

With First Literacy's help, 2 realize their college dreams

By Adam Sennott
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Two Boston residents who escaped violence and poverty in their homelands earned college degrees in New Hampshire and Massachusetts this month with scholarship help from First Literacy, a Boston-based nonprofit.

Kherrina Williams of Mattapan graduated with highest honors from Southern New Hampshire University with a bachelor of arts in communications. Bismillah Mohammadi of West Roxbury graduated with high honors from Roxbury Community College with an associate's degree in information systems technology, First Literacy said in a statement.

Williams, a native of Jamaica, and Mohammadi, a native of Afghanistan, each completed Adult Basic Literacy or English language programs at accredited programs, making them eligible to apply for a \$1,500 First Literacy scholarship to help pay for college or vocational training.

The scholarships are given in recognition of academic achievements, community service, and "perseverance in the face of hardship," the statement said.

Mohammadi, who received his scholarship last year, said the financial help "made a big difference in my journey."

"It helped me cover some expenses, allowing me to focus on



GRADUATES

Kherrina Williams and Bismillah Mohammadi received scholarships.



my studies without the stress of financial burden," he said in the statement.

"I'm thrilled to be reaching this milestone," Mohammadi said of his graduation. "It's been an amazing journey filled with growth and learning."

The long war in Afghanistan made it difficult for Mohamma-

di to excel in school. He pursued new opportunities in higher education in the United States. "Determination and perseverance enabled him to overcome obstacles and strive towards future goals," First Literacy said in the statement.

He now plans to apply to a four-year college to pursue a

bachelor's degree in information systems technology.

Williams started college in Kingston, Jamaica. But personal tragedy derailed her education, First Literacy said.

During her second year in college, her daughter's father was murdered. Shortly after, Williams lost her job and was forced to put her education on hold, the statement said.

Williams decided to move to the United States to provide a better life for herself and her daughter. In 2020 she was nominated for, and received, a First Literacy scholarship.

"Kherrina faced many challenges when she arrived in the US; but her desire to pursue her dream of a college education

and set a precedent for her daughter gave her strength," First Literacy said.

Williams said First Literacy's support was "paramount" to her success.

"Education is expensive, therefore the impact of the scholarship from First Literacy cannot be overstated," said Williams, whose degree included a concentration in public relations. "It was a reassuring feeling to know that an organization was there to assist adult learners like myself who were striving for higher education despite challenges and circumstances."

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