

My name is Melissa Mallem, my mother, brother, and I are immigrants from Algeria, I grew up in a city called Ouargla, only 52 miles away from Hassi Messaoud, the First Energy town in Algeria. This little but mighty town is the threshold of not only the largest oil and gas companies but is known to be the site of myriad massacres against humanity.

In 2001 Amer Taleb a fundamentalist Imam ignited a mob of 300 self-righteous men, ranging from respectable town doctors and conscientious lawyers to unemployed 30-year-olds, to attack the women who lived in that area without the company of a male guardian, based on the sole reasoning that they may be sinners and adulterers.

These men were promptly fueled with power exerted from their own tempestuous beliefs and unjustified hatred, to attack, murder, rape and mutilate 40 innocent women in a matter of five hours in front of the whole public.

During the next few days, this barbarousness had spread across to other neighborhoods in the city and hundreds of women had lost their voices, their pride, their dignity, but most of them had lost their lives to the words of a single man. In the years to come, violence and hate spread faster than ever across the country. Women could not find safety even amid their own homes; what was once normal and acceptable became sinful and immoral and what we here consider as trauma they considered natural. This juxtaposition in morality and lack of empathy lead Algeria to live in a constant state of numbness and a constant state of denial.

Coming from a country where life was a struggle against societal and familial violence, has given me and my family load too heavy to carry on our own. Before immigrating to the United States in 2015, I was silently suffering from mental health disorders and unhealed wounds from past traumatic experiences, I found myself reclused, confined and deprived of all help in a society and culture that do not acknowledge the existence of mental health, rather they considered them ordinary and the violence necessary. Coming to the U.S. with such a background was not the easiest of transitions, and despite the hard circumstances I had to face while being in Foster Care and receiving treatment, I was able to graduate high school and transfer to Northwestern Connecticut Community College.

There are myriad misconceptions concerning Community Colleges and it is because of this stigma that I hesitated to join NWCC at first, but to my surprise, this college ended up being my home away from home. Being part of this community means a great deal to me because NWCC took me when I didn't have many options along the way, I had just graduated high school and left an intensive psychotherapeutic residential facility, I didn't know what to expect but I found exactly what I needed

During my two years here, NWCC has provided me with so many opportunities to participate in many events and hold so many positions, despite it being a 2-year college not a 4-year university. We do not have the same funds as 4-year universities, yet NWCC has not stopped investing in its students; our faculty and professors have always encouraged us to dream big and have empowered and enabled us to achieve those dreams. It is because of this support that I was able to hold many positions such as: the vice president of leadership of my Phi Theta

Kappa chapter, president of the American Association of University Women where I attended a national conference in Washington DC for student women leaders. I am an ambassador, a student senator, a secretary, and treasurer of the History Association, and a member of Team Success Scholars. I was additionally a member of the Community College Quadcopter Challenge organized by the NASA CT Space Grant Consortium and this semester God-willing I will be visiting the United Kingdom and participate in the Oxford Consortium for Human Rights Conference. After graduating this spring, I plan to transfer to a 4-year University, my biggest passion is to study Christian Theology and combine my love for Biblical Studies with Psychology. After which, I plan to further my education by attending medical school.

These achievements are not to be taken lightly, they require a lot of funding and a lot of resources which are not always available at community colleges. This lack of economic capital has not prevented NWCC from being there for me and for its students. My professors and the faculty have taught me a great deal and have inspired me in so many ways, they have invested their lives in us, and have not stopped fighting for us to achieve more than what our circumstances allowed us to see. When you are allocating the funds, please take into consideration the financial limitations we are struggling with and the difficult background each one of us is tied to, because every single one of us is worth your investment.