

Meet Kathy and Babak

Kathy and Babak are learners in the English At Large One-to-One Tutoring Program. As a married couple they came to the United States with their son from Iran in 2010.

They spoke little English and the transition was hard for the family — they had no relatives in the area. They had no one to guide them on how much an apartment should cost, where to live, how to rent a car, or provide other vital information.

“When we came here we didn’t have anything and it was hard” explains Kathy. This process was made harder by the language barrier. **“We didn’t know English, and it was horrible.”**

So, why do it? Why move to a new country, learn a new language, and navigate a new culture? Kathy said coming to America “is the big chance for everybody,” adding that “If you try hard, you can get everything you want.”

This hard-working spirit is evident in the couple’s efforts to learn English. After a year on our waitlist for tutoring, they were each matched with a tutor in 2016. Today, they continue to learn with their tutors and also attend English At Large conversation groups.

Kathy voices her appreciation for English At Large, and emphasizes the **importance of free language instruction for people trying to get on their feet in a new country**. She also notes that English At Large provides the couple with **more than language instruction — they have gained cultural knowledge and friendships**.

Babak and Kathy are determined to learn about American culture. Kathy’s English At Large tutor, Jane, notes that Kathy will come to her, tell her about a situation and ask, “Is this normal?” Together the pair navigate cultural differences between Iran and the U.S.

“I ask her every single thing I need in life, even in my work — tell me what I should do!” says Kathy. Babak reiterates her sentiment, “Now I can ask my tutor Denis everything, about the job, everything”.

Babak and Kathy say that **people who take the time to help them, like Jane and Denis, are crucial to their success**. They speak of their landlord who went with them to the local public school to help register their son. They rave about a teacher who helped Kathy get a job at a nearby preschool. Kathy can’t say enough about Jane, “I’m so happy with Jane... because she can help me, because she knows me, she knows my mistakes, and she can edit me.”



Jane and Denis both speak of the dramatic English improvement of their learners. Denis voices pride in Babak’s improved ability to communicate difficulties at his job. Jane is thrilled to notice Kathy is self-correcting her English more and more every session.

With the help of their tutors, Babak and Kathy hope to continue to improve their English skills, so they can get better jobs and become more independent.

“If I can speak English, the life everywhere, not just here, is better, very better” says Babak.