



# The Learning Web

FALL 2007 NEWSLETTER

LEARNING BY DOING IN TOMPKINS COUNTY  
SINCE 1972

*focus on*  
**Support**

## Identifying Needs—Gathering resources

### 2007 Independent Living Survey Project

“Dad, I couldn’t answer my phone because I ran out of minutes.” “Mom and Dad, my car died and it needs a starter. I can’t afford it—how am I going to get to work?” Most parents of young adults can relate to these exchanges and most respond to their children with support; both emotional and financial. But for more youth in the County than we care to imagine, there is no parent, no stable adult, no emotional nor material resources from which to get support for life’s challenges.

In September 2007, the findings from The Independent Living Survey Project, were released and the evidence supports the disturbing realization that homeless and transient youth (youth under 21 who have no parental, substitute, foster or institutional home to which they can safely go) exist in significant numbers within our county. The Learning Web, the Tompkins County Youth Services Dept., Cornell’s Family Life Development Center, the Human Services Coalition’s Continuum of Care Committee, and a group of youth from the Learning Web’s Youth Outreach Program—the real experts on youth homelessness—undertook a joint project to learn more about youth homelessness in Tompkins County.

We used an innovative research approach which engaged a group of currently and formerly homeless youth as research partners who were able to reach those individuals not connected to programs or services, the invisible and underserved sector of the homeless youth population. The project was enormously successful in reaching the target population. Our goal was to have 100 surveys completed; we surveyed 204 young people during a six week period of the winter. We estimate that those surveyed reflect almost one-half of the homeless youth population in the county.

(continued on page 3)

***“I was a troubled teen, always in trouble, didn’t have my father and my mom was on drugs bad.”***

*Independent Living Survey respondent*



Kristie Jerkins, right, responds to a question from Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency Committee member, Susan Cummings, left, at a presentation of the Independent Living Survey Project. Kristie and fellow youth research partners have been active in speaking to local policy makers advocating systemic change to improve housing affordability, transportation, and employment opportunities for young people living on their own.

# Supporting— Learning beyond the classroom

Highlights from the Career Exploration & Apprenticeship Program (CCEAP)

## Whale Songs

Big things were happening at Michelle Mathios' first apprenticeship at Cornell's Lab of Ornithology Bioacoustics Research Program. Joining mentor and Visiting Cornell Fellow, Renata Sousa-Lima, in exploring whale communication and boat noise, Michelle expanded her own understanding of research: "It's helped me think about different careers and different research. I've always liked the idea of research—it's bigger than I thought—having an experience with research has shown me a lot. It's given me a sense of how huge it is and how you can answer and find out more than the question you started with." Also huge was the help that Michelle contributed to the research project, as her mentor pointed out: "Michelle is an outstanding student and was able to process large amounts of data in a time that was shorter than expected. She also learned how to work with the custom computer programs very fast and efficiently." Mentors like Sousa-Lima offer the chance for county youth like Michelle to take part in one of the world's centers for the study of whale sounds. That's HUGE!

To learn more about the Lab: [www.birds.cornell.edu/brp/index.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/brp/index.html)

Now in her second apprenticeship in the Bioacoustics Research Program at Cornell, Michelle Mathios, pictured here with new mentor, Danielle Cholewiak,



discuss what it's like to be a researcher and the various career possibilities Michelle could consider.

This year, Michelle is helping Danielle with her research about humpback whale communication. Michelle has been able to use what she'd already learned last year to help identify patterns and phrases in the whale songs.

## Comic Craft

Making a good cartoon into a great cartoon is no easy task. Jim Garmhausen, local artist and professional cartoonist has inspired and instructed many Learning

Web apprentices over the years and shares what he has learned along the way: "Cartooning is a pursuit like any other. There is a certain methodology to it, and the closer a student can stick to the basic rules, and learn to work within them, the better his or her work will be. It is great to see confidence grow, and art move from doodling to polished work. Talent develops much more quickly with guidance."

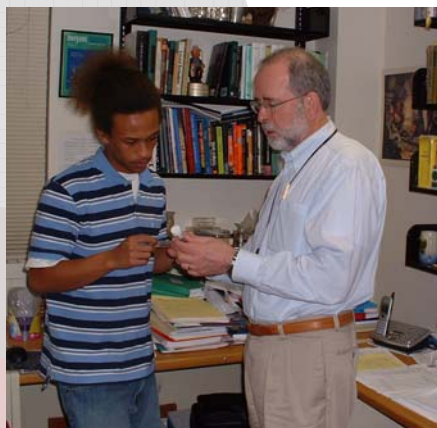
Michael Carruthers and Alex Mwaka's love of cartooning brought them to The Learning Web. With Jim as their mentor, both young men have defined their individual styles and developed as artists. Michael is weighing the possibility of a career in the field while Alex is exploring options in biology. "I may not choose art as a career field but it will always be a part of my life." Alex explored biology as an apprentice to Dr. Jean Hardwick, Ithaca College Biology professor, last summer. Mastering lab procedures while exploring the neuronal regulation of cardiac function, Alex got a taste of the world of academic research.

To learn more about Jim's cartooning classes or to contact him:

<http://www.csma-ithaca.org/jimgd.artist@gmail.com>



From left: Apprentice, Michael Carruthers; cartooning mentor, Jim Garmhausen; and apprentice Alex Mwaka.

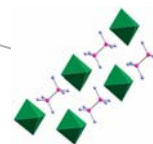


## Great Chemistry

Brothers Alex Mwaka (see story above), and Alan Gilo, have more in common than genes. Both brothers have a passion for science and both have pursued science-focused apprenticeships—though Alex headed south to Ithaca College and Alan headed east to Cornell. Alan joined Dr. Frank Disalvo (the pair are pictured left), a veteran mentor for The Learning Web and faculty member in the CU Department of Chemistry & Chemical Biology, and Collaborating Scientist Janet Hunting, in research involving the discovery and understanding of new chemical and physical phenomena in solids.

For more info about the project: <http://www.chem.cornell.edu/fjd3/home.html>

Alan is also involved in youth issues and is a member of the Tompkins County Youth Services Board.



## Supporting youth – as they find their place in the world.



### Fall Fun at The Iron Kettle Pumpkin Farm!

Ciarra Hickling, Travis Anderson, and their son Cain enjoy the displays at the Iron Kettle Pumpkin Farm on a beautiful day last October. Youth Outreach staff and several young parents and their children ate candy apples, petted the animals, got lost in the corn maze, and had a hayride at the Halloween landmark in Candor, N.Y.

### 2007 Independent Living Survey Project

Continued from page one

A summary of the highlights, below, reflect the housing instability of the youth surveyed, their histories of severe family conflict and dysfunction, their lack of positive adult support, and a refreshingly typical picture of their hopes and dreams for the future. The study team was struck by how reasonable the expressed plans and goals for their futures were. Almost half want to pursue a "Career/Job" and 41% plan to "Pursue education." Yet it is also interesting to note that youth reported "Personal Fulfillment" more often than "Financial Security" (these are primarily adolescents after all). These youth are not the stereotypes of rebellious, alienated young people who leave home for adventure.

Both in the survey and at public presentations of the research findings,

(youth researchers have made presentations to several local groups from the County Legislature, to Cornell Faculty Fellows in Service, to the Ithaca Psychotherapists Group), youth have spoken eloquently about the challenges of living on their own. From trying to put food on the table to solving life's problems—these young people paint a moving description of the isolation that can result from living on ones own. The respondents repeatedly spoke about how difficult it is to pursue their goals with the limited resources available to them.

This is our challenge. Our community must find ways to build support --- through better, affordable housing, job training and placement, and access to education.

### 2007 Independent Living Survey Project Summary of Findings

#### On the move. . .

**81 PERCENT** of youth said they stayed in multiple places in the last year. Of these youth:

**55 PERCENT** of youth said they stayed in 2-5 places in the last year.

**25 PERCENT** of youth said they stayed in 6-11 or more places in the last year.

**23 PERCENT** of youth reported that they stayed outside, in a vehicle, or abandoned building.

**17 PERCENT** of youth reported staying at the emergency shelter.

#### Leaving neglect & abuse . . .

**58 PERCENT** of youth could be characterized as pushed out/throwaway youth--relatively few youth reported running away from home (12%), instead youth cited:

- thrown out by parent/caregiver (25%)
- parent/caregiver abuse (15%),
- substance abuse by parent/caregiver (14%),
- parent/caregiver in jail (3%).

#### Isolated & forgotten . . .

**30 PERCENT** of youth reported having no one who they can turn to for support and only 28% said they could turn to family members for support. Peers, similarly stressed and vulnerable, were the most significant sources of support reported by youth.

**40 PERCENT** of youth ages 15-20 reported that a top need was "someone to talk to."

#### Hopes & dreams and a call for assistance . . .

**TOP 5 NEEDS REPORTED BY YOUTH** in order of priority:

- **Housing**
- **Education**
- **Help Affording Housing**
- **Transportation**
- **Finding a Job**

Youth reported very realistic and positive goals for the future including career/job, education, and family.

*" There should be more help for people who are currently trying to get their lives together. It's hard for me to find a place to stay that is a clean and safe environment and I'm trying to leave my old friends alone cause they all use."*

# Support from our community—

## *Taste how good giving can be!*



Diners indulge in some Ithaca Art Bar chocolates at last June's Taste of the Nation benefit. The local Taste events raised more than \$8,000 for The Learning Web.

Magnificent mango sticky rice, mind-blowing mussels, tremendously decadent truffles, and a glass of superlative sauvignon blanc—and that was just for starters. Ithaca's premier culinary benefit, Taste of the Nation, brought together area restaurants, wineries, breweries, and people who appreciate both good food AND doing good. Held last June at Ithaca College's Emerson Suites, the event raised both funds and awareness of the issues of hunger and poverty in our community and provided valuable support for our agency and in particular, our Youth Outreach Program.

This year's event netted \$38,000 for The Learning Web, Loaves & Fishes, and the Food Bank of the Southern Tier. Thanks goes out to Jerry Dietz and his tireless committee: Darlene Zaharis, Jyl Dowd, Tim Anderson, Leslie Muhlhahn, Connie Fairfax Ozmun, Charlene Testut, Erik Lehman, Gregar Brous, and Cathy Perkins. Taste of the nation is a fundraiser of the national organization, Share Our Strength.

Join us next June for a fabulous feast and support our programs!  
For details: [www.ithacatasteofthenation.org](http://www.ithacatasteofthenation.org)



Mike Longo, left, presents the BIG Check to a happy Dale Schumacher & Sally Schwartzbach.

## *Fore !!* Youth—

A little healthy competition netted over \$3,000 for The Learning Web! Golfers gathered for Ithaca Sunrise Rotary's benefit golf tourney this past September at the Elm Tree Golf Course. Sunrise Rotarians and co-chairs, Mike Longo and Kathleen Larson, deserve kudos for the quality of teams assembled and the number of sponsors supporting the event. The funds underwrite employment training for local youth; a win-win for our participants and our local community.

To learn more about Sunrise Rotary: [www.ithacasunriserotary.org](http://www.ithacasunriserotary.org)

## *You can help !*

### **Support Our Annual Appeal**

Invest in our community's youth—  
Your dollars go directly to youth participants, underwriting:

- Apprenticeship stipends paid to youth.
- Snacks and supplies for group workshops; employment prep for CCEAP youth, and Youth Outreach parenting training, women's group, and independent living workshops dubbed, "Dinner Club."
- Independent living supplies; hygiene products, alarm clocks, diapers, cleaning supplies, and laundry detergent.
- Transportation costs for service groups, exploration and apprenticeship activities, and Youth Outreach recreational activities.

★  
*Give charitable donations as holiday gifts*

### **Learning Web Board of Directors**

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Jeff Dobbin, Treasurer

Jon Hilton, Secretary

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Susan West Engelkemeyer

Tim Little

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Mindy Rosenthal

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Sally Schwartzbach,  
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Find us on the web at:

[www.learning-web.org](http://www.learning-web.org)

### **Try the Ithaca Alternatives Gift Fair**

Choose a meaningful alternative to "more stuff"—  
Honor family & friends with a gift that supports Learning Web youth programs.

Saturday, December 1st, from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.

First Presbyterian Church, 315 North Cayuga Street

Gift prices start at \$5 and are tax deductible

*Look for us there!*



The Learning Web would like to thank Ithaca College for underwriting the printing of this newsletter.