

Private Capital



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CANBERRA LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

'I love it here': from refugee to leader

WHEN Ammar Altayib fled Sudan for a better life in Australia, he knew the keys to success were language and knowledge.

He was just 17 when he arrived in Australia, living first in western Sydney with his father and two sisters, doing anything he could to improve his English.

"I used to go and buy a newspaper every day. I used to go to the library and borrow a book and just read whatever I could read and learn a few words. I used to sleep with the radio on all night. And I used to just force myself in front of the TV, listening for hours and hours without even knowing or understanding," he said.

Two decades, an Australian citizenship and "four or five" degrees later, Ammar is now chief pharmacist at the Queanbeyan Hospital as well as working Saturdays at the Queanbeyan Pharmacy. He is also a leader in the Queanbeyan community, the "unofficial Imam of Queanbeyan", teaching Arabic and leading prayers. He was most recently nominated for a patient safety award from the Southern NSW Local Health District.

In Refugee Week, this week, Ammar says it does give him pause to reflect on how far he has come, tackling a new life in a new country. And how much help other new arrivals need to understand their new country, in even the smallest way.

"You remember your own journey and the people who are struggling now, arriving in the country," he said.

The theme for this year's Refugee Week is "finding freedom", with a focus on family. Ammar was 17 when he left Sudan, then and still, a war-ravaged country where its citizens live on the brink of famine and death.

"There's always fear and uncertainty," he said. "There's always the risk of losing everything at any time. I was glad to be given the opportunity to migrate to Australia and start a new life. I was very grateful."

Ammar went to school and TAFE and had his sights set on a science degree at the University of Sydney. His English was still basic and he had no idea even how to get to the university.



Ammar Altayib works at Queanbeyan Pharmacy and is also the chief pharmacist at Queanbeyan Hospital. Pictures by Elesä Kurtz



Ammar helping Christine Rushall at the Queanbeyan Pharmacy.



Ammar was 17 when he fled Sudan for Australia.

"I pretty much went to the Liverpool train station and asked how get to the University of Sydney. So I bought a ticket and went and walked into the university and asked, 'How do you apply?'," he said.

Ammar ended up getting a science degree from the University of Sydney and pharmacy degree from the University of Newcastle. He would record his lectures and listen to them over and over. He also supported himself in

a range of jobs from kitchen hand to trolley pusher. As a security guard, he was posted everywhere from the Sydney Cricket Ground to nightclubs. "You see parts of the culture you never knew existed," he said.

Now married to Zeinab Osman and with four children aged two to eight, Ammar says he loves the multicultural nature of Queanbeyan and its country living-city benefits location. It has been home since 2017. "I

came for training. I enjoyed the city - I loved it. And a job came a few months later so I applied and got it," he said.

In Refugee Week, Ammar says he wished for more help for newcomers to navigate the system and for professionals to have a process to follow to be able to use their qualifications in their new country.

He says integration is "very important" for migrants. "Because if you exclude yourself, no one knows about you and your religion and your story. Different cultures can come to Australia and contribute positively, not just to the economy, but to the culture," he said.

With his home country still in the grip of civil war and a looming famine, Ammar hoped Australia would lend a helping hand. "I'd ask the Australian government to address the current crisis in Sudan and to consider providing urgent medical aid and speed the processing of visa applications for Sudanese nationals," he said.

Vegan sausage sizzle fundraiser moves to the Dickson shops

THE Little Oak Sanctuary is having a vegan bake sale and vegan sausage sizzle at the Dickson shops on Sunday - but hasn't entirely given up on Bunnings. The local farm rescue organisation that was in a tussle with Fyshwick Bunnings over its planned vegan sausage sizzle has reached a happy decision with its fundraising.

It is having its vegan bake sale and vegan sausage sizzle at the Dickson shops on Sunday from 11am to 3pm after the ACT Government gave it the green light to use the location.

Little Oak co-owner Kate Luke said it would have another vegan sausage sizzle on August 10 at the Bunnings store in Gungahlin - with all parties on board with

the vegan-only sausages.

Bunnings managing director Mike Schneider earlier this month apologised to Ms Luke because the Fyshwick store had asked her to supply a beef option or else the scheduled sausage sizzle at the store could not go ahead.

Ms Luke had made it clear to the store she was only going to sell vegan sausages and not sausages made from the animals the sanctuary tried to save.

She said the vegan sausage sizzles had been held successfully before by the sanctuary at both the Dickson shops and the Gungahlin Bunnings - and with "zero drama".

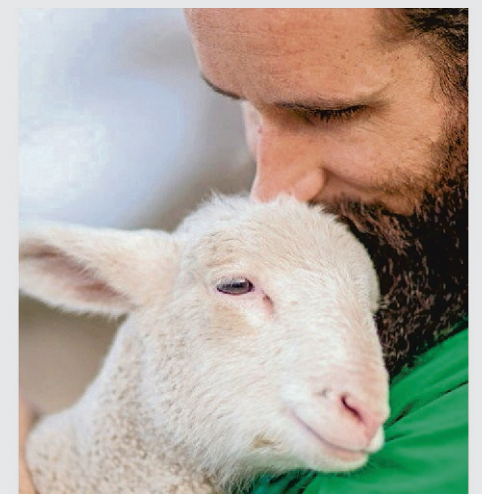
Ms Luke said she was keen to kick along their winter appeal, which was at about 70

per cent of its fundraising goal, to tide the sanctuary over the colder months, caring for more than 300 rescued farm animals on a property between Bungendore and Braidwood.

"We would love to get as close as we can to ensure we can cover our costs over winter," she said.

Sunday's vegan bake sale and sausage sizzle will be held at the Dickson shopping centre, near Woolworths and Coles. "It's a perfect day out for food lovers, animal advocates, and anyone looking to make a positive impact," the sanctuary's Facebook page said.

There will also be some merch for sale on Sunday. The Little Oak Sanctuary winter appeal is at donorbox.org/warmhearts



The Little Oak Sanctuary is at about 70 per cent of its fundraising goal for its winter appeal. Picture supplied