

odyssey oracle

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Special Edition:

Odyssey Class of 2011 Profiles



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Stephanie Pamperin by Kian Cunningham

Stephanie is always misunderstood. If people actually got to know Stephanie they'd know that she is a goofy sweetheart.



Stephanie is from Atlanta, Georgia. She lived in foster care all of her life and doesn't know her family. She was adopted twice and has lived all over Wisconsin. She moved to Madison to get a "northern" education. She made a promise to her foster mother to finish school. Stephanie is very humble and motivated. She has a light shining in her. She is going to finish college and is going to make it.

Stephanie has lupus and cerebral palsy and people judge her because she uses a walker. Stephanie is a beautiful person, inside and outside. She is extremely cautious of people and doesn't let people in her business. She has friends that are close to her but they are "a lot of work." If she struggles, she struggles by herself.

Stephanie's favorite color is purple and her kitchen accessories are black and purple. She really loves movies and books. She would be most happy if she could be in a room with books and movies.

On the subject of marriage, Stephanie says, "I am not one to love easily, but if I were to love, it would be for life." Her favorite quote is, "My word is my word."

Kian Cunningham by Stephanie Pamperin

Kian Cunningham named her oldest son Jameer after an NBA superstar for two reasons: because he was cute and after her cesarean she was heavily medicated.

Kian and her two-month-old son came to Madison in September 2005, all her belongings stuffed into garbage bags in her Toyota. She moved to escape her family in Chicago. Kian hated her family for not protecting her from her stepfather. Her childhood was abusive. Kian knew her family wouldn't be able to protect Jameer. She does not talk about her family because they have brought her nothing but pain. Her family never accepted her husband because he was black. They thought she was moving to Madison because Kian and her husband couldn't afford to pay rent. They chose to live in the caves of racism and prejudice and she chooses to be free.

Honestly, Kian is always misunderstood. If people really got to know her, they would realize that she is sweet and means well. The abuse she suffered as a child has had a major effect on her life. She has a thick skin over her heart so no one can hurt her anymore.

Five years later, Kian has somewhat moved on from her Chicago life and her abusive childhood. Her freedom is made up of her two boys, Jameer and Prestin, and her husband. She also has a cleaning business, Kleen Geeks, of which she is very proud. She says with a smile, "I make more money than my husband. That's kind of nice [because] now I wear the pants in the family." Kian wants the best for her family.

Kian wants to graduate from UW-Madison with a Business Accounting degree.



Dalonte Nobles by Eleita Florence

Dalonte Nobles had the need to express his artistic side since childhood. He was gifted at an early age.

He was born in 1986 in Joliet, Illinois. Dalonte, his sister and mom lived modestly, struggling to make ends meet. They moved quite frequently. Dalonte always had his drawing and writing to keep him grounded. He would make comic books, illustrating and writing the stories himself. He completed his first comic book at the age of five. His most important piece came at age ten: he created "Sky Strykers."

To this day, Dalonte finds solace in his artwork. He feels that in the future his artwork will express his passion. Dalonte says, "My passion in life is to do art."



Eleita Florence by Dalonte Nobles

She was raised with an iron fist... by a mother of nine. In the October of 1961 Eleita Florence became the last of them to come. As with most "babies" of the bunch, Eleita was spoiled and sheltered. She began babysitting at the age of 10 which allowed her to mature herself and develop a passion for working with kids. In 1973 her family moved to what she describes as a "colorless old mediocre frame house" on 67th and Winchester located in Englewood on the south side of Chicago. However, it would be this house where she'd graduate from high school, attend Kennedy-King College, get married, give birth to her two sons Andrew (15) and Daniel (11) and quit an addiction that nearly ruined her life.



The heroin came post-college, 1989 to be precise. Her mother passing away in 1997 is when her use had reached its zenith. In this period she had lost a job and gotten a divorce. Eleita felt she needed to clean up her life and sought out residential treatment. There they gave her medication and treatments to help her move away from the drug. In 1999, with the birth of Daniel and in need of a new start Eleita moved to Madison, WI. Eleita now has rekindled her passion and by 2006 she was working with children specifically teens from troubled homes. "I just want to stay clean, be a good mom, and be a successful woman... and you can quote me on that," says Eleita with her usual warm and inviting grin that hinted at a sort of enlightenment that only a woman with her life experience could understand.

Marie Hill by Nikyra McCann

Marie moved to Madison from Joliet, Illinois because she heard it was a better place to raise her children. It was hard after losing two children: one was a baby, and one was nineteen. She has three other children.



In the past, she struggled with drug addiction for three years. She remembers people telling her that she would never get off, but Marie believed in God. She believed that He would deliver her. Once, while she was living on Worthington, she saw the drug dealers who supplied her with crack. When they asked if she would like to buy some, she replied, "I don't get high anymore. The Lord delivered me." She has been delivered for nineteen years. In June 1995, she received her HSED from Madison College.

When her daughter died, Marie was at a loss for words and very crushed. With God's help, she's going to make it.

Nikyra McCann by Marie Hill

Nikyra McCann moved to Madison from Chicago when she was three years old with her mother and two siblings. She is intelligent, outgoing, beautiful, and quiet. Her interests are doing hair and going to church. She is a youth leader at Miracles of Life church. She has been called to become a minister.

She has faced some obstacles. For example, she was in a five-year relationship with someone she loved, trusted, and was faithful to. When she found out that he was a lying cheat with a lusting heart, she was crushed.

She loves to make money. She has a job and she works very hard. She currently works at Denny's and recently had an interview at Potbelly's. She says that she loves to make money legally by working hard for it at her job.

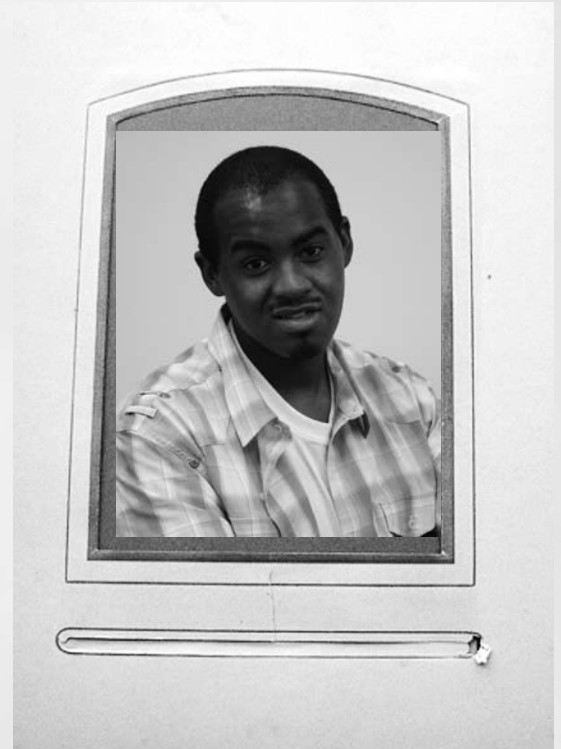


Marseills McKenzie by Kiara Hill

Marseills listens to all types of music, but he really loves hip-hop and R&B the most.

On the fourteenth day of July in 1984, Marseills McKenzie was born to Alete McKenzie. He was born with cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is a disease in which one side of the body does not function as normally as the other. Marseills has one older sister and two younger brothers. His mom worked two jobs to take care of him and his siblings.

Marseills said, "My teacher told me I would never graduate from high school and never go to college. I proved her wrong." He always wanted to be a guidance counselor to the youth. "I feel that there are not enough positive role models out there," he said. "Parents are not always the right choice."

**Kiara Hill by Marseills McKenzie**

On December 7, 1989, Maria Hill gave birth to a beautiful baby girl named Kiara Hill at St. Mary's Hospital. She has a diverse ethnicity: she comes from a mix of African American and Native American heritage.

Kiara was raised in a single parent household along with two sisters, a brother, and an older sister. She attended Markee High School and finished in 2007.

She plans to become a parole officer in the future. She has a passion and purpose to help others.



Dennis Listenbee by Yasmin Horton

Dennis, from Beloit, came to Madison in 1976 to find work as an electrician's helper until the Urban League helped him obtain work with Madison's school district. While living in Madison, Dennis fathered four children, three daughters and one son. To his credit, Dennis raised two of his now-adult daughters as a single father.

He has retired from one profession and now works at Sam's Club. Dennis is an avid athlete who enjoys tennis, baseball, and golf. He wants to own a set of golf clubs one day.

Dennis expresses that he was never happy during his 33 years of employment but it paid the bills.

**Leah LaBarre by Dennis Listenbee**

Leah was born and raised in Madison and attended a lot of different schools. Leah loves the outdoors and loves to camp with family and friends. She is currently raising her two-year-old daughter. Leah takes care of her daughter full-time along with attending the Odyssey Project.

Leah graduated in the top ten of her class, even after her daughter was born. She received a leadership award and a thousand dollar scholarship.

Leah loves to read and watch cinema arts. She also loves kayaking, rock climbing, hiking, snow shoeing, and water tubing. Leah loves to walk for exercise and also loves to read to her daughter. She also enjoys cooking a lot. She experiments with different recipes.



Migizi (Ray) Hopp by Catina McAlister

Migizi is the youngest of eight children and has a twin brother who is three minutes older. He is from Lac Courte Oreilles, which is a Native American reservation in northern Wisconsin.

Migizi moved to Madison a month before his eighteenth birthday and has lived here for twelve years. He moved here for better opportunities, school, to meet new people, to find himself and others. He enjoys riding his bicycle, outdoor activities, taking nature walks, and hiking.

Migizi has eighteen nieces and nephews. His mother is the youngest of thirteen children.

In his spare time, he loves listening to all types of music and dancing. Someday in the future, Migizi sees himself becoming a substance abuse counselor and returning to his reservation to help with AODA issues. One of the quotes he lives by is from Winston Churchill: "Success is how high you bounce when you hit rock bottom."



Catina McAlister by Ray "Migizi" Hopp

Catina is the program manager for the Minority Counseling Training Institute in Madison, WI. This incredible program is geared towards training minorities to become substance abuse counselors that help people suffering from the disease of drug addiction.

Catina was born in Beloit, WI. At five, she and her mother moved to opportunistic Madison, WI. Catina is the eldest of three beautiful African American children. She has two brothers.

Catina loves to care for and help others in need. She would like to be a peer specialist for young teenage girls who are seeking caring, loving people to listen and be a big sister and friend.

Catina loves to cook and create delicious meals. In the future, she would like to own her own catering business. A quote of importance to her is "live life to the fullest!"



Edwina Robinson by Morgan Chichester

With three kids at twenty years old, an eighth-grade education, and a love for the fast life, Edwina Robinson was on a destructive road to an untimely end.



Edwina was born in 1959. She is originally from Chicago but followed her son to Madison five years ago. During this time, she was struggling with drug addiction. When she first came to Madison, she stayed clean for twenty months. During those twenty months she was accepted into the Odyssey Program, but due to a relapse she could not be a part of the program. Edwina has been a CNA for thirty years and has a love for helping and taking care of people.

Edwina states, "I have been clean for sixteen months with no slips, no dips, and no weekend trips. I am out to prove we can recover."

Morgan Chichester by Edwina Robinson

As a child, Morgan remembers lining up all of her stuffed animals and pretending to teach them different things. She developed two things from this playtime: an escape from reality and a love for working with children.

Both of Morgan's parents were addicted to drugs, so Morgan was forced to move from house to house until her grandmother stepped in. When Morgan was fourteen, her mother asked her and her brother to move back home. Morgan went back but her brother refused. He could not forgive his mother.

Morgan was also in the military. She loved the army. However, on September 11, she changed. She wanted to be a mom. That's when all the military benefits stopped. Morgan is 29 years old with two children, one boy and one girl. They truly are her everything, the very air she breathes.

She came to Madison after Hurricane Rita. Her daughter's father was from Madison, so they came here to decide what to do with their lives. She found about Odyssey through a Facebook post by Kegan Carter.

Morgan works as a playground aide/ special education aide. She enjoys working with children that are somewhat challenged.

God continues to bless Morgan with all types of jobs. God's plans are intact!



Dwayne Ellis by Michael Lozano

Dwayne is from the west side of Chicago. “Where I’m from, in my neighborhood, you either do what’s around you, go positive, or find your own way.”

Getting through high school was a struggle for Dwayne because he was surrounded by drugs and violence. He was able to change his lifestyle in Madison, WI, through employment. He found a job at Certco as a lead forklift operator. Due to his ability to maintain employment and make money, his circumstances are much more positive living here than in Chicago. “Even when I go back home I see people who still do the same things we did in the past,” said Dwayne.

Dwayne’s dream is to own his own business: either a beauty shop, or a chain of skating rinks. When asked, he stated his goal is “to succeed and to achieve [his] dream of owning a lucrative business and being able to support [his] family financially and mentally.”

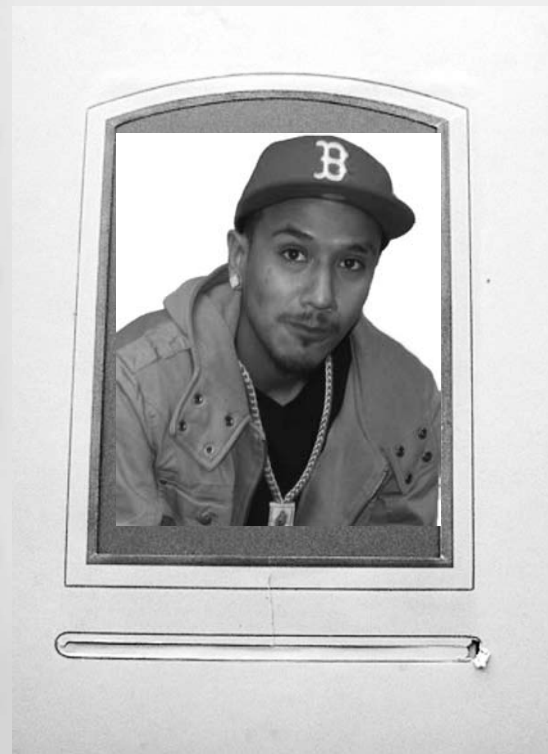


Michael Lozano by Dwayne Ellis

Michael Lozano was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. When Michael was younger he had to move to Madison because his father lost his job. “I’ve been poor since I can remember,” he said. “I’ve been in Madison about ten years.” Michael stays in Madison with his parents and siblings. He currently works for Madison College.

School was never really an option for Mr. Lozano. He was always surrounded by gang and drug activity. “Getting through life is an obstacle in itself,” said Michael. “Waking up every morning is enough for me.”

Michael describes himself as an outgoing, loyal, honest, and dedicated individual. As childhood progressed into adolescence, he enjoyed sports such as basketball, soccer, and swimming. He hopes to open an entertainment business and be a director of a facility for juvenile delinquents.



Danielle Rosales by Takeyla Benton

Not many people aspire to change the world and make a difference these days. Danielle, a student of the 2010-2011 Odyssey class, is one of those rare people who do. Her family is her life, but she has plans to build a great life for herself.



Born in Connecticut, Danielle and her family moved to Wisconsin when she was young. The adjustment to life and schools here was difficult, and as a result, she chose to hold off on school at the age of fourteen. Her childhood dreams were filled with doing charity work in impoverished areas. When she was seventeen, she moved to Madison where she met her husband of eight years.

She has three wonderful kids who have been her world. Danielle hopes to gain computer skills and expand her understanding of education and what is expected to be successful. She plans to take her time and continue to keep her main focus on her family, but she is leaving room for personal growth. Danielle says, "[Odyssey] is the only thing that will help me start a life for myself... I want to be a part of the bigger world and be functional." Reflecting on her potential career, she says, "It's not about the money... I need to see a bigger change through my work."

Takeyla Benton by Danielle Rosales

Takeyla is a writer. She is currently writing two books: a book of poetry and a novel about women and friendship. These books are for mature readers. "I can't think of my books as P.G.," she says.

Takeyla moved to Madison from Chicago when she was eleven. Her family wanted to get out of the city. She loves to read and write, and she also loves reading to her kids. She has overcome some challenges such as being a teen mother and job loss. Takeyla is currently attending Madison College for journalism, working as a personal banker, and raising two children. Her daughter is eleven and her son is three.

Takeyla is very ambitious. She currently blogs online for The Madison Times. "I would love to be an anchor on CNN," she says. This is one woman that is definitely going places.



Pamela Lee by Precious LaShore

Pamela Lee is a very outstanding woman, but she is going through things that the outside world would never know, including psoriasis. Psoriasis is a skin disease that causes inflammation and itchiness. This is a genetic condition. Pamela says, "Sometimes I itch so bad, I want to kill myself." Hopefully, she will get some help before that.

Pamela was born in the Chicagoland area where violence overcame her and her three children. She felt that her children were "prisoners in their own home." She was so determined to succeed in life that she moved to Madison. She has been living here for sixteen long, memory-filled years.

Pamela is now very successful as her own boss, managing several condos in downtown Madison. She is also excelling in her classwork at Globe University, where she majors in criminal justice. She hopes to work in homeland security.

It is admirable that she regrets nothing from her past and believes that every experience is meaningful. Pamela says, "Regret is the cancer of life."



Precious LaShore by Pamela Lee

Precious is a life-long Madisonian. She has two brothers and two sisters. Precious was very excited and proud about the first night of class, but that was ruined when she went home to an eviction notice on her door. She went to live with her mom for a short time and then moved into a homeless shelter because she is determined to live on her own.

Precious attends Globe University in the vet tech program. She has a fondness for animals, especially dogs, large animals like horses, and my forty year old brother Anthony.

Precious has been through a lot of trials but she will weather the storm.



Eric Rodgers by Michelle Bozeman

Whenever life gets tough, Eric Lydell Rodgers finds ways to fight back and stand tall. He was raised by his mom; his stepfather was in and out of the household. Eric was pressured to become a man at an early age.



He was born on February 19, 1986 on the west side of Chicago, a community full of gangs, drugs, and violence. Eric is the second oldest of four boys. He has always had a love for reading. Books take him to another state of mind. His past experience with incarceration led Eric to overcome being involved with the wrong people. He is finally at the point where he can put all negativity behind him.

Eric says, "I love to skateboard, sing, and play guitar. I bet that surprises you." He has a take-charge attitude and is confident in his upcoming accomplishments.

Michelle Bozeman by Eric Rodgers

Michelle Denise Bozeman grew up in a Chicago, Illinois community that was crime-ridden, full of poverty and dead-end solutions. Raised in a family where she suffered from child abuse and alcoholism, she is making positive changes in her own life to become stronger.

Michelle was born on June 25, 1974 and attended a private Catholic school during her younger years. Growing up, she was a basketball player and loved to watch and play sports. Today, she also enjoys singing, reading, watching movies, decorating, and being a party planner. She works for the Department of Workforce Development in the Division of Equal Rights, handling numerous tasks in order to get her work done.

Her first full-time job is being a single mother of five. Their ages are twenty, nineteen, sixteen, twelve, and nine. She is also proud to be a brand-new grandmother. Her grandchild is two months old. Michelle takes a lot of pride in raising and maintaining her family.



Bonita Greer by Helen Montgomery

Bonita was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. She is the eldest of six children; her mother was a single teenaged mother when Bonita and her brother were born. Her mom was married before the birth of Bonita's last four siblings.

Bonita moved to Madison in 1991 at the age of 21, following her aunt who was just three years older than Bonita. Bonita planned to follow her aspirations of becoming a doctor while her children were young, but life began to happen. She got married and had more children.

Today, she is a divorcee whose career as an independent LPN is most fulfilling. She loves spending time with her children as well as her extended family. She has been living in Madison for nineteen years. Bonita says that she is a leader. "Most of my friends confide in me with their life and personal issues."

Unlike her mother and grandmother, Bonita graduated high school as a teenaged mother. "That's one thing I overcame," she said. "Going back to college is major."

**Helen Montgomery by Bonita Greer**

Helen Montgomery came to Madison, WI on October 17, 2005. She is a single mother of two. Due to the high crime rate in Chicago, Helen decided to move her son and daughter to Madison. This was a good decision since her son was robbed at gunpoint. Helen's children have both completed high school and have gone on to pursue higher education.

Helen is the youngest in her family of fourteen siblings. She has a small group of extended family here. One surprising thing about Helen is that even though she is very vocal and interactive in social settings, she is usually a loner. One of the obstacles she has overcome is being unemployed after raising two well-rounded children to adulthood.

Helen's last job was an emergency room registrar at Mercy Hospital in Chicago. She has hopes of receiving her degree in health information technology. Some of her interests are reading fiction and music.



Tracy Cunnigan by Marvin Pratt

Mrs. Tracy Cunnigan came from Mississippi at the age of twelve. After living in the south and moving north to Madison, it was hard to adjust to the mixture of different races.



After a year, she returned to Mississippi at the urging of her mother who missed her only child. When Tracy eventually returned to Madison after fourteen years, she met and married her husband. She has been married for ten years and has one child.

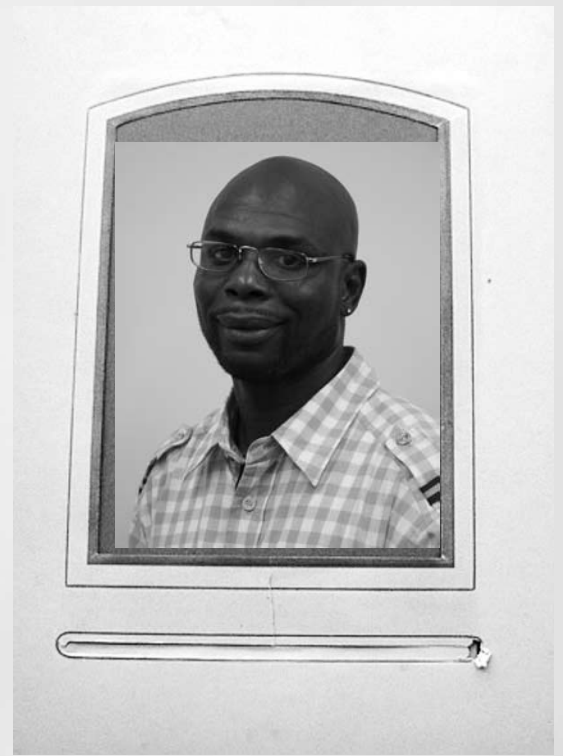
Tracy works and owns her own childcare service. On the weekends, she works as a health care provider. She loves being a homebody. "I see that being out of the limelight isn't always a bad thing," she says.

Marvin Pratt by Tracy Cunnigan

Marvin Pratt is from the south side of Chicago. He came to Madison to escape from gangs and drugs. He was in a gang and he just wanted to better his life. He also hoped to find love.

Marvin is laid back; however, he is still fighting his fears of love. His mom and dad left him with his aunt when he was two. His aunt had nine kids of her own, so Marvin always felt like he really did not belong there. At thirteen, he found his mom. She had had two more children that she was raising. This also made Marvin feel like he did not belong. This is when he joined a gang and began raising himself.

Marvin's philosophy is "don't ask questions you do not want answers to." He uses this statement to get by in life because his heart has never been the same. He currently works as a barber.



Diance Lor by Trendell Johnson

Diance's parents fought in the Vietnam War. During that time, her parents' families were fighting to make it across the Meng Kong River to Thailand hoping for a better life there. Unfortunately that dream failed and another opened: coming to America.

Diance was born and raised in Madison all her life. As a child growing up, she had no option but to learn at an early age how to cook, clean, garden, and raise her younger siblings as a form of carrying on the tradition as a woman.

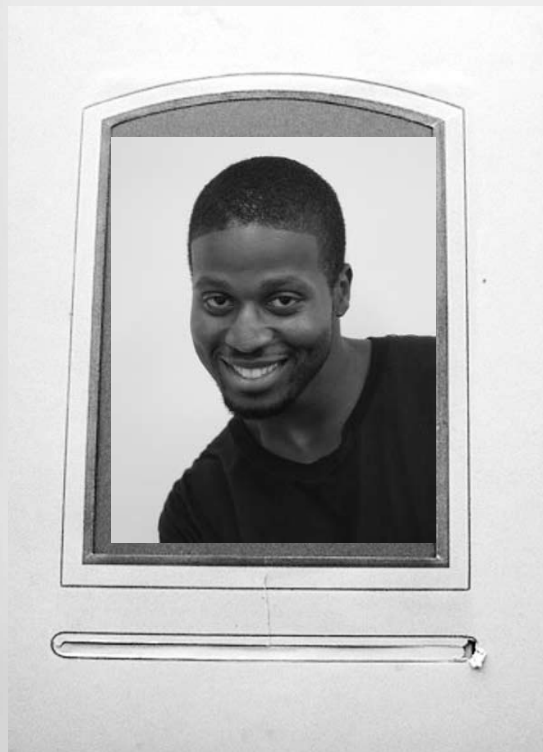
She is a single mother with two lovely kids, working hard and going for her dreams by joining the Odyssey Program. She is seeking a better life for her kids and herself.

**Trendell Johnson by Diance Lor**

Trendell Johnson was born in Chicago, Illinois, on April 4, 1988. He came to Madison, Wisconsin, at the age of five. His mother and father thought it would be safer to move than staying in Chicago.

Trendell was taken out of the home at age nine. He lived in six different facilities over the course of five years. He returned home in 2002 to a world he says he didn't know.

Trendell is one of four siblings: one brother and two sisters. He is hoping to be the first in his generation to go to college and get a degree. He believes that this class will help him to do so.



Shardetra Ofori-anim by her sister, Sheriah Quartey ('08)

If I had one word to summarize Shardetra it would have to be unique. She is certainly not the kind of person that the saying "what you see is what you get" can apply to. She looks like a young, shy, and quiet teenager, but in reality she is an outspoken, humorous young woman.

Born in Chicago but raised mostly in Marshall, Wisconsin, Shardetra, or Dee Dee, is 21 years old. She loves to do creative things like make jewelry and clothing. She started getting into arts and crafts in her early teenage years. Every Christmas she would keep getting new sets of beads and other materials to help her explore that side of her. I have seen things for sale in stores that did not even look as good as some of the stuff this girl can make.

Shardetra has a passion to be an English teacher one day. Throughout her life she never let any discouragement change her mind about what she wanted to do, even when she was told that she had a learning disability. She is one of the silliest people I know. When she finds something funny, she will laugh so hard that you can't help but laugh with her. Every time she thinks of the thought, she will laugh like it was her first time knowing about it.

She is beautiful inside and out and does not like to be stereotyped. She loves to be set apart so lots of times she won't do something

just because everyone else is.

Shardetra did not have the easiest childhood with having to deal with drug addicted family members and other personal tragedies, but she never let that stop her from believing that she can rise above it all and live out her dreams.

Kathann Jackson by Shardetra Ofori-Anim

Like many of us Odyssey students, Kathann Jackson is truly on a journey, unsure of what led her to this class, but very positive on what direction she wants to go in. Kathann has very high hopes for her future. Ms. Jackson wants to be a human services worker. She would like to work with abused women. This couldn't fit her calm, nurturing personality any better.

Outside of school Kathann enjoys restoring her faith by going to church. Going to church only strengthens her and makes her want to continue on her journey to becoming successful. Another part of Ms. Jackson's life that encourages her to stick with her goals is her singing. This is a creative part of her that she loves the most. Besides her love of working hard in school, church, and music, she also enjoys her kids.

All in all you may be intimidated at first by Kathann's quiet exterior, but she is more than warm and inviting. After having a conversation, you will be inspired to not only further yourself in the career aspects of your life but you will also be inspired to help others out the way she does.

[Note: Kathann experienced a "calling from God" that led her to pursue discipleship classes at her church on Wednesday nights. We wish her well and welcome her back among us any time.]

