

Media Release
June 20, 2016

Hope and Courage at TAFE Queensland North

Pascasia Nyirashaka cried a river of tears when she was reunited with the son she thought was dead.

“When my son, Dennis, arrived at the Cairns airport I just sobbed and I hugged him so tight,” she said.

Their reunion came 15 years after they were separated when the Rwandan Civil War reached their doorstep in 1994.

Ms Nyirashaka thought Dennis and another son had died in the mayhem.

“I now know Dennis survived, but I still don’t know what happened to my other son, Joseph, who also became lost,” she said.

After years of life in refugee camps, losing her husband to illness, beatings and robberies, Ms Nyirashaka made the bold decision to try and leave.

“It was a long process but I could not believe it when I was told that I was coming to live a new life in Australia. It was a huge sigh of relief and I was very, very excited,” Ms Nyirashaka said.

She arrived in Cairns in 2010 with five children.

Meanwhile, her son, Dennis Bemeliki was raised by another couple, who kept his past a secret from him.

“The people I called mum and dad were not my biological parents, it was a real shock when I eventually found out,” he said.

Not long after arriving in Australia, Ms Nyirashaka met a man at church who told her he had recently holidayed in Africa and had seen a boy who looked exactly like her.

“I thought, maybe it is one of my sons, I must try and find him,” she said.

She eventually tracked Dennis down and he moved to Cairns in 2014.

He got a part-time job at a local bakery, two weeks after arriving.

“When Dennis moved here, I told him he needed to find a job straight away so he could have his own spending money and take responsibility of his new life in Australia,” Ms Nyirashaka said.

Mr Bemeliki is a student of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

It is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training and is offered at TAFE Queensland North.

Ms Nyirashaka also took part in the AMEP to improve her English and she now works in childcare.

Mr Bemeliki expects to complete his English studies later this year.

“When I came to Australia my English was not as good as it is now. The teachers at TAFE are great, they have been very helpful,” he said.

Mr Bemeliki has his sights set on a career in health care, he wants to gain a Diploma in Nursing through TAFE Queensland North and use the qualification as a stepping stone to enrol at university.

“I recently left my job at the bakery and I currently work in housekeeping but ever since I was a young boy I have wanted to be a nurse.

“My mother who raised me was always sick. It hurt me to see her in pain and crying.

“It made me very angry that she did not have access to good health care and so I decided that I wanted to help people and to make them feel better,” he said.

Mr Bemeliki and Ms Nyirashaka are sharing their story of hope and courage to mark Refugee Week.

Mr Bemeliki and other past and present students are taking part in the TAFE Queensland North Hope and Courage Art Exhibition, which will officially be opened by Cairns Mayor, Bob Manning on June 21.

The display will feature students’ first-hand accounts of what life was like as a refugee, their contributions to the Cairns community and their aspirations for the future.

Mr Bemeliki said he is looking forward to the event.

“The thing I enjoy most about living in Cairns is the friendliness of the people, they are very helpful and it is very multi-cultural here, it is amazing.

“I think the exhibition is a great idea, it gives people the chance to share their thoughts and cultures with others,” he said.

The public is welcome to tour the TAFE Queensland North Hope and Courage Art Exhibition in K Block, via the Eureka Street entrance from midday on June 21. It will remain open to the public until midday on June 24.

The media is invited for filming, photographic and interview opportunities. The attached image is of Dennis Bemeliki at TAFE Queensland North.

Where: TAFE Queensland North Cairns campus, K Block

When: Tuesday, June 21 at 10:30am – 11:00am

Media Contact: Sarah Weir 4042 2746 or 0408 746 747

Further information:

About the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

The AMEP provides up to 510 hours of free English language tuition to eligible migrants from the skilled, family and humanitarian visa streams, to help them learn English to assist with their settlement in Australia.

The AMEP is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. In Queensland, the AMEP is delivered through TAFE Queensland. For more information please visit tafeqld.edu.au/tells.