

JAKIN'S JOURNEY

Jakin Gerushom, originally from Uganda, recently graduated from Rhode Island College with a bachelor's degree in social work (BSW). We spoke with Jakin about his accomplishments and who he feels contributed to his success. Jakin says, "The Refugee Dream Center advocated on behalf of all refugees, including myself to ensure our rights are protected and that we have access to the resources and services we need to thrive in a new environment. The agency also connected me to my sponsors Kate and Ora who sponsored my college education." Jakin says he met Kate and Ora through Dr. Omar Bah, the Co-founder and Director of Programs. Through this relationship, Kate and Ora were able to sponsor Jakin's college education.

Kate Gillis, one of Jakin's sponsors, said she was originally connected to the Refugee Dream Center through a newsletter article that had the Refugee Dream Center listed. Kate states that she ended up researching the Refugee Dream Center and saw that the center had a public wish list. On this wish list was a knitting machine, a very specific knitting machine that was added to the wish list per Jakin's mother's request. Jakin's mother had learned how to knit while she was in the refugee camp. Seeing how Kate also enjoyed arts and crafts, she figured she would try her best to find this specific knitting machine for Jakin's mother. Kate was able to find this specific knitting machine for Jakin's mother via eBay and purchased it for her.

Dr. Omar Bah reached out to Kate to let her know that Jakin's mother was so thankful and wanted to meet Kate. That is how Kate originally got connected to Jakin and his family. Kate says that eventually she got involved with the entire family. She was not only helping with teaching Jakin's mother how to speak English, but she was also spending time with Jakin's siblings as well. Kate says, "I had a wonderful time with the family."

Ora Wry, Jakin's other sponsor, read Dr. Omar Bah's biography and felt inspired by his story. Ora then found out that Jakin and his family also had to flee from their country. Ora felt as though, there was no better way than to work with a family that needs help and decided to get involved with Jakin's family to help in any way she could. Ora saw Jakin's devotion to work and family and was very impressed. Ora felt as though if Jakin can do so well in high school, then he can also excel in college. Ora says, "That goes for helping all students. When I taught, I used to look at them and say they got a lot going for them. Sometimes they need resources from another source." Ora wanted to make a difference not only in Jakin's life but also in the lives of any refugee looking to obtain a higher education. Ora then was able to establish the Dr. Omar Bah and Teddi Jallow Scholarship Fund for Refugees. This scholarship is available for the support of Rhode Island College to award scholarships for students who



Jakin wanted to get his driver's license and Kate was readily available to help in any way she could. Kate took Jakin to the Community College of Rhode Island in Warwick to take the courses he needed for his license. At that time, Kate and Jakin also toured the college just to see what college was about. Jakin was very excited about the idea of going to college. Later, Jakin decided to continue his education and began taking classes at CCRI. Kate says, "I helped Jakin get his books for CCRI and I tried to help in any way I could." After taking some classes at CCRI, Jakin decided to continue to pursue his education at Rhode Island College. Although Jakin applied for financial aid, things took a turn when Jakin's family decided to move to Ohio that same summer, which left Jakin with nowhere to stay. At this point, Jakin's only option was to live on campus, but due to financial circumstances, this was not possible. Kate and Ora were then able to sponsor his room and board so Jakin could attend RIC full-time.

We asked Kate and Ora, "What advice would you give to someone looking to sponsor a community member?" Kate says, "I would say they should expect to learn a lot. Learn from the person you are helping. You will change because of this experience." Helping a community member achieve something as big as obtaining a higher education can be a life-changing experience for someone. Ora says, "Well, I think the most important thing is to get to know the individual the best you can. Once you see that you are not imposing, you will see the value and worth. You help them discover their self-worth and value."

We asked Jakin, "What advice would you give another community member in regard to obtaining a higher education?" Jakin says "I would tell them to remember that obtaining a higher education is not just about acquiring knowledge and skills but also about personal development, self-discovery, and preparing for a fulfilling and meaningful future. Stay motivated, stay curious, and stay committed to your goals, and you'll be well on your way to success." We are so proud of Jakin and all his accomplishments, and we cannot wait to see all the great things Jakin will do in the future.