

LARAWAY YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

LARAWAY... IT'S ABOUT THE KIDS



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Fall 2010

Children thrive in a nurturing environment

Lessons from Summer

Summer's warmth lingers in memory as days grow shorter. During the school year, we witness kids at Laraway achieving academic and personal strides with supportive guidance from our caring staff.

Summer provides unique opportunities for kids to learn and grow with unexpected "teachers" in unexpected places. Our Summer Program provides academic, recreational and volunteer opportunities with a healthy dose of summer fun.

Thanks to a grant from the Stowe High School SHAPE Club, a group of kids in our foster care program experienced integrated art and meditation activities with a certified yoga instructor.

Kids in Laraway's Backpack Program volunteered at The Manor in Morrisville, playing Scrabble and Cribbage with seniors. Intergenerational friendships formed as healthy competition ensued.

Laraway School students cleaned and painted the Johnson Community Skate Park. Volunteer activities were complimented by biking, swimming and a nine mile canoe trip down the Lamoille River.

Experiences such as these allow kids to see themselves as part of something bigger while developing skills—social and academic—to carry into adulthood.

In this newsletter you will read about other great things our kids are experiencing including writing projects and starting a micro business initiative!

Wishing you a wonderful autumn!

Greg Stefanski, *Executive Director*
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Words from our youth: My Dreams

To live in a different part of Vermont...
To travel far and to help others...
To take care of my family...
To find that right job for me...
To go for more schooling...
To show I care in my own way...
To help animals in need and most of all people...
To keep myself right and believe....
To follow my dreams in life. **M.L.**



Becca Hemmer: Kids weave new patterns into their lives

Becca Hemmer joined Laraway in 1994 as an overnight staff person.

"I was starting grad school (in Mental Health Counseling) at Johnson State College", Becca recalls. "I'd drive in for classes, study in the library until 11 p.m. and come to work."

Becca learned much from the youths she worked with in what was then a residential

program. Soon after, the "res" transitioned to a community-based program authorized to place children in foster homes.

Becca realized that most kids in foster care would benefit from some connection with their biological families. Today, she directs Laraway's Substitute Care Program which facilitates therapeutic foster care placements, mentoring,

and life skills activities for children and youth in State's custody.

Asked why she works with kids, Becca says, "I've always been fascinated by people's stories. Life is lyrical even when it's dissonant."

Asked why she stays, Becca offers, "The kids. It's all about the kids. Knowing their history and witnessing them weave new patterns for themselves is powerful."

Laraway responds to the needs of at-risk kids and their families by offering innovative strength-based services thru alternative education, therapeutic foster care, and public school based support programs

Laraway designated a NASET School of Excellence

Laraway was recently selected as a 2010-2011 School of Excellence by the National Association of Special Education Teachers. The professional organization bestows this honor upon private special education schools who meet rigorous professional criteria and demonstrate truly exceptional dedication, commitment and achievement in the field of special education.



Community Thank You's

Merchant's Bank Foundation

Paul & Mary Dupre

Green Mountain Fund

Senator Susan Bartlett

VT Campaign to End Childhood Hunger

Representative Shap Smith & Dr. Melissa Volansky

Morrisville Rotary Club



Ben & Jerry's

We appreciate our supporters. If, for some reason, your name was omitted, please contact Katherine Stamper at (802) 635-2805 x 205 KatherineS@Laraway.org



Alumni Profile: Working one's way to independence

“Poverty is a great motivator,” Lee says. “I’ve been working since I was 12 or 13. I knew very early on if I wanted something, I’d have to work for it.”

Laraway alumni

Lee didn’t receive a lot of support from the adults around him during his early adolescence. He lived with his mother and her boyfriend in a camper in Beaver Meadows near the Vermont town of Morrisville.

“I was tomcatting around, spending weekends on my own in Morrisville. I was a kid living like an 18-year-old,” Lee recalls. “My family life was pretty weird---it was non-existent. I really didn’t *have* a family life. My mother and her boyfriend were either working or passed out. They put their own needs ahead of us (kids).” Lee hadn’t seen his father in years.

“Poverty is a great motivator”, Lee says. “I’ve been working since I was 12 or 13. I knew very early on if I wanted something, I’d have to work for it.”

Lee barely attended 8th grade--he skipped school and wasn’t particularly engaged when there. Academically, he was capable of doing the work. Emotionally, he was distracted by the very adult burdens he carried as a child in a dysfunctional home. Lee was placed in foster care at age thirteen and enrolled in Peoples Academy in Morrisville as a freshman.

“I was very rebellious,” Lee observes.

Lee’s pattern of rebellion and truancy continued at Peoples. He was asked to leave in the fall of his freshman year.

“I wanted to go to Laraway (School),” Lee remembers. “It was the next step, the only place for me to go.”

Laraway offered small classes and highly

individualized instruction. It afforded Lee a level of structure and accountability he was unaccustomed to, but clearly recognized he needed. Up until that time, Lee was planning to quit school at 16. For the first time, Lee saw the opportunity to earn a high school diploma.

“I liked the strong feeling of camaraderie....the support and sense of organization Laraway provided,” Lee observes. “Laraway was kind of like family. Once I got into Laraway, I wanted to excel.

I knew it was my last chance. I wanted to do well for myself, but to also show the teachers I could do it.”

Intimate classes and highly attentive teachers meant there was no place to hide. Accountability for one’s own learning was expected and actively encouraged.

Lee, so used to living without emotional support, recognized that

Laraway’s structure was just what he needed. He formed positive relationships with staff members who cared and yet set high standards for him. Lee started getting A’s and B’s at Laraway, earning his diploma in 1985.

Lee worked a series of odd jobs---farming, woodcutting, painting, logging, small engine repair, electrician’s helper----before a successful 4-year stint with the Marines. Reflecting on his military experience, Lee feels he gained greater direction, structure, and the awareness that he could overcome obstacles.

Today, Lee owns and operates a construction company in central Vermont and is the proud father of two daughters.



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

Got Bread? Micro-business launched at Laraway

Laraway teachers and students launched the "Yeast Coast Bread Company", an internal micro-business initiative in which students learn all aspects of running a small business while creating artisan breads.

Students met with professional bread bakers to discuss craft and the

business side of making dough. One day a week, the aroma of yeast rising and bread baking filled our offices at 95 School Street as students weighed and measured, kneaded and shaped dough into delicious, fresh, hand-crafted loaves made from scratch. Laraway just might be an incubator for entrepreneurs!



Laraway goes GREEN!

Prefer to receive this newsletter via email? Email KatherineS@laraway.org, type GO GREEN in the subject line, and we'll take care of it. Thanks!

Thank you for supporting Laraway's work in the community

**LARAWAY YOUTH
& FAMILY
SERVICES**

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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.

