



Danny Starts a New Chapter

Original story written by Camila Castellanos and published by The Outlook. Adapted for The Chirp

Before coming to Villa Esperanza Services, Danny Chan didn't think he could ever work, feel smart or appreciated, or make good friends. But Chan, 40, has learned this past year that anyone, at any age, can begin a new chapter.

Since coming to Villa three years ago, the shy, soft-spoken Chan has gone from not showing up to interviews (there's always a fear of not being accepted, of not knowing the answers), to diligently showing up at his job, working hard and smiling at others while washing dishes at the Freshwater Dumpling and Noodle House in the Huntington Library. And while he likes his paycheck, Chan especially likes knowing he's doing a good job and people appreciate him. He never could have done it without Villa Esperanza and its staff members, whom he counts as his close friends.

"For a long, long, long time, I never had a skill," said Chan, who's lived in a group home for most of his life. He paused to explain, holding back tears and apologizing "for getting emotional."

"I never had confidence in my whole life, and Villa gave me that confidence. It's been the best gift anyone has ever given me. Now when I face something difficult or something that's hard I have the confidence to keep persevering, and I don't give up," Chan said.

Nearby, Community Integration Program (CIP)



Danny working at his new job at the Freshwater Dumpling and Noodle House at the Huntington Library and Gardens.

supervisor Perla Moran mirrored his teary eyes: “Danny, you’re going to make me cry now!”

Emotions are something Villa has worked hard to discover and talk about with its clients, who are living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It helps them communicate, understand themselves and the world, and relate to others. For Chan, it’s been especially meaningful, he said, pointing to his heart, “Everyone at Villa helps me a lot here, on the inside, and I really appreciate that.”

Villa has been helping individuals like Chan discover themselves and more fully live their best lives since 1961, with the mission of providing, love, care and hope for those living with disabilities and for their families. By meeting



Danny helping straighten up song books for a local church.

the special needs of each client within a continuum of care that ranges from infancy to adulthood, Villa has striven to expand services over the years and advocate for individuals to become fully integrated members of their communities.

Using a person-centered approach, Villa helps individuals develop in jobs that fit their wants and needs. The CIP program has been enormously successful and meaningful to adults like Chan, said Darryl Goodus, Director of CIP and Independent/Supported Living Services.

“It’s been a lot of fun and a very rewarding program to be a part of,” said Goodus, who seeks out potential employers based on program participants’ feedback about their “dream jobs” while also matching their skill levels with available job opportunities.

“Identifying the challenges and barriers is also a big part of what we do, while finding something fulfilling for our clients, finding out what they want to do in their lives — if they like being around people, we shoot for customer service opportunities; if they love animals, we try to find them something to do around animals — there are lots of different ways we try to get them those experiences and that exposure,” said Goodus.

The program participants have logged experiences through volunteer opportunities within the CIP — in 2019, Villa Esperanza clients volunteered at the Pasadena Humane Society, Cancer Support Community Pasadena, the Salvation Army, Union Station and multiple other nonprofits.

“We ask them to treat the Community Integration Program like a full-time job,” Goodus said, adding that employees get specific job training beforehand, as well on-the-job supervision from a Villa staff employee. “Our clients make excellent employees — every day is a great day for the people who are participating in our programs — they are sincere and genuine people.”

Goodus is working hard to create more employment opportunities for Villa participants, and encourages employers to keep an open mind.

Through all of his hard work and with Villa’s help, Chan will soon be moving to Villa’s supported housing, living in his own room and apartment for the first time. He can hardly believe his good fortune, he said, taking the opportunity to thank his mentor, Moran, for helping him.

“I’m learning, I’m learning so much ... I like providing a good service for everybody,” Chan said. “It motivates me and helps me do better when I see all those people around me.”

Villa Update on COVID-19

Villa’s first priority is the safety and health of our students, adult clients, and staff. As the COVID-19 situation develops, we have made the decision to close Villa School and adult day programs while still supporting clients in our residential homes and in our Independent Living Skills programs. Villa is continuing to explore additional ways we can support those at home including staff. If you are able, we hope you will consider a gift to Villa today. Your contribution is truly important and can help provide the additional support our population needs during these turbulent times. We look forward to welcoming back Jun, Danny, and all of our clients and staff once programs reopen. We will continue posting up to date information on our website and also on our Facebook and Twitter. Thank you for your understanding and support during this difficult time.

Jun Exercises His Voice

For many students at Villa School, especially nonverbal students, communicating their feelings can be a struggle. Difficult behaviors or acting out are often products of feelings of isolation and frustration as they feel no one can understand what they are trying to say. Teaching students how to communicate effectively is a priority at Villa School, and Villa student Jun is a great example of how opening the channels of communication can help a student grow and thrive.

Jun started at Villa as an elementary school student and at first, like many of Villa's students, he struggled with body regulation and verbal speech. However, once he started learning to use an iPad regularly at Villa's Hjelte-Phillips Speech & Language Center and to calm his body at Villa's Occupational Therapy Center, Jun started learning, communicating, and growing. He can now express his feelings and answer questions with his iPad. He has recently been typing full sentences and expressing himself more after working with an outside speech therapist that specializes in typing. "This has really opened his world up," Jun's mother, Sophia, shared. "He's able to share his wants and one of the first things he said was,



Jun communicates using his iPad to type sentences.

'When can I talk?' I didn't have any hope that my son would be able to communicate, and now he's able to do math, touch chat, and express himself with a high level of vocabulary. This is truly life changing."

Now that Jun is able to communicate more of his ideas with his teachers, therapists, and friends, they know he is very interested in math, science, and especially outer space. In speech sessions, Jun studies and answers questions about the solar system. In his middle school class with Teacher Rowena, he has even helped teach lessons about outer space to the other students using the workbook he created in speech. Ariel Hegedus, Villa Speech and Language Pathologist, has been encouraging Jun to follow his passion. "He felt 'shy' to help teach his peers, but 'happy' he did it," Ariel said. "We know there is so

much he wants to learn, and we are working to help him share his thoughts and feelings more consistently with more students and teachers at school."

This article is actually a direct result of Jun sharing what he wants. "During a speech session earlier this year, Jun's friend David came over and showed us an article written about David in the Chirp," Ariel recounted. "I asked Jun if he would like a story like that written about him one day. He said 'Yes' with his iPad. We continued working on his speech goals and at the end of the session, I asked him if he had anything else he wanted to say. He typed 'Get' and I asked, 'Get what?' He responded with 'Get paper.' So I asked Jun, 'You want to have a story written about you in the newspaper?' He immediately and enthusiastically typed 'Yes' on the iPad. So I went straight to the Development Department to tell them about Jun and his desire to be heard!" When Sophia asked Jun how he felt about being in the Chirp like his friends, Jun said: "Yes yes, I feel amazing to be in the magazine. I am a boy who loves to appreciate music and art."

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VILLA ESPERANZA SERVICES

*Where Hope is Hard at Work for Individuals
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March is
National Developmental Disabilities
Awareness Month!

Individuals with intellectual/
developmental disabilities (I/DD)
attend school, volunteer, work and live
in our communities. They are enriching
the lives of the people around them and
bringing joy to others.

If you are interested in learning more
about how individuals with I/DD are
making an impact please contact Villa
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