



Green Apprenticeship Permaculture and Ecovillage Design Alumni Report Series Josh Tolkan, Spring 2006 Session

Josh Tolkan participated in the GA as part of his undergraduate studies at Carlton College. His goal was to gain practical training and permaculture methodology as a complement to his academic studies. He went on to receive a Masters in Urban Planning from the University of Minnesota in 2008.

A portfolio of his “mud” design and construction work can be downloaded at http://carbonneutraldesign.com/sustainyou/Stories/wp-content/uploads/images/Josh/mud/Mud_Portfolio.pdf.

This report, written by Josh in July 2009, follows his work with an urban organization that combines gardening, reading, and social skills. He says that his ability to deal with the challenges of the program is rooted in his GA experience.



Spring 2006 – Green Apprenticeship students Josh, Ruth, Erin and Sarah engage in natural building during their permaculture studies. Here they are building the EcoCampus housing units (earth plastered straw bale domes). Ruth continued from the GA to become a civil engineer. Erin is an archeologist specializing in pre-Colombian societies. Sarah works for two Washington DC nonprofit organizations: the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) and the Healthy Building Network (HBN).

Project for Pride in Living, Minneapolis, MN

Project for Pride in Living (PPL) is a big non-profit low income housing developer with land throughout the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. PPL started many years ago when a group of citizens started renovating old houses that were home to poor families. Today, PPL's mission is to help low income families achieve self-sufficiency through housing, employment, training, education, and support services. To that end, they provide many social services and educational programs for families in their buildings. One program provides after school education programs to children whose families live in PPL housing.



The Roots and Reading program started last summer when PPL planted a small garden in the backyard of a group of townhouses. The garden was used to teach kids about their

environment, while bringing some fun into their summer reading lessons. This summer, a second garden was built at a different property, and there is programming once a week at each site. The program is run by two really great PPL staff members and a whole slew of volunteers. Some volunteers just come once a week to mentor kids one on one, help with their reading lesson and work with them on the gardening project. Other volunteers, myself included, put in additional time to come to lesson planning meetings and lead activities. The kids range from age 4 up through high school and are really fun to work with. Most of them are East African Muslim immigrants, but there are also many African Americans. One of the kids I mentor is named Zakariah, who is about to start high school. He is really bright, loves soccer and is very eco-conscious.



This summer has been going really well. In the first part, we planted seeds and seedlings and painted signs for the gardens. We have a three sisters garden (corn, beans and squash), a pizza garden (tomatoes, basil, peppers, onions), a sandwich garden (lettuce, herbs, and yes, watermelon), and a wildflower/butterfly garden. We have gone on field trips to nearby community gardens and also planted flowers and seeds in front of homes and in a nearby vacant lot. I have organized projects for kids at both garden sites. Recently I helped the kids make seed balls and they loved it. I think we will take a walking tour of the neighborhood soon to scatter the seed balls. I also am planning a scavenger hunt of the community garden, which contains my personal garden. Kids will have to identify all the types of vegetables (root, shoot, fruit, flower, stalk, leaf, seed).



Roots and Reading is really fun to be involved in and I look forward to it every week. It also has its challenges as it is a struggle to get the lesson across to the kids sometimes. The large age range means that one group of kids often gets bored or lost. When I am frustrated, I can always remember lessons I learned on Kibbutz Lotan to help me through. The most important thing you can teach kids is to love playing in the dirt, and if they have that, they will learn to love nature on their own. While we don't always get our message across, we do help the kids get messy, and enjoy it!



Josh Tolkan, July 2009
<http://rootsnreading.wordpress.com>

Kibbutz Lotan's Center for Creative Ecology is an environmental research and education institute. Its vision is that through *Tikkun Olam*, the Jewish concept of taking action to transform the world, we can build a just society that protects nature. It is supported by Israel's Amutat Tzel Hatamar nonprofit registered society 580347029 and The Friends of Lotan (USA), a 501(c)(3), number 17053031035036 tax exempt organization.



The Green Apprenticeship is a Training Program in Practical Ecology using the Permaculture Design Course and Ecovillage Design Curriculum. The program is in partnership with Gaia Education and endorsed by UNITAR-United Nations Institute for Training and Research. Gaia Education is a program of the Global Ecovillage Network.

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