

## **“How My Community College Has Changed My Life.”**

I am a 40-year-old immigrant woman who since January 2023 had to start her life from scratch in an unknown country, with a different language, culture, climate and customs that are at times oppressive. I had an immense sense of emptiness in my heart, I felt alone and overwhelmed by the idea that I was nobody here, that I didn't know anyone and that I didn't know where to go.

I never thought I would leave my land, my family and my life in Colombia but I had to. I set off on a trip without a return ticket in which I was accompanied only by my 3-year-old daughter, two suitcases and endless memories. How can you pack a lifetime in two suitcases? I couldn't explain it. For the first few months we were cooped up, looking out the window at the snow and trying to figure out the world outside those four walls.

Depression and despair increased and made me spend endless sleepless nights, it was clear to me that I needed to get my mind moving, get out of confinement, talk to someone to occupy my time and be able to heal from the sadness, loss and uprooting I felt. The College of Lake County changed and continues to change my life in a definitive way. The College gave me hope, its hallways became my home, I spent hours and hours between my classroom, the library and running after my daughter to see Lake Michigan through the windows or the balcony of the new Lakeshore Campus building.

The College, through the Children's Learning Center, offered me the security of taking care of my daughter while I took my classes. Together we arrived every morning to study at 9:00 am and left at 3:00 pm. For months I didn't have a dollar in my pocket and the College took care of me and my daughter. He gave us the gift of the market, through the Sharemarket, hot coffee every day, innumerable aids that allowed the darkness to go away and hope to return to me. God showed me that He is the one who takes care of me and my needs and He did so during that semester through the College and for that, I am immensely grateful.

At the Lakeshore Campus I have met wonderful people who always had a smile and a word of support and hope, who shared my pains, needs and also my joys. Cindy at the Lancerzone, Alice at the library, Katrina with her love and art as a space of liberation, the Dean, the Police Officers, my teachers and classmates. I said to myself, this is all perfect!! How can this be possible? The College has thought out each and every one of the needs that a student may have and the tools to solve them and make them feel capable of meeting their goals and undertaking the challenge of studying without other worries.

I can't leave aside the fact that through CAPS I received psychological help throughout the semester, in person at the Lakeshore Campus. I was able to cry long and hard in front of Glorivette and get stronger to keep walking. The reasons why the College of Lake County has changed my life are endless, I have become its ambassador so that many other people like me can come to study without thinking about money or notebooks, because even that is what I received. The College gave us movie afternoons and evenings when we didn't have the money to go to the

movies, snacks, gifts, and the incredible feeling that we are important and valuable to them. I feel the College as my alma mater.

The College of Lake County gave me back the hope, confidence and security of the woman I was, it showed me that anything is possible if I work hard and am brave to overcome adversity. Before the end of the Fall 2023 semester I completed all my GED exams and earned my high school diploma, got my first job and am currently a recipient of a scholarship awarded by the College to study Early Childhood Education Program in Spanish. I continue to have the unconditional support of the staff of the College and every day I am the proudest and most grateful student of my beloved College. I have dreamed of the ceremony in which I receive my associate degree and the honor of presenting the speech to share with everyone what I am conveying to you today.

Thank you forever College of Lake County.