



A group of young volunteers decided to prototype the idea of local-community OLPC offices by running one in downtown Chicago during summer 2008, paid for entirely by saved-up internship funds. Six young volunteers spent the summer fixing laptops, running workshops, debugging, developing, teaching, and learning. Their adventures are chronicled here by 13-year-old Melanie, one of the youngest members of ILXO.

Hey, this is Melanie. I'm currently located in Massachusetts and I'm a freshman in high school. I prefer for things to stay the same, or for things to go in the way that I plan them to. I've tried to be more adventurous in the past few years, though, and I'm quite happy with what I've accomplished in doing so.

I have always been interested in the different ways that games are created and designed to be made fun to play. There are simulation games, board games, and RPG (Role Playing Games) games like Pokemon and games that follow the storylines of books or movies. I prefer the RPG's, personally.

I asked my cousin Mel how these were made, and she said that one of the ways that people create those worlds and maps is by using Python, a programming language. She asked if I would like to make one, and, after getting the okay from my parents, I was on a plane to Chicago, with the goal of creating a game using Python. The game, later named Larry, was my summer project at ILXO.

Our cousin Mel says: "The average staff age was 18.5, and the oldest among us was 23. To this day I have no idea what the folks we rented the office space from - a gorgeous superprofessional office building, right downtown by Union Station - thought when we walked in the first day. Everyone else was wearing fancy suits and ties, and these kids came in with t-shirts and a bunch of electronics and proceeded to decimate their free hot chocolate."

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We tried our best to keep our office neat and fairly presentable, but we had more than 25 laptops that all needed power cords to charge and storage space. Our office was also home to a stack of malfunctioning XO's Nikki repaired. We occasionally left partly dismantled XO's on a table in the back. We also had a sticky note calendar on the wall, which we used to post important deadlines and events. With the small crowd, it wasn't that hard to stay focused.

Larry was my pet project during the ILXO office hours. Written using Python, it eventually became a game that was meant to teach people Spanish vocabulary words. Since the XO's are mainly used for educational purposes, I had to create a game that was mostly educational.

When I first arrived in Chicago, my first days at the office were spent going through "How To Think Like A Computer Scientist," an open Python textbook. It was quite hard for me, and I needed help very frequently. Eventually, though, I started getting into the design interface of the actual game. It ended up being a multiple choice answer game. Though I was aiming for more of an RPG game, I ended up with an equally satisfying project.

It was a great experience overall. I had the opportunity to work with other kids, as well as with adults. It was very interesting to see both sides of the OLPC project; the one where everything gets developed and built and prepared, and the one where it's put out for the public to judge. Having been exposed to the XO laptop prior to joining ILXO, I was able to find out what went on beneath the surface, which I thought was very cool. I got to witness the designing of new projects, which was one of the neater experiences I gained during the summer.

one
laptop
per
child

