

Student Parent Month Feature: Naidine Villa



In 2023, Naidine Villa found herself at a crossroads. After staying home for over four years with her young son Ely, now six, she and her husband had depleted their savings. The pandemic had taken a toll on her mental health, and she knew it was time to reclaim her independence, rebuild her future, and return to school.

Pursuing an education after being out of school for more than 12 years was overwhelming.

“I didn’t realize how hard it would be,” Naidine said. “I went in blindly. I didn’t plan ahead, especially for child care.”

With her family in another state and only her husband's family nearby, finding a safe space for Ely while she studied became her biggest challenge. But she was determined.

Naidine recently completed her Associate’s degree in sociology and liberal arts at the Northfield Community College Collaborative and will be transferring to St. Catherine University in the fall where she will be the first person in her family to earn a degree when she graduates with a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies in 2026. Eventually, she hopes to enroll in a master’s program for library science.

From professors who gave her the flexibility she needed to succeed both as a parent and student to advisors that helped her navigate local and statewide resources, Naidine found more than just academic support at Northfield, she found a community.

“I had people on my side who were my cheerleaders,” she says. “They believed in me even on days I didn’t believe in myself.”

Her goals today? Not millions, but meaningful, fulfilling work.

“A lot of people pursue a job for how much they want to make,” Naidine said. “More fulfilling work might not make millions, but the benefits of personal fulfillment are huge. I want to be an example for Ely and show him the value in giving and receiving.”

To other parenting students, she offers this advice: “Share your truth. Don’t be ashamed for taking steps to better yourself. Even a short pep talk from someone can make all the difference.”

Naidine’s story is one of resilience, community, and hope - a reminder that with the right support, it’s never too late to begin again.