

LARAWAY YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

LARAWAY..... IT'S ABOUT THE KIDS



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Spring 2008

Children thrive in a nurturing environment

Annual Appeal: Nurturing 21st Century Learners

What makes someone a "21st Century Learner"? There's been much discussion about 21st Century Learners in Vermont and across the nation due to availability of a federal grant bearing the same name. Many of our local public schools have applied for funds through this grant to support after-school programming.

At Laraway we take very seriously our role in preparing young people for challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Building on emotional, social, and mental health supports we provide through our programs, our creative and flexible staff focus on two aspects of a young person's development: social and technical skills development.

We believe success for our young people depends on the ability to work well

with others. Whether coordinating with college roommates, negotiating a business deal, or buying milk at the grocery store, our world requires and thrives on human interaction. Our school, foster care, and school-based programs strongly emphasize the development of social skills. This may range from learning how to accept "No" for an answer to giving and receiving positive feedback.

Social skills open doors to employment; technical skills help young people find security in today's workforce. The future holds many possibilities for our kids. Some will attend college. Others may enroll in apprenticeships in carpentry or pursue technical training in culinary arts or auto repair.

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Moment in Time: A Recipe for Success

The volcano sits in a classroom, dormant but ready to erupt. Pieced together by Charlie from paper mache, glass beads, duct tape, nail polish, and a recycled water bottle implanted ingeniously in its core, the volcano is both a work of art and an engineering marvel.*

When Charlie carefully combines cider vinegar and baking soda deep within the 12-inch high structure, it spits and spouts a hissing stream of kid-made lava.

Some kids learn best in hands-on teaching environments.



Learning about and ultimately building a model volcano has taught Charlie

much more than the physics of magma rumbling below the earth's surface. He's also learned that he's smart enough to research, design, and create a science project.

Small successes such as these help kids like Charlie develop the confidence to take on loftier academic and personal challenges.

"I like the staff here and most of the kids," Charlie says with a smile. "The staff really seem to care about us kids. If I'm angry sometimes and need a little space, they give it to me."

"Charlie has an amazing ability to get people to come together as a group," reflects Laraway School Director Julie Landry.

Teaching kids to believe in themselves—their talents, hopes and dreams—is what Laraway is all about.

Board Members

W. Duncan Tingle, President
Barbara Burmeister, Vice President
Carrie Lambert, Treasurer
Rebecca M. Hill, Secretary
Paul Dupre
Stuart Senghas
Justin Philie

History Project: We Started in a Garage

To say Laraway's beginnings were humble is an understatement: we started in a garage.

The year was 1972 and it would be three years before the federal government enacted legislation guaranteeing all children, including those with special needs, access to a free and appropriate education.

"Districts were excluding kids with special needs," remembers Bob

Kilkenny, Ed.D, Executive Director of Boston-based Alliance for Inclusion and Prevention, and Laraway's first executive director.

"There were kids no one would take---expelled, in foster care, runaways, warehoused at Weeks (the state reform school in Vergennes). They were couch-surfing."

Somebody noticed. Rumsey Jesser, a local artist, witnessed teenagers, spurned from public schools

ill-equipped to meet their educational needs, wandering downtown Johnson. She established an informal school for them in the garage of her Waterville home, focusing largely on the creative arts. The rest is history.

Have a Laraway memory to share? Please contact Katherine Stamper, Development Coordinator, at 802-635-2805 x205.

Jingle Nail Run a Snowy Success

Runners braved chilled air and snow to race the Mountain Road in Stowe, raising \$675 for Laraway.

Women's Winners:
1st Sherry Ricker
2nd Wendy Brothers
3rd Leila Bandar

Men's Winners:
1st Nathan Fields
2nd Todd Archambault
3rd Jad Daley

Kate Laporte, age 11, distinguished herself as the youngest runner to complete the course!

Thanks to The Rusty Nail Bar and Grill for all their support!

Classroom Visit: Art Imitates Life

Kristin Thompson's classroom is awash in art projects. The Johnson State College graduate has been teaching art at the Laraway School since 2001.

Murals, painted in vibrant acrylics, enliven the walls with student depictions of artworks by Edward Hopper and

Georgia O'Keefe among others.

Students, palates in hand, mix and measure the paints trying to capture the exact tint achieved by masterful artists.

There is trial and error as too much of one color is added which needs to be blended with yet another color to achieve aesthetic balance.

Our students must learn to balance and blend different pieces of their lives as they journey towards adulthood. Art helps them learn to be creative in their approach.

Staff Voices: Where our students' gifts and talents lie

- Computers
- Writing Stories
- Theater
- Gardening
- Music

Community Thank You's

Thank you to the following individuals and organizations for their generous donations to Laraway:

- Smuggler's Notch Resort
- Leahy Center for Lake Champlain
- Johnson State College
- Teresa Manning
- VT Food Bank
- Mary and Ron Bushnell
- Stowe Mountain Resort
- Donors to our 1st Annual Appeal



Mary and Scott Ackley: Always room at their table

Mary Ackley has plenty of room at her kitchen table. She can always add one more place setting if there's a child who needs a house to call home. Ackley and her husband Scott are among Laraway's veteran foster parents, having worked with our kids since 2002.

"It was something we always knew we wanted to do," Ackley says, reflecting on the many Laraway kids she's opened her heart and her home to.

"When a child comes into our home, they come with a clean slate. Each child has a history, sometimes pages and pages," Ackley observes. "I read the information and then kind of put it on the back burner." Ackley's desire to treat each kid fairly and with respect means more than providing a bed. "These kids become part of our family. This becomes their home. I don't send them to the fridge where a list of rules is posted."

"These kids really need something stable in their lives, even if it's just the relationship my husband and I can provide. It's important for them to know someone is there for them and cares for them."

Ackley and her husband currently have three biological children at home plus three Laraway kids. They also have two adopted children.

Over the years, Ackley and her husband have shared their home with several Laraway kids, some just before crossing the bridge to adulthood. She reflects on one particular youth who, now in the community, is holding down a job, paying his car insurance, and supporting himself independently.

"Tim* came into our household as a teenager and lived with us for about two years. When he turned 18, he felt ready to go out on his own, even though he had the option to stay on a bit.

He showed a little bravado and kind of left in not so good a way," she remembers. "He's still a part of our life. About two months after he left, he started calling. He might ask to spend a few days with us because it's grounding for him. He might even show up for holidays, it kind of depends on who his girlfriend is," Ackley says with warm, motherly laughter. "It's amazing how well he's doing given what he's been through."

Asked what she hoped people would understand about Laraway kids, Ackley says, "These children need a good home, a good family, a good, stable place in life. I wouldn't be able to be a foster parent without Laraway. The case managers, the support system is incredible. They know me, they know the child. If there is an issue, I can reach someone twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They care about the kids and they care about me and my family."

"These kids need someone willing to go out on a limb for them," Ackley says.

Laraway is lucky and grateful to have wonderful foster parents like Mary and Scott who really do make their houses homes for our kids.

Rich Farrell, Assistant Director of Laraway's Substitute Care Program which encompasses foster care, offers the following: "One of the (many) strengths that Mary has is to truly make the foster kids not feel like foster kids. Everyone is family under Mary's roof and the children understand that."

*Name changed to protect confidentiality

"These children need a good home, a good family, a good place in life."

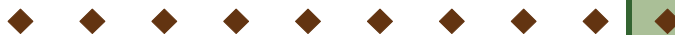


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At Laraway, our kids use computers to research history projects, communicate via email or text messaging, and develop Power Point presentations. Computers allow us to provide kids with access to assistive technologies crucial to meeting their education goals.

Thanks to the generosity of folks who responded to Laraway's 1st Annual Appeal, we've purchased several new computers, replacing older, slower models, allowing us to introduce educational software to help our students learn better and more efficiently. Your generosity helps our kids improve social and technical skills crucial to their success in the 21st century marketplace. Thank You!

Greg Stefanski, Executive Director



MISSION

In a community that promotes compassion, honesty and respect, children, youth and families are empowered to develop awareness of their abilities and assets to live safe fulfilling lives.

Board Member Profile: Rebecca Hill

Rebecca Hill is a Nurse Practitioner at Johnson State College and the mother of two college-aged daughters. She has worked with young people for most of her career.

"No matter what sorts of difficulties a young person is struggling with, I always feel hopeful that they can turn their lives around," Hill observes.

Hill joined the Laraway Board two years ago when invited by a JSC colleague. She serves as Board Secretary and agency representative on our local restoration panel.

"Laraway is a gem of an agency", Hill reflects, "with a staff committed to helping youth deal with far more than academic issues."

Thank You
for supporting our
1st Annual Appeal!

LARAWAY YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

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Website
Re-launched
Visit us at
www.laraway.org

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.

