



Umm-Kulthum "Ummiy" Siddiqui

The sky is the limit for Umm-Kulthum "Ummiy" Siddiqui, a student in the Workforce and Economic Development Information Technology Support Specialist program. Ummiy chose to start her academic journey through WED because of "the ease with which I was able to enter the program and receive funding. The staff at the workforce were very encouraging, helpful, and sincere. They told me I could get into any program I wanted, and helped me understand my own value to Mott and the workforce in general," she said.

Starting her education at MCC has opened up worlds of possibility for Ummiy. She plans to continue her education but is unsure which path will best help her achieve her long term goals. "I would like to pursue expertise in finance, law, and psychology with the goal of starting an organization dedicated to healing women and helping them out of poverty and other difficult or traumatic situations," she explained.

Receiving a PATH program grant has been a tremendous boon for Ummiy, whose only barrier to completing her education is financial. "At the moment, I am not eligible for financial aid support through the government, as I am disputing the \$30,000 in student debt wrongfully obtained in my name by my ex-husband," she said—she found out about the debt when she returned to the United States in 2020 and tried applying to finish her bachelor's degree. "I was very disheartened by this and almost gave up on post-secondary education completely." The scholarship helped me understand there were other ways I could continue my education. It helped me to not give up on my vision."

Working at the Flint & Genesee Literary Network—a division of Mott's Workforce and Economic Development—Ummiy is building toward her future as an AmeriCorps member. "My experience at the Network has been of extreme growth," she said. "I have learned so much while being here, and the Network's staff has been very supportive in my development as a professional, and in my role as a mother."

Ummiy is proud she was able to establish security and stability for herself and her children with almost no family or community support. "When

I left Turkey in 2020, we were in the middle of the pandemic. I had never lived on my own. I had never worked an 'official' job. I had never driven. But I made the decision to find my own way. I obtained my license and found my job at the Network, and we eventually transitioned to our own home. For the first time in my life, I have my own home, my own income, and my own car. For the first time in my life, I feel like I am living according to my own principles and values. I am shaping my children's life according to their fullest potential."

Ummiy said her scholarship is a gift she considers "priceless." "As a mother, I am grateful to have an opportunity for a better way to support my children. As a woman, I learned that opportunities in the workforce are tremendous, and the value I bring to the workforce is unique and just as valuable as a man's. As a person, I learned that there are people in the world who care and will help you out if you are really serious about changing your situation."

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Creating her own path