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From Kabul to Paris and Beyond

Spring 2026



Building Hila Together

A Note from the Founders

Hila Initiative began with a simple conviction that access to learning, community, and opportunity can restore something essential : hope.

What started as a small remote program of 21 students and 4 teachers has grown into a vibrant, connected community of 61 students supported by 6 teachers. Together, we have built a learning environment that spans levels of English from beginner (A2) to advanced (C1), with students meeting online twice weekly online for immersive 90-minute sessions.

An essential part of this journey has been our dedicated volunteer Conversation Partners in France, the UK, Ireland, and the United

States. This community has grown from 20 to over 60 volunteers, creating space for students to practice English, strengthen speaking skills, build confidence and form meaningful human connections.

As the program evolved, we expanded our vision. We introduced "Path Forward," encompassing courses beyond and opening new possibilities for your students. Through partnerships with Coursera, Code to Inspire, and ReFocus Media, students access training in Python, graphic design, and videography, while photography is led by a highly talented Hila in-house teacher. To address isolation and support mental well-being, we launched Expressive Arts for Empowerment, led by a volunteer psychotherapist.

The results have been deeply encouraging. Test scores show over 78% of students advanced at least one CEFR level last year. Virtually all reporting improved mental health, and—most importantly—began to feel hopeful again.

This community exists because of you, your belief, your generosity and your willingness to stand with us since the beginning. Thank you for being part of Hila.

We want to give a big shoutout to the Newsletter team who worked so hard to get our first edition going.

"Hila" means hope in Pashto. It is the purpose that guides everything we do.



For our initial newsletter we asked our **Conversation Partners** (CPs) and our

Teachers to reflect on what initially drew them to Hila, the perspectives they have gained through their involvement, and the moments that have left a lasting impression. Collectively, their responses underscore our shared commitment to helping women feel seen, safe, and empowered.

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

We have been deeply moved by our students' unrelenting desire to learn and their perseverance, qualities that speak to the profound resilience of the human spirit. The moments that resonate are often the quiet, intimate glimpses into their lives and moments when remember the hope that exists in the power of connection.

We share some teacher observations:

I teach ten young Hila students. Like students in any language class, they have varied skills levels. One speaks with near perfect intonation and writes better than many native American speakers. Another is a grammar whiz. One has a fearless drive to speak. Others are quiet but reveal their abilities in small ways. They share a favorite English word "dear" and a favorite emoji – a heart.

Bit by bit, I'm putting together a picture of them through their class behavior and work. Unfortunately, I have little visual information to add, as only one student turns on her camera (they may keep them off to save bandwidth or out of modesty). Recently, to help fill in more details, I created an interview template with questions about their families, their skills, their friendships, their future aspirations, and favorite places, seasons and colors. Before putting pairs in break out rooms, I offered that they could help each other in Dari but needed to write their interviewee's answers in English. That direction was unnecessary: when I popped into rooms, I was delighted to find them chatting away – in English. They loved getting the chance to meet each other virtually, and after presentations, one student invited everyone to come to her house to share a batch of firni she had made. I don't know if that would ever be possible, but it was a happy moment for all of us. (Anne A, B1 teacher)

CONVERSATION PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Many of our Conversation Partners shared moments when they were invited into the more intimate fabric of their students' lives.

"When my conversation partner said her daughter wanted to meet me, I was so happy! She is also learning English, and she was proud to have a conversation with me. I loved talking with her and look forward to saying hello when I meet with her mom." (Deborah M)

"My CP experienced the death of her father a few months ago. They were close and his death was not expected. He encouraged her education and her working at her job. An activity they shared was watching television news interview with foreign journalists. I was touched when she asked if I would watch a news interview with her during one of our chats. It was a moving and intimate experience. (Laurie S).

I talked with my conversation partner as she prepared for her family's Eid festivities. She cleaned the house and shopped and carefully prepared a variety of foods for a Marth-Stewart-worthy table, every dish artistically presented. As her reward for the hard work, her mother allowed her to buy a new Punjabi robe. She finally found the perfect one, elegant and graceful. I remember thinking how much was accomplished with so little money and such loving spirit. (Meredith M)



This short video above was created by a student participating in our Media class, part of our broader effort to provide digital and creative skills to our students **Click on image to play.**

STORIES OF STRENGTH FROM OUR STUDENTS

**Our students express
gratitude for their
classes and supportive
teachers, gaining in
confidence and**

"I would like to sincerely thank Hila because, through its English classes, I have been able to improve my English skills significantly. I am also very happy with my conversation partner. She is a very kind person, and speaking with her every week is helping my English get better and better. Regarding the photography classes, I truly love them."

personal growth as their English skills improve. Most heartwarming is the joy and meaning they find in the experience - through conversation partners and creative classes, hope, connection, and a sense of personal fulfillment have been infused into their lives.

They are not just classes for me, but also a special time that I genuinely enjoy spending for myself. Thank you for providing such a valuable experience."
Nilofar, B2

"Hila", as its name suggests, has been a source of hope in my life and a path toward greater success. During the time I have been a student here, I have learned many valuable and meaningful things.

All of our teachers are wonderful and supportive, and they have helped me grow in many ways. One of the biggest improvements I have seen is in my English. My speaking and understanding have improved a lot, and I feel more confident using the language.

The Conversation Partner (CP) sessions are also very helpful. They are not only good for improving my English, but they also help me learn more about the world and different perspectives.

In addition, I have learned new skills in my classes. For example, before, I could not take good photos, but now I am improving and can take much better and more creative pictures.

In my opinion, HILA is one of the best opportunities I have ever had. It has given me hope, confidence, and motivation to keep learning and growing.

Thank you very much for all your support and guidance." Sutooda, B2

Donations

To sustain access to Hila's programs, we are seeking \$14,000 to support essential digital needs. This includes monthly internet credits for approximately 46% of our students, as well as replacing inoperable mobile phones, ensuring consistent participation in classes. Your support helps maintain reliable access to learning for every student.

For direct bank transfers in US Dollars or to donate appreciated stocks, ETF's or mutual funds please contact Evelyn@hila-initiative.fr for details. Paypal links below

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