



## A Success Story from Project REACH

by Audrey Dreier-Morrison, Associate Director of Project REACH

*Project REACH (Recognizing Excellence, Achievement, Commitment, and Honor), a Student Support Services program at Cazenovia College since 1986, provides academic assistance, career guidance, and other support services to eligible students. It is designed to enhance the rate at which students succeed at the post-secondary level. Project REACH coordinates a Peer Mentoring Program; providing academic, social, and emotional support to ease the college transition. Peer mentors advise students about classes and instructors, encourage social interaction, and inform students of campus services and activities. Peer mentors are role models; they are trained and caring students who want to make a difference.*

### A Success story:

As a pre-freshman, **Laura Duchette '12** completed a Project REACH application but thought it was a peer mentor application. She was upset because she thought that she was being denied a peer mentor position but in reality, she did not meet the requirements for membership. She was hired as a peer mentor for the fall 2011 semester, her senior year.

As a peer mentor/tutor during the First-Year Summer College Program, Laura worked closely with students, especially **Janeen Bligen**. Janeen said that when she arrived she was “scared, lost, and confused. I struggled and did not want to continue.” Coincidentally, Laura was assigned to mentor Janeen in the fall. Laura, who soon discovered they are from nearby towns, commented, “We have similar past experiences and we connected on many levels.” Also, Janeen participated in Marist College’s Upward Bound Program during high school, while Laura’s mother worked at Marist.

Janeen is shy and began college with her identical twin. Laura said that it was challenging to get Janeen to open up. These young women forged a close and trusting relationship. When Janeen struggled with

presentations for her effective speaking course, Laura suggested she incorporate Harry Potter into her speeches since she loved the books. She also helped Janeen prepare tentative course schedules. After discovering that Janeen's passion is writing, Laura provided encouragement and guidance so that Janeen was comfortable changing her major from criminal justice to English. Janeen said, "I gained so much because she has such a positive attitude. Her heart is big and she helped me through a lot. She would talk to me for a long time and comfort me when I needed it." The mentoring experience allowed Janeen to create her own path and gain confidence in herself and her abilities. "She made sure I went to tutoring, was doing my work, and not missing classes. She helped me talk to my teachers so they would understand how to help me." As a result, Janeen's grades have steadily improved, and staff and faculty have noticed significant positive changes. Janeen summed things up, "I am so grateful to have met her and I will never forget what she has done for me."

It is impressive when non-Project REACH members apply for peer mentor positions. When Laura was asked why she was interested in being a peer mentor, particularly during her senior year with a challenging course load and employment as a head resident advisor, master student, substitute teacher, and waitress, she said she wants to be someone to whom students can turn. Laura pointed out that students don't always connect with their resident advisor, instructors, or staff members. Her experiences assisting first-year students have been very rewarding. In fact, Laura enjoys mentoring first-year students so much, she is now employed by the College as the residence director of Watts Hall!

Students interested in developing or improving leadership skills, giving back to the College, and helping peers with the college transition, should consider peer mentoring. Recruitment occurs each spring. Details may be found by selecting the peer mentoring link at [www.cazenovia.edu/projectreach](http://www.cazenovia.edu/projectreach).

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