

It Takes a Village

Peggy Blanchard '66 makes a commitment to help children heal and grow

BY ASHLEY STARR

A passion to give back and be part of something bigger led Peggy Blanchard '66 to pack up her house of 22 years in California and move across the country to tackle life's next adventure.

It was an AARP magazine article that piqued her interest in moving to New Life Village, an inter-generational community in Tampa, Florida, that provides below-market housing to adoptive families of children, many of whom have survived abuse, trauma, and neglect. They invite seniors to live in the community to serve as surrogate grandparents to support both the parents and children of the adoptive families. After holding onto the article for more than five years, Blanchard knew that if she wanted to seize this opportunity, it was now or never.

"I've always worked in nonprofits and love making a better life for families and kids," says Blanchard. According to the Centers for Disease Control, "safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are essential to assure that children reach their full potential." Given this, adoptive parents and seniors living at New Life Village are pivotal in providing children an environment where they can heal and rebuild their faith—not only in society, but in themselves—opening their eyes to possibilities for a future they had never dared to dream.

Seniors living in the Village community complete 18 hours of volunteer service a month, which includes everything from coaching sports to teaching the children to swim and cook. Blanchard treasures her time at the on-site Learning Center, where she tutors two boys, ages 8 and 10.

When Blanchard started working with her 8-year-old tutee, he was in jeopardy of having to repeat the second grade. But after working diligently together at the Learning Center for three months, Blanchard was elated that he started third grade this fall. "It

is such a rewarding experience to provide a sense of stability for children and to help them succeed in school," she says. "Many children have the skills, but their confidence is lacking. That's where I come in—to give them the extra push and continuous encouragement they need to thrive."

Mariah Hayden, executive director at New Life Village, sees the kind of impact Blanchard and others make. "If caregivers are supported and are accomplishing family goals, Village children will experience healthier outcomes—including increased resiliency, social connectedness, academic success, and overall health and wellbeing."

She adds, "Peggy has brought culture, adventure, holistic support, and a never-ending smile to our Village."

Blanchard's personality resonates with the children. One of her students who had gone through several tutors over the years, for example, asked if she would be his tutor again the following year. (Her answer was a resounding, "Yes!")

A sense of gratitude and pride overwhelms Blanchard as she watches her students—who arrived timid and skeptical—develop into self-assured, respectful young adults.

Reflecting on the work that she is doing, Blanchard fondly recalls her time at Regis, where service to the community was always a strong value and at the core of the mission, as it is today. She is grateful to still have that value as a driving force in her life, and looks forward to witnessing the lasting impact on the families she serves.

"I hope the children learn to work hard when they need to master difficult things and enjoy their accomplishments when they finally do," Blanchard says. "Most importantly, I hope they learn to trust in the goodwill of people who are here to support them." ■



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Photo: Reid Steinhilber