

# BANDIRI\* (SOMALIA)

**“Education is the passport to the future.”**

See [Layla’s Refugee Learner Narrative for another perspective and additional information on Somalia](#).

## Life before Canada

### Birthplace and Family

*Is ka warran. Nabad miyaa?* Hello. How are you? My name is Bandiri. I was born on October 19, 1991, in Mogadishu, Somalia. Just a few months before the burbur (catastrophe) of 1991-92 and the collapse of the Somali state, clan war, and famine.

Before coming to Canada, I lived one month in Nairobi, Kenya. I belong to the Somali cultural group and the language that my family spoke and continues to speak is Somali. My family consists of six children (four boys, including myself, and two girls) plus my parents.

In Mogadishu, we lived in a villa. My mother looked after the children while my father worked at two stores he owned. He sold construction equipment in the Bakara Market (also known as Bakaara market) in Mogadishu.

Mogadishu is a big city with a population of a million people. The buildings are very close together like London, England. There is not much space between them. I have always enjoyed a good relationship with my family. I was surrounded by relatives, family, neighbours, and teachers, all who supported each other. The culture that I come from is one where “everybody is your parent.” In my community when a child has done something bad or is going to do something wrong, an adult usually intervenes. They will speak to the child or stop them from behaving badly, even if the adult is not the child’s parent. We would call these caring adults uncles or aunts, even if they were not relatives. This was considered a sign of respect. I was very happy living in this community.

### School in Somalia

My first school was a Koran school that I began attending at the age of four or five. This was a religious/spiritual school. At the age of seven, I began attending a “normal” school and entered Grade 1 (there wasn’t any kindergarten year). I attended school from Grade 1 to Grade 8. My parents had to pay a monthly tuition of about \$10. The primary school’s tuition was \$7 a month. All of my brothers and sisters also went to school. If you had a lot of kids, you were in trouble.



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\* To protect the participant’s privacy, pseudonyms have been used in this narrative.

## SOMALIA

### Bakaara Market

The Bakara Market (also known as Bakaara, *Suuqa Bakaaraha*) of Mogadishu is the largest open market in the nation. The Market is located in the heart of Mogadishu. The market was created in late 1972. Merchants and businesses sell everyday food essentials, gasoline, and medicine. During the Civil War, the market expanded significantly and became notorious for selling small arms and other weapons.

Bakara market has been the site of many violent incidents and events over the years, including the October 1993, Battle of Mogadishu (also known as The Battle of the Black Sea). It was in the market area that two American Black Hawk helicopters were downed which led to a fierce firefight that lasted the whole night. More recently, on May 14, 2011, heavy shelling hit the market resulting in at least 14 civilian casualties. Most of the civilians killed were women who were doing their shopping and a child was also killed.

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When I attended primary school, it was from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. When I attended junior high school, it was from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The subjects were taught in Arabic and Somali. I studied English in high school. The school year was from August to May and we attended for 5 ½ days a week, Saturday to Thursday, which was a half-day only. Friday is *jumu’ah* or “Friday prayer day” and was our day off. Boys and girls attended the same school. At first, the sexes were not separated but when the Islamists took control of the government, that changed. After that, the males and females were separated. This happened about the time when I was in junior high.



© Stuart Price/UN Photo. August 9, 2011. Mogadishu Market District Deserted. A woman walks through the deserted streets of Bakara Market in central Mogadishu, Somalia. Bakara was, up until 2011, a strategic stronghold of the Islamist group Al-Shabaab until their sudden withdrawal from the city overnight 5 August. Thousands of Burundian and Ugandan African Union troops, which support the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), now control over 90 percent of the city since Shabaab's retreat. CC License.<<https://www.flickr.com/photos/africa-renewal/6036306862/>>.

The school was a one-storey rectangular shaped building with primary grades on one side and junior high on the opposite side, with the school office at one end. The rooms are identified using the Somali alphabet rather than numbers. The school building was made of cement. The windows were opened to get cool air, because there was no air conditioning. There were just tables and chairs in the classrooms, no other equipment. The students learned from books or the teacher’s notes on the board. Not all the students had books because they weren’t able to afford them. They would copy the teacher’s notes into notebooks. There weren’t any handouts.

In my first school, there were 180 students with about 24 to 25 students in a class. When I was in junior high, the class size increased to about 30 to 34 students. We used to sit two or three students together at a cement table, attached to the ground. Students stayed in their classes and the teachers rotated. This was true of all the grades even in high school. If the classroom was filled with students, then the extra students would either go to another school or wait until the next semester to see if there was room. The school just had classroom spaces and we did not have any space for students to get together. If necessary, students could cross the city to go to another school. It really was based on first come, first served.

I did not like the teachers very much. I think that most of the teachers were rude and I couldn’t talk with them. Some of the teachers were very stupid and they were very hard on students. They tried to beat you. There were three incidents that stayed in my mind.

The first incident occurred when I was in high school. In the afternoon, there is a break at 3:00 p.m. followed with prayers at 3:15 p.m. One day, I was washing myself in preparation for prayers when a teacher came along who felt that I wasn't hurrying enough. The teacher told me that I should have been ready by that time. The teacher beat me with a very hard stick. I felt that the teacher had beaten me for nothing. My uncle was the vice-principal of the school and so I told him what had happened. My uncle told me that he would speak to the teacher.

Another incident involved the same teacher. I was writing an English exam and I had brought a math book into the exam room. When I am nervous I sweat a lot. The book had a plastic cover and I used the book to rest my hand on to keep the sweat off my exam paper. I told the teacher why I was using the book. The teacher didn't believe me and kicked me, hitting me in the kidney. That day I went to my uncle and my mother and told them that I wasn't going to that school anymore.

The third incident involved an issue about the payment of school fees. The school wanted me to pay for a month when I did not attend school and I was discussing the situation with the accountant. My math teacher overheard the conversation and reacted by taking a math book and slamming it against my face!

But not all teachers were bad. Some teachers were very good, very honest, and did their jobs well, teaching even when they were sick and advising students on life issues. The teachers controlled the whole school and they could do whatever they wanted.

Despite the physical punishment and the attitude of some teachers, I enjoyed going to school. My mother never had to wake me up for school. My favourite subject was geography. I was successful in my studies in spite of the relationships I had with some of my teachers. I only missed about two months of school when the war directly affected the city of Mogadishu. Before Canada, my dream was to attend university and help Somali kids by possibly becoming a teacher.



© Abdurrahman Warsameh/International Relations and Security Network. May 12, 2008. Students at Al-Khaliil Primary School, Mogadishu. Despite the shelling and pitched battles in the Somali capital, teachers, parents, and students are willing to risk life and limb for an education. CC Licence. <[www.lurvely.com/index.php?id=2492041906](http://www.lurvely.com/index.php?id=2492041906)>.



© M.Sheikh Nor/UNHCR. May 11, 2010. A Somali woman carries her belongings as she flees to safety in Mogadishu. <[www.unhcr.org/4be9651c6.html](http://www.unhcr.org/4be9651c6.html)>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

## Civil War and Conflict

Somalia achieved independence from Italy in 1960 and merged with the British protectorate of Somaliland to form the modern Somali Republic. Dissatisfaction with Barre's totalitarian regime in the 1980s led to the outbreak of the civil war in 1991 and overthrow of Barre's regime later that year. From this point on, Somalia became a divided nation with different groups and militias, competing for power. Since 1991, conflict and instability has continued in Somalia and the civil war has gone through three distinct phases.

**United Nations intervention (1992–1995):** The combined effects of the civil war and extreme drought conditions created a massive humanitarian crisis in Somalia. Early in 1992, estimates suggested that over half of the Somali population of 4.5 million people, were in severe danger of starvation and malnutrition-related disease. This resulted in the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) intervening in 1992 by sending forces to support humanitarian aid. Later, a United States led multinational Unified Task Force (UNITAF) was dispatched to ensure the protection of the relief efforts. The UN forces were withdrawn in March of 1995 as a result of opposition from several of the competing militias.

**Steps Towards a National Government and Ethiopian Intervention (2000–2009):** The early 2000s saw the first steps towards the establishment of national administration and government. These resulted in the creation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004. However, by 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), an Islamist coalition of militias, assumed control of much of the southern part of Somalia. The TFG fought to re-establish control over the territory with support from Ethiopian troops, African Union peacekeepers, and the United States of America. By the end of 2007, it had managed to drive out the rival ICU and resume its control over most of the country. However, some of the more radical elements of the ICU, including Al-Shabaab, regrouped to continue their fight against the TFG and the presence of Ethiopian military in Somalia. From 2007 to 2008, Al-Shabaab managed to again control many areas of central and southern Somalia. By 2008, the TFG together with several rebel groups agreed to a truce and formed a coalition government.

**Southern Somalia and Al-Shabaab (2009–present):** Presently, the war is concentrated in the south. This phase of the civil war started in early 2009 with fighting between The Federal Government of Somalia (with the support of African Union peacekeeping troops) and the forces of various militant Islamist factions led by Al-Shabaab. This phase of the war saw the continued presence of Ethiopian troops and the involvement of Kenya in support of TFG. The violence has displaced thousands of people in the southern part of the country.

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## Civil War

War changed my life. In times of war you don't worry about going to school. I witnessed many bloody days in Somalia that made me forget about school. Three of my brothers were persecuted and killed by Ethiopian soldiers. My father was put into jail, where he suffered a stroke due to the stress of the situation and lack of medical attention. He is a diabetic and has high blood pressure. As a result my father is now paralyzed from the stroke, unable to use one hand and one leg. I was also jailed at the age of 15 for three months.

In 2006, the nature of the war in Somali changed. It went from a being a civil war to a regional war that involved nearby countries and other international forces. It became a kind of global war. The Islamists militia (Al-Shabaab) began to take over the country and Mogadishu during this time. The United States got involved and supported those fighting the Militia. They sent East African troops into Somali to defeat the terrorists in Somalia and nearby region.

The situation was desperate during this time; 1.5 to 2 million people were killed. Everything broke down. There wasn't any police or military, no functioning government, no government schools, everything was

## *“You Don’t Know Who To Blame”*

### **War Crimes in Somalia**

“Civilians have borne the brunt of the fighting between the many parties to the Somali conflict: the TFG, al-Shabaab, AMISOM, the Ethiopian-supported pro-TFG militias Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama’a and Ras Kamboni, and Kenyan-supported militias. There have been serious violations of international humanitarian law (the laws of war) by the parties to the conflict, including indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas and infrastructure, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and summary killings.

Somalis fleeing from al-Shabaab-controlled areas reported widespread human rights abuses. Al-Shabaab continues to carry out public beheadings and floggings; forcibly recruits both adults and children into its forces; imposes onerous regulations on nearly every aspect of human behaviour and social life, and deprives inhabitants under its rule of badly needed humanitarian assistance, including food and water.

The population in areas controlled by the Transitional Federal Government and its allies has also been subjected to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. These include arbitrary arrest and detention, restrictions on free speech and assembly, and indiscriminate attacks harming civilians.

Somalis seeking safety in Kenya contend with police harassment, arbitrary arrests, and deportation back to Somalia. Somali refugees en route to the sprawling complex of refugee camps at Dadaab, Kenya, take hazardous back roads to avoid the Kenyan police and the official border post that until recently remained closed. They are then at the mercy of well-organized networks of bandits who engage in robbery and rape.”

From: Human Rights Watch, “You Don’t Know Who to Blame,” 14 August 2011, <[www.hrw.org/reports/2011/08/14/you-don-t-know-who-blame](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/08/14/you-don-t-know-who-blame)>.

private. The health care was so bad that if you had money and any type of significant health issue, you had to go out of the country to get the necessary care.

Things changed again in Somalia and another situation arose. Allies of the Somali Government intervened and 30,000 to 40,000 soldiers with tanks occupied the country. They were targeting the rebel

militia. The militia was not an army, it was civilian. They didn’t have a particular dress or military numbers. The militias did what El Qaida did. They bombed and they fought. It was very difficult for the soldiers to find the militias because they fought at night, wore civilian clothes and covered their faces. In the morning the soldiers would spread out in the district looking for young men who could be involved with the militia.



© S. Abdulle /UNHCR. February 9, 2009. Displacement in Somalia. Recent fighting in Mogadishu has sent thousands fleeing the capital for Lafole, where they set up a makeshift encampment near the 100-bed maternity hospital run by Dr. Howo Abdi. Dr. Abdi said that she had not seen such crowds since 1991 when the civil war toppled dictator Mohamed Siad Barre. Conditions at the encampment are rough with several people sick from dysentery. Here, IDPs haul water to their new temporary home. <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/3214421359>>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

## Somalis in Nairobi

Kenya and its capital city, Nairobi, hosts many Somali refugees and immigrants. Eastleigh district of Nairobi is inhabited primarily by Somalis. In the commercial sector of the district, many businesses are owned by the Somalis.

Kenyan Security Forces from time to time will carry out operations to identify and arrest Somali refugees without legal documents. In the last few years, the declaration of war by the Somali al-Shabaab militant group has heightened tensions and placed the Somali community in Kenya under greater scrutiny.

**Source:** *Somali Refugees in Eastleigh, Nairobi* by Manuel Herz, Published in: *Instant Cities*, (Ed.: Herbert Wright), Black Dog Publishing, 2008.



© Dan Kori. Somalis in Nairobi: Garissa Market, Eastleigh. CC License. <[https://www.flickr.com/photos/d\\_kori/8180074675/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/d_kori/8180074675/)>.

On one such morning raid, five male members of my family, including me, were captured by the Ethiopian soldiers. I was 15 years old at the time and I was the youngest of the group. I was taken to a Somali troop station.

We were separated. My three brothers were taken to the Ethiopian camp. My father was taken to the biggest Somali station. Each of us was unaware of where the others were. Those taken by Ethiopian soldiers were usually killed, tortured, or persecuted. One day the Ethiopian soldiers were attacked by the militia. Several Ethiopian soldiers died. As retaliation, the Ethiopian soldiers murdered all the prisoners inside their station. My three brothers were part of the group who were murdered on October 10, 2007. They were not involved in the militia. Beyond my immediate family, there were many more of my relatives who lost their lives.

I was freed thanks to the actions of my mother who paid \$100 for my release, which she collected from our relatives. My father was also eventually released because he had had a stroke and the soldiers didn't want to look after him. While in jail, I was sometimes interviewed by the soldiers. They wanted to get information about the militia from me but I didn't know anything. After I was released in the beginning of October, 2007, my family and I decided that I had to leave Somalia. I did so on October 15, 2007, just four days before my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday!

I was sent by my family to Kenya for my safety, but I had to travel alone.

I traveled from Mogadishu to the Kenyan border through southern Somalia. It was a difficult land to travel through. I didn't need to hide but, when I got to the Kenyan border, it was very risky. The soldiers make sure that they see you.

My path took me through Somali communities and villages on both sides of the border, as North East Kenya is called the Somali region because there are so many Somali people there.

I managed to cross from Somalia to Kenya safely, but I couldn't stay in that part of Kenya. I had to get to Nairobi. In Kenya I travelled by car at night, not often during daylight for safety reasons. I didn't have papers. So I had to hide and I couldn't go into a refugee camp. It was full of risk.

I stayed with my father's friend in Nairobi for a month. I felt like I had lost my freedom during this time. I was always hiding. I couldn't walk down the street at night because it was too risky. I could not take the chance of soldiers stopping and questioning me. I didn't have papers and I didn't have money to bribe the soldiers, if necessary. There was always the fear that I would be put in jail, possibly tortured, and called a terrorist. I stayed inside most of the time and during the day I was helped by my father's friend to complete documentation to immigrate to Canada.

I couldn't go to school during this time period. My memories of this period in my life are all bad. Kenyan people were nice but the Kenyan soldiers were not. They were too rude to strangers. They tortured and raped women even during the present day.

## Immigration to Canada

I was in Nairobi just before coming to Canada. I lived with my father's friend. I really didn't know anything specific about Canada. I just knew that it was a country that is safer than Somalia and Kenya. I knew that in Canada there was a chance for a better life and that I could build a future there, and that I could then help my family. In Canada I could build a new life.

I wanted to "open that window" that going to Canada allowed me to do. That was the image that I had. It also included the United States. I chose to come to Canada because my father's friend "sponsored" me as if I was his son. I travelled with my father's friend as far as Toronto but then I went on to Winnipeg. I did so because my father's friend thought it would be safer for me in Winnipeg

and I was not likely to have problems with the immigration people. My father's friend said that in Winnipeg I would get my immigration papers faster. My father, mother, and two sisters were forced to remain behind. They couldn't get out because it was too risky to travel by foot, by car or truck. The only way they could get out of Somalia was by airplane, but there was no money for them to do so, and I was not able to help them. But even then, it would have been very risky for them.

When I arrived in Canada, the only person I knew and my only friend was my sponsor, my father's friend in Toronto.

## Starting a New Life in Canada

I was 16 years old when I immigrated to Canada. I arrived in Winnipeg on December 12, 2007, and so my first impression of Canada is that it is a very cold place. The snow was piled up high in hills. I was not expecting hills of snow and wondered how the snow became hills. There was a lot of snow that winter. There was a 40 degree difference between the temperature in Winnipeg and Kenya and Somalia. I was not dressed for the weather.

Since I came to Canada under "different" circumstances, when I arrived in Winnipeg, my first step was to approach the local Somali community for help. The president of the community at that time took me to Welcome Place. Welcome Place gave me a place to live, food, and

sent me to Family Services. They also assigned me a legal guardian who was a counsellor at Welcome Place. She helped me with my finances, gave me advice, and took me to social events. She helped me a lot and she helped fill the empty spot that was created when I left my family in Somalia.

I am very thankful for the help I received from Welcome Place. I met my friend Mada, who is also Somali and had also worked at Welcome Place. Mada helped me a lot too. He shared his room with me, until he moved out a few months later after he got married.

Now that I have been here for a while, the thing I like best about being in Canada is that I feel safe right now.



© J.Ndua/UNHCR. June 11, 2007. Members of the popular Waayaha Cusub band outside the video rental business that they run in Nairobi's Eastleigh district to raise funds for their operating costs. <[www.unhcr.org/466d68fa4.html](http://www.unhcr.org/466d68fa4.html)>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

## Back to School in the World's Largest Refugee Camp

The new academic year got under way in September 2011 in the world's largest refugee camp complex, with some 43,000 Somali children turning up for classes at Dadaab in north-east Kenya.

Education in Dadaab is a luxury denied to most of the children who live there. Set up at the outset of Somalia's civil war in 1991 to accommodate 90,000 refugees, three camps near the northeastern Kenyan town of Dadaab—Hagadera, Ifo, and Dagahaley—are now home to more than 5 times that number, and persistent conflict in Somalia, from where 95 percent of the refugees originate, means the population grows daily. In 2012, the refugee population there was close to 470,000.

Some, particularly those who have arrived in the last three months, are going to school for the first time. But enrolment rates among the estimated 156,000 children of school age are relatively low in Dadaab's camps, which have 19 primary schools and 6 secondary schools. In addition, there are 11 private, fee-paying primary and six secondary schools.

According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the primary school attendance rate is 43 percent while in secondary schools the rate is just 12 percent.



© S. Perham/UNHCR. September 2011. First day of school for Somali refugees at the new Ifo 2 Primary School in Dadaab, Kenya. <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/6119723672/>>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

I like the diversity that I see in the population. I like living with different people. In Somalia everyone knows everyone. If you go from one corner to another corner everyone welcomes you and treats you like family. Someone will know your uncle or dad by name in other parts of the country. I could connect with people I met because they were somehow connected to a relative. In Somalia everyone is Somali. It's like they are one big tribe. This makes them too close. But here in Winnipeg living among different people and from different communities, everyone is very happy to be with others. They are very helpful, and very

welcoming. They are all very happy to be here. Canada is a good place to be.

But there are some things that I do not like about living in Winnipeg and Canada. These are the weather and the geographic location (I miss swimming in the Indian Ocean a couple of times a week), and the loneliness. I miss my family greatly. I have friends who help me, but not as much as I sometimes need and they can't replace my family. It's not the same. It is not good to live alone, and have all these memories of my parents and sisters and missing them all the time.

I am pleased that I have been able to give something back to the Somali community in Winnipeg. At one point I was invited to share an apartment with a young man who also

was a refugee and was here by himself, and a third person, Ali, a Somali. It was Ali who introduced me to the Winnipeg Somali



Youth organization. Ali is no longer involved with the organization, but I am. I have been given the responsibility of being the organizer/coordinator for the organization. Ali also introduced me to the community and the soccer team. The relationship with Ali has proved to be very good for me. I easily made many good friends through the organization.

I am one of the founders of the Winnipeg Somali Youth League and I got involved in sports, particularly soccer through the organization. This involvement helped me to build confidence, to develop many good friendships, and it has made me happy. I volunteer in the community and help Somali youth stay in the school by encouraging them to continue their education and helping them recognize the importance of education over money. We also do a lot of fundraising through bingos and social events.

My adjustment to living in Canada was helped a lot by my involvement in the Somali community, being supported by Welcome Place, playing soccer, and the moral support I receive from my family from their twice monthly phone calls. Also, I have had a fairly stable home. I didn't move a lot, because I don't like moving!

I was very scared when I first came to Canada. But the Somali people are very strong. I was advised when I left Somalia to be careful and to try not to lose my identity. However, when I came to Canada I realized that people respect my culture and that I can live freely as a Somali Canadian. When I went to court for my immigration hearing to obtain permanent resident status, I found that I was more than welcome here. The immigration officer told me that he knows that Somalia is going through a dark period at this time. He recognized that there were few opportunities for me. There was

no place for me in Somalia. The officer recognized that I, Bandiri, was seeking a chance for a life and he told me that I was more than welcome to stay here in Canada. The immigration officer talked to the school that I was attending and he asked questions about my life. As a result I was given permanent resident status. And now, at the time of the interview, I am preparing for my Canadian citizenship test, which will test my knowledge of the history of Canada and my competency in English, among other things.

### *School in Canada*

I attended a junior/senior high school in the southwestern part of the city of Winnipeg. I call it the star school. I had just arrived and was 16 at the time. I was first placed in Grade 9. Initially my timetable included some junior high subjects, Grade 9 Math, Physical Education, and EAL classes. In second semester I had some Grade 9 and Grade 10 courses. I was placed partly in regular programming and partly in EAL. Three out of five classes I attended were in the EAL program which involved English, math, and social studies, so this was approximately 60% of my day.

The EAL program had an EAL teacher and an educational assistant (EA). There were approximately 12 students in the program but the class numbers would fluctuate throughout the year. The EAL teacher and the EA helped a lot. They did more than teach the contents of the textbooks. They would help in many other ways. They helped me deal with Family Services; they helped with my family situation; they encouraged me to study; they worked hard to develop a relationship with each student; they encouraged us to talk about our feelings; they worked hard at building their

students' hope and encouraged us to think and dream about our futures.

This was quite different from my experiences with teachers when I attended school in Somalia. In Somalia, there wasn't any discussion of personal feelings or family matters. There was a distance between the teachers and the students. It was all about discipline.



**Keinan Abdi Warsame** (also known as **K'naan**) is a Somali Canadian poet, rapper, singer, songwriter, and instrumentalist. One of his biggest hits and one that gained him a world presence was his single "Wavin' Flag," which was chosen as Coca-Cola's promotional anthem for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Besides hip-hop, K'naan's sound is influenced by elements of Somali and world music. He is also involved in various philanthropic initiatives, including WE Day.

© David Shankbone/Wikimedia Commons. April 22, 2010. K'naan at Tribeca Film Festival 2010. Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K'naan>>.

In my school in Winnipeg, the EAL teacher and EA invited the students to their homes and encouraged the students to be close to them. They were more than just teachers. They used to bring their own children to school to talk with the EAL students about attending university, and the way of life in Canada. The EAL teacher and EA were able to help me learn and to adjust to the school.

The “regular” teachers were very helpful as well. They would ask me about my life before coming to Canada. They offered help and asked me how they could help me. They had a great deal of respect for me. Eventually, I became very well-known in the school. The teachers were very pleased to have me as a student. I was voted the most valuable player for soccer by the teachers.

While going to school, I had to work. I worked three nights a week from 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. on Thursday to Saturday. I used to go to school every day at 8:00 a.m. but my attendance became erratic. But the teachers let me be because I would always do my homework even if I handed it in late. They understood that I needed to work and so they were lenient with me, because they could see that I was trying very hard. But, there was one teacher who scared me. This was the Grade 10 Pre-Calculus Math teacher who was always quite serious. But, she allowed me to hand in assignments late because she knew that I was trying. She also gave all the EAL students more time on exams.

The school program and all the support I received really met most of my needs. However, I believe that more EAs are needed in the regular classes to support EAL students.

During the first two years at the school, I found it difficult to get to know the regular (non-EAL) students. By the third year, it was much easier and I had many friends among the regular students. I met some of them through playing soccer and others in my non-EAL classes. They discovered that I was very friendly and I had friends who came from many backgrounds, not just Somali.

I graduated from high school in June 2011, four years after I arrived. I liked being in school in Canada because I believe that education is the passport to the future. And, I know that I have to prepare for that future today. I want to get that passport!

## Life Today and Hopes for the Future

My family was finally able to leave Somalia and they are now living in Kampala, Uganda since March 2010. I have started the process of sponsoring them to Canada. In the meantime, I send \$300-\$400 a month to help support them. I am excited about being reunited with them soon. This will mean a lot to me.



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provide youth with a video-making project that explores their experiences and features their voices in navigating in their new environment and the challenges they face. Artists, Jim Agapito and Ervin Chartrand, worked with the IRCOM youth over an extended period and a project emerged that reflected an artistic style and content that was relevant to the youth. Wab Kinew and Dammecia Hall joined the filmmakers (mentoring the youth in hip hop music and dance) as well as other artists to create a high quality rap video and documentary of the process. IRCOM youth decided what they wanted to say and in what way, making their video unique and personal, as well as an often universal expression of life in a new land.

The youth of IRCOM who wrote the music and performed in the films were: Azim Bekhodjavea, Takatel (T.K.) Dayasa, Dagmawit Fekede, Mandela Garang, Mohamed (M.D.) Mohamed, Musa (D.P.) Mohamed, Daniel Ogbagirgis, Biniom Tesfaldet, and Jamshaid Wahabi.

Live from 95 video: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3amrAKEpwol>>

Life from 95 Documentary Part 1: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6op3KQMjW0>>

Life from 95 Part 2: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sv1qQaPBA3w>>

## Life from 95

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba Inc. (IRCOM) is located at 95 Ellen Street in downtown Winnipeg. It is a transitional housing complex that is the first home in Canada for many newly arrived refugees and immigrants. In addition to housing, IRCOM delivers social and recreation programs.

On average, 300 people live at IRCOM of which more than 50% are under the age of 18, thus youth programming is an important part of the services provided. IRCOM's youth program through the Winnipeg Arts Council's *With Art Program* was able to



**Shadya Yasin** is a teacher who was born around 1984 in Somalia. She later lived in Tanzania and Kenya, before emigrating to Canada in 1998 while in her teens. She is presently working toward a Masters in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Yasin is an active community member and, since 2008, she has been the network coordinator for the York Youth Coalition, in Toronto. She has recently been named as one of the People to Watch by the Toronto Star. <[www.thestar.com/news/gta/2012/12/30/people\\_to\\_watch\\_shadya\\_yasin.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2012/12/30/people_to_watch_shadya_yasin.html)>.

© Awesome Mohamed/Wikimedia Commons. September 20, 2011. Somali social activist Shadya Yasin. CC License. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shadyasin1.jpg>>.

Presently, I have taken some time off from my studies. I did this because I have to prepare and to look at my situation. I need to consider my family, scholarships and loans available, and how to start university in the best way. This is my preparation year.

I have found work at the university that I plan to attend and I am getting to know the layout of the university, where the classes are held, and who the professors are. My friend Mada has helped me find information about various financial resources to help me attend university. I am planning to apply for Opportunity Funding. I am interested in studying international development and conflict resolution. I hope to finish as soon as I can in completing a double major degree. When I begin my university program, during the summer months I would like to work with one of the United Nation agencies that work with the refugee people of the world, and especially the children in East Africa. I want to help these children.

My hopes for the future are good. I am mostly satisfied with my life and experiences in Canada and my prospects for the future. Canada is the only option that I have to help myself, my family today, and my family in the future. Living in Canada has given me the chance to get an education, and the government helps us do so. But I recognize that by being given this opportunity, it is important that I give something back to Canada and Canadians. I hope to do this by being active, participating in the Somali-Canadian community, and the Canadian community at large. I just want to thank all the people who have helped me and others like me.



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**Muuxi Adam** is a former economics student at the University of Winnipeg and one of University's first Opportunity Fund students. In 2012, he was a recipient of the Annual Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award. Muuxi arrived in Winnipeg in 2004 as a teenage refugee from Somalia, struggling to

overcome the effects of working 16-hour days without pay in a garage fixing cars. Since his arrival in Winnipeg, he has been dedicated to helping other refugees. At one point, he was employed as the After School Program Coordinator at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba. Currently, he is the Newcomer Community Development Coordinator for Aurora Family Therapy Centre. A few years ago Muuxi helped to found Humankind International which, in the spring of 2014, opened a new pre-school in Dagahaley Camp.



© D. Mwancha/UNHCR. Somali children at the pre-school in Dagahaley Humankind International. <[www.unhcr.org/5321ae6a9.html](http://www.unhcr.org/5321ae6a9.html)>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

He is a community leader who is passionate about working with youth and their families and is also a filmmaker who produced "Ray of Hope" an inspiring documentary of courage and luck. "Ray of Hope is a positive and hopeful film that uses stories to go beyond the borders of ethnicity and age to address those issues we hold in common—

family, personal dignity, and community responsibility." said the National Film Board of Canada's Joe MacDonald, who acted as a mentor on the film. See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Rb-lwi5Utg>> for a video on Muuxi's work with IRCOM.

## VIDEO RESOURCES

See [Caution Concerning the Use of Resources about War and Refugee Experiences](#).

### **The Conflict in Somalia**

*Somalia Refugees* by Journeyman Pictures is a documentary covering the history of the conflict since 1991 and the challenges that Somalians face in surviving in such trying conditions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOdFq69itQ4>

*Somalia: caught in the war of Mogadishu* and *War in Mogadishu* by FRANCE 24 English, are two videos that provide information about the conflict in southern Somali in the 2009–2010 period.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUO4Pe9503Q>  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y\\_tFQ6kOVY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y_tFQ6kOVY)

*This is Somalia* by International Rescue Committee: “The International Rescue Committee’s Peter Biro reports on the crisis in Somalia, a country devastated by conflict and the worst drought in 60 years. As a result of the violence, hundreds of thousands of people are displaced inside Somalia with little access to humanitarian aid. Learn how the IRC is helping uprooted families survive.”

[www.rescue.org/video/somalia](http://www.rescue.org/video/somalia)

*Conflict in Somalia: a young member of the militia* by BBC Learning Zone: “A report following a young boy, Muktar, who is a member of a militia group in the Somali capital.”

[www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/conflict-in-somalia-a-young-member-of-the-militia/3227.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/conflict-in-somalia-a-young-member-of-the-militia/3227.html)

### **Somalian Refugees and Experiences**

*Somali Refugees in Kenya—Hawa’s Story* by MSF South Africa: “Hawa, a young Somali woman who has fled the civil war, talks about the violence she has escaped and the realities of her life as a refugee.”

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_kNylg4\\_-Tw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kNylg4_-Tw)

*Somali Refugees: Camps in Crisis* by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): “UNHCR faces a major challenge in finding solutions for newly arrived Somalia refugees in Kenya.”

<http://unhcr.org/v-49be1e262>

### **Somalian Diaspora**

*Mustafa Ahmed 12 Spoken Word Artist Somali Toronto Canada* by M.J.G is a moving and thought-provoking video of a performance of a young Somalian Canadian artist.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_qCc8CppZbg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qCc8CppZbg)

*Integration TV—Episode 2: Somali-Canadian Community and Education* by INTEGRATIONTV, is a City TV programme focusing on the Somalian Canadian Community. This programme focuses on education including an initiative by the Toronto District School Board to help Somalian students succeed that became controversial.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFHKVU9X9jc>

*Canadian Somalis in Alberta Parts 1–3* by Global TV is a series that looks at violence in the Somalian community in Alberta.

Part 1:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=L16j1sckC-Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L16j1sckC-Y)

Part 2:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2owKOYEXtKg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2owKOYEXtKg)

Part 3:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HGLpd2bJss](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HGLpd2bJss)

*Civil War Kids: Young Somalis in Minnesota* by MPRdotOrg: “This is a glimpse into the stories of young Somalis confronting violence in their new communities, struggling with the psychological scars that the bloodshed in their homeland left behind and building stronger relationships in the process.”

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3r6DmYlp2o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3r6DmYlp2o)

A series of videos about the Somalian-Canadian artist, K’naan

- *Somali Success Story* by garoowe74  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQiro2luFjQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQiro2luFjQ)
- *Shameless Idealists—K’naan* by freethechildrenintl  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wm0ILGsozBY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wm0ILGsozBY)
- *K’naan explains how Islam shaped his giving* by The Globe and Mail  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LRs\\_14HNxl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LRs_14HNxl)
- *K’naan—Wavin’ Flag (Coca-Cola Celebration Mix)* by Knaan VEVO  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTJSt4wP2ME](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTJSt4wP2ME)
- *Knaan Goes Back To Somalia* by CEO CidPro Tv  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wqXsLzoFgQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wqXsLzoFgQ)