

# Knocking on Closed Doors

Many times it's not the experiences we have that are our biggest achievements, but it's what happens as a result of these experiences that has the greatest impact.

Reem Abou Elenain, who serves as an EducationUSA Adviser in Alexandria, Egypt, advises students who want to study in the United States. Before taking her position at EducationUSA, she was a Fulbright grantee for the Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program, sponsored by the U.S Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, teaching Arabic at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania.

When Reem returned to Egypt after her Fulbright program, she continued working as an English instructor, but also took every opportunity to share her experience and to encourage people to apply for degree programs or exchange programs to the United States.

"After I became an adviser at EducationUSA, my goal was to help as many students as I could, but I also wanted to engage students who would be intimidated to apply to study in the United States; those thinking these kinds of possibilities are not for them; or that it would not be possible for them to study in the United States."

After one year at EducationUSA, Reem realized that there was a group of people that she wasn't reaching and who face even greater challenges. This group of people were students with disabilities.

"I reached out to an association for visually impaired people and have started to learn about the challenges they face, and I wanted to plan a way to overcome them."

## The Challenges Reem Learned

- 1 Many students with disabilities do not know that they are eligible to U.S. colleges and universities.**
- 2 Students with disabilities often do not have access to a quality education. Many times, their only option is to join special public schools that don't integrate non-disabled students.**
- 3 There is a lack of access to English language training for students with disabilities.**
- 4 Blind and low vision students are barred from pursuing many majors, especially STEM fields due to lack of technology and access to equal education.**



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to Start Your #Access2USA**

**[educationusa.state.gov](http://educationusa.state.gov)**



## See Reem's Steps to Inclusion





# Set Expectations, See Benefits

Know that students with disabilities are underrepresented in international exchange programs and that everyone should have **EQUAL ACCESS** to opportunities to study abroad. After students gain access to quality education, they can contribute the skills and access they experienced in the United States back in their home country.

*“It would give them the tools to help other generations of visually impaired people to have access to better lives and more opportunities.”*

## Targeted Outreach

Be **PROACTIVE** by including students with disabilities in study abroad fairs. Low participation rates are likely not because they don't want to join, but they may not realize that they are welcome and that organizers can provide assistance. Reem has established a strong relationship with a blind association in Alexandria and is now looking to reach out to other disability organizations.

*“I believe that everyone should have an equal chance to gain access to opportunities to study abroad.”*

# Educate Students About the Opportunities

Make sure to EDUCATE students with all types of disabilities about #Access2USA for their studies and understand what support they need to make it happen.

*“I always tell all my students to knock on closed doors. When they think it is ‘impossible’ to gain admissions to U.S. universities. They simply don’t know, and often, many doors open.”*

## Plan and Find Solutions

Reem CONNECTED with a few local schools and invited their high level English-speaking students to volunteer to teach English to students with disabilities that had little English proficiency. She believes, change can only happen when people with and without disabilities are integrated together in society.