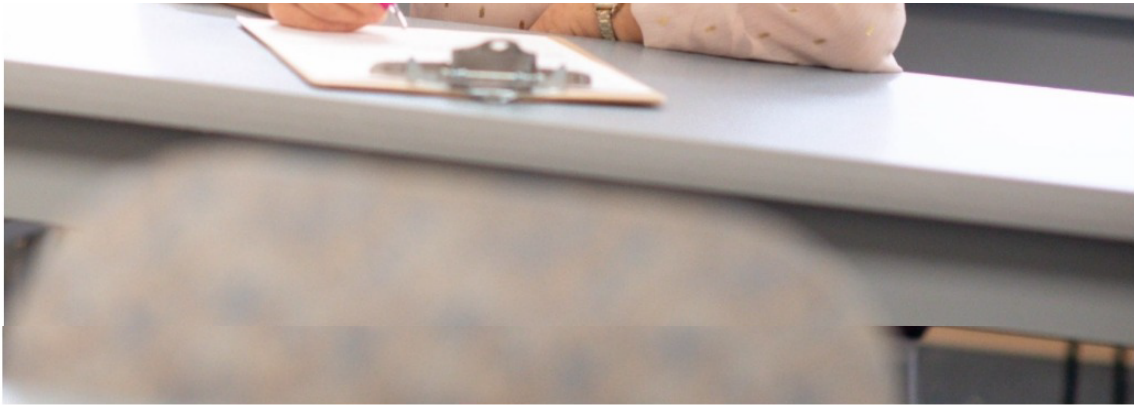


Iranian woman, 69, pursues American dream with help of United Way of York County

Zahra Tehrani didn't speak English, know how she'd get a job, or have health insurance when she moved to the United States in 2019. When businesses needed essential workers during the pandemic, she used it as an opportunity to establish her independence.

WRITTEN BY: REBECCA HANLON STORY PAID FOR BY: UNITED WAY OF YORK COUNTY





Within a week of moving to the US, Zahra Tehrani was at the York County Literacy Council taking "English as a Second Language" classes, which are made possible by United Way of York County's Impact Fund. (Photo by Chelsea Foster for Our York Media)

When Zahra Tehrani stepped off the plane from Iran on Nov. 16, 2019, she didn't speak any English. She didn't have a job or health insurance. She couldn't even drive.

But she wanted to be closer to her grandchildren, so immigrating to the United States and moving in with her daughter's family was worth facing those obstacles.

"No one would have blamed her for just easing in," says her son-in-law Kuyomars "Q" Golparvar, who's an immigration judge working in York County.

But Zahra didn't want to just sit around. Within a week, she was at the York County Literacy Council taking English as a Second Language classes, which are made possible by United Way of York County's Impact Fund.

"I have a lot of big dreams for myself," she says, with the help of Kuyomars as her translator. "I want to be independent."

It wasn't long after Zahra got underway in her ESL classes that COVID-19 shut down many resources in the community. She continued her classes online, not wanting the pandemic to slow her progress. When businesses needed essential workers, she started applying for jobs at local grocery stores.

By August 2020, she was working part-time in the produce section at Walmart in Springettsbury Township. When they offered her a full-time position in December, she took on the extra hours with a sigh of relief — the role came with health insurance. She no longer had to worry about getting sick.

A full-time job and health benefits are just a few items checked off Zahra's long list of goals. She recently got her learner's permit and plans to be driving herself to work. She also hopes to someday have her own apartment or even own a house. At 69 years old, the American dream is not out of her reach.

"I feel like I'm part of my community," she says, naming the friends she's made at work, many who have forged similar paths. "I am making this my home."



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