

## NEWS RELEASE

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## UW-Stout inspiring graduate Kate Johnson: 'My education provided me the support and guidance I needed'

*Boyceville native shares how she overcame challenges to earn master's in clinical mental health counseling*

[Kate Johnson's inspiring graduate Q&A](#)

[Additional inspiring graduate Q&As](#)

### Photos attached

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Menomonie, Wis. – Kate Johnson, of Boyceville, has multiple learning disabilities, some incredibly severe. During her developmental years, she was informed by educators that she was “too disabled” and that she would never thrive in education.

“I recall vividly, when I was younger, feeling as though my ability to advance in school would be a tumultuous mountain to climb. Honestly, a mountain I was not sure I could scale,” she said.

However, with support from her mother, partner and an innate desire to continue her education, Johnson earned her [master's in clinical mental health counseling](#) from UW-Stout on Dec. 17. She also earned her bachelor's in service management with a concentration in nonprofit from UW-Stout in 2009.

“I find myself feeling incredibly confident in the perseverance and grit which was born and forged within me throughout the journey. I have learned through time and dedicated effort that difficult endeavors are possible no matter the mountains we face on our path. The perseverance built within has redefined the way I see the world and how we show up in it,” Johnson said.

Post-graduation, Johnson plans to earn her Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors credentials and then hopes to create a nonprofit to assist those experiencing homelessness, financial insecurity and co-occurring mental health diagnoses with gaining mental health care.

“This is a fundamental need that is lacking in many state systems. I lost two very close relationships due to this, but I hope to use my knowledge gained to make an impact for those experiencing similar hurdles,” she said.

### **How has Stout prepared you to work in your field?**

When I think of Stout, I think of my cohort – the peers I, at times struggled besides, laughed with, connected with, at points burned out with and now celebrate with. I also think highly of each one of my professors.

Dr. John Klem, Dr. Julie Bates-Maves and Dr. Andy Felton are some of the highest quality educators I have ever had the pleasure of learning from. The diligence these professors put into each course, the program in totality and each individual student is top tier in terms of education.

I feel incredibly prepared to work in the field of clinical mental health counseling and am thankful I was able to study in this program with these brilliant minds.

### **How has your Stout education and experience changed you?**

My education at Stout, for both my bachelor’s and master’s, provided me the support and guidance I needed to trust in my own abilities.

It has also helped in guiding me toward outlining my goals and identifying how I can create a meaningful impact for the world around me.

I realized my abilities were far greater than many people in my past life experience had given me credit for. Now I realize not only am I capable of accomplishing a hard thing, but my potential is boundless in many ways.

### **How did you overcome the challenges you faced in earning your degree?**

For much of my post-secondary education, I struggled and grappled with my learning hurdles. My fear of failure and the voices of doubt would rear their heads, and often times I thought I was kidding myself to think I belonged in a master’s program, much less be able to complete it successfully.

However, with the support of Stout's incredible [Disability Services](#), my professors, my cohort, my loving and diligent partner, Alex, and the words of my mother, I was able to overcome much of these wrongfully instilled negative beliefs.

Dr. Klem will always stand as a beacon for me from this day forward. He reminded me that learning disabilities were not the end of my potential, and there was no need for me to fear living beside them. He not only modeled how far a person can go when they grow past labels and imposed limitations placed on those with disabilities in our society, but he helped me to re-create my beliefs in myself. He challenged me and pushed me to remember I am not defined by disabilities; I am profoundly capable and sometimes I just need to remember that and move forward with confidence.

I am thankful for Dr. Klem, who truly instilled in me a new and renewed sense of who I can be when I live with my truth and not against it. I am changed because he believed in me enough to challenge old narratives and support me in making way for a capable human who leaves this institution knowing she can share this hope to inspire others.

### **What are you most proud of as you finish your degree?**

Education has been an uphill battle for me for all my life. The day I was accepted into the program, I could hardly believe my professors saw potential in me. I had put off attempting to get a master's degree for a decade due to being terrified I would not be capable enough to succeed at this level of academics.

Walking across the commencement stage, I felt a sense of accomplishment that is hard to express in words.

I am a changed human because loved ones, professors and peers believed in me. I not only celebrate graduating with my master's, but I celebrate graduating from old beliefs that people with disabilities are any less capable than anyone else.

*UW-Stout is [Wisconsin's Polytechnic University](#), with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the [FOCUS2030](#) strategic plan.*

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### **Photos**

Kate Johnson receives her master's hood at commencement on Dec. 17.

Kate Johnson and Chancellor Katherine Frank.