

Maha Lulu's Story



Maha arrived at SCAP on the first day of Career Readiness class with a goal. She said, "I want to become free and independent within my marriage, to get a job and have something for myself." Later that week, she pointed to a picture in a collage she made on the first day of class and explained she felt like that bird in the cage, she wanted to be free to fly. However, quickly enough, Maha's enthusiasm and confidence to move forward was waning and the next day she was full of self-doubt again.

Maha is an immigrant from Jordan. Although she has lived in America for more than 20 years, until the first day of class, she spoke mostly in her native language. As a traditional Islamic woman, Maha wears a Hijab (head covering) and was concerned this might be a problem. Her experiences in this country revolved solely around her family. She cared for her five children at home and sometimes helped out with the family business. To Maha, helping in the business was just part of being a family.

In class she was uncomfortable speaking out because she felt so different and wasn't confident in her ability to speak English. Also, she was afraid her experiences were not good enough to help her get a job outside of her family. She expressed, "I am not like these other students; I do not have a work history like they do." She even voiced her doubt about participating in the class and on day three was not sure she was going to come back.

Willing to try, Maha *did* come back and in spite of struggling through many unsure and uncomfortable moments, she continued to move forward. For example, her class was asked to make a list of what they felt were their skills. Even though it was her belief that she had no skills, she listened as the instructor explained that skills can come from anywhere, even hobbies. Then, she was able to complete her list. Maha listed her unique experiences as a mother, a family business worker, and a hobbyist. From that, she was able to see she had a good deal to offer. This was the beginning of a renewed sense of self-confidence for Maha.

Over the next few weeks Maha proved to be a hard worker, she learned how to use a computer to research job possibilities and to write her resume. As her resume came together she began to think about herself and what she loved to do. Her focus shifted from what she felt she was not to what she felt she was. When she realized her love of art and being with children could lead to a job, she was delighted.

Close to Maha's home is an Islamic school. Maha felt confident enough to contact the school and make an appointment to discuss future opportunities. Even though the school year was ending, she was able to secure a volunteer position teaching Arabic for the summer which started right after her SCAP career readiness graduation. Maha's volunteer position turned into a full-time job. Now, she is happy, she gets to be around children, her English has improved, and she is more confident in her strengths and abilities. Maha plans to continue her education to secure a full-time teaching position at the school. Regarding her job Maha said, "I'm doing it, 'cuz I'm loving it!"

