

# MCC alumna **overcomes** personal circumstances to **build** her dream **career**

**A**t age 30, Montcalm Community College alumna Rachel Gilbert was a homeless, unemployed single mother of three young children. Today she is Director of Nursing at SKLD (Skilled) Medical Residence in Ionia.

On the verge of tears, the 38-year-old from Trufant shared her story at a recent gala to honor MCC Foundation scholarship recipients. She said the support she received at MCC helped her rise from one of the lowest moments in her life to build a successful career that she shares with her partner, Dan, and their four children.

“All I could think was what was I going to do,” she said.

With limited work experience, she feared she would be stuck in a dead-end job, struggling to survive and provide for her family.

“The thought of returning to school scared me to death,” she said, “partly because I struggled with a learning disability and partly because of the cost.”

She said these were some of the circumstances she had to overcome, and she did so through sheer determination, motivation, positive self-thought and a desire to achieve something more.



“Sometimes it was downright grit that got me through,” she said. “Second was finding an emotional support system – that person I could call when I was down and who I celebrated

with, too. The third key was invested instructors.”

Gilbert told stories of instructors who stayed after class to provide her extra assistance, shared lunch with her and allowed her to bring her kids to class. The final key to success, she said, was financial support.

“I had federal grants. I took out multiple loans, and it wasn’t enough,” she said. “I remember the first time I applied for an MCCF scholarship. I nearly didn’t fill out the application, not because of what I lacked but because I didn’t want to fail.”

Gilbert said to help overcome her fears, she was determined to set a good example for her children.

“I filled out and turned in the scholarship form, thinking the worst that could happen is I would be told no,” she said.

When she received notification that she was selected to receive a scholarship “I literally jumped,” she said. “I couldn’t believe a scholarship was awarded to me. I was a person they didn’t know, they had never laid eyes on, and they invested in me ... It didn’t matter if I had to skip a meal, sleep in my car or on a classroom floor. It just mattered that I could be successful.”

During her time at MCC, Gilbert was the recipient of several MCCF scholarships. She earned a Pre-nursing Certificate with high honors from MCC in 2013 and an Associate of Applied Science in Nursing with high honors from MCC in May 2015 and continued her education at Davenport University, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2017.

Gilbert supports efforts for continued education in her workplace and is a member of the Nursing and Health Careers Advisory Committee at MCC. ■