



A 2011-12 Minnesota TRIO Acheiver – Jennifer Perez

Jennifer entered Central Lakes College as a single parent with a two-year-old daughter, Ahnicka, living in income based housing and her income was Minnesota Family Investment Act public assistance. Jennifer has described this as a poverty trap and felt bound by the chains of generational poverty. She was terrified to begin college but believed education was the only way to make a better life for her and her daughter.

Jennifer attributes her academic success with the support she received through Trio Student Support Services. No one in her family understood why college was important or how hard she had to work. She said that TRiO advisors helped keep her focused on a positive life direction; completing her goal of an AA degree at Central Lakes College and a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from St. Scholastica. Jennifer has overcome many obstacles: living in an environment where alcohol and drug use was common place, abusive oppressive relationships, poverty, small town stereotypes, transportation and childcare barriers and learning how to live differently.

While a student Jennifer was asked to talk on a panel for the Legislative Committee to End Poverty by 2020. She continues to serve on a committee where this is the local community focus called Operation Community Connect. She worked as an advocate for women and would bring women who had left abusive relationships to the college and show them there is another way and share her story This last year she volunteered as a parent facilitator for Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota Circle of Parents group that meets weekly to develop positive parenting skills. Jennifer is currently a case manager for Lutheran Social Services working with families to prevent homelessness.