

## Kpoti Tevi

(Speech given at LVGH Gala)



Good evening,

My name is Kpoti Tevi and I am here to tell you about my experience at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford. I attended English class and was a part of the Career Pathways program. LVGH changed my life.

I was born and raised in Lome, the capital of Togo in West Africa. Life was not easy there. My father passed away when I was 11 years old. He was a teacher and always put education first. After his death, I had to work with my mother after school at a small grocery store that she ran. A public education costs money in Togo, so as I got older, I was lucky to go to a technical school for a few years and learn how to be an electrician.

Even after becoming an electrician, I still dreamed of leaving Togo one day. There is a lot of poverty and few opportunities available.

Another reason I wanted to leave Togo was because my girlfriend, now my wife, was living in the United States after winning the visa lottery in Togo. She was living in Hartford, Connecticut. I had never heard of this place, but that is where I went.

I arrived in the United States in November. When I landed, I did not have the right clothes on, and I remember never feeling so cold in my life. My excitement overcame me, and I completely forgot how cold it was.

Once I was settled, the first thing I knew I had to do was learn English. A Togolese friend who I met in Hartford told me about an English school called Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, so I enrolled, and I am really glad I did.

It was very hard at first, but the teachers at LVGH are patient and understanding. They encourage you even when you feel like you aren't making any progress. Learning English for me was hard because as a French speaker, a lot of the words look similar, but are pronounced or spelled very different. I also enjoyed being a class with people from all over the world. We were all going through the same struggles, and we supported each other and practiced with each other. Slowly, my speaking and literacy skills started to get stronger.

Not long after I started at LVGH, I heard about the Career Pathways program and how they would help you find a job. I was working at Wal-Mart, but always had the dream of becoming an electrician in America. I met with Leo and told him I thought becoming an electrician here would be impossible, but Leo gave me the confidence I needed. Leo helped me apply to Porter & Chester's electrical program and to my delight I was accepted. I was so excited to start working towards my dream. If Leo had not pushed me to apply, I probably would still be working at Wal-Mart. So, Leo, Thank you.

It is so hard to start over in a new country and to learn a new language. When I look back at the challenges I had to face, I know I would not be where I am today without the help of LVGH.

I have been in the U.S and Connecticut for three years. This is my home now. I married my wife here and we have a one-year-old son now. When I think about my son, I feel happy knowing that he can be whatever he wants to be when he grows up. With all the struggles that my wife and I have been through, I feel good knowing that my son is growing up in a country that values education. My dad always told me that having an education is important and that is something I was to pass along to my son.

I want to thank you for supporting LVGH and providing the resources for students like me to learn English and to be successful. Without programs like LVGH, a lot of new immigrants would struggle. Once I moved to the U.S, the thing I wanted most was a chance to be a part of my community and be able to have opportunities. Because of LVGH, I speak English, have a job I enjoy, and can provide for my wife and son.

Thank you for listening and thank you for your support. Have a great evening.