

# PLATO 2020-2021 Education Fund Scholarships

In 2020, PLATO provided scholarship assistance to four University of Wisconsin-Madison returning adult students, financial support for the Odyssey Project, and educational opportunities for young people through five community agencies. This was all made possible by the generosity of PLATO members who value lifelong learning and provide needed financial support on behalf of students who would be left out of educational opportunities due to financial need.

## Returning Adult Student Program

Administered through the UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies, these scholarships are awarded on a competitive basis and targeted toward single-parent students and other nontraditional adult returnees. Financial need and academic potential are critical components in determining the awards. For 2020, the PLATO Education Fund has supported four \$3,500 scholarships.

**Rachel Belter** is a graduate of UW-Madison with a major in gender and women's studies and is now pursuing a master's degree in the School of Social Work's part-time program. She is a first-generation college student. Her family of origin did not have the means to financially support her education. She has worked in nonprofits for more than 10 years in the areas of domestic abuse, early childhood education and homelessness. She is a mother to a 4-year-old boy. Rachel wants to work in hospice care with her social work degree and use the therapy dog she has been training.



**Rebecca Waschek** is a first-year iSchool student working to attain an MA in library and information studies. Rebecca's passion is to provide opportunities of literature and arts for people who have disabilities, the elderly and low-income populations. During the 14-year gap between undergrad and graduate school, Rebecca spent 10 years working with people who have disabilities in La Crosse, Wisc., and spent a substantial part of this time overseas. She has worked in public libraries for three years and is currently working at College Library.



**Kasey Kohlhardt** is obtaining a master's degree in the part-time social work program. She works full-time at Central Wisconsin Center as a client rights facilitator. One of her greatest passions in life is being a voice for those who cannot speak up for themselves. She will use her education to become a clinical social worker in mental health. She intends to educate the public to eliminate the stigma that often occurs with having a mental illness. Kasey's daughter is an undergraduate at UW-Eau Claire. Having an empty nest is what inspired Kasey to go back to school and continue to be a role model for her daughter, emphasizing the importance of education.



**Erin Bayerl** is a first-generation graduate student working toward a master's degree in physician assistant studies. Her goal is to be able to help fill the gaps in healthcare in rural Wisconsin. Erin worked as a clinical dental hygienist for more than 18 years when she decided to pursue a bachelor's degree. She graduated from Minnesota State University, Mankato, in 2013, while raising two children. With her degree, she went on to teach dental hygiene at a local college and eventually took on the role of program director. In 2019, Erin decided to keep advancing her career and education.



**Odyssey Project**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



In 2020, the PLATO Education Fund donated \$6,000 in support of the **Odyssey Project**. Since 2003, the Odyssey Project ([www.odyssey.wisc.edu](http://www.odyssey.wisc.edu)) has empowered more than 400 adults near the poverty level find their voices and get a jump-start on college degrees they never thought possible. Their children participate in **Odyssey Junior**, allowing whole families to learn and hope about the future. **Onward Odyssey** connects program alumni with other UW-Madison courses, including Special Education Paraprofessional training, Food Systems, and African American Studies.