

Thorns & Dreams

HELPING IMMIGRANTS COPE



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*“When you spot a man running through a forest of thorns,
he’s either in pursuit of something—or fleeing from it.”*



African Resource Center of West Michigan
Grand Rapids, Michigan



*Our elders say,
“When you spot a man running through a forest of thorns,
he’s either in pursuit of something—or fleeing from it.”*

*No one leaves home lightly.
No one runs through thorns unless the pain behind them
is greater than the pain they anticipate ahead.*

*These are the primary push factors: conflict, poverty, drought,
unemployment, the prospect of starvation, and fear.
Each thorn is a reason to run.*



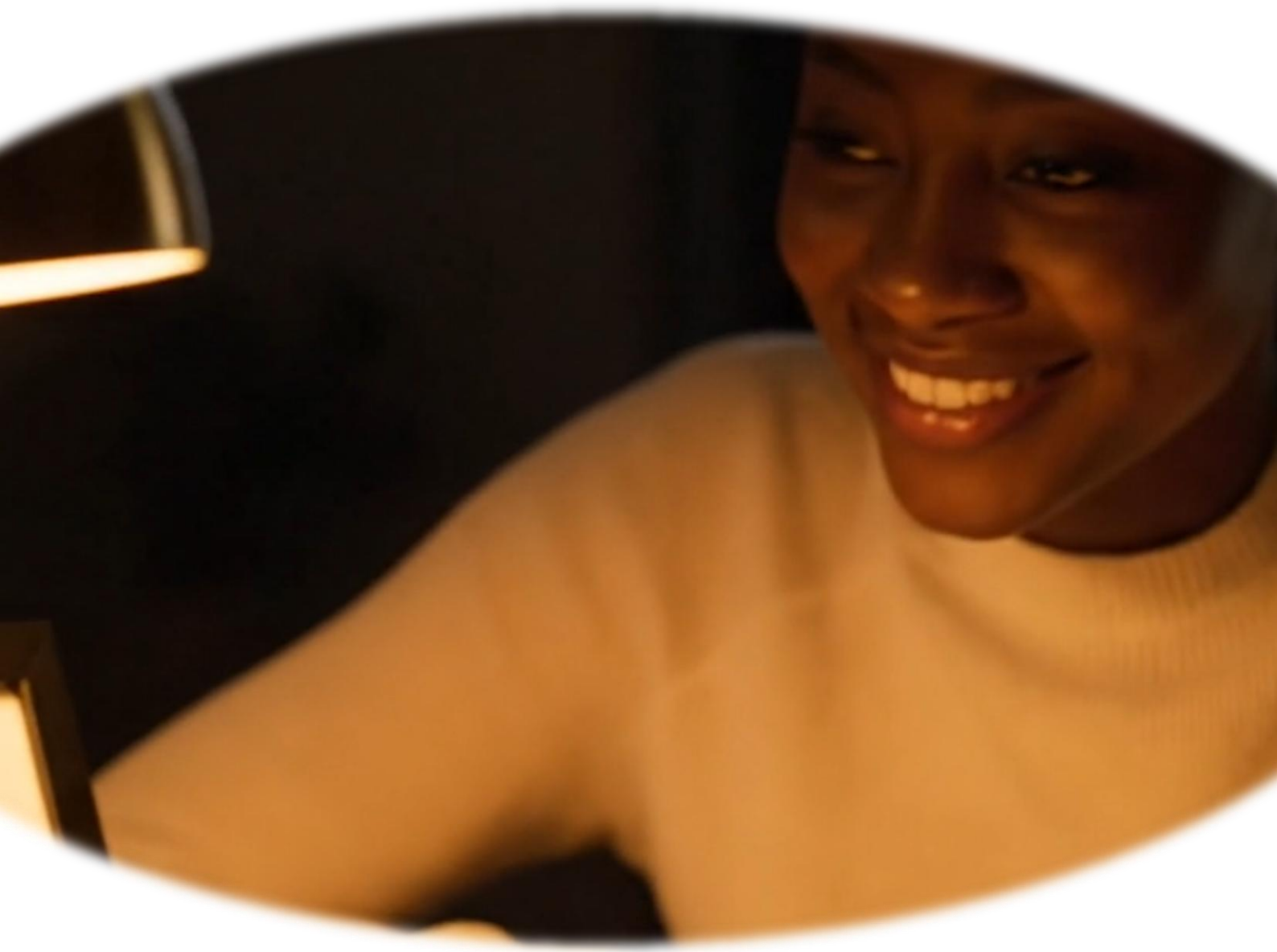


*But migration is not only an escape.
It is also a pursuit.
People chase safety, education, and dignity.
They want their children to have opportunities
that they themselves did not have.*

*These are the pull factors:
jobs, peace, freedom, safety,
and good health.*

*Each dream is a reason to endure
and not give up on life.*





Some people fled disaster and despair to chase a future.

*Others left not because they stopped loving home,
but because they wanted a fighting chance
for their family.*

They chose hope instead of anguish; love in place of hate.

Migration is courage. It is resilience.

It is the human spirit refusing to be crushed.

Behind every migrant is a story—of pain, yes.

But also, of purpose and hope.

*So, when you see someone running
through a forest of thorns,*

*Please don't ask what is chasing them;
ask what they are running after.*





*What they are hoping to find is more important
than why they left.*

*Because if we listen closely,
We'll hear not just their footsteps through thorns,
But their heartbeat of hope, courage,
and the desire to make life worth living.*

Reflection Questions for Activities and Discussion

Personal Connection

- What does the proverb, “When you spot a man running through a forest of thorns, he’s either in pursuit of something – or fleeing from it,” mean to you? What does the image of “running through a forest of thorns” mean to you personally?
- Have you ever faced a situation where the pain behind you felt greater than the pain ahead?
- Which “push factors” (conflict, poverty, fear) resonate most with stories you’ve heard or experienced?
- Which “pull factors” (safety, education, dignity) inspire you most when you think about migration?
- How does this story challenge the way people usually talk about migrants and refugees?

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Activities for Engagement

- **Thorn & Dream Mapping:**
 - On one side of a paper, participants list “thorns” (challenges/push factors).
 - On the other side, they list “dreams” (pull factors).
 - Discuss how both sides shape the immigrant’s journey.
- **Heartbeat of Hope Exercise:**
 - Invite participants to write one line that captures a migrant’s heartbeat of hope.
 - Share aloud in a circle, creating a collective “poem of courage.”
- **Role Reversal Storytelling:**
 - Ask participants to imagine themselves as migrants.
 - Write or act out a short scene: *What are you running from? What are you running toward?*
- **Community Connection:**
 - Invite elders or community members with migration experiences to share their stories.
 - Compare their real-life journeys with the metaphor of “running through thorns.”

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WHY PEOPLE LEAVE

*“When you spot a man running through a forest of thorns, he’s either
in pursuit of something—or fleeing from it.”*

Portions of this handbook and its accompanying video—including draft text, images, and narration—were generated with the assistance of AI tools.

The final message and all editing decisions reflect the lived experience, values, and creative guidance of the African Resource Center of West Michigan’s media team.

Appreciation:

We gratefully acknowledge the **Grand Rapids Community Foundation** for their generous support of the African Resource Center’s Health and Wellness Project. Their partnership strengthens our mission to promote culturally responsive care and community well-being.

Thank you!

