

## 2018 Update

Janet Lawson, MFT | December 29, 2018

### Oh, what an amazing year!



Autistry growth in 2018 was much like that of a teenager- awkward and exhilarating, fun and a bit frightening, at times plodding and frustrating yet filled with limitless possibilities.

We grew in bursts and scrambled to hire staff to work with all the new students. We went from 4-day work weeks to 6-day work weeks (and the 7th may yet come into play).

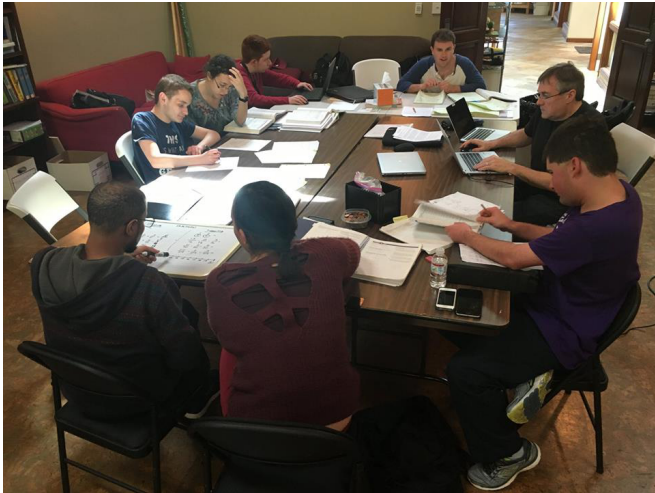
Like teenagers, we explored, experimented, bonded together, and overcame obstacles as we pushed through to a new level of organizational maturity.



Core Workshop: we welcomed many new students this year and saw the completion of some outstanding projects. Edward and Tom created beautiful large puppets that have now set off a new puppet-making trend at the studio. Danielle put the finishing touches on her Under the Sea 4-piece multi-media artwork. Alex's new board game is a huge hit. Jonathan designed and built octagonal redwood end tables for his patio. Steven and Nat are each working on sequels to their last animated short films. Freya finished Jupiter, the first in her ShopBot planet project. And Avery's Venom diorama received far better reviews than the movie!



Autistry Comprehensive Adult Program: our most impressive growth has come in the ACAP program. Not only did we triple our ACAP student body after the spring semester but we have several new students and new staff beginning in January. All our ACAP students take at least one academic college course during their first two semesters in the program. Managing all these college course schedules, vocational skill trainings, and community activities is a challenge but well worth the effort: the Fall 2018 students surpassed all our expectations! Many of our students are well on their way to getting AA degrees. Others have discovered new abilities and awakened dormant talents by taking challenging courses. They all worked diligently, studied in earnest, and are setting new goals for themselves in 2019.



I could not be prouder of this group of young adults, many of whom did not recieve a high school diploma. They have reinvigorated my faith in the resiliency of the human brain and the human spirit. Seeing their success has also strengthened my committment to continue to advocate for remedial level community college Math and English courses that allow students to gain foundational academic skills. The maturational lag of autism often precludes autistic individuals from accessing/processing abstract information at the same age as their neurotypical peers. Because of this, autistic students are diverted into speical education life skills courses and are assumed to be unable to grasp complex material. But, as the Autistry students are proving, brains mature at different rates and when they are ready they surprise us all.



2019 Plans: Autistry has partnered with two other nonprofit organizations to create vocational internships. Square Peg Foundation at Cadence Farm in Sonoma and the Western Railway Museum in Rio Vista both offer a wide variety of jobs and many opportunities to learn new skills. At Cadence Farm our crews will be working with rescued thoroughbred racehorses and helping to maintain the farm and keeping all the various riding equipment in top shape. At the Western Railway Museum there is much work to be done restoring historic trolley cars, general museum upkeep, and engaging with the public. Meaningful work and continued college education are the key ingredients for Autistry 2019.

