



focus on The Learning Web Alumni

the Learning Web

Learning by doing...youth becoming adults

From the Executive Director's Desk

Graduates and Alumni!

That is a big part of what Ithaca is all about; Graduates and Alumni. It's a big part of what The Learning Web is all about, too. This newsletter highlights a few of our alumni. We are often asked how we measure success. Our alumni's accomplishments are a central part of knowing if our work has value and is successful. Of course, it should be noted that the Mentor-Apprentice model of our work, learning by doing (our motto), life skill development, and experiential education as seen in the photo at the top of this page are all ways in which we help youth to transition from adolescence to adulthood.

As you enjoy the life stories of each Learning Web participant in this newsletter you will quickly note that the youth does the "work" him or herself. We all grow up alone. We are, however, helped along the way. At The Learning Web we often say that we will match a youth's efforts. Positive

Youth Development research tells us of the importance of adult contacts in a community for youth to best develop and reach their goals.

Of course, The Learning Web doesn't do this all alone. There are hundreds of able mentors in our community who help with this endeavor. Setting up an apprenticeship is based on two things; the youth's area of interest and a willing mentor. Youth in Ithaca are fortunate to be able to explore nearly any interest through local artisans, businesses, and professionals.

The rich mosaic that is Ithaca is a great classroom in the community which we use to help young people achieve success; success that is easily exemplified in the inspiring stories that our Alumni have graciously shared with us. We are excited to hear about what these young people are doing with their lives and we hope that you are too!

Kind regards,

Dale C. Nicholson



"I'm under the age of forty. It's because of The Learning Web that I've already been working in the industry for 20 years." - Eric Clark p.2



"Whatever you need The Learning Web is going to help you 200%. They can't do all the work for you but they can help you get to where you need to go. But you have to have that spark—that spark—that fire to want to have a better life." - Jen p. 4

From Cable 13 to MTV

Eric Clark, Learning Web Alumni

Eric Clark's career has led him all over the country, given him access to music and screen stars, and allowed him to create media content that millions of people enjoy. "I knew what I wanted to do since I was 10 or 11 years old," Eric said in an interview recently, "I loved the *Cosby* show – I wanted to understand what happened behind the scenes." And for Eric, the move from watching TV to producing TV all started with a Learning Web apprenticeship.

Eric's uncle connected Eric with The LW so he would have the chance to pursue his interest in video production. Eric apprenticed through The LW's "Young Visionaries." LW Apprenticeship Coordinator and videographer, Jorge Cuevas, mentored a small group of apprentices, including Eric, in video production through Public Access Cable 13/Pegasys. With Jorge's help, the apprentices learned to shoot with a camera and do basic editing. After passing the skills test at the station, Eric began producing shows that aired on the station.

"Jorge taught and instilled in us how to make a plan and execute it. He would say, you have a great idea, that's great – how are you gonna do

it?" Eric applies these skills to his career, "This is something I still do today -working on details and the best way to execute a plan/produce a show/film. I just fell in love with video production . . . I enjoyed everything about it – structure, deadline, doing a whole day of school and rushing down to the studio. It was exciting to me. To build something, create something— realize something that was in my head—that was exciting to me. When I had an opportunity, it felt right and I jumped in, I fell in love, I can't imagine anything else."

Eric went on to study at SUNY Brockport and he soon learned that he was more skilled than other video production students. "I gained a strong foundation [from my apprenticeship] to be able to use more advanced technology."

His apprenticeship continued to help him many years later. Specialization was stressed in college. In 2003, MTV was moving away from specialization and Eric was ready. Eric was one of the first MTV producers who could also edit. "This was due to learning



video production with Jorge – learning everything," said Eric. "My love is producing and directing but I can communicate with the Director of Photography and editing people because of The Learning Web."

Eric has always been a freelancer and has worked for NY1, ABC News, VH1, and MTV, among others. Early in his career, he said, "On the way home from work, I would think, wow, I just produced something that is going to be seen by millions of people –before Youtube – this was a thing that was amazing to me – I was one of these content providers." Eric's advice to young people: "Don't knock any job because you never know where it will lead. If you have an idea, just go for it, just do it."

Finding Good Work Under the Hood

Jared Wright, Learning Web Alumni



You can find Jared Wright under a car most days at Diane's Downtown Auto. It wasn't the case until he joined our Life Skills Program. "Before I really didn't do much- sleep all day. Now I get up and go to work and have a life. And get a paycheck!" remarked Jared when we caught up with him recently. "At first I didn't really want to do it—thought it was a waste of time. But Ryan [Life Skills staff] really started focusing on the things I liked, like cars . . . I realized that Ryan really cared about how I was doing and she wanted to make sure I was doing good and she made sure I did!"

Now an alumni of the LW, Jared spoke about how his apprenticeship led to

his job and career start in auto mechanics at Diane's. "I started working on cars and checking them out in the BOCES program [in high school] and I really liked it. Ryan and I came to Diane's and I looked around and I really liked it. Diane's was a good fit." Jared said, "at BOCES I knew a little bit about tires and brakes. When I came here [Diane's] I can now do tires, I know quite a bit about brakes, oil changes, and maintenance things. This experience has been so helpful."

Jared really likes his job, saying, "When I get here I like to interact with people, I like helping, and everyone is so nice it's like I'm not really working. Me, Diane, and everyone here—I feel like we're just a huge family."

Designing a Life's Adventure

Mane Mehrabyan, Learning Web Alumni

"Be curious – stay curious – strive after something. Have curiosity for people too." Mane Mehrabyan said she first discovered the power of this life approach through her Learning Web experience. "Dabble in everything because, why not? The world is amazing!" Mane was a shy high school student when she walked by The Learning Web table at Ithaca High. She decided to try the program and went on several tours: Trowbridge, Wolf, Michaels Landscape Architects; Cornell's departments of Design & Environmental Analysis and Landscape Architecture's Design-Teach program; and Holt Architecture. The tours sparked Mane's interest in landscape architecture.

Undertaking an apprenticeship with CU's Design-Teach was a real growth experience for Mane. As a high school senior she would hike up the hill after school and they would teach her and assign her tasks. She said, "I loved it, I felt like I was part of the department. I really grew because I felt bigger... In high school I felt small – I was very shy. Working with Design-Teach gave me maturity and confidence. I was meeting people who were graduate students, and we would laugh together and get to know each other. In high school, I didn't feel like I belonged so it really helped me."

After high school, Mane was accepted into CU's Landscape Architecture program. The summer before college, Mane changed her mind about her major, switching to Design and Environmental Analysis (DEA). Mane said "I've had support through the [college] process, but The Learning Web was my first stepping stone before coming to Cornell. It made me feel like I had an 'in' before coming to Cornell." The skills learned from Design-

Teach transferred to her major in DEA and furniture design. She completed her assignments before her peers and did not have homework. The instructors from Design-Teach helped Mane realize she had a unique approach.

Mane continues to consider how to connect her many passions: she combines dance and video; she researches how sound affects humans (applying it to building design); writes and is taking a spoken-word poetry class; loves languages and studied abroad in France; and dances – tango, salsa, Armenian dance. As Mane says, "There are things you learn in books and things you learn in the world and The Learning Web gives you that "book of experience" – postcards of experience and then you can keep them and they don't go away." Mane is assembling an amazing "book of experience" for herself and we look forward to hearing about her journey.



Tips from the Pros



"Stay late: once I overheard a record head saying 'Tell Stevie I'll be there around 9:30pm.' I apologized for eavesdropping and asked, which Stevie are you talking about?... 'Oh, Stevie Wonder.' Can I get coffee and do food runs for you guys? Take opportunities."

- Eric Clark



"I've been real with my children. I have open communication with my son who is 18. It has deterred him from doing things."

- Jen



It's fun, it's easy. They [Learning Web] really try to help you do what you like to do which is nice. Once you know what you want to do they'll get you there. You'll be happy."

- Jared Wright

“

The LW makes you dream, which is a gift that's hard to give – they take you to all these places – they show you how your life can be, when your young that gives you hope, makes you dream."

-Mane Mehrabyan

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Sixteen years ago Jen was a homeless 20 year-old with two children under age 3 to care for. That's when Youth Outreach (YO) helped her make big changes.

1999 “My first concern—my children”

“My life has just been a battle. I feel like my mother and my stepfather set my fate in life. They would abuse me emotionally and because those are your parents you think it's OK. So when you meet a person in the street you're going to think it's ok because you relate it to your parents' “love”; so it's ok for him to call you terrible names and smack you around. Because that's what you're used to —not knowing that's not what a normal world is. I was in foster care ... from there I went to group homes. The judge emancipated me when I was 16 so I dropped out of school and got pregnant.

“I didn't want to be dependent on this man, but that obviously didn't work out ... I got married fast and the relationship started to go downhill really fast. I was looking for stability and a place for my children. I don't know if you are a mother or not, but that was my first concern—my children—if they can have food in their stomach and a roof over their heads—that was my main concern.



“She's My Goddess”

“YO could help us find stable housing and had diapers and things you need and they have a lot of connections to services that can help— that drew me to the program. Mona, [YO Senior Case Manager] she's my goddess... Mona's real! Mona is a real person and Larry [YO Program Coordinator]-he's like the other ‘real-est’ person. He always kept it ‘100’ with me.”

“My children were taken away from me after an incident that happened in front of Mona. I think she was conflicted because she knew I was not a bad person but she was also a mandated reporter. Once that happened, I was screaming and yelling at her. Mona took me into her office and said that she hadn't wanted to call Child Protective but that she had to. And she told me that we were going to work together to get my kids back. Mona helped me a lot! A lot emotionally—everything she could do, she did. That's why I stay in contact with her. I'm a very loyal person.”

“Learning Web helped me stop my cycle of abuse so that my children no longer see that”

“I was going through abusive situations—guns to my head, knives to my throat —you name it, it happened. But I was confused. I knew that it was wrong but my heart didn't want it to be ... but I felt like I didn't have options. Mona got me into the Advocacy Center. I got into that program and it helped me get my kids back.”

“YO helped me recognize that just because things happened to you it doesn't mean you have to continue to be a victim. I think the LW helped me stop my cycle of abuse so that my children no longer see that. . . It's like a light. It's like a light that shimmers, and it goes on and off. But the light works and you just need somebody to go and screw it in a little tighter. And that's what the situation was...I always knew that I could do things.

2015 “You have to do what you got to do in order to survive, by yourself, your responsibility.”

“I've been with my second husband for 12 years and he's adopted my 2 youngest. I graduated from college with an associate's degree in vet tech. I went from homeless to actually being a landlord. Our first house is being rented out. I live in an 8-bedroom, 3 full-bath house in a really nice area. . . My oldest son once said to me, “Listen, I could have been a drug addict, I could have been a father, I could have been an abuser, I could have been in jail and I am none of those things because you taught me.” I'm very proud of him- he's going to the college that was his first choice.”

“At YO there's always something that they can do for somebody whether it's to talk or whether it's to go there to use supplies to make it easier. YO will say, “We'll give you a little bit but you have to work for the rest, but we'll help you put your foot in the door.” They are just there as the foundation. They'll help you build your castle but they can't finish the project for you. You have to actually do what you got to do in order to survive, by yourself, your responsibility.”

