

## RE-INTEGRATE - The Text

The text below was created in collaboration with four members of the refugee / asylum-seeker community living in Coventry. Every line below was written by the person who says it collected over a number of exercises, and they were then brought together by Paul O'Donnell.

Re-integrate became three short videos which will be presented as part of Coventry Creates digital exhibition in September 2020, and a gallery exhibition in 2021. It is presented in both English and Arabic.

### Chapter 1: The Home I Happened To Be Born Into

Ahmad: Their names are Ahmad,

Sozdar: Sozdar

Harry: Harry

Aya: And Aya

Harry: And they were born in Iraq,

Aya and Sozdar: ...Syria,

Ahmad: ...and Egypt

Aya: When I tell this story I will not say "once upon a time". Because it is not meant to be a fairytale.

Harry: It is also not a horror story,

Ahmad: it is a story of hope,

Sozdar: of change...

Harry: And a noble Avengers style quest for safety and peace. It starts like this...

Aya: In the beginning there was war.

Ahmad: There were military coups

Sozdar: There were a lack of rights for Kurdish mothers

Aya: And for their daughters.

Harry: There were death threats arriving in the post every week.

Ahmad: And a 2 year prison sentence without a crime.

Harry: There were bombings and shootings.

Ahmad: There was a lack of democracy.

Aya: She was wrapped in chains which entangled her soul and life. These chains were called traditions and customs. But she would not call them that.... to her they were a poison which killed life's pleasure.

Ahmad: He had to wake up in his prison cell for 2 years having committed no crime, without seeing light, in addition to seeing another human being. It was cruel, and he suffered greatly until his life was almost over. There is no death more catastrophic than destroying the dreams of the people.

Sozdar: Her dreams ended when her family decided that she would marry the first man to propose to her. She spent her life with this man as if she were in prison, a small hopeless insect which deserved to be crushed. She spent her life with him deprived of all her rights, even the small ones. She carried on for the sake of the children. She sacrificed her youth and happiness for them.

Harry: He was 17 when he first had a gun aimed at him. He was 17 when he received his first death threat. He was 17 when his father passed away and he couldn't save the man he looked up to. For all of these, he was still just a child.

Sozdar: These places they called 'home' were no longer safe.

Ahmad: And safety is the most important thing in the world. When you are safe you can do anything.

## Chapter 2: Our Constantly Changing World

Harry: Did you know that our planet rotates at 460 meters per second. It's strange how we start somewhere and one second later we all end up somewhere completely different.

Sozdar: The world around us changes every year, every month, every day, every hour, every second. The world doesn't stop changing.

Ahmad: And after years of oppression, fear or imprisonment, their world finally changed for the better.

Harry: He received a call from the UN immigration centre telling him he was accepted in the UK.

Sozdar: The UN immigration centre saying "would you like to travel to Britain?"

Aya: Hope was born at that moment again for her. Dreams started again. Happiness and joy began defining her life once more.

Ahmad: Who would have imagined that after so long in this terrible waiting game, the decision to approve his application for asylum would come.

Aya: She waited for the big day when she could travel, this time not to the unknown. She knew this time where she was heading – a place of safety and peace. Where she will be at ease. She was coming to the land of freedom, culture, knowledge and love.

Harry: He was just happy that he would finally leave this hell.

Ahmad: He escaped from his country and bid it farewell.

Aya: As she travelled to the UK she felt like every tear that she had ever shed had fallen into the sea and created the waves carrying her to this new place, this new country, this new culture.

Sozdar: This was the start of their great journey to Britain. A place which she imagined as a loving mother who would hug her on arrival, a homeland for those who had no homes, an ID for those who had no right to one before.

Aya: When she crossed the border to this new land the 14 year old she was before died and she was born again. In this moment she found herself a new name: refugee.

### Chapter 3: A loving mother's hug.

Sozdar: I imagined the UK as a mother hugging me on arrival, a homeland for those who had no homes, an ID for those who had no right to one before.

Ahmad: ...where peace and love is the only language.

Harry: Before I arrived, all I really knew about England was... Sherlock Holmes.

Aya: After I arrived happiness never left my eyes.

Sozdar: My eyes started to shine with hope.

Harry: I was greeted by multiple agents and people who were happy that I had arrived.

And that surprised me, I never expected that people would be happy I arrived.

Sozdar: The roses bloomed, the birds sang, the ears of corn danced. Spring was here. A spring that I had never saw before in my life. This country where I could finally enjoy all of my human rights.

Aya: For me, it is perfect, it is... safe.

Ahmad: And when you are safe you can do anything.

Aya: I know now that a beautiful future is coming...

Ahmad: The family meeting, the house, the job, the PHD

Sozdar: I will learn, I will write, I will sing, I will express myself, I will draw, I will do every hobby I love...

Aya: I will watch western movies and I will learn English, I will read books and novels, and take photographs.

Harry: And I, well one day I will become an Avenger. ...Trust me.

Ahmad: Me... I am still looking forward to achieving more in my life. I know now that I will.

Aya: I am happy that I have come here. It is my dreamland. For the first time when I shout I can hear the echo of my voice.

A beautiful future is coming!