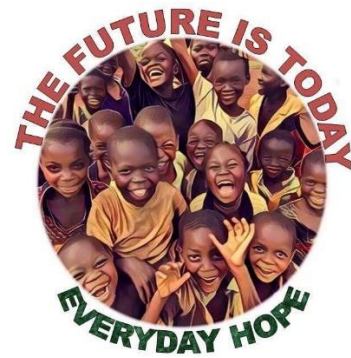


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Lessons we can learn from the refugee experience

Dear members,

It may feel like our lives are on hold right now. But with resilience, we can start building for the future.

When refugees are displaced by conflict or disaster, life as they once knew it suddenly comes to an end. Their jobs, their homes, their dreams and plans – all gone. One of our program's key roles is to help them rebuild their resilience so they can start over. I believe that some of what we have learned from that work can be helpful for us all in this current crisis.

1. Stay connected

For Gasengayire, arriving in Uganda from Congo, the challenge of starting over was in many ways even greater than the challenge of surviving the conflict. Not knowing English and with no contacts, she felt rejected and alone.

"I didn't know anyone in the Uganda. I couldn't talk to my friends in Congo. They were in the middle of a war zone and here I was in the best, safest country in the world and I was worried about not being accepted. This is not something I could share. I ended up not speaking to anyone about it."

When we know that times are difficult for everyone else, we may struggle with feelings of guilt or shame. It's as if our struggles don't matter because we are not

suffering as much as they are, but our struggles are real. We all matter, so it's important to stay connected with people and share those struggles.

2. Learn new skills

Gasengayire's isolation was compounded by her lack of English, but rather than retreat into herself, she took control.

"I decided, if people aren't going to help me assimilate, then I am going to do it by myself. I started collecting English newsletters which are easy to find in Uganda and I would just read pages every day and underline the words and definitions."

It's quite a task to teach yourself a new language from scratch, but Gasengayire used her creativity to make it happen.

*"I would turn on the TV that **The Future is Today** gave us, and read the English subtitles, I would go on and on repeating the words out loud. I don't have the best voice, but I would sing the words. I had to learn somehow. I even learned 40 to 50 famous English slang terms like, 'I'm going to spend a penny'. I mean what does that even mean?"*

We can all use this time to learn new skills so that we are better equipped to rebuild and re-establish our lives when we come out the other side of this crisis.

From honing your IT skills to fine tuning your DIY talents, or learning a musical instrument. What could you be practicing now that will help build your own future resilience?

3. Keep hope alive

The time and effort Gasengayire put into learning English paid off in two key ways. Firstly, the process of taking charge of her life gave her strength to carry on.

"I got to be a hopeful person. I learned the importance of being able to fix yourself, by yourself instead waiting for someone to do it for you."

Secondly, as she emerged from the crisis, Gasengayire was able to reap the rewards of her efforts.



*"After a few months I went to a youth club meeting and said a few words in front of the group of people. Someone from a charity approached me and said that my English was very good and that she liked what I said. It lifted me up. It was a turning point for me. I was able to sign the contract for making facemasks because I knew how to use a sewing machine, which **The Future is Today** donated to me. It felt like my hard work had paid off."*

Having lost one way of life, Gasengayire was starting to create a new one. Many of us may feel life as we knew it has come to an end, but if we stay resilient, we can prepare ourselves for starting over.

Yours in solidarity,

Aime Kalangwa

CEO of The Future Is Today

