Victoria Rochester possessed years of work experience, from a probation office supervisor and a counselor for at-risk children to mid-level office jobs, but she felt stuck professionally.

“I found that my ability to promote or advance in other areas was limited because I lacked a four-year degree,” said Rochester.

She had two associate degrees, one in criminal justice and the other in corrections, but then set aside her college dreams. “Life’s responsibilities took priority over higher education,” said Rochester, a working mom who was raising three children.

It wasn’t until her youngest was in high school that Rochester finally said it was her time. At 47, she went back to college.

Rochester and her oldest daughter Taylor were students at Sacramento State at the same time, though they never crossed paths. Rochester was earning her degree entirely online.

“It still wasn’t easy juggling a job and school, she added, “but my family kept me going and reminded me how important my degree was.”

In 2018, Rochester earned her Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice through a degree completion program, offered by the College of Health and Human Services in partnership with the College of Continuing Education at Sacramento State.

“Walking across the stage at commencement was such a euphoric experience,” recalled Rochester. And her kids made the day even more memorable, decorating her graduation cap with family photos and a congratulatory message: IT TOOK A VILLAGE.

With her degree in hand, Rochester earned her promotion.

Today, as an attendance supervisor in the San Juan Unified School District, she ensures that education code and truancy laws are followed. And twice a week, she chairs formal hearings for students and their families.

She often shares a personal story of becoming a “successful graduate at 50” and will catch the students’ look of surprise followed by respect.

Rochester’s daughter Taylor will become the second Hornet graduate in the family. And her younger sister is headed to college too.

“Our mom set an example for us,” said Taylor. “She persevered, and it was a beautiful thing to see.”