

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



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



Client Dennis Koerner is finding his voice as newly elected president of Villa's Community Integration Program (CIP) advocacy group.

## Learning to Lead: Dennis's Villa Journey

Articles by Katherine Evans, Villa Esperanza Services Grant Writer

The crowd is hushed in anticipation when Dennis Koerner takes his place at the head of the table. "Mr. President," a Villa staff member in the audience calls out, "are you ready to begin?" This is the weekly meeting of the Community Integration Program (CIP) advocacy group. CIP is a day program for adults living with intellectual/developmental disabilities who want to build their employment skills through volunteerism. The newly formed CIP advocacy group gives members a voice in their program activities—participants eagerly await as agendas are passed around the room, and the recording secretary readies his pencil.

"I've always been a natural born leader," Dennis explains as he looks over the day's agenda. "I worked very hard to become president. It was a lot of sitting down and thinking and I practiced speaking in front of my staff. We had a BBQ to announce who was elected." He smiles, thinking of this accomplishment, and prepares to address his assembled constituents. "Buckle your seatbelt," he says. "It'll be an interesting meeting!"

As Dennis promised, the meeting is engaging and participants enthusiastically share their thoughts—mention of CIP's recent bottle collection initiative is met with cheers. The bottle collection program was one of President Dennis's campaign goals and over \$40 dollars



Board Members of CIP's advocacy group posing proudly after their meeting.

has been raised thus far. Members agree that the money should be used to help CIP participants attend their upcoming prom celebration at the Aquarium of the Pacific. Dennis nods in approval and focuses on the next topic of discussion: selection of prom king and queen candidates. Throughout the proceedings Dennis is self-assured, charismatic, and passionate—so passionate, in fact, that he reads his vice president's announcements, too! "I'm sorry I got ahead of myself," he says, grinning. "I'll turn it over to my vice president."

It wasn't always this way. "When Dennis first started with us in 2016 he was depressed and hardly talking or participating," shares CIP Director Darryl Goodus. Once Dennis joined CIP that began to change. CIP Skills Instructor Perla Moran credits his transformation to Villa's individualized approach. "Our staff took time to sit down and find out what Dennis wanted to do and what his goals were.

Just sitting with our clients and finding out who they are as a person is so important. It's giving them that one-on-one attention so they can see you really do care." For Dennis, watching his peers participate in the program also helped provide motivation. Staff challenged him to give new experiences a try, and Dennis rose to the occasion.

Now Dennis approaches new opportunities with gusto—opportunities like volunteering at the Zimmer Children's Museum or the Salvation Army. His goal is to transition into paid employment and he is actively interviewing with assistance from CIP staff. As for his aims as president, Dennis has a wealth of ideas.

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"We started our bottle and cans collection to help get some money into the bucket. It was kind of my idea," he says modestly. "Matter of fact, next month we're gonna have a nacho sale, too!"

Creativity, kindness, and humor have defined Dennis's tenure as president. After joking that he's 101 years old, Dennis laughs and says, "I'm 53 years of age and getting younger. If you say I'm getting younger you feel like a child again." It is this positive outlook that has helped Dennis transform into the leader he is today and CIP staff couldn't be happier. "Before he never would've considered running for president. Now he is the most proud of anyone," says Perla. "I'm very proud too," she adds, her voice softening. "It's so rewarding to see."

## Community Integration Program (CIP)

Villa's Community Integration Program (CIP) is a transitional program that allows adults 18 years and older to gain the work skills necessary to obtain meaningful employment while giving back to their community through volunteerism. The CIP day program is a 100% community based program that is designed to assist individuals to develop the skills necessary to one day be gainfully employed. With a support ratio of 1:3 or 1:4, Villa staff assists program participants to develop the required skills by:

1. Supervising program participants at volunteer sites throughout their community thereby providing real work experience.
2. Provide training courses through related activities such as:
  - Developing a resume / completing job applications
  - Practicing interview skills
  - Appropriate social and behavioral skills in the workplace
  - Using public transportation
  - Proper hygiene and clothing for the workplace
  - Self-advocacy skills
  - Money management and math skills
  - Writing and reading skill development

**For more information about CIP, please contact:**

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Teresa caring for bunnies through Villa's CIP Program.

# A New Chapter for Shakobe

Do you remember visiting your local library as a child and the excitement of plucking a title from the shelf? Libraries not only inspire a love of reading, but they also offer children the opportunity to practice valuable life skills. For many Villa School students, behavioral difficulties make library visits a challenge. The newly opened Helen Vaughan Memorial Library at Villa's Hjelte Phillips Speech and Language Center has given Villa School students a library of their very own—students like Shakobe.

At 14 years old, Shakobe is a talkative, outgoing high schooler. While assisting with check out at the library's unveiling his social skills are on full display. "Would you like to check out a book?" he asks a patron, his iPad poised to scan the title's barcode. The scanner registers the title. "Okay," Shakobe says with pride, and hands the book over. "Thank you and you're welcome!"

Getting Shakobe to this point wasn't easy—it has taken him months of careful practice with staff to learn how to check out, re-shelve, and categorize books. "I break it down into steps and have him repeat the cues," says Speech Language Pathology Assistant Barbara Martin. "I'll also write them down and give him a visual. Reducing auditory input is important, and sometimes we go in another room and I talk to him one-on-one so he can focus."

Before Shakobe joined Villa in April 2017, he struggled in his local public school where he spent much of his time feeling bored and isolated. Teachers didn't give Shakobe challenging tasks or opportunities, and he had frequent tantrums. "At his old school I dreaded the weekly phone calls I would get about his behavior," says Shakobe's mother Mose. "I would have to come get him, or they would talk about suspension. Since he started at Villa I've only got a call twice, and that was at the beginning. They know how to work with him and they're giving him responsibility."

Shakobe's progress is also evident to classroom aide Khamir Morgan. "When he started he'd yell in a high pitched voice and push over chairs and tables," Khamir explains. Villa staff worked with Shakobe on understanding and identifying emotions—his own and classmates—and that helped considerably. "He's a real good kid," says Khamir. "He loves words. He grabs the dictionary every morning and writes a word on the blackboard."

When asked what word he looked up most recently Shakobe doesn't hesitate to answer: "Contest, I looked up today," he says. "And science." One after another, library patrons line up and Shakobe greets each with eye contact and a smile. He checks out library mainstays like *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, the *Cat in the Hat*, and the *Berenstain Bears*—when prompted to share his favorite topic to read about Shakobe pauses. "Cars," he says, beaming.



Villa School student Shakobe prepares to check out books for library patrons with his iPad scanner app.

## VILLA ESPERANZA SERVICES DIRECTORY

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Phase I of Villa's new campus is almost complete! Thank you to all the amazing donors for giving generously to this important project. 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.

Villa School Phase I Grand Opening - Tuesday, October 23, 2018, 4 - 6 pm.  
Invitations to follow - Join us!



## 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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*Where Hope is Hard at Work for Individuals  
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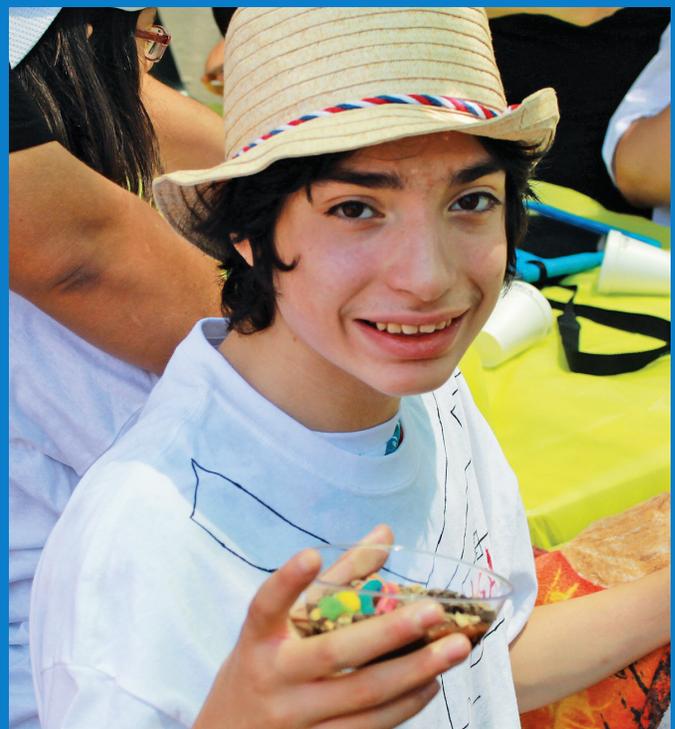
Thank you Villa donors for making a difference. You helped create summer fun at Camp Esperanza!

Joshua and his friends enjoyed the summer camp experience, started by Girl Scout Julia Nail and carried on by Villa's Speech & Language Center staff. This year's camp theme was science and students practiced socialization and communication with themed crafts and science experiments. Thank you to all the volunteers and staff who made Camp Esperanza a blast this year!

#VillaSpeech #CampEsperanza

Interested in donating? Log on to  
[www.VillaEsperanzaServices.org](http://www.VillaEsperanzaServices.org) and click **Donate Now**.

**THANK YOU**



Joshua is really proud of the "mud" treat he made at Camp Esperanza!