The life-changing UW Odyssey Project has devoted the past dozen years to empowering adults near the poverty level to overcome adversity and achieve dreams through higher education. Odyssey graduates have moved from homelessness to degrees, from incarceration to meaningful work in the community. The Odyssey Project strives to close the achievement gap and break the cycle of generational poverty. Odyssey students report transformational effects, noting that they are more likely to continue on in college, read to their children, vote, and feel hopeful about their whole family’s future. The story of Yasmin and James demonstrates only one of the many families who have had their lives changed by this inspiring humanities program.

Yasmin Horton, 2007 graduate of the Odyssey Project, spoke at her graduation ceremony about how her son had rescued her from a life of addiction in Chicago. She went on to attend Madison College, become a substance abuse counselor, and earn a bachelor's degree from UW-Whitewater, and she has just started work on a master's degree in Social Work at UW-Madison. Yasmin said, "The Odyssey Project enabled me once again to believe that I can. I re-entered school through Odyssey after more than 30 years of absence. This opportunity to re-commit to my life is a blessing. I know that nothing can deter me from achieving whatever I set my mind to."

Two years after Yasmin went through the program, her son James became an Odyssey graduate. James is now completing the Liberal Arts Transfer program at Madison College and plans to transfer to UW-Madison to earn a degree in English. A published poet, James hopes to teach English at the college level. James wrote, “The UW Odyssey Project is more than a weekly class where we discuss great writings and works of art. Personally, it has been a life jacket tossed just as I was about to drown in a sea of uncertainty. On Wednesday nights, we feed our bodies, then our minds. Wonderful guest speakers challenge our ways of thinking, and before you know it you are writing allegories, comparing Martin Luther King and Gandhi, performing Shakespeare, writing poetry, and discussing what separates Greek from Roman architecture. Analyzing great works and great people keeps you aspiring to greatness yourself." At a party for his mother’s graduation, James proudly pointed to his own children’s achievements in school and said, “They’re on the path to college. We all are.”

Can you help sponsor a student? $4,200 covers the student’s tuition, books, course supplies, and childcare for the six-credit UW Odyssey course. Please help us give adults near the poverty level a chance to jumpstart their higher education! Donations large and small help change lives.

PLEASE DONATE by visiting http://go.wisc.edu/odysseydonation

Consider making a gift in honor or memory of someone you know. Make a difference! As one graduate observed, “Odyssey helped me rewrite the story of my life.”

For more information on the Odyssey Project, visit www.odyssey.wisc.edu or contact Odyssey Project Director, Professor Emily Auerbach, at eauerbach@dcs.wisc.edu or (608) 262-3733.