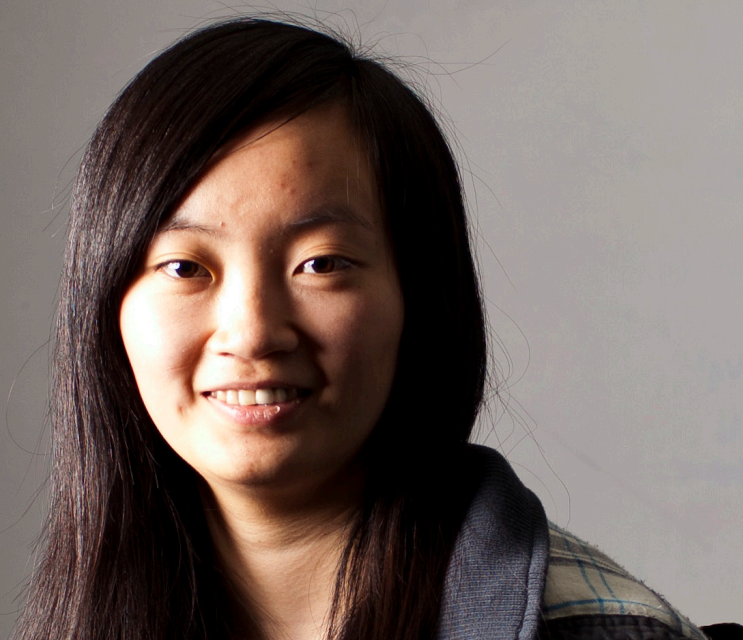


Shuzhou Lin:

“I learned how to communicate with the doctor or nurse, how to make an appointment...

I’m ready now!”



Imagine coming to Madison to fulfill your dream of attending college—but not knowing a word of English. You can’t open a bank account or use the library. You can’t make friends. And, of course, you can’t enroll in classes.

That’s the situation Shuzhou Lin found herself in a year and a half ago. She and her mother, brother, and sister emigrated from China to join Lin’s father, who had been living here for ten years. Life was frustrating and lonely for Lin. “In this country everybody speaks English,” she says. “If you don’t speak English you can’t communicate with others.” She didn’t even explore her new city because she couldn’t read signs and maps, and she couldn’t ask for directions.

Her younger siblings enrolled at West High School, which offers English as a Second Language classes, but there was no obvious place for the twenty-year-old Lin to learn English. Then her cousin found Literacy Network by searching online—which, as it happened, was just down the street from the restaurant where her father worked.

In 2010, Lin began attending classes regularly and grew into a well liked and respected student among her peers. She participated actively in class and even volunteered to present information in front of the group for class projects. She attended extra “conversation group” classes, the Mobile Learning Lab, Health Literacy classes and the unique “Conversation and Writing” course held in partnership with a UW-Madison graduate program.

“I learned when to call 911—when my life or another life is in danger. I learned how to communicate with the doctor or nurse, how to make an appointment,” said Lin.

Lin also learned how to conduct business at a library, store, or bank. “The last time, I wanted to open a new account for myself, but they said I needed an ID. So my teacher told me what I need and where to go,” she said. “I’m ready now!”

If she can’t think of a word for what she wants in a store, she can usually explain it in a roundabout way. “I just say what I like, its shape, and they guess what I need,” she says.

Her biggest triumph, however, was the day this fall when she enrolled at Madison College. She now is in the accounting program. “In my memories, my Dad was an accountant in China. I want to be an accountant as he. I think accounting is the funnest job,” says Lin. “You can be a friend with numbers, and you can be a friend with money.”

She commented that attending Literacy Network’s diverse and free programs helped give her the confidence to succeed with that goal.

After completing her two-year program at Madison College, Lin hopes to get a job in accounting and also to pursue a higher degree. Thanks to the Literacy Network, she’s well on her way to making her dreams come true.



Literacy Network
Improving Lives Through Literacy

Lin tells her story in video at www.litnetwork.org

Literacy Network teaches reading, writing and speaking skills to adults and families so they can achieve financial independence, good health and greater involvement in community life. All programs are free of charge.

Photo and Video: Narayan Mahon