



*focus on*  
**CHANGE**

## the Learning Web

*Learning by doing...youth becoming adults*

### From the Executive Director's Desk

As I start this, my last newsletter message to you, the focus of this edition seems most appropriate. Change! Most of us tend to dislike change. Some of us actually shy away from any change. And yet, as the saying goes, the only constant in life is change.

The photo at the top of this page is of Mohan Jewitt at Cornell's Fuertes Observatory. The tour that Mohan participated in was conducted by Patricia Eugenia Fernandez De Castro Martinez of the Spacecraft Planetary Imaging Facility. Youth learned about how telescopes have been used through time and how science has changed.

Throughout this newsletter we highlight youth who have grown and changed, and at the same time stayed the same. Life is a series of changes, and connectedness from the past to the present to the future.

Change is coming in the near future to The Learning Web, too. As many of you know, I am retiring after 12 years here. This retirement will happen as the Board completes the search for my successor. Also,

Larry Farbman, Program Coordinator at Youth Outreach, is retiring at the end of the year. Larry started with Youth Outreach in 1990 when the fledgling program was the first of its kind for youth living independently in Tompkins County. Larry has been instrumental in the growth (change) in Youth Outreach. His impact on those he has helped, like James (story page 2) and many others, is evidenced by their desire to keep in touch for years after they have exited Youth Outreach.



Of course, as change occurs, so does much go on the same. The Learning Web is dedicated to the positive development of youth, and while people may come and go, that mission will remain the same.

*Dale C. Ackerson*

To exist is to change,  
to change is to mature,  
to mature is to go  
on creating oneself  
endlessly.

-Henri Bergson  
1859-1941, French philosopher

# THE YOUTH OUTREACH PROGRAM

## Harmony Malone— Stepping Outside Her Comfort Zone

“I was in a very dark space mentally and physically--I needed a positive and safe environment to be in.” Harmony Malone, in her early twenties, was a college graduate facing challenges that most young people don’t have to face. Among these, homelessness was just one; as she describes it, Harmony had hit, “rock bottom.”

Needing safe housing and a job that would cover rent and living expenses, she learned that The Learning Web’s Youth Outreach (YO) could help. “A few friends told me about The Learning Web, and I came in off the street and just walked into the building one day.” “I wanted to learn how to become more independent, how to basically become an adult in regards to consistently paying bills, learning how to maintain an apartment, and being on my own—being alone.”

In addition to being a college grad, Harmony was (and is) also a talented and accomplished dancer and dance instructor, with a great work ethic and big dreams, but her personal challenges had left her overwhelmed and defeated. Working with The Web, Harmony worked hard to rekindle her ambition and confidence. “I was working at the Super 8 of Ithaca at the time [when] I started with Rick [YO Education & Employment Case Manager] and he helped me find another job—and he helped me update my resume and apply for a position as Director of the Youth Program at Southside Community Center and I got the job. Rick connected me with Larry [YO Program Coordinator] and he helped me get an apartment through their Housing Scholarship Program.”



Asked if her work with Youth Outreach helped her reach her goals, Harmony said “It definitely did.” “I am now extremely independent but also know when to ask for help. I learned how to communicate when issues arise that need immediate assistance or need immediate care. I also learned how to save 30% of each check which is awesome and budget myself to some degree—still working on that too! Also, just increasing money management skills and time management skills and pushing myself outside of my comfort zone and seeing the full potential that I have in regards to my business life and that I always have someone to talk to which is always great!”

Harmony is closer to her long-term goal of opening “Miss Harmony’s Dance Studio.” “I am currently working at Southside Community Center as the Youth Program Director but I will be starting a new job at the Greater Ithaca Activities Center doing dance which is my main focus and passion and allows me to develop clientele as well as have time to build the foundation of Miss Harmony’s Dance Studio.” In addition to her job at the community center, Harmony teaches dance at the Community School of Music and Art and conducts private lessons.

“I’d like to say a big thank you to The Learning Web. I greatly appreciate everything they’ve done for me and I hope that they will continue to be a part of my life in the future—in terms of collaboration, in terms of being a mentor, and to be able to rely on you guys to help me out. Yes, thank you to everyone—thank you for allowing me this opportunity especially being that I was a student who had a college degree and I’m the 1% that was outside of the norm and that you all took a chance, let me thrive, and you guys picked me up when I was down and I will forever be grateful for all of that.”

## James— Transforming His Life

It was the late 90’s, when James was 18 that he first engaged with Youth Outreach. Fast forward 21 years and he stopped by to say hello and update us on his life. “Back then, “I didn’t have any adults in my life that I wasn’t battling.” Larry Farbman, YO Program Coordinator (pictured at left with James) became James “go-to” guy—“he was somebody to talk with and helped me figure out the difference between right and wrong. My apprenticeships helped me learn the value of work, the need for working and the confidence that I could work just like anyone else.” And that is what James has done for the past 21 years.

No longer the young man alienated from the adult world, he lives down south and has a business doing roofing and gutters. He likes the work and it has allowed him to have a good life with his partner and their two children (and he has also rebuilt his relationship with the son he had when he was a teen.) We look forward to hearing from James the next time he’s up north!





# THE YOUTH EXPLORATION PROGRAM

## Owen Haoqun Piao—Designing His Future

“I think you should try a lot of different areas of work—you might think you’ll like [one occupation] but actually [find that]the work is different so you may change your mind and explore more.” That was the thinking of sixteen year old Owen Piao, recently from China, who was planning on studying architecture when he reached college. When Learning Web staffer Jorge Cuevas came to the International Club to speak about the Youth Exploration Program, Owen soon had the opportunity to follow his own advice and it really paid off. “I wanted to check [architecture] out to see if it [really] was something I’d like to study in college.”

Through a Learning Web apprenticeship with mentors in Cornell’s School of Landscape Architecture, Owen developed an entirely new understanding about architecture. First, Owen saw that the mechanics of architecture involved more than he had thought. “At first I thought you design using the pen only—writing, sketching. But in the apprenticeship we also used the computer—after drawing we put the drawing onto the computer and used photoshop, and other stuff to make it look better.”

Most surprising for Owen was that his original inclination to be an architect of buildings shifted; as his apprenticeship deepened, he became very interested in landscape architecture. This summer, to build on his new interest in landscape architecture, Owen decided to gain some experience in horticulture.. Working with mentor Martha Gioumousis, Owen joined the Ithaca Beautification Brigade. As Owen explained, “In the first apprenticeship we did drawing and design ... and there was no planting, so I wanted to do that part so I have more experience.” The apprenticeship was fun for Owen, and it was also an eye-opener: “I thought planting flowers and trees [would be] easy [but] after doing the planting you also need to do weeding and do a lot of stuff to keep it growing—it takes a lot of time. I liked doing the work—there’s a lot of people that walked by and said it looked good and that made me happy.”

“Originally I thought I was interested in building-architecture, but after I did the apprenticeship in landscape architecture I think that interests me more—it has planting and also designing so that’s what I want to do.” And that is what he’ll be exploring even further this fall when he returns to the Cornell Dept. of Landscape Architecture. His mentors at Cornell are as excited as Owen is to take the next steps, “This is such wonderful news. I’m excited to have Owen back. Hopefully we will have another fun and inspiring apprenticeship this coming fall.”



## Opening Horizons—exploration visits

Dave Burbank and a group of Learning Web participants, left, chat about photography. He discussed his journey to becoming a well-respected and recognized photographer and what a young person can do if this is a career path they want to pursue. A portrait shoot helped our amateur photographers learn how to use different pieces of lighting equipment to capture the perfect photo.

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## Youth Exploration Program—Volunteer Service Groups

### Middle Schoolers Take Action to Better Our Community



Our middle school service groups were busy this year—(clockwise from top left) adding their elbow grease to distribute food for Friendship Donations Network; analyzing Cayuga Lake's waters to keep it safe; fighting hydrilla on Cayuga Lake; beautifying the Village of Lansing Town Hall; sorting & organizing clothing donations at Catholic Charities; baking to fund Meadowgate Horse and Brown Cat Rescues; and hunting for fossils to add to the Museum of the Earth's collection. Inspiring young people to adopt a culture of contribution while learning and growing is a major goal of our Youth Exploration Program.



## Reflections on Change & Growth

“

It has become much easier for me to talk to adults [as a result of my apprenticeship]

Apprentice

I feel more patient and capable.  
Apprentice

I really enjoy doing research in a lab setting. My mentor helped me get ready for college and I learned a variety of opportunities that I can take advantage of when I'm there.

Apprentice

Go to the Learning Web and don't be afraid to tell people that you need help or to ask for help. Don't wait until you're hitting rock bottom like I was. Ask for help and know that there are always options for you and that if you are willing to work at it you can get the assistance that you need and be the individual you want to be with the right support and the right foundation in place.

Harmony Malone, article p.1

His self-confidence and work habits soared.

Parent of Apprentice



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