

All the News Worth
Chirping About from
Villa Esperanza Services
Summer 2021 Newsletter



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



Thank you to the entire Villa team for 60 fabulous years. No matter where at Villa they work, be it in Pasadena, San Gabriel Valley, or Conejo Valley, Villa is grateful to have such talented and compassionate staff as part of our community. Thank you all for all that you do!

Thank you, Villa Team!

Article By Nina Weber, Villa Esperanza Services Grant Writer

It takes a village to raise a child. In 1961, three mothers understood this proverb, coming together to help each other raise their children with special needs by providing the educational opportunities that were not accessible anywhere else. Since then, Villa Esperanza Services has grown to include nine programs that serve individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities from ages five to 65. The organization has truly taken this proverb to heart, forming a village of teachers, therapists, case coordinators, nurses, administrators, and family members who are committed to providing the safest and most nurturing environment possible for the individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who we serve.

To ensure the highest-quality services, each of Villa's more than 200 employees plays a critical role in the organization. The dedication of each staff member was evident this past year when COVID-19 required drastic changes to all programs. Program Directors and staff confronted the challenge head on by creating new ways to provide services, carry out activities and reach our clients when they needed it most.

The Villa School, along with the organization's other programs, successfully provided its services remotely through distance learning and teletherapy. The program's success during this time is highlighted by one of its star students, Eddie, who lives in Villa's Wagner House and has attended the Villa School since January 2020.

Eddie first came to Villa after his mother, Staci, toured the campus and filled out the enrollment packet on the spot. According to her, she knew that Villa was the ideal learning environment for her son. Unfortunately, Eddie was only able to enjoy the campus for two months before the mandatory suspension of in-person services in March 2020. Staci



Speech Therapist, Michelle, has adapted to provide services to Villa Students virtually. Many of her sessions are now held over Zoom.

explains that, “during the implementation of the Virtual Learning Program, we all faced technical challenges with class set up and schedules. However, prompt and diligent communication between the Villa Staff and myself resulted in Eddie making excellent academic progress. We are a team that works together to advocate for his education and social skills as a young man entering his adult transition, which he will remain at Villa as he continues to thrive in this progressive environment.”

Staci loves Villa because the staff is professional and they truly care about the students. This extends to all of the organization’s programs, which went above and beyond this past year. For example, when the pandemic caused new challenges for our adult clients, program staff did not hesitate to provide additional help. This included food and medication pick-up and delivery and assisting in cases of remote medical appointments. Villa day program staff also went the extra mile (literally!) to deliver work packets to the clients for weekly activities, which helped to maintain a personal connection and allow in-person interaction at a safe distance.

Villa also became a lifeline for clients this past year. When stay-at-home measures were enforced, Residential staff committed to 24/7 care to ensure the health and safety of the medically vulnerable individuals we serve. Many of Villa’s residents have been in the homes for decades, like James, who has lived at Allen House for the past 22 years. His mother reached out to Villa to tell us that there have been times when she didn’t know what she would have done without Villa. She is particularly appreciative of the leadership provided by Kelly White and her staff over all the years.

Another resident is Sharon, who has been part of the Villa community for five decades! Her brother expressed that Villa has “allowed Sharon to thrive to the best of her abilities with your dedication, creative programming, and comprehensive care, and live a life of dignity”. This sentiment was shared by Joan, who has three children in the Employment Program. After a temporary furlough at the beginning of the pandemic, the three siblings were able to continue to work, giving them a sense of purpose during a difficult time. Joan commented that they “feel respected, trusted, appreciated and loved by their job coaches. They are like family...teaching, guiding, and genuinely caring about facilitating each person’s abilities”.

This past year has demonstrated that Villa is not only a pillar of the community, it’s also a “village” made up of program directors and staff, administration staff, clients and their families, Board Members, and donors. Villa would like to thank the direct care staff, in particular, for everything they do on a daily basis to care for our community. Recently this work was also recognized by Assemblymember Chris Holden at a special state-wide event to honor direct support professionals. The strength of the community is the foundation of Villa’s success, and we look forward to celebrating another 60 years together with all of you who form part of our village!



Villa Esperanza Services turned 60 this summer! To celebrate, we have been reflecting on the previous six decades and looking to the future. Over its first 50 years, Villa had been providing services out of a hodgepodge of repurposed buildings. What had once been houses or storefronts were turned into classrooms and offices. In 2014, the Villa Board voted to start a Capital Campaign that would build a campus that matched the level of care that Villa provided. Over the next decade, funds were raised for a three part capital campaign, which broke ground in 2017 with the construction of a new middle and high school campus. The new facilities, opened for instruction in 2018, were constructed with Villa students in mind and contained state of the art technology, kitchens to teach life skills, and more! The new school campus is only the first step.

As Villa looks to the future and another 60 years, it will be with a newly renovated campus that matches its mission to provide love, care, and hope to children and adults with special needs.

Camp Moai

Article by Lindsey Harrison, Villa Volunteer and Special Events Coordinator

60 years ago this summer, Villa Esperanza Services was built by families looking for innovative solutions to care for their children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Luke, a junior at Loyola High School with a brother attending Villa School, is the latest Villa family member to carry forward this spirit of innovation.

In 2019, Luke was looking for a way to support his brother, Dominic, a high school student with special needs. After discussing with his parents and Dominic's therapists at Villa, Luke started a monthly social club, Club Moai.

It very quickly became apparent that Dominic was not the only one that could benefit from a social group with their peers. Club Moai now has 10-15 regulars that meet monthly to do activities like painting, games, and more. "I really wanted to start this just for my brother," Luke recounts. "But I am so happy with how it's grown and I just love all of our participants."

This year, Luke decided to expand the concept of Club Moai to cover a whole week in July, creating Camp Moai, a day camp for teenagers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Creating a day camp from the ground up is no small feat, especially when the campers need additional support and coaching to succeed. To help cover the cost of the camp, Luke applied to the Dragon Kim Foundation for a grant that would fund his innovation and won \$5,000. "I was thrilled to be chosen!" Luke told us. "The grant allowed us to provide the camp at no cost and provided me with a mentor and entrepreneurial training to help make it a success."

Funding secured, Camp Moai began to come together. A week in late July was chosen and different activities were planned for each day. The itinerary included both summer camp classics like swimming and friendship bracelets as well as more unique activities like a day trip to the Huntington Gardens.

"I think my favorite activity was swimming," Luke said. "When you are in charge of the camp, you don't really have time to spend time with everyone, you're always preparing for the next activity. But when we were at the pool, I was able to stop and hang out with everyone."

For its first year, Camp Moai was an overwhelming success, welcoming 36 campers with intellectual and developmental disabilities, free of charge. The spirit of Moai won't end with summer vacation though. Club Moai will pick up again this fall to give Dominic and other teenagers with special needs a safe place to connect and socialize.



Camp Moai Campers, including students from Villa School and volunteers from Polytechnic School, enjoy a week of fun activities with new friends.

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Speech & Language Center**
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Occupational Therapy Clinic
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**Community Integration
Program (CIP)**
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Employment Services
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Adult Residential Program
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Independent Living Skills (ILS)
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Want to join the fun? Camp Moai might be over, but Club Moai meets monthly. Contact Luke Aloe at LukeAloe@icloud.com for more information!



VILLA ESPERANZA SERVICES

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

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Congratulations!

Congratulations to Michelle Lam, Director of Villa's Adult Day Services, for her recent nomination for the LA Sparks #WeAreWomen Community Award!

Michelle has worked with Villa for nearly 10 years and is well known to Villa staff and families for her creativity and compassion. She is being recognized this year for how she kept Day Program participants engaged and their families supported throughout the pandemic.

Thank you so much, Michelle, for all that you do! And congratulations again for your well-deserved nomination. #VillaTeam

