



Student Spotlight
Momena A., *ESOL Student*
 Wickham Literacy Center

Seven years ago, Momena left her native country of Jordan to begin a new life in America with her husband. Life in Jordan, where she grew up with fourteen siblings, was extremely difficult. While she enjoyed her work as a nurse, Momena says she received little support from her family, and that overall, there were few opportunities for women in her country. “I felt that I had no control over my own life,” she says. Her husband assured her that they would have a better life in America.

But soon after arriving in the U.S., Momena found that life here was not as easy as she had been promised. Since she did not speak any English, she was completely dependent on her husband and his family, and felt isolated and alone. In 2013, she decided to move with her young son into a women’s shelter. The staff there told her that the first step to creating a new life for herself would be to improve her English. Upon this realization, Momena immediately began practicing English on her own, and signed up for an English class at the local community college. Soon, her English had improved enough that she was able to apply for housing assistance and move into a new apartment with her son.

In early 2014, determined to continue improving her English, Momena signed up for twice-weekly ESOL classes at LVGH’s East Hartford location. At LVGH, she says, she is “always learning; the tutors always keep me working. Now, I know more difficult words and have better understanding... and I don’t have to ask as many questions.” She says that the tutors and her classmates keep her motivated, and she is grateful for the supportive environment.

“This is my life.”

As her English improved, Momena’s confidence grew tremendously, and she gained the courage to continue taking steps towards a better life for herself and her son. By the fall of 2014, her English skills had improved enough that she was ready to study for the U.S. citizenship exam. With the help of our partners at East Hartford Adult Education (which hosts a variety of classes in the same building as LVGH’s Wickham Literacy Center), Momena became a U.S. citizen in December. “Everything was black before,” she says. “[Becoming a citizen] felt like starting my life. It feels like something good is coming soon for me and my son. This country helps me to look to the future. This is a good country for women and kids; it protects them.”

Momena’s next goal is to return to the medical field; she recently enrolled in the medical assistant program at the local community college. “I cried on the first day of college,” Momena says. “I am an Arabic lady who can prove my life, I can do more. I am not under the control of anyone. This is my life.”

In addition, Momena’s long-term dream is to own her own restaurant, because she loves to cook and wants to share the food from her native country with those in her adopted country. Seven years after leaving home, it seems that Momena is finally experiencing a taste of the American Dream.