

# VILLA VIEWS

FALL 2015

The Newsletter  
of St. Joseph's Villa



## BUILDING BRIDGES

Villa students learn career and life lessons through partnership with Habitat for Humanity

*Garland Guion, Villa Career and Transition Specialist (top left) works with students in Dooley School's new Applied Living Classroom.*

**A** new partnership with Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity will help youth at St. Joseph's Villa develop leadership and teamwork skills through real work experience. Students from the Villa's Brook Road Academy, Dooley Center for Alternative Education, Dooley School and Sarah Dooley Center for Autism who participate in our Career and Transition Services (CATS) have joined Richmond Habitat's ReStore work-readiness training program, where they perform jobs tailored to their abilities. As they manage inventory, stock items and clean, among other responsibilities, they have the opportunity to interact with customers and receive

valuable career insights. Students will be supported, supervised and evaluated by Habitat's management team

"Our goal is for the students to learn from constructive feedback given outside the Villa, and apply those lessons to their future careers," said Matthew Kreydatus, Director of the Villa's Career and Transition Services.

On top of building their resumés and business connections, Villa students are learning about community needs and the importance of contributing to those causes. The ReStore is a retail outlet offering furniture, home goods, and home improvement supplies to the public at

greatly reduced prices. All proceeds generated at the ReStore support Richmond Habitat's mission of building homes, communities and hope in the Greater Richmond area. By serving as ReStore participants, students are directly changing the lives of others.

"We are always looking for new ways to engage youth in the mission of Habitat for Humanity," said Whitney Guthrie, Director of Community Engagement at Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity, "We are excited to embark on this new program with St. Joseph's Villa, and hope to continue to grow this partnership for years to come."

*Continued on next page.*

## BUILDING BRIDGES

*(continued from front)*

Students unable to work onsite at ReStore will have the opportunity to participate in Habitat projects on the Villa campus, from creating photo albums for new homebuyers to building flower boxes for Habitat homes. The Villa will also be working on an apprenticeship program in partnership with Richmond Habitat, both at the ReStore and on construction sites.

Even as CATS builds partnerships with local nonprofits, businesses, and universities, the Villa's on-campus work centers continue to provide students with hands-on experience. These centers include a student snack preparation program, recycling program, and campus-wide shredding program where students gain problem solving, communication, and networking skills.

CATS is supported by:

- Altria Companies Employee Community Fund
- Capital One
- Dominion Foundation
- Lowe's
- Mr. & Mrs. E. Claiborne Robins, Jr.
- Share Our Strength and the Virginia No Kid Hungry Campaign

Community partners include:

- Art 180
- University of Richmond
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

## CARING FOR BODY AND MIND

### **Crisis Stabilization Unit finds therapy in yoga**

Project Yoga Richmond has teamed with our Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) for the past year to teach kids how to cope with their emotions through yoga. Yoga activities help offer a holistic approach to treatment by reinforcing the impact of physical health on mental health and increasing self-esteem.

## School supplies drives equip students for successful year

More than 250 Villa students started the school year with a brand new book bag full of supplies thanks to the community's generous donations. Without gifts of pencils, binders, calculators and more, many of our students would not have had access to the essential supplies they need for academic success.

Besides the gift of supplies, our students were given confidence, pride in starting school with something of their own, and the feeling of fitting in with their peers. We are grateful to all our donors and volunteers who helped give our students a strong start to the year:

- Altrusa International, Inc. of the Capital City of Virginia
- Bank of America
- Bon Secours
- Dominion
- Draper Aden Associates
- First Capital Bank
- Fortune Builders
- International Institute of Business Analysis
- Knights of Columbus #12525
- Singlestone
- Virginia Board of Accountancy
- Virginia Commonwealth University Into the Streets Service Plunge



*Volunteers from Dominion help prepare book bags for distribution to students.*

Yoga therapist Carolyn Keller Sells volunteers at the CSU each week. "By the end of each class all the kids seem to have a more peaceful energy," she said. "Just one hour of yoga can begin the transformation from being anxious or depressed to calm and relaxed." Even kids who "don't do yoga" have recognized that it calms them down and say they would do it again.

CSU staff have also engaged in self-care with the help of Project Yoga.

Sells provided the team with a session of "Laughter Yoga" that combines laughter exercises with yoga breathing, bringing more oxygen to the body and increasing energy levels. "Yoga has helped the CSU with team building and emphasized the importance of taking care of ourselves as mental health professionals," said Christa Koshock, Program Manager. The CSU is a 24/7 six-bed facility for children ages 5-17 in mental health crisis serving more than 20 localities.

## A family made stronger: Hannah rises above aggression

**H**annah's friends know her for her big heart and sincere desire to help others—but before coming to St. Joseph's Villa, her caring nature was buried beneath anxiety and depression. Hannah faced bullying from her peers and struggled to keep up in class. She lost her self-esteem and had a hard time forming positive relationships, even at home, where she became violent toward her younger brother as outbursts escalated. When she was diagnosed with mental illness, her family sought help through the Villa's Therapeutic Day Treatment program.

St. Joseph's Villa was already a familiar place to Hannah. When Hannah's family experienced homelessness years earlier, they lived in the Villa's Flagler Home. Although Hannah returned to the Villa for individual treatment, the impact would once again be felt by her entire family. Program clinicians teamed with Hannah's family to create a behavioral plan tailored to her needs. Hannah came to the Villa after school and engaged in activities to build her confidence, social skills and self-control. She also had a specific set of goals to work on at home. Hannah's family and Villa staff stayed in close communication to ensure she was making progress.

Hannah achieved all of her behavioral goals and graduated from the program this past summer. Her relationship with her family improved and she is now trying out for school sports teams. With the help of Villa specialists and the support of her family, Hannah's best qualities have come to light.



Hannah



Photo credit: Paul Bickford, Belltower Pictures

### LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

### **Shooting The Prodigal** **films at the Villa**

We got a behind-the-scenes look at the independent movie *Shooting the Prodigal* as scenes were filmed in the Villa gym in June. Produced by Belltower Pictures, *Shooting the Prodigal* is a comedy about a New York filmmaker helping a Baptist preacher in southern Alabama make a movie about the Prodigal Son.

Visit [shootingtheprodigal.com](http://shootingtheprodigal.com) for more photos and information. Stay tuned for the release date!

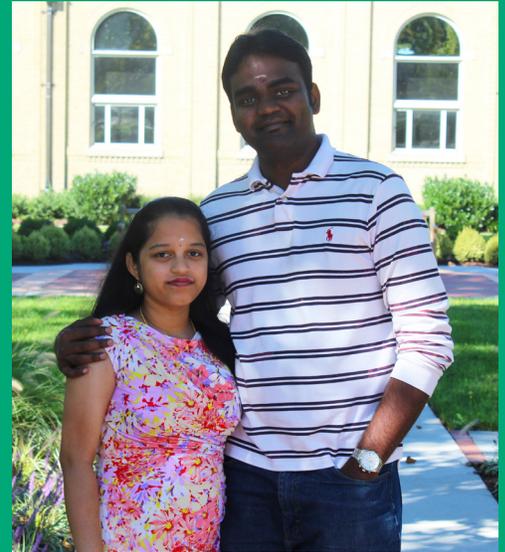
To find out how the Villa's campus facilities can accommodate your next event, please visit our website at [neverstopbelieving.org](http://neverstopbelieving.org) or call 804-553-3226.

# Murugesa family brings spirit of giving from abroad

“Do something for God, and God will help you.”

Balaji Murugesa lives by these words. They were instilled in him by his parents as he witnessed their passion for charitable giving in Chennai, India. When Balaji’s career brought him to Richmond in 2010, he immediately looked for ways to carry on their tradition of philanthropy—particularly by helping children in need.

An internet search for children’s nonprofits led Balaji to discover St. Joseph’s Villa. After participating in a campus tour, he and his wife, Revathi, were overcome with emotion.



*Balaji and Revathi Murugesa*

“We knew right away how precious our gift would be here,” said Balaji. “We had no children at the time, and there were so many children in need at the Villa.” Balaji and Revathi have made ten gifts to the Villa since last year, all while forgoing gifts to each other.

Now expecting a child of their own, Balaji and Revathi plan to continue giving to the Villa both financially and through volunteer opportunities. Balaji and Revathi truly embody the spirit of giving and have changed countless lives at St. Joseph’s Villa by acting upon their desire to help those less fortunate.

## NEW DAY, NEW LOOK

### **Villa buses brightened with graphic wraps**

Since 1834, St. Joseph’s Villa has made every effort to provide children and families with the most nurturing and therapeutic environment possible. We recently extended our efforts to our buses, which have been refreshed with bright colors and graphics that represent our mission to build brighter futures. When those we serve see our belief expressed in their surroundings, they begin to believe in themselves.



*Day Support kids prepare to board the bus for a field trip.*

## Inside the renovated Dooley Center for Alternative Education



Summer brought major changes to the Villa's Dooley Center for Alternative Education. The Center has moved from the Dooley School building to one of the Villa's newly renovated cottages designed with this middle and high school population in mind. With the help of community partners, we equipped the cottage with state-of-the-art educational technology and employment training areas to help them prepare for stimulating and productive futures.

The goal of the Dooley Center for Alternative Education is to help suspended or expelled students learn the importance of making positive choices, and transition back to their public schools.

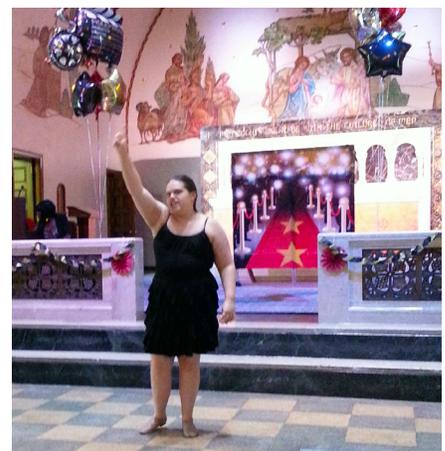
1. New exterior plantings welcome students and visitors.
2. An all-new culinary kitchen donated by Lowe's Home Improvement helps students learn employment and independent living skills.
3. Principal Diana Morris, Admissions Coordinator Hattie Porter, and Teacher Curtis Brandon in the Center's upgraded computer lab.
4. Comfortable classrooms help students learn in a peaceful and nurturing environment.
5. A recreation room provides incentive for students to meet their academic and behavioral goals.

### TIME TO SHINE

## Students soak up the spotlight at Villa Idol

Our students from the Sarah Dooley Center for Autism, Day Support, and Therapeutic Day Treatment continued the annual tradition of taking the chapel stage and sharing their talents with a live audience. Staff, friends and family gathered for Villa Idol to celebrate their children's accomplishments as they watched a fun program full of song and dance performances.

Villa Idol is one of many programs that provide students the opportunity for self-expression and affirmation that they might not get anywhere else. Every year our students revel in the spotlight and perform with determination and self-confidence—qualities that the Villa strives to impart to every child who walks through our doors.



*Christine puts her heart into her Villa Idol performance.*

Students and teachers cheer on the racers at the corner of Brook Rd. & Laburnum Ave.

## LEARNING ON THE GO

### Brook Road Academy joins in Richmond bike race excitement

Richmond, Virginia was put on the international map when it hosted the 2015 UCI Road World Championships in September. When the Elite Men's 33-mile time trials brought racers just blocks from our campus, Brook Road Academy teachers and students gathered among hundreds of Richmonders to watch. Talk about a once in a lifetime learning opportunity!



Angel (center) and Tre' (adjacent right) with the other Roane children.



Flagler transitioned to a community-based rapid re-housing model in July 2013.

## Adopted Flagler Home children embrace ties to the Villa

From a young age, Janice Roane always wanted to adopt children. She was encouraged to follow her dream by her husband, Andrew, so the two of them became foster parents after they moved to Richmond in 1988.

It was not long before Angel and Tre' came into their lives. Angel (3 years) and Tre' (22 months) had been living at the Villa's Flagler Home—an on-campus transitional housing program at the time—until they were abandoned by their mother. After serving as their foster parents for a few years, Janice and Andrew officially brought Angel and Tre' into their family through an open adoption. Janice has maintained her children's connection to the Villa ever since. "I wanted to teach that we always give back to where we come from," she said.

As kids, Angel and Tre' excitedly worked with their parents and involved their church in collecting clothing, toys, dishes and other goods for Villa families in need—and they would always help deliver the donations to the Villa in person.

Today at ages 25 and 22, Angel and Tre' are living successful, independent lives. Angel attended Old Dominion University and hopes to work with youth in juvenile correctional facilities. Tre' works in a naval shipyard in Portland after having served in the U.S. Army. They remain very close to their adoptive parents and call home several times a week.

Janice, now a minister, links her congregation with needed services in the community. St. Joseph's Villa is at the top of her list. In her early days as parent, she herself sought the Villa's therapeutic in-home services for her children and watched them grow into healthy young adults as a result. Another of her children attended the Villa's Sarah Dooley Center for Autism.

"I made sure Angel and Tre' never thought ill of their mother," said Janice. "She may have left them, but she left them in a safe place with people who cared."

# Get to Know Adam Dreyfus Director, Sarah Dooley Center for Autism

Adam came to the Sarah Dooley Center for Autism in 2013 after serving the Commonwealth of Virginia as a Technical Assistance Associate at VCU's Autism Center for Excellence. He graduated from the University of Connecticut with a Bachelor's degree in Language and Child Development and went on to earn his Master's degree in Special Education/ Applied Behavior Analysis from Columbia University's Teachers College. A Board Certified Behavior Analyst, Adam is a published author and has presented international autism education workshops, most recently in Belarus.

**Q: Why did you choose to work at St. Joseph's Villa?**

**A:** I viewed this position as an opportunity to demonstrate that high quality research-based education can be delivered outside of clinical settings. The Villa and the Sarah Dooley Center for Autism are deeply rooted in the community in many ways and are affiliated with public schools, which I found very appealing.

**Q: What inspired you to work in the field of autism education?**

**A:** One of my goals in life is to find the area of greatest need, and match it with my greatest skill. When I decided to transition from my career as a TV producer, I asked myself what it is I do best. I worked with kids almost my whole life, many with special needs and specifically autism. I went back to school for education, earned my Master's in Applied Behavior Analysis, and began my new career in autism education.

**Q: What do you find most rewarding about your work?**

**A:** Teaching a child a skill that opens up their world.

**Q: What is your biggest accomplishment as Sarah Dooley director so far?**

**A:** In a very short time, I believe I built a team of educators that's one of the best in the area.

**Q: Who is your biggest role model?**

**A:** My grandfather worked as a civil rights attorney in Mississippi. He taught me that doing the right thing, even when unpopular, is still the right thing. That lesson drives me to provide education and advocacy for children with autism every day.

**Q: What are your hopes for the school's future?**

**A:** I hope the Sarah Dooley Center for Autism will continue on its upward path of serving the community and working closely with public schools. I see our school helping to train teachers in the public schools, and showing that world-class services for students with severe disabilities is attainable by any school division. I believe in the public school model. Children should be educated in schools closest to their homes. Our goal is to help kids be successful where they live.



Adam Dreyfus

Villa children and families are successful because of the support of our community. If you enjoyed reading about these successes, please consider how you can help St. Joseph's Villa change more lives every day.

**TODAY**

Make a gift to the New Day Fund, the Annual Fund of St. Joseph's Villa, with the enclosed envelope or contribute online at [neverstopbelieving.org](http://neverstopbelieving.org).

**TOMORROW**

Join our Archway Society by providing for the Villa in a bequest or other estate plan. Call 804-553-3220 or go to [neverstopbelieving.org/foundation](http://neverstopbelieving.org/foundation).



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We never stop believing in children and their families.

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## Villa joins Partnership for the Future

Rising high school junior Destiney did not slow down when school let out in June. She instead determined to spend the summer exploring her interests in hopes of discovering a career path to pursue after graduation. Through the nonprofit Partnership for the Future (PFF), Destiney began a three-summer internship at St. Joseph's Villa. PFF connects promising high school students from challenging circumstances with tools and experiences to help them attain a college degree. This is the Villa's first year as a PFF partner and intern site.

In her first summer at the Villa, Destiney further developed her interests in communications and social work. She reflected in a blog post, "The most priceless thing I learned was that in order to be the best at what you do, you have to have all of your heart in it. I've spoken to many people here who are passionate about their work and wouldn't trade their jobs for anything."



Destiney (middle) with Villa staff at the 2015 PFF graduation

