



# The Learning Web

LEARNING BY DOING—YOUTH BECOMING ADULTS

FALL 2010 NEWSLETTER

*focus on*  
**A Day in the Life—**

## From the Executive Director's Desk

Think! Think back to yourself at 12 years old; and again at 18. Think of all the days that passed from the time you were born until you reached age 21. Think of a day here and a day there. Think of all the different activities and chances to grow and learn that happened on all those days. Day by day, experience by experience youth develop and grow into adults.

Youth will develop, with us or without us. The ways in which a community provides for its youth greatly influences the adults that result. This newsletter is aimed at sharing with you some of the activities that are facilitated by The Learning Web to enhance the development of the youth of Tompkins County. A day in the life of Tompkins County youth is a day of exploring, learning, contributing, belonging, and being safe.

Here at The Learning Web we often speak of Positive Youth Development. Positive Youth Development is the name given to the very carefully thought-out and systematically planned activities and experiences that help youth to progress from adolescence to adulthood. The literature is ripe with research and evidence of the needs of youth. A sense of belonging in a community, meaningful opportunities to contribute, relationships with adult role models, and safe places to go are a few of the important aspects of Positive Youth Development. And, these are key factors in the programs at The Learning Web.

Programs like The Learning Web's are an investment. Donations from Friends of the Web, public money from county government, federal grants, United Way contributions, awards from Foundations, and thousands of hours from hundreds of volunteers contribute to this investment. We all, as a community, take on this awesome, yet most rewarding responsibility. How might you help? Can you write a check? Will you volunteer time as a tour guide? Share your passion as a mentor?

In the vignettes that follow you will read about days in the lives of Learning Web participants. These depict your investment; an investment that enriches the lives of youth and adds color and character and class to the mosaic that is Ithaca and Tompkins County.

May you all find peace and happiness this Holiday Season and throughout the New Year,

Dale C. Schumacher



# A Day in the Life—

“TANYA HAS COMMENTED MAN

ALL OVER ITHACA AND TOMPKINS COUNTY, LEARNING WEB YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS ARE LEARNING, CONTRIBUTING, AND ENRICHING OUR COMMUNITY. OUR PROGRAMS DO NOT EXIST AT ONE LOCATION AT ONE SPECIFIC TIME. ACTIVITIES ARE INTEGRATED INTO THE FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITY—INDEED, ON ANY GIVEN DAY, YOUTH AND ADULTS BECOME A WEB OF LEARNING. HERE ARE SOME OF THEIR STORIES OF CONTRIBUTION.



LW staffer, Anrielle George (holding the puppy), and some VCSP group members outside their meeting place, St. Catherine of Siena Church.

## Mornings of service —

Between 9 AM and 12:30 PM on weekdays this past summer, cadres of middle schoolers joined the Downtown Ithaca Beautification Brigade; prepared for the “hatchday celebration” for Gaia, the Ithaca Children’s Garden turtle; scrubbed reptile cages at The Cayuga Nature Center; and distributed food at the Lansing Mobile Food Pantry. The young people, part of The Web’s Volunteer Community Service Program (VCSP), used their summer vacation to improve the community. And they had a load of fun! One group member liked the service project at the Cortland SPCA best, “because animals are so cute and awesome.” She said she joined the VCSP, “to learn new things, have fun, and help out the community. It’s really important to help your community.” She was so taken with pet ownership that she persuaded her parents to bring a dog into their family (pictured at left).



Amber, left, enjoys spending time with the residents at Clare Bridge.

## Getting more than she bargained for—

On Saturdays, you can find Amber De Jong getting a taste of occupational therapy (OT) at Clare Bridge, a Brooktondale Senior Living community. A senior at Ithaca High, Amber is getting more than just experience in the field of OT before going off to college, she is also making wonderful connections with the elders she helps. Amber’s apprenticeship involves working with people living with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, helping them complete daily living activities, and leading residents in chair exercise. The apprenticeship has shown her the importance of intellectual stimulation for the elders. Amber said she gives the residents riddles to solve, “the goal being to have the residents feel engaged, active, and feel like they are connected.” Amber says that working at Clare Bridge has been a gratifying experience, “One resident came up and thanked me for getting her moving again. It was a great feeling.” Her mentor concurs, “Amber is genuine. She is a great teenager.”



Cameron is enjoying the car he earned through his apprenticeship at Pony Hollow Motors in Newfield.

## Turning work into wheels —

Hot summer afternoons couldn’t keep Cameron Chrisman from his passion—cars. Cameron joined his mentor, Frank Borra, under the hoods of cars at Frank’s auto repair shop, Pony Hollow Motors. Cameron, a Newfield High student, learned how to replace brakes, tune up engines, and do auto body work and painting. He gained skills in changing oil and tires, salvaging parts, and working on every system in the autos. Cameron, who wants to be an auto mechanic, says he enjoyed “being able to experience and learn auto mechanics hands-on.” He also learned something about himself, saying, “It makes me feel like I can do more.” He gained more than just experience through his apprenticeship. Frank gave Cameron the opportunity to buy a car in exchange for the money Cameron had earned during his apprenticeship. He taught Cameron the skills he needed to repair his car from bumper to bumper. Frank says that Cameron was a “quick learner.”

## Cultivating civic participation—

Many evenings last summer, 14-year-old Keyasha Evans could be found at an Ithaca City Council meeting. Keyasha was apprenticing to Common Council member, Svante Myrick. With impressive leadership and communication skills, Keyasha hopes to become an advocate for youth, a politician, or someone who works with youth in social services. Given her aspirations, she was matched with Svante in a dual apprenticeship— part time with Cornell Alumni Affairs and part time with the Ithaca Common Council. “I think what was special about our apprenticeship was that no two days were alike,” Svante said, “At times Keyasha was helping me in my role as City Councilman by taking notes and attending meetings. Other times she was freeing my schedule by reading and reporting on books and articles I would not have gotten to otherwise. The entire time, I watched Keyasha’s confidence and ability grow.” Keyasha loved her apprenticeship, and Svante says he will continue to mentor her long after the apprenticeship ends. Her work and her leadership skills garnered her a recommendation for the summer Ithaca Youth Bureau Leadership Camp, and a nomination from Svante to the City Youth Council.



Keyasha Evans, right, and her mentor, Svante Myrick, covered a lot of ground in their apprenticeship—dividing their time between City Hall and Cornell Alumni Affairs.

## That moth may be watching you—

Surveillance moths? Sounds like something out of a sci-fi novel, but it’s happening right here in Ithaca. On weekday mornings last summer, Hannah Thompson assisted her mentor, Marjolein Schatt, with research involving the horn tobacco moth. Their goal was to increase a moths’ size in order to attach cameras and electrodes to their bodies. Military personnel will then control flight direction and use the moths for surveillance. A 10th grader at Ithaca High, Hannah wanted to learn about working in a lab. She began an apprenticeship at Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research, where she fed and measured the caterpillars, prepared their food, observed their transformation into moths, and helped set up a trial experiment. “Marjolein made it a fun place to work,” Hannah said, “I will definitely consider going into biology and entomology.” She also learned something about adults: “They know how to have fun and work at the same time.” Marjolein says she enjoyed “the opportunity to share my joy in biological studies with a bright young mind, and watch that mind grow.”



Hannah, left, and mentor, Marjolein, with the moths and caterpillars they are studying at Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research.

## Learning skills for self-sufficiency—

At age 19, Nik Astle was living on his own and wanted to learn how to earn a living with his hands. Nik, a participant in our Youth Outreach Program, got that chance last summer. With an interest in the building trades and restoration, Nik apprenticed at Significant Elements several afternoons each week. Working with his mentor, Alphonse Pieper, Nik learned how to dismantle, restore, and refinish furniture, windows, and was involved with many other aspects of Significant Elements’ salvage and restoration work. Nik also gained experience with inventory and data entry, and increased his comfort level with customer service. “Having a person like Nik is what makes the program enjoyable,” Alphonse said, “Nik’s dedication to learning exceeded my expectations!” Nik enjoyed his apprenticeship, getting his feet wet in the building and restoration trades, and gaining confidence as his skills grew. He says he “learned a lot about how things work,” and acquired “an insight into carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work.” That growth helped him find a job after his apprenticeship, working in roofing and siding, where he earns money to support himself.



Nik, left, with his mentor, Alphonse, in front of the store with the completed outdoor wall they built with a Japanese tongue and groove technique.

# A Day in the Life—

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## Creating a home and creating a living —

Cassandra Cornwell, age 25, enjoys spending time with her 1 ½-year-old daughter, Ajionna, before going off to work each afternoon. Cassandra's life has changed a lot in the past 2 years. When she first came to Youth Outreach, she was having a tough time finding housing and was not getting the support she needed from the people in her life. She was accepted into our Housing Scholarship Program (HSP) a few weeks before Ajionna's birth. A single mom, Cassandra says the HSP helped her learn how to handle her money so she was not just living from paycheck to paycheck.

She is now able to provide for her daughter and has money saved for emergencies. She attributes the support from the HSP to helping her go from instability to having more control over her life. She graduated from the HSP and now rents a very nice apartment for herself and Ajionna and works full-time at a local restaurant. She continues to check in with Youth Outreach staff and is currently getting assistance from staff to complete her application materials for entrance into TC3 this spring, acting on her dream of going to college.



Cassandra and her daughter, Ajionna, enjoy a cuddle while visiting the Youth Outreach office recently.

## “Experience Ghana” Event a Success!

“Experience Ghana” was made possible through the generous support of our:

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For those who appreciate beauty and the visual and performing arts and who enjoy learning of new people and places, “Experience Ghana” was the place to be on a fall Saturday this past October. The Learning Web joined forces with The Community School of Music and Art (CSMA) to host the event. Adults and youth alike enjoyed an exceptional evening, featuring the culture of Ghana through music, dancing, fabulous Ghanaian appetizers and an African fashion show. The centerpiece of the evening was the Mbanba Cultural Troop from Ghana. Their masterful drumming and dancing were so engaging that many of the attendees joined the musicians and had a fantastic time drumming and dancing like those pictured below.

