



College of Adaptive Arts

Inclusive Collegiate Partnerships

DECEMBER 2023



Mission: CAA provides an equitable collegiate experience to adults with special needs who historically have not had access to college education.

Vision: Empowering the student body to creatively transform the way the world views individuals with disabilities. CAA creates successful contributing citizens through inclusive collegiate partnerships.

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Bright Futures and Endless Possibilities

Looking ahead to 2024, we couldn't be more excited about the future of the College of Adaptive Arts. Over the past several months, our small but mighty college has been fortunate to receive local, state, and national recognition for our groundbreaking educational model for adults of all abilities.

In July, the County of Santa Clara provided CAA with \$250,000 to help expand access to new workforce apprenticeship programs for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Santa Clara County Supervisor Joe Simitian championed these efforts after touring CAA, meeting with students, and seeing firsthand the need for more opportunities for adults with disabilities focused on critical thinking, problem-solving, and promoting situational awareness.

Shortly after that, California State Senator Dave Cortese (D-San Jose) announced a state investment in the 2024 budget to CAA for 2.2 million Dollars. Senator Cortese and his wife also toured CAA, talked with our students, and witnessed the tremendous impact that our school has on the community. The county of Santa Clara and the State of California are investing not just in our programs but in our students and their abilities and futures.

We broke records at our "Celebration of Inclusive Collegiate Partnerships" Gala Fundraiser in September, raising six figures for the first time, thanks in large part to our fundraising maven Dee Dee Kiesow. Our sponsors and donors showed up big time, and we are so grateful for all their support.

CAA hosted one of its most anticipated yearly events in October: the CAA Annual Golf Classic. We had more students participate than ever before, and it was truly a magical day. Later that month, CAA's co-founder, Dr. Pamela Lindsay, traveled to Washington, DC, to receive a prestigious national award from AARP. The AARP Purpose Prize is awarded to only a handful of non-profit leaders over the age of 50 who have had a tremendous impact on their communities. We couldn't be prouder of the trailblazing work Dr. Pam is doing to advance access to higher education for people of all abilities.

We continue to enjoy a beautiful, symbiotic relationship with West Valley College, which has welcomed us onto its campus and truly embraced our vision of community, inclusion, and education for all.

In the coming year, we will celebrate our 15th anniversary. It's a momentous feat, and we hope to gain 150 new recurring donors at the \$15 giving level. CAA's 2024 Giving Campaign

is to secure \$1 in donations for each \$1 in tuition to achieve full operational sustainability.

For all of you who continue to support and champion higher education for adults of all abilities, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We are slowly moving the mountain for our eager, lifelong learners. And the future couldn't be brighter.



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Board Member Spotlight Sandee Raval Kiehl

events. When she met DeAnna Pursai through a Chamber Luncheon and learned about CAA she was hooked and began volunteering.

Giving back is important to Sandee, and in addition to her role at CAA, she has also volunteered with Sacred Heart, teaching finance classes, helping in the food pantry, and with the backpacks for kids program. She is also a Board Member of the Campbell Union High School District Education Foundation.

“When I was single mom, I wished I had more support and resources in the community,” said Sandee. “Now, I am blessed to be where I am and want to give back. I want to set a good example for my kids and grandkids, and I truly believe in karma.”

Sandee has been on the CAA board for the past six years, first serving as the Treasurer. She says it has been a wonderful experience because she is surrounded by so many people with different strengths, but who all really believe in the cause.

Sandee’s passion is her family, which includes her husband, three sons and two grandchildren. When she is not spending time with them, she is a self-described fitness nut who does Crossfit workouts nearly every day of the week. She also is a big foodie who loves exploring new cuisines and new cultures.

And while her term as a board member will be up in 2024, she says she looks forward to continuing to volunteer with CAA and be an advocate for the school.

“Whenever I am having a bad day, I visit the CAA campus,” said Sandee. “I get so inspired by the joy and confidence I see in the students. They are thriving and in a place where they truly belong.”



As a young single mom growing up in the Central Valley, Sandee Raval Kiehl could never have imagined that she would be a successful banking executive in the heart of Silicon Valley.

Sandee is the Vice President of Cash Management of Pinnacle Bank, a community bank specializing in commercial banking and has been in the banking industry since 2008.

As she began flourishing in her career, Sandee started attending various business networking



Professor Spotlight Sharon Lea

them and when CAA needed instructors who had compassion and commitment to teach.

“At CAA, you don’t need the degree, but you need the heart,” said Sharon.



Professor Sharon is the Director of Music at CAA and teaches many popular classes, including Concert Choir and Music Appreciation. In both those classes, she stresses to her students to find something that they like in the music and reminds them that it’s not about hitting all the right notes.

“One of the reasons I love CAA is because I see the benefits of what I’m doing every day in the classroom,” said Sharon.

When she was young, Sharon had to overcome a significant stutter to relate to the difficulties some of her students have with being heard and understood. Sharon says that she learns just as much from her students as they learn from her, and she loves coming away from classes and hearing new perspectives and ideas.

According to Professor Sharon, CAA is a unique workplace because the leadership puts people in positions where they can thrive.

“This has been such a wonderful growth experience for me,” said Professor Sharon. “I feel incredibly lucky to be a part of a supportive environment which celebrates caring and collaborative teamwork.”



Sharon Lea has always loved music, but it wasn’t until joining CAA that she could meld her passion and career.

Sharon obtained her degree in English from Chico State and worked most of her life in administrative roles. The companies she worked for made products like medical devices, and she always enjoyed customer service and helping people. After surviving a cancer diagnosis and losing her husband all within a three-year span, Sharon took time off work and began volunteering with CAA. That volunteer work quickly turned into a fulfilling career.

CAA came into Sharon’s life when she needed



West Valley College Volunteer Spotlight Paula Murray

Paula Murray spent more than 30 years working in the travel industry before torn tendons in her elbow forced her into an early and unexpected retirement.

Faced with what she wanted to do next, Paula enrolled in West Valley College and was introduced to CAA through

the Disability and Educational Support Program (DESP) program.

Paula began volunteering at CAA, helping in classes including the Joy of Broadway, Contemporary Cultural Dance, Joyful Fitness, and Bowling. She loves being able to interact with the students and also keep her own body moving in the process.

According to Paula, involvement in CAA is especially beneficial for the older population. "Older people often don't have as many opportunities for work, continued education or recreational activities,"

said Paula. "We want to participate in things and have an active mind. Why shouldn't we be able to continue to grow and learn?"

Paula is currently enrolled in pottery and swimming classes at West Valley, and she hopes that her volunteering with CAA will turn into a paid position one day.

"I am so much happier since being at West Valley and CAA," said Paula. "I am finding my joy."



Student Spotlight Noah Kang

Noah Kang moved to Cupertino from Michigan when he was five years old and had a great life growing up. He loved school and described himself as a "super nerd" whose idol was Albert Einstein.

When Noah was 12 years old, he was in a horrible car accident which left him with a traumatic brain injury and he was hospitalized for nearly four months.

After his accident, Noah said he had a "hard reset" and had to relearn everything. It was a new territory he didn't know how to navigate. In high school, Noah participated in special

education programs and went to Menlo School of Business and DeAnza College, but ultimately, it was not a good fit.

"My past colleges didn't really care about the students, but CAA cares about the success of every single student," said Noah.

One of Noah's passions was studying music and opera. After discovering CAA through a potluck dinner event, he realized they had a lot of classes that he was interested in.

At CAA, Noah takes classes like Voice Acting, Graduate Theater, Shakespeare's Heartbeat, Technical Theater and Design, and Introduction to Employment Skills. When he is not in class, Noah enjoys traveling and hopes to take a trip to Korea over the New Year's holiday. He also enjoys hiking and going to the movies,

especially historical films. Noah also loves spicy foods and holds the unique distinction of trying the world's spiciest gummy bear.

Noah wants people to know he is a nice, friendly guy who likes to challenge himself and test his limits.

"There will always be people who judge you," said Noah. "But what's there to be scared of? I say, always give it everything you have!"



15 Years of Inclusive and Lifelong Learning

2024 will mark CAA's 15-year anniversary. We are humbled to see how our school, which started out as just one class, has grown to serve over 225 students across nine states. It's proof that our model of inclusive, lifelong learning is essential to so many communities all over the country.

Our goal for 2024 is to gain 150 new recurring donors at the \$15 level. CAA's 2024 Giving Campaign is to secure \$1 in donations for each \$1 in tuition

to achieve full operational sustainability.

\$15 equates to few cups of coffee, a movie ticket, or a take-out meal from a local restaurant. Could you trade that in exchange for giving an adult with differing abilities the opportunity of a lifelong education?

If you are not a recurring donor, we urge you to become one. And if you already are, we urge you to recruit a friend or family member who supports our

mission of social justice and education for all.



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Spring 2024



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