

SOCIAL CAPITAL

HOUSING
CORPORATION
OF
AMERICA

2013



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SOCIAL CAPITAL 2013

Written and designed by Nuri Amanatullah



Strumming Away

Sounds Like

Paradise

Quietly travelling through the halls of Stevenson Manor, it starts as a simple pluck of the string. A whimsical strum. A playful note. As it all comes together, the undeniably familiar melody of "Over the Rainbow" floats to recognition. A timeless song about dreams, aspirations and someplace else. It is familiar, but oddly new. It's lighter. It's loftier.

It's being played on a ukulele.

A cross between a guitar and a banjo, the ukulele is a four-stringed instrument with a standard length of just twenty-one inches. Allegedly brought to Hawaii in the late 1800s by a wave of Portuguese immigrant cabinet-makers, its petite nature makes it the perfect instrument for delicate hands and gentle grips. Just ask Molly Laurel, instructor of Stevenson Manor's ukulele music program.

"I think it's so fun and accessible for everyone because there are only 4 strings," explains Molly. "And some of the chords are one finger, so even if you don't have an octave span or you're not a virtuoso you can play right off the bat."

Lifelong musician, Molly played piano her entire life and frequently performed professionally in musical theater. She fell in love with the guitar while performing in a rock show in New York. Shortly thereafter, when she got involved in a bluegrass musical based out of Michigan, she began to play the "uke." The instrument's growing popularity drew the interest of older generations as well.

"My parents actually took some ukulele classes on a Hawaiian cruise and loved it. The cruise director taught ukulele and they played 'Tiny Bubbles.' And that's kind of how we got the idea to teach it at Stevenson."

Classes met twice a week at this 61-unit senior community in the heart of Hollywood. As the ukulele was unknown to most residents, classes began with very introductory group lessons, the first element of which, was strumming.

"I didn't realize that that was going to be difficult for people," Molly admits. "I thought the chords were going to be the difficult part. We worked on air strumming, like air ukulele. I got everybody these funny felt picks. You don't use a regular pick for ukulele. You use a felt one. It makes it even more fun. You have this tiny little instrument and this giant pick. We talked about how to strum and by the end of the first class we played 'Row, Row Your Boat' as a group."

As students improved their strumming technique they began to learn different chords and tuning, an integral part of playing any musical instrument. Participants progressed at different speeds, so Molly often split them into smaller groups, spending one-on-one time with each participant. The predominance of ESL students made communication challenging, but in the end, it motivated an unexpected teaching aid that would garner a new exuberance from her students: YouTube.

"A lot of the residents speak Spanish or Russian and in fact, I don't speak any Russian. But they know rock music. I pulled up some YouTube clips of The Animals singing 'House of the Rising Sun' and everybody nodded in agreement. I thought, 'Okay. This is a start.' We've been playing that together either with the YouTube video or with me singing so we all work on the same stuff."

The residents of Stevenson embraced this enhanced learning environment in which they received tailored, individualized tutelage, but could also reference videos and songs online in their independent research at home, just as if it were homework.

"I'll bring things in and they bring things in too. I brought in 'Amazing Grace' and [one resident] found a video of Elvis singing it in the right key so we played it with the Elvis video that he found."



Instructor Molly Laurel helps Stevenson resident Alexander Verpukhovskiy.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable stories is of a particular resident who confided in Molly that she had not left the building since 2004.

"It's a big deal for her to come to class. She gets really freaked out, but she is doing very well. She knows all of her chords and she practices, she watches the videos and researches. She feels like she can't leave yet, but it's a step towards leaving. She says that now that she sees ukulele everywhere on TV. She loves listening to her Hawaiian station. It was overwhelming to hear that because I would have never imagined that that would have been the case, that me teaching her 'Tiny Bubbles' is helping her to get outside, but that's what she said."

And the surprises did not stop there.

"She has been newly introduced to the computer and she has been looking up YouTube videos of the ukulele. She found Pandora and is now listening to Hawaiian radio. I think it has really expanded her world view of music and her view of herself in the world of ukulele."

As much as Molly has influenced her students, she admits that it has been a reciprocal relationship.

"I was impressed with the amount of research they had done on their own and their amount of enthusiasm. They had found all of these teach yourself ukulele videos on YouTube and even one of a big group of people playing 'Under the Boardwalk' on the ukulele so we all played it together, with this virtual group. I'm inspired by them... I play my ukulele more often too, I go to the park and play the ukulele outside and then I get to come here and say 'look what I learned and I'm going to teach it to you'. I watch what they are doing and see how I can make it a little bit better, a little easier on them."

Such an engaging learning environment is rare to come by



Stevenson resident Dinorah Barroso strums away

and the vision of a senior surfing the web for music videos, ukulele clutched in one hand, mouse in the other may not be the first image that comes to mind when thinking of resident services; however, music's power to connect with people cannot be underestimated. It can transport us back in time and to far away places, if only for a little bit.

"A lot of residents have a music background from back in the day and this is regenerating their love for music in a new way. One woman has arthritis so she can't play the trombone anymore, but she can play one chord of the ukulele and have that again," explains Molly. "To have them all in their separate apartments, but all listening to Pandora Hawaiian radio station is pretty awesome and different and hopefully exciting for them in a way they did not expect."

"A lot of the residents speak Spanish or Russian and in fact, I don't speak any Russian. But they know rock music. I pulled up some YouTube clips of The Animals singing 'House of the Rising Sun' and everybody nodded in agreement. I thought, 'Okay. This is a start.'"



OPEN FORUM

MATT KASSEL & ARBOR GARDENS



Arbor Gardens Manager Matt Kassel

“**B**

uilding a community is putting responsibility on the residents,” Matt Kassel states emphatically. “Getting everybody involved in a collective understanding that your neighbor is not just someone you live next to, but someone you can say hi to, talk to rather than going to the manager every time.” As the Arbor Gardens manager,

Matt was in just the position to put this philosophy to work. While looking around this 116-unit senior community, it’s easy to say that he was on to something.

Open since 2005, Arbor Gardens is nestled just off of the newly revitalized Lancaster BLVD. With dining, shopping and entertainment opportunities right outside their doorsteps, residents are well-situated to lead an active lifestyle. But as it turns out, it is what happens within the walls of Arbor Gardens that has helped foster such a strong sense of community.

Matt cites a very literal yet nonetheless foundational example that unites this tightly knit community. “It’s a courtyard building. You are inside and outside at the same time. It’s so important. Many of these seniors don’t get to be outside as much as they like due to limitations. They can feel safe here and it allows everybody to be able to be outside and experience what they otherwise may not.”

Matt, who worked in the Napa wine industry just prior to Ironwood Management, learned about it and InSite Development from a family friend.

“I really enjoyed hearing about what they did with both low-income housing and the opportunities that they provided on the business side—especially a burgeoning senior population that needs this housing.”

He knew he wanted to work in the public sector, and so he accepted a position at Arbor Court, another senior community in

the InSite portfolio.

In 2010, Matt made his way to Gardens just a few blocks away. He was almost immediately held to high standards, but found that in meeting them, his residents would follow suit. One way Matt was able to maintain those standards was by holding weekly meetings, which functioned as more than gripe and gossip sessions.

“Instead of holding it every few months, I let them know what’s going on weekly and pass along what I expect of them,” explains Matt. “You can nip things in the bud right away if you tell them that you are holding them responsible. I tell them this community is going to be as great as the sum of its parts and you are those parts. They can shape and sculpt a community that they want.”

And they have done so.

With the help of volunteer April Joy, Arbor Gardens enjoys a myriad range of activities such as potlucks, game tournaments, and arts and crafts projects to name a few.

“Having HCA and Ironwood there to supplement programming is great. Fridays with April are not projects that require money or if so, very little. It’s a great program, especially to get seniors on a fixed income to look outside of the box. To have them put their goals on a vision board, setting a goal, going outside their comfort zone is not easy. She made it so their goals were attainable.”

Since our interview Matt has moved on from Ironwood and now manages a property with TSA. His philosophy of a community built by the residents for the residents carries on strongly in his absence.

“THIS COMMUNITY IS GOING TO BE AS GREAT AS THE SUM OF ITS PARTS AND YOU ARE THOSE PARTS.”

Yoga is Union



Yoga teaches us to cure what may not be endured and endure what cannot be cured. And that does not only go for the body, it also goes for the mind."

That is the philosophy of Klara Bella, yoga instructor at Canyon Creek in Calabasas.

Klara's story does not begin with yoga at all, but rather with ballet. The Paris native started dancing at the age of five. She eventually moved to the Big Apple for new professional opportunities. After a few years however, she was sidelined with a leg injury, which all but ended her dance career.



Yoga at Canyon Creek



Canyon Creek Yoga Instructor Klara Bella

"I was really lost. I was dancing since I was five... When they told me that I didn't know what to do with my life," recounts Klara.

On a whim, she decided to try yoga. Her first class was a large, disorganized hive of people, moving to the soundtrack of loud techno music and an instructor barking, "downward facing dog!" Undeterred by the spectacle, Klara gave it one more fateful shot. And indeed, her second class, the polar opposite of her first, lit a genuine interest. She has been pursuing yoga ever since.

Now a certified instructor and Angelino, Klara teaches an intimate group of dedicated Canyon Creek residents once a week. Though they have a bit more life experience under their belts, Klara's own experience with injury has uniquely prepared her for the instruction of senior-friendly yoga.

"My first priority is safety, I am very technical. That's just my nature. When I am teaching beginners and seniors I want to give them the right way to do it. That's very important. That's how they can enjoy their body."

Communication, Klara explains, is also essential to the safe practice of yoga.

"I always ask if they have an ache or concern at the beginning of class. I find out what is bothering them so that I am aware of it. Because sometimes when people do classes, even people my age, we push—especially when we know people are looking."

Watching eyes are a particular challenge at Canyon Creek, where classes take place in a community area. But for Klara, it's just another opportunity to practice

meditation and mental acuity, necessary prerequisites to proper movement and positioning.

"I generally try to guide my students to a state of relaxation first. I start by making them notice their breath because the breath is what controls the mind. We work on breath techniques, which also brings their focus in. They listen to my words, close their eyes and they have a moment to just put their attention on what they are doing."

What follows is a progression of exercises that begin on the floor, where students support themselves on their hands and knees for balance. They slowly move up to a standing position, towards what Klara refers to as the "peak" or "top pose", and then repeat the exercises in the opposite order back down towards the floor.

"It's like an art," describes Klara, "but there is logic behind it anatomically speaking."

That delicate balance between art and logic seems to have worked its way into students' daily lives. Klara recounts the growth of one student in particular:

"She always pushes herself and she also has vertigo and higher blood pressure. She wants to impress and do everything. We have been working on her breath techniques and she told me, 'I started doing that breath thing when I wake up and it has been helping'."

And as much as she has helped the seniors of Canyon Creek, Klara admits that they have helped her as well.

"They have improved so much. And we have an exchange. Being a teacher is being an eternal student. I have learned a lot of things from teaching them... They not only give me purpose as a teacher, but as a human being. They feel better in their bodies or they tell me they are practicing their breath techniques and their blood pressure went down. For me, to know that I made a small difference in someone's life makes me happy."

"Yoga teaches us to cure what may not be endured and endure what cannot be cured. And that does not only go for the body, it also goes for the mind."



Tutor Jasmeen Kaur assists Magnolia resident Alhamis Mayanja

Global Classroom

A new kind of after school programming flourishes at Magnolia Villas

A burgeoning arts district, North Hollywood (or Noho for short) is more than a series of strip malls and high-rise condos. Much like its parent city of LA, it is a veritable melting pot. And perhaps no other community demonstrates this quite like Magnolia Villas. A microcosm of North Hollywood itself, the property boasts an ethnically diverse population that is primarily Bangladeshi, but also inclusive of African-American, Latino and Middle Eastern cultures.

Who better to spearhead after school programming than Jasmeen Kaur. Fluent in English, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, Jasmeen's lingual acuity has helped break down what would perhaps be the largest barrier for many individuals dealing with a population as diverse as Magnolia's—language.

"Ever since I started the Homework Club, I have been knocking on doors introducing myself as the new teacher," Jasmeen explains.

"A lot of residents are from Bangladesh. I can speak to them in Hindi... [The parents] were very comfortable sending their kids to me. The first day we had about fifteen students, which was a great turnout."

The success of Jasmeen's Homework Club has been a constant ever since. A student of history at California State University Northridge (CSUN), Jasmeen has made this subject an integral part of the arts and crafts component that defines the Homework Club as a bona fide enrichment program as opposed to a tutoring service alone.

"I thought of incorporating history and arts and crafts together since history can be boring for many young children," explains Jasmeen. "Ancient Romans and ancient Egyptians had math, geometry and hieroglyphics. We wrote our names in hieroglyphics, created Roman shields that the Spartans used and we also studied geography and maps... They created their own [restaurant] menus and they charged their own prices for items, but the numbers had to be in Roman numerals. They came up and presented their menus."

We did a lot of presentations to get their confidence up."

Effectively turning each activity into a learning experience makes the Magnolia Homework Club not only an educational environment, but a place of cultural exchange as well. On the day of my visit, the activity was "World Flags" for which each participant painted the flag of his/her native country. Jasmeen put on some music for the exercise.

"I usually try to bring world music so they get in touch with different types of music. French, African, Persian, Mexican — have them open their minds. It's an opportunity and a great honor for me to teach these kids about their countries. We live in LA—a cultural melting pot. That's one of the reasons I do activities like world flags and the music. A lot of these kids are from different backgrounds and I encourage them to say something about their countries. When they finish their homework we chat about what happened in their country, why they are here."

Surely few after school programs boast the breadth and variety that Jasmeen's Homework Club offers, but it is called Homework Club after all and her primary focus is the continued academic success of her pupils. She directs students to work on homework for an hour plus, then mandates at least fifteen to twenty minutes of reading. Only then, and only with good behavior throughout are they allowed to participate in the arts and crafts portion of the program.



Tatar Jasmeen Kaur helps Magnolia resident Mahi Arshay with homework.

"The number one rule that I have is discipline and respect for other students," states Jasmeen. "When they don't listen they get a penalty. If they get three strikes, they don't get a prize at the end of the day. There is no yelling and they can't raise their voice. If I am talking, no one else talks. There is no talking over each other. I had to teach them to stop talking and listen... They learn the study skills and the habits and especially, they listen. It's so important to listen."

In so doing, Jasmeen ensures that her students develop the skills they need to be successful in and outside of the classroom environment. Some students already recognize the importance of a good education. Jasmeen cites the example of a Ugandan family that makes the most of their time in the Homework Club.

"They look forward to coming here," says Jasmeen. "They are very active in their grade level. Actually, they are ahead of their grade level. I was very proud when one of the brothers named Abdul came here and picked up a book and just sat there reading in the corner. I asked, 'Don't you want to go play outside with the other kids?' He replied, 'My dad told me to read as much as possible, because in America you can't do anything without an education.' That's one of the reasons they came here, to escape political and civil wars. They are refugees. When I teach those four kids it means the world to me. They listen. They give me eye contact. When we did arts and crafts, they told me they never did that in their country or in school. To hear that and be able to provide it for them makes me very happy."

While the path towards academic success can be long and winding, Jasmeen has already seen results.

"Some of the kids now have gotten older. They know the study skills I have taught them and they don't come back. I ask them why and they say, 'I get the homework now, I just do it.'"

While she admits she is sad to see them go, Jasmeen explains that her ultimate goal is for them to learn their subject matter and feel comfortable enough to complete their homework without the Homework Club. "They do come back for the arts and crafts," says Jasmeen smiling.



Magnolia resident Rebecca Rivas paints her art project.

"I usually try to bring world music so they get in touch with different types of music. French, African, Persian, Mexican -have them open their minds. It's an opportunity and a great honor for me to teach these kids about their countries. We live in LA-a cultural melting pot."



CREATURES



OF CLAY

CREATING A CERAMIC ZOO

As an instructor for three (soon to be four) HCA-InSite sculpture courses, I am floored to think about how far the program has come since its inception.

When I came on board halfway through the first sculpture program, Talking Heads, I wasn't sure what to expect. The job posting for "Assistant Sculpture Instructor" was descriptive, but also nebulous, bringing further intrigue to the position. It was my first ever gig with HCA and InSite Development and I assumed it would be like a studio class setting, but perhaps without the critique or grades. Having taken many studio classes in school, I was familiar with the collaborative environment and the fluid nature of idea exchanges when working in a shared space. However, nothing could have prepared me for the journey ahead.

On my first day with Talking Heads I was charged with helping to bring order to a room full of kids brimming with excitement and energy, almost too frenetic to contain. Clay was smeared all over the tables and floors, not to mention everyone's clothing. We worked at finding form and building shapes and creating robust artifacts from virtually nothing but a single image. We found order in the chaos.

“
We spent the first five weeks of the course without even touching clay. We were refining our design sensibilities and concepts the same way an animation or movie studio would when designing creatures. By the end of those five weeks, students were itching to sink their fingers into the clay.
”

Fast forward to *Creatures of Clay*, our third sculpture venture. Though still chaotic -as any room of children and young adults given a handful of clay will be - my co-instructor Linda DeJesus and I found a way to forge works of art from these local youth. Perhaps more importantly, we also found a way for the same sampling of youth to be part of something larger and exhibit their work in a museum, a dream for any artist, aspiring or professional.

The *Creatures of Clay* sculpture program was initially designed to build upon concepts and production methods established during the previous two sculpture programs, *Talking Heads* and *Clayhouse*. For Linda, an Art History major from UC Berkeley, *Clayhouse* was her first sculpture experience. It was, as she explains, similar to mine.

“At the time I wasn’t really clear on too many of the details of the position, but thought it sounded interesting and felt like it could be something I would enjoy. A few months later I got a call back from Nicole [Weinstock] and pretty soon after I began working on the sculpture programs at Village Pointe and the Arbor at Palmdale.”

After a successful campaign with *Clayhouse*, both Linda and I were eager to start planning the third sculpture class and began brainstorming ideas. The idea was to effectively combine our existing sculpture knowledge into the biggest and best sculpture program to date. Utilizing the framework from the previous courses, we had a battle-tested recipe for success that enabled participants to focus more on the design process without being bogged down with the more weighty aspects of a course that is, for all intensive purposes, collegiate level.

The idea of creating a clay bestiary or a ceramic zoo seemed not only fun to create, but also exhibition-worthy. Beginning with an animal of interest, the sculptors of both the Arbor at Palmdale and Village Pointe communities were first tasked to do as much research as possible about the animal they decided to sculpt.

They recorded all of their findings in their own “sketchbooks,” including images and text describing anatomy, locomotion, habitat and other pertinent details.

In previous sculpture classes, we had printed image references from the Internet and that sufficed as source material went. For *Creatures of Clay*, Linda and I both thought it would help not only for design, but also retention purposes if students were more emotionally invested in their projects. Choosing an animal of their choice was the first step. Rather than choosing to sculpt a *Spongebob* or *Ironman* replica, which they may grow out of in a few years, we opted to focus the class’s entire subject matter on a more enduring subject and historical muse: the animal kingdom. Students became ever more committed to their project through a thorough investigation of their chosen animal and the responsibility of its care throughout the process. They had to ensure that it did not get damaged, dehydrated or fall apart.

We spent the first five weeks of the course without even touching clay. We were refining our design sensibility and concepts the same way an animation or movie studio would. By the end of those five weeks, students were itching to sink their fingers into the clay that was sitting on display on the countertop, a constant reminder of things to come. When all designs were finalized, form-finding was underway. Using plumbing pipe, each sculpture began as a rough skeleton of their creature. By bulking this skeleton up with crumpled newspaper and masking tape, each student developed a rough shape for their creature, an armature. This armature was then covered with clay, the specifics of which were already mapped out in their sketchbook.



An Arbor at Palmdale resident sculpture awaits the opening of the *Creatures of Clay* Show at the Museum of Art and History in Lancaster, CA.



Varying textures and degrees of detail help each piece come to life

Since each ceramic piece had to be fired in a kiln at a temperature reaching 2000 degrees Fahrenheit, there was a certain protocol that needed to be followed to ensure safe passage from the creator's table, to the kiln and to the table once more. Despite the extra five weeks of preparation, there were challenges as there are with any class of this scale.

"I think the most challenging aspect of the program was only having two instructors for the number of participants," recalls Linda. "It was hard to make sure everyone was getting attention and sometimes it felt like you could get stuck with one person for an extended period of time. It was a challenge to try and give your time equally to everyone."

In addition to a busy studio setting, the medium itself presented its own challenges. Variables such as thickness of clay impact a sculpture's reaction to the firing process. If a section is too thick, any trapped moisture can cause cracking or breaking in the high heat as the water expands. If a section is too thin, it may break under the weight of the completed sculpture. To ensure a 100% success rate we had all students perform depth checks by plunging chopsticks or pens into various portions of their form. We measured how thick each portion was and only when it was at the right depth could students begin to create the finer details such as eyes, horns or hair. Allowing the students themselves to gauge and correct their own work helped further instill a sense of ownership for each project.

By the end of the program we had achieved our ceramic zoo: twenty five sculptures of beasts of varying sizes, shapes and colors including seals, pumas, a spider and even a few mythological creatures.

To properly conclude the behemoth program we needed the exhibition to be as ambitious as the program itself. After some negotiations, we were honored to have all work exhibited in the new MOAH (Museum of Art and History) centrally located on Lancaster BLVD. The chance for these artists - some as young as seven years old - to display their first sculpture in a museum was affirmation of the highest order. It was the validation that their work was not only good, but also relevant to the current growth and redevelopment of the Antelope Valley.

“ I know it is not always easy for people to make it to museums so this program, in a way, brings the museum to them. ”



A Village Pointe resident's work in progress

Many of the stalwart aspects of HCA programming were evident as well: a robust financial literacy component in which two Kiva entrepreneurs were microfinanced, a payout earned by each participant upon program completion, and, of course, stunning works of art conceived and produced by members of the community.

Linda, who is now enrolled in the Museology masters degree program at the University of Washington, knows the value in providing such programs and opening new doors for any potential artists.

"It provides a creative outlet for participants. I think this is also an important program because it exposes people to arts education. I know it is not always easy for people to make it to museums so this program, in a way, brings the museum to them. I also feel that the students gain a sense of confidence and importance about themselves through the whole process and the work they create."

For me, it is always an honor to be able to participate out in the "field" and to be privy to such uncanny creations and processes first hand. With each subsequent sculpture class, it seems that the pieces get more elaborate—a testament to the evolutionary nature of the course. And for each returner who participates in the class we have two new participants bringing with them fresh insights and challenges. Sculpture is and continues to be a one-of-a-kind program that is unparalleled in the world of resident services and rivals courses taught at most institutions, public or private. The real affirmation for me however, comes from those who have been impacted by sculpture the most: the students. Each time I step on to either property at least one sculpture graduate or someone who heard of the program or saw pictures asks me when we will be starting again. While not exactly a measurable outcome, it lets me know that we have the ability to affect change, one bag of clay at a time.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to start preparing for our next sculpture class.



Sculpture instructors Linda DeJesus and Nuri Amanatullah



Arbor at Palmdale resident Jeweliette Soto poses with her mother next to her sculpture



BEYOND the BRUSH

PAINTING AT STEVENSON MANOR

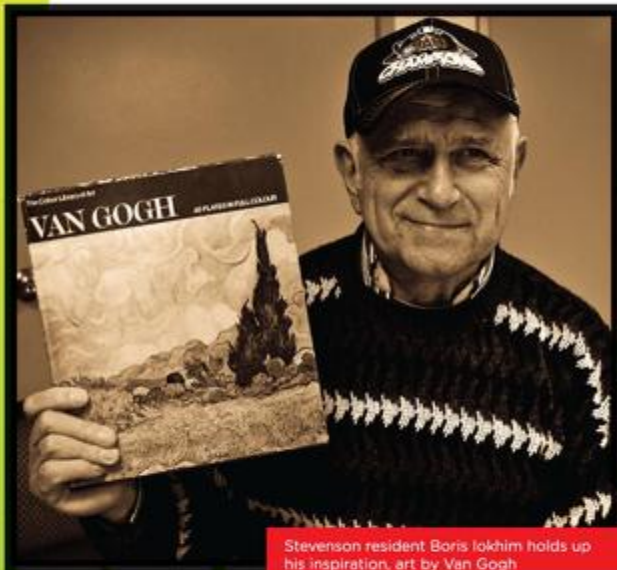


Art Director Hannah Cassell helps resident Dinorah Barroso with portrait painting

"If you hear a voice within you say 'you cannot paint,' then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced."

The above quote, credited to the eccentric master Vincent Van Gogh, speaks to our natural tendency to shy away from that which we do not know. So many times I have heard people tell me that they can't draw a straight line to save their lives. In response, I usually tell them that very few artists I know can do so, even with the aid of a ruler. Encouraging people to draw, paint, or do anything artistic for that matter is one thing, but to actually get them to take that plunge, to pick up a brush or pencil is another thing entirely.

Enter Hannah Cassell.



Stevenson resident Boris Iokhim holds up his inspiration, art by Van Gogh

Her penchant for creativity knows no bounds. Whether working on her own pieces, or helping others create works of art, Hannah emphasizes the importance of art in all aspects of her life. Stemming from her own interests and unbridled passion, Hannah has been enriching the lives of the seniors at Stevenson Manor in Hollywood for nearly two years, teaching them to use painting and other art forms as a medium of expression regardless of skill level or prior experience.

Perhaps it is fitting then that we meet in the shelter of LACMA's sculpture garden. The community garden, while on the museum premises, is free for art patrons visiting the museum or denizens who just happen to be out on a stroll along the bustling thoroughfare that is Wilshire Boulevard.

Hannah and I sit down and catch up in the garden after a trip through LACMA's current exhibition, *In Wonderland: the Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*. The trip was organized by Hannah, who also works at LACMA, as a field trip of sorts for Stevenson residents. And much like LACMA's community garden, the goal of Hannah's art program at Stevenson is to engage those acclimated to the arts as well as those who are curious, but may never have held a paintbrush.

Such trips (there have been a few) serve as further exposure to concepts and art styles Hannah introduces in her class, brewing both inspiration and creativity for seniors who may be reluctant to try something new.

Hannah, who previously facilitated arts and crafts with the youth at Magnolia Villas, draws comparisons between the two while acknowledging the challenges in facilitating activities for seniors.

"It's very different [than teaching children], but in some ways it's very similar," explains Hannah. Kids have less inhibition than seniors. It takes seniors a long time to get involved in the arts, but when they do it's such a lovely atmosphere there. It's like a family."

Whereas facilitating arts for youth is chock full of unbounded excitement and energy, one could argue that teaching seniors can be a bit more subdued.

"It's a different kind of pace. It's slower. You have to take your time with things. You have to be more sensitive in how you are with them. What you say, what you do. What they are capable of and what they are not. I had a whole curriculum planned and it all went out the window during week one."

High expectations are common - almost a prerequisite - amongst individuals as talented and passionate as Hannah. And although progress was a bit slower than anticipated out of the gates, her arts facilitation at Stevenson has become a staple program at this Hollywood property.

"I just want them to try each angle," she explains. "One of my original intentions was to link art with memories of their past. I love portraits. I wanted them to find old photographs and try to paint them. We looked up different artists and different styles of portraiture."

To help break down the barriers of hesitation that hold back many beginning painters, Hannah immersed her students in examples of past masters and periods.

"Basically, I purchased several art books. I started by copying. That seemed less daunting - to copy something rather than having nothing to go off of. We looked through books, they looked at things they liked... I don't think there's anything wrong in copying. When they do it, it doesn't turn out like the real thing. It's their interpretation of it... It's their own thing."

"I don't think there's anything wrong in copying. When they do it, it doesn't turn out like the real thing. It's their interpretation of it... It's their own thing."



Stevenson resident Ron Moreno stands by his work

teaches English and computer literacy classes.

"Students were all at different levels," explains Hannah of her ESL participants. "I was teaching English specifically for conversation, not for grammar. I just wanted them to talk."

Tying two programs together, Hannah sometimes incorporates art terms into her ESL classes, such as mood and coloring, as she did before their LACMA trip. "A few of them are actually into art as well. They were looking at Max Ernst's *The Kiss* and surrealism asking, 'What is this?'"

And perhaps most importantly, ESL serves as a time for interaction and cultural exchange, where the learning is not exclusive

And while Hannah's painting classes may draw a small crowd, grand things have come from each brush stroke her students apply to the canvas.

"I have one resident, Dinorah, who knocked out a Renoir within one session," exclaims Hannah. "She is crazy good for somebody who had never painted before. And now she loves it. She has found the passion that she didn't think or know she had."

Painting isn't the only way Hannah has been able to make an impact at Stevenson. In addition to painting, felting, clay sculpting and jewelry making, Hannah also

to the students.

"It's an hour where they can talk and speak in English and they've told me that pretty much the only time they speak in English is to me. They don't use it with their families. Their grandchildren do, but they continue speaking Russian and Spanish to their grandchildren. They want to hold on to that... I learn lots of things about them. Learning the difference in mentality for example, how it is in Russia versus England. I learn loads and I love it."

As for Hannah's computer class, she covers the basics: computer literacy, Internet navigation, email and Facebook. The results are no less impactful.

"I have an agoraphobic resident," Hannah explains, in reference to a resident with anxiety about leaving the apartment community. "It has helped her find the outside world through the computer."

Currently, Hannah continues her work at both Stevenson and LACMA. She just wrapped an acrylic painting class course for ten to thirteen year olds in the museum's children's gallery and has also started teaching art at a school in Van Nuys, having to implement her own brand of art education from scratch. If her time at Stevenson is any indication, the program will be a big success, not only due to Hannah's creativity, but her uncanny ability to facilitate art by channeling empathy, emotion and passion one brush stroke at a time.



Resident Mary Ann Gould smiles at the camera during Stevenson's first resident art show



Gallery: Painting at Stevenson Manor



EMPOWERING A GENERATION

For those of us who grew up with computers, blog in our free time and consider the iPad to be the ultimate travelling companion, it is easy to take our techy knowledge for granted. We give little consideration to the basic relationships between physical movements, like keyboarding and mousing, and the appearance of type or moving arrows on the screen. For those who are just now discovering the world of computers however, technology can seem like a daunting jumble of cords and wires written in a foreign language.

Fallea Bocanegra, who teaches weekly computer literacy classes to seniors at Leffingwell Manor, makes it her business to translate and de-mystify this language for newbie users.

"I try to help them with their nerves because they are afraid to learn," Fallea explains. "It's intimidating for them. I try to help them get over that and encourage them."

Speaking of intimidating, Fallea's educational background is an eclectic mix of engineering, art and architecture. Her exposure to this mélange of right and left-brained disciplines has strongly informed her creative approach to teaching, and the patience and detail with which she instructs her seniors.

"You really have to explain everything to them. Specify between right-click and left-click. You also have to be very patient and understand how they see so you can effectively teach them. People learn differently. Sometimes you have to change your teaching style."

In addition to age and learning styles, Fallea caters her lessons towards skill level, as there are a few senior students with basic computer literacy already down pat. She describes one student who has not only embraced the computer for recreational use, but is looking to master some work-related programs as well.

Computer Literacy @ Leffingwell Manor



Faileta Bocanegra teaches Facebook to a Leffingwell resident.

"She is an advanced student, sharp as a tack at age 87 or so. I began teaching her Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and then she would go to a class for [Microsoft] Office, and bring her homework to class [here] so we could go over it."

Other students focus on the Internet navigation, operating browsers and visiting many sites. And while the Internet's architecture is sprawling and robust leading its users down many unintended corridors, some seniors have embraced the medium for its unparalleled capacity for communication, specifically social networking.

"We'll go over Facebook, Skype, Craigslist, how to research things on Google or Wikipedia," says Faileta. "I think a lot of them are just getting started so I help them set up email accounts or navigate within their email."

And while sending an e-mail may seem straightforward, each browser, each site, and each app looks and operates differently, leading to potential speed bumps on the road to exploration.

"Visually it's overwhelming and spatially it throws them off. It's hard to find the mouse. And when they do it's all over the place."

In addition to the learning challenges associated with teaching there are also limitations as far as equipment and assets are concerned. Faileta's class has garnered attention and is quite popular week-in and week-out with up to six residents lining up and waiting their turn to learn. Considering the class is only once a week and only one hour per week, that is a lot of information to cram.

"There are only two computers and sometimes the time management aspect gets a little challenging. You have to shorten people's time. Fifteen minutes isn't really enough time to go over something with one of the students. A lot of them haven't had the computer experience before so looking at the screen is completely foreign to them."

Still, Faileta makes it work and the seniors are engaging with themselves, their instructors and family members in ways that they may never have thought possible.

"Another aspect [of the program] is socializing and interacting. It's building a community, which is important for people who are older. Sometimes they are secluded and they can't interact like they used to with the outside world. They are more fragile. It's nice to have someone from the outside come in and interact and socialize and talk. Sometimes they just want to talk to somebody."

And while computers continue to be a driving force in the economy and society, future generations would be wise to remember that a world does exist outside of the pixels—a lesson that it seems the golden generation has learned.

"There is a lady who I teach, she's learning the basics and she's a member of the Audubon Society. She is really into birds, nature and trees. She'll take me around and show me where the new hummingbird nests are and where the wisteria is. That's kind of nice."

"IT'S BUILDING A COMMUNITY, WHICH IS IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE OLDER. SOMETIMES SENIORS ARE SECLUDED AND THEY CAN'T INTERACT LIKE THEY USED TO WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD. THEY ARE MORE FRAGILE. IT'S NICE TO HAVE SOMEONE FROM OUTSIDE COME IN AND INTERACT AND SOCIALIZE AND TALK. SOMETIMES THEY JUST WANT TO TALK TO SOMEBODY."

S Musical Therapy

Discovering Music Through Pain



HCA Scholarship recipient Demetra Briscoe

A nurse and a patient, a traveller and a musician, Montecito resident Demetra Briscoe has worn many hats. Now a recipient of HCA's 7th Annual Arts Scholarship for Seniors, Demetra is officially adding "student" to the list as she excitedly applies her scholarship funds towards private violin lessons.

Demetra's interest in violin was piqued long ago, thanks to a visit to her aunt's.

"I went to my aunt's house and I heard someone playing violin in the back bedroom. It was her daughter and she was taking violin lessons. When I heard it, it just changed my life. I knew I wanted to play this instrument. It just evoked so much emotion. I could even feel it resonate in my bones and muscles."

Though her passion was strong, circumstances prevented her from playing there and then. "Music wasn't really a part of our family," says Demetra. "We could barely make ends meet let alone make music."

So in the absence of a music career, Demetra followed in the footsteps of a much beloved great aunt. Born and raised in Anderson, South Carolina, Demetra lived and worked as a registered nurse around the south.

She came out west in 1988 and worked in critical care at St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica. "It was the best 8 years," she beams. "It was so much fun."

Demetra eventually decided to go back to school to receive her masters in psychology. She moved to Santa Barbara and studied at the Pacifica Graduate Institute. While finishing her masters in 1995, her health began to decline. In 2005, now in LA, she was diagnosed with a debilitating condition.

"They told me I would never go back to work, I would never do anything. That literally my life would shrink to being at home. I spent almost two years literally in bed, or going from bed to the couch. And I said I can't do this. I'm not living like this. So I sought some alternative treatment measures."

She eventually struck a balance, working in hospice care two days a month among other activities, and began to return to more normal living. Upbeat even in the hardest of times, Demetra was never one to be deterred by ill news. So it is unsurprising that amidst her new and recurring health concerns, 1995 and 2005 were also key years in her pursuit of the violin.

In fact, after falling ill in 1995, Demetra had a life-changing experience when she decided to attend the Santa Barbara Symphony on a whim.

"It was just spur of the moment, just like that. I rushed in, didn't even look at the program and guess what they were playing. They were playing Rachmaninoff's Symphony #2. I sat there and I saw and heard them playing this and I just started crying. I was watching the violinist just so moved. I left there and I said, 'I gotta do this. I gotta do it.' Well, you always say 'you gotta do it,' but then you put it on the backburner because you go back to work and you don't have time, you come home exhausted. So in 2005 when I got sick I started listening to classical music. And in 2010, I took an adult ed class at Santa Monica City College.

Class aside, explains Demetra, the violin is a tricky instrument to play.

"With violin you have to feel out the instrument to know where you are going. It's more organic, you learn it more by intuition and sound rather than knowing where your finger would be... It's not easy. There are no frets. There is a tremendous amount of arm movement. It's not just plucking around."

Once the six-week summer class started however, Demetra had one more factor to consider.

"When I heard it, it just changed my life. I knew I wanted to play this instrument. It just evoked so much emotion. I could even feel it resonate in my bones and muscles."

"I rented a violin for this class that met once a week and oh gosh, every time I played the instructor said, 'You sound like you're in the back of the bus with that rental violin,' Demetra says in a mocking voice. "So after that, is when I decided to buy one."

Looking back at her experiences in healthcare and her own health trials and tribulations, Demetra is a firm believer in music as a healing type of therapy.

"Music is something you can benefit from without participating or knowing how to play it. Whether it's for alleviating anxiety or use in pain control, we always suggest it to our patients for pain management. It not only affects our moods and resonates in our bodies, but it effects our limbic system, which is the center of our emotions. It has this emotional quality, the feeling quality, and it also provides social interaction."

With all these recognized health benefits, music books, YouTube videos and class experience, Demetra felt that the one resource she still needed for musical advancement was individualized instruction. Enter the scholarship.

"I applied specifically to allow myself to have private violin lessons. I knew I would not progress in a class. It's essential to have that one-on-one. And there's no way I could afford private violin lessons... It was a gift."

Following the 2011 scholarship year, Demetra has since applied and become a recipient of the 2012 HCA Arts Scholarship for Seniors. She will once again be applying her winnings towards private violin lessons.



Lark Ellen Village resident Angel Montalva reaches for the ball



FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME BASKETBALL MENTORING AT LARK ELLEN VILLAGE

In 2002, the upstart Sacramento Kings made an improbable playoff run squaring off against the juggernaut Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA's Western Conference Finals. I was living in Sacramento that year, and frankly, it was hard not to be a fan of the Kings. In fact, it was at that moment when I first became a basketball fan. It was something special to be in Sacramento at that time watching the electrifying, scrappy band of misfits challenging the perennial contending Lakers.

Now, just over a decade later, I'm seated with Sacramento native, surviving Kings fan and HCA basketball mentor, Brian Galarde. And it is not without irony that we find ourselves meeting in what is decidedly Laker territory in El Segundo close to Raytheon, where Brian works. And although we went to rival high schools and are meeting in the lion's den, we still find common ground over our love of basketball, the Kings and our work with HCA.

"The fans are rabid up there," reminisces Brian about Sacramento. "It's just one of those things, I don't know if it's just the place we grew up. It's different than it is here."

As with any other Sacramento-bred basketball fan, Brian's start in the sport was nothing short of fanatic. "I used to play basketball in elementary school and some high school. I went to games with my father. I played games in college with friends. I've always had an interest in it. I have fun watching it, I have fun playing it."



Volunteer mentor Brian Galandé teaches defense to Lark Ellen Youth

It to help make a difference. Brian cites being a father as well as curiosity as his primary motivations behind his volunteerism. And although Brian was finally able to satiate his longtime curiosity, basketball was uncharted territory for Brian and HCA alike.

"We were both learning what it would be like... Our biggest goal was to get the kids out there exercising, doing something for an hour where they can learn basketball skills and a little camaraderie. Just get them outside rather than playing video games or on the computer all day."

The basketball program at Lark Ellen Village met Friday mornings. Focusing on basic drills such as dribbling and shooting, Brian was effectively able to gauge the needs of each individual and slowly build upon their skillset. If a certain drill required a little more study Brian would backtrack and review in order to ensure a solid foundation.

"The first time we played some five-on-five half court it was just like bees swarming—wherever the ball went everybody would just run there. So we had to slow it down a bit, and teach them the fundamentals. A lot of basics, double dribbling, traveling, keeping your pivot foot down."

And it is with the same fervent zeal that Brian approaches another aspect of his life.

"I always thought it would be fun to be a coach. It would be fun to teach [my son] certain things. I thought of this as a cool opportunity to try it out, see what it is like teaching and mentoring other kids. I always wanted to do some sort of community service. Through a work website I found a basketball mentoring opportunity. I got a call from HCA a few days later."

Constant with Brian's admiration for the game of basketball is his willingness to use

Learning the rules of the game of basketball is what brought Brian and the Lark Ellen youth together, yet Brian knows that most of what was learned will translate to life off the court.

"One thing I didn't tolerate was putting other people down for not making their shot. You saw kids trying their best, they worked hard and couldn't quite get it. We would encourage them and then you saw the other kids saying 'you can do it!'"

For many, Brian's basketball program could be taken at surface value—an hour or so of shooting hoops and having fun outside. When I first learned of the program, I instantly thought, "Oh, that sounds fun." And while it was fun indeed, the differences between basketball mentoring versus just simply shooting hoops was self-evident. There are instructions, drills and rules to be considered—a structured learning process, not unlike academic tutoring. The differences between basketball mentoring and homework tutoring is perhaps not as clear; however, the more we dice it up, the more I see how what Brian was doing is larger than basketball.

"Tutoring is helpful for the individual, to help with their academics. But I think one of the big differences between this and basketball - or any team sport for that matter - is the group component. It's a camaraderie thing. You are in it together."

The program has since wrapped, but not without making an impression on the community and Brian alike.

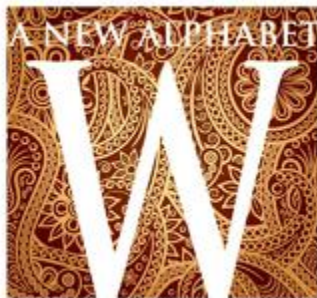
"It validated what I wanted to do... I always liked the idea of doing community service and helping out. It was a perfect combo of doing something for the community and for me. It worked out quite well."



Chasing after the ball



ESL Instructor Nare Avagyan at the Gardens on Garfield



Writer Rita Mae Brown once wrote, "Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going."

For Nare Avagyan, the importance of understanding language and people has taken her nearly half a world away and now back again, bringing with her an unrelenting enthusiasm for bettering the lives of those around her.

Armenian by birth, Nare moved to the US in fourth grade. Though Armenia was no longer her permanent home, her cultural heritage would later serve as a springboard for many of her professional and personal endeavors. She eventually went on to graduate from UC San Diego with degrees in both human biology and psychology. Around the same time, Nare and a friend developed an ESL program

for Armenian high school students. They flew back to Armenia during the summer of 2011 to teach it. Nare was a bit new to teaching, but still saw the importance of what she was doing.

"There are not a lot of opportunities for high school students," declares Nare. "That was my main motivation. The English program helped them with their university entrance exams and also for employment."

She fell in love with the teaching aspect of the program. She missed it when she returned state-side and began work as a behavioral therapist for children with autism. It was serendipity at its finest when she stumbled upon the posting for an ESL instructor at the Gardens on Garfield. A few weeks later she was teaching her first class.

Although she had experience teaching English, Nare knew there would still be some gaps in her new environment.

"The challenge here is finding a way to really communicate to students," states Nare. "Yes, I did teach English in Armenia—but I worked with high school students who already knew some level of English and could understand the concepts much more easily."

The Gardens on Garfield students on the other hand, were all adults with a much more basic understanding of English. Nare was not the only one who had to adjust her approach.

"In the beginning they seemed very intimidated. They did not want to express themselves. They

were shy, but I stressed that they be open. The only way that you can learn a language is to speak it."

And speak it they did. Nare began each class with an interactive review of the previous session, followed by an introduction of new materials. Students were encouraged to practice new vocabulary and phrases out loud throughout. Nare's patient pacing and conversational emphasis was soon reflected in students. They often showed up early to ask questions or show her what they had accomplished at home.

The "at home" part was perhaps the most important piece of Nare's class, not to mention language classes in general. Since the class only met once a week for an hour, the onus was on students to do their part in practicing their English out in the real world. Nare explains how challenging this can be given their location:

"In Glendale specifically, students don't have many opportunities to interact in English because there is such a huge community of Armenians. They told me that when they are in a situation where they have to speak English they have a hard time remembering the phrases that they know."

Feedback like this is not only a means for Nare to assess her students, but also to gauge her own teaching methodologies.

"It makes me reflect on what I'm really doing. Why are things the way they are? Why do they like this way of teaching?... It makes me work on myself too, to make myself a better person."

Nare cites one student who truly demonstrated the importance of tenacity and change at every age.

"She taught me it's never too late to do anything that you like. She really pushes herself, challenges herself. She doesn't let her limitations keep her from doing what she wants to do—from learning."

Nare's gift of communication and passion for helping others has led her abroad once again. She is pursuing her Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Health back in Armenia. This time she carries her experience at the Gardens on Garfield with her.

"They have given me ideas to possibly work with an older population. Here in the US, there are a lot of opportunities, a lot of things that they can participate in. And I thought, 'why not create something like that in Armenia?' I'm really grateful for the opportunity I have had here, to give back to the community. It has inspired me to do other things which I am very excited about."

And so are we.



An ESL class at the Gardens on Garfield

A Measurable Outcome

SKYLINE VILLAGE



Skyline Village Manager Jose Tobar

One of the greatest challenges in the affordable housing industry is measuring impact over time. With residents moving up and out, it can be hard to track success. But for Jose Tobar, Manager of Skyline Village, the impact of housing has been a constant ever since his family connected with the housing nonprofit, Habitat for Humanity (HFH) in 1995.

"Habitat for Humanity has been a huge entity in my life. It's been a part of my family; it's been a part of me. I actually come from a low-income family background. We were blessed with the opportunity to purchase a home through Habitat back in 1995."

As it turns out, Jose and Habitat would stay in contact for many years with Jose volunteering as a speaker at HFH events.

"They call either myself or someone else who has been involved with Habitat to speak on their behalf and I let them know where I am, where I am coming from and how Habitat has changed my life."

When TSA partnered with HFH a couple of years back for their annual Big Give charity drive and staff volunteer day, Jose just so happened to be the volunteer speaker.

"Thomas Safran, TSA's chairman, was there along with their president, Jordan Pynes," recounts Jose. "After the speech we connected. Mr. Safran enjoyed the speech and he said, 'You know, why don't you let us have your resume and see what comes about? There might be some serendipity.' He actually used the word serendipity. I had never used that before, I didn't know what it meant. But, I did. I connected with them, sent them my resume."

After interviewing, Jose knew TSA was a fit. In fact, he remembers it as being almost too good to be true.

"Their passions described a lot of my passions. I love connecting with people. I love connecting with individuals who have a desire to prosper or look for an opportunity to better themselves. And TSA does have that. They have great vision and core values."

Grateful for the opportunity afforded to him and his family, Jose remembers what he felt when they were in search of decent housing.

"You have this relief that people really do care. When I was in high school I had bad grades—really, really bad grades. We lived in a one-bedroom apartment, my brother, my sister, myself, my mom and my dad. It was just so cluttered, but we couldn't afford anything else. The year Habitat came in, we moved into the house. I had my own place. It changed the idea of how I viewed doing my homework, how I interacted with people. I could actually read! I finally had space."

In addition to the physical aspect of housing, Jose underscores TSA's commitment to the social aspect as well.

"The building itself can be fantastic, but you must have interaction within the community. Without that interaction, it's like sitting in a theater with nothing playing. You can have a great building, but if you have no interaction, how can you affect that change? TSA organizes monthly birthday parties and yoga classes; HCA sets up the basketball programs. These programs are amazing and not a lot of people are doing that."

According to Jose, the basketball program led by HCA volunteer Chris Smith, has been very effective in furthering the sense of community at Skyline.

"It connects the kids here. Chris doesn't just teach them, but is here on a consistent basis. It teaches them to compete and be proud of themselves and those around them."

Because of where Jose is from, he now knows where he wants to go. From an early age, he saw a glimpse of the prosperity for greatness that exists within mankind and it has been his mission to continue this greatness by helping his residents.

"I'm going to give you a quote from the 1995 Jimmy Carter building blitz which is when my family received their home. Jimmy Carter worked on my parents' house. Jimmy Carter worked on all of those twenty-one homes and it was a huge thing. It was phenomenal. And that time when he was being interviewed he said something that stuck with me and will always stay with me. He said, 'People are

always so worried about trying to change the world, when really they just need to worry about changing one person's life. Because that one person will change another and another.'"

And at Skyline, Jose has the opportunity to do so, one family at a time.

"People are always so worried about trying to change the world, when really they just need to worry about changing one person's life."

SETTLING IN

STEVENSON MANOR MANAGER ALMA CARBALLO IS CREATING A PLACE FOR SENIORS TO CALL HOME IN THE HEART OF HOLLYWOOD

While many property managers come from other positions in the management field, Alma Carballo transitioned into management from a career in retail. A first-time manager, Alma was drawn to her role by a soft spot for seniors. She had spent time volunteering with seniors at a local hospital in past; she realized how much she enjoyed it. Several months later, she found herself managing a sixty-one-unit senior tax credit property in the heart of Hollywood.

"I love it, but [at first] I was really scared. I did not know what to expect," confesses Alma. "I was nervous, but as the weeks went by and with my training it all came together."

A majority of Stevenson residents are Russian and many do not speak English. This was as an immediate challenge for Alma, who is bilingual in English and Spanish, as well as a circumstance that shapes her daily approach to community management.

STEVENSON MANOR MANAGER ALMA CARBALLO

"I think they [the residents] saw me as an authoritative figure, the person who collects their rent. And that really bugged me. So as the weeks went by, I would say hello to everybody, I got to know everybody's name."

Though the going was tough, Alma relied on skills like patience and creativity that she cultivated during her hospital volunteer tenure and her countless customer experiences with diversity in retail.

"There is always a way to communicate with somebody without words," states Alma.

Her endurance has paid off. Residents drop by her office to say hi on their way around the building; a few call on the phone. Alma's communication style has encouraged a comfort level amongst residents that allows them to openly address community-wide needs.

"If you sit down with residents who live in the community and hear what their wants and needs are, you get the information from the source. You really get a feel for what the community needs to be peaceful and for everybody to love calling this place home."

This home, nestled in the heart of Hollywood, is just minutes from Amoeba records, the ArcLight Cinema and many other restaurants, cafes and shops that populate this

famous zip code. Nevertheless, InSite Development, HCA and Stevenson Programs Director Hannah Cassell work together to ensure the provision of affordable and accessible on-site programs for residents. The property has featured art classes, acting classes, computer literacy classes, ukulele classes and of course, given the importance of communication, ESL classes.

And still, with all of the success at Stevenson, Alma wishes she could provide more.

"The need for affordable housing is so great. I have families walking in asking for apartments. I wish I had more units."

While the affordable housing demands continue to soar, properties such as Stevenson continue to up the ante on programming. Many of Alma's suggestions have already been fulfilled. Field trips, for example, were organized to and from both the Los Angeles

Contemporary Arts Museum (LACMA) and UCLA Hammer Museum over the spring. The art provided yet another layer of communication for the seniors at Stevenson while at home and beyond.

"There is always a way to communicate with somebody without words."

DANCING FROM AFRICA TO BROADWAY



Entertainment and the Value of Education

Harry Scott Jr, Montecito resident, lifelong dancer and 2011 HCA Scholarship recipient, is all too familiar with the entertainment industry and its high-risk, high-reward dynamic. That's why he decided to use his scholarship funds to support his training for *Dancing from Africa to Broadway*, a dance education program that he designed for California schools to keep the arts alive and encourage young and aspiring artists to prioritize

their education.

A lifelong performer and student at every age, Harry himself began to pursue dance – tap, to be exact – at the tender age of seven in Long Island, New York. He eventually moved to Brooklyn where he gained exposure to musical theatre productions. His calling became evident soon thereafter.

"I had already studied dancing and tap dancing before, but *West Side Story* inspired me to pursue a career in dancing," Harry reminisces.

In New York, Harry studied ballet, jazz, tap, acrobatics and singing. He took acting lessons at the Lee Strasberg Method Acting School and even studied with famous choreographer June Taylor.

The breadth of his experience and his enduring passion for dance eventually brought *Dancing from Africa to Broadway to life*. A practical and historical introduction to dance, the program introduces young audiences to various types of movement, ranging from early African dance to styles used in Broadway theatre and Hollywood musicals. Harry strongly emphasizes the interconnection of these styles as well as their historical meaning and contexts in his curriculum.

"I start with African dance which was brought to the country by slaves who came from West Africa. The first Afro dancing they used to do here was African dancing. I show it to them, what African dancing is, a brief outline of the characteristics, a brief history of jazz dancing and tap dancing," explains Harry. "I perform and demonstrate, while giving the history of jazz music. We talk about how that started, again with slavery,

The spirituals. The field hollers where the people working in the fields would yell out songs to help keep them motivated. Prison songs. Ragtime."

Harry hopes to define dance as more than just a source of entertainment for audiences. He provides teachers with a basic outline of topics that they can discuss with students prior to his arrival. He also offers an optional residency program through which students may conduct further research in or outside of the classroom on a dance subject of their choice. The purpose, Harry explains, is to improve student literacy, a skill that he feels is paramount to a successful career in the arts.

"The most important part of this is the education, if you want to have a good quality of life, you have to be able to read and write. You need a good education to get a good job," Harry says emphatically.

Harry knows how tough it can be to get students excited about more traditional dance forms, let alone reading and writing. So he used his HCA scholarship to cover tuition at the Debbie Reynolds Studio, where he studied hip-hop.

"If I go to the schools and if I am there for a residency I can teach the children ballet, jazz and tap. But to really get them motivated I start out by teaching some simple hip-hop routines. Styles that kids like to get them in the groove."

Harry hopes that by increasing his program's appeal, he can more easily instill the value of education in students' lives, particularly African American students.

"For all of the kids, it should help them retain their core studies. For African American children it will hopefully instill a certain amount of pride in them, dance being one of the things that has been contributed by black people throughout the years... We see a lot of black actors, hip-hoppers, playing basketball, robbing and raping and shooting people, but you don't see black people going to Harvard on the news without having a race riot or selling drugs as part of the backstory. That's why



HCA Scholarship recipient and Montecito resident Harry Scott Jr

it's important for African American kids to really hone in on their education, not quitting school and dropping out."

And for Harry, dispelling the myths of success and fortune in show business is an important part of educating the youth of today.

"I think it's important to know that no matter how talented you are, you may not make a living. That's why you need education under your belt first. That's what I really want to send home. If you have education under your belt then you have something to fall back on while you are looking for show business or you get fired of show business."

PIECE BY

Arts and Crafts at



April does a lot of volunteer work. Her Fridays are spent arranging a variety of activities for the seniors of Arbor Gardens in Lancaster, CA.

April's passion for volunteering is coupled with her love for animals as she also dedicates her time to fostering and finding homes for abandoned pets. In fact, at the time of our interview April was in the middle of a veterinary assistant's class. An avid crafter to boot (April donates her handmade jewelry to a local Christian women's group), I asked April about the driving force behind her dedication to others. Her response is quite frank.

"I like talking to people—I enjoy it. I like solving challenges and giving people different experiences."

And as April and I talk further it is clear that her passion comes from an almost systemic desire to want to help others. Abandoned animals and seniors alike, April makes connections with all of the lives she touches, a lifestyle that she believes to be rooted in her youth.

"I grew up in group homes and foster homes... I like solitude as well, but I really enjoy being around people on a daily basis. When I was younger I was in a gang, I was with the wrong groups of people. Now that I'm older I'm still in a group. We're just not out robbing the bagel store. At least we haven't talked about that yet," April laughs.



Arbor Gardens resident Mary places tiles on the mosaic pattern.

PIECE

Arbor Gardens



Instead of flirting with the idea of a senior-run crime syndicate, April spearheads a myriad of activities with the seniors at Arbor Gardens including mosaic, collages, card making and games.

She also brings in medical reference books so that the seniors can read up on healthier lifestyles. As a facilitator and willing participant, April is in a unique position to identify and relate to their needs, wants and life challenges. This was undoubtedly what motivated one of the year's most memorable activities, vision boards. Together with April, residents searched through magazines for images or words that related to a personal goal or a solution. They arranged them together on paper and hung the finished product in an accessible place at home as a means of positive visualization.

Apart from the vision boards, one of April's largest undertakings was the Arbor Gardens mosaic project. Over four feet in diameter, this colorful tiled flower was process heavy and quite the group effort.

Mary, an Arbor Gardens resident, contributed heavily to the mosaic and viewed it as an eye-opening experience.

"I wasn't really into art," says Mary. "I had never done a mosaic before, but I don't mind doing another one!"

April chimes in, "Mary can be resistant to artsy things, but once she does them, she does them well. It's good for her. It makes her happy and that makes me happy."

The mosaic itself now sits in the courtyard at Arbor Gardens, a testament to the collaborative hands and minds that helped to piece it together, one tile at a time.

With continued activities and another mosaic on the horizon, April is still searching for new experiences that she can share with the seniors, while still focusing on the most important aspect of her time at Arbor Gardens, having fun.

"I like talking to people—I enjoy it. I like solving challenges and giving people different experiences."



BEHIND THE LENS

PHOTOGRAPHY AT RANCHO DORADO

In an increasingly visual age of information a single image has the power to evoke emotion, brew controversy or even offer a glimpse (albeit a fleeting one) of a life outside of our own. Without a doubt, photography has entrenched itself as one of the most, if not the most, accessible forms of art and expression. In addition to digital cameras, the growing affordability of which enabled HCA to run its trademark photography program at Rancho Dorado

North, many mobile devices now tout a camera. Virtually everyone has the opportunity to be a documentarian, to record their narratives and collective histories and share them in a gallery or on one of several emerging social media platforms. These moments, captured and documented, have become a journal, describing shared and individual experiences.

In the spring of 2012, the youth at Rancho Dorado North were tasked with capturing such moments. The ten-week long photography program was a joint venture between HCA and Palm Communities that culminated in a final exhibition showcasing works of eight different students. They explored subject matter largely outside of their everyday school curriculum.

Guided by instructors Sabrina de los Reyes and Barby Tolentino, the class boasted both a comprehensive and varied approach; it consisted of an introduction to contemporary photographers, important concepts such as pattern, texture, color, shapes, framing and the camera itself, as well as shooting exercises and the post-production workflow. It also emphasized the importance of documenting the artistic process through regular print development and journaling.

While Sabrina had previously facilitated a photography program at Cottonwood Place, another Palm Communities property, running the program a second time around gave way to a fresh process with more possibilities.

"This time around we added a few new elements to the program," states Sabrina. "We had new computers and the students were able to edit their images digitally. We also added a few studio lights so I was able to change the curriculum. We had a few more indoor photo-shoots

then the previous program. The students were able to grasp the concept of lighting through hands on activities."

A photographer and social documentarian herself, Sabrina understands the importance of readily available equipment to experimentation, creativity and originality. She recalls a shoot on a particular afternoon:

"We had a class photo shoot and we were photographing food. The kids were more excited to eat the food than photograph it, but when they started playing with different types of food on their mini sets they became really creative and everything we went over in previous classes all of a sudden came together. The students were paying close attention to their composition and color palette and lighting. It was amazing to watch their process. It's very rewarding when you see everything you talked about in class come through their photographs."

These hand-on activities are what truly set apart the photography program at Rancho Dorado and other HCA ventures. It is one thing to sit at a desk and learn about shutter speeds and apertures and a whole other experience to adjust these settings on an SLR outside in broad daylight. And as invaluable as having equipment to learn with is, it presents its own set of challenges.

Unlike public school classes and after school programs,

"I WANT TO INSTILL IN THEM THAT PHOTOGRAPHING THEIR OWN LIVES IS JUST AS VALID AND MORE INTERESTING THAN PHOTOGRAPHING SOMEONE FAMOUS."



Rancho Dorado residents setting up a composition for a photo shoot



Instructor Barby Tolentino stands with Rancho Dorado photography graduate, Ricardo Hernandez.

these photography programs target a much wider range of ages and student experiences. As a result, material that is rooted in learning the in's and out's of a highly technical piece of equipment - even in a small class like Rancho Dorado's - can be time consuming. Enter co-instructor Barby Tolentino.

"There were [students] as young as elementary age to high school students," explains Barby. "Their focus went in two entirely separate directions: either creating with the use of formal elements, which was easily understood by the younger students or making conceptual work about a teenage view on popular culture. Each student had her or his own learning process so we collaborated to work with individuals in the last few weeks of the program to give them the guidance and support that they needed to complete their project in a timely manner."

Barby's interest in photography was first piqued during a family trip to Yosemite. There she was introduced to the works of Ansel Adams, which helped solidify her interest in art and photography in particular.

"I was immediately drawn to the idea that photography is a powerful medium that can create an impact or an awareness such that people change for the better. Since then, I've felt consumed and passionate about photography through my travels and experiences as a way to document my own life. I learned this process of how to inspire and impact others through the images I captured."

Barby stumbled upon HCA during downtime between grad school and joined Sabrina at the midpoint of the program. Sabrina and Barby worked at focusing and refining the raw vision of this group of Moreno Valley youth into an artful and contemplative slice of life shaped by adolescent eyes. This kind of opportunity for self-

expression is an important part of youth development, providing a healthy creative outlet that is increasingly absent in schools.

"Photography or any other programs are highly significant at a very young age, if taught in an inspiring way that connects with these young students," Barby insists. "It's a way for them to find their own voice and to feel passionate about something... In photography, it's not just about learning the basics such as the composition within the frame, lighting techniques and how to handle a camera. It's also about an outcome from the efforts that were made, not quitting because it's a challenge and having the access to something that wasn't possible before."

Sometimes, despite interest, the means to procure supplies, equipment or even the chance to follow through and execute can be restrictive. As Barby explains, the Rancho Dorado North program shattered many of these limitations.

"Photography is an expensive art, but having a program that is financially supported by an organization such as HCA and Palm Communities can be a life changing moment for some of these children. That's why these programs are tremendously important. These programs are a means to an outcome, to inspire the youth to work at fulfilling goals such as completing a higher education, getting involved in their community through their own form of art or being successful in their future career."

By the end of the program, the results spoke for themselves. With the help of Palm Communities who funded 50% of the program costs, and significant support from LifeSTEPS staff Zoila Parodi and Viry Esquivel, the Rancho Dorado program became one of the most successful photography programs to date. The final exhibition showcased large format prints featuring a variety of photography genres as well as a summary of the students' work. In addition, the program's financial literacy component helped make an impact globally. Using fifteen percent of the photography class participation earnings (students earned two dollars for each hour of participation) the photography class at Rancho Dorado North microfinanced a single mother working as a property manager in Peru via Kiva.org.

All in all the program helped to enrich the local community while affecting global change, providing a different perspective for both the young photographers and onlookers alike. And though



Instructor Sabrina de los Reyes poses with Rancho Dorado photography graduate Emmanuel Mccall.

programs such as these do celebrate collective progress, moments of individual achievement shine just as brightly. Barby, who is currently working on her thesis project and graduating with her Masters in Fine Art this fall, proudly recalls one student in a moment of discovery:

"He was a challenging student that needed one-on-one time away from the other students. I was able to have a conversation with him about his miniature toy dinosaurs that he was adamantly playing with instead of working on his final project. I asked him if the two dinosaurs are best friends, brothers or if they are in a battle to rule the world. From that conversation, his demeanor changed as the idea of a battle was implanted in his thoughts. He immediately took a camera and started to shoot while he lay on the grass to capture a fighting scene on the dirt and on a tree branch. There was a moment I knew that I piqued his interest and I felt it was an endearing connection with a child who initially had no interest with the camera."

"Photography is an expensive art, but having a program that is financially supported by organizations such as HCA and Palm Communities can be a life changing moment for some of these children. That's why these programs are tremendously important."

Barby has also admitted that her experience solidified her decision to become an educator; it is her goal to work with young students again. For Sabrina, the Rancho Dorado photography experience has fueled her conviction and philosophy that not all photographic subjects are photogenic or make traditionally "pretty pictures." While she makes no criticisms of classic sunsets or beach photos, she advocates for an evaluation and appreciation of art based upon its representation of the artist's reality, regardless of its incorporation of more traditional notions of beauty or art. Sabrina sums it up:

"[We are] helping the students experience their life through photography. Showing them how special, unique and interesting every one of them is. Their interests, their friends and family, their environment. I want to instill in them that photographing their own lives is just as valid and more interesting than photographing someone famous. I want them to photograph this amazing world that only they have access to: their own."



Rancho Dorado's photography class

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

BASKETBALL AT SKYLINE VILLAGE



One of the best professional basketball players in history, Michael Jordan gifted the world with more than just clutch buzzer beaters. He taught an entire generation to not only aspire towards greatness, but *to be* the greatest.

Like so many, Chris Smith's love for basketball began in the Michael Jordan era. Unlike many others, however, Chris's passion has turned into something that not only drives him towards greatness, but also drives those around him. Through volunteering as a basketball mentor at the downtown TSA community, Skyline Village, Chris has been able to create a little inspiration of his own amongst his eager students.

A Chicago native and Bulls fan, Chris hit the courts when he was five years old. In the second grade, he joined his first competitive team.

"I remember the neighbor across the street, five or six years older, would work on his game everyday outside. Through snowstorms, rain, wind, blizzards," recalls Chris. "Hard work and love for the game—it's an MJ thing. I've always tried to play that way."

Chris admits that a big part of the continued success of the Skyline basketball program is the energy of his students.

"It is rewarding to see how enthusiastic they are, how they pass on that love of the game and work hard, doing things the right way. I don't have to be much of a disciplinarian because so many of them take it so seriously."

Chris played basketball in college while majoring in finance and entrepreneurship. Though he eventually began his career in real estate investment and development, he always found time to play in adult leagues and with friends. Ever interested in coaching, Chris had been looking for an opportunity, but wanted to get involved with something a bit more substantial.

"I was sure there were kids that could use some mentorship and I did want to do something more on the mentorship side as opposed to just coaching. Although coaching is fun, I thought I could be a decent example of a human being and a good role model."

He found his opportunity with HCA in 2011. What began as a summer basketball program evolved into an ongoing opportunity for both Chris and the youth of Skyline Village.

Meeting once a week for an hour or two, Chris teaches the basics of basketball to resident girls and boys, ages seven to ten. Largely inexperienced, participants needed a solid introduction to the fundamentals of the game.

"I don't think many of them had ever touched a ball before. A lot of them were starting from scratch... I try to show them little games and drills they can work on when I'm not there. I can see them progressing. I notice how they have gotten better and the additional skills they have picked up."

Chris jokes about one of his most dedicated students, Astrid, who he refers to as his own "little MJ".

"She's about eight or nine and now she wants to teach people to play. I give her direction. Just imagine a very small girl working on her left hand, shooting from both sides of the basket, working on cuts to get open and just going up to boys seven, eight inches taller than her with no fear, defensively standing there trying to block the shots. It makes me very proud."

Astrid's growing confidence, in addition to her skills improvement, touches upon the underlying value of basketball, and sports in general.

"Once you have a love for the game, you want to get better. In order to get better you have to engrain these basic fundamental skills like teamwork, accountability, hard work, and self-motivation. I think these are skills that you take with you for the rest of your life and you pick them up without even knowing it."

Indeed, whether they know it or not, Chris's attitude and ethics have undoubtedly rubbed off on the youth of Skyline. He recounts a story about team injuries:

"My first month [volunteering] I broke my foot playing basketball and I was in a boot and on crutches. The volunteer coordinator said, 'If you are in pain you don't have to go.' I thought, this is a good lesson, so I'll go. I told them, 'Sometimes you have to play through the pain and there are responsibilities to the team that you want to fulfill.' A few months later, someone jammed his finger on the ball. When I asked if he was okay and if he needed to sit out, they replied, 'No. Sometimes you have to play through the pain.'"



"ONCE YOU HAVE A LOVE FOR THE GAME, YOU WANT TO GET BETTER. IN ORDER TO GET BETTER YOU HAVE TO ENGRAIN THESE BASIC FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS LIKE TEAMWORK, ACCOUNTABILITY, HARD WORK, AND SELF-MOTIVATION."

BASKETBALL INSTRUCTOR CHRIS SMITH WITH RESIDENT B-BALL PLAYERS, ASTRID AND STEPHANY CALREÑO

Building Community at the Villaggio

In many ways, the Villaggio is the quintessential TSA property. Its distinctive architecture is reminiscent of an Italian villa, complete with colorful landscaping and fountains. Its location is central within the city of Carson where public facilities and a neighboring TSA community, The Gateway at City Center, are just a stone's throw away. Last but not least, the Villaggio boasts a number of valuable on-site resources such as a computer lab, recreation room, basketball court and playground. Yet despite these impressive aesthetics and amenities, it is the ubiquitous sensation of family that truly brands this 149-unit family and senior community as TSA at its finest.

For Maria Reyes, Property Manager of the Villaggio, family values are not just reserved for evenings and weekends. They are an integral part of her management style.

"Make your property your own, make your residents part of your family and make them feel welcome," she states. "There is no such thing as 'I'm too busy.' There is always a way."

Maria's philosophy grew over fifteen solid years in the industry. When she saw its reflection in TSA, she instantly knew they would be a fit.

"People are genuine...They are here to help. That makes me proud of the Villaggio. That makes me proud of TSA."

Sonya Garcia, Assistant Manager at the Villaggio, is further testament to this stalwart authenticity. Eleven years ago, she was a Villaggio resident herself. After becoming increasingly involved with community functions, she was promoted to receptionist. Now, she assists Maria in managing the constantly evolving property. For Sonya, the Villaggio truly is and has been home.

"It's more of a community versus just having neighbors," explains Sonya. "I have seen it change since I first started living here."

Maria, who joined the Villaggio and TSA in 2011, was a

welcome part of that change.

"I received positive feedback from the residents. They love that I always take the time to say hello. Because you never know what is going on in someone's life. Sometimes that 'hello' or smile will brighten their day."

But she and Sonya give their residents much more than a warming smile and friendly greeting. They coordinate summer camps, computer classes, basketball classes, field trips, birthday parties and many other activities to enrich the Villaggio community. Like dedicated parents, their support and enthusiasm extends beyond the workday, into the evenings and weekends. Like a sweet perfume, the aroma of optimism and solidarity has transformed their community. It is tangible, even to strangers.

"...When people think of affordable housing, they often envision something underwhelming and run down," says Maria. "But when they tour the Villaggio, they can't believe it's affordable housing. They think it's market rate. I have had people leave in tears, saying that this is what they want for their kids. They don't want their kids running in the streets, but they can't afford [market rate] rent."

In the meantime, the Villaggio community is enjoying the 2012 addition of weekly classes in computer literacy and basketball. Maria continues to steer residents closer to each other while Sonya inspires their success through her own story. They are tireless in their efforts and energized by their mission. As Sonya puts it,

"Being able to provide something as beautiful as a home is special. A home is not about where you live or what kind of furniture you have. It's about what you do to make your home that counts.



Manager Maria and Assistant Manager Sonya with a Villaggio resident

"Make your property your own, make your residents part of your family and make them feel welcome... There is no such thing as 'I'm too busy.' There is always a way."

New Growth at The Gardens on Garfield



The Gardens on Garfield Manager Nver Gasparyan

On Garfield Avenue, a quiet unassuming street connecting Brand and Glendale, lies the Gardens on Garfield. At thirty units, it is a relatively small community; however, what it lacks in size, it makes up for in charm. Delicate trees and understated landscaping give way to an exterior of simple lines and natural colors that gently guide you to its entrance.

A long-time member of the TSA family, Manager Nver Gasparyan began working as an office assistant at Strathern Court, in high school. She still works as an assistant manager there, but was eventually asked to manage the Gardens on Garfield as well.

"Being a new manager is a challenge because I taught younger students in my previous field and now I work with adults," Nver explains. "Having patience, being understanding, encouraging and having great customer service are all important to being a good manager. If you do not have any of those, residents are less inclined to listen or respond to you in a positive way."

And while most of the families at the Gardens on Garfield are Armenian, that does not necessarily translate into a community.

"At first, there was a lot of tension between residents," says Nver of the new property. "It was a brand new building and nobody knew each other. Activities helped to relieve that tension and residents were able to get acquainted with one another."

These activities include monthly birthday parties, bingo classes, quarterly financial literacy classes hosted by World Financial Group, quarterly health care seminars, healthy cooking classes and local walks. Nver was also deeply invested in Nare Avagyan's weekly ESL class. It commanded a robust turnout with up to ten residents participating—an impressive feat for a thirty-unit community.

While Nare focused on resident communication at the language level, Nver continues to encourage open paths of communication through her commitment to programming.

"Having a good support system is essential," she proclaims. "Many residents ask me questions or approach me in a different manner. They feel comfortable and relaxed in my office. They don't feel like they are in trouble or intimidated. To have a bona fide community you have to provide support to get it in return. It has to be mutual."

Despite her common heritage with many of the Gardens on Garfield residents, Nver admits that it is one of the non-Armenian residents that has really impacted her.

"She is a single mom. Like many here, language is a challenge for her. Her son is learning English and she is trying to learn with him. Watching her work with her son makes me proud," beams Nver. "She wants to help her son succeed."

Echoing the sentiments of Nver's experience, the importance of a place such as the Gardens on Garfield cannot be understated. In a property where many first generation residents may be born, raised and go to school, this type of community is increasingly important as a cultural gateway bridging the culture and tradition of today with the opportunities of tomorrow.

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