

Community Alliance for Youth Success

# CAYS

DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE



KEARNY HIGH SCHOOL  
DISCOVERY CASE STUDY

# COMMUNITY ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH SUCCESS



## **OUR MISSION**

**Is to provide the framework and tools that inspire young people to discover their purpose to succeed in school, career, and life, and engage the surrounding community to support their youth and build a stronger future together.**

# COMMUNITY EDUCATION

**“PURPOSE IS A FUNDAMENTAL  
COMPONENT OF A FULFILLING LIFE.”**



## **OUR GOAL...**

**TO HELP YOUTH SUCCEED BY GIVING THEM THE TOOLS  
TO DISCOVER, DEVELOP, AND LIVE THEIR PURPOSE.**

# CAYS CASE STUDY FOR KEARNY HIGH SCHOOL IN SAN DIEGO

## THE CHALLENGE

- More than 1.2 million students drop out of high school every year resulting in under-developed talent – many of them could offer their great talents to fill future jobs.
- Businesses want employees with skills essential to the Future of Work which most educational systems do not teach well, if at all: By 2030, lack of relevant skills will create a global talent shortage of more than 85 million people.
- Many young people do not have a sense of direction, goals or a purpose in their lives, and the pandemic has created additional, severe emotional challenges and anxiety for many young people hindering them from succeeding in school and life, and in building more productive communities.
- Suicide is already the 2nd leading cause of death among 10- to 19-year-olds in the U.S.



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## THE POWER OF PURPOSE IN KEARNY

CAYS works to keep kids in school by making education relevant by organizing and mobilizing community leaders and organizations to interact, provide programs and volunteer to transmit meaningful information to kids.

### **CAYS TRANSFORMING STUDENTS LIVES**

Candice Fee launched the program at Kearny during the 2015-16 school year. Later, Shannon Garcia, an associate principal who had volunteered with CAYS, arrived and recognized the synergy between the organization and Fee's program. She put Fee in touch with Bobbi DePorter and Stedman Graham, the founders of CAYS, and a collaboration was born.

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## THE NEED FOR THE PURPOSE

Motivating students has long been a challenge for educators. In 2003, for instance, a National Research Council report found that roughly 40 percent of high school students were “chronically disengaged” from school.

**There are many ways to motivate people, but more and more research is confirming that traditional carrot (rewards) and stick (punishment) approaches are insufficient. Connecting our work to a higher purpose, on the other hand, fuels intrinsic motivation. Indeed, the need for purpose is a “defining characteristic” of human beings, according to Steve Taylor, an author and senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University.**

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**High school counselors for decades have suggested that students take personality-based assessments designed to give them clarity about what to do with the rest of their lives. You feed the assessments information about who you are, the counselors say, and, voila, they shoot out insights about what you should be.**



As a student, Candice Fee took such an assessment and, as promised, it gave her some career advice.

“It spit out this answer,” she said, “and the answer was that I was supposed to be a forest ranger.”

There was just one problem with that answer: Fee had no desire to become a forest ranger. She enjoyed the outdoors, liked variety in her life, and gravitated toward teaching – all things that might point her to a career as Ranger Candice – but she intuitively knew that was not the direction she should go.

She eventually found her way into education and became a counselor herself. And in 2015 she reflected on her experiences while she was considering a disturbing trend among her students at Kearny High School in San Diego.

An assessment like the one she took in high school might help, but Fee had a bigger vision. So she developed the Discover Your Purpose curriculum, a flexible course that had so much success that the Community Alliance for Youth Success (CAYS) took notice, got involved, and is now taking it to schools across the nation.

“It bothered me that there were so many models out

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**“We were seeing students with college credits and good grades and great potential,” she said, “but they weren’t going to college. I did some research and learned that many of them just didn’t see the purpose in going to college. They were fine working in whatever jobs they had while they were in high school. So I felt we needed to help them discover who they are. We needed them to go forward with a purpose.”**

**—CANDICE FEE**  
EDUCATOR AND CAYS  
CURRICULUM DESIGNER

there,” Fee said. “We wanted to develop something that was free and that could be used by anybody. All of the assessments that are in it are either things that I’ve written, backed up with research, that we’re able to offer for free or that can be swapped out with other assessments. But all the assessments are tools. The real work happens with the reflection.”

Fee launched the program at Kearny during the 2015-16 school year. Later, Shannon Garcia, an associate principal who had volunteered with CAYS, arrived and recognized the synergy between the organization and Fee’s program. She put Fee in touch with Bobbi DePorter and Stedman Graham, the founders of CAYS, and a collaboration was born.

CAYS has been working with school districts since 2011 to help young people “transition into adulthood with purpose, empathy, and tools to navigate life’s challenges.” The non-profit brought its community outreach focus to the curriculum, began scaling the program with marketing and fundraising, and created standards for qualifying as a Discover Your Purpose (DYP) School.

“That this is my purpose—to get this out to as many students as possible,” Fee said. “Seeing what it’s done in my school, it just feels like this should be bigger, that we should be able to get this to more students and affect more lives.”

A decade later, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at George Washington University did a review

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**The trend has continued. A 2019 nationwide survey of 21,678 U.S. high school students found that “nearly 75% of the students’ self-reported feelings related to school were negative,”**

**—ACCORDING TO RESEARCHERS FROM THE YALE CENTER FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE YALE CHILD STUDY CENTER.**

of research on motivation. Here’s how an article in Forbes summarized the report’s findings: “Students who are bored or inattentive or who put little effort to schoolwork are unlikely to benefit from better standards, curriculum, and instruction unless schools, teachers, and parents take steps to address their lack of motivation. ... On the other hand, students who are motivated to learn have higher achievement, show better understanding of the concepts they are taught, are more satisfied with school, and have lower dropout rates.”

There are many ways to motivate people, but more and more research is confirming that traditional carrot (rewards) and stick (punishment) approaches are insufficient. Connecting our work to a higher purpose, on the other hand, fuels intrinsic motivation. Indeed, the need for purpose is a “defining characteristic” of human beings, according to Steve Taylor, an author and senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University.

“Human beings crave purpose and suffer serious psychological difficulties when we don’t have it,” he said in a 2018 article for psychologytoday.com. “Purpose is a fundamental component of a fulfilling life.”

Study after study also shows that students (and adults, for that matter) are more motivated when they identify a purpose and connect it with their work. As then-Senator and future President Barack Obama told graduates of Wesleyan University in

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**“Critical thinking and innovative thinking - I didn’t even know what those things were,”**

**—ARAYAH PALMS**  
KEARNY STUDENT

2008, “It’s only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you realize your true potential and discover the role that you’ll play in writing the next great chapter in the American story.”

In schools such as Kearny, however, many students have never given purpose a second thought. The challenge is accentuated by several socio-economic factors. The vast majority (68%) of Kearny’s roughly 1,400 students qualify for free and reduced lunches, and only 25% have parents who graduated with a four-year degree. It also has a diverse population that collectively speaks around 15 different languages. And more than half of the students (63%) consider English their second language, including 15% who are classified as English Language Learners.

Robert MacPhee, an entrepreneur whose work as a DYP volunteer for CAYS has included mentoring sessions with high school students, told us, “It’s really natural for young people to get focused on one kind of a path and think, like, this is what I’m going to do. But there are all sorts of other options available to them.”

Many of the students he visited with, he said, had never considered owning a business because they didn’t know anyone who owned a business. One was planning to go into the military because that’s what everyone else in his family had done. Others hadn’t given their future beyond high school much thought. Or they had given it so much thought they were adrift in a sea of ideas.

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## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

THE DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE CURRICULUM INCLUDES OPTIONS FOR INVOLVING COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM, SPECIAL WORKSHOPS AND ASSEMBLIES, AND AT THE “EXPRESSION” PRESENTATIONS AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE PROGRAM.

“There were two young people that I remembered immediately, kind of on opposite ends of the spectrum,” MacPhee told us. “One was a young woman who was very quiet and reserved. And one of the things I remember feeling really good about was that by the end of our sessions she was much more willing to engage—to actively engage without significant prodding, you know? By the end, she was asking questions and responding to the questions that she was getting from me and from her peers who were encouraging her about these other possibilities.”

At the other end, he said, was a student who was talkative and whose mind seemed to race at 100 miles per hour.

“He had all these ideas,” MacPhee said. “He was going to do this, and he was going to do that. And by the end of our time together he was starting to get much more grounded in the most important of those ideas. He was starting to kind of narrow things down and figure out where to really focus rather than trying to do everything.”

All the students MacPhee has mentored are different in some ways, he said, but also similar in at least one way—they needed to expand their view of the purpose and the options they might pursue in life.

“I felt like at the end, and the feedback bore this out, they mostly had opened up to these new possibilities,” he said. “They were thinking of things a little bit differently. They were seeing that more was possible.”

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**“People want to work for a cause, not just a living. When there is alignment between the cause of the company and the cause of its people, move over, because there will be extraordinary performance!”**

**—WILLIAM POLLARD,**  
former chairman of ServiceMaster,  
in *The Soul of the Firm*, which was  
originally published in 1996

## LIVES TRANSFORMED

Alexis Rigley, Arayah Palms, and Derek Ulrich were ninth-graders in Fee’s DYP class, and a year later they all could attest to the personal growth that came from the experience.

“In sixth and seventh grades, I was always worried about what people thought of me,” Palms told us. “And then more towards eighth grade I started to let them go. And then by the end of ninth grade, I was like, I do not care what anybody thinks of me.”

The class, they said, helped them develop their self-awareness and confidence, as well as the skills they need to succeed in high school, college and life.

“Critical thinking and innovative thinking – I didn’t even know what those things were,” Palms said.

Assignments like those in a “skills that pay the bills” section of the class, she said, helped her develop time management skills for prioritizing her busy schedule.

“This class should be an opportunity for all high school students, because not a lot of us are aware or not taught those things growing up,” she said. “To have these skills gives you a better understanding of what you’re doing. Because you won’t always have that help along the way. And you won’t always have your parents to be there. So to have the understanding of these skills and these mindsets, it’s really beneficial.”

All three mentioned the significance of the self-awareness that came from the course.

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**“This is the true joy in life, ... being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; ... being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; ... being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.”**

**—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**  
PLAYWRIGHT, CRITIC, ACTIVIST.

“We started doing these assessments and projects and finding our personalities and who we are or will be in the future,” Ulrich said. “And for me, it was just a very interesting experience.”

A key, according to Rigley, was seeing how the self-awareness connected to their behaviors and the outcomes of their actions.

“It’s so important for students to understand that everything they do, every tiny little thing they do, affects their future and that their past will affect who they are today,” she said. “So it’s not good for people to dwell on things, but it’s good for you to be able to reflect and see how things shape who you are as a person. I think it’s really important for teachers to teach this to students, because you know, a lot of students don’t care about their past or they think about it too hard and don’t reflect as much as they just kind of dwell on things.”

The mentoring the students had with community members added another layer of insight to what they were learning in the class, they said.

“My favorite moment from class would have to be when we had the mentors with us,” Rigley said. “I had Wendy Darling, and she is an author and a motivational speaker. And she helped me figure out things more about myself that I didn’t even know were possible. She helped me find my path and what I want for my future goals.”

Ulrich said the advice from mentors -- like the

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**“Success is never final;  
failure is never fatal. It’s  
courage that counts.”**

**—JOHN WOODEN**  
PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL  
PLAYER, COACH, SPEAKER.

formula for problem solving he got from MacPhee -- was super helpful, but he also was thankful for the time MacPhee invested in him.

“I really appreciate him taking time out of his day, especially because for one call he was in Hawaii,” Ulrich said. “And so he definitely took time out of his day for me. And I really appreciated that. And for me, as well, the energy that he gave me was just really good.”

## **A FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM**

Discover Your Purpose was designed to open those possibilities, not to give students definitive answers. The student who was considering the military, for instance, very well might have found that to be his best option—not because of family tradition, but because it connects to his personal purpose. Purpose leads other students to trade schools or community colleges, then into the workforce, while others might pursue four-year degrees or more.

“We want students to know who they are and to be the best them,” Fee said, “whatever form that takes.”

No matter where they see their journeys going, having a clear view of their purpose and the options for their future motivates students to do the hard work necessary to move forward.

The needs of students—as well as teachers, schools and communities—differ and continually change. So the program is flexible enough to work in a variety of ways. Fee has taught it as a stand-alone semester-

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**“Yesterday is gone.  
Tomorrow has not yet  
come. We have only today.  
Let us begin.”**

**—MOTHER TERESA**  
FOUNDER OF THE  
MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY

long workshop, but it’s also been integrated into the curriculum of existing classes and taught by classroom teachers. Other classroom teachers have used it without tying it to their normal curriculum.

“We’ve taught it mostly through our English courses because every student needs to take that course at every year,” Fee said. “It’s aligned to those core content standards. So right now, I am teaching it alongside the teacher in a ninth-grade class and in a tenth-grade class. But the beauty of this is that it can be taught a variety of ways. So we’ll work with schools to develop what works best for their master schedule.”

Regardless, it follows a standard pattern by addressing purpose in three stages. The first is all about discovery. This is where students investigate purpose through self-evaluation. In the second stage, they develop their purpose by working on their skills and talents. And in the third stage they emphasize living it out through real world experiences. Each stage is taught using a four-part sequence: Experience, Discover, Define, Reflect.

Fee also developed a train-the-trainer program that goes into detail about the content and how best to present it depending on the ages of the students or things like how it can be integrated into existing curriculum. As a bonus, those who have taken the training say they learn about their own purpose while learning how to help students.

Frances Hoover, who has taught the program in

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**“The environment, the learning style -- it was really hands-on and helped us figure out who we were as people,” said Rigley, one of Fee’s students. “We were working in groups and individually. It was just very flexible and helped everyone in all different learning styles.”**

**—ALEXIS RIGLEY**  
KEARNY STUDENT

San Diego, said the curriculum presents individual personality traits, interests, and learning styles in a positive light and provides the skills to apply them with perseverance, teamwork, and confidence.

“These skills alone will go a long way for anyone,” she said, “let alone a high school student.”

Like MacPhee, Hoover told us the process of self-discovery was transformative for many of her students. For instance, one student with a “highly social” personality felt a sense of relief, Hoover said, when she realized there were career options that were suitable to her natural wiring.

“It made sense to her that she might thrive in a job that allows her to work with others, which in turn would nurture her need to develop relationships, communicate verbally, as well as teach and listen,” Hoover said. “I noticed that she began to exude a sense of pride when she learned that she, with a social learning style, is considered to be responsible, kind, caring, patient and friendly.”

In addition to the in-class assessments, assignments, and discussions, the students meet with community mentors, participate in projects in their communities, and share the story of their journey at community events.

These aspects of the program allow seasoned leaders to encourage students and offer the practical wisdom that comes from their experiences. But as volunteer Wendy Darling told us, they also bring joy to the mentors because it allows them to fulfill their purpose.

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**“I love supporting youth to find their place within themselves in their lives and to explore what success means to them and what their purpose could possibly be,”**

**—WENDY DARLING**  
AUTHOR, SPEAKER

The purpose students discover for their lives might set them on a course for years, but more importantly it establishes a way of thinking that prepares them for each day. One student who stood out to Darling, for instance, decided his purpose was “discovering his purpose.” So during a community event where students gave short speeches about what they had learned, she intentionally had this student go last because his story emphasized the process over the results.

“He went into this whole explanation of his love of tomatoes,” she said. “And what I loved about his talk was he was demonstrating so beautifully that finding your purpose is not necessarily a definitive, final act. It’s a process, and it’s a journey. I loved his honesty in saying his purpose at this point in time was exploring what his purpose might be. Because I think all too often people feel like purpose is final and finite. And it’s not. You can have all different kinds of purposes in life. They change or maybe they don’t change. But it’s a journey.”

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## **DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE**

CAYS, Community Alliance for Youth Success, has developed its Discover Your Purpose curriculum that is already being applied by San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD ) teachers, to inspire students ages 10-19 to discover their purpose and leverage their talents to succeed in school, life and career.

**PURPOSE IS THE DRIVE THAT GIVES MEANING TO OUR LIVES, AND BY DISCOVERING THEIR PURPOSE, THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS GAIN:**

- 1. A SENSE OF DIRECTION.**
- 2. THE DRIVE TO SHAPE AND SET GOALS FOR THEIR EDUCATION AND A PURPOSE-DRIVEN CAREER.**
- 3. THE MOTIVATION TO CHANGE BEHAVIOR IN PURSUIT OF ACHIEVING THEIR PURPOSE SUCH AS STAYING IN SCHOOL, GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL, ATTENDING COLLEGE AND ENVISIONING A FUTURE CAREER.**

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## COMMUNITY EDUCATION

**RESEARCH SHOWS THAT STUDENTS ARE MORE ENGAGED AND MOTIVATED WHEN THEIR LEARNING HAS PURPOSE.**

Imagine what they can do when their life has purpose! CAYS Discover Your Purpose Curriculum engages youth ages 10–19 to discover their purpose, which helps bring direction and meaning to their lives, insight into possible careers, and a dedication to education.

**“STRENGTH LIES IN DIFFERENCES, NOT IN SIMILARITIES”**

—Stephen R. Covey

# THE PURPOSE CURRICULUM

THE DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE CURRICULUM  
FOCUSES ON STUDENT AGES 10 - 19

The Purpose Curriculum which is free to schools and teachers consists of 3 core stages:

**DISCOVER** - focused on inspiring students to discover what their individual purpose is.

**DEVELOP** - which further develops the skills obtained in the discovery stage.

**LIVE** - where students use their purpose skills in real life.

PASSION LED US HERE

# OUR HISTORY

## CAYS TIMELINE

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**2011** CAYS is founded by Bobbi DePorter and Stedman Graham in Oceanside, CA working closely with schools and communities

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**2016** CAYS partners with Oceanside School District (2015) and launches the first Youth Success Week event January 2016: 23 schools and 18,000 students

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**2017** CAYS continues its success working with local school districts and communities to plan and implement Youth Success Week programs

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**2018** CAYS adds its foundational program: Discover Your Purpose and partners with Kearny High to develop the Purpose curriculum

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**2019** CAYS and Kearny High launches the initial Purpose curriculum on October 17th; KUSI News commits to monthly, live interviews on CAYS progress

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**2020** CAYS launches its new website with its redesigned, easy to access Purpose curriculum.

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**LET'S CHANGE THE WORLD  
TOGETHER**

# MEDIA



KUSI News San Diego has graciously offered to work with CAYS to share our important curriculum and message with the world so that we can help every student in this country and beyond discover their individual purpose.

CAYS Mentoring Program further supports and prepares students in their efforts to self-actualize their potential.



## **COMMUNITY ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH SUCCESS**

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### **ADVOCATE - EDUCATE - GRADUATE**

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In 2012, with the leadership of Stedman Graham and Bobbi DePorter (Quantum Learning Network), the alliance sparked in Oceanside CA, where community leaders came together to send a message that they care about our youth, education, and the community.

Participation includes several hundred highly successful business owners, authors, experts in the field of human potential, educators, city officials and community agencies.

#### **CONTACT:**

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