

00:00:03.000

Trevor Dotzler: Okay.

00:00:04.380

Chuol Tut: Okay so now it's better so.

00:00:06.960

Trevor Dotzler: Oh, perfect. All right.

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Trevor Dotzler: Hello, my name is Trevor Dotzler today is May 18th, 2021. And I am a current undergraduate student at UC San Diego. Today I have the privilege of interviewing Chuol Tut; did I pronounce that correctly?

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Chuol Tut: Yes, correct. Yes.

00:00:30.780

Trevor Dotzler: Okay, and through zoom for the UCSD Race and Oral History Project. I genuinely appreciate this opportunity, and I'm looking forward to our interview today.

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Trevor Dotzler: First off, would you be able to provide your first name for me?

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Chuol Tut: Yes, good afternoon, my name is Chuol Tut [spells out his name].

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Trevor Dotzler: Thank you.

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Trevor Dotzler: If you could briefly describe yourself in a few words, what would that be?

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Chuol Tut: As I said, my name is Chuol Tut, I'm a former refugee from South Sudan and I came here United State as a refugee. Currently, I'm a CEO or executive director, with a South Sudanese Community Center. I graduate from CalState San Marcos and currently working with the San Diego Unified School Districts.

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Trevor Dotzler: Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about your hometown and what your favorite part of, if any, of where you grew up?

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Chuol Tut: Yes, I was born and raised a little bit in South Sudan and the town is called Nasir [spells out the name of the town]. I was born in that town and it's more part of the South Sudan is located border with Ethiopia. Because of the war in South Sudan, that was in '83-'87 so we left the town and we, we went to the camp in Ethiopia that's where I was grow up. I left, I left my hometown at the early age of ten, early on, and then I went to Ethiopia separately that where I went and continue my school there until I came to the United States and then that's where I came.

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Trevor Dotzler: Okay. So could you describe your upbringing in the refugee camp and and a little bit about how that environment shaped you to be who you are now?

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Chuol Tut: The the camp is some sort of difficult life is not that something that you could imagine how you live there. Because wherever you are as a refugee, the situation is not that normal even you have a chance to go to school, but the school is not that sufficient enough to have a resource, like any formal school, but you could tell make it, because this is all of the option you have, so I know the camp is so difficult, the life is so difficult. The people live in the, in the tents, this is where they call them a home and they don't have running water, basically, so they just use whatever they use shower. They don't have like a better life, they don't have a better

hospital, they don't have a school, and also they don't have anything that you could call another formal essential life that people could enjoy. But still, because this is where you could be, live, so that's what I know, and I know the life wherever it can so difficult it's not that easy and when leave us refugee, they know how it looked like to be refugees, basically.

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Trevor Dotzler: So what was your family dynamic like growing up? Like who did you live with in the refugee camp, and how was like a sense of family and community? Or how would you describe that, I suppose?

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Chuol Tut: Yeah, so, the family, because of the war, we all left South Sudan majority of them, they came to camp, so I live with mom and sibling and pure the people also is still in South Sudan. Even the people left during the war but there's there's a couple of people remain in the country, because not everybody leave. So yes, I live with sibling, my mom also leave with me over there, and see my dad passed away during the war, so I was grow up with a number of relative, some of the uncle, some of cousin. So yes, we that's where we leave with.

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Trevor Dotzler: What are some significant memories, that you have from the refugee camp?

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Chuol Tut: The the horrible memory, we have is a situation that the people living the camp, sometime you may pass a day or two day with no food distribution. Because they don't have their home food and the food is coming from the United Nations sometime during the rain season. So the transportation will not make it to where the people leave because you don't live in the city you live outside the refugee camp and every month, the people have to wait once a month for the food distribution collaboration. So this way that people get it, and sometimes if they did not make it during rain season, so the people suffer that's a difficult memory. And sometimes you will not go to school as a child, because there is no school and the school cancel due to rain, where the school build with grass and some of the merge, and when it's raining season, so is all the water go inside, so the kid will not go to school, so those are the memories I know. They so bad.

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Trevor Dotzler: Despite all of that, how would you describe yourself as a child, like how did you how was your outlook on life and and how did you cope with things?

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Chuol Tut: Yes, I think it shapes your own personality to become who you are, because if you go through that difficult situation, you have everything in a struggling. So you have a difficulty getting food, you have difficulty getting education, so if you have a chance. So it make you strong personally because you have to know what is your life is going to look like, if you get a better chance, so that mean it shape you to be strong, to be a sound mind person, that you have a thing that you need to do to change better life. That's how it changed me.

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Trevor Dotzler: Wow, very inspiring. In what ways, if any, do you feel that you've changed over time, like it sounds like that's a pretty challenging situation that you dealt with for many years of your life. So, I mean, I heard you say that you, you feel that it's shaped your personality and in what ways, do you think like specifically that that's made you to be who you are now?

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Chuol Tut: Yeah one thing I know for sure I know the struggle of the refugee; I know the difficulty of the life for the refugee kids; I know the refugee family they are traumatized they have during the war, so the way I know that I make a difference is running this organization, because I know the impacts, the lives of difficulty of the refugee. The challenging I know all the refugee kids so I know exactly how difficult they are. So in that way, I want to make sure that the kids have a chance, so I have to advocate them. So what do they need to do in their life? What kind of career do they want to do? And then I offer them some of the support, and not only through education but through their career, they want to do through the mentoring, that I give to them.

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Chuol Tut: So that way I know for sure that they will not take it all, but some of them, they made it better, because some of them, they kind of struggle when they come here. A lot of kids they went to school and they put them in the group and in their own grade, somehow so somehow they don't have school and in Africa in the refugee camp. They will be turning 15 or they turned 16 they put them in middle and high school and they kind of struggling and that make it so difficult. And knowing that, I have a chance to find the tutor to find some of the results that could support those kids because I know I went through those and I know those challenges. And I know their parents are not capable of helping them so having this Center is a resource for them

is a resource for young children, the resource for the other people getting some training; resource for other people getting esl that could upgrade the great resource for them to get job training so those kind of thing I know it being a refugee and being going through those kind of things, so I have better idea of how I could support those refugees myself.

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Trevor Dotzler: So, since you're on the topic of the organization, could you tell me how you first started the organization or how you got involved with the organization and came into the position that you're in now?

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Chuol Tut: That organization was a start, I was not founder of it, but I was the co-founder of it of the youth in the beginning. I was in college, but I wasn't involved in the decision making, sometimes the idea of what benefit the youth, so I was start the youth mentoring while I was in college. And then, by the time I graduated with my bachelor's degree, and then they have a need of assistant have some idea, but I will say I have not do. But the only thing I could support area mostly the youth area because I know there's a lot of need, like youth sports, youth leadership until I finished my graduate school and then I came into the position of being executive director on top of that.

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Trevor Dotzler: Excellent, thank you. So since we're on the topic of the organization, what demographics in San Diego do you serve in terms of like ethnicity and regionally within San Diego? If you could speak to what populations you serve.

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Chuol Tut: The population, I would say is a general population for mostly like low income refugee. There is no particular person that they cannot benefit of this organization, as I became a director, because I know, even you are not a refugee, you still have a low income family who are suffering the same line. So we are inclusively assisting anyone who need a support. Because we have a food distribution sometime and we let it open even the people who are homeless and they have a need of food, we give it to them. So mostly this one, we are helping a lot of people from a refugee community. Because I know those people they don't have an access outside, but they all know this location mostly, but we are not, we are not rejecting the other people who are low income, who are not refugee, but we still accept them when they come and meet the system, at the same time.

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Trevor Dotzler: Okay, thank you. So I'm interested to know how coronavirus specifically impacted you and your organization. I know from my own experience, I used to work in nonprofits and I actually left my nonprofit at the beginning of COVID, so I'm interested to know, specifically how you've seen COVID impact your organization and how you guys have dealt with that.

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Chuol Tut: Actually the COVID really affects a lot of people in a community. It does not affect them because they contract with COVID, but it affects them indirectly. A lot of people they lost their employment, some people they have hard time paying their bill, some of the people they have hard time even buy their own food. So there is a lot. So what we did we kind of apply with some of the small grants and we support the Community Member who are affected, paying their bill, or need the food, or need of a diaper for the youngest kids, so we are assisting them financially some of a little bit. On top of that, we give them some PPE, personal protective equipment, like masks, and gloves, and sanitizer. All those we give it to them. And what we did also yearly, we have a Back to School supplies that we give out over 100 or 200 children back to school supplies, every year. And then on December also we give out this one to the family all the kids they come here. So on that one we also managed to get some grants that we hire a number of youth in our community that they reach family about how they protect themselves. Where they could go when they have an appointment or where they could go for the vaccination, or who they could see if they have any other factors that affect them, so we have about three employees, they working part-time, and they speak the language, the Sudanese language in different. So we they reach out the Community, because we have a database when we have something in the communities, so they call the people and they come and pick it up. Because all the data we have we have the name and contact and all the phone number, we give out some of the diaper, personal protection, some of the rental assistant or food distribution money, so we give it to the people that we call them. So these people they reach out to Community Member and they all well educated and the issues. Some of them one of them graduate already. One has a bachelor degree and working on our master; another one is a senior at San Diego state as a psychology major; another one is a public policy at CalState Longbeach, so they reaching out the Community they speak the language and they assist the people they need the US and the read the family members and.

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Trevor Dotzler: I see. So it sounds like these employees are basically like a COVID outreach team.

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Chuol Tut: Yeah, they do outreach and, yeah, community outreach, yes. And they will do the event we do like a zoom because they work at home. So we do like a conference zoom for the people, or we do like a group text so we send them the information from the county. And then they created in the language and they translate them also the language they need, whether they could speak an Arabic. So we have the flyer they can read in Arabic whether it is going to be another Sudanese's language. We translate that, and they create it so they get them an idea how the people could be indoor, what they need to do when they go outside, so those kind of thing, yes, we have community outreach.

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Trevor Dotzler: Okay. In closing, what do you feel is an important message that you'd like to provide the world?

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Chuol Tut: I think the most important, I would like to share is how the refugee community of practice mostly is a lot of challenge for them, because when they come to United State or wherever they go. As a people who came out refugee. When they come as a refugee, they thought, everything is going to be coming by itself, they don't know how they're going to do their own thing. Majority they don't have a transportation, they don't have a job experience, or employment experience and by the time they come here, the agency or the host agency, who sponsored them give them only three months. In those three month period, they tell them that you need to go and you got to pay your rent. And you need to pay your food in your home. And imagine somebody don't even know the center of the city. Don't even know any experience, where they're going to find the job. There's a lot of people who are stressed out about that. So the most important is they need to prepare the arriving refugee, but if they need to give them orientation. They need to give them something to scale that they should get the unemployment and then they have to support their family, other than that, there are a lot of people to stress out within three month period.

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Okay. Is there anything in this interview that you feel that I missed or that you'd like to share from what we've talked about?

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Chuol Tut: Yeah the other one I want to add is kind of support, because a lot of refugee families, they have difficulty for their kids go into college. This is another problem also most of the people, even some of them, they didn't make it to college of their choice because they don't have a scholarship and the family, they don't have money. And even if they accepted that there is a deposit need that they will pay before you go into the dorm. So this one, a lot of a lot of children they missing that opportunity because apparently they don't have money and they don't have a scholarship to make that. I think that one they need to do something on that. And I think this is missing a lot in the community, and they working so hard as a person who were the school. I know that what did they did their mind and they try everything they can, but it still is so difficult in that area.

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Trevor Dotzler: I see well, I really appreciate the interview today, and thank you for your time.

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Chuol Tut: You're welcome. Thank you.

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Trevor Dotzler: Alright, talk soon.

00:17:51.810

Chuol Tut: Alright, okay, bye.