

Heritage Munyakuri's story



As a young boy, Heritage loved to watch airplanes cross the sky. At the first sound of the engine roaring above, he would drop to the ground, lying flat on his back until nothing but a white streak remained. From his mountaintop village in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he imagined the world beyond. “I wondered, where are those planes going?” Years later, he too would fly, to the other side of the globe.

Heritage endured a childhood of war, in which he was snatched up to serve as a child soldier for rebel groups — three times. Twice he was forced to fight; the third time he refused to pick up a gun. “I told them to kill me, I won’t fight. I had found Jesus.” His captors tried to coerce him, delivering vicious daily lashings. But he held firm, sticking to his faith. His resolve finally set him free, but not for long. One unthinkable night, he saw his loved ones, his tribe, his entire world, go up in flames, when his people were massacred by rebels wielding machetes, torches, and guns.

He could have emerged a furious person. Instead, he changed his fate.

His journey took him to Rochester, New York, where he saw his first snowfall and carved out a new life. He became a pastor and now runs his own church, where he welcomes refugees and immigrants. When they land, disoriented and displaced, he uses his own experience to help them adapt. As America fights with itself over whether to close its doors to refugees, Heritage’s story is a powerful reminder of what can happen when those doors remain open.

Heritage likes to say that he is the product of New Hope Free Methodist Church, who showed him how welcome refugees with love. The investment made by the church “will carry me for a lifetime.”

Heritage now works as Church Mobilizer for World Relief Western NY, whose mission is “to empower the local church to serve the most vulnerable.” World Relief longs to see more churches join this movement to welcome refugee and other immigrants, just like New Hope did for Heritage.

Together, we can build a welcoming community.

Yam Lamgadey's story



Yam was born in Chirang, Bhutan in 1978. He loved school and studied until 4th grade. Life was beautiful and happy.

In 1989, the Bhutanese government introduced the "one nation, one people, one rule" policy. This policy sought to promote a homogenous national identity and culture, but it came at the expense of the Nepalese ethnic community. The government began to crack down, and the situation soon escalated into a full-blown crisis. In dereliction of human rights, Nepalese were forcefully evicted by the government. "I am a product of the political turmoil that engulfed the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s."

As the government's campaign of repression intensified, many Nepalese were tortured, raped, imprisoned, and evicted. "We were among thousands who had to flee Bhutan." With his parents and five siblings, Yam escaped to Nepal in 1992 at the age of 14.

"Our journey was fraught with danger. We crossed mountains and forests, avoiding patrols and other hazards. When we finally arrived in Nepal, we found ourselves in a refugee camp. Life was a daily struggle, with limited resources and no certainty about our future." Despite the difficulties, they managed to keep their spirits up. Yam continued his education in the camp, got married to Lachi, and welcomed their daughter Simran. In 2010, after 18 years of waiting, they were finally granted resettlement in the U.S., an opportunity to start a new chapter.

When his family arrived in Rochester, "we were lost and overwhelmed by the new culture and system." He is forever grateful to Catholic Family Center (CFC), the resettlement agency that welcomed him, for their unwavering support during the difficult transition. It was not easy, but Yam worked hard to build a new home for his family.

Eventually, he realized that there were many refugees who needed the kind of support he received. "As a proud graduate of SUNY Brockport, I was eager to give back to my new homeland, especially refugees who were going through the same struggles that my family and I had faced."

Yam joined World Relief Western NY as a Resettlement Specialist in February 2022. "Every time I welcome a refugee at the airport, I am reminded of the day my family and I arrived. I know firsthand how daunting it can be to start a new life in a foreign country."

He is grateful every day to be part of an organization that is committed to serving the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in our world. "Despite the challenges non-native English speakers and people from different ethnic backgrounds face, we can always believe in them and encourage them to grow."

Join World Relief Western NY as we walk alongside our new neighbors like Yam and give them opportunities to share their talents and enrich our communities!