Professor Edwina Pio, Director of Diversity at AUT, Simon Chu, Director International Office University of Otago and Hariaty Abu Hassan, Scholarships Administrator at Victoria University for their wise advice and counsel.

A very special thank you to Irena Madjar who so generously gives of her time to coordinate our mentoring programme and support the girls through the ups and downs of university life.

I acknowledge the partnerships between Robt. Jones Holdings and Victoria University, the University of Waikato, the Auckland University of Technology and the University of Otago. These institutions match the scholarships by 50% for students attending their universities. This enables Robt. Jones Holdings to offer more scholarships each year. It also provides a valuable link between RASNZ and these universities so that we can work together to provide the best possible support for the students.

The stories in this booklet are inspiring. They provide an insight into the challenges faced by refugee families when they are forced to flee their homeland, leaving behind everything that is familiar and meaningful. Many of the young women have had limited formal education and are the first in their family to go on to higher education. They describe their determination to make the most of every opportunity, to make their families proud and to contribute to New Zealand society.

RASNZ is extremely proud of these outstanding young women and we wish them every success.

Dr Ann Hood
CEO RASNZ

Ilham Akhlaqi

Kia ora and salaam alaikum. My name is Ilham Akhlaqi and I came to New Zealand as a refugee from Afghanistan in 2005. I graduated from Mangere College, in the hope of being selected for the Bachelor of Engineering with Honours (BE Hons) degree at the University of Auckland. I am the first woman in my family to want to pursue a future in engineering, which I am passionate about!

My parents fled the war happening in Afghanistan and resettled in Iran, where I was born. I came to New Zealand as a refugee in October 2005. Incidents happened during our journey to New Zealand - my father was unable to come with us and our family was broken. At the age of only six, I witnessed many things a child should not see. Coming to New Zealand was a miracle. Growing up with my single mother who had a lack of English language skills and could not work, we were dependent on WINZ.

I am the oldest child in a family of seven living at home. My family have done their best to support me but I still have financial issues that I face today. Through high school I worked after school taking night shifts as a cashier so that I could be more financially independent.

My journey towards adapting to New Zealand was not an easy one. I would not always fit in because I was a Muslim who wore the hijab, as well as being different from other students. That didn't stop me from getting my education and taking it to a higher level of achievement. Education has always been a fundamental part of my life and I have been an academic achiever throughout my school years. I regard education as a privilege, as I know that many people back in my home country will never receive it, especially women.

Although engineering is a male-dominated field, I do not see this as a barrier to achieving my goals. I am dedicated to following my dreams and am self-motivated to study my best.

I want to make a difference in the world as an Afghan refugee woman. I want to gain enough experience to rebuild my war-torn country once again. Coming to New Zealand as a refugee at the age of six, I remember how the war affected the homes of my loved ones and left them in inhumane conditions. I have an ambition to help rebuild those homes so that they are safe and sustainable for everyone.

I want to make my dream into reality, to face stereotypes and be a role model for my sisters. Being a recipient of this scholarship is a life-changing miracle for me and a huge step closer towards my dream.



Clench Enoka

In my last year of school, my whole family moved to Australia from New Zealand, but I decided to remain in New Zealand to finish my last year. It was a challenging year as I was not living with my family and didn't have the support I am used to. At the same time, I had an awesome year!

I learned new skills, tasted new food and learned how to cook foods that I hadn't encountered before. This year made me more independent and more responsible. In a way, it prepared me for university. I am now more open to new experiences. It is also a reminder of the journey that my parents endured, coming to New Zealand as refugees and being far away from the home they knew and the people they loved. It has taught me to work extra hard because I am away from the support I had and it was important to make my final year count so that the sacrifices we made as a family were not wasted.

I grabbed as many opportunities as I could and am proud to be a part of UNICEF U Report and the Hutt City Youth Council. Through these initiatives, I have gained many transferable skills that will benefit me in life. Through these groups, I have had the opportunity to be more involved with my community in Naenae. I am very grateful for this and it has helped shape the person I am today. Building relationships with the people of Naenae, the place I grew up in, I can recognise the support and help we had as a family, so it felt good to give something back.

I was surprised to be nominated by one of the Naenae Clubhouse mentors for the Hutt City Youth Award 2017, under the category of "Embracing Diversity". I was amazed that they recognized the work I had contributed to the community.

I was also chosen to become a Prefect for the 2017 Leadership Team at Naenae College. I wanted to be a good role model, especially for the Year 9 students, showing them that you do not have to be smart or sporty to become a leader and succeed in life. I felt proud seeing the students striving to become better versions of themselves.

My Year 13 was the most challenging, but I pushed through and graduated with my fellow students. I wished my family were there to celebrate my achievements as they had faith in me to never give up. I can still remember the day Mr Floratos forwarded me the application to apply for the Scholarship. I've never wanted something as much as this. When I found out I had been accepted I was filled with excitement and happiness and my parents wrote a huge paragraph expressing their pride.

I am studying a Bachelor of Graphic Design at Massey University in Wellington. I am nervous, but also excited to see what the future holds for me on my journey.



Melika Hassan

My name is Melika and I am 19 years old. My mother is from Iran and my father is from Iraq. I was born and raised in Iran. Through lack of fortune, we had to flee our country. After finishing Year 6, I was not given my examination results and was therefore unable to pursue higher education. I could not follow my dream of becoming a dermatologist or nurse. I had no hope and no future. My parents were so upset and decided to sell everything from jewellery to clothes so we could flee and take refuge in another country. I was only 12 when I left and had to go to many other countries before coming to New Zealand. Despite selling everything, there was only enough money for two of us to travel and so it was decided that my father and I would start the journey together first.

I understood that I was going to be separated from my mother for a long time. We had never been apart before. When it was time to say goodbye, we held each other and cried so hard because we knew that our journey to hope was also going to be one of loneliness, worry and risk. One of the countries I lived in was Vanuatu. I found it so difficult to go to school there as I was unfamiliar with the culture and the language. I was always alone in school and dealt with racists comments from my classmates. I couldn't understand a word the teachers were saying and had no teacher aid to help. But I worked so hard and managed to get through and pass year 8, 9, 10. I began to learn English and I also learned Bislama. Half way through year 11, after long years of living in poor conditions, my father and I were accepted as refugees to New Zealand. This was one of the best moments of my life. After years of separation, depression and fear, God had answered our prayers.

When I came to New Zealand I was so happy, I have a country now that I can call home. I have a bright future which I can see. Feeling these emotions made it one of the best moments of my life. I have a dream of becoming either a dermatologist or a nurse which I'm passionate about and this is a way to satisfy my desire to help people which now I'm determined to work towards. The moment I heard I had won this scholarship was another best moment of my life. Receiving this scholarship means the world to me.

I'm a lucky person to have this success and opportunity to follow my dream without having the burden of huge debts. First thanks to God and second to Sir Robert Jones for opening the door to pursue my dreams and passion. This scholarship is not only helping me financially, but also emotionally. My parents have risked it all for me and my future. All they wanted from me was to have a career and be successful. And for me, I want to be somebody that my country, New Zealand, is going to be proud of. Now by having this precious scholarship I can achieve all of these goals. Thank you Sir Robert Jones and all the other members who chose me as a scholar and made it possible for me to achieve my dreams.



Zainab Kamali

My name is Zainab Kamali and I came to New Zealand from Pakistan in 2014 with my family as refugees. My dream and passion is to inspire others that come from a struggling background as a refugee, through a profession such as nursing.

I want to become a registered nurse because I want to help others in need and dream to serve the country which provided me a new life with endless opportunities.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan there were no opportunities for study especially for girls that come from a struggling background. This is something that I really want to change one day as I believe that education can change the whole world for the better. Nothing can be benefited by ignorance.

In my spare time, I like to read books and walk to the park to enjoy the beauty of nature. I feel very privileged to live in one of the most beautiful countries in the world!

There are many opportunities available for students who live in New Zealand and I am very lucky and grateful that I live here. I can sleep in peace knowing how peaceful New Zealand is contrasted against the war torn country I used to live in.

I would like to thank you so much for the opportunity for this scholarship which can help me turn my dream into a reality in order to help serve this beautiful country!



Ja Seng Aung Lahpai

My name is Ja Seng Aung Lahpai. I am a 2018 recipient of the Sir Robert Jones Refugee Daughter Scholarship. I was honored to receive this scholarship and am grateful for the opportunities it will provide me.

I am Kachin, from the northern most part of Myanmar. I have three brothers and we lost our father when I was 3 months old. Due to many civil wars and violent government soldiers, my family, along with many other people were in danger. My mother took my brother and fled from Myanmar to Malaysia. After a few months, through the United Nations, we were able to call New Zealand home. After eight long years, we were able to reunite with the rest of our brothers through the Refugee Family Reunification Programme.

My family's journey into New Zealand allowed me to appreciate life and aim high. Although New Zealand culture is very different to Kachin culture, over a few years I was able to learn how to find the middle ground. I consider myself a Kiwi-Kachin. This way I was able to maintain my Kachin culture and language while improving my English and adapting to Kiwi culture. Despite some difficulties with language and cultural differences, my family and I are very grateful and blessed to call New Zealand our home.

My relationship with God is the most important thing for me. I value love highly, for God is love. I have chosen the medical path, in the hope of one day becoming an obstetrician. I want to see the miracle of life happen before my eyes, when the babies take their first breath and cry. I have a passion for science. It helps us understand and discover many unexplained things around us. Since education at tertiary level did not exist in my family's history, I had many doubts for my education. Gladly I was offered a preferential entrance into University of Otago to study first year health science in 2018.

Without a doubt, the Sir Robert Jones scholarship will play a major role in helping me achieve my educational dreams. Your generosity and support will help me overcome many financial obstacles so that I may focus fully on studies. Thank you for your investment in students like me.



Kim Van Nguyen

My name is Kim. I left my country and have been living in this safe and lovely country, New Zealand, since 2013. It has been the best 5 years of my life.

My mother and I came from an Asian country where gender discrimination remains a big issue. There, society is dominated by men and the son is the preferred offspring in a family. The day I was born there was no celebration because I was a girl. My mother was neglected in hospital giving birth to me and nearly died as a consequence. She had no food or drink during the first few days after birth. Thanks to the kindness of my grandmother and an elderly neighbour, we reached safe hands and care.

When I started school, my mother had to fight for the best educational opportunities for me. She worked hard to get money for schooling and also to find ways to send me to school. Education for girls is perceived as unnecessary and a waste. I grew up solely in the protection of my mother. She is both a mother and a father to me.

We started our new life in New Zealand and found everything new; the country, the people, the weather and us! We are very happy as New Zealand is a safe country, and people are very friendly and kind. I am supported not only by my mum but also by new Kiwi friends, and organizations like RASNZ, who care about refugee health and wellbeing. I am so lucky.

I am now at the University of Canterbury. I chose to study commerce with a focus on international business, because I want to help the development of New Zealand - my treasured adopted home, by connecting the country with the rest of the world.

I am so happy to be granted the Sir Robert Jones Refugee Daughters' Scholarship as it will help me realize my dream to study and allow me to contribute back to the community. I am extremely grateful to have been chosen as one of the scholarship recipients this year.

Thank you and God bless you!



Jenny Huynh Nguyen

My name is Jenny Huynh Nguyen and I'm the second born child and only daughter to my parents who were originally from Vietnam. I was born and raised in Auckland. I'm 18 years old and have just finished my final year at McAuley High School. The highlights of my academic achievement during secondary and primary education include Dux 2012, and excellence endorsement in all 3 years of NCEA.

I plan to study Biotechnology at the University of Otago in the forthcoming years as I have always been passionate about science. With modern technology blooming exponentially I believe that this field will have many things to offer me; challenges, lessons, and the chance to be constantly learning and exploring our world and all it has to offer.

During the late Vietnam War, both my grandfathers served for the American army, however only one returned. During the communist reign in 1989, my grandfather and parents made a formidable decision to leave Vietnam, due to the increase in violence and the fact that Vietnam no longer held any potential future for them. My parents sailed onboard a boat for 3 days. With the help of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Pulau Bidong, Malaysia was their new home for the next 3 years. They were forced to live in inhumane conditions which were psychologically tormenting, simply unforgettable and traumatic. On the island my father by day was the local hairdresser/barber, at night he attended the local school where he learned English to prepare himself and our family to be able to integrate into society more easily. When the Pulau Bidong camp closed, my family was relocated to Sungai Besi for a year. Later, due to their failed application, they were repatriated back to Vietnam in 1993. My Grandfather, however, was successful and entered New Zealand on 30 July 1993.

My grandfather successfully sponsored both my parents and new-born brother in 1998 and they began building their new life. Our family of five to this day remain living in the same house we bought in Otahuhu. Although we are deemed disadvantaged in terms of New Zealand social economics, I feel that we are much more privileged than how we could have lived if my parents did not choose to migrate.

The magnitude of what the Sir Robert Jones Scholarship has done for not only me but the wider Vietnamese community and the many boat families in New Zealand is indescribable. Having an education is already a blessing, something that sometimes is forgotten because it is so readily available. However to be able to go to university to pursue my goals and dreams without worrying about loans and my parents' finance is such an overwhelming feeling. I believe that our stories are meant to be and shape us into who we are. My parents are incredible people and their resilience and all they have been through, the lessons they

have learned and taught me have caused the series of events in my life to occur. This scholarship provides hope and encouragement for those who have been fortunate enough for a second chance at life; for that I wish to extend my wholehearted gratitude to Sir Robert Jones and RASNZ. I look forward to the next chapter in my life and all the challenges it is bound to bring.

This photograph was taken in Sungai Besi refugee camp on the day my family separated – Grandpa travelling to New Zealand and my parents travelling back to Vietnam.



Samera Omindwar

I was around twelve years old when my family and I left Iran to move to Indonesia. We registered with UNHCR as refugees and we were chosen to resettle in New Zealand after two and a half years. I always had the dream of becoming a doctor as a kid but couldn't visualise it ever materialising.

I was fifteen when New Zealand accepted us. In April 2014 we arrived in Auckland and stayed in the Mangere centre for six weeks and then were sent to Palmerston North. I had missed school for almost three years and that made me very anxious and concerned.

Schools are different in New Zealand compared with the schools that I used to attend before coming to New Zealand, so it took time for me to settle and get used to New Zealand educational system and culture. I remember students asking questions about my Hijab and why I wore it, or if I wore it while sleeping or while taking a shower. My classmates were curious about why I didn't eat during Ramadan and kept asking whether I was starving!

In cooking classes I used to give my portion of food that I had cooked to my friend if the ingredients contained gelatine or pork. They said "Aww...sorry that you cannot eat this". These questions were a bit new to me since no one had ever asked me before but everyone was kind and helpful.

The staff in the International Department helped me out in the mainstream classes. Tutorials were also organised for me where I practiced Science and Maths with three other international students. That helped me a lot to catch up with other students and to understand the content of the topics we were taught in classes. I improved day by day and got my hope back in achieving my childhood dream.

I hope to study Medicine at University of Otago. I want to do well to make my parents proud, to be a role model for my younger siblings, to fulfil my own dreams and also to be a positive, productive New Zealand citizen and give back to the NZ society.



Pragya Pradhan

Namaste and kia ora! My name is Pragya Pradhan and I'm a Bhutanese girl born in Nepal. My father is from Bhutan and my mother is from Nepal. My father fled Bhutan due to political disturbances and civil unrest in the 1990's. He took asylum in Nepal where I was born in 1998.

I lived in the Beldangi Refugee Camp in Nepal, as a refugee, for two years on humanitarian grounds before I arrived in New Zealand in 2014. I was sixteen years old when I came here and it was quite hard for my family to adapt to the unique environment and culture. As my English was not very strong I struggled a lot to communicate with people at school and within the Nelson community. However, I have managed to overcome this problem in the past couple of years which has helped me enormously with this transition.

I loved school and I loved to go to school! Geography and digital technologies were my favourite subjects. I enjoyed getting to know and understand the diverse land, cultures and issues of New Zealand in geography, whilst learning new technical skills every day in my technology class. I listen to a lot of English music these days, which has assisted with my language. My hobby is dancing; however, I also like to read books and spend quality time with my friends and family in my spare time.

My aim is to become a software engineer because I like creating and designing websites using digital skills. I have chosen to study software engineering at Victoria University and achieve my aim in life.

New Zealand offers many types of technologies and opportunities, but very few people from refugee background communities, especially elderly people, have experience in computing skills. Therefore, I want to help them in every possible way I can, because they have not been given the opportunities to learn, nor have they had the access to computers because of constraints such as limited finances and no electricity in refugee camps.

Education is very important to my family and myself. My mother works part-time while my father is a full-time student studying in NMIT. Since my family financial status is not stable, I'm very thankful to Sir Robert Jones for supporting refugee daughters and helping us to achieve our dreams. I feel very honoured to be a recipient of the Refugee Daughters' Scholarship.



Fatima Qadami

Ye vîya şîya- If you truly want to, you will be able to"

My name is Fatima Qadami. I am the eldest of four children, and I am a Kurd. My family come from Iran in the Kurdish province of Ilam in a small town called Dehloran. During the 1990's, my parents left Iran due to political persecution because they supported Kurdish independence and my father supported the Peshmerga. Such persecution forced my parents to defect and escape to Iraq, where it was much worse for Kurds, especially when there was a Kurdish uprising against the then oppressive Ba'ath led government.

During the 1990's, Saddam Hussein cracked down on Kurds, murdering hundreds of thousands of innocent Kurdish men, women and children. My parents left Iran at the worst possible time and reached the Iraqi border where they were arrested and charged just for being Kurds. They were not given any legal assistance and were each sentenced to six years in prison. That day was the day they wouldn't see each other for six years. My Father had the worst six years of his life, he was mentally and physically abused, starved and suffered from disease and infection like tuberculosis. My mother dealt with depression, learning about the death of her brother and finally realising that she would never see her family again.

After six years, they were released and left with nothing but the clothes on their back, and suffering from allegations that they worked for the Iranian government. Two years later, on the 25th of December 1999, I was born in the infamous Al-Tash camp in Ramadi, Iraq. In 2001, we had the chance to come to New Zealand. We stayed in the Mangere refugee centre for six weeks, where we arrived with several other Kurdish refugees.

I will be studying for a Bachelor of Law and Bachelor of Social Science conjoint, majoring in both Law and Philosophy at the University of Waikato. My parents have struggled in life and their sacrifices to keep me educated and humble motivate me to become a lawyer. My parents standing up for their rights and the rights of others during the oppressive Iranian regime on Kurds also encouraged me to pursue this career. In the future, I would like to work with refugees who have gone through the struggles of reaching a new land and trying to grasp the new culture. I would like to fight for the rights of Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria where they have been caged like animals and discriminated against because of their identity. I not only want to be known as a strong refugee, but also as a strong Kurdish woman.

Being awarded the scholarship has meant that my hard work has paid off and that I can go on to university and pursue my dream career as a lawyer and fight for our rights and the rights of others. I would like to thank everyone who has supported me and especially Sir Robert Jones for awarding me this prestigious scholarship. With this scholarship, I don't have to worry about the financial impact that would affect my life in the future.

"The moment you accept the troubles you've been given; the door will open"- Rumi



Sakina Sarwari

My name is Sakina Sarwari and I am a 19-year-old Afghan girl studying for a Law and Management degree at the University of Waikato. My journey has been a long and successful one. My family arrived in New Zealand on the 14 of November 2003, having been reunited by the New Zealand Government after we were separated during the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Having come from a warzone and having lived with a lot of insecurity for several years before being accepted into New Zealand, I appreciate the support I have been given and this has strengthened the value I place on humanity and has led me to my chosen career of being a lawyer.

My story begins the same as many other refugees, but ends differently with more hope for the future. Afghanistan was not safe for us, and we were scared to death every minute wondering if it would be our last day to live. I was not yet 3 when I landed with my mother on the tiny island of Nauru in the remote Pacific, joining more than a thousand other war refugees in a strange outpost.

Coming to Nauru was a journey of more than 8,000 miles, but Nauru was not the desired destination. The Australian Navy, acting to keep refugees like myself from entering the country, forcibly put us there. After more than four years of separation, our family were reunited with permanent residency in a safe and welcoming country, New Zealand. However, this sense of security did not last very long because on January 15, 2006 my family was involved in a severe car accident in North Auckland, on our way back from a trip. This was a turning point in our lives which left my mother and I dependent on each other.

I am studying for a conjoint degree in Law and Management Studies. My goal is to become an immigration lawyer, so I can help other people like me who need a safe place to call home. I am also interested in human rights law because this would help refugees at the international level.

The Refugee Daughters' Scholarship is a lifeline for me. It will enable me to complete my studies and not only help make me an independent woman but also enable me to help others. I am the first female in my family to attend tertiary education and am very blessed to be given this opportunity by Sir Robert Jones Scholarship to make them proud by giving back to the country that took my family in and helped me.



Usanthini Sasikumar

My name is Usanthini Sasikumar. I came from Sri Lanka with my family under the Refugee Quota system into New Zealand. My family was separated from my father in the civil war in my country and we have lost contact with him. My mum has raised me through all this time on her own and I have been supporting her as much as I can, especially because I have developed my language skills over this time. My mum is now doing cleaning in a company called OCS. I also have 2 siblings aged 21 and 19. I only received a formal proper education after I came to New Zealand. My mother relies on me a lot to help with health, legal, and other social matters.

The civil war in my country forced me to migrate to other countries. I left Sri Lanka when I was 8 and I was a refugee for nine years. I have lived here in New Zealand for four years and studied at Hutt Valley High School. My experiences as a refugee fleeing from my country with my family were terrible and have left me with memories I would rather not have. When we left Sri Lanka as a refugee family we went to Thailand, but then were turned back by the police because we had no visas. My mother and I left Sri Lanka for a second time, leaving my brothers behind. We stayed in Thailand for three years before being granted refugee status in New Zealand. It was a time of both relief, but also grief without my brothers being able to be with us. This caused much pain for us, especially to my mother. Last year in December, thanks to the Family Reunification plan, my brothers were both able to come to New Zealand. This is a very happy event in our lives and now I feel like my life can move forward.

Academically, I have been improving myself to achieve my ambitions. My ambition is to become a engineer. My desire is to create new software programs that might help people make their lives easier. When I was at Hutt Valley High School I learned many things and had many opportunities. Through these I discovered I love designing and creating new solutions to problems. I have an enquiring and curious mind, and I enjoy maths because of the type of thinking it involves. I have worked very hard to catch up to my peers even though I had significant language barriers, and missed five years of formal education. I am very grateful for the ongoing maths, English and science tutoring offered to me by a wonderful older Sri Lankan woman and other tutors from church.

My days of tuition sometimes went till 9pm. Because my mother works, I often have to do the housework as well as my homework and study after that. I also had a work experience position at ANZ for one day a week which gives me a lot of valuable skills and knowledge about New Zealand and in banking and customer service. This meant I spent one day a week out of school, but I studied very hard and had excellent time management so I kept up with my school work. I also tutored some younger students in maths and science for a year to help them progress in their studies.

I am grateful to receive assistance from the Robert Jones Scholarship to pursue my dreams to be able to take the financial worry and responsibility off the shoulders of my mother. I will work with diligence to prove I am a worthy person for this assistance. It means I have the opportunity to give back to society through my focus on engineering and for helping people – whether it will be in a degree in Software Engineering or a related alternative.



Dina Tesfay

My name is Dina Tesfay and I am Eritrean. I came to New Zealand from Sudan in 2009 under the refugee quota system with my two parents and four siblings.

We migrated to New Zealand because my parents wanted me and my siblings to have the best education in order to for us to have bright futures, the gift of education and to have access to the many opportunities our new home had to offer. As difficult as it was to leave our beloved home I am beyond grateful to both my parents for all that they have accomplished for me and my siblings in bringing us to New Zealand.

When we first arrived I personally was very intimidated and felt as though I would never be able to adapt to the new culture, society and language that I was introduced to.

One of the most challenging aspects of being in this foreign place was only being able to speak fluently in Tigrinya and Arabic with little English. However, because I was so eager to be able to read, write and understand the language I read every day and listened to audiobooks. This soon allowed me to assist my parents during appointments in translating and eventually they did not require a translator, as I learned the language at a fast pace.

Growing up, my parents continuously reminded me and my siblings about how important education is. Being the eldest daughter of four, I feel as though I need to set a good example for my younger siblings who will, in the near future, be making decisions about their lives. Therefore, receiving the Sir Robert Jones Scholarship will allow me to give back to my parents, particularly my mother, as she continues to work tirelessly to make sure that I achieve to the best of my ability.

In 2018, I will be studying at Victoria University, Wellington and wish to study for a Bachelor of Laws and International Relations with a minor in Political Science. I have chosen this degree as it opens up many doors and opportunities to help people (particularly refugees) and give back to New Zealand which has provided me with a new home and the opportunity to build a brighter future for me and my family.

I want to extend my utmost gratitude to Sir Robert Jones and the committee for giving me and many other young women the chance to complete tertiary education and pursue our dreams. Your generosity and continuous support is valued beyond measure.



Htawee Thin

Seventeen years ago my family fled from Burma as refugees. This was during a longstanding period of unrest and devastation caused by the conflict between the authoritarian regime of the military junta led by General Ne Win.

The conflict between the rebel groups and military government disrupted life in Burma, resulting in gratuitous violence and mass killings of innocent civilians. My parents were at the forefront of this historical turning point in Burma; in fact, my father was kept as a political prisoner for two years after working as a lawyer defending innocent people accused of being involved with the revolution.

When my siblings and I were born, my parents decided that our home was no longer a safe place to live. My mother first fled in 1997, travelling on foot with three young children, while my father stayed to aid in the crisis. Three years later, my family arrived in New Zealand as refugees: my mother, father, and five young restless children. I was the youngest, only a few months old, while my oldest sister Hser Paw was 10 at the time.

It causes me both pain and pride to think about the sacrifices and hardships my parents endured as refugees. I think the plight of refugees is often something that is overlooked or misunderstood by some Western audiences who cannot understand the harrowing experience of being forced from your homeland. We are often made to feel alienated and ashamed for these circumstances which were out of our control.

Being a young woman from a refugee background is a large part of my identity in many ways. I feel the impact of my parents' journey every day; often times through the loss of family, language, and culture. When I was younger, speaking about my family always caused me great discomfort, as this would force me to confront the shame I felt about my background, culture, and identity. I wanted so badly to erase that part of myself. To put it bluntly, I wanted to be white. What causes me great discomfort now is hearing people vocalise their anti-immigration/refugee opinions. I believe the solution to this, as young refugees, is to rise through the ranks and demonstrate that we are capable of giving back to the countries that enabled us to succeed.

I have the privilege of receiving a Sir Robert Jones Scholarship for my studies. In my studies I seek to become a vocal part of the community, I will be pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in 2017 in Gender Studies and English in order to pursue a writing/journalism career in which I will utilise my experience and my voice to share my ideas on a large scale, and help to give a voice and platform to those who do not have one.



Dilukshi Thurairajah

I am Dilukshi Thurairajah. I am a proud graduate of Sir Edmond Hillary Collegiate. I came to New Zealand in 2013 to reunite with my dad and sister. I was born in Sri Lanka and raised there until the final stages of war broke in 2008.

My uncle was a victim of the brutality forced onto the Tamil community and my dad was forced to flee to save his life as he was threatened.

When I was 9 years old, my family and I fled from Sri Lanka to India. My family lived in India for 3 years under severe financial pressure and this forced my dad to find a better place to live. My father and sister fled by boat but the destination was changed as the GPS failed and they were forced to seek refugee status in Indonesia for more than two years before they came to New Zealand in December 2012.

After a long process, my mother, brother and I came to New Zealand in October 2013 and were reunited with our father.

I think that my struggles helped to shape me as I am: self-driven, eager and determined to pursue my dream of becoming a registered architect in New Zealand. I will be the first person to attend university in my family. This means a lot to me - being a role model for my siblings and uplifting my family financially whilst also exploring my passion for the art of building.

This scholarship will be a huge support for me as my family is dependant on my dad's income. I think it will offer me the opportunity to provide them with a better living.

I am looking forward to achieving my goal of becoming an architect and being a change-maker, both for my family and in the New Zealand building industry. This scholarship will also allow me to focus on building up my confidence by studying with people who are well trained in mainstream education, unlike me. I will motivate myself to stand along with them, facing the challenges during my study in order to prove that a student from a refugee background is no less than others.

I am very grateful that I was provided with this prestigious scholarship. I will be a responsible candidate who will make a difference to my family and in the community of refugees living in Auckland. Thank you!





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