



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: College Access Plan

### A Conversation with College Access Plan Executive Director, Mo Hyman

*Mo Hyman's experiences in nonprofit and education fields (from camp counselor to community college English professor) gave her insight into student needs that were not being met. Ultimately, these experiences also gave her the tools to create [College Access Plan \(CAP\)](#) in 2006 along with business partner Kathleen Parent. Hyman took time to chat with David Kietzman, managing partner at [Momentum Solutions](#) about CAP and its nine-year partnership with Southern California College Access Network (SoCal Can).*

#### What is CAP?

We are a college access and success organization. We prepare students to understand the college requirements, application process and how to choose good schools for their own personal needs and interests. We also support them through college graduation. If we are known for anything, it is having a drop-in program at high school sites. The drop-in program allows students the flexible option of utilizing one or more of our services as much as they would like to. Then it's our job to follow up with the students, build a relationship with them and see what level of input they need. Sometimes requiring students to participate a number of times means that we will likely miss the most vulnerable students, but the lack of requirements in our drop-in program solves that.

**You've described some of CAP's access programming, but tell us about your college success programming.** We invite about 100 graduating seniors who have utilized our programs regularly while in high school to participate in our college success program, which is called "I Heart College", and about 80 to 85 percent typically opt-in to participate. Our goal is not to hand hold them throughout the process, but for students to feel free to come to us with their problems or opportunities. We do this to reinforce a habit of seeking out resources and finding help. Our students don't necessarily feel entitled to talk to their professors, to ask questions or to ask for support. So we push them to go further and build those relationships and strong self-efficacy skills. We, of course, also reach out to them all the time. We send them care packages and postcards. We also invite them to parties that we have when they are in town.

#### Who is the target audience for CAP?

We partner with the Pasadena Unified School District. About 75 percent of the students who attend the schools we serve are low income. Our data shows that, typically, over 90 percent of the students who utilize our services are low-income and/or first-generation college-going.

### **Why is CAP important?**

Programs like ours are very important, especially in a political environment where it is not clear whether funding for education programs, college access programs, first-generation and low-income students are going to be prioritized. I believe our ability, economy and creativity add a different way to work within our sector. Firstly, we are lean, mean, down and dirty. I believe that we are finding new ways to do this work. We are learning to measure student outcomes differently. We have been able to build a robust and responsive evaluation based on where they are, not where we need them to be. Secondly, we have a partnership model to serve students economically. We don't do anything without collaboration and partnerships. Thirdly, we are always thinking creatively about the work. We are not married to one curriculum or one way of doing things. We utilize traditional and nontraditional ways of teaching. We serve a broad range of students and we learn a lot when being responsive to any student, not just a specific group.

### **What do you mean by working with students in a nontraditional way?**

In traditional education, students know that they are in a classroom with rules and a curriculum. And we do incorporate some classroom teaching like in our SAT prep and middle school programs. But that's not really what we are. In nontraditional education, students don't necessarily know that every step they take is a form of education. We can comprehensively approach what builds a strong college student and a strong, engaged leader. Nontraditional educational opportunities present themselves all the time. It might be students calling to say hi and out of the conversation you end up talking about how they are not doing well in class and you help them strategize how they might want to talk about it with their professors. The greatest benefit of going to college is not getting into a specific career, but creating critical thinkers who can be engaged and thoughtful about what they do with their lives. Nontraditional education really helps to foster those intangibles.

### **How did CAP become involved with SoCal CAN?**

We became involved with SoCal CAN through somebody who was mentoring us when our organization started. I reached out to Alison and she came to visit one of our after school programs at John Muir High School. We just immediately jumped in and became active members and now we are steering committee members. We are excited to be helping and looking towards the future of SoCal CAN.

### **How has a SoCal CAN membership benefitted CAP and why is this membership necessary?**

As we were first building our program for college success, we couldn't do it on our own. So it was really great to participate in Level Up — the program that supports students through college graduation. We still participate and it's another layer of our college success program. For me personally, being a member means keeping connected. Pasadena is near Los Angeles, but is also a unique place. With So Cal CAN, we can really keep our finger on the pulse with what is happening in L.A. as a whole. We also get to be in the same room with people who are thoughtful and passionate about the work in the sector. We are very lucky to have such a robust community and to have a nationwide opportunity to drive policy around college access and success.

*Together we* **CAN.**  
Southern California College Access Network – Member Spotlight