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Leading by Listening

Dear Friends and Partners,

At the Pal Center, we root our work in a core value: Be Yourself. It's more than a phrase; it's a daily practice. It means showing up authentically, embracing challenges, and honoring the lived experiences of our community. In a time of shifting political tides and persistent inequities, we choose to lead by looking inward, through reflection, recalibration, and by listening more deeply than ever before.

This past year, we leaned into discomfort and invited hard conversations. We paused to ask ourselves not only how we work, but why, for whom, and with what impact. That introspection fueled a year-long process to develop our Centering Community Voice Plan.





Under the leadership of Pal Center Community Engagement Department, the Plan enacted for 2025-2026 provides a framework for meeting hundreds of people of all ages who participate in our programs – and meeting them exactly where they are. Through intentional planning, quarterly listening sessions, and collaborative design, our strategy ensures that the people we serve not only benefit from our mission but also help shape its direction.

For example, we now have a Youth Advisory Team and are meeting our community's request for more financial literacy programming. This shift resulting from our 2024-2025 listening effort is about more than programming.

It's about power. It's about building a foundation where community voice drives the work forward. It's about aligning leadership with lived experience and building systems that reflect not only what we do, but who we are becoming.





Our investments in infrastructure, such as data tools, staff development, and community partnerships, are all rooted in this commitment: to listen first, act with intention, and grow with integrity. We're not just preparing for the future; we're shaping it with and alongside the people who matter most.

As Executive Director, I'm committed to continuing to listen (really listen). By doing so, we'll build the internal strength, shared vision, and adaptive tools to stay responsive and resilient. Listening, after all, is where leadership begins.

Thank you for walking this path with us. We're proud to be growing on purpose, in partnership, and with open hearts.

Ivan Martinez
Executive Director
ivan@redwoodcitypal.org





Our Listening List

A key component of our listening list from last year stemmed from a study conducted by a Stanford Alumni Consulting Team (ACT), a group that matches Stanford University alumni with non-profits to receive pro bono consulting services.

Many thanks to the ACT Team that met with Pal Center for hours to assess each of our programs overlaid with their costs and their impacts: Bill Berry, Ian Chan, Robin Reynolds, George Rossmann, and Jim Sandstrom.

Together that team:

- Interviewed Pal Center leaders (Executive Director, Associate Director, Board Chair, Treasurer, Administration Manager, and Bookkeeper)
- Studied background documents, such as our Collective Agency SWOT Analysis, Future Forward Project Framework, San Mateo County for Youth Vision 2030, CCCS Survey Preliminary Findings, State of California Expanded Learning Opportunities Program, CDE Program Quality Assessment Tool, and local non-profit websites and 990s.
- Interviewed clients, partners and local non-profits, including Redwood City School District, San Mateo County Office of Education, Redwood City Police Department, Redwood City Fire Department, Redwood City Equity and Inclusion Officer Briana Evans, One Life Counseling, Friends for Youth, Fit Kids, and Healthy Cities Tutoring.
- Interviewed funders, such as Sequoia Healthcare District, Saga Foundation, Monterra Credit Union, SV2, and Silicon Valley Community Foundation.
- Analyzed Pal Center financial documents, including our annual fiscal year profit & loss statements, IRS 990s, and detailed account statements and operational balance sheets.

The main thing Pal Center learned from listening to the Stanford ACT team was how to home in on delivering the most impactful and sustainable programs.

How will we do so? By listening to you.



Stories That Stir

Within the overarching story of Pal Center as an organization are the many individual stories that produce pride in our programs. From the hundreds of lives we impact directly and the thousands more we may reach through ripple effect, here are program descriptions and some of our most stirring stories.

Community Care and Enrichment (CCE)

Our core after-school program continues to provide a safe, engaging, and supportive environment for all students, focused on nurturing social-emotional growth, creativity, and leadership through a variety of fun, hands-on activities. Two of our most impactful enrichment areas were Creative Arts & Expression and Health & Wellness.

In Creative Arts & Expression, students explored creativity through art projects, music, and storytelling, using these outlets to express themselves and connect with others. This built confidence, encouraged emotional awareness, and fostered a love for the arts, all while giving students a safe space to share their ideas and identities.

Health & Wellness programming helped students develop healthy habits for both their bodies and minds through physical activity, mindfulness exercises, and open conversations about nutrition and self-care. Students learned the importance of staying active, managing emotions, and making positive choices for lifelong well-being.





Homework support remains a key part of our daily schedule, working closely with school coordinators at each site to ensure strong academic support, such as one-on-one and small group tutoring. These partnerships helped us better advocate for students and meet their individual needs, incorporating seasonal events, field trips, and community showcases to highlight student achievements and strengthen connections with families and the broader school community.

Story from Alan De La Rosa, Site Lead at Clifford Elementary School

"Kiaralyn has come a long way from the day I met her. She had trouble with friendships and making friends. At times, everything would become a lot, and she would either shut down or lash out or leave class.



We made a decision as a team to focus on Kiaralyn's well-being to our fullest extent. We met her outside therapists and saw a lot of her world, including one mentor who bonded with Kiaralyn through love of fashion and makeup, so that Kiaralyn saw her reflection in this mentor. The safe space that Pal was able to provide helped Kiaralyn to grow and be happy and to cry and be sad and to discover herself more."

Story from Khayla Pedroso, Site Lead at Taft Elementary School

"This student, whose family wants to keep him anonymous, first joined Pal quietly carrying the weight of anxiety and low self-esteem. Social situations were challenging, and expressing his feelings didn't come easily. But at Pal, we believe in the power of community, creativity, and connection.

Knowing his deep love for music, we encouraged him to sign up for our guitar class. It was a small step, but it opened the door to something much bigger. That class became more than just a space to learn chords. It became a safe haven where he could grow, belong, and be heard.





Today, he's a different person. His confidence has grown, and he's learned to communicate openly and seek support when he needs it. Watching him pick up his guitar and play with joy, knowing how far he's come, reminds us why we do this work. His journey is a testament to what's possible when young people are given a safe space, encouragement, and a chance to shine."



Story from Lalo Saavedra, Site Lead, Hoover Elementary School

"Andy has made significant strides this year, overcoming both academic and personal challenges with growing maturity and focus. Early on, there were struggles to stay on track – dealing with low motivation, inconsistent participation, and outside pressures that made academic success difficult.

With steady support from staff, peers, and mentors, Andy began to make positive changes. He became more engaged in program activities, more receptive to guidance, and gradually started showing a stronger commitment to education.



As a result of this growth, Andy successfully completed middle school and graduated. This is a huge milestone that reflects his hard work and resilience. His progress has been a reminder of how capable students are when given the right tools and support."

Story from Maria Alejandre, Programs Assistant

"One of the most meaningful highlights of our after-school program this year was witnessing the transformation of a student who initially struggled with self-expression and confidence. Through consistent, supportive relationships with our team, this student (whose family prefers anonymity) felt truly safe and seen.

From the beginning of the school year, we prioritized building trust – focusing on "connection before correction." As a result, the student opened up, felt supported, and began communicating more comfortably with staff.





His mother also shared her deep gratitude, noting how our team helped both her and her son learn to advocate more effectively for his academic and emotional needs. Together, we worked to connect them with appropriate school-based support services, including counseling and academic interventions.

By the end of the school year, the progress was unmistakable. The student was confidently advocating for himself and participating in enrichment activities. His growth is a powerful reminder of the impact a safe, supportive environment can have on a child's confidence and success."



Sports

Pal Center's sports program provides physical fitness and socialemotional learning opportunities for hundreds of students and adults. Sports opportunities include Junior Giants baseball, golf, sailing/rowing, and a rapidly expanding futsal league that has grown into one of our signature programs.



Story from Jesus Ortega, Health and Wellness Manager

"One of our students at Adelante Selby Spanish Immersion School is a first-grader, who has ADHD and requires a bit more love and attention. However, when it comes to sports, he is 100% focused and actively participates to the point where he is now out of his own bubble.





When it comes to sports skills, he learns every Saturday and is enjoying it, as we can see his smiles when he is out there. If I am not mistaken, he is also part of our Summer Sunrise Program. This had such impact that his Mom became one of our Junior Giants volunteers!"

Community For Wellness

This program provides adults (21+) with free group yoga, Zumba, and fitness classes to improve their emotional outlook, physical health, and sense of belonging. Participants receive tools to set and track their personal wellness goals and stay active in a joyful community setting. Classes are led by passionate, dedicated Spanish/English bilingual instructors.



Story from Corina Patiño, Fitness Instructor

"Gloria has been actively doing her best to focus on her health and wellness. She registered for Zumba and although she can't do a lot, she adjusted the movements. She mentioned that our environment helps her as well. With personal stuff happening in her life, such as being a caretaker for loved ones, it was difficult to commit to coming every day. Yes, life gets in the way, but she does not let it bring her down. Zumba and our other activities are a key part of her life now."





PACE (Purposeful Action Creation, and Engagement)

This year, the PACE Program provided youth in Redwood City with opportunities to grow, lead, and thrive. Whether through after-school enrichment, citywide events, or leadership development, PACE created spaces where students felt supported, inspired, and connected to their community. We focused on three core areas: youth enrichment, civic leadership, and college & career readiness.



PACE youth engage in exciting, meaningful experiences that helped them build friendships and explore new interest, including Field trips to the Parcade, Spring Break Hangout, Parks & Rec Teen Takeovers, SFMOMA Field Trip, Outdoor Movie Night, and NACHOO.





Through the Sequoia High School Flex Program, we engaged more than 80 students directly on campus in enrichment activities focused on academic support, college and career readiness, and emotional wellness. Additional sub-programs within PACE include Youth Leadership Pathways, service on the PACE Advisory Board, and the VOICE Program (Vibrant Opportunities for Involvement, Community, and Empowerment), focused on civic engagement and policy advocacy.



Story from Tito Alvarez, Youth Empowerment Specialist

"Kimberly has been an incredible part of our program since we met her during the Flex Enrichment Program at Sequoia High School. She's played a key role in planning events, supporting outreach to new students, and leading by example. She also received the RCPD Community Impact Scholarship and is currently interning with Councilmember Chris Sturken, showing real leadership and commitment to the community."





Toy Drive

Each winter holiday season, Pal Center leads a toy drive, along with first responders, to ensure that hundreds of families can experience the tradition of holiday gift giving with their children. This year's program impacted 563 families in Redwood City and North Fair Oaks.



Story from Redwood City Police Officer John Stamps

"A grandmother told our group that she was raising her three grandchildren and living on a fixed income. She said the Toy Drive gave her a way to make Christmas special for them without worrying about choosing between presents or paying bills. She thanked the officers and volunteers for treating her family with dignity and kindness."





Story from Redwood City Police Officer Aaron Susman

"The team I was on was delivering toys at the trailer park located on East Bayshore, when we noticed a family across from us just staring as we delivered toys. I approached the family and asked the Dad if he was giving his kids anything for Christmas. He said he could not afford any gifts, so I went to the back of our van and gave the girl a bike that I had put there for these kinds of circumstances. The girl started crying, as well as the Dad. Which really touched our team."





Tattoo Removal

This program helps participants who are seeking education and employment opportunities by removing stigmatizing tattoos tied to domestic abuse, incarceration, or gang affiliation.



Story from an Anonymous program participant

"It wasn't hard to leave the gang. I joined to protect people, but it wasn't the right thing to do. When my son was born, I wasn't willing to endanger my family."

Informative Sessions and Summer Sunrise Camp

Pal Center provides a robust summer camp program for K-8 youth, including such activities as Cooking, Gardening, Music, Art, Coding, Financial Literacy, Soccer, Flag Football, Outdoor Activities, Self Care, Social Skills Building and more.



Story from Maria Lopez, Pal Center Member

"I would like to thank Pal Center for all the programs they have offered, especially the informative sessions. Every Wednesday is very special to me because I come to learn about different topics and also spend time with my daughters, learning together and enjoying delicious food.

Regarding the summer program, I love seeing how happy and excited my daughter is. She tells me that she has fun and shares experiences with other kids, and when we get home, she just wants to rest. Having these spaces for parents is a huge help, because during those hours I can go to work to pay my rent and also organize myself for when she's done."







Partner Praises

Pal Center is only as strong as the many partners who collaborate with us and support our efforts toward positive community impact. Along with all the rest of our listening, we hear and share their voices, too!



"PAL Center uplifts our youth and strengthens the entire community. I'm honored to recognize their impact and proud to partner in building a brighter future together."

- Lisa Gauthier County Supervisor, 4th District



"Pal Center is deep within the community. They serve hundreds of people weekly in Zumba classes alone for the Whole Health for You Collaborative."

- Cece Chu
Executive Director at Friends for Youth



"The Pal Center has become a trusted partner for our families, providing consistent support and meaningful opportunities for students. Their work makes a real difference in helping our students feel connected and supported beyond the school day, fostering academic growth, social-emotional development, and enrichment experiences that extend learning in a safe, nurturing environment."

- Enrique Calderón Expanded Learning Coordinator, Redwood City School District



"Pal Center creates a critical bridge between North Fair Oaks and Cañada College. Pal Center's support for first-gen students in particular is inspirational! Pal also provides critical aspirational support to the community, working with the younger students to develop good study habits, explore academic interests, and envision college as an attainable, even expected, goal."

- John Pimentel

Pal Center Board Member, President, and SMCCCD Trustee Area 5



"The Redwood City Police Department's collaboration with Pal Center is essential. It allows us to build relationships based on trust, so we can work alongside families and young people to create safer and more resilient neighborhoods. By joining forces, we open doors to mentorship, education, and positive activities that help guide youth toward bright and successful futures. This partnership is about more than public safety. It is about fostering a sense of belonging, shared responsibility, and hope for the next generation."

- Kristina Bell Chief of Police at the Redwood City Police Department

SOBRATO Philanthropies

"Pal Center is a local cornerstone of community resilience. Its team offers holistic support to families and youth, creating pathways for residents to thrive through connection, empowerment, and care. They are a stellar example of a community-based organization driving to create meaningful, systemic change, and we are honored to partner with them."

- Carlin Johnson Politzer
Senior Program Officer at Sobrato Philanthropies



Events That Elevate

Along with day-to-day operations that enrich and uplift our community Pal Center creates and partners on many events, profiled here in chronological order throughout our 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Annual Golf Tournament

July 1st, 2024

Our Annual Golf Tournament aims to bring the community together to support youth programs, promote healthy activities, and raise funds for local family and youth services.



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National Night Out August 6, 2024

National Night Out is an annual community-building event designed to promote neighborhood safety, strengthen relationships between residents and local law enforcement, and foster a sense of unity and support within the community.

Vida Sana & Completa by Stanford August 7th, 2024

The Vida Sana & Completa session by Stanford provides valuable information and resources to promote healthy living and well-being within the community, focusing on nutrition, wellness, and preventive care.



Proclamation International Youth Day August 12th, 2024

The Proclamation for International Youth Day recognizes and celebrates the contributions of young people, raises awareness about youth-related issues, and encourages community support for their empowerment and development.



Alternative Community Transportation by Commute Organization

August 21st, 2024

This event promotes sustainable and accessible transportation options within the community, encouraging residents to explore alternative ways to commute that reduce environmental impact and improve connectivity.

12th Bliss Charity Concert August 24th, 2024

The 12th Bliss Charity Concert brings the community together to enjoy live music while raising funds and awareness to support local charitable causes and make a positive impact.





Palo Alto Junior Museum September 28th, 2024

This event brings together families from our center and other communities, so parents and children alike can explore the museum and learn about the animals that live there.

Copita Festival October 6th, 2024

Copita Festival is a vibrant community celebration, featuring cultural activities, music, and family-friendly fun that brings people together to honor traditions and enjoy a lively festival atmosphere.



College, Community, Career Fair October 10th, 2024

The College, Community, Career Fair connects students and community members with educational opportunities, local resources, and career pathways to support personal growth and professional development.

Pal-o-ween October 25th, 2024

Pal-o-ween is a festive community event that brings families and friends together to celebrate Halloween with fun activities, costumes, and safe trick-or-treating.





Dia de los Muertos November 2nd, 2024

The Día de los Muertos event offers the community an opportunity to remember their loved ones and celebrate their traditions together.

Holly Jolly Fiesta

December 4th, 2024

The Holly Jolly Fiesta is a festive Christmas-time event where everyone is warmly invited to celebrate together with delicious food, exciting raffles, and other fun activities that bring families and the community closer, creating joyful memories with kids and loved ones.



Hometown Holiday December 7th, 2024

Hometown Holiday is a beloved community celebration that brings residents together to enjoy festive entertainment, holiday markets, and family-friendly activities, fostering a strong sense of local pride and holiday spirit.

Empowering One Another by One Life December 11th, 2024

This event is an inspiring opportunity for women in our communities, focusing on self-love, building strong bonds to grow stronger together, build personal growth, and establish community connection.





Toy Drive Wrapping Party December 16th, 2024

The Toy Drive Wrapping Party is a festive community event where volunteers come together to wrap donated gifts, spreading holiday cheer and ensuring every child receives a special present for the holiday season.

Help Shape a Resilient Future for our Community by Climate Resilient Communities

January 29th, 2025

This informative session invites community members to learn about climate resilience and actively participate in shaping a stronger, more sustainable future for our community through education, collaboration, and action.



Hursy

Parents and Child Connection Series by One Life

Weekly from Feb. 26th-Apr. 2nd, 2025

The series offers families meaningful opportunities to strengthen bonds, improve communication, and nurture positive relationships through engaging activities with therapists.



This event brings the community together to enjoy a delicious meal while supporting local youth programs and charitable initiatives through fundraising and fellowship.



Family Community Day March 15th, 2025

This event introduced families to the exciting sports of rowing and sailing. Attendees had the opportunity to try both activities through hands-on demonstrations led by experienced instructors.

Community Round Table - WHY Initiative

April 9th, 2025

This is a collaborative forum involving our organization, Friends for Youth, One Life Counseling Center, and Siena Youth Center. Community members come together to discuss important local issues, share ideas, and work collectively toward positive change and solutions.





Middle School Parent & Child Connection Series by One Life Weekly from Apr. 23rd-May 28th, 2025

The series provides families with supportive sessions led by therapists, helping parents and children strengthen their relationships during this important developmental stage.



STEM Fest is an exciting, hands-on event that sparks curiosity and creativity in science, technology, engineering, and math, offering students and families fun activities, interactive demonstrations, and inspiring learning opportunities for all ages.





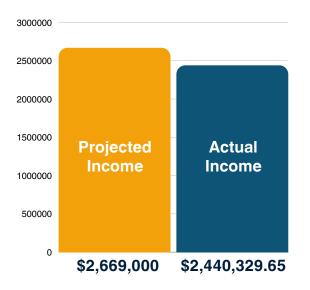
Financial Focus

Pal Center approached fiscal year 2024-25 with disciplined financial management, guided by a strong Finance Committee chaired by Wade Painter, CEO of Monterra. The Finance Committee provides thoughtful oversight, ensuring our organization remains responsible stewards of every dollar entrusted to us.

Income and Expenses

Projected Income: \$2,669,000
Actual Income: \$2,440,329.65
Projected Expenses: \$2,668,186
Actual Expenses: \$2,334,112.51

• Net Profit: \$106,217.14





While falling short of our projected income, careful expense management let us operate within our means and conclude the year with a surplus. This demonstrates the sound fiscal strategies we have in place and our ability to adapt to economic challenges.

Expense Management

Our largest expense category was personnel, reflecting our commitment to the people who deliver impact every day. Supporting 36 staff members, personnel expenses totaled \$1,855,206.36. We front-loaded significant program costs, anticipating reimbursement later, which required discipline and careful cash-flow management throughout the year.

Despite tight margins, we balanced operations strategically. We made targeted investments in staff infrastructure, including the hiring of a Strategic Initiatives Lead to support the Executive Director and strengthen organizational capacity. These investments ensure we are prepared for long-term programmatic growth while meeting immediate community needs.

Revenue Challenges

This year, we did not see the anticipated contributions for the PACE program, requiring us to seek new funding sources outside of city allocations. Additionally, corporate donations were not as strong as in previous years, highlighting an area of focus for 2025-2026. Strengthening private and corporate partnerships will key more flexible funding that supports operations and sustainability.

Stewardship and Reinvestment

The positive net balance of \$106,217.14 was reinvested in ways that strengthen our organization:

- Staff retention and professional development to ensure our team feels supported and grows with us
- Strategic recruitment of staff, such as the Strategic Initiatives Lead
- Staff Wellness Initiative, a new effort to promote staff well-being and resilience.

Looking Ahead

Our financial stewardship demonstrates that we operate with care, discipline, and foresight. Even while navigating economic headwinds and constrained revenue, we finished the year in a positive financial position. At the same time, our experience underscores the importance of cultivating flexible operating dollars to ensure long-term stability and innovation.

With strong leadership and the continued support of our community, we remain confident in our ability to grow responsibly and sustainably while advancing the mission of the Pal Center.

Pal Center Leadership



Ivan Martinez **Executive Director**



Jade Martinez

Associate Director



Gabi Morales
Strategic Initiatives Lead



Erendida Cerrillo

Administrative Manager



Lidia Santiago
Operations Manager



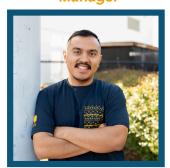
Jesus Ortega Health and Wellness Manager



Rocio Vega Community Engagement Manager



Maria Palencia Program Assistant



Tito Alvarez Youth Empowerment Specialist



Lalo Saavedra School Site Lead



Alan De La Rosa School Site Lead



Khayla Pedroso School Site Lead

Pal Center Board



John Pimentel President



Debbi Jones-Thomas Secretary



Wade Painter Treasurer



Chief Kristina Bell Fundraising Committee



Lennies Gutierrez Fundraising & Events Committee Chair



Peter Tsai Fundraising & Events Committee Co-Chair



Bill Growney Fundraising Committee



Eric Bet Finance Committee



Sgt. Paul McCarthy Fundraising Committee



Quency Philips Past President



Steve Penna (1958-2018) *Honorary Member*

