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I am currently a non-traditional first-generation college student, so without the help of RCC staff the process of becoming a student would have been much more difficult. Being a first gen. student gave me little knowledge in how to even begin the process let alone how to be successful at it, so my success thus far has been largely dependent on some of the programs offered by RCC, such as TRiO, or "College Success and Survival" even "Life Planning" which are courses offered by RCC to guide traditional and non-traditional students. Other programs that offer tutoring, school supplies and incentives such as Math Marvels, were critical to my success in my first term. I could not afford some of the tools that classes required such as, a scientific calculator, a lap-top, or having just moved into our new home, internet access. The teachers, support staff, advisors have been amazing, from my personal experience they genuinely want to see us succeed. They have helped me every step of the way. Financial Aid advisors helped me file my FAFSA; they guided me so that I could learn about student loans, without pressuring me one way or the other. Counselors and advisors helped me get my GED, at the time I did not know that was a requirement to attend college I was under the impression that if you did well enough on the placement test that you could attend college regardless of high school diploma status. Southern Oregon Options, Department of Human Services, as well advisors at RCC helped me navigate getting my GED in time to register for Winter term. My first term at RCC I struggled with getting back into a classroom setting. It has been almost a quarter of a century since I was in school, so like I mentioned before having the support of not just the staff of RCC but also Southern Oregon Options, to help give me direction was amazing, they answered questions that I did not even know to ask, such as help with housing. In January of 2021 we lost our housing. Although it was not related to schooling RCC had ideas on where to look to help with housing. With their ideas I was able to sign a rental agreement for our current home on the first day back in school, coincidentally that just happened to be my birthday, Jan 3, 2022. Our apartment is located about four miles away from campus, and I did not have a car at the time, again RCC's goal to help students succeed led me to RVTD Rogue Valley Transportation District, our local public transportation. They offer a student bus pass for a fraction of the cost of daily bus fare, which helped tremendously in the way of transportation. I could go on and on about the positive programs and staff at RCC, but the hardest part about returning to school was getting the process started. I was homeless, lost my job, and was fairly deep in a depressive state of mind. I was in regular sessions with a therapist at Southern Oregon Options when I knew my life needed direction. Most of my life I have been an empathetic person; over the last couple of years prior to that epiphanic moment, I had been contemplating becoming a therapist myself. When I talked to her about wanting to become a therapist, I was under the impression that it was not even an option because of my living situation, unemployment, no high school diploma, not to mention my age. When I told her I did not think it was possible to go back to school she just lit up, like a kid on Christmas morning. Within a week she had connected me with an advocate/liaison, whose job it was to help people seeking a higher education. What I really hope to achieve by telling you my story is getting more information out there sharing with people that it is never too late to pursue a higher education. I honestly would have started this years ago had I known that I could have. I think people that may be in an analogous situation need to see that there are ways to improve your station in life, whether it be for personal gain, a need to help your community, or to insure a better future for themselves and their families.

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