

Overview:

The Refugee Crisis is an essential story about vulnerability, humanity, resilience, and grief. As people today bravely flee terrible circumstances, the world is often not ready to open its arms to them. According to The UN Refugee Agency, more than 84 million people have been displaced worldwide as of mid-2021. The International Rescue Committee echoes this statistic and adds that this number is on the rise, and the average time of displacement is now longer than ever. This is all without mentioning the recent tragedy of COVID-19. The climate crisis — another key factor — is expected to worsen this reality as well, with possible projections suggesting that climate change will lead to another 150 million more individuals being displaced by 2050. In the coming years, how will we learn to welcome a new wave of migrants?

I am inspired by stories of aspiration and resilience, and I find those traits are often crucial to stories of migration. To give up everything in search of something better for oneself and one's loved ones shows, I think, the true spirit of the human condition, the traits that show our humanity best: sacrifice, passion, determination, and the search for joy. I'd like to help people share that story by passing along messages from a major center of migration currently, Greece. However, I'd like to tell these stories in ways that honor the communities they come from. As a first-generation Nigerian-American student, this is particularly important to me.

Both of my parents were born in Nigeria. They came to America for all the usual reasons: to try and find more financial opportunities, to start a new life, to see the world. But to me, the story of their immigration has always been more; it's been a story about reclaiming the narrative about who they are, and who they can be. My parents came to America because they had been given a story about their life they refused to accept. They came to America to change their ending, and I've always admired the resilience and bravery they displayed, by dreaming such lofty, bold dreams in the face of unfavorable odds.

That is why I've decided to title my project "Art & Agency," as that portrays the sense of what I'd like to do. I'd like to use art to reinsert agency into people's lives. Art is therapeutic, and art is transformative. But art is also a skill, and there is nothing more empowering than when we connect to each other through sharing knowledge, skills, and information.

I went to Athens, Greece in the summer of 2019 for six weeks, to plan, prepare, and research for this project. Professor Liana Theodoratou, head of the NYU Hellenic Studies Department and the NYU Summer in Athens Abroad Program Coordinator, has committed to helping me. While visiting Greece in 2019, she assisted me in establishing a relationship with numerous agencies. In particular, I have been in discussion with Ms. Miszewski of The Orange House, an NGO in Athens, Greece that offers regular resources, shelter, and English classes to refugees. Our goal would be to provide art classes (defined here as: writing, painting, and photography) through The Orange House. The Orange House would then sell the art made on items such as tote bags, shirts, prints, etc. The funds would go back into continuing the lessons.

Over the summer of 2022, I would like to visit Greece to execute this project. To encourage a strong start, NYU in Athens will host an event in partnership with The Orange House at the end of this summer's study abroad. This event will be an exhibition of art from The Orange House where merchandise from the classes will be available. Using the NYU in Athens building and the project funding, we will attempt to draw a large audience to this event, and encourage interest and donors in the Athens area to the project.

The Orange House will then continue this program after we leave, with the sales of the goods funding the classes, any necessary supplies, etc. Eventually, it should become a self-supporting project.

### Research/Demonstrated Need

It is rare to be able to place resources directly into the hands of those that are most vulnerable. I would like to provide a project that's sole goal is to amplify the voices of people who may otherwise go unheard. As migration numbers rise, I hope the world learns to open its arms. I feel the best way to achieve it is to form ongoing relationships. This is why I would hope to use NYU and The Orange House's infrastructure together, to work toward a community of shared goals.

Much of the news that we ingest suffocates the humanity of the people it depicts. As John Berger states in his essay on photography from the Vietnam War "Photographs of Agony," capturing a photograph (or quick news article), can be a sort of "double-violence" (Berger). Essentially, he argues that reducing someone, in this case a photography subject, to one single moment that is going to shock others creates a harmful and potentially dehumanizing barrier between us all. It cheapens the potential experience of intimacy for both parties. This project aims to bring humanity back into the equation, by extracting art from a population of refugees, not solely just any tales of suffering they may have.

### Timeline & Plan of Action

The goals of this project will be as follows:

**Jan - March:** Communicate with The Orange House/Outline Ideas (what the class curriculum would look like, what supplies might be needed, size of classes & scope of exhibit, a list of potential volunteer teachers, etc)

**April - May:** Planning of Art & Agency Event (licenses to sell/ legal concerns, acquiring necessary materials, etc.)

**June - July:** Execution (attend and execute classes in Athens, distribute promotional materials, form ongoing business relationships between The Orange House and sponsors, execute event, etc.)

### Assessment/Reflection

By the end of this project, I hope to have 1) set up a reliable rotation of individuals to teach at The Orange House and 2) established relationships between The Orange House and several local businesses. If these objectives are completed, then The Orange House should be able to continuously provide art lessons and will be able to produce and distribute art that empowers its creators, rather than victimizes them. At the Art & Agency event, I would hope to distribute some sort of pamphlet or booklet for sale as well, with interviews from the staff at The Orange House and the artists themselves. This could serve as a tool for publicity, marketing, and a mission statement, so to speak.

### Sustainability:

As stated above, this project will hopefully eventually support itself. As The Orange House already provides language lessons regularly, Art & Agency should very naturally fit into the curriculum there. Attendees will be given the chance to sell the art and leave with work experience. This could hopefully be not just an outlet, but an opportunity to develop an applicable skill. Attendees will carry this forward with them throughout their life, and gain something to take away.

Projects for Peace Budget Template

<b>Name:</b> Sarah John
<b>Project Name:</b> Art & Agency
<b>School:</b> New York University

<b>TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:</b>
#VALUE!

<b>Total Additional Funding:</b>	none	
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<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES:</b>
\$10,000

Student Expenses					Project Expenses				
Travel (Including Airfare)	Lodging	Communications	Food (Biweekly)	Miscellaneous	Non-Student Travel and Lodging	Direct Equipment and Supplies	Marketing and Event Support	Staffing Costs	Miscellaneous
\$2,000	\$2,000	50	200	450		2000	3000		300
<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>
\$2,000	\$2,000	50	200	450	0	2000	3000	0	300

<b>Total Student Expenses:</b>
\$4,700

<b>Total Project Expenses:</b>
5300

This form should be used to prepare your final budget and submitted with your project's final report.