

Nov. 14, 2019

## Learning Network Presenter Bios

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### **Mary Katherine Bier**, Pacifica Collaborative (and Pacifica City Council member)



Mary is a lifelong resident of Pacifica. She is a Terra Nova graduate, and a San Francisco State University alumnus with a Bachelors in Psychology and a minor in Holistic Health. Growing up in Pacifica, working in her family business, and focusing on school shaped Mary's strong sense of community and tireless work ethic.

Mary is the facilitator of the Pacifica Collaborative, a monthly gathering of Pacifica's nonprofits and social service agencies. The group shares updates, ideas and mutual support to promote collaboration across a wide range of community concerns. She is also the director of the Pacifica Prevention Partnership, a special project of Jefferson Union High School District. Mary works with students, parents, and local law enforcement to conduct research, share resources, and implement prevention and recovery strategies. Her work includes serving as a consultant to the North County Prevention Partnership. Mary was elected to the Pacifica City Council in 2018. Previously she was a commissioner of the Pacifica Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission.

### **Veronica Escámez**, Casa Círculo Cultural



Veronica Escámez is originally from Mexico City. That is where she began her career as an educator, working as a teacher and then school principal. She became inspired to do community work after serving as director of the nursery that cared for the children of people who lived and worked picking up garbage inside the city's dumps. When she arrived in the U.S., she started working at immigration law office in San Francisco. When it closed down due to illness, she started a support group in her home which has evolved into Casa Círculo Cultural which operates out of a warehouse location in the eastern part of Redwood City.

The mission of Casa Círculo Cultural is to work with immigrant families, offering a wide range of free classes and cultural activities, in Spanish for the youth (to not forget their family's native language) and in English for Adults (to learn their new language). The organization just celebrated its tenth anniversary and uses family members as volunteers to be able to provide an impressive array of activities including student presentations at the San Francisco Symphony, the annual Children's Business Fair and at the annual Día de Los Muertos festival in Redwood City which draws over 10,000 participants.

## **Cari Pang Chen, Associate Director, Rebuilding Together Peninsula**



Cari joined Rebuilding Together Peninsula (RTP) in August 2008, currently serving as the Associate Director. She has worked for a variety of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations since 1993, including the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University, The San Francisco Foundation, and Thrive - The Alliance of Nonprofits for San Mateo County.

Building relationships and leveraging resources to improve the quality of life in local communities has been a constant theme in Cari's career, which drew her to the mission and work of RTP. She continues to be an active community volunteer, and was honored by State Senator Jerry Hill in May 2014 with a "Community Champion" Award for the 13th Senate District. The award was given in recognition of her work with RTP, Friends of Mandarin Scholars in the San Mateo Foster City School District, and the Sterling Downs Neighborhood Association in Belmont. She joined the Advisory Committee for The San Francisco Foundation's Koshland Civic Unity Program in May 2017, and also serves on the Vestry of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Redwood City. Cari has a BA in Urban Studies/Community Organizations and a MA in Education/Policy Analysis & Evaluation from Stanford University. A Peninsula resident, Cari lives in Belmont with her husband and two children.

## **Kate Comfort Harr, Executive Director, HIP Housing**



Kate is Executive Director of HIP Housing, a San Mateo County based organization specializing in creative affordable housing solutions. In her tenure with HIP Housing, Kate has been very involved in property development and program expansion and has been a frequent speaker on a wide range of affordable housing topic. She holds bachelor's degrees in Sociology and Communication Studies from UCSB and a master's degree in Nonprofit Administration from the University of San Francisco.