

THE STORY OF MILLENAIRE SANO: FROM REFUGEE CAMP TO OPPORTUNITY



SANO MILLENAIRE

My name is Millennaire Sano, the son of a refugee immigrant. I was born and raised in a refugee settlement that covered only 98.8 acres, yet held more than 14,700 people in nearly 3,000 households. Life there was built on hope, scarcity, and community.

Food was distributed only once a month, and the 28th day always felt like a holiday. Children waited outside classrooms, watching for trucks that carried relief supplies. When the food finally arrived, they would run out singing with joy. Hunger was part of our daily lives, but so was laughter. We lived simply, shared everything, and survived together. Hardship was normal — dreams were not something we planned for. But our parents carried a quiet conviction: **education could save us.**

My own journey shifted when I received a scholarship from World Vision to attend boarding school. For the first time, I studied alongside students from outside the camp and saw a world beyond survival. But fear followed me. I had watched my brothers graduate high school and wait five long years with no work, no opportunity, and no future. Many around me lost hope, and I began to wonder if school had any meaning for refugees.

But my parents' voices stayed with me. My father once told me:

"Son, do your part as best as you can, so opportunity will find you ready — not empty."

Those words anchored me. I graduated with honors, returned home, and waited for opportunities that seemed impossible for someone with refugee status. Many scholarships excluded us; sometimes only two were selected out of hundreds of applicants.

To keep moving forward, I began teaching chemistry at a high school. Even when doors closed, I stayed ready and gave what I had. Then something unexpected happened.

A small group of students reached out to me and offered to support my education. At the time, I was preparing to resettle in the United States and didn't fully understand who they were. When I arrived in the U.S., I searched for them — I wanted to meet the people who believed in a young refugee they had never met.

That's when I discovered their mission.

They were Congolese refugee students at Oakwood University who had created a simple, powerful movement:

"We are studying today because someone helped us. Let's help someone else tomorrow."

Using their small campus jobs, they pooled money each semester to help refugee youth back home — students who felt forgotten, overlooked, and stuck.

This wasn't charity.

This was **love in action.**

That day, I knew I didn't want to be only a beneficiary.

I wanted to become part of the mission.

I wanted to help carry hope forward.

Today, through OCRS, we celebrate what once felt impossible. In just five years, we have supported seven students through graduation — three now working in their fields. My story is no longer just about surviving a refugee camp. It is proof that when preparation meets opportunity, lives change.

I am not just a former refugee.

I am a witness that **refugee is a status, not an identity.**