

# LARAWAY YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

## LARAWAY...

## IT'S ABOUT THE KIDS



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### Board Members

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Greg Stefanski, *Executive Director*

December 2008

*Children thrive in a nurturing environment*

### Holiday Greetings from Laraway

Much has happened since our fall newsletter: Winter snow, a newly elected President and more news about an economic crisis.

Recessions often prompt increased rates of depression, alcoholism, drug abuse and violence, impacting individuals, families, and communities. Unfortunately, our media often overlooks these impacts.

Laraway remains committed to supporting young people and their families despite economic challenges. Our work is about helping kids reconnect to their families, schools and communities.

This holiday season, Laraway students and staff are actively seeking out opportunities to give back to the community that supports us.

Our students organized a "Pennies for Presents" drive, raising \$600 to buy gifts

for Lamoille Family Center and Johnson Food Shelf clients. Staff partnered with generous area businesses, to create gift baskets for families and seniors experiencing need. Laraway staff and foster parents personally donated \$1000 to replace vandalized Toys for Kids presents while inviting other Vermont businesses to join the effort. Finally, Laraway and Johnson State College donated gift certificates from local businesses to be raffled at the Johnson Holiday Festival with proceeds benefiting Johnson's Food Shelf and Historical Society.

While these actions may not solve the problems in our economy, they are helping building community. Please join us as we work through these tough times.

Best wishes for a safe and joyful holiday season.

**Greg Stefanski, Executive Director**

### Moment in Time: Kids tackle hunger in Vermont

Small acts of kindness go far to minimize hunger in Vermont. Laraway students demonstrated coordinated strength and giving by moving 100 cases of canned

vegetables, soup and beans to the pantry of



the Lamoille Community Food Share, doing their part to insure food would be available to folks experiencing food insecurity as the holidays approach.

"We have seen a 26% increase in the number of people using our pantry this year," observed Manager Deb Krempecke.

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## Lessons learned by the cider press

Cal Stanton, knows kids....and apples. As Laraway’s Behavioral Coordinator, Cal integrates life lessons into hands-on teaching activities.

When Shelburne Orchards advertised a deal on apples gleaned from the ground—\$50 for a loaded pick-up truck—

Cal seized the bargain and envisioned a learning opportunity.

He dusted off Laraway’s ancient cider press and enlisted his students in assembly. Kids worked together to wash and quarter apples before loading them in the press. After a few careful cranks, cider flows, offering up

the fresh, fruity flavor of tree-ripened fruit.

“This cider is much better because it’s so fresh,” Cal observes.

What did our kids learn?

To gather, prep, grind, create...and to enjoy the drinkable fruits of their labor!

### Staff Voices: What our students have taught us:

- Pay attention to what matters
- Listen to your heart
- Pick your battles
- Just trying is a huge thing
- Laughing together builds rapport

## Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Grant: Healthy Snacking 101

Laraway was fortunate to receive a “Fresh Fruits and Vegetables” grant from the VT Department of Education. Grant funds are designated for healthy snacks for kids in our programs.

“The grant allows me to serve fruits and vegetables I might

otherwise be unable to because of the cost”, says Lisa Rock, Laraway’s Food Service Coordinator.

From fresh cut pineapple to carrots, beans, and crisp sliced apples, Laraway kids end their school day with a healthy afternoon snack.

Eating habits are formed early in life. Laraway is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles for the kids we serve.

When the afternoon grows long and nutritious treats show up, our kids are ready to dig in.

## Community Thank You’s

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

- Sandy Malone, Leapfrog Systems, Inc.
- Carmen Portelli
- Norma Spaulding
- Morrisville Rotary Club
- United Way of Lamoille County
- Chuck Conger, Mobil
- Walmart



What our kids say about Laraway’s programs:

**“People should know Laraway never gives up on kids. Laraway never gave up on me.”**

Martin\*  
Age 17

\*Name changed to protect privacy

## Laraway History Project: Interview with Cindy Cole

Cindy Cole arrived at Laraway Youth and Family services in 1982 as a reading specialist. She served as Executive Director from 1983 to 1986. Cole currently works as the school psychologist for Chittenden South Supervisory Union.

I have very fond memories of working at Laraway. The work was all-encompassing. I was there all the time." Cole reminisced with a hint of laughter.

Laraway, still in its infancy, was a residential school. Cole helped expand services to include day students.

"I learned a lot about what was required for a program for kids with emotional needs," Cole observed. "At the end of the day, I'd drive kids home because there was no transportation. I learned so much about reaching out, connecting, and building community."

Laraway's small classes accommodated individualized learning styles. Students attended school four days a week and—thanks to available federal youth job-training funds—worked for local employers one day per week. Kids gained valuable experience by doing everything from working on cars to scooping ice cream in a unique partnership with Ben and Jerry's. Employers became mentors.

"Laraway was into creating a sense of family,"

Cole observed. Students and staff cooked meals together, breaking bread in the dining room of the old Victorian on School Street still in use today.

Mealtime conversation provided natural ways to reinforce positive social skills.

Laraway was committed to creating peak experiences to help kids build self-esteem. Fall hiking trips, overnight camping—even in winter, and spring canoe trips forged decades ago, continue to this day.

"All of the kids had an advocate," Cole said. "If a problem arose, we'd come together as a group of kids and staff to find a solution."

Cole looks back fondly on her days at Laraway despite the hard work, long hours, and sometimes sad student stories. What is perhaps most gratifying is when, even today, Cole runs into former students who are successful—living, working and raising their families in Vermont.

*"I learned so much about reaching out, connecting, and building community."*

*Cindy Cole*

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"As a community supported organization we feel a great responsibility to shop wisely. When many items go on sale at once it can be a challenge. Thanks to your (Laraway's) help, we were able to take advantage of those good prices."

Lamoille Community Food Share is built upon the idea of one neighbor reaching out to help another neighbor in a time of need. Laraway, in actively seeking out opportunities for our kids to participate in community service, allows them to reap the positive benefits of helping others.

Winter is expected to be long and cold in Vermont. Laraway, in partnering with Lamoille Community Food Share hopes that all our neighbors' tables will be plentiful throughout the season.



## MISSION

**Empowering children, youth and families to develop awareness of their abilities and assets to live safe, fulfilling lives.**

### Board Member Profile: Stuart Senghas

Stuart Senghas' history with Laraway started when his car broke down in 1988. Scott Johnson, Laraway's Executive Director, offered Senghas a lift and told him about the kids.

Senghas, a recent graduate of Johnson State College, was hired soon after as a Residential Counselor and then a Behavioral Specialist.

"I eventually went back to school to earn my MSW because the kids encouraged me", Senghas remembers.

Senghas, Coordinator of the Supervised Child Access Program at the Lamoille Family Center, makes time to volunteer for Laraway's Board because, "Laraway recognizes the potential of each youth, the diamond in the rough with the ability to contribute something positive to society."

**Thank You  
for supporting  
Laraway's work in the  
community!**

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!

### LARAWAY YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

PO Box 621  
Johnson, VT 05656

Phone: 802-635-2805

Fax: 802-635-7273

E-mail: [admin@laraway.org](mailto:admin@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.

