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### No Shortage of Women to Celebrate During Women's History Month

BY DR. CLAUDIA V. SCHRADER

It's Women's History Month, and there is no shortage of women to celebrate. For centuries, the "first ladies" club has added to its ranks women like Sandra Day O'Connor (former Supreme Court justice), Sara Teasdale (Pulitzer Prize-winner for poetry), the late Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, Kathy Hochul (NYS governor), Frances Marion (the late Academy Award-winner) Kamala Harris (U.S. vice president) and Leticia James (NYS attorney general). They made history as the first in their positions. I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to shine the light on three women at Kingsborough who represent the hundreds who are the first or among the first in their families to attend college. Though hailing from different countries - namely, Puerto Rico, Guyana, and Trinidad - their stories share a similar spirit of resiliency, focus, and determination to succeed.

It has been a long road for 50-year-old Lucy Del Valle. After graduating from high school, she was accepted into the SEEK program at Hunter College, but was already working at 19 years of age, and financially supporting her family, so she could not enter school full-time as required.

Her education took a back seat but was



KCC FLEX students Lucy Del Valle, Ilesha Yansen and Kathleen Browne are three of many women in college to be celebrated for making history in their own way.

never far from her mind as she continued to be a caregiver, moved out of state, and even attempted to enroll in a community college in Florida, but difficulty getting her high school transcript prevented her from doing so. But once back in NYC in 2020, she learned about KCC FLEX, an affordable program specially designed for adults juggling school, family and work. It enables students to start or finish a college degree with an online, on-campus, evening or weekend schedule that meets their needs.

Lucy is enrolled in the associate degree in business administration and has her eyes set on working as a tumor registrar in the health-care field. For Lucy, KCC FLEX was "perfect timing," as she

could work full-time from home and care for her mother, the person from whom she said she earned her strong work ethics and strengths.

Ilesha Yansen, 24, also credits her mother with teaching her how to love herself, how to persevere in life and how to be a mother. It was motherhood that made KCC FLEX a good choice for Ilesha. After giving birth during the pandemic, she wanted to stay home with her son. She remembered that she would see the Kingsborough campus from an office where she worked in Sheepshead Bay and decided to explore the website, discovered KCC FLEX, and enrolled as a business administration major. This young woman, who

looked out a window and set her sights on Kingsborough, is now setting her sights on completing her degree in business this December and becoming the first in her family to earn a college degree.

A younger Kathleen Browne always wanted to go to college, but working took precedence. But now, at 47, not even fibromyalgia, which causes her constant pain, will stop her from earning her college degree. Travelling is extremely challenging for Kathleen. Fortunately for her, the online chemical dependency counseling (CASAC) programs offered through KCC FLEX are helping her to take her education further. With her degree, she plans to help others. This is her calling, she

shared, and she doesn't let the pain she often experiences define or stop her. She told me her resiliency is a gift from her mother, who came to this country as a babysitter, gained her citizenship, and worked tirelessly to support her family.

It is her mother who inspired her to follow her dreams. Kathleen will not be the first in her family to earn her college degree (her sister already has) but she won't be the last (her daughter is enrolled at NYC Tech).

You won't find their names in our history books (not yet, anyway) but Lucy, Ilesha and Kathleen and the thousands of other women who will be the first (or among the first) in their families to graduate from college have earned their place in our celebration of Women's History Month. Today we celebrate them and the women who raised them.

*Kingsborough Community College's KCC FLEX is college your way — anytime, anywhere. It's an affordable, flexible way to earn — or finish — a college degree that fits your lifestyle. You can complete a KCC FLEX degree online and on-campus, daytime, evenings and weekend classes. You can create a class schedule that meets your needs by taking classes in any combination. For more information visit <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/kccflex>.*