

Project Refuge

Client Profile: “Dalal” from Somalia

*The following true story is presented as an example of the plight endured by refugees who can benefit from Project Refuge services. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect client confidentiality. **Warning:** The descriptions of hardship and persecution suffered by client families may include graphic violence.*

Dalal is a 24 year-old married man from Somalia, with no children. He speaks three languages: Somali, English and Italian. While Dalal’s smile is bright and his manner is pleasant – he admits that his cheerful exterior is a façade. He carries a burden of deep sadness and worry, explaining, “As a man, I cannot show emotions, but inside I am very hurt and sad.”

Dalal grew up in Mogadishu. He lived with his father and mother, and is the oldest of nine children. Prior to the fall of the government, his father worked as a surveyor and his mother was a housewife. Dalal describes their family life as peaceful. They had their own home, a good life, suffered no clan-based discrimination, and got along well with neighbors. As a child Dalal was very sociable, loved to play soccer and had many friends who would often gather at his home for food and games. However, after attending pre-school, Dalal’s pleasant family life was disrupted by the outbreak of civil war.

When the Somali government collapsed in 1991, the majority tribe immediately began targeting minority groups, and the family’s clan became vulnerable to persecution, assault, torture and murder. His father’s job vanished. One day, out of the blue, men from the majority tribe burst into their home and robbed Dalal’s family of their money, clothing, cars and gold. They beat Dalal’s parents with a pistol. When his 18 year-old Aunt tried to protect her brother, she was raped. Dalal witnessed all of this.

The family fled Mogadishu. In their new area they had little food and no clean water. But over time, Dalal was able to attend a private school for language and math, where he learned English and Italian. He received honors, and was chosen as a paid Teaching Assistant. He was very pleased that his paycheck could help his family.

In 2008 the war continued to rage on. The majority tribe was forcibly recruiting young men to join their ranks and fight. Four armed men came to Dalal’s house and insisted that the oldest son go with them or be killed. When Dalal overheard the demands of the armed intruders, he jumped out of the window and fled to a friend’s house. His father was there and advised Dalal to leave the country. He has not seen his father since that day.

Dalal’s uncle sold his house to raise money for Dalal’s escape from the country. He traveled for seven months to reach the US border. When he arrived he was detained and imprisoned pending the outcome of his appeal for political asylum. He was allowed to call his mother, and learned that she has no idea of his father whereabouts, or if he is dead or alive.

Dalal describes a deep and painful sense of powerlessness about the situation in Somalia and the tragic struggle that his family has endured. When innocent people are targeted, “There is no government to protect you and nothing you can do,” he says. Despite this hardship and uncertainty, Dalal has remarkable resilience and coping skills. He is deeply lonely, but gives his all to his responsibilities. He remains proud that he was the breadwinner for his family after they fled their home in Mogadishu. He worked hard to earn his position as a Teaching Assistant, and enjoyed helping others learn. “I’ve been working since I was 16—I like to put all my effort into things—I’m used to big efforts—and I really enjoy helping others,” he says with enthusiasm.

Dalal loves his family, and has hope that they will be re-united. He finds strength in his religious faith, remains optimistic and stays focused on his goal of freedom.

The mission of Project Refuge is to facilitate a transition to social and financial independence for refugees from Somalia and East Africa who have suffered extreme violence, torture and persecution in their homelands; by providing safe, comfortable housing and centralized access to a network of supportive community services.

For further information visit www.projectrefuge.org

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