

SPOTLIGHT



**ILLINOIS VALLEY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**CENTER FOR ACCESSIBILITY
& NEURODIVERSITY**

SUMMER 2022

'I'm showing myself what I can do!'

As she nears 30, Josie Malone is taking stock. Last month she ticked another item off her bucket list when she graduated from IVCC's nursing program.

Skeptics said it couldn't happen. They also told her having a baby at 17 wouldn't take her anywhere. That a learning disability would stall her education. That a car crash that smashed her body should smash any dreams of a future. That she wouldn't amount to much.

Seven years and two associate's degrees later, Josie has a message for them all: "I've graduated, and I'm on the right path now, finally!"

As overjoyed as she was during the pinning and commencement ceremonies recently, though, her thoughts were somber and solidly on the future. "Now that I'm done with school, I was scared. But it motivated me to understand better what's next for me. I know I want a career as a nurse, but how far do I go? Bachelor's? Master's?"

While she was here, she earned an Associates in Applied Science/nursing degree, an Associates in Arts degree (2021) and a certified nursing assistant certificate (2018). She already was a licensed beautician.

Next up, she'll take the state licensing exam to become a registered nurse, prepare to transfer to a bachelor's degree program at Illinois State University, and apply for nursing posts. Eventually she hopes to become a nurse-educator.

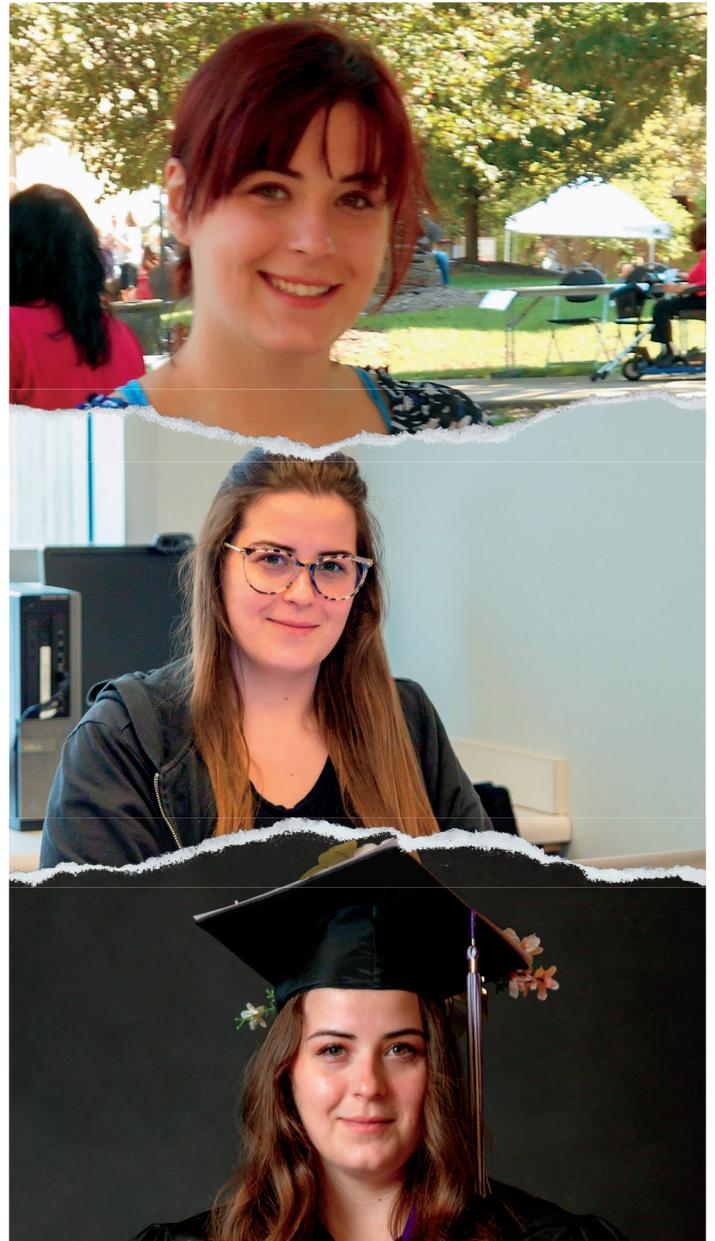
Things that stood in her way became a source of strength.

She is a single parent and daughter and granddaughter of single parents. As a waitress, she doesn't earn much. College sometimes warred with work and keeping her family fed and housed.

Contrary to skeptics, she discovered having and raising a child grounded her and lifted her. "I wouldn't have done what I've done in life if I hadn't had a kid."

Chants of "you can'ts" ringing in her ears only made her try harder. "I'm showing myself what I can do, but it stems from the doubts of others," she says.

Her growth has been both steady and abrupt. The troubled and rebellious teen mellowed. The single mother is parenting a teenager. The granddaughter took over as caregiver for a grandmother who had cared for her and ultimately inspired her career choice. The former beautician known for her compassion and care for clients' needs



Josie when she began her IVCC career in 2015 (top), in 2022 (middle) and as a graduate

beyond hair and nails strives toward a better-paying career caring for patients.

Then there was that 2014 car crash that left her with a broken body and a brain injury.

"It hit me like a ton of bricks. Things were never the same. Life was all about having fun, and I didn't consider my daughter (enough) before. I was used to going fast through life, and it slowed me down, so now, I enjoy what I'm supposed to."

She started college shortly after, her career choice stamped in part by her grandmother's dire doomsday

predictions, such as (she quotes with a wry grin): Nurses will be vital if civilization nose-dives or the country is invaded.

She resumed her lifelong battle with dyslexia --- a learning disability that makes reading difficult. "It's annoying baggage that means extra work. I do a lot of backtracking to get it right."

She and a foreign-born nursing student partnered as study buddies, and helping her friend comprehend the English language and the medical concepts bolstered her own understanding of the material.

Then she flunked a course and slid out of the program for a year.

"My confidence took a **BIG** hit. Maybe I wasn't supposed to be a nurse." Meanwhile, she continued taking college courses, and credits that off-year with confirming that nursing was where she belonged.

"Failing (the course) was the best, or the worst thing, but it was God's plan, and going through the course twice solidified it for me."

When she rejoined the program, mastering new

material "built my confidence. And my instructors saw that I went above and beyond to prove myself."

Still, it was tough going. "Every single day, I wanted to quit." As, all around her, classmates did.

She harnessed the resources of Center for Accessibility and Neurodiversity, Business Employment Skills Team, and Project Success, and applied for (and earned) scholarships. She's begun to build a similar layer of "comfort people" at the university, too.

"I know I need help. We're all big children, and we need a village behind us. We need a support system. Closed mouths don't get fed. Why wouldn't I try to get resources?!"

She was surprised and reassured by the amount of help around her: resources to ease financial strain and learning struggles, advice on choosing courses, technology loans. "I didn't have to do everything by myself."

Equally important were the shoulders she could lean on. "If I had problems, I could go in and they'd talk me through it."

Tina Hardy, Center for Accessibility & Neurodiversity coordinator ---

Josie is an absolute success story! She has proven that "if there's a will, there's a way," for sure. Despite all the things that could stop her from meeting her goals - single parenthood, minimal income, learning differences, having to step away from, and re-enter the nursing program - Josie never took the role of a victim. Was she stressed? Yes. Frustrated? Yes. Defeated? Absolutely not. No matter what, Josie accepted challenges, took on personal responsibility for learning and seeking out supports, and refused to give up. I've seldom seen a student with such grit and persistence! I am so incredibly delighted to see Josie finish her degree and move on to an entirely new world of opportunities. She certainly is living proof that even if there are obstacles, smart students with a clear goal, determination, and the willingness to ask for help CAN succeed.

Chris Herman, Project Success coordinator ----

Josie Malone epitomizes everything that we hope to see students accomplish while being a part of Project Success/Student Support Services. I was her counselor throughout her time here. I really had no idea if Josie would make it through to the finish line or not. I knew it was going to be a very slow process as she took just a couple of classes per semester to start and she had to start out in developmental course work. She dealt with several setbacks personally and academically that could have completely taken her off course. She could have easily given up! She chose not to and continued to fight and grind it out. She persisted through to the finish line and is a definite success story coming from a disadvantaged background. We are all very proud of Josie and we will miss her!

You can reach far if you reach out

If there's one lesson our 2022 graduates share from their time here, it's that there's no limit to what they can achieve – and that they're never on their own without a friend and a champion.



Kendall Jenkins



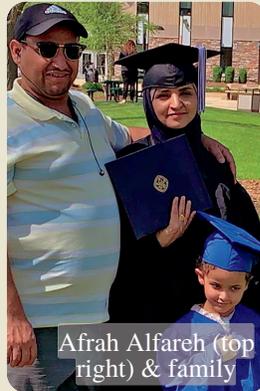
Sharon Zambo



Suzan Weiland



Josie Malone



Afrah Alfareh (top right) & family



Jonathan Schmidt



Insaf Khouaja & family

"There were people that wanted me to succeed. I found a circle of friends I can count on to cheer me on and to support me." -- Jonathan Schmidt, Associates in Arts Degree

"Listen to people who've been through this already. I took all the time I needed. Enjoy the journey of getting there. I came here with nothing, no job or resources, and if I can get through it, so can you!" --- Josie Malone, Associates in Applied Science/Nursing

"I found all the support to make me fulfill my dream. IVCC has changed my life! Don't hesitate to reach your goals. IVCC is the best place to start!" --- Afrah Alfareh, Associates in Arts Degree

"It was not easy for me as a working mom of three kids. Besides that, I speak different languages that interferes with my understanding sometimes. I found the help I needed. Don't hesitate to reach out. Don't miss your chance to make your dreams come true!" --- Insaf Khouaja, Associates in Applied Science/Nursing

"Every student needs a Tina Hardy on their side! Do not be afraid to ask for help and advice because the worst thing someone can say is nothing. If you are struggling, let your professors know and see what assistance they can provide you with." -- Kendall Jenkins, Associates in Arts Degree

"Don't take all your hard courses in one semester!" Suzan Weiland, Associates in Arts and Associates in Science degrees

"Never give up. Keep going." -- Sharon Zambo, Associates in Arts Degree

Mark Your Calendars!

DO ...

- Arrange accommodations for fall semester with Tina in C-211
- Arrange student parking permits at Campus Security in C-103
- Set up your campus technology accounts. Email Student Help Desk for help at shd@ivcc.edu

7/13 - Explore IVCC event

7/25 - Fall textbooks go on sale

7/28 - Return summer semester rental books

8/1 - Collect book vouchers from Financial Aid

8/15 - Fall classes begin