



Overcoming Obstacles

Mina Ehsan

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What are *halal* foods? Share what you know.
2. When you moved to a new community, how did you find what you needed in your new home?

Many Challenges

When we moved to the U.S. from Afghanistan in 2021, we faced many challenges.

Finding Basic Household Items

First, though we had an apartment, we did not have any household items or furniture. There is a resettlement agency in Massachusetts. They assisted us. They introduced us to volunteer groups. They visited our home, and they offered help. We were so glad to have their support. They helped solve our problems. Now, we have everything we need.

Finding Food

Second, we had a hard time getting food, especially *halal* foods. The nearest store with *halal* food was seven miles away from our home. To overcome this obstacle, we made friends with our neighbor who helped us by giving us rides to the store.

Our neighbors are Russian. When we first moved here, they came to visit our home. They liked us a lot, especially my little daughters. They understood our situation and our needs, especially transportation. The Russian man told us to ask whenever we needed a ride to the grocery store. He lives with his wife, and we started sharing food with them. Whenever we cooked anything for ourselves, we cooked the same for them as well. This friendship is still alive, and we hope it will last forever. Our Muslim friends were



A grocery store selling halal meat. Photo by Peter Trimming. CC 2.0.

also looking for *halal* foods. We shared with them a list of stores selling *halal* foods.

Finding English Classes

Looking back, there were a lot more tools I could have used to get through my challenges. If I had known about Holyoke Community College (HCC), I could have started my English studies sooner. The way we found English classes at HCC was by talking to people in the community and looking up information online.

If we had known more about the resources Massachusetts had to offer, we could have had more luck finding employment and getting access to legal counsel. Yet, once we had a better understanding of the resources, we were able to access practically all of them.

Finding Lawyers

For example, we searched for volunteer lawyers around us. We did not have much money, so we were unable to pay the lawyer fees. We needed a



Refugees arriving at a location in Germany. Photo by Raimond Spekking from Wikimedia Commons.

lawyer to help us apply for permanent residency. Luckily, we found a paralegal team from the resettlement agency, and a volunteer lawyer is currently working on our case.

Other resources were available, but we didn't use them because we weren't aware of them. Jewish Family Services (JFS) is a resettlement agency in western Massachusetts. They provide support to refugees. They help them find homes, work, and a school for learning English.

Sharing with Others

Now that I know about these resources, I can share them with many other Afghan immigrants who have just arrived.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. List three ways that Mina found information. How did she use the information?
2. How do you find information in your community? Have a discussion in your class about what kind of community resources people already use or wish they could find. Conduct research online, notice public service announcements on

the radio and in the media, look at flyers posted in clinics and elsewhere, and talk to people to learn more about resources that are available in your community. Work in small groups and collect information about these resources. Share it with other students in print or electronically.

GRAMMAR PRACTICE

3. Notice the construction "If I had known about HCC, I could have started my English studies sooner." Write your own sentences using a similar construction:

If I had known _____,

I could have _____.

Mina Ehsan is an ESOL student at Holyoke Community College. She is from Afghanistan, and she immigrated to the United States in 2021. Mina hopes to become a teacher in the United States where she lives with her husband and kids. Growing up in Afghanistan, Mina and her family had considerable hurdles in transitioning to a new language and culture here in the U.S. However, their constant determination and dedication to study enabled them to overcome these challenges. Mina is now an inspiration, displaying her persistence and enjoying her journey for a brighter future in the United States.