

MEOA 2018-2019

Scholarship Winners

Cassparina Carlson

**Visions Program/TRIO SSS
Mount Wachusett Community College**



I am forty years old and although I always wanted to go to college, it never seemed like “my turn”. Growing up, I did not have the support or resources to guide me towards continued education. My parents did not go to college; therefore, they did not have the knowledge to share with me. Instead, I joined the Marine Corps and served my country for the next four years. I met my husband and started a family while in the Marine Corps. From an early age, I always had kids, a spouse, a family to take care of, and no time to get the education I wanted. I was a stay-at-home mom for eight years after exiting the Marine Corps, and my job was to take care of my family.

After twelve years of marriage, my husband and I divorced, and I went back to work. For several years I worked in retail as a store manager and I enjoyed my job, however, retail is demanding, and takes away from family. I missed nights, weekends, and holidays because I worked in retail. This all worked for a while because my ex-husband and I were able to co-parent and created a schedule that worked for all of us. Unfortunately, in June of 2016, he was killed in a motorcycle accident. This tragedy devastated all our lives and forever changed the dynamics of our family and the lives we had been living.

For several months, I battled the balance of being a single parent, work a demanding job, and mending our broken hearts. This fight to balance our lives was not working and I finally made a huge decision that changed all our lives once again; I decided to quit retail and go back to school fulltime. This decision was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time. By quitting my job, I was sacrificing many monetary benefits but was gaining family time, and I found the decision to choose my children over money easy.

Going back to school after so many years presented many challenges and anxieties; I feared being too old, not being able to manage the workload, and being financially strapped down. For the last two years, I have made many sacrifices including having to choose between schoolwork and events with the kids, not having the money for extracurricular activities, and having to get back into a student mentality. The experience has been humbling and a great lesson for my children to witness. I have faced anxiety over relearning math and sciences I had not thought about in twenty years and had to learn how to write papers all over again. Every sacrifice I have made has been well worth the experiences I have gained and the pride I feel in finally returning to school to fulfill a dream from decades ago.

Helping others has always come naturally, so now I want to use that natural gift and make the lives of others better as a social worker working with veterans. I will be attending Anna Maria in the fall to pursue my BSW/MSW. By receiving scholarships, I can continue my education while still being able to take care of my children. The scholarship money would go to help pay for tuition at Anna Maria.

As of now, I am receiving the Pell grant and financial aid, Anna Maria has also granted me a merit scholarship in the amount of \$23,000 for academic excellence. My time in service was too long ago and I do not qualify for the G.I. Bill anymore. I am currently working with Veteran's Affairs vocational rehabilitation to help pay for my tuition and books.

I have received several awards and scholarships including: The Visions award, human services academic award, the Judge Moore award, The Newman Civic Award, 29 Who Shine, Phi Theta Kappa Coca-Cola Silver scholarship, \$1250, Joseph B. Ruth scholarship, \$1000. I served as the student representative for the 3rd Congressional Debate at Fitchburg State. My GPA is a 3.83 and I am graduating with honors and am a member of both the New England Organization of Human Services (NEOHS) and Phi Theta Kappa.

While my children were younger, I spent many years as a girl scout leader. As they got older, I switched from girl scouts to booster club president for the cheer program at Gardner High School. While at MWCC, I was president of the Human Services Club and secretary of the Veteran's Club. I spent months campaigning and fund raising for Wreaths Across America, including helping lay wreaths on National Wreath Day at the Veteran's Memorial Cemetery. I worked on a semester long service learning project educating students on mental health awareness and an anti-stigma campaign pledge.

I have found that my community service and my journey at Mount Wachusett Community College in the Visions Program, the human services department, and with the help of Veterans services has helped pave my path towards working with veterans who have mental health needs. I am excited to continue my education at Anna Maria.

Brittany Gale

Rx Program/TRIO SSS Mount Wachusett Community College

Growing up in a poverty-stricken family, surrounded by other families that struggled as much as we did, things were *very* hard. My mother was *very* sick, and my father was physically and emotionally abusive so the essentials on how to create a great life were never passed along. I helped take care of my disabled mother from a young age and had a lot of family struggles on my shoulders. My worries included what we would eat, how would we get clean clothes, would we have enough to go around. Childhood was short lived for me.

I did not know what credit was or even what a GPA was. I have four older siblings that gave the local school systems the run around, essentially tiring them out. So, when it was my turn, the school had low expectations of me. I got caught up in a rough crowd and dropped out of school, going down the path that was basically promised to me. It was when my disabled mother begged me to go back to high school that I walked away from a life of uncertainty. It opened my *eyes* and allowed me to see the damage I was already doing. Because I finally had a little support, I graduated with honors from the local night school program. I was the first of my siblings to graduate high school. Unfortunately, my mother passed away twenty-eight days later. My siblings and I had already endured so much but that moment broke our humbled spirits. With my father in prison and our beloved mother gone we felt like orphans.



Eighteen and on my own, I was naïve and figured that I'd already won by graduating high school. I started working at a local company and established a good name for myself. I had two beautiful daughters down the road. In 2004 my oldest daughter was in a horrific accident that landed her in the ICU. It taught me life is so precious and that was when I realized not only did my children deserve more but so did I. I reached out to Mount Wachusett Community College and everything became so real. I learned how to be responsible with money, how to make new friends and how to find myself along the way. My childhood home life had beaten the spirit out of me and yet college helped me find the broken pieces and restore me to a strong confident woman. College has shown me how to not settle for average but reach for extraordinary. It has enlightened me to a world of understanding and support that I never knew existed. Because of MWCC, I'm not another statistic of poverty. I was given a chance to break the cycle and give my children a real chance in life.

Now I have all the support I could dream of. I've been involved with CCAMPIS for help with my youngest daughter's care. Being able to connect with other parents was very important to me. I utilized my new connections to create a dual fundraising event between my daughter's preschool center and dance studio. I was also elected the president of the Student Nurse Association club at MWCC. This allowed me to build strong connections in the local community and taught me valuable leadership and teamwork skills. I also have the TRIO Program, RX, that became my foundation and is more helpful than words can say. They offered great advice and allowed me to create forever friends through group events. They offered effective tutoring for which some classes would otherwise have been impossible to complete. After perseverance and great guidance, I was accepted into the nursing program. I was surrounded by strong, loving individuals who wanted nothing more than for us to succeed. I built friendships that will last a lifetime. The professors helped mold us into our own skin and find the balance of the chaos that surrounds nursing. They were firm yet supportive till the last day.

I graduated on May 23, 2019 with my associates in nursing with transfer to Worcester State as my goal! I plan on making the most of my opportunity with my essential end goal being a nurse practitioner. As a mom of two with low-income this scholarship will help me achieve my goals and help me show my girls the way to success.

Life leads us to many roads, some not that desirable. My journey has been a series of moments that was left in my hands to decipher. The cards I was continuously dealt expected me to look at the glass half empty, but I couldn't. I may not have parents, but I have my loving siblings. I have created a loving family of my own with a man who adores me and my children that I get to show the real world to. I may have been pushed down many times but only to rise again to something better. I've learned to embrace my toots and want to help others in the same situations do the same. Without our foundation there is no beginning to who we are. You cannot be embarrassed of what you cannot change. I want to help others realize how many can relate to their history.

I am not naïve to think others deserve this scholarship as much or more than I do, but I hope I can be a strong candidate. All our applications represent a story of how we overcame obstacles and built our foundation to have successful lives. I hope to continue my education and help as many people as possible throughout my career. Thank you for your time and investment in people like me. Because of scholarships like you we have a chance.

Parisa Hatami

Pace Program/TRIO SSS Northern Essex Community College



Hi my name is Parisa Hatami and I am 39 years old I have one child, a daughter who is ten. I am a single parent, I work part time and I am going to school full time. I am an immigrant who is alone without any family or friends in the United States. I grew up in Middle East where is a place of war and unfair for human especially for women. I came to United States when I was 26 years old with great hope to achieve my goals at "the land of the free." Upon my arrival I began to realize that everything I had "known" about America had nothing to do with reality: everything was much more prosaic and harder, life was different here. Sometimes I felt like a helpless child who was learning to talk, walk, and make friends, but after thirteen years, I am trying to build everything new here by going to school and becoming a member of the community. It is hard to study and experience new things here, but with my great motivation I am sure that I can do it.

Currently I enrolled at Northern Essex Community College. I graduated this spring with my associates in Business Transfer. My GPA is 3.41. I have worked very hard to do well in my classes here..Overall, I have really enjoyed being a student at NECC. I have met some inspiring professors in the Business Department and they have motivated me and encouraged me every step of my journey. I am planning on transferring over to a four-year university. I have applied to UMass Lowell after graduating from Northern Essex Community College. The scholarship money would be very beneficial to me in helping to pay for my next semesters at UMass Lowell. I am planning to enroll in the fast-paced Bachelors/Master's Course of studies at U-Mass Lowell; hopefully I will get to graduate with a master's degree in three to four years. I know that I have to go through a very long and difficult journey, but I really wanted to embrace this change.

At NECC I participate in the PACE Program, I am a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Alpha Beta Gamma organization, and The National Society of Leadership and Success, Sigma Alpha Pi. Recently I received Leadership Award from The National Society of Leadership and TRIO Award from PACE. In the PACE program, I have received a lot of help and information that helped me to find my path to achieve my goals in the future. I have tremendous support from the PACE Staff which helps me as I am a single mother and immigrant and need to work hard to build a valuable life for myself and my daughter. I have attended to several field trips to see and get information of some good University at Massachusetts and New Hampshire that were very helpful and fun. Recently PACE had a good opportunity trip to NYC that I got a chance to be selected to this trip which was awesome trip I have had to see New York City and visit Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration as an immigrant I understood their hardship. Also I visited the Memorial of September 11 which reminded me all about the war and attack with no mercy. At Northern Essex Community College, I have volunteered for the Haverhill Bazaar at Opportunity Works, Cor Unum Meal Center, and Student Life Fair. last spring, I received a NECC Community Service Award for the work that I have done. In addition, I did work study at Northern Essex Community College in the Financial Aid office. I receive Financial Aid award (Federal Pell Grant). For summer semester I received Retention scholarship that helped me to pay my books and school materials.

Someday I hope to work in an international business company or become a financial adviser. The reason why I chose this career field is because I would like to make a difference in life, I enjoy helping people, and I like to be involved with the community as well. International business and financing are my two favorite subjects. I would like to use my knowledge in these areas to be a good role model, serve the community, plus be a good influence on my daughter to make a good plan for her future, family, friends and peers. For example, I can teach my daughter about her finances and how she can manage her money. I hope to be involved in a community organization that offers free services to educate individuals on financial literacy. I am applying for this scholarship, so it can help pay for some of my tuition costs, course fees, books etc. for the upcoming semesters. As a single mom, I am always concerned about money, and the scholarship would really help me reduce the amount of money I need to borrow. My daughter and I would greatly appreciate it.

I enjoy being involved and making a difference not only for me but for those around me as well. Thank you very much for considering my scholarship application. It would mean a lot to me to be chosen for a MEOA Scholarship award this year.

Ejide Mbarushimana

MassEdCo Education Talent Search Burncoat High School

My name is Ejide. I am from a refugee family from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country where war and violence is normal. Militia said my people don't belong, that we are Rwandese, not real Congolese, because we, Banyamulenge, have a similar language to the Rwandese, their enemies. But our people have been in Kivu Province for hundreds of years. My parents, eight siblings, and I abandoned our farm and our cows – everything in my culture. I missed school for months until we reached safety in Nakivale Refugee Camp in Uganda. After four years., the United Nations resettled us here in Worcester in 2016.

I am happy in the United States now that I am getting the education I dreamed of. I am now living the life I wanted. America will offer me a lot of opportunities, and there are no more gunshots, no more leaving our homes and sleeping outside, no more walking long journeys because of a lack of transportation. I want to finish my high school education and study further into college. I can and will do all that. I'm happy to be in America, a place I once only dreamed of. A place I now call home. A place my family and I belong and I am grateful.

The first school I went to in Worcester was the New Citizens Center for refugees who had gaps in their education. But I wasn't happy there. It was not challenging, no credits, and no way to get a diploma. I asked my parents to transfer me. Burncoat High was definitely more challenging because it was a bigger school, more classrooms, and more homework, and higher expectations. I succeeded because I worked hard. I made friends on the soccer team. I got involved in community organizations in Worcester. I followed people's advice such as Frank Murphy. I met Frank first at African Community Education (ACE) because he used to work there and visited my family when we first moved to Worcester and helped us with homework. He still teaches my Dad English on Saturdays. Last year he came to Burncoat to work as my advisor for Educational Talent Search.



When I came to the United States, my dream was to play soccer in college. But I had no idea what college is like. My parents never finished elementary school in Congo. No one from my community ever went to university. I achieved my goal to understand how to go to college by joining the LIDER Program at the Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University. We went on field trips. I joined ACE for tutoring. Last year I joined 100 Males to College and took a Public Speaking Dual Enrollment class at Worcester State. I stay after school every day with Frank Murphy of Educational Talent Search to work on applications, financial aid, and scholarships and more tutoring. I work hard in school and take more classes in college that will help me become a teacher, like public speaking, to help me get ready for teaching.

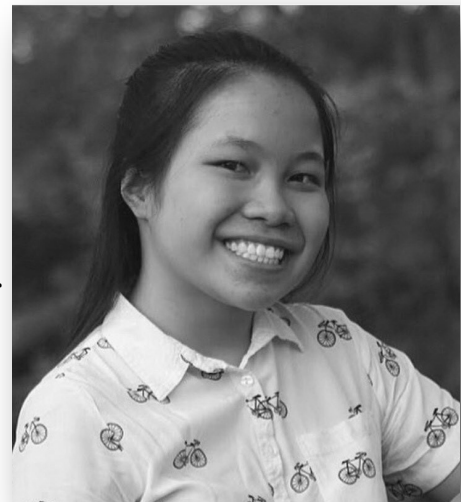
My goal is to graduate from high school and go to a four year college or university, and be a teacher one day. I want to be a hero for youth and give knowledge to young kids who need an education, especially the new immigrants who come to America, who don't speak English. I can be a role model for them because that is my story. I did not know a lot of English, my family was traumatized, and we started a new life from nothing. But I have lived in America for 3 years. I can now speak, write, and examine the written content by myself.

I need this MEOA scholarship to make possible my further education. My family cannot pay for tuition or fees or even give me money to pay for books, a laptop, or transportation.. I want to work this summer, but I know it won't be enough. My two older brothers work now to pay the rent and food. I have 5 siblings still in school. My parents are not working right now because of health problems. My Dad has high blood pressure and my Mom had ear surgery last month. This year, two of my uncles were killed and my grandfather died in Africa. Since we are the only family in America, we had to send a lot of money to pay for funerals. My family just got an eviction notice this week. It's possible I will have to move in with someone else and help pay rent. Finances cause a lot of stress. Even though I got accepted to MCLA, Fitchburg, and Worcester State, I am choosing to go to QCC so that I don't have to borrow any loans and save money from a summer job to pay for transportation and my license. I will spend \$250 for two semester student UPass for the WRTA public city bus.

Thanh Nha Train

Bruce Wells Scholars Upward Bound You Inc.

Life can be cruel and unfair. Bad things are going to happen regardless. Bad things happen to everyone. However it truly depends on the person's character on how they come face to face with obstacles in their way. During my freshman year of high school, my mom became ill with hypotension. The doctors didn't know what was causing it or how she could possible be alive. She had to receive open heart surgery to get a pacemaker implemented into her heart to regulate her blood pressure. My dad had to accompany her due to translating purposes. I was left alone in the apartment during this time period. Many times I would have emotional breakdowns because I missed my family. As this was the longest period of time I had been away from them. However I still went on with my life and continued to move forward. I still went to school as usual. I still completed my homework. I still did daily tasks that I would do on a regularly basis. I still lived my life as if nothing had changed and that everything was normal. All my life I have truly believed that everything happens for a reason, both good and bad things in life. I learned that there are two options in life when things get tough. It is just to shut down and let the darkness win or to keep going and turn all of that pain into



strength. I did not let my challenges in life regarding my parents health stop me from greatness. My mom always told me that if I excelled in my academics that it would make her feel better and her health would improve. I knew that was not physically possible but I still worked hard to achieve academically anyway. Everything that I am and have become is because of her.

All my life, I grew up with my parents who suffered severe illnesses. I remember that my parents couldn't see their only child on their birthday because my mom was in the hospital. Everyday and every night I would have to remind my parents to take their medication before doing any other daily tasks. However I did not let my times of adversity stop me from pursuing an educational future. In fifth grade, I was accepted into a science and engineering summer camp at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Furthermore, I have been a very active member in my community by participating in community service club, National Juniors Honors Society, National Honors Society, Photography club, and Bruce Wells Scholars Upward Bound Program. I have received many awards for my academic accomplishments such as the Harvard Book Award and the Superintendent Scholar Award. My story may not have a happy beginning but that does not make me who I am. I can still accomplish great things despite the pain and that is what makes me who I am.

Money has always been a factor that my family has struggled with. My mom is the only person in my family who works more than 40 hours in a week. Even though she has severe allergies and a pacemaker, she still continues to work and is our family's only source of income. My dad cannot work because he is too ill to do so with severe allergies, kidney transplant, and hypertension. Living my life with only one source of income has always been a struggle for me because many times I couldn't afford things that would help benefit my education. I would often struggle with payments for school field trips because my family didn't have any additional money to lend me for me to go. I would often find myself trying to figure out how to pay for school expenses (AP Fees, NHS Fees, Senior Dues). I knew my family couldn't help me in paying because they had their own things to worry about. All the money that my mom would earn would go towards paying the rent or buying food. I remember how we would always move from apartment to apartment because the rent payment became too high that we couldn't afford it anymore. I have always grown up in a low income based family but that does not determine my future. Although my family and I have always struggled with money, I am truly grateful for the things that we could afford. I am grateful for always having a roof over my head, food on the table, and clothes on my back. I am not defined by my struggles, I am defined by what I do about it when faced with adversity.

My educational goal is to attend UMass Amherst to double major in biology and speech pathology. I have received financial aid from my institution but I am still left with a \$9,000 gap. I will utilize this scholarship to go towards funding for my education. With the help of this scholarship, I know that I can go forward and make not only my parents proud but make my community better. By showing that your past and where you come from does not define who you are and what you will accomplish. It is about how you choose to live your life and make your story to continue to prosper despite all the obstacles in the way.

Tremaine Pinnock

Gateway To College Mount Wachusett Community College



At the age of 18 you have already broken statistics and stigmas, I know you'll continue to do so and even go further and be a successful black man." I was told that by one of my friends' parent. A woman that I have only met for a handful of times and has stopped to encourage me to never to be intimidated to feel weak and less than my peers. I am a recent graduate of a dual enrollment program called Gateway to College from the Ralph C Mahar Regional School District which was based in Mount Wachusett Community College. I started the program in January 2018, a few months after I emigrated from Jamaica with the intentions of living with my father and the possibilities of having a better life. I started life in America adjusting to the experience of culture shock which resulted in social anxiety and stuttering. I had never had those issues when interacting with people so those experiences hindered my self confidence for a period of time. It was around that time I reflected within myself and realized what and who I wanted to be life and the possible steps that needed to be taken for it to be successful.

I made a promise to myself in that year to build my character. I vowed to challenge myself with responsibilities that I would normally shy from. I believed that was the initial step in becoming a leader. I believed, being a leader would set me apart from most and be the key characteristic of the career I want to pursue. My career goal is to become a culinary chef. A chef that is able to travel across the globe, visit many cultures and learn their cuisines. To eventually become an executive chef and with the years of knowledge in the industry. All my volunteering efforts, community engagements, and academic success were driven by the need for bettering myself to becoming a leader and a positive force on my environment. Since starting the gateway program, I have competed with friends and mostly myself to excel. I maintained a strong academic presence my whole time in the program where I was awarded a congratulatory certificate for each month of my first spring semester. I maintained a GPA of above 3.0 each semester and was placed on the dean's list. I graduated from the school while being given the curriculum award for Interdisciplinary Studies and the president's service and volunteerism award for completing more than 100 service hours. At those moments, I felt I made the most of my opportunities. Having the opportunity of being a dual enrollment student, a high school student completing college credits, I worked hard enough to not only graduate from high school but as well as the college where the program was based with an associate degree and at the top of the major. Until just now, I forgot to reflect and realized that was the moment I surpassed my parents. The moment, my parents didn't have the luxury of experiencing. I felt that I put all the resources provided by my parents and stepparents to good use. I am constantly motivated by myself and my parents to live for something they couldn't.

My time at the Mount, in the gateway program was not only spent on self-improvement but as well as community engagement. I graduated while completing more than 200 hours of service to the community. I also believed this was a medium for building my character. I started my community engagement a few weeks after being in the program. I became a member of the Otaku United. Although it was an abrupt decision after being asked, I ran for secretary. I became an officer of a club that celebrates and appreciates Asian culture. Being a part of a club felt like a community which allowed me to integrate myself into the school a lot easier. One of the major community projects I participated in was with Otaku United. We hosted a silent

auction, which displayed a wide range of items that benefits many demographics. We auctioned off books, animated films, theatre tickets, and even items from teddy bears to handy toolkits for a house. We went to businesses from different towns and asked for donations to place for auction. After tallying all our proceeds, we purchased books from the Scholastic Corporation and donated them to neighboring schools to first and second graders. Having a leadership role in the club gave me responsibilities which pushed me to the center of attention, to lead and report to my peers. Celebrating Black History was a Tea Time Series event I attended in my first spring semester, which also had an impact that encouraged me to continue on my personal promise to improve myself. The panel referenced culture shock which I related to. They emphasized that I had to persevere to better myself because the results are what matters and I need to succeed and surpass expectations. I later volunteered in the Tea Time Series event in my last semester which was titled Celebrating Africa where I recited a poem called Melanin. Attaining that strong confidence led to the urge to volunteer more of my time in the club. I wanted more responsibilities and leadership roles. I eventually became the secretary of ALANA, by being a part of ALANA I have also participated in creating a mini-conference to stimulate a deep discussion within the community about the portrayal of people of color in the media and afro-Latinx/American beauty and the politics of hair. I became the At-Large representative of the Student Government Association and at the end of my last semester the vice-president of Phi Theta Kappa. In both organizations, I was able to represent a mass of people at my school and assist in planning and maintaining events at the school. As a result, I bettered my communication skills, decision making skills, and proper self-representation. I also managed to attain a part-time job on-campus job as a student ambassador where I gave tour sessions of the campus to possible students as well as middle school students to spark the interest in post-secondary and higher learning.

My career goal is to become a culinary chef and every academic and personal decision taken is of the intention of being a step closer to my goal. That is the main reason I became a student of Upward Bound Math and Science after-school program at Fitchburg State University. I utilized that program by visiting colleges inside and outside the state of Massachusetts to broadening my knowledge of colleges, to decide which one best fits my needs. My plan after graduating from my program was to enroll in Johnson and Wales University in Providence for their Culinary Arts Bachelor's degree. I knew to afford to be a student there, I had to apply for multiple scholarships. Unfortunately, after applying to a decent amount of scholarships, I am still unavailable to attend the school I know is one of a kind for my major. I am genuinely devastated but I cannot afford to be stumped for long. Along with my parents, I decided to attend Fitchburg State University for Business Administration in a management concentration. I am still thankful, I was awarded a \$2000 scholarship by the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. The financial stress on me is greatly reduced by enrolling at FSU and being awarded the scholarship. I am also being aided by the federal and state financial aid services, which I am deeply thankful for. I am still in need of more aid to cover tuition and school supplies. I am positive Massachusetts Educational Opportunity Association would provide considerable aid in paying for college. For me, going to college has a deeper meaning than it may to others. The ability to attain a degree would mean that I have further surpassed my parents, and in my eyes, have made them proud. I would become the first college student in my family and a step closer in pursuing my career.