

## DOLORES ZIMMERMANN

Valley Village Founding Parent, Foundation Board Member, volunteer, and champion for people with developmental and intellectual challenges.

“ In looking back on this journey, I have learned that the best thing you can do for yourself is try to make someone a better life.



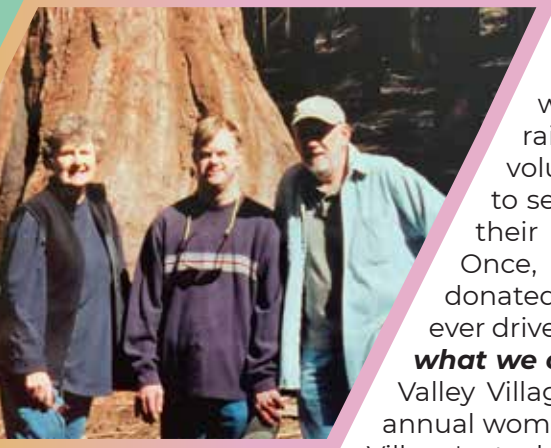
When you become a parent, your sense of responsibility and commitment changes forever. Your care, love, joy, concern, worry, and devotion for your child last for your lifetime and theirs. Parents of children with developmental and intellectual challenges take on an entirely different level of anxiety, from their children's opportunities to "who will care for my child when I am gone?"

In the early 1970s, a group of families living in the San Fernando Valley came together with those concerns and others in common. They sought to create a place where their children could live and thrive for a lifetime. Their work leading up to and decades beyond Valley Village's founding in 1971 made lasting positive impacts for their children and thousands of others. "That was the impetus for Valley Village, to provide a home for adults with developmental disabilities for the rest of their lives," explains Dolores Zimmermann, founding Valley Village parent and volunteer. **"Not just a roof over their heads, but a comfortable, loving home."**

Before 1970, no public school services existed for children with developmental and intellectual challenges. The founding families organized and formed "The Valley Parent Group for the Trainable Mentally Retarded" (VPGTMR) in June 1970. The group engaged with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and informed the district of their children's educational needs. The group worked closely with LAUSD, leading to three school openings in the San Fernando Valley between September 1970 and September 1971. The VPGTMR became an official nonprofit organization in 1971 and held its first meeting at one of the schools it helped create – the West Valley School – to give a collective voice to the developmentally disabled, their families and advocate for their needs. In 1987, the organization changed its name to Valley Village.

At that time, a deinstitutionalization movement was sweeping the country. Parents had few long-term residential options for their children beyond institutions. **The group wanted better lifelong opportunities for their children beyond their education, and the parents who founded Valley Village were not settling for the status quo.** They wanted their children to live in a community where they would lead healthy, active lives. They developed community-based, family-style housing for their children who were graduating from LAUSD schools.

Creating an organization like Valley Village was uncharted territory. The founding parents encouraged more families with younger children to join their vision. They learned about grants, foundations, licensing requirements, building and fire codes, Department of Rehabilitation, insurance, city, county, and state requirements, and more. After six years of hard work, the first Valley Village home opened in 1977. **"When the first family-style homes were opened, our standard was, as it still is, 'Would I want to live there myself?'"**



The Engel Family

Laura and Guenther Engel met the founding Valley Village parents through the school meetings. "We heard about Valley Village and began to volunteer with other parents." At that time, Valley Village needed to identify new ways to raise needed funds. The organization opened a thrift shop to help raise funds, and volunteers like Laura and Guenther would search for unwanted items in the area to sell at the shop. "Barbara Wheeler would call and ask companies and stores for their discontinued items. Clothing, shoes, furniture, and anything we could sell." Once, Laura and Judy Hawthorne used a large truck to pick up new mattresses donated to Valley Village. After watching Judy down-shift gears, Laura asked, "Did you ever drive a truck like this before?" Judy replied, "No. Never." **No one was going to tell us what we could not do.** At that moment, we focused on getting the mattresses for new Valley Village homes. In addition to the thrift shop, Valley Village raised funds through annual women's fashion show luncheons (organized by a volunteer, Milly Blum) and Valley Village's steak fry events.

Eventually, Laura began volunteering at the Valley Village office, where she met and bonded with June Stanton. June and her husband George Stanton were founding family members, and June was Valley Village's bookkeeper at the time. Laura admired June for her strength, wisdom, and vision for Valley Village. Laura shares that **"June believed we should have real homes for our children and that they not be institutions."** Laura said, "I helped wherever I was needed, answering phones, typing, and distributing food to Valley Village homes. She tells how Valley Village's Executive Director at the time, Fred Chapa, secured government surplus food, including large blocks of cheese, huge cans of fruit, bread, and frozen chicken. She remembers prying apart the bulk frozen chicken to divide and distribute it to the six homes Valley Village had at the time. Laura maintains her commitment to Valley Village, and her son continues to thrive in the care of his Valley Village group home.



June Stanton and Laura Engel

Dorothy Bushong, another founding family member, helped establish Valley Village along with her husband, Leroy. Her son moved into Valley Village's second home in 1978. Thanks to care providers and support staff, his parents and siblings witnessed his growth and maturity over his years with Valley Village, where he is thriving today. Dorothy has seen Valley Village grow from a volunteer-run organization to the mature nonprofit it is today.



Laura Engel, Dwight Wheeler and Marc Weisel

Dolores Zimmermann – like other founding family members – wore many hats over the years at Valley Village. She served on committees, including the Ad-Hoc Committee, working with LAUSD to develop a Special Education Commission. The commission informed LAUSD's Board of Education on the needs of children with developmental disabilities that the district served. She identified and worked with two attorneys who assisted 100 families through the conservatorship process for their children. She served on the operations board and continues to serve on the Valley Village Foundation Board. She helped with day-to-day operations, fundraising, and advocacy. Her commitment to her son, who resides in a Valley Village home and the children of other families, continues today.

Fifty years later, Valley Village continues to evolve to meet the needs of people with quality services. Valley Village and its dedicated staff serve 400 women and men with developmental and intellectual challenges through its three, day programs and 18 group homes. Valley Village's day programs include an Adult Development Center (ADC), an Adult Day Health Center (ADHC) in Winnetka, and a Sunland Program offering ADC and ADHC services. The residential program includes semi-independent living condominiums, fifteen Intermediate Care Group Homes, and three residential nursing programs, two of which provide continuous nursing care. The founding families' vision was the seed that grew into an environment for life-long quality care with dignity and respect for their children and thousands more. **We could not celebrate 50 years of Valley Village without acknowledging and thanking the founding families for their vision and commitment.** They created a lasting legacy that continues to give families peace of mind, knowing their loved ones will receive the lifetime of care they deserve.



The Bushong Family