

First, You Have to Believe in Yourself

Deeqo Jibril

When I was growing up, I thought leadership was just for people with money or fame, but I have learned that leadership is not the position you hold. It's the difference that you make in your family and in your community.

It's been a long journey for me to come to where I am now. I am from Somalia, but I had to leave because of the war there. I lived in a refugee camp in Kenya. I came to the United States in 1991 at the age of 13. I went through a lot, but it made me a better person. Many people helped me, and that makes me want to help others.

I'm the first one in my family to go to college. My mother never went to school. Many Somalis feel that educating girls is not necessary. Some of my own family members felt that I should raise my children first and then get my education.

I have three children ages 2, 6, and 7. They are my motivation. Every time I want to quit school, I think, "How am I going to tell my son or daughter that they need an education if I don't have one?" I went to English High School in Boston, but I didn't learn anything about going to college there. Later, I found the Bridge to College program. It helped me with my writing, math,

I am somebody, and my voice is powerful.

and computer skills, and I learned how to apply for college. Now I'm a

mentor for other Bridge program students.

As an immigrant, I never realized that I had a voice. In April 2007, I attended the Commonwealth Legislative Seminar for Minorities. I learned how laws are passed and how to advocate for issues. I did an internship for Senator Jarrett Barrios. Every time he had a committee hearing he invited me to come along. That experience led me to become even more interested in politics. It made me realize I am somebody, and

my voice is powerful.

One year, I attended a hearing and advocated for the Dream Act, which would allow undocumented immigrant youth to pay in-state college tuition. I also volunteered for our Governor's campaign. I motivated other Somalis to vote. It takes persistence. At the beginning, they said, "Why should we vote? What's going to be different?" But I gave them examples of how elected officials affect our lives. For example, the government makes decisions about our rights at work and our children's education.

My plan is to enroll in the Women and Politics program at the University of Massachusetts and to become a leader in my community. Most of my people don't vote. I want to be a role model for Somali women and show them how politics affects them. Eventually, I want to run for office. Women are not just made to have babies. We can also become effective leaders.

To me, advocacy means speaking up for what you believe is right. Without advocacy, change won't happen. The most important lesson I have learned so far about speaking up is that first, you have to believe in yourself because if you don't believe in yourself you cannot be an effective advocate. Then, you need to act on your beliefs.



Deeqo Jibril attended Cambridge Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She received a Citizens Bank/World Education college scholarship in September 2007. Deeqo's story is retold in pictures on the next page.

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Deeqo in Somalia, age 10.

It has been a long journey for me to come to where I am now.



A Somali refugee camp in Kenya.

I am from Somalia, but I had to leave because of the war there. I lived in a refugee camp in Kenya.



Deeqo in her ESL class, age 15.

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Deeqo's children, Ayan (age 7), Munira (age 2), and Hamza (age 6),

My children are my motivation. Every time I want to quit school, I think, "How am I going to tell my son or daughter that they need to get an education if I don't have one?"



Deeqo with State Representative Sanchez and the director of the Commonwealth Legislative Seminar for Minorities, Joel Barrera.

In April 2007, I attended a class to learn how laws are passed and how to advocate for issues. I realized I am somebody and my voice is powerful.



Deeqo with Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts.

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