

All the News Worth
Chirping About from
Villa Esperanza Services
Fall 2020 Newsletter



Providing Love, Care
and Hope for Individuals
with Intellectual/
Developmental Disabilities
and their Families since 1961



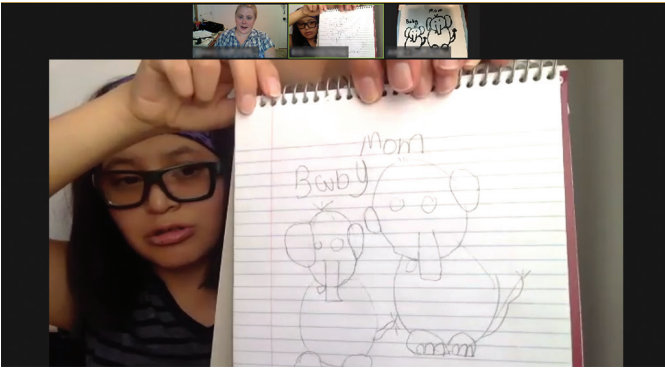
Villa Employment crewmembers John, Julianna, Miguel, Denise, Michael, and Antoinette.

Villa Esperanza: 60 Years Strong

Perspective by Peter Vaughn, Villa Esperanza Services Board Chair and Parent of a Son with Special Needs

Adversity is what created Villa 60 years ago when a handful of mothers with children with Down syndrome started an organization to marshal resources and support with families struggling to raise children with intellectual differences. 60 years later, Villa manages individuals ranging in all ages who are facing the many challenges that come with over 30 different diagnosed disabilities. Today, 24 school districts and over 40 cities in Southern California lean into Villa for help dealing with the myriad of issues around having a loved one with an intellectual or developmental disability. Clearly Villa has helped thousands manage adversity and challenges and remains a unique institution that listens to those who all too often do not have a voice in our confusing world.

2020 has tossed up another adversity for Villa – one shared by all of us but one that has a particular set of challenges unique to Villa and her constituents. COVID-19 does not discriminate. What COVID-19 does choose to do in a particularly terrible way is make direct social interaction dangerous. While this creates challenges in all sectors of our lives including education at all levels, Villa's students and adults, in particular, rely on and are served by a culture defined by personal



Villa student, Erika, attends her Occupational Therapy (OT) session over Zoom, with help from OT Director, Amers Goff.

contact and attention. Whether it is the one-on-one attention the school's students receive to hone motor skills, the supervision of daily routines in the residences or the frontline service jobs held by persons served by Villa in stores and retail establishments around greater LA, there are few populations more vulnerable to the social distancing required to manage this pandemic.

Villa's response has been immediate, thorough and entirely what her constituents have learned to expect from this organization. While the school was required to close, the teachers remained in on-line contact with students as consistently as possible. This has not always been easy. The school's population is not one predisposed to remote instruction and often teachers and staff had to seek alternative ways to stay in touch with a student body that is all about "staying in touch". The same applies to hundreds of adults who relied on Villa to transport them back and forth to centers where they received the personal attention required to help them integrate into our world. They, like the students at the school, are not easily accessed by the remote digital world and similar creative efforts have been required to keep in touch and reassure this client base that Villa has not gone anywhere.

Finally, the residences remain full and safe. This has been because of the tireless efforts of the dedicated Villa staff – a dedication shared at all levels of the organization.

The administration had to immediately come to terms with a financial and logistical set of problems nobody could have anticipated. The good news is that Villa is a veteran when it comes to facing these types of challenges since taking care of those with special needs has rarely been a top priority in Sacramento. As such, Villa was more than ready to scramble to keep the house in order and support all the different initiatives required to service her varied clientele. The network of support, both financial and human, that has lain behind Villa all these years has met the challenge. The school will be open in whatever capacity is deemed safe and appropriate. The adult population has been polled about what has worked and what hasn't. While COVID-19 has not gone away, neither has the resourcefulness that has been the hallmark of Villa over the past 60 years.

While we cannot time when the school will buzz with a full and active population, we know that when that day arrives, the new classrooms and meeting areas as well as the lovely courtyards will be appreciated in ways never before imagined. I suspect that that appreciation may soon blossom into similar facilities and space for all the constituencies of Villa. Meanwhile, Villa will continue to serve no matter what new adversity may arise. That is how she began and that is what makes her tick.



Peter Vaughn is a teacher, writer and investor. He taught American Literature, US History, and Investments to high school students and adults. Peter has a son with developmental disabilities who attended Villa's School many years ago. Peter currently serves as Villa's Board Chair.

Happy Anniversary, Villa!

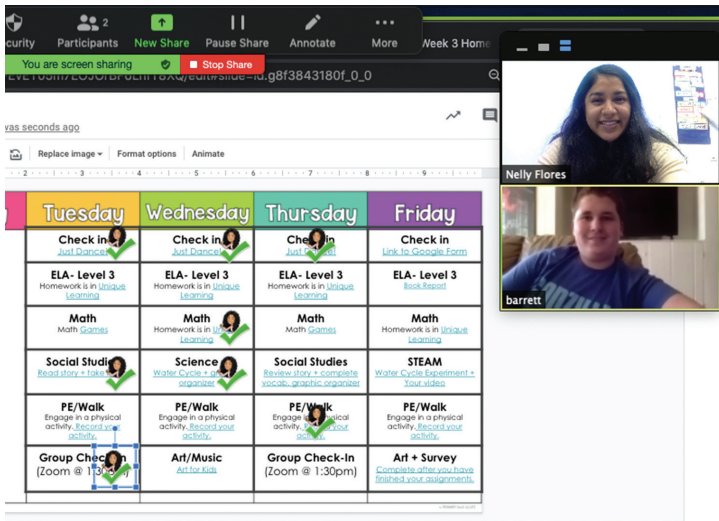


Villa Esperanza Services is turning 60! To celebrate, we wanted to look back on the previous six decades and reflect on how we became an environment of love, care, and hope for so many. Let us set the scene for Villa's founding – mother Rachel Keith is forging her own path when it comes to raising her son Ronnie, who was born with Down syndrome. Rachel believes in a radical idea: that her son does not need to be institutionalized or hidden away from society. With this in mind, Rachel and a small coalition of like-minded mothers begin an informal school for children with Down syndrome, providing these children with education from the comfort of Rachel's home.

By 1961, the culture and societal norms finally start to catch up to Rachel's vision. With the help of the Pasadena Civitan Club, the founding mothers purchase an old storefront property on Villa Street to create an official school for students with Down syndrome. Incorporated as a non-profit in 1961, Villa Esperanza is now open for business and already building on the legacy of innovation that Rachel inspired.

This year will challenge us, but not break our spirits!

Article by Shana Biaz, Villa Volunteer



With a little support from his family and teacher, Nelly, Villa Student Barrett has mastered navigating his Zoom classroom.

With the support of our Speech and Language Therapy team, who have been using alternative communication devices for a number of years, many of our new students are now equipped with iPads, laptops, and other technology and therapy tools they need for remote learning. Our teachers have continued to work diligently with family members and caregivers to help them adjust to the new technology and to navigate the individual challenges each student faces. Villa teacher, Mr. Ziad Fattah, reminds us that “the main stars in all of this are the parents and caregivers who show up as aides to almost every Zoom session. If anyone deserves a shout out, they do.”

While engaging our students via virtual learning can be incredibly challenging, our talented team continues to assess new ways to keep students motivated. Students participate in drawing tutorials, virtual and audio field trips, social groups, yoga, science experiments, and more; and our educators are incorporating small group activities, individual sessions, and supplemental at-home materials to make activities more accessible.

While there have been hurdles to overcome, there has also been extraordinary progress. One student that Villa School teacher Ms. Nelly Flores wanted to highlight was Barrett. “When the school closure began, Barrett was struggling to do his work from home and join our scheduled Zoom meetings. His family made a great effort to keep him motivated, and in June, Barrett began attending his meetings and doing his work with me,” Ms. Flores shared. “Since then, he has consistently logged in to every meeting and participates during group activities.”

Our care and commitment to our students has not wavered, and despite uncertainty, the tone of the new school year remains positive. “I am hopeful that if we focus on collaborating with parents and amongst the teachers, this year will challenge us, but not break our spirits. I foresee us all—educators, parents, students, and service providers—growing in skills that we did not even know we needed up until now,” said Ms. Flores.

As we celebrate our new school year, we would also like to extend our gratitude to our outgoing Vice President of Children and Youth Programs and Villa Esperanza School Principal, Ms. Casey Gregg. Over the past 18 years, Casey has dedicated her passion and expertise to Villa and our students. She has been instrumental in our ability to adapt to change and to strengthen the quality of services we provide for our kids. We are forever appreciative of her contributions to Villa and our community. Thank you, Casey!

So far, 2020 has been a year unlike any other, and the start of the new 2020-2021 school year has been no different. On August 31, the first official day of the Villa Esperanza School’s fall semester began. Rather than greeting our new and returning students on campus with open arms and high fives, our teachers and administrators leveraged everything they have learned over the past six months to empower our students to succeed in their digital classrooms.

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Hjelte-Phillips

Speech & Language Center

626-449-2919, ext. 176

Occupational Therapy Clinic

626-449-2919, ext. 140

Community Integration

Program (CIP)

626-398-4435, ext. 172

Employment Services

626-449-2919, ext. 161

Adult Residential Program

626-449-2919, ext. 113

Independent Living Skills (ILS)

626-398-4435, ext. 108

Dimensions Adult Day Program

1990 E. Walnut St.
Pasadena, CA 91107
626-346-9109, ext. 103

Adult Day Program (ADP)

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Pasadena, Ca 91104
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Independent Living Skills (ILS)

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2020-2021

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VILLA ESPERANZA SERVICES

*Where Hope is Hard at Work for Individuals
with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities*

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Villa's Adult Day Program (ADP) staff are doing some awesome things to stay connected with participants and families remotely. Summer activities included art, music, and games of bingo over Zoom where the winners won ADP Team Awesome T-shirts and masks!

ADP participant Mark (pictured) had a blast and his mom shared: "Thank you so much for this. Mark absolutely loved it and I see the other clients did also. You [Villa ADP staff] are the best, and you made Mark's day."

