



CAA December 2025 Newsletter

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A Revolution in Higher Education

As we close out 2025, all of us at CAA are reflecting on how the hard work, dedication, and passion of so many has helped to ignite a revolution in higher education.

Behind the scenes, our management and staff have worked tirelessly to build a multi-year growth and expansion plan and to create a strong infrastructure for our online community, including documenting best practices for teaching online classes and supporting our online learners. We also hired more professors so we could expand our offerings, which are now at 99 class offerings up from 70 in 2024.

We also established a Student Services Department this year, made possible through the \$2.2 million grant from Senator Dave Cortese. This new department is focused on first-year student success and supporting student management of enrollment, registration, and attendance.

CAA's Workforce Development program continues to shine with six apprentices graduating from the program and moving into regular staff roles. This is a powerful demonstration of how CAA is building what traditional systems have not: a pipeline of skilled, confident leaders with IDD who are stepping into public-facing roles and reshaping what inclusion looks like.

Our partnership with West Valley College is stronger than ever, with CAA now having more on-campus space for additional classes to meet the needs of our students. And in November, we held an Open House at Laney College who has expressed interest in bringing CAA's model to their campus.

Our Executive Director Nicole Kim met with DDS and was successful in maintaining reimbursement for our online learners, however we are still

working towards renegotiating that rate of reimbursement, which remains outdated and insufficient.

Both our co-founders, DeAnna Pursai and Dr. Pamela Lindsay, represented CAA on a national and global scale, with Dr. Pam presenting at the CAPED conference and DeAnna giving a Ted X Viiki talk in Helsinki in October with the theme of “Amplifying Silent Voices.”

Over the past six months, CAA held several events that raised much needed funds, including our Annual Gala Fundraiser which saw donations of over \$200,000. We also held lounge nights, such as the Line Dancing Lounge Night and the Halloween Silent Disco, which provided social settings for our students to connect with each other outside of the classroom.

Over the summer, we partnered with 3Below Theaters in San Jose to support its “Reel Heroes Film Series” which spotlighted films on disability and allowed our students to lead the Q&A portion of the event. It was wonderful to see our students embracing new responsibilities and stepping into leadership roles.

As we look ahead to the coming year, we will continue to lead the revolution in higher education. We will show the world what happens when higher education is built for equity instead of exclusion. We will show the world what happens when there is no deadline for learning and potential has no age limit. We will show the world that there can be a place where students are respected, challenged, and celebrated.

That place is CAA.

Executive Director **Nicole Kim**

The Promise of Expansion: Bringing CAA’s Model to More Families



As we look toward 2026, CAA is entering an exciting phase of growth. This year reaffirmed something core to our mission: when adults with intellectual and

developmental disabilities (IDD) are given true access to higher education, they rise to the occasion with determination, joy, and talent. Our next step is to ensure that more families across the Bay Area can experience this opportunity.

Our expansion work is moving forward with purpose. West Valley College remains a strong home base, and we are now preparing to extend

our reach to Laney College in the East Bay and to Mission College in the South Bay. These new locations will allow us to reduce barriers for families and meet students closer to where they live. Most importantly, they reflect our belief that collegiate learning should be lifelong and community-based.

The first phase will focus on enrollment, outreach, and relationship-building. New students will be able to join online classes right away, participate in our virtual networking lounge nights, and attend periodic in-person workshops. Once we reach 30 to 40 students at Laney College, we will begin offering onsite classes. That milestone will open the door to deeper engagement and a

full CAA experience for our East Bay students.

This expansion represents more than regional growth. It is a commitment to equity and to a future where adults with IDD are welcomed into learning environments that challenge, support, and celebrate them.

Thank you for being a key partner in this work. Together, we are building something extraordinary.



Expanding CAA to a Global Stage

On October 18, CAA co-founder DeAnna Pursai joined panelists from around the world at the Ted x Viikki event in Helsinki, Finland. DeAnna’s talk was titled “Amplifying Silent Voices: A Higher Education Revolution.”

DeAnna spoke about the educational gap that adults with IDD face and offered tangible strategies to expand collegiate opportunities for adults with disabilities.





20% Increase in Student Enrollment in 2025



88% of CAA Students Enrolled in Online Only or Hybrid Classes



90% of Students and Caregivers Reported Increased Quality of Life After Attending CAA



Board Member Spotlight **Persi Kanga** **A New Chapter**



College of Adaptive Arts is excited to welcome Persi Kanga as the organization's new board chair. Persi has been an active board member since 2022 where he served as the treasurer, and he is looking forward to stepping into a larger role within the organization.

Persi's vision is to take CAA to the next level on a national, and even global, scale. His two main points of focus will be to expand the college into new markets and also to secure a new regional center reimbursement code for CAA, which remains outdated and insufficient at its current level.

"One of the most important things for CAA is to secure a better source for funding than the regional centers and to find an alternate, sustainable

methodology for funding," said Persi. "Expansion is also key because we need services available to more students in geographic locations."

Persi is also excited to be a part of new improvements to CAA's existing site. He is involved with Eagle Scouts, and with their help, has secured raised planter beds to start a vegetable garden which hopefully will be completed by spring or summer of 2026.

For the last three years, Leann Cherkasy Makhni has been the board chair of CAA. She has been an integral part of the school's success and is deeply connected to our students, our families, our donors and our community. Her steadfast guidance has helped elevate CAA's position and prepared us to continue to grow.

College of Adaptive Arts also salutes Richard Hermerding for

his exquisite and astute skills as CAA's part-time CFO for the past 12 years. His fiduciary oversight and guidance helped CAA grow from a very small, grass roots budget to an operational budget of well over 1.5 million since he began with CAA. His professionalism, teamwork, and financial background in operational oversight were truly foundational as CAA continues to grow and scale to become a nationwide model that can fit on each and every campus of higher learning for adults who historically have not had access. His valuable contributions and service have improved so many lives.

The time, effort and heart that all these individuals have devoted to CAA over the years is immeasurable, and we thank them all for their incredible contributions and leadership.

Donor Spotlight **Bill and Linda Giannini Family Foundation**

“Why I Give”



The Bill and Linda Giannini Family Foundation has been proud supporters of CAA since the school's inception. Bill's granddaughter Morgan has been a

longtime student at the school and enjoys classes like Spanish, Digital Arts and being a part of the Cheer Squad. Her mother, Mimi, says that in addition to her education, Morgan also loves the social aspect of CAA and has made so many great friends.

“CAA has a great mission and fills a big need,” said Bill. “When you give to a smaller charity in your community,

your money goes farther and you can see the real impact it has.”

The Bill and Linda Giannini Family Foundation has been the presenting sponsor of several of CAA's annual Gala Benefit Fundraisers, and Bill says that it warms his heart to help such a deserving cause.

Bill is now retired and his daughter Mimi helps to run their family business, Saratoga Springs, which is a serene recreational venue perfect for weddings and corporate events. Bill, who is a talented golfer and cook, hosts regular Sunday dinners with his entire family and loves to cook risotto and barbecue together with Morgan.

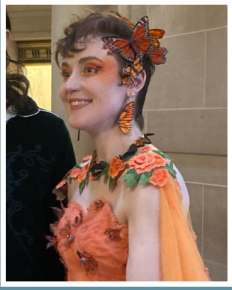


Scan to view this years list of donors:



Professor Spotlight Jane Hamaker

A Professor with Perspective



Professor Jane may be relatively new to the CAA staff, but she is not new to the world of dance, movement, performance, or disability.

In 2019, Jane was diagnosed with autism and for most of her life had been around people who learned differently. Growing up, her world revolved around being aware of educational differences, so CAA's model of accessible, inclusive, lifelong learning attracted her.

Jane became interested in dance in middle school and danced professionally for nearly a decade, but throughout her career she learned to manage both the

challenges and gifts that came along with her autism.

"I had challenges in ballet with memory, spatial awareness and multi-sensory processing issues that I couldn't quite understand before my diagnosis, but I just worked around these difficulties without having a way to quite talk about it successfully," said Jane.

As an active member of the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science, Jane is always keeping aware of how sports medicine and science affects the development and health of dancers. Jane is also certified in the Barre Method Technique and has training in Pilates.

Throughout her life, Jane was always interested in the arts, studying

poetry, clowning and even Mongolian contortionism. One of her biggest passions is hip hop music, and when she is not teaching you can find her onstage freestyle rapping and battling other emcees as "Jane the Message."

One of the things that Jane enjoys about CAA is being able to test out ideas and get feedback right away from a diverse range of people.

"Being at CAA just feels like coming home," said Jane. "Growing up, I never felt like I belonged in my typical peer group. I felt like I was missing out on opportunities to be understood and to understand others. Getting to work with the students at CAA, it's like finding these flashes of recognition all the time. I can really relate to them."

Apprentice Spotlight Katelyn Marchok

Expanding Career Pathways



Incoming apprentice Katelyn Marchok has been a longtime student at CAA who enjoys all sorts of classes, including Pound Fitness, Belly Dancing, and Adaptive Guitar.

Katelyn was the Salutatorian this year at CAA and is excited to step into a larger role in the Cardinal Apprentice Program. She says she is looking forward to helping others and learning more as she begins as a CAP Fellow. "I want to learn job skills," said Katelyn.

Katelyn is very proud of her independence, and takes the bus and VTA to her classes. She shops for her own groceries and likes cooking things for herself including eggs, banana bread, salad and chicken nuggets. She enjoys participating in a weekly dance class and the outdoors. She loves hiking in National Parks, and has hiked to the top of Half Dome in Yosemite five times (so far), and Angels Landing in Zion National Park.

In addition to her studies at CAA, Katelyn is also an assistant teacher with her mother Teresa's "Dance for All" class every Saturday. She also has been a volunteer at her local YMCA since 2023 and participates in the "Kids with Dreams" program

through Stanford University.

Katelyn is extremely artistic and has created all sorts of different art pieces, from drawings and gem collages to ceramics and jewelry.

When she is not in school, Katelyn enjoys hanging out with her boyfriend, her dog Chip, and all her friends from CAA.



THE CARDINAL TIMES

Written and Edited by, Alison Kennedy

The Faces Behind Workforce Development Pathway at CAA



There is much more to the Workforce Development Program, than students simply working as apprentices for a year at the College of Adaptive Arts (CAA). There is more than meets the eye. In order for the program to effectively provide trainings and work experience, Program Manager Andy Urrutia consults with our Advisory Team: Deborah Williamson, Joe Siecinski, and Tara Sreekrishnan. These leaders may not be visible to students, but each brings unique talents and skills behind the scenes to make the WFD a reality. The Advisory Team is, in short, the behind-the-scenes crew that helps make opportunities for student apprentices possible.

Tara Sreekrishnan, an Advisor to the WFD and our community connector. She ensures CAA remains connected to legislative and civic opportunities that can strengthen and sustain the program. Her advocacy and strategic input have opened doors to meaningful conversations and have elevated CAA's visibility.

Deborah Williamson brings her extensive experience to CAA in ways that directly benefit apprentices. Deborah contributes deep community connections and a strong background in workforce and talent development. Her guidance ensures our apprenticeships align with real-world industry needs while expanding our network of partners and opportunities.

Joe Siecinski has been instrumental in guiding curriculum development and identifying the key skills that employers value, helping us keep our program both innovative and practical. Joe brings decades of business strategy, leadership, and entrepreneurial expertise to the team.

CAA Community Corner



Adaptive Guitar at CAA Benefit Fundraiser



Oliver at Graduation



Halloween Silent Disco



Brigid Live in the Bay



Line Dancing Lounge Night



Dr. Pam CAPED



Ann Lunt Moderating Reel Heroes Q&A



Thanksgiving Potluck Lounge Night



Merry Wives of Windsor Performance



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West Valley College
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Platinum
Transparency
2025

Candid.

Our Mission: To provide equitable, accessible, and lifelong college programs for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities wherever and whenever they need them.

Our Vision: To transform the perception of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities by creating a world with innovative and inclusive access to ongoing college education.

Give the Gift of Lifelong
Education



Donate today and help
transform the future for adults
of all abilities!

Save The Date!

CAA's Golf Classic
Fall 2026

