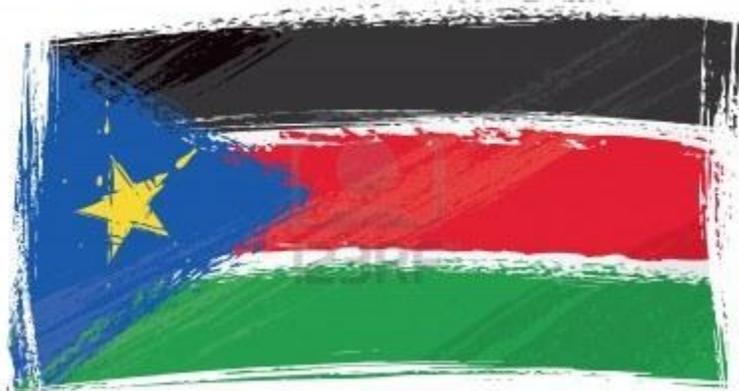


# The “American Dream” defined by South Sudanese resettled refugees



By

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## Introduction

The well-known adage, “The American Dream”, is interpreted in a variety of ways by a variety of individuals, families and even communities. In a nation which is more “jambalaya” than “melting pot”, the diverse ingredients of peoples and cultures in America have each staked a claim to their own intimate version of an “American dream”. For those victims of human rights abuses abroad who must evacuate their homelands for refugee camps or worse, some are relocated through resettlement programs to the United States; into significantly different, albeit stable communities far from home. It is expected that this major life-change has disruptive or destructive effects on their traditional life-goals and objectives. The question posited by this study asks what life-goals and objectives do South Sudanese men develop post-resettlement; specifically, a segment of “The Lost Boys of Sudan” who have been resettled in Phoenix area communities. What are their “American Dreams” and how do those dreams compare with others?

As the value and funding of resettlement programs and immigration itself is debated, the results of this study are hoped to reveal or better clarify the differences and similarities of the intentions and goals of a segment of displaced persons compared to a sampling of “the rest of us”.

## Human Rights

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,  
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,  
that among these are  
Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”  
– Declaration of Independence (United States of America 1776)

The concept of “Human Rights” can be defined as simply “the rights one has because one is human” (DeLaet 2006). Beyond that ideal, murky inconsistencies abound as to a deeper understanding and application of such rights. The concept of state sovereignty brings politics into the arena of human rights. Consequently around the world, the juxtaposition of these two concepts often results in conflicting objectives regarding individual rights versus collective rights as sovereign states redefine, enforce, ignore or violate human rights to suit their political objectives.

The definition of human rights therefore is rarely palpable. Instead of an inherent understanding of a natural human right of self-determination, an application of the concept of human rights relies primarily on legislative acts. Following those, reasonable and fair enforcement by state (or global) apparatus is necessary. The post-World War II discourse on defining the concept of human rights yielded a United Nations “Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)” in 1948. While adopted by the UN General Assembly in a 48-0 vote, ideological (Saudi Arabia) and political (Soviet Union) differences caused eight nations to abstain. Such differences between nations has resulted in controversial application or blatant violations of the UDHR, but continued vigilance by various governmental organizations and especially NGOs, publicize and leverage support for improving the conditions for all people around the world.

## Refugee Resettlement

“What happens to a dream deferred?”

American poet Langston Hughes - Harlem”

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, established in 1950), leads international action to protect refugees and resolve global refugee issues, including resettlement. The numbers are staggering. Currently over 7000 staff members of the UNHCR are located in over 125 different countries and assist almost 34 million people. The UNHCR has a mandate to “ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or resettle to a third country, and to help stateless people” (UNHCR.org).

In various refugee camps around the world, some displaced peoples are designated as candidates for relocation. They are processed through a gauntlet of protocols that includes seven separate security and background checks that not only include the individual themselves, but also consider that person’s direct relatives in the criteria for the ultimate decision on viability. Even those lucky ones who have no “skeletons in their closet” are still at risk of rejection because of higher-risk extended family.

As individuals and families become eligible for resettlement in host countries, a number of NGOs step in and coordinate the remaining steps. These include the International Rescue Committee, Catholic Charities, World Relief and Lutheran Social Services.

After what typically last between 2 and 12 years, relocation may finally be approved, and the new challenge of adaptation to a new life begins.

## “The Lost Boys”

“They are no longer in their  
homeland, but their homeland is  
still in them.” - Arabic proverb

The “Second Sudanese Civil War” between the Sudanese government and the “Sudan People’s Liberation Army” occurred from 1983 to 2005, ending with a peace agreement which adopted limited autonomy for southern Sudan but ultimately led to the referendum which established the independent nation of South Sudan on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

One of the significant and most publicized occurrences during the war was the tragic saga involving Sudanese youth. As their villages were overcome in war and the threat of violence prevailed, children were either sent away to survive or were simply caught outside their village when war made it impossible to return. These displaced and orphaned children, who were mostly boys between 7 and 17 years old, endured an odyssey of more than one thousand miles as they trekked on foot to Ethiopia (the village girls were either killed along with their parents or forced into marriages or slavery by their captors).

Upon arrival, these “Lost Boys” were summarily rejected for any measure of asylum. Incredibly, they turned around; some returned to what remained of their villages while others made it to Kenya. For those who returned to Sudan, many turned yet another time and eventually joined the others in Kenya refugee camps which had finally been established. In following years, additional nations including Egypt, Uganda and finally Ethiopia agreed to assist Sudanese refugees by accepting to build camps in the outskirts of their countries.

The number of “Lost Boys” has been estimated to be in the “tens of thousands” with additional estimates that more than half perished during their journey. The United States became one of the host countries which began accepting “Lost Boys” for resettlement in the 1990s. Those with no family connection were processed through programs including the “Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program”, which acknowledged the desperate need for a specific protocol in processing and placement of this significant orphaned demographic.

Currently the largest population of resettled Sudanese refugees in the United States is the approximately 7000 located in Omaha, Nebraska. While the International Rescue Committee (IRC) reports close to 4000 Lost Boys were resettled in the United States in 2001 alone, Phoenix, Arizona has been the host city for over the largest concentration (over 500) between 2001 and 2005.

The UNHCR maintains that the first and best solution for refugees is to eventually return to their former homes; however the reality is that an overwhelming majority must integrate into local communities in host countries. It is a much easier and more successful integration (adaptation or assimilation) if the host country is relatively close to the home country, but politics and availability of resources in nearby countries is typically not conducive to integrated resettlement (Masterson 2009). Many of Sudan’s neighboring countries such as Chad, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Eritrea are themselves to unstable or politically unfeasible as hosts for placement. Others including Kenya, Egypt and Ethiopia have acquiesced to the UNHCR’s desperate need for at least refugee camps but do not enthusiastically accept the Sudanese displaced persons as citizens of their countries.

Instead many refugees remain in limbo for a decade or more; in camps where they are provided food and supplies on a subsistence level as well as some basic educational opportunities. Without much hope for returning home or relocating nearby, the demographic of “Lost Boys” welcomed their resettlement in the United States with relief. The question is; did they bring hopes which translated to or could be modified to be called an “American Dream”, and how might their American dreams differ from others?

## **The “American Dream”**

“I am the epitome of what the American Dream basically said.

It said you could come from anywhere and be anything you want in this country.

That’s exactly what I’ve done.” - Whoopie Goldberg

While there is no consensus beyond vague generalities, the term “American Dream” is culturally taken for granted. It can be traced back to the 1931 book “*The Epic of America*” by historian James Trusslow Adams. Written during the Great Depression, the term does not appear until the epilogue. Adams wrote, “[b]ut there has been also the *American Dream*, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement.... It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (Adams 1931)”.

During World War II the American Dream as a tradition of rugged individualism, was used as a propaganda weapon against Hitler and Stalin. Two decades later, the 1965 Norman Mailer novel, “*An American Dream*” chronicled the fictionalized fall from grace of a decorated war veteran and talk-show host, who had seemingly achieved the pinnacle of the American

dream. Following Mailer, the semi-autobiographical novel “*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*” by Hunter S. Thompson in 1972 follows two protagonists who descend into a drug-induced haze while considering the failure of their counterculture to positively impact society in the 1960s.

While both novels appear to weave the American Dream through stories of decadence and failure, each one positions the concept differently. For Mailer, the American dream embodied post-World War II industrialization and with it, material and financial success. But for Thompson (as well as the aforementioned originator of the term, Adams), the American Dream was far less about a house in the suburbs and a corporate job as they were warnings about the false perception that the accumulation of material (and debt) was the path to happiness. They were warnings about the death of the American Dream (Wright 2009).

As income disparity grows and gaps in race and gender equity increase, the American Dream may be more difficult to achieve, however the ambiguity of the definition of the American Dream and the debate over whether it is alive or dead is evidence that it continues to exist in popular culture. For the cynic it is a dead or dying concept. To hard-core (patriotic) believers, coming “up from nothing” is quintessentially American.

In “*The American Dream*”, Cullen writes that “[y]ou have to describe the country in terms of what you passionately hope it will become, as well as in terms of what you know it to be now. You have to be loyal to a dream country rather than to the one to which you wake up every morning” (Cullen 2003).

This freedom to create one’s own definition of the American dream along with the loyalty (belief) that you will be in a position (and country) in which it can come true is the starting point. From there, individual and collective imaginations carve out the details of each American Dream.

For immigrants, including resettled refugees, the American Dream has been a historical constant, as Irish, German, Italian, Jewish, Chinese and Japanese strove for self-determination in the United States; even as prejudice and bigotry posed tremendous obstacles. Today similar attitudes are confronting Muslims, Mexicans and others including resettled refugees. Self-described “real Americans” fear losing precious opportunities which appear to be dwindling.

For African Americans, a concept of the “American dream” is rooted much deeper than wide-eyed enthusiasm while “getting off the boat”. A forced migration through the transatlantic slave trade along with subsequent centuries of unimaginable mistreatment, while in effect building the very America which chained them, and then forced them to scratch and claw for what should have been inherent human and civil rights, would be expected to result in a more hardened definition of an “American dream”. Expectedly, South Sudanese refugees who are resettled in the United States might not share the “hardness” of that collective narrative.

McGowan poses in *“Rethinking the American Dream”* that for much of our history we have never quite decided whether we regarded immigrants as a blessing or a curse; attitudes which are quite obvious to immigrants themselves. Regardless of obstacles and negative experiences, immigrants create and strive to achieve their own American Dream. While many naturalized Americans might believe that the American Dream of immigrants and resettled

refugees is different, unattainable or downright subversive, evidence of similarities and consistencies shows otherwise.

According to a Zogby survey (2010) a majority of Americans from diverse backgrounds consistently expressed that the American Dream for themselves (and their families) is more about spiritual happiness than material goods, but that achieving the American Dream will be more difficult for future generations. While both majorities are decreasing, the belief that opportunities are improving for the poor and immigrants is increasing. This could be explained by the Americans who fear, while others cheer, the election and re-election of President Obama which is indicative of a more liberal leadership with intentions to expand programs which benefit the less fortunate.

Additional insight gained from the Zogby survey reveals that the typical American Dream which is rooted in the belief that hard work pays off is not shared by immigrants. Conversely, most they believe that in their own homelands hard work does not pay off. This is in significant contrast to the annually low and stable seven percent of Americans which respond in surveys that, “I cannot achieve the American Dream”. Overall however, it is clear that a concept of the American Dream is alive for citizens of all classes and statuses, regardless of definition or tenure in the United States.

## **The Present Study**

The present study utilized questionnaires and interviews which were distributed and conducted between March 8<sup>th</sup> and April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Data was gathered in the Phoenix area community, at locations including the *Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development*, and *St.*

*Paul’s Sudanese Mission Church*, as well as *Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest*, *Immigration and Refugee Services* and at the *Roosevelt Row First Fridays Arts Market*.

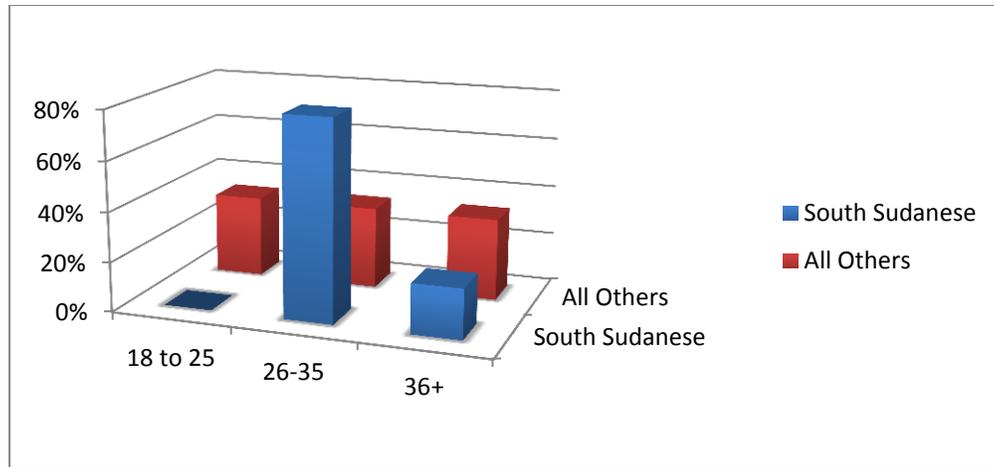
## **Participants – South Sudanese Men**

South Sudanese participants were exclusively male. While this initially appeared to be an unexpected limitation of the intended research, ultimately it was as much of a contributing dynamic as any other and will be explained further in the discussion portion of this paper. A total of 24 adult South Sudanese men participated in the study by either completing the questionnaire, engaging in an interview or both. While interviews gleaned additional qualitative data, all participants answered the same questions whether verbally or written.

The South Sudanese data was collected primarily after two Sunday services at the *St. Paul’s Sudanese Mission Church* and during three weekday visits to the *Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development*; both located in Phoenix.

An equal number of Non-Sudanese participants included men and women of various ages, backgrounds, nationalities and ethnicities. Data was collected through the same questionnaires and/or an interview process. Venues included the *Roosevelt Row First Fridays Art Market* events in downtown Phoenix in March and April, as well as the *Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest, Immigration and Refugee Services* office in Phoenix.

While the “All Others” group age range was balanced across categories, the South Sudanese participants were predominantly in the 26-35 age range, with a small percentage 36+ and none younger than 26. The ages of the participants can be compared in the following chart:



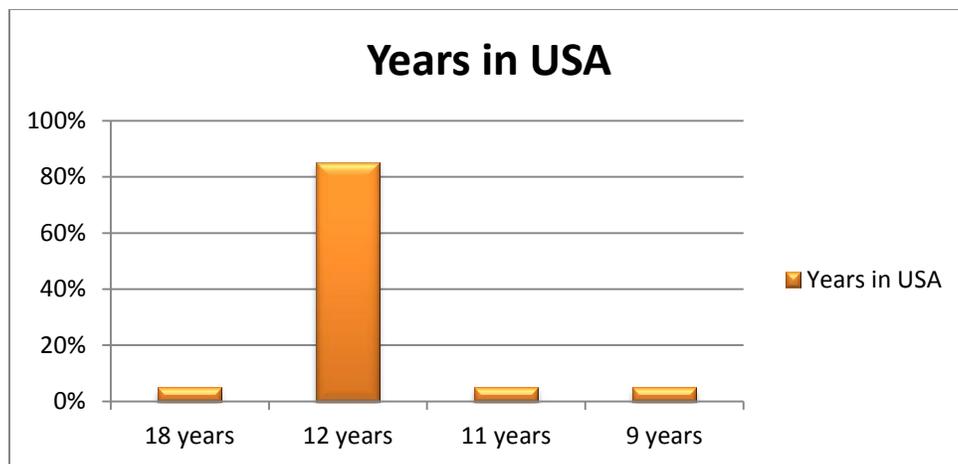
As concentrated as the ages of the South Sudanese participants were, their “Years in USA” were equally concentrated as well. A significant 85% arrived in the USA in 2001, matching the percentage in the 26-35 age group. This dynamic is reflective of the documented experiences and demographics of the “Lost Boys” group. While these men may in fact be former “Lost Boys”, that specific question was not asked because it is considered primarily a western “human rights” label applied to this collective. The men relayed stories of their treks and travails before coming to the USA, and did identify themselves as former “Lost Boys” at times, however they did not dwell on the term nor did they use it to illustrate a collective narrative. Each man’s history was individual, unless they described a brother.

The spike at 12 years spent in the USA is affirming to this study as it establishes that the vast majority of South Sudanese participants have had a reasonable amount of time experiencing American culture. This of course enhances appropriate context for the South Sudanese participants; thus allowing them to better define their “American dream”.

The question of “why didn’t South Sudanese women participate” is understandable. The primary venue for data collection, *St. Paul’s Sudanese Mission Church*, post-service, was alive

with family activity; men, women, children. While the three groups seemed to gravitate to each other, it was only as a social dynamic and was in no way purposeful segregation.

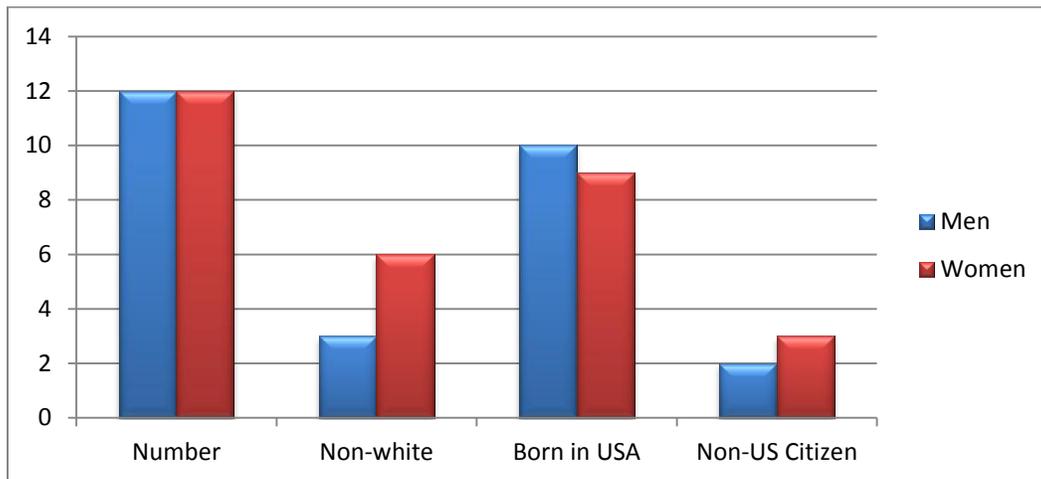
However, the attempts to include the women in the data collection were met with respectful resistance by the men. They politely relayed that any “American dream” described by the husband would be the same as the wife’s. It was a reflection of the social order of the family in their culture and resulted in an exclusively male source for data.



### **Participants – “All Others”**

The “All Others” group was gender balanced, and besides being equally diverse in age across three delineations, the demographics of this group varied in nationality and ethnicity as would be expected by a random sampling in a major metropolitan venue. Nineteen out of the twenty-four participants were born in the US while nine of them described themselves in terms which were non-white, using descriptions as either “Hispanic”, “African American”, “Biracial” or “Multiracial”. Both groups included six respondents who preferred to remain anonymous; all others used at least their first name.

While the ages of the South Sudanese participants were almost wholly between 26 and 35 years old, the balanced ages of the others ranged from 18-53. These age ranges for each group, narrow for the South Sudanese and broad for the others, are indicative of their overall demographic. The average South Sudanese man has not been in the USA for much more than a decade and less than two, while a random sampling of others is expected to reflect the broad demographics of “the public”.



## Materials

The questionnaire featured ten basic questions that determined age and residency status of the participant, their ethnicity or nationality and whether they had an “American Dream”. Open-ended questions invited participants to provide details as to the definition of their own “American Dream”, whether or not they had achieved it, and if not, what was preventing said achievement. The majority of questions were intended to be simple, straight-forward and especially easy to answer. As each participant completed these, it was expected that they would be more committed to complete the main open-ended qualitative questions.

### Questionnaire for Study

This questionnaire will be used in a study on the notions of "The American Dream" compared and contrasted between random individuals and South Sudanese immigrants and resettled refugees. The data collection will take place in March and April, 2013.

1. Circle one: Male Female
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you lived in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Nationality or Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you in the United States as: A) Resettled Refugee B) Immigrant C) Born Here D) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Have you heard of "The American Dream"? A) Yes B) No
7. Do you have an "American Dream"? A) Yes B) No
8. What is your "American Dream"?

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9. Have you achieved your "American Dream"? A) Yes B) No C) Not yet

If yes, how?

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If "No" or "Not Yet", why not?

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10. Your Name (OPTIONAL) \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation. Your contribution will assist interdisciplinary academics and professionals in the fields of Human Rights, African Studies, American Studies and Sociology to better understand the dynamics of immigration and refugee resettlement.

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## **Procedure**

The questionnaire was distributed after church services to individuals who indicated an interest in participating. Following the completion of the questionnaire participants were queried to determine if they were open to follow-up discussion. Those who agreed to both the questionnaire completion and the follow-up interview were typically those who expressed a more cogent definition of their “American Dream” and exuded more enthusiasm regarding the subject.

Interviews were utilized to gather primary data reflecting the questionnaire as well as for follow-up and acquiring additional in-depth information. Interviews with both groups were typically held one-on-one. Although other individuals were nearby and the interviewees had no previous relationship with the interviewer, there was no observable behavior by the participants which indicated they were uncomfortable.

Interviews included both open and closed questions with ample opportunity for the participant to dictate pace and express themselves in a comfortable atmosphere.

## **Results and Discussion**

The questionnaire and interview data from the South Sudanese Men” and the “All Others” categories was compiled and coded to reflect four “American Dream” dynamics; education, family, career and altruism. Coding resulted in determinations of which category or categories were identified by the participant in their “American Dream”.

The “Education” category was qualified through any mention of academic intention or accomplishment by South Sudanese post resettlement/post-immigration to the USA, and by all others in any domestic setting.

The “Family” dynamic was noted when any participant expressed family members other than themselves in relational aspects which included said members within the scope of the participant’s “American Dream”.

The “Career” aspect was identified by any participant reference to their job, work, income, or professional calling. Any reference to schooling which leads to a desired position was coded with both education and career dynamics.

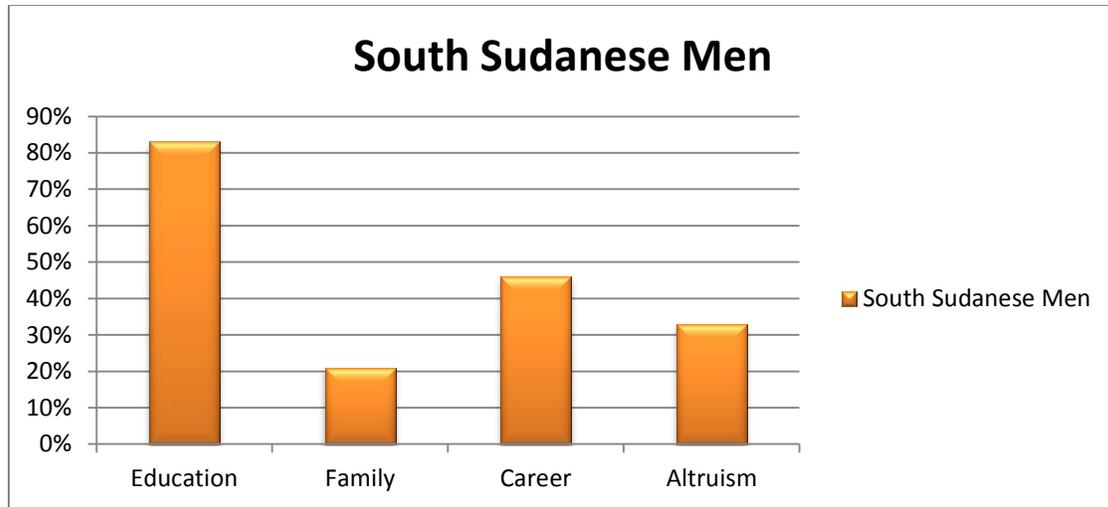
The “Altruism” factor included all participant reference to “giving”, or any intention or experience which transcended any of the other three categories. While somewhat of an ambiguous category, in terms of an “American Dream”, aspects of altruism are easily noted.

## **South Sudanese Men**

The results of data coding the responses by South Sudanese men offered a clear understanding of priorities which are shared across this demographic. Variations reflected an evolution of goals and intentions as real world obstacles and/or opportunities presented themselves.

Percentages of South Sudanese men who mentioned “Education” in their “American Dream” was twice the amount who mentioned the next most popular category; career. Not insignificantly, both categories, while distinctly different, are directly related. Almost one-third of South Sudanese responded with some reference to altruistic intentions in their “American Dream”, while only 20% mentioned family.

The following chart illustrates the category representation in the South Sudanese men demographic:



(The total percentage of more than 100% is a result of multiple categories being represented in an individual’s “American Dream”.)

The data on its own shows a clear “American Dream” concept realization for these South Sudanese men leaning heavily toward taking advantage of educational opportunities. Education, without a doubt, is the most important facet of the “American Dream” for them. In fact, seven of the questionnaire respondents simply and succinctly wrote only “Education” as their “American Dream”. Others went into more detail, expressing through questionnaire or interviews that the ability to achieve academic success is the key to achieving all of their dreams. Six expressed that they had already graduated from a four year university program while four others were currently enrolled and “working on my degree”.

Connecting educational opportunity with career was an expected complimentary dynamic. Interestingly, the overwhelming commentary on career or “job” reflected either dissatisfaction for the current level of success achieved in the American workforce, or difficulty in finding an appropriate or more deserving job opportunity. While this may be reflective of

overall current economic conditions as well as self-confidence of the individual, three of the respondents acknowledged experiences they felt were discriminatory and therefore unreasonable obstacles.

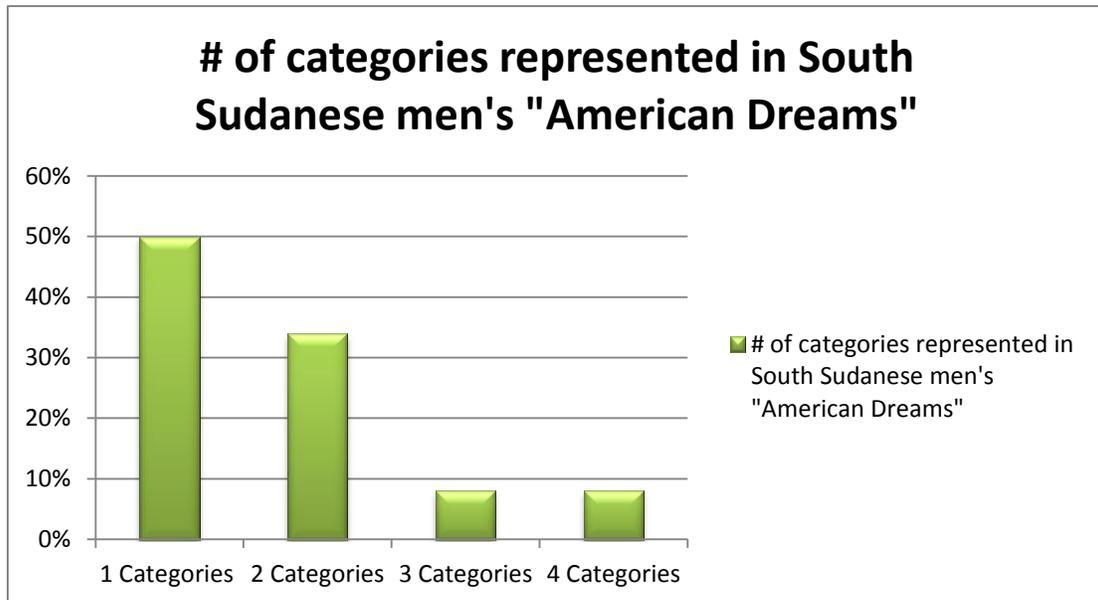
The number of categories which South Sudanese men cited slid from a high of half of the participants focusing on one category to almost a third who identified two categories. The remaining fifth is split between one-tenth referencing three categories and another one-tenth touching on all four of the categories.

The predominance of naming a single category (in this case that would be “education), is indicative of the importance and focus of this singular priority in the lives of South Sudanese men after resettlement in the US. Conversely, the very low response to naming “Family” as part of their “American Dream” is not evidence that the “family” is of low importance. Rather, family identity for these South Sudanese is much more a cultural aspect as opposed to an “objective”. It is not related to the American experience of these men.

Additionally for these men, the dynamic of “family” is unrelated to achieving an “American dream”. It is “life as we know it”, as it was explained to me by Samuel, a South Sudanese man who was asked why he did not mention “family” in the survey. While conducting an interview with Samuel after a church service, he gestured toward the group of men who were casually engaged in conversations and told me, “We have our wives and families, or if a man is not married he does not worry about that, because he knows he will be married as sure as he will be sleeping tonight. It is a normal part of life”.

Altruism was mentioned more than family as part of the “American dream”. The longer a South Sudanese man is in the USA, the longer they demonstrate a desire to give back. By giving

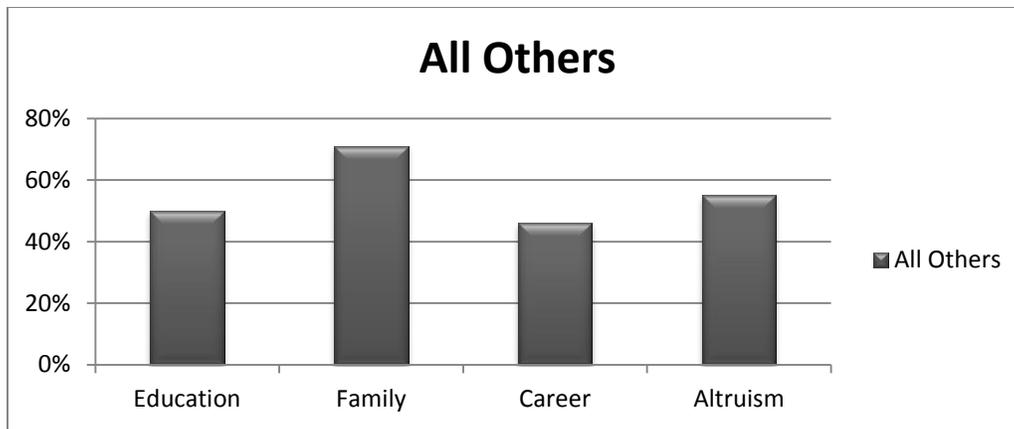
back, the men were committed to assisting the newly formed South Sudan. Granted, when they arrived in the USA they were considered Sudanese, however the independence granted South Sudan two years ago established a deeply rooted sense of national identity for these men as South Sudanese.



### The "All Others" Group

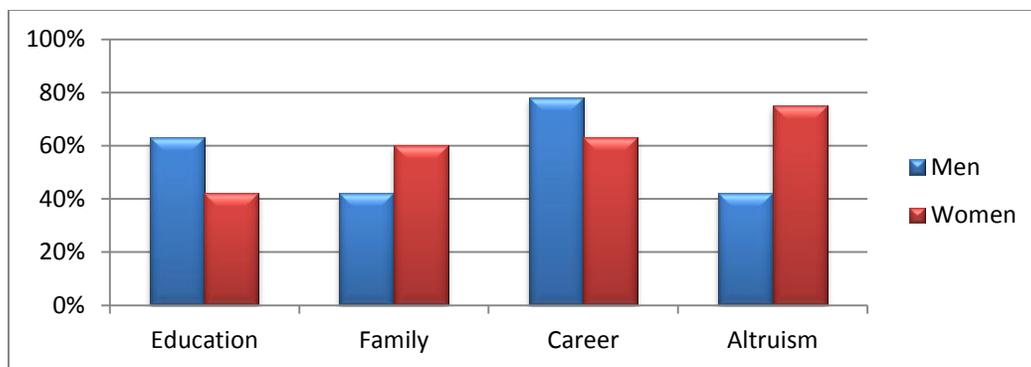
As noted earlier the demographics of the participants in the "All Others" group are diverse. This group was provided the same questionnaire and interview protocol as the South Sudanese men. Data was compiled and coded not only in the same four categories as those for the South Sudanese men, but also delineated by gender for further contrast.

Group-wise, 71% of "All Others" identified "Family" in their "American Dream", followed by 55% noting "Altruism", 50% with "Education", and 46% noting "Career".



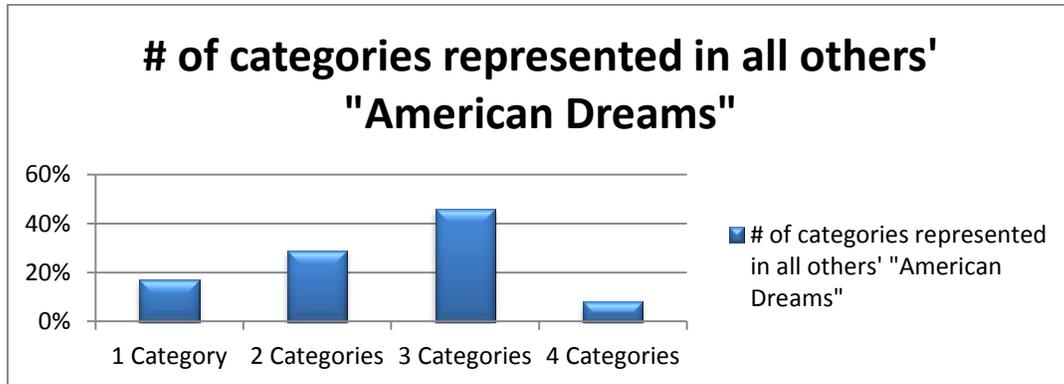
Coding by gender reveals differences between men and women in the definition of their “American Dream”. Within each of the four categories however, women gave almost equal attention to “Altruism”, “Career” and “Family”, while men as cultural bread-winners expressed far more interest in “Career” and “Education”.

Women on the other hand, appear to be more attuned to altruism as it relates to an “American dream”. In those who have established themselves in the American culture, altruism is an expected dynamic.



Forty-six percent of individuals in the “All Others” group cited three of the four categories, while 29% selected two and 17% selected one category. Only 8% cited all four of the categories. The overall observation here is that perhaps the more established an individual is in

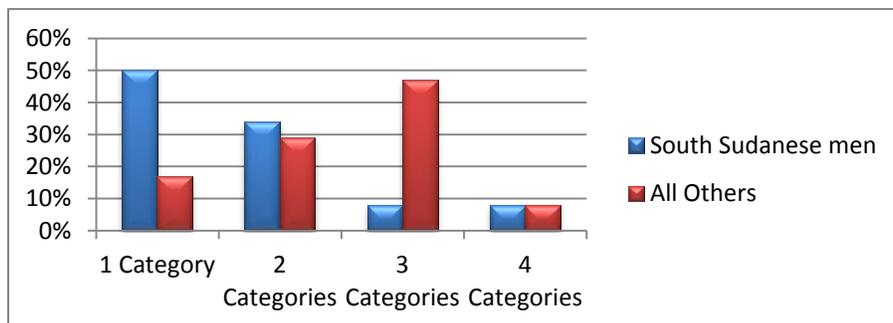
American culture; the more likely one’s “American dream” can be broadened to include additional dynamics.



### South Sudanese men contrasted with All Others

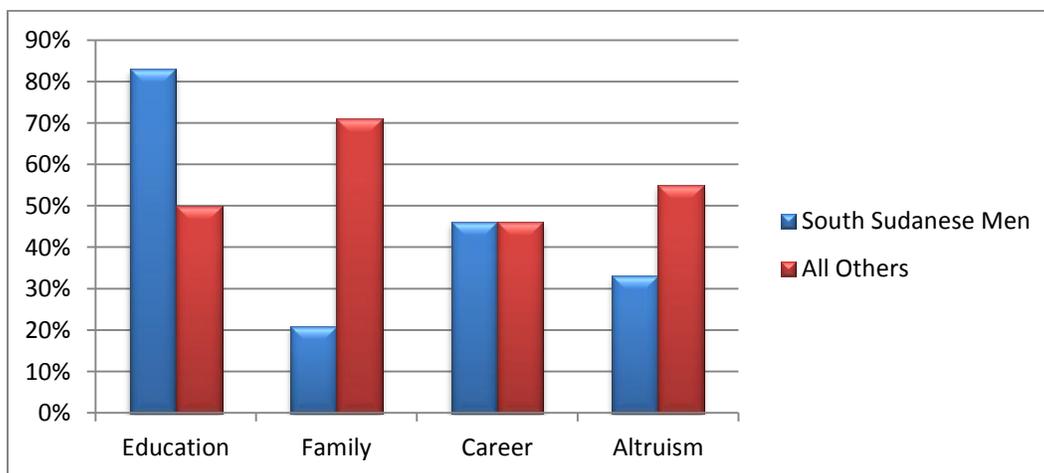
Contrasting views and trends emerge through side-by-side comparisons of coded data between South Sudanese men and all others, including the combined data of other men and other women, as well as each gender of “All Others” contrasted separately. While only 8% of both South Sudanese and non-South Sudanese groups cited all four categories, the data for citing one, two or three categories trended in opposite directions.

While the “American dream” of most South Sudanese men focused on only one category (in this case, education), far more of the other non-South Sudanese participants cited three of the four categories. This dynamic is illustrated in the following chart:



Between the specific categories, as indicated throughout this study, South Sudanese men emphasized “Education” much more than any of the other three categories. This contrasts with the “all others” group whose predominant emphasis was on family. Further study would undoubtedly reveal that the family relationships of the South Sudanese men are far sturdier than the others insofar as divorce rates, which explains why “All Others” demonstrate the fragility of “family” in American culture. This would account for the chart below which clearly shows a low priority to include family in the South Sudanese version of the “American dream”. As stated earlier, the South Sudanese men as extremely comfortable and exude confidence regarding their familial relationships.

Conversely, the “all others” non-South Sudanese participants (predominantly Americans by birth) have high divorce rates and complex dynamics which strain family relationships. Not unexpectedly, this dynamic emerges in the popular choice to include “family” as part of their “American dream”. As education and careers are more achievable for this group, there is a lower cause to “dream” about them. While likely not taken for granted, these aspects are already part of the “standard” cultural experience for this group as much as family is for the South Sudanese men..



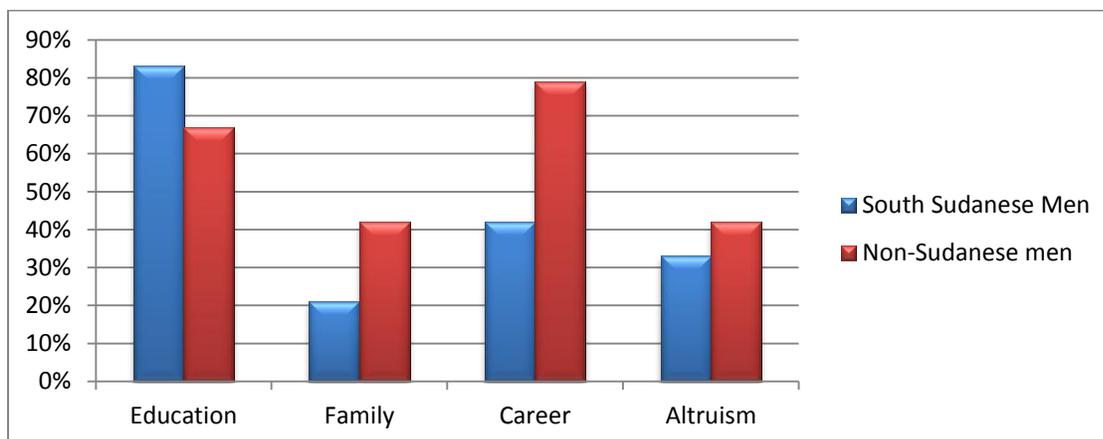
## South Sudanese men contrasted with non-Sudanese men

The contrast of category coding between South Sudanese men and non-South Sudanese men is most clearly noted in the categories of “Career”, “Education” and “Family”. Expanding on earlier observations and contrasts between the two groups without respect to gender, the isolation of men in a comparison and contrast shows distinct differences in “American dreams”.

An example of a non-South Sudanese man with multiple categories cited in his “American dream” preferred to remain anonymous, but who responded with, “[t]o live life to the fullest, overcome adversity and be happy”. Another non-South Sudanese man, Riaz, defined his “American dream” as a, “[s]uccessful life, good job, good house, best family”.

Non-South Sudanese men were much more likely to respond with more general “qualities of life” than their South Sudanese counterparts. For example, Kelly S. has an “American dream” to, “[g]et promoted. Freedom to worship God as I believe”.

Even more overstated than the “all others” group as a whole, the South Sudanese men and non-South Sudanese men plant their “American dreams” foundationally in education and career, respectively. The chart below illustrates this contrast:

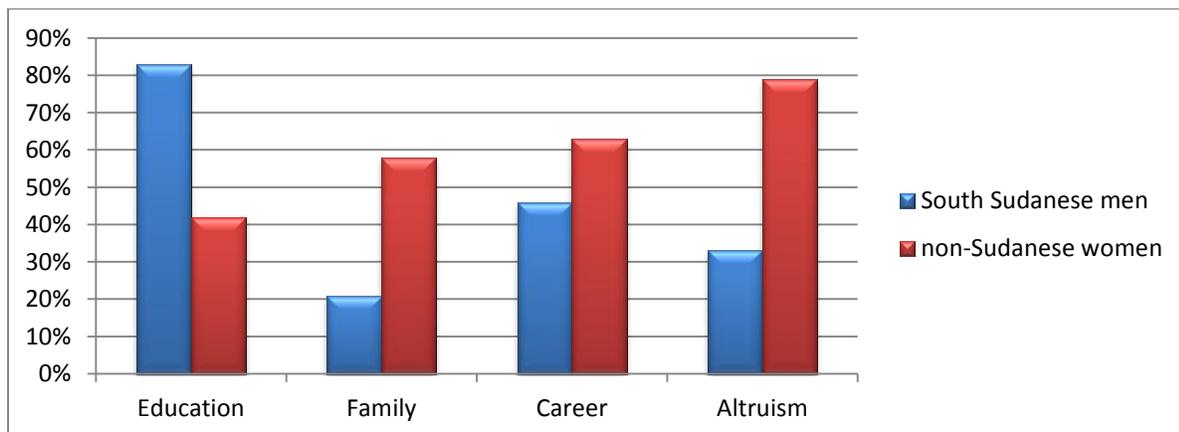


## South Sudanese men contrasted with non-Sudanese women

The contrast between South Sudanese men and non-South Sudanese women also reflects striking differences within the parameters of this study. Trends are in complete opposition with each other. Obviously, there are substantial differences between South Sudanese men and non-South Sudanese women as they experience life gender-wise and culturally. In this comparison however, non-South Sudanese women show a high propensity for altruism.

Examples of this altruism could be found in comments such as from Marie C. who expressed, “my American dream is to continue Mother Teresa's work and end hunger”. Another participant, Sara, noted, “My [American] dream is to travel nationally and internationally and help people fulfill their life goals and boost their self-esteem”.

Education was the factor cited the least, which would appear to be related more to an expectation of available educational opportunities, then to a lack thereof. Multiple category responses included Kayla, whose “American dream” is, “[t]o have a family and make a living while also selling my art”. The following chart reveals this contrast:



## Summary

“Opportunity is America’s promise, and education is the ink with which that promise is written”.

– Dr. Wayne A. I. Frederick

Provost and Chief Academic Officer,

Howard University

A variety of useful information and insights can be gleaned from the compiled data and answer the question(s) posited by this study. The most cogent of these is that the core of the “American dream” for participant South Sudanese men is rooted in education. These men, resettled refugees, whose childhood experiences have been as dramatic as any who were fortunate enough to be able to recount them, crave educational opportunities which not only fulfill their “American dream” of prosperity, but will also allow them to support other family members and as importantly, contribute to the prosperity of their homeland.

The birth of South Sudan as an independent nation has codified an identity for these men not as proxy but an affirmation of their ethnicity as it relates to national self-determination. While they are quick to express their love for the United States, they are proud to be *South* Sudanese. They have surely adopted the United States as much as the United States has adopted them, and their “American dreams” are a driving force in their lives. At the same time however they welcome a recognizable nationality of which they can be proud.

Generally, minority diasporic groups no longer desire to abandon their pasts (Baser, 2008). It is weaved strongly into their identity, and most believe it comes with an obligation. The great majority of South Sudanese immigrants and resettled refugees have family members in refugee camps or struggling independently in other countries; especially Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt

and Uganda. These relatives have come to expect to receive support from their relatives in America. While some expressed added pressure to fulfill this obligation, they do not run away from it either.

Through research on this transnational dynamic, Lin found that while there is a literal dimension when immigrants make frequent visits to their original homeland, it also assumes a figurative dimension where immigrants sustain economic and emotional ties with that home country without necessarily visiting in person (Lin 2009).

The predominant group of South Sudanese men in this study who arrived in the United States in 2001 appear eager to make that transnational connection stronger; both literally and figuratively. There is tangible (literal) evidence here of this transnational dynamic demonstrated by a small group of these South Sudanese men who arrived in the United States between 1995 and 2001.

Kuol Awan is the executive director for the *Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development* (LBCLD) in Phoenix. He has been in the United States since 2001 and has completed a Master’s degree in Social Justice and Human Rights from Arizona State University. Along with program director Jany Deng, who has been in the US since 1995, these former Lost Boys founded this center from its nascent beginning as a community resource for former Lost Boys into a structured program that trains former Lost boys candidates as leaders who commit to returning to South Sudan for at least one year as teachers and entrepreneurs.

This is a significant conduit to their homeland and allows them to fulfill their deeply rooted obligation as well as their “American dream”. Both men have become pillars in the South Sudanese community in Phoenix and have been featured on local and national media, oftentimes

during emotionally charged visits to their former villages in South Sudan, or simply retelling the stories of their epic journeys.

Deng’s experience is especially haunting as he lost his older brother to violence after they had finally reached the United States. His “American dream” not only honors his educational and altruistic intentions, but it also pays homage to his brother.

Even in a limited and concentrated study such as this, patterns and trends emerge that reveal the definitions and dynamics of various demographics. Further sampling and research on the “American dream” should be undertaken to affirm or modify the resulting conclusions for use in leveraging adequate resources for them to succeed. Other factors such as income, career path and access to educational resources would present more detailed results. These results can be utilized to benefit not only additional academic discourse but also those working in refugee resettlement or immigration environments.

Developing (cost) efficient protocols and programs which improve opportunities and quality of life for resettled refugees and immigrants is paramount especially during the current economic climate coupled with global conflicts that continue to result in hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. For a tiny fraction of those, the opportunity to experience the concept that is the “American dream” is in itself, a dream come true.



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**Community Resources:**

Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development. Phoenix, AZ.

St. Paul’s Sudanese Mission Church. Phoenix, AZ.

Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest, Immigration and Refugee Services, Phoenix, AZ.

Roosevelt Row First Fridays Arts Market. Phoenix, AZ.