

First Literacy awards scholarships to 26 students at Boston City Hall ceremony

By **Kiera McDonald** Globe Correspondent, Updated August 20, 2024, 8:56 p.m.



Valentina Ribas, left, with Trinh Nguyen, Chief of Worker Empowerment for the Office of Mayor Michelle Wu. GREGORY CICCARELLI

A woman who immigrated from Columbia to the United States at 19-years-old while battling a rare disease is one of 26 students who received scholarships from First Literacy of Boston to further their education.

Valentina Ribas, a recent graduate of Bunker Hill Community College, was honored along with other recipients at the 2024 First Literacy Scholarship Ceremony last

Thursday at Boston City Hall, the nonprofit said in a statement.

Mayor Michelle Wu's office hosted the ceremony which honors the "educational achievements and potential, community service, and perseverance in the face of hardship," the statement said.

Ribas said she faced challenges suffering from a rare disease that causes painful benign tumors in her bones and adapting to a new country after immigrating to the US from Columbia at 19-years-old.

"First Literacy stepped in guiding me and providing me with the support that I needed to navigate this new chapter," Ribas said. "First Literacy believed in me and has been instrumental in my journey."

The organization has awarded over 600 scholarships to adult learners throughout Massachusetts since 1990, the statement said.

Ribas said she is grateful for the scholarship and will continue her education at Lesley University where she will study psychology.

“After so many years I am closer to achieving my dream, “ she said. “I am proud that First Literacy has agreed to support me in my journey as a student at Lesley University.”

Trinh Nguyen, chief of worker empowerment for the mayor’s office, opened the ceremony by telling students to chase their dreams as she highlighted the sacrifices her parents made after immigrating to the US in the 1980’s as refugees.

“When I told my mom I was speaking at this event for First Literacy she said she wished she had First Literacy when she came to the United States,” Nguyen said, whose parents worked tirelessly at low-wage jobs to give her better educational opportunities.

Other awardees of new and continuing scholarships included students born in the US, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Morocco, Haiti, Bangladesh, Uruguay, Algeria, West Africa, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Ivory Coast, and Brazil, according to the statement.

First Literacy Executive Director Terry Witherell said she was pleased to be a part of students’ educational journeys.

“Every time I’m at this ceremony I am inspired by our scholars and their perseverance and I’m reminded why First Literacy matters,” Witherell said. “We are so proud of what our scholars have done already, and we can’t wait to see what they will achieve in the future.”



First Literacy scholarship winners were honored recently at Boston City Hall. At far right is Trinh Nguyen, Chief of Worker Empowerment for the Office of Mayor Michelle Wu. GREGORY.A.CICCARELLI.PHOTOGRAPHY

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