



**IOM Nepal**

## **LIFE BOOK TRAINER'S GUIDE**

### **What is a Life Book?**

A Life Book is a story and celebration of your students' lives. It has activities that students can complete in class, at home, or in their new country. The Life Book focuses on the present and the future; it does not dwell on the past as the past of many of the students have painful memories that CO trainers may not be able to deal with.

### **Why have a Life Book?**

Students are about to undergo huge changes in their lives. Some of their experiences, like saying good-bye to their friends and family, will be very difficult. The Life Book can help put these changes into perspective and provide a way for refugees to say good-bye to their home and prepare them for their lives in their new home. Once in their new country, Life Books can help refugees teach their children where they came from as well as to show their neighbours who they are.

### **When Will Life Book Activities Be Done?**

Many Life Book activities can be done during CO class or as homework. Some activities must be completed in their new country. It is important students understand this – they must take their Life Books with them!

### **How to work with the Life Book**

- Hand out a book to each student; have them look at it in silence for a while.
- Ask students what they think this book is about.
- Ask students if they think such a book can be helpful to them. What can they do with it? (see 'Why have a Life Book' above)
- Ask them if they want to participate in this adventure. Do not force anybody to participate.

- Select one of the activities, explain how to do it, and give them time to complete it in class.
- Once done, ask for volunteers to come up and show their activity and share it with others. Don’t force anybody; this is very private.
- Choose some more activities, explain them, and ask students to complete them at home.
- Students can share their Life Books the following day in class if they wish. This can be done as a whole class activity or in small groups.

Students should be encouraged to express themselves in a way that they are comfortable with. They may like to draw answers or write them or express themselves in another way.

Please explain the purpose of each learning activity so students understand why they are doing this. If students understand the point of an activity they are more likely to see it as important and be interested in it.

### **The Order of the Activities**

The activities in the Life Book are in a logical order but trainers can do them in any order, as they see fit.

### **What If My Students Aren’t Completing the Activities?**

The Life Book asks people to reflect on their lives. For some, this may be very painful. If a student does not want to work with the Life Book; don’t force them; allow them to study something else while other students are working.

## **LIFE BOOK ACTIVITIES**

### **Tree of Life**

The Tree of Life activity encourages refugees to think about who they are, where they’ve been and where they’re going. It aims to build their confidence by thinking about what they’ve already achieved. It also encourages them to make goals and keep on achieving. Focusing on the past may bring up painful memories that CO trainers may not qualified to deal with; the focus of the Life Book should be on the future.

### **Where do you live?**

People all around the world take photographs of family occasions, their friends, their vacations, and so forth, as a way to of remembering. Once refugees leave their homes, they may never see them again. Refugees may not have cameras to help them remember their home, so they can draw a picture, or many pictures, or where they live now. These pictures need not only be general scenes; they can be of things like their kitchen (the one in their new home will be very different), their bathroom, the pigs under the house, father sleeping on the floor. These things are ordinary in their lives, but only here. When they get to their new country; all these things will be gone.

### **Your favorite place**

Refugees have suffered; otherwise they wouldn’t be refugees. This activity focuses on the positive and helps students remember good things in their lives. Their difficulties will not be over when they get to their new country; their pictures of their favourite place can help put them in a positive frame of mind. You can tell students that there is another page in this book that will ask them to describe / draw their favourite place in their new country, to encourage them to take the book with them and complete it in their new country.

### **Tell me a story**

Every person has a story to tell. Being able to tell the story affirms that the person is worth listening to. It is important to allow students to tell any story they want. They can choose how personal and how deep they want to go. They may choose a story about their own lives or a story from their culture.

### **Free page**

The free page allows students to explore and go where they will. It’s also a good page for the trainer to learn something about the students. Whatever they do on this page is important to them. This can be the best page of all.

### **What’s important to you?**

These can be cultural objects such as traditional clothing, music, food, etc. It can also include people and places – the mountains, the streams, etc. It can also be sounds or smells – the sound of the chickens in the morning, or the smell of a rice field. It can also include abstract things like one’s religion, or truth, or honesty. Try to get students beyond just the simplest things; have them think deeper down. Some of these things they’ll have to leave behind but others they’ll be able to take with them. Have students think about which ones they will have to leave and which they can take. This is encouraging because they won’t be losing all the things that are important to them.

### **Things you’ll leave behind**

This is potentially a sad page but students need to come to terms with the fact that they will be leaving some things behind. The trainer can help focus students on the things they might WANT to leave behind – bad habits, quarrels, anger, etc. You’ll have to point these things out to students as they may not think of them by themselves.

This activity helps refugees think about what they are leaving and what they are gaining from resettling. It can be a good opportunity for people to leave behind negative characteristics or habits. It will also help people think about what is important to them. The activity encourages refugees to think about how they will deal with missing certain things. Trainers could ask refugees things like:

‘If you’re going to miss that, what could you do to miss it less?’ ‘Is there anything similar in your new country that you could replace that with so you don’t miss it so much?’ ‘Are there people you are going to miss? How could you miss them less? Could you keep in contact with them?’ This question leads on to the homework activity ‘Who Will You Keep In Contact With?’

### **What are your strengths?**

Ultimately, the most important thing refugees take to your new country is themselves! So, give them a chance to think about what makes them strong. If they take these things with them, they can survive and succeed. This is a very positive exercise, so you may want to do it the same time you do ‘things you’ll leave behind’.

### **Where are you going?**

The idea of this page is to show students that they are traveling a long way and it won’t be easy to come back to where they are now. They must come to terms with this. They can mark on the map of their new country where they will be. They can check with their friends where their friends will be. There’s a good chance they will be far apart and will not be able to visit each other easily.

### **Who will you keep in contact with?**

Students will want to keep in contact with their friends after resettlement. They should make sure they have kept their contact details.

### **What’s it going to be like?**

This page gives students an opportunity to put down what they expect their new country to be like. When they get there, they can look at this page again and see how right or how wrong they were. Encourage students to think about more than the obvious – tall buildings, a nice house, etc. Ask them to think about friends, the weather, food, happiness or sadness, etc.

### **What are your dreams?**

Dreams are fine and people should be encouraged to dream. However, one also needs to have their feet on the ground. Trainers should at some point discuss how realistic people’s hopes and dreams are. I’d suggest this not be done during the Life Book exercises as it might make participants reluctant to share their Life Book.

### **What are your fears?**

It may be enough for people just to share these and learn that other people have the same fears; they are not alone with their fears and experiencing fear in the face of such drastic changes in one’s life is normal. Trainers can follow up on these thoughts with a discussion of what to do about one’s fears.

### **What are your goals?**

Likely, participants will need guidance with working on this page. Follow the instructions as given in the book. Start with picture 1 (where you are now); then go to picture 6 (your dream); then have them fill in what they need to do in between – go to English class, complete high school, etc.

### **Write a letter**

I once wrote a letter to myself, sealed it, and sent it to myself a year later. My hands were shaking opening it! The letter showed me where I was at with my life, and what I was thinking a year ago. It seemed kind of immature; the things that were so important a year ago now seemed small and of little consequences. I had come a long way! Perhaps the participants will find the same.

### **Your home in the United States**

This page is meant to be done in the US. Participants had drawn their old home; now they’re drawing their new home. It’s good to compare the two.

## **Your favorite place**

Participants have now come full circle. They’ve lost more than one favorite place now. Finding a new favorite place is very important; it’s one of the steps in making America home.