To Whom It May Concern;

I am a non-traditional student who had to overcome unbelievable obstacles in order to stand before you today. I was raised in a home where every kind of abuse imaginable was a part of daily life. I ran away at fourteen, with an eighth grade education, to save my life. I was able to get my GED but without proper help and counseling I strayed and then found myself married to a appallingly abusive man. Unfortunately this would not be the last time I would repeat the patterns of my childhood. After many years of working at low paying jobs and raising my nine children alone, I had a job related accident in 1998 that left me living with chronic pain, even today. At the same time I was at home suffering in pain and fighting workman's comp, I also had an emotional breakdown. I no longer had work to keep my mind off the terrible things that had been done to me as a child and I found that I just could not cope anymore. I was able to become strong enough to walk away from the abusive relationships and I have been alone for fourteen years, but after losing my house, my car and everything else, I barely made it through one day at a time. (At this time I spent one and a half years homeless with six children.) In order to have my physical pain treated I had to agree to counseling. I have continued with counseling for the last eight years, every week, without fail, even now. Five years into it, in 2008 I finally felt well enough to make some changes in my life. The one thing I had wanted since I was a little girl and still always dreamed about was getting my degree from college. I was terrified, I didn't know what I was doing but I went to apply at Manchester Community College. I can now see God's hand on my life, if I hadn't gone through what I did, I would not be here ready to graduate in May 2011, I would not see one of my greatest dreams come true, and I would not be going into a field where I can help other people who have experienced the pain that I have.

At first I did not know what I wanted to do in school, I just wanted to get there. It did not take me long to settle into the DARC (Drug and Alcohol Recovery Counselor) program. I, who was disowned by my entire family, have made friends here, I found people coming and asking *me* for advice. After a while the staff would see me in the halls and call me by name and ask how I was doing, or a "how great you look!" After much encouragement from Ivette Rivera-Dreyer and Jodi Bailey I took part in the Federal work study and found my self-worth again by being ...not only able to contribute to supporting my son, but being able to help, inform and encourage students right here. I have worked with some of the best people in the world, people who help out with the scholarships, for some like me who so badly need it to survive and accomplish our goals, and people who spend every second here helping students any time of the day, all day, even without an appointment, in fact, much without an appointment!

I don't believe I would have received all this in a big school; I would have been lost in the crowd and probably would have dropped out. (I have spent most of my life being "lost in the crowd".) I have been able to take advantage of tutoring help, spent lots of time studying and doing homework in the school's library...too much noise at home, and I have even joined the gym where I take classes with both students and staff, not only to stay in shape and stay healthy, but because I have lacked the fellowship for so long, I delight in being part of the human race again and feeling safe doing so. I have been a recipient of the college's scholarships and relished in staff walking through the hall congratulating me. I am able to feel some pride again, or rather, finally. I have been able to dream again, finally finding hope in a world that robbed me of all of it. And I cry when I hear that my children are telling others how proud they are of me getting up and trying again...and succeeding. After a brutal and scary first semester, I have made straight A's and have a GPA of 3.68. I have made the Dean's list and President's list for part time students...and I go home at night, not crying myself to sleep anymore, but dreaming of what I have yet to become. This small Community College helped me get here. They prepared me for the next step, the challenge to get to a four year school. They gave me self confidence to go out on my own. They helped me realize that I can do anything I set my heart and will to doing. If you hurt us financially, many like me will fall between the cracks. I hope you will reconsider and help us help ourselves. We don't want to be a burden on society, we want to pull our own weight...we just need a hand up, and what better place to get that than at a Community College. Thank you.

Mary Ann Carrasquillo