

All the News Worth  
Chirping About from  
Villa Esperanza Services  
Spring 2018 Newsletter



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



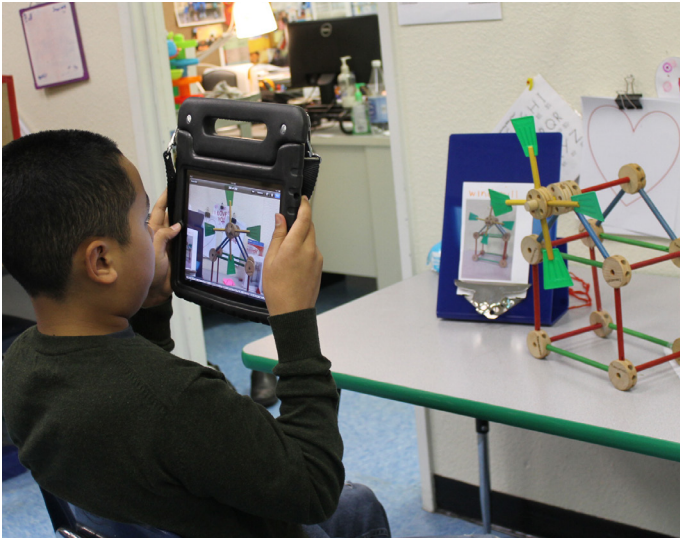
Villa School Student Nicolas is thriving academically; here he's working on his time recognition skills.

## Nicolas Finds His Voice: One Boy's Journey at Villa School

Written by Katherine Evans, Villa Esperanza Services Grant Writer

Villa School student Nicolas Seto counts to ten and holds a stretch. It's yoga time in Classroom 2, and Nic is deftly moving through the day's poses. "Show me tree pose," teacher Lauren Davis prompts, and Nic stands tall, with arms stretched skyward. Thirteen-year-old Nic is confident, strong, and focused—a far cry from the timid boy who joined Villa School in 2011. "He was so shy! He had a difficult time interacting with his peers and staff," Lauren shares. "Now he is one of my classroom leaders. He helps other students find their assistive iPads. He is a true gentleman." Nicolas has made great strides academically, too. "It has been amazing to see his math abilities, money counting, and time recognition skills progress," says Lauren. "I can see the gleam in his eyes when he accomplishes things on his own. His self-motivation and determination has and will take him far."

Nicolas's growth is evident to his mother Nilma, too. "I'm from Brazil and my husband is from Hong Kong," Nilma explains. "When Nic was born we didn't know autism. He was our first child. I thought it was just too many languages being spoken at home." After Nic's diagnosis, Nilma struggled within the local school system. "I'll never forget his preschool teacher saying, 'Your son doesn't belong in this classroom.'"



**Nicolas photographs one of his 3D model creations during an Occupational Therapy session.**

School days inevitably ended in Nic screaming and crying—but that all changed at Villa. “I don’t know if I have the right words to describe what Villa has meant to our family,” Nilma reflects. “I shed so many tears to understand what autism was. You feel you are alone and you wonder who can help me? At Villa, a new world opened up for my son.”

Speech Language Pathologist Ariel Hegedus echoes Nilma’s sentiments. “Now Nic can participate in interacting with classmates. The other day he was playing Candy Land with a peer and they were smiling at each other the whole time. I was ecstatic. He is initiating friendships.” Through his work in Villa’s Speech and Language Program, Nic is also excelling in sharing his emotions and describing the world around him with adjectives like “cool” and “pretty.” He can express himself both verbally and with the use of his iPad communication app TouchChat—one of the assistive technologies incorporated in Villa’s multimodal educational strategy. “He is even learning to program his device with help,” Ariel explains.

In addition to opening up another world of communication

for Nic, the iPad has inspired something else: a budding love of photography. Nic is fascinated with photos and cameras. Indeed, during a recent session in Villa’s Occupational Therapy Clinic, Nic’s passion for photography was on full display. After constructing a 3D model of a windmill—employing both fine motor and spatial skills—he proudly set up a snapshot of the finished project. Through projects like scrapbooking, model building, and even making origami, Nic’s sense of empowerment has grown.

**“I shed so many tears to understand what autism was. You feel you are alone and you wonder who can help me? At Villa, a new world opened up for my son.”**

For Nilma, her son’s transformation is like “a dream”—he is thriving at school and at home. As Nilma puts it, “Nic is finally where he is supposed to be. He is just growing up so beautifully with the help of Villa. Now he has a voice and he is using it.”

Villa Esperanza School is a comprehensive program which is transforming the lives of students with special needs. Villa School offers highly experienced and trained teachers and staff; individualized K-12 instruction; speech & language therapy; occupational therapy (OT); behavioral intervention services; music and pet therapies; training for families; and a transitional program. Best practices include Applied Behavior Analysis, DIR-Floortime based therapy; augmentative and alternative communications (AAC) and sensory integration strategies. For more information, please contact:

Casey Gregg  
 Vice President of Children & Youth Programs  
 (626) 449-2919, ext. 117 or  
[CGregg@VillaEsperanzaServices.org](mailto:CGregg@VillaEsperanzaServices.org)



Villa students and staff give a huge thumbs-up to the new campus under construction. Thank you to all the amazing donors for giving generously to this important project.

Phase I of Villa’s new campus is in full production. Once complete, this portion of the new campus will include 7 classrooms, a multipurpose room, kitchen and 2 adaptive play yards for our students to learn and grow. Stay tuned for information about the grand opening this fall.

Pictured left: Villa students Sarah, Daniel and Erika enjoying their hard hat tour with Casey Gregg, Villa’s Vice President of Children’s Programs and Charlie Crofoot, Bernards Construction Superintendent





# Partners in Positive Change: Villa and Community Conscience are Meeting a Growing Need

At first glance, the two-story building at 80 E. Hillcrest Drive in Thousand Oaks may seem like an unassuming office complex. In fact, within these walls a groundbreaking exercise in social change has been underway for thirty years and counting—this building is home to Community Conscience, a non-profit that offers rent-free space to non-profit social service organizations.

Founded in 1981, Community Conscience grew as a result of a grassroots effort on the part of concerned community members. “At that time we had tax reform, budget cuts, and funding was being affected,” explains Robin Britt, Community Conscience Executive Director. “Our founders said these charities are going to have to close their doors, and what is going to happen to the clients?” As a result of the community’s efforts, the idea of a rent-free space for social service organizations became reality—social service organizations like Villa Esperanza Services, which has been a proud tenant since 2009.

“Villa has the happiest clients in the entire building,” shares Britt. “You complete us—it’s a very successful relationship!” As a Community Conscience tenant, Villa’s West Region office saves between \$40,000 to \$50,000 each year that would otherwise be spent on rent. Another great benefit of Community Conscience’s building is that it functions as a one-stop shop for Villa’s clients and other vulnerable community members.

Irene Raciuc, Villa’s Manager of Residential Services, West Region, explains, “Ventura County Human Services is located right across the hall from us. It’s really convenient for our clients because they can get MediCal, sign-up for CalFresh or take advantage of the job center. We had clients who were unable to pay electricity bills and Lutheran Social Services assisted them—there are many partnerships going on each day.” Indeed, for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), access to healthcare, employment, and educational opportunities remains a challenge, and service organizations within the building function as allies to address these concerns. “We meet with tenants bimonthly and have a round table discussion where we talk about what their needs are,” Robin Britt explains.

It was during one such round table that fellow tenant Fit 4 The Cause (F4TC), a nonprofit providing fitness and nutrition training for low-income communities, first explored a partnership with Villa’s Community Integration Program (CIP). CIP gives adults with I/DD valuable prevocational experience and independent living skills training, and F4TC’s therapeutic exercise program offered an enriching opportunity for Villa’s CIP participants. After discussing the possibilities, F4TC team members choreographed and designed Move-Dance-Breathe class exclusively for CIP. The class combines cardio, strength, and yoga-inspired cool-downs, and Villa’s clients have greatly enjoyed their customized fitness program. This is just one example of the life changing partnerships unfolding at 80 E. Hillcrest Drive each and every day. Villa remains a proud ally in Community Conscience’s inspiring mission to maximize coordination among service agencies while addressing the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.



Community Conscience Executive Director Robin Britt, Villa client Elizabeth Flood, and Fit 4 The Cause Executive Director Cindy Rakowitz



Fit 4 The Cause and Villa team up to get fit! Each week they offer a Move-Dance-Breathe class tailored specifically for clients attending Villa Esperanza Services. Thank you Community Conscience for connecting our community!

Pictured: Villa Clients after their weekly work out with Fit 4 The Cause Executive Director Cindy Rakowitz (back row center) and Events Coordinator, Christina (front row, far right).

## VILLA ESPERANZA SERVICES DIRECTORY

### PASADENA

2060 E. Villa Street  
Pasadena, CA 91107  
www.VillaEsperanzaServices.org  
info@VillaEsperanzaServices.org

**Main Number**  
626-449-2919

**Villa Esperanza School**  
626-449-2919, ext. 119

**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. 1

**Employment Services**  
626-449-2919, ext. 161

**Adult Residential Program**  
626-449-2919, ext. 113

**Independent Living Skills (ILS)**  
626-398-4435, ext. 1

**Dimensions Adult Day Program**  
1990 E. Walnut St.  
Pasadena, CA 91107  
626-346-9109, ext. 103

**Adult Day Program (ADP)**  
1757 N. Lake Ave.  
Pasadena, Ca 91104  
626-398-4435, ext. 1

### WEST REGION

Community Conscience  
Human Services Center  
80 E. Hillcrest Drive, Suite 206  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

**Main Number**  
805-446-1939

**Community Integration  
Program (CIP)**  
805-446-1939, ext. 112

**Employment Services**  
805-446-1939, ext. 112

**Independent Living Skills (ILS)**  
805-446-1939, ext. 107

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## VILLA ESPERANZA SERVICES

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

2060 East Villa Street  
Pasadena, CA 91107

[www.VillaEsperanzaServices.org](http://www.VillaEsperanzaServices.org)



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## VILLA ESPERANZA SERVICES

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

April is Occupational Therapy (OT) month! Villa's OT staff help our clients develop therapeutic strategies to be successful at home, school, and in the community—students like Daniel. Daniel has created a poetry blog with help from Occupational Therapist Rebekka. Daniel posts a poem of his own creation each week, starting with a verbal prompt. Rebekka shares, **"Daniel has really grown in his confidence with his own voice."** Way to go, Daniel!

Be sure to check out Daniel's amazing poems here:  
<https://danielthepoet.blogspot.com/>

#VillaOT #OTMonth



Daniel with Occupational Therapist Rebekka celebrating OT month.