

# Making a difference through film





## Thok Koang Thor

**Nationality**  
S. Sudanese

**Course**  
Diploma in Film and  
Television Production

**Institution**  
Africa Digital Media  
Institute(ADMI)

**Start** - 2016

**Finish** - 2019

With a passion for storytelling and a desire to use his creative skills in pursuit of positive social change, Thok Koang Thor has excelled in his recent studies. Thanks to support from Sue Mulholland Scholarship which was managed by Windle International Kenya, Thok – known fondly as David – has successfully completed a Diploma in Film and Television Production at the Africa Digital Media Institute (ADMI) located in Nairobi. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, David is developing his skills and continues to offer his expertise to projects working for social change.

### Background

David grew up in Kakuma Refugee Camp, where he resided with his family after fleeing conflict in his home country of South Sudan.

“Kakuma is home to people like me, home to people of diverse nationalities and cultures,” says David. “In my opinion, life in Kakuma offers some of the best and worst life stories. I feel extremely lucky that my story is that of resilience and triumph.”

### Primary and Secondary Education

David studied in Kakuma refugee camp for his Primary and Secondary education.

“Growing up in Kakuma, like every young refugee, I held on to the hope of getting an education and believed in the future it held for me and my family. I also had my home country in mind, with the hope of one day going back and being of service to my country, and playing an active role in bringing about much-needed positive change.

“In my quest for education, I enrolled in Pokotom Primary School, a public school in Kakuma refugee camp. When school fees were introduced, I knew it was time to put my creative skills into use to generate income, so as to continue studying. I therefore had to juggle school work and screen printing and branding of t-shirts. If lucky, myself and other artists that I collaborated with would get orders to print football t-shirts for local camp-based teams, and the proceeds would go a long way in supporting my education needs and that of my siblings.

“In 2011, I sat for my Kenya Certificate of Primary Education Exams (KCPE) and although I did not hit my target of making the cut for the highly sought-after secondary school

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David on location, shooting content.

sponsorship offered by Windle International Kenya (WIK), I was still able to join Kakuma Refugee Secondary in 2012. For me, this was another chance and a step forward towards realizing my dreams. I knew the journey would also come with its fair share of challenges but it brought hope. By this time, I was determined to nurture my inborn talent as a creative.

“The thought of being in secondary school, therefore, was enough motivation for me to pursue my dream of becoming a filmmaker and be part of the next generation of storytellers in Africa and beyond.

“With this inspiration, I became actively involved in drama club activities and was a vital part of the team bringing to the table fresh ideas to help tell stories through drama.”

### Engagement in “My start” projects.

Thok, wanting to sharpen his creative skills, would be an active participant in MyStart Project activities ([www.mystartproject.co.uk](http://www.mystartproject.co.uk)), a project that runs art and film workshops for young people living in Kakuma.

Sue Mulholland, The Chair of GUA Africa ([www.gua-africa.org](http://www.gua-africa.org)) had this to say, “Thok excelled in the MyStart Project workshops both as an artist and then a mentor and teaching assistant. He stood out as someone who could act on initiative and be independent, resourceful and supportive across the diverse groups in the camps.”

This encounter is what would later present David with a life changing sponsorship opportunity to pursue higher education alongside other short-term training opportunities. Describing the experience as a participant in the project, David reckons:

“I would take part in MyStart projects during school holidays. This is when my passion for storytelling grew and I was able to further develop my creative skills. I also became an assistant for MyStart and helped teach younger children. This encounter also presented other opportunities in film making like the FilmAid Media training Programme that I undertook.

“I was still an active participant in film and art workshops in the camps when I sat for my Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) Exam in 2015. I scored KCSE grade D Plus, which was way off the mark for most tertiary education scholarships for refugees in the camps. But I did not lose hope and while I waited and remained hopeful for an opening to further my education, I kept busy by engaging in community work.

“The breakthrough finally came in 2016 when WIK, in collaboration with MyStart Project, and through Sue Mulholland, awarded me a scholarship to go to college and pursue my passion for Film at a professional level.”

### Tertiary Education

#### ***Thok talks highly of his passion for film.***

“My tertiary education journey started when I joined the Africa Digital Media Institute (ADMI) college in September 2016 for a Diploma in Film and Television production.

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He describes the opportunity to access college education as life changing.

“The magnitude of what this opportunity meant for me was so surreal and I was more than determined to overcome all the challenges that came with it. Being in a new environment with the transition from camp life to life in the urban set up that is Nairobi, I had to adapt to the pace of things very quickly so as to keep up with my studies.

“The first year was one the most challenging, but I pulled through it and even in the subsequent year with the support of WIK.

“As a leading creative media and technology training college, the ADMI Internship placement program allowed students to sharpen their skills outside of the classroom through internship placements in leading institutions. This was very beneficial to me because of the platform it provided to network.

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“Come 2018, I completed the 2 years’ diploma programme at the college and graduated with Credit in June of the following year in a colourful graduation ceremony. Indeed, there was no looking back. The future was now bright and very promising.”

## Transition to Employment

“In June 2019, I started work with What’s Good Studios, a media production company based in Nairobi, becoming a part of a vibrant community of young creatives taking on some of the most challenging productions across the country.

“The opportunity has been instrumental in developing my skills in the content creation industry while offering a wide range of skills in the media space. While my engagement with the Company is currently on hold owing to challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, I have still been able to take on some projects through my start-up production company, African Creative Triangle.

“For instance, I have worked with Mums Village, a leading Parenting website in Nairobi on creating video content focussing on resources, support and expert advice for young mothers in Kenya.

“I also have previous experience working with Save The Children UK in Lodwar when the Director of marketing and fundraising and team visited their programs in Turkana county. Not forgetting the video content and photography work I did for Dulwich College UK, when the college Master and the Director of Art and Technology visited Kakuma and Kalobeyei refugee settlement.”

## The Impact

For David, it is evident that the impact of the education support from Windle International Kenya has turned his life around.

“I didn’t see myself before as being important in the society, given the fact that I had absolutely nothing to offer. I was just living



David in Kakuma

for the hope of making through the next day. But now I have so much to be grateful for, and I am not just living for tomorrow but also living for the future and the difference that I want to make in my society through the power of storytelling.

“Besides, I am now in a position to amplify the voices of my fellow refugee brothers and sisters through telling their stories. I know what it means to feel like you are invisible, to feel like you do not matter, to have the constant thought of not having a country to call home.”

Thok is also keen to give back to the community which he describes as an opportunity to be an agent of change.

“Whenever I go back to Kakuma, I train my fellow creatives through mentorship programmes. Since not everyone has a chance like me to chase their dream up to college level, using the knowledge and skills I have acquired is like bringing school to my fellow refugee brothers right in the camp.”

## Future Plans

“I aspire to tell stories of this beautiful continent of Africa and contribute towards changing the lives of people in some of the most marginalised communities. This would have remained as just a dream, were it not for the intervention by WIK to support my education. I am very grateful that I got that opportunity.”

## In Conclusion, Sue Mulholland had this to say:

Education is life changing and comes in many forms, not just the academic or scholarly. There are many pathways in the creative and vocational world that need to be understood and valued by individuals and the communities they work in and are part of. As a teacher my mission is to instil a love of knowledge and help develop young people as independent learners. Learning through making, writing, listening and questioning and most importantly finding that passion and developing the skills that can empower. What Thok and many of the students I have the privilege of working with have taught me is they can take even the smallest amount of belief, education and encouragement and really grow it.

**‘When you know better, you do better’,**

**Oprah Winfrey**



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