

# Eight-grader designs rainwater harvesting project

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ALISO VIEJO – Journey School eighth-grader Cyreine Adams, 13, has implemented a water conservation technique that is self-sustainable, cost efficient and involves students of all grades. Students volunteer to dig a mulch hole during their break.

Hands-on eco-literacy projects may not be a regular activity at many schools but it is at Journey School in Aliso Viejo. Journey School – the first public parent-initiated charter school in the district – teaches students from kindergarten to eight grades to be participants of their environment rather than mere spectators or active destroyers, school educators said.

As part of an eco-literacy project promoted by the school, Brad Lancaster, who's considered an authority in the field of rainwater harvesting and water management, came to speak to students about rainwater harvesting for dry lands in 2011. On his website, [harvestingrainwater.com](http://harvestingrainwater.com), Lancaster said: "I believe we all can become beneficial stewards of the land, and partners in the ecosystem in which we live, and I believe that by harvesting rainwater sustainably we can all begin to transform our households from consumers of resources to producers of resources."

Lancaster offered the following message to Adams before the installation: "Cyreine, it is awesome that you were thirsty to learn, allowed the flow of water-harvesting wisdom to sink in, got inspired, took action, and planted that knowledge to grow your school into a better place for students, teachers, staff, visitors, and your community—including plants, animals, and insects! You're giving all who encounter your project the opportunity to enjoy the functional beauty you've created, learn from your example, and spread your good work to their own homes, workplaces, and beyond. This is how change happens!"

Inspired by Lancaster's work, Adams researched, studied and designed a self-sustainable garden.

"Journey School has a dream of being eco-efficient on campus so what we did is take rainwater from the roofs and use it to water the garden instead of using costly irrigation," Adams said. "We took from the downspout, and laid pipes that go across the garden and the water comes out through the hole into the mulch basin. We are filling the huge hole with mulch because it allows all the surrounding soil to absorb the water that alone can irrigate all the surroundings plants and creates a healthy ecosystem for the garden."

Adams' project saves countless gallons of water and reuses the water to hydrate local native plants and make food for bees, butterflies and lizards, as well as to beautify the school's entrance and provide environmental education.

Adams said her role model and mentor is Jodi Levine, founding director of Earthroots Field School, based in Trabuco Canyon.

Levine writes on her website, [earthrootsfieldschool.org](http://earthrootsfieldschool.org): "I am passionate about sharing the Earth's gifts with children, knowing that they will inherit it all. My hope is that we will protect these gifts along with the knowledge to make them worthwhile for generations to come. I am devoted to these values and enjoy living them."

The rainwater harvesting demonstration and eco-literacy program were made possible with financial support from individual, community and corporate donors. The Home Depot, Paradise Designs and Tree of Life Nursery donated supplies and materials for the project. The project will be maintained by members of the community, including students and parents from Journey School and Soka University.

If interested in volunteering or to make donations, contact Michelle Spieker at [michelle@cherishedself.com](mailto:michelle@cherishedself.com). For more information: [journeyschool.net/innovation/eco-literacy](http://journeyschool.net/innovation/eco-literacy).