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FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS



CROSSING BORDERS BRIDGING LIVES

Esther Kim and Waghma Ahmadzay, SCSC Fellows 2022



20

22

TESTIMONIAL

"Reading her letter made me envision walking across a bridge. With each step, I learned more about her home, her life, and as I reached the other side, I understood her story. It felt so precious."

-Zahra



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INTRODUCTION

The Crossing Borders, Bridging Lives project is a community engagement initiative that connects individuals from around the globe through shared stories of migration. In this project, we recognize migration as a right of every individual, and we wanted our participants to express and share these stories through a letter exchange. This project produced 12 hand-written letters by our participants who voluntarily signed up through SCSC social media advertising.

Throughout this report, we have highlighted excerpts and testimonials from our participants that reflect their experience not only as a migrant but as a participant in this project. These quotes are taken directly from our participant's letters and interviews with their consent.



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EXCERPT

"Here is the thing they do not tell you about migration- that you never really settle in. Even if you become a citizen, even if you carry that passport, nothing ever really feels like home. It is like being stuck between two crossroads."

-Arezo



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OUR PARTICIPANTS

For this project, we divided our participants into two categories of “migrants”: those who have experienced forced migration (especially those who have gone through immigration detention) and those who have experienced voluntary/not forced migration, both categories inclusive of people with disabilities.



12 Participants



9 Different Countries

Canada	South Korea
United States	China
North Korea	United Kingdom
Nigeria	India
Afghanistan	Bangladesh

5 Forced Migrants

7 Voluntary Migrants



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EXCERPT

"I wouldn't consider myself a 'traditional migrant' in the sense that I have never moved thousands of miles away from home, I've never left my country, I've never had to learn a new language or a completely new culture. But I have moved cities and left communities behind, which has been tough and quite emotionally painful." -Josie



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PROCESS

01 — Writing the Letter



Each participant in our project was given a stationery set which comprised of writing utensils, blank paper, an envelope and an instruction sheet to hand-write their letter. We provided participants with various prompts surrounding migration but ultimately allowed them to express their own thoughts, feelings and emotions on migration.

02 — Swapping the Letters



All the written letters were then collected, screened, and then sent out to participants of the opposite category. We are, in essence, creating a “pen pal” for our participants, specifically around experiences of migration.

03 — Interviewing Participants



After everyone has both written and received a letter, we provided participants with the option to be interviewed. We conducted 7 interviews with participants about their experiences of migration and their thoughts and responses to our CEI project.



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EXCERPT

"My mother paid a man to take my eldest younger brother across the border to the south.

The rest of us crossed on our own. My younger siblings and I carried baskets and pretended to forage for plants close to the border. When there were no North Korean soldiers around, I took my siblings across the border one by one." - Donghyun



UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION

Our Community Engagement Initiative was focused on connecting the lives and stories of people who have gone through migration. While the term “migration” often draws up a picture of refugees, displaced peoples, immigrants, and migration across country borders, we recognize that migration is not a limited category, but rather, it is part of every individual’s life and history. We all have a story of migration, whether experienced ourselves when migrating to a different country, moving to a different state, county, or city or even moving into a different neighbourhood or a different home. Migration is also part of our history; most of our ancestors have migrated at some point, even if it was hundreds of years ago, or we have family members or friends who have moved and migrated away. We are all impacted by migration in our increasingly global world.



We asked participants in this study: In one word, What does migration mean to you?



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MIGRATION IS...



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EXCERPT

"All the travelling has been great and I look forward to much more. But there's nothing like being accosted by the familiar heat once you step off the plane in Abuja (my hometown)." -Ndidi



MIGRATION MAP

To further visualize the diversity and outreach of this project, we created a map of some of the migration pathways taken by our participants.



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EXCERPT

"I often wondered how my parents migrated across the world with four children and did not have a single idea of the culture or language of the place that they were moving to. I couldn't even handle a move 10 minutes away from my old neighbourhood in a place I grew up in." -Pal



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IMPACT

Overall, this project reflects the principles of social connectedness, because it has highlighted various stories of migration and has built connections with individuals from various walks of life and backgrounds. This project has expanded the definition of migration and made participants re-think their views and gain more insight into what migration looks like around the globe. This project allowed participants to share their own stories, read someone else's and then reflect on both pieces. This project sparked many of our participant's interest in creative writing and has also allowed them to share stories they have not yet shared. The future plans for this project are to allow individuals to continue the letter exchange and potentially connect more individuals and more stories.



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TESTIMONIAL

"I got to learn about somebody's personal story. And I got an opportunity to feel compassion for what someone else has suffered...There's a personal element to it, where...I got to learn about a person."

-Anthony



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all participants of this project. It is through these shared stories that we are able to connect and learn first-hand about topics such as migration. We would also like to thank the SCSC for the platform and tools to carry out this project. We hope to continue this research and continue to share stories.

More About the Coordinators



Esther Kim

Coordinator

Esther holds a BA in English Literature and minors in Education and in Disability Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, as well as an MPhil in Development Studies from the University of Oxford. She has prior experience conducting research on the lived experience and social identity of people with disabilities in Uganda



Waghma Ahmadzay

Coordinator

Waghma is a recent graduate from the University of Toronto where she majored in Political Science, Criminology, Law and Society. Waghma is passionate about human rights and refugee policy. She is interested in finding more ways to include newcomers in all aspects of social discourse.



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