Sarah Abdullah came to the United States as a refugee from Iraq in July of 2013.

It was not an easy journey, but a necessary one for a safe future.

Abdullah attended college in Jordan to enter the pharmaceutical field.

“After I graduated, I was told people from Iraq are not allowed to work in Jordan, so I went back home to find a job in hospital pharmacy,” she said.

Abdullah soon began managing the pharmaceutical department at a hospital and gaining experience in the field she’s always wanted to be in.

An increasingly dangerous work environment led her and her husband to the decision to come to the U.S.

“When there was a suicide bombing in the hospital I was working at, I knew it was time to look at leaving,” Abdullah said.

When she arrived in the U.S., Abdullah realized that her education and work experience wouldn’t qualify her for a pharmaceutical license.

“I didn’t know where to go or what to do, until I heard about the Welcome Back Center,” she said.

The Welcome Back Center is a national initiative that helps internationally educated individuals get back into their chosen fields.

“Highline opened a WBC on campus in 2008 and it has been an amazing success,” said Linda Faaren, director of the Welcome Back Center.

Getting people the licenses they need to be able to work in their field is the most challenging part, she said.

“We help students learn the processes and study for tests they need to take to be able to earn these licenses,” said Faaren. “Even though they have great experience and education, it doesn’t transfer when they come here.”

“Even with more than 20 years of experience, international candidates struggle to compete against brand new U.S. graduates,” said Cheryl Carino-Burr, educational case manager.

There is no application process to receive help from the Welcome Back Center, she said. All international students with previous education and or experience are welcome to come in.

With and infectious smile, Abdullah says she would be lost today without the Welcome Back Center.

“Not only did they help me learn what I needed to do, but I also was able to get a job working at the WBC while I finish getting my licenses,” said Abdullah.

After taking a pharmaceutical knowledge test in April, Abdullah has recently received word that she passed and will be moving on to the next phase to earn her license.

“After you take a knowledge test, you then have to pass an English proficiency test,” she said. “Linda let me take a month off of work before my test to allow me to study and not be too overwhelmed with everything I had going on.”

After completing the English proficiency test, Abdullah says she will be searching for an internship to begin working.

“The best way I can describe everyone at the WBC is dream makers,” she said. “They always keep me motivated and have helped me work so hard to achieve my goals.”