



Empowering Youth  
Strengthening Families  
Building Community

# LARAWAY

## YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES



September 2011

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*Executive Director*



## Welcome to Our Place

"I finally feel I'm in a real school."

This sentiment was shared by many of our students completing the first summer program in our newly renovated barn. It's the highest compliment we can receive yet, it begs the question: **What is a "real" school?**

**It's a place** where students, parents, teachers, staff and the community take ownership of the classrooms, buildings and grounds. We're planting trees, recycling and composting, and developing campus recreation fields.

**It's a place** where hillsides become classrooms and gardens and rivers become therapeutic places of healing.

**It's a place** where young people learn healthy ways to manage stress:

walking through a garden or taking a hike around our 37 acres of fields.

**It's a place** where students study in classrooms amid quiet and safety, surrounded by Vermont's unique and beautiful landscape.

**It's a place** where youth, families and the community are invited to connect with the broader world.

Please join us at our **Grand Opening and Harvest Celebration on Thursday, September 15, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.** It's a chance to meet youth and staff and learn about how this place—**Our Place**—is making a real difference in the lives of the youth and families we serve.

**Greg Stefanski**  
*Executive Director*

## Moment in Time: Set to do well

Hickory. Oak. Black Walnut. Apple. Pear. What do these have in common? They represent some of the 40 trees planted at Laraway on August 3rd.

Youth and staff dug shovels into the earth, checking depths and layering compost and nutrients before gently yet firmly placing saplings in fertile soil.

"To plant a tree, you want to set it well," explained Laraway Farm Steward **Cornelius Murphy.**

Thanks to **East Hill Tree Farm** and

**Elmore Roots** for discounts.

Young people, like trees, require care to grow tall and strong. We are committed to providing academic and therapeutic supports to help youth establish roots while also spreading their branches.

A youth was quick to ask: "Can I pick the first apple off my tree?"

You bet!



## Backpack Program: Stuffed full of summer fun and learning

**Backpack**, a school-based intervention program, offers a 5-week **Summer Program** featuring experientially rich opportunities for youth to grow in skills and confidence.

A typical day looks something like this:

- 8:15 Breakfast
- 8:45 Morning Meeting
- 9:00 Art Class
- 10:00 Volunteer at Meals on Wheels
- 11:30 Lunch
- 12:00 Swimming at Lake Elmore
- 2:30 Daily Journaling
- 2:45 Dismissal



**Laraway  
Alumni  
Brunch**  
**Saturday  
November 5th  
9:00-11:00**  
**Join us at the  
Farm!**



**Questions?  
Contact Katherine  
(802) 635-2805 x106**

Structured and fun activities help participants strengthen social and teamwork skills. Special trips to **Circus Smirkus** and **Whales Tales Water Park** are realized through the help of donors. Volunteer work at **The Manor** elder care residence and local farms enhances self-confidence while planting seeds of empathy and caring. The program culminates with a talent show and auction facilitated by **Nicole Pfende, Backpack Program Coordinator**. Students use points earned over the summer to bid on games, clothes, art supplies and even really cool sunglasses.

### Thank you to our supporters!

#### Individuals

- Rev. Elise Braun
- Lori Draper
- Rich Farrell
- Melissa Fleming
- Rebecca Hemmer
- Carrie Lambert
- Jessica McCoy
- Jessyca Nelle
- G. Joseph Rogers
- Sara Russell
- Matthew Sadowsky
- Jackie Sforza
- Katherine Stamper
- Greg Stefanski
- Dr. Terry Starkey
- Rhonda Stuart
- Rep. Mark Woodward

#### Businesses / Organizations

- American Lung Assoc.
- Caplan's Shoe & Apparel
- Country Home Center
- Chuck's Bikes
- East Hill Tree Farm
- ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain
- Elmore Roots
- High Mowing Organic Seeds
- Johnson Elementary School
- Price Chopper/Morrisville
- Richmond Elementary School
- Vermont Community Foundation/Gr. Mt. Fund

- Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation

*If your name was inadvertently omitted, please contact Katherine Stamper at (802) 635-2805 x 106*



## Unconventional Pedagogy: One Student's Journey

*"Eleven years ago when I started at Laraway, I wouldn't have thought this was possible"*

David, Laraway Graduate

"Willpower. Determination. Resiliency. Heart. These are words that come to mind when I think of **David**," **Brigid Scheffert** said.

Brigid, Superintendent of Washington West Supervisory Union, spoke at **Laraway School's Student Recognition and Graduation Day** on June 15th. As the former principal of Johnson Elementary School, Brigid was instrumental in forming a partnership with Laraway in David's elementary school years. This successful endeavor laid the groundwork for Laraway's collaborative efforts with public schools today.

We came together with youth, families and community friends to celebrate the achievements of all our students. A special recognition was offered for David who was awarded his high school diploma.

David's early life was difficult, characterized by significant family challenges and upheaval. Extremely difficult circumstances in David's early years led to challenges in his behavior and learning.

Brigid and Laraway staff saw something special in David...a kindness of heart and a desire to work as hard as necessary to achieve both academic and personal goals.

"If you're lucky in your career," Brigid said, "students teach you a lot. David taught me that everything is possible if you want it badly enough."

David taught Brigid that sometimes it was

important to leave the confines of the school building to help him work through a certain challenge. Unconventional pedagogy assumed the form of lunch at a local restaurant—a BLT sandwich, french fries and a hot fudge sundae—topped off with a ride to and fro in the principal's little red Corvette.

"As an educator, I find that students fill your heart with motivation. Words cannot describe how motivated I was to help this young man who worked so hard to learn to read, to do math," Brigid observed.

"I know life is nothing but a game. I encourage you to play hard, play fair and play safe," Brigid said. She turned to David, handsome in his cap and gown, to say: "I love you and I will always be your advocate."

David approached the podium to read the speech he had written:

"Eleven years ago when I started at Laraway, I wouldn't have thought this was possible. I want to thank all the people who supported me, especially during my rough times."

As David was awarded his high school diploma, the audience erupted in applause. Achievements, hard won, are certainly the sweetest.

Laraway remains committed to providing the youth we serve with the tools to identify and work toward their personal goals...just like David!



## MISSION

Providing opportunities for children and families to recognize their individual strengths while supporting them to grow and contribute within our communities

### Staff Profile: Dan Stearns, an Inventive Mentor

Dan Stearns once worked as an engineer near Washington, D.C. He has tutored kids in a squatter community in Guatemala. He served on staff at a Quaker camp. He also holds a recently issued U.S. Patent for inventing a spherical hub mechanism.

Dan works as a Mentor in Laraway's Substitute Care Program. He helps youth

strengthen their social, recreational and independent living skills.

"I've been told I have Peter Pan Syndrome, and working as a mentor enables me to play just about every day."

Dan's enthusiasm and inventiveness add much to Laraway's work with children, youth and families. Thanks, Dan!



Laraway goes GREEN!

Prefer to receive this newsletter via email?

Email: [KatherineS@laraway.org](mailto:KatherineS@laraway.org)

Type GO GREEN in the subject line.  
We'll take care of it. Thanks!



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Laraway is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to identifying and building on the strengths of children and youth with emotional, behavioral and mental health challenges, through alternative education and therapeutic foster care.