

"I used to work seven days a week. I wanted to be the best mother, the best everything. I had no social life for 20 years - just my kids and my job. Sometimes, I didn't know how I could continue."

After coming to the U.S. from Brazil in 1999, Zelia spent years trying, with limited success, to teach herself English at home when she wasn't working or caring for her children. Last year, with her kids grown, she finally found time to enroll in an ENB class, *English Innovations*, in East Boston.

What she learned was more than phrases and verb tenses, it was a renewed sense of self-worth.

"Every day, the teacher had something new and great to say, like 'You can start again...you're not old.' Now, I feel like what I did in my life was good, I feel like a very strong woman - how I raised my kids by myself, and I'm here, and how I think good thoughts about everybody. I felt like it's never too late."

Zelia joined a leadership group and became a representative of her ESOL program and took advantage of public speaking training provided by ENB. Weeks later, she visited the State House offices of her Representatives and Senator, shared her experience of learning English, and encouraged them to support ESOL classes.

She was nervous.

"It was my first time going to the State House. I had no experience. But, they said 'just be yourself.' So, I did, and I felt like the Representatives wanted to help the immigrants. For me, it was a wonderful experience, and I hope to do it again."

In fact, Zelia has done it again. Zelia and other ESOL students returned to the State House many times last spring to speak in support of ESOL classes.