

## SPRINGFIELD

### 'I showed them'

Single mother of 3 overcomes obstacles, graduates from STCC

Saithe Winspeare grew up thinking she would never go to college.

"I'm dyslexic, so my whole life I was told college was something I couldn't do," said Winspeare, of Springfield.

She proved them wrong.

On May 30, Winspeare wore a cap and gown and participated in Springfield Technical Community College's commencement exercises, picking up an associate degree in criminal justice. She not only graduated from college — she earned her degree with honors for maintaining good grades.

"My daughters were my motivation," Winspeare said. "I wanted a better life for both my girls. When you're told you have a learning disability, people tell you you're not smart enough to do college. But I did it. I showed them I could go to college and graduate with honors."

But like many STCC students, her journey was not an easy one. When Winspeare started at STCC in 2016, she was a single mother of two children and a domestic violence survivor. She saw STCC as place that could transform her life and create a pathway to a brighter future for her children.

Already taking classes, Winspeare moved in to an apartment in Springfield, but she didn't have the money to furnish it. One of her criminal justice

instructors, Huguette Williams, discovered that Winspeare was sleeping on the floor.

"She was in a domestic violence situation and was living outside of the area," Williams said. "Once she came back to Springfield, she had nothing. She was a young mother sleeping on the floor in the middle of the city and no one knew. I thought, this cannot

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SAITHE WINSPEARE, STCC GRADUATE



Saithe Winspeare, of Springfield, holds her infant son on the campus green at STCC.

## Saithe

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be. Every time I think about it or talk about it I get emotional. “Williams decided to give Winspeare the furniture from her second bedroom. She emptied the dresser, stripped the bed and rented a truck to bring the items to Winspeare’s apartment.

“I got her a microwave and a living room set,” she said.

“I bought linens for the little girls’ bunk beds.”

Winspeare said she was grateful for Williams’ generosity.

“I couldn’t believe it,” Winspeare said. “I cried when I saw what she had done for me.”

Williams, a STCC alumna, said her only stipulation was that Winspeare stay in college and graduate. The instructor told her: “If you don’t have an education, you will not be able to provide a good life for your children and get off welfare.”

It wasn’t the first time Williams helped a student in need. Since coming to STCC in 2011, she has helped four students who were sleeping on their floors find beds, linens and other necessities.

“It would be great if there were more people who are willing to help our students who are in dire straits, but still continue to struggle to get an education,” she said. “You’d be surprised to know the amount of students we have on campus who are living in squalor.”

Winspeare overcame obstacles during her two years at STCC. While a student, she became pregnant. Her son was born prematurely during her final semester, three months before she was scheduled to graduate. She wasn’t sure she would be able to continue with her studies, but was encouraged not to give up by Williams and others.

STCC offers a variety of support services to help first-generation college students, students of color and others who are struggling financially. Some turn to the Center for Access Services, which runs a food pantry and offers emergency housing options. Winspeare participated in TRIO Student Support Services (SSS), which helped her adjust to the college environment and prepared her for her transition to a four-year university. In the fall, she will start working toward a bachelor’s degree in social work from Elms College in Chicopee. The STCC-Elms partnership allows her to take classes on the STCC campus and complete the program at an accelerated pace.

Kaylee Furlano, an academic advisor who works with TRIO SSS, described Winspeare as “passionate and highly driven.”

“As a mother, STCC graduate, upcoming STCC/ELMS student and future champion in the field of advocacy and social work, Saithe is a force to be reckoned with,” Furlano said. “She is empowered, courageous, independent and determined. When faced with adversity, she perseveres and uses obstacles as motivation.

She intends to pay it forward to society through her education and employment in social work, and I am confident she will be successful in her journey.”

Having earned her degree from STCC, Winspeare is now looking forward to her next chapter. She will continue taking college classes while raising her three children – an infant son and her daughters, ages 4 and 7.

“I have a small but great support system,” she said.

Winspeare’s goal is to work at a courthouse as a victim’s advocate for domestic violence survivors.

“I went through a lot, especially with the domestic violence,” she said. “I want to help others and show them there’s a way out. If I did it, they can.”



Saithe Winspeare, of Springfield, who graduated from STCC in May, received help from TRIO Student Support Services.