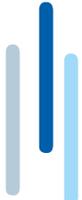




# Breaking Stereotypes



By Mai Obaid



I am 25 years old and have been fighting muscular dystrophy since I was 12. Although my health condition threatened my ability to walk and my chances to continue my education, my family has always supported me, helping me to finish high school and obtain a university degree.

*Tawjihi* (the senior high school year in Palestine) was challenging. It was both stressful and exhausting because I was down with health issues that forced me to stay in the hospital for weeks while studying for the exams that are a stepping-stone to university life. But even though this experience was reflective of the challenges I had been experiencing throughout my student years, I managed to graduate with an excellent GPA and obtained the grade of 97.8 with a specialization in science.

I chose the tech field because I've always had a passion for discovering software. The computer I owned as a kid was my baby doll; I enjoyed playing around with the hardware and experimented with the software. Moreover, software engineering was a perfect fit for me as it didn't require much physical effort. I knew it would be a challenging field, but I made up my mind to shine as a female software engineer. During my university years, I made sure to always meet deadlines and to be ahead of my tasks because there were times when my hands betrayed me. I wouldn't be able to move them or do anything.

By joining the Mercy Corps–Gaza Sky Geeks programs, I hoped to gain expertise in my field, and the course structure and the team helped me exceed my expectations. The Gaza Sky Geeks' Code Academy was a unique experience as it works in three verticals: the first is self-learning, where mentees learn how to educate themselves in tech fields. The second is techniques, and the third is professional skills. I not only upskilled as a front-end developer but also was able to make wise decisions regarding my career path and build financial independence by working with leading companies.

The mere idea of being economically independent gives me, as a female, a lot of strength. It has made me capable of supporting myself in many ways. Being independent has given me the feeling that I have the freedom to do a lot of things. I can

even financially provide for my loved ones. After graduating from the Code Academy, I qualified for a four-month internship with Google for Startups. This experience paved the way for me to shine because I could upskill further and enhance my CV. Currently, I work with UNRWA. My goal is to be among the women who make a change in today's world, break stereotypes as a developer, and inspire others to pursue a career in technology.

*Mai Obaid is a passionate, hardworking developer who works full-time with UNRWA at UNICC.*

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Mai Obaid: an inspiration

