

# VILLA VIEWS

SPRING 2016

The Newsletter  
of St. Joseph's Villa

## DISCOVERING NEW PATHWAYS

**Brook Road Academy's personalized approach to education leads students to build on their unique strengths.**

*Conrad, Brook Road Academy alumnus, returned to the school this year to speak with current students about transitioning to college.*

**C**onrad hit a rough patch in middle school. "I was very introverted, and in my own head a lot," he said. Asperger's syndrome and social anxiety made it hard enough for Conrad to build friendships. To make matters worse, he began to face bullying from his peers.

Between his sense of isolation and the pressures of academics, Conrad decided public school wasn't for him—so he refused to go.

"I didn't think I could ever fit in," said Conrad. "I started having anger problems at home. My mom saw that I needed a

different environment, where teachers would understand the issues I was dealing with."

Brook Road Academy provided the solution they needed. Conrad gained footing in small class sizes, a culture that encourages students to speak freely, and faculty with experience teaching students whose personalities may fall outside of the social "norm." Over time, he came out of his shell and enjoyed success both academically and socially.

"Brook Road Academy gave me the sanctuary I needed to develop in my own way," said Conrad. "I was able to meet

similar-minded people and form some of my strongest friendships. Friends do wonders. I still keep in touch with a lot of them."

Conrad graduated from Brook Road Academy in 2012 and is currently majoring in biology at William and Mary. He plans to move to Japan to study biology and urban planning, and is considering a career in education.

"It all started for me at Brook Road Academy," he said.

Find out what makes our school different at **BrookRoadAcademy.com**.

## Villa welcomes new CFO, Head of Brook Road Academy



### Suzanne Hinton, CFO

Suzanne Hinton comes to St. Joseph's Villa with more than 20 years of accounting, auditing, and consulting experience. Prior to joining the Villa, Hinton served as Controller for the Medical College of Virginia Foundation, following 15 years of public accounting experience with Dixon Hughes Goodman where she served the nonprofit community across numerous public service areas. She is a CPA and a member of the American Institute of CPAs and the Virginia Society of CPAs.



### Jeff Carretto, Head of Brook Road Academy

Jeff Carretto has 12 years of experience in public and private schools. He has worked with a diverse population of both general education students and students with special needs, including students with intellectual disabilities, autism, speech and language impairments and other health impairments. Carretto moved to Richmond from Rochester, NY in 2001. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music Education and a Master's of Education in Educational Leadership, both from Virginia Commonwealth University.

## Villa's Crisis Stabilization Unit named national Runner Up for Innovative Practices Award

The Council on Accreditation (COA) presents the *Innovative Practices Award* to spotlight organizations that bring lasting change to the lives of vulnerable individuals through unique, forward-thinking initiatives. This year, our life-saving Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) will be named runner-up for this national honor at the annual COA Conference in New York City.

The CSU opened in 2012 in partnership with Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA) Region IV as the first facility of its kind in Central Virginia, providing treatment for children in mental health crisis across 23 localities. Since then, the CSU has served more than 500 children and diverted nearly 90% from costly, unnecessary hospitalization.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports that 1 in 5 children in the United States ages 13-18 have, or will have, a serious mental illness. Yet for many, hospitalization for mental illness can be associated with a sense of shame. The Villa's CSU is designed to actively engage children and their families, find what will truly help them in the midst of crisis, and link them to community resources based on their expressed needs.



*The CSU is located on the Villa's 82-acre therapeutic campus.*

Find out more about how the CSU is keeping families in tact at [NeverStopBelieving.org](http://NeverStopBelieving.org).

*"We were both grateful and delighted at the quality of service delivered, all the while maintaining an excellent level of respect and honor with our son. Thank you."*

- Parent of child served by

## Hillary gains independence, outshines expectations through Day Support program

**W**hen Hillary was just six years old, doctors did not expect her to live past her thirteenth birthday. Parents Lisa and David began to feel hopeless after she was diagnosed with autism and a host of other physical and developmental disabilities—until they found St. Joseph’s Villa. “We were really excited about the Villa when we found out about it, because back then there weren’t really a lot of options,” recalled Lisa. Hillary started in the Villa’s Day Support program that year, and she has been coming ever since. Today she is thriving at 22 years old.



*Hillary has attended our after-school Day Support program for the last 16 years.*

Hillary’s early days at the Villa did not come easy. Lisa received frequent calls from staff informing her of severe behavioral issues. However, in the face of any challenge, Lisa remembers that staff offered reassurance and expressed hope that Hillary would be back the next day.

“A lot of places didn’t have that attitude,” said Lisa.

Now an adult, Hillary has successfully transitioned into a group home—something Lisa and David never dreamed would be possible. With years of experience on Villa field trips, she does well in sit-down restaurants and can even use utensils on her own. Her care at the Villa has continued through the newly launched Adult Day Support program.

“They staff really adores Hillary,” said Lisa. “They do everything they can to make her happy.”

## VCU mentors introduce Villa students to college experience

The thought of college can be intimidating and stressful for any high school student. As our students approach life after the Villa, student mentors from Virginia Commonwealth University have been there to provide them with encouragement, support, and a real-life picture of college.

As volunteers through our Career and Transition Services, VCU mentors have led personal campus tours for our students including everything from attending class to eating in the dining hall. Mentors are also helping our students develop work and communication skills that will help them succeed in college and in their future careers. Perhaps most important of all, VCU mentors are helping our students realize that college is attainable.

We thank VCU for their partnership in preparing our kids for life after high school.



*Dooley School and Brook Road Academy students tour the VCU campus.*

# Once-homeless family returns to Villa campus after ten years



*Karen and her sons remark on campus enhancements as they walk the pedestrian avenue.*

Karen knows from personal experience that homelessness can happen to anybody. Nearly a decade ago, despite having a steady job, she and her two sons Mikalyn and Malachi became homeless when apartment renovations raised her monthly rent and left no choice but to vacate.

Prior to experiencing homelessness, Karen had been receiving child care services from the Villa's Lewis Children's Center. Through their fleeting stays in hotels and shelters, she saw St. Joseph's Villa as a place of normalcy for her children.

"The Villa took care of my kids as if I was doing the job myself," she said.

Karen then decided to seek help from the Villa's Flagler Housing & Homeless Services. She says that Flagler helped her build confidence and equipped her with the skills to maintain self-sufficiency. She has remained stably housed ever since.

On Mikalyn's 16th birthday, Karen returned to the Villa with both children for a campus tour. "Everything had changed for the better," she said. "The programs were so great for my family, and I was moved by the things I saw and heard that are happening today." They also had a joyful reunion with Carolyn Seay, who cared for Karen's sons in the child care center and now serves as operations coordinator for Flagler.



*Karen's family reunites with Carolyn Seay*



*For many students, working with animals is a calming and therapeutic experience.*

## **Villa students give back to Richmond animal shelter**

Through our Career and Transition Services (CATS), Villa students began volunteering with Richmond Animal Care and Control in April. Students help the shelter provide care to adoptable pets while learning valuable job skills

and about careers working with animals.

Our CATS staff is always looking for new ways to help our students engage with the community. If you are interested in providing an opportunity, please call Matthew Kreydatus, CATS director, at **804-553-3224**.

## Message from Kathleen Burke Barrett, CEO on children's mental health

*Letter published in the Richmond Times-Dispatch on April 4 and featured as Correspondent of the Day*

On behalf of St. Joseph's Villa, I commend the Virginia General Assembly for appropriating increased funds for children's mental health services. Thanks to advocacy efforts by Voices for Virginia's Children and partner organizations, much-needed psychiatric and crisis stabilization services for children will expand throughout the Commonwealth.

The prevalence of mental illness is not going away. Voices for Virginia's Children reports that 130,000 children in Virginia live with a serious mental illness. That's enough to fill the Richmond Coliseum eleven times. Perhaps even more alarming is that the average delay between the onset of symptoms and treatment is eight years for children and teens, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

In my work at St. Joseph's Villa, I see how early intervention and crisis services are critical for keeping families intact and ultimately saving lives. I am also greatly heartened by the General Assembly's steps to see mental health as an important issue. The needs our children and families are experiencing today are profound, and they deserve the opportunity to get help to achieve all life has to offer.

While this increased funding is a great step forward, it is just one of many more that are needed to ensure all children have the support they need to grow into healthy, productive adults. We are excited that Virginia is being set on course for a more promising future.

Kathleen Burke Barrett  
CEO, St. Joseph's Villa

### Villa's Flagler Housing & Homeless Services named Best Housing Program in Virginia

Flagler was recognized for its successful rapid re-housing services at the annual Governor's Housing Conference with the Virginia Housing Award for Best Housing Program in the state. Nearly 800 housing advocates, providers and policy makers attended the conference this year.

In a press release about the awards, Governor Terry McAuliffe said,



*Flagler team with Susan Dewey, Executive Director of VHDA (right)*

“Creating a stable place for our residents to live is a key component in our efforts to build a new Virginia economy. These housing awards recognize outstanding and innovative efforts in crafting effective solutions for



*Kathleen Burke Barrett*

the Commonwealth's complex array of housing needs. I applaud the winners for the great work they are doing.”

## Brook Road Academy students discover career opportunities at local music studio

Many students and faculty at our Brook Road Academy share a passion for music, prompting a field trip to Richmond's In Your Ear recording studio. Students had the opportunity to learn about the music directly from composer and studio owner Carlos

Chafin, who introduced career opportunities in scoring soundtracks, operating studio equipment, and recording and editing live music.

In Your Ear has recorded soundtracks and voice overs for major movies and TV shows, including Pirates of the Caribbean, Gladiator, Family Guy and Law and Order, as well as Grammy-winning artists and bands. Students even got to watch a live recording as Head of

Academy Jeff Carretto performed on the piano.



Students in studio with Carlos Chafin (right).

## When Caring Isn't Enough

*Commentary by Adam Dreyfus, Board Certified Behavior Analyst and director of the Sarah Dooley Center for Autism at St. Joseph's Villa.*

When people ask me what drew me to the field of autism education, I remember JD. He was the first child with autism I that I was able to reach. When I met JD I learned that he could speak, but he only spoke in phrases taken from Thomas the Tank Engine videos. In an attempt to connect with him, his parents had converted their basement into a huge play area filled with trains. Train tables. Trains on the TV. Train blankets. There seemed to be no connection to the larger world.

JD didn't make eye contact and often engaged in intense tantrums for no reason. He tolerated my presence but would become upset if I picked up a particular train or moved a track. Other times he was fine with me interacting. I could never tell one time from another, and he could not let me know.

One day I noticed he was holding his stomach and was slightly hunched over. It looked like he had an upset stomach. Not long before, we had watched a Thomas video in which Thomas expressed not feeling well by saying, "My boiler is full." I pointed to JD's tummy and said, "Your boiler is full." He looked up and at me and for the first time our eyes locked. I repeated myself, "Your boiler is full." Maintaining eye contact he said, "My boiler is full." It was the first moment we truly connected.

Although we know more about the disorder today than we used to, teachers and parents can still feel frustration when trying to get through to a child with autism. In the most severe cases, the child cannot speak or communicate in a way the parents and caregivers understand, they appear to have little desire to socialize, and they can frequently respond by getting upset at people's attempts to interact with them. This can be devastating to loved ones.

While there is no "cure" for autism, research-based strategies derived from Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) can help. We live in a messy, chaotic, unpredictable world, and the goal of ABA is to help children develop communication and social skills to help them operate in society. The underlying philosophy is that every child has a way to communicate. As the director of a program offering ABA treatment, I see the positive impact we can have on families. Every day at the Villa's Center for Autism we are seeing children speak their first words, make their first friends and learn behaviors that will help them prepare for the fullest, most independent lives possible as adults.

**An Op-Ed by Dreyfus was published in the Richmond Times-Dispatch on March 27.**





*Career and Transition Services student grows watermelons in the Villa greenhouse.*

Since 1834, St. Joseph's Villa has helped children overcome seemingly impossible challenges and grow into healthy, productive adults. Nearly 3,000 children and families will benefit from your generosity today, but what about the countless others who will rely on Villa programs in years to come?

By making a gift to St. Joseph's Villa through your will, you are ensuring that future generations will have access to groundbreaking services that help them reach their full potential. All it takes to get started is a conversation—you may be surprised at how easy it is to make a bequest or other type of planned gift.



**Contact us to learn more about establishing your legacy at St. Joseph's Villa. Please call 804-553-3220 or visit [NeverStopBelieving.org/Foundation](http://NeverStopBelieving.org/Foundation) today.**



### **Lighting It Up Blue for World Autism Day**

Observed annually on April 2, World Autism Day was adopted by the United Nations nearly a decade ago to help raise awareness of autism as a growing global health priority. This year we joined thousands of organizations in the international "Light It Up Blue" campaign by Autism Speaks. We shined a blue light on our chapel for World

Autism Day in honor of individuals and families everywhere who are affected by autism.

St. Joseph's Villa has provided education and care to children and families facing autism for more than 30 years. Our programs are designed to help students with autism build life skills that will enable them to engage with their community, and live as fully and independently as possible.

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**Brook Road Academy graduate  
recalls how the school changed his life**

**NATIONAL HONORS**

**Innovative practices of Crisis  
Stabilization Unit to be recognized  
by national Council on Accreditation**

**GROWING UP WITH  
THE VILLA**

**Day Support client of 16 years is  
exceeding the hopes of her parents**

We never stop believing in children and their families.

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**Collegiate School students provide week of  
service to Sarah Dooley Center for Autism**

**Collegiate School's Community  
Engagement Week was a very  
special time for our Center for  
Autism students.**

**Thirteen freshmen volunteers  
spent five full school days  
assisting our students from  
kindergarten all the way up to  
high school. Collegiate students  
split up among the Center's  
grade levels, and chose to stay  
with one classroom for the entire  
week so that they could really get  
to know each student.**

**This is the first year St. Joseph's  
Villa has served as a volunteer  
site for Collegiate's Community**

**Engagement Week, and it was  
an enriching experience for all  
involved. We thank Collegiate for  
their partnership and for the care  
which their students gave to our  
school.**



*Mitchell and Tucker bond with our  
Career and Transition Services students.*

