

A Refugee's Story of Freedom and Connection

Shabnam and Michael

In 1994, Shabnam Arabsha Heefled the dangers of Afghanistan. She moved to Pakistan, where she worked for three years for the United Nations.

“Since I knew Persian and Pashto they had me search for Afghan refugees. I went from tent to tent looking for Afghan women who had no husbands, families, or homes.”



These women—and Shabnam herself—were granted passage to the United States. The day after Christmas, Shabnam arrived in this country, unable to speak a word of English.

“I looked for someone to help me learn English. One day I was in the Villa Park Library. I saw a notice for [Literacy DuPage]. I called the number and a lady put my name on a list. She told me to wait.”

Three weeks later, Shabnam met Michael, her tutor.

“He is very patient. This was two years ago and he is still teaching me. I learn by reading, writing, and speaking.”

Shabnam works to improve her English so she can be employed, informed, and connected. She also wants to help others.

“English is an international language and by knowing English I can also help other refugees. English also helps me to understand the media and to know what is going on in the world ... Knowing English is a big part of this great and free country.”