

College Is Real

Summer 2018 Newsletter



Congratulations to the Class of 2018!

With 62 graduating seniors this was CIR's largest graduating class ever. By all standards we had a truly remarkable year with 100% of these students accepted into four-year colleges. As you can see in the listing to the right there will be 23 students attending UC schools this coming fall, 33 attending CSU's, one heading north to Oregon (Lewis & Clark), and, for the second year in a row, one of our seniors will be attending Stanford University. Three of our students are choosing to begin their college careers at local community colleges.

We are very proud of each and every one of these students. They have worked hard and succeeded while oftentimes facing difficult challenges in their personal and family lives. We wish them nothing but the best as they begin their college careers. We know they will succeed!

| University | # of Students Attending |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| UC Berkeley | 3 |
| UC Davis | 6 |
| UC Los Angeles | 2 |
| UC Merced | 7 |
| UC Riverside | 1 |
| UC San Diego | 1 |
| UC Santa Barbara | 3 |
| Stanford University | 1 |
| Chico State | 1 |
| CSU East Bay | 3 |
| Sacramento State | 5 |
| San Francisco State | 15 |
| San Jose State | 4 |
| Sonoma State | 5 |
| Cogswell College | 1 |
| Lewis and Clark College | 1 |

Richmond High School

100% acceptance to a four-year college

96% attending a four-year college

De Anza High School

100% acceptance to a four-year college

88% attending a four-year college

Scholarship & Awards Dinner

The end of the year is always a bittersweet moment and this year was no exception. Families, students, CIR mentors and staff all gathered to celebrate and recognize our seniors' accomplishments. The seniors shared their experiences, reminisced on the journey, spoke about the important role CIR has played in their lives, and, to a person, expressed their heartfelt appreciation of all that our Senior Program Director, Angie Arriaga, has done for them over the years. There weren't too many dry eyes in the room following these comments.

The evening concluded with our annual awarding of scholarships which come directly from the funds we are able to raise during the year. This year we awarded over \$180,000 to the class of 2018. And, we are proud to report that 32 of our 62 graduates attained a Dean's List Award for graduating with a GPA of 3.5 or higher.



role CIR played in helping them move forward and succeed.

We were able to raise \$330,000 that evening with a bit over \$200,000 of this being donated during the "Fund a Dream" portion of the auction. Feedback received from many was that this year's event was the best yet with a lot of compliments made about the ten-minute video that we created for the evening. This video, shown prior to the beginning of the auction, helped put everyone in a "giving" mood as it provided a clear understanding of the CIR program and how it has been so critical in bringing positive change to the lives of the incredible students we are proud to serve. Here's a link if you would like to see this [here](#). And please share with friends who may themselves want to become CIR supporters.

We are already busy in planning for next year's event so please mark the evening of April 6th down on your calendars now to avoid potential conflicts.

Annual Fundraiser

Our annual fundraising event took place on April 28th and was once again held at Round Hill Country Club in Alamo. With over 150 guests and 30 students attending the room was full of celebrants enjoying great food and a thoroughly enjoyable evening in support of a great cause. The two student speakers touched the audience with emotional stories of overcoming tremendous obstacles in their personal, family and academic lives, and the key

CIR College Grad Returns to the Community

We interviewed CIR alum Jillian Ortiz Cruz who has returned to Richmond High School as a teacher. Jillian is one of four CIR alums who are giving back to the Richmond community they come from by becoming high school or elementary school teachers.

How did being part of CIR impact your educational trajectory?

CIR was a key player in my educational trajectory. CIR provided me with the resources and information to apply and be accepted into a four-year university, including one-on-one support with college and scholarship applications and SAT and ACT prep. CIR led me to attending University of California Berkeley where I majored in Social Welfare.

Why did you decide to pursue education as a career path and why in Richmond?

When I went to college I was able to notice the disparities that existed between me and my peers. Although I was extremely successful in high school I was not at the same level as my counterparts on the Berkeley campus. As I started learning more about educational inequities I began to more fully appreciate the need that my Richmond community faces, and I began to understand why there are organizations like CIR that are so passionate to provide support to students from low-income communities. I decided to teach in Richmond because I have always been passionate about giving back to my community. I am thankful for all the support that was granted to me and I know that if it wasn't for CIR, and the teachers that supported and believed in me through my



high school career, I would not have been able to obtain my degree. Coming back to Richmond to me meant helping the youth in my community realize how much potential they have and at the same time giving back the support that I was so very fortunate to receive.

How does it feel to be giving back to the Richmond community as a teacher?

I have come full-circle. I would not trade this experience for anything else in the world. Each day I come to work I see myself in my students and I try my hardest to push them to their full potential and provide them with support so they can be successful, not just in my class or school, but also in their personal lives. I constantly remind them that there will be barriers but that we are warriors and no matter what obstacle comes our way we will work together to succeed. Looking back as the school year just ended I have seen how much they have grown academically and personally. Knowing I played a part in that means everything to me.

Interview with Assistant Director Fabian Martinez

Where did you grow up and attend school?

I've attended schools in San Pablo and Richmond since fourth grade, transferred to Richmond High in tenth grade and graduated from Richmond High in 2012.

What led you to become involved with CIR?

My brother joined CIR during its early years and kept telling me how great a program it was and that I should also join. And, when beginning tenth grade, I was strongly urged by my soccer coach, Renee Siles, and by my brother's former mentor, Paul Riccardi, to join the program.

I then met Angie who had recently come on board as program director, occurring at a time when I was going through some very difficult personal problems. With her help and guidance I was able to deal with these problems and to become motivated to focus on my studies and career aspirations.

What did CIR mean for you in college and what did you do upon graduation?

Throughout my college years at San Jose State I kept in close contact with Angie and CIR -- they became part of my family. There is no doubt that the confidence and self-esteem gained while in CIR helped me deal effectively with the challenges and opportunities encountered during my college career.

After graduating SJSU I took a job as a Health & Wellness Instructor at a San Jose high school. But, in the middle of that first school year I got a call from Angie about a possible role with CIR. I couldn't contain my enthusiasm and

jumped at it -- and am so happy to now be an Assistant Program Director.

Why did you choose this as a career path?

It's all about the impact CIR has on the lives of the program's students. Absent CIR, the dream of earning a college degree would just not come true for many of these students. These students are on the same journey I was, and I want to do what I can to give them the same opportunities that CIR provided to me. I want to help guide them to be better versions of themselves, to let them know it's possible to overcome the hardships we face, and to prove that college for them is REAL!

How do you see CIR impacting the Richmond community?

As it has done for me, CIR has brought a new sense of hope and offered a second chance to so many students over the years. There are now many alums in college or recently graduated who are on their way to better lives through education. And many of these students are returning to Richmond and deciding to give back to the community however they can.

What are your aspirations for the next few years?

On a personal level, I want to gain as much knowledge as I can from my position at CIR and to one day pursue a Master's Degree in Counseling. I will do my best to help CIR grow our student headcount at De Anza this coming year and to start the program at Kennedy High. I hope to be able to look back in a few years and feel that I have done the best I could in helping our students succeed.

Interview with CIR's Board Member

Renton Squires

Tell me a little bit about your background.

I am originally from Lakewood, Colorado. I studied economics at the University of Colorado Denver and received a master's degree in Finance from Seattle University. While working on my master's degree I took a job with Arthur Andersen's valuation practice in Seattle, made my way to the Bay Area in 1999 and eventually joined PwC's valuation practice in 2005. I am currently a partner in PwC's valuation group here in San Francisco.

How and why did you become involved with CIR?

I was looking for a volunteer opportunity focusing on youth education. My father was a school principal and my step-mother and younger brother are both teachers, so I had an interest in this area. I learned about College Is Real through David Millstein, CIR's Executive Director and retired PwC Partner. I joined College is Real as a mentor before joining the board.

What was your past experience like doing individual mentoring?

My primary experience was limited to mentoring and coaching junior staff at work, not necessarily mentoring students. However, I have one son in High School and one in College, so I've tried to leverage experiences with my boys in my role as a mentor.

You and some of your team at PwC are now part of our group mentoring program at RHS. How has that been so far for you and your team members?



It's been a lot of fun. My team is comprised of younger professionals. They have thoroughly enjoyed connecting with the students and sharing their experiences from high school, the college application process, and their years in college. And they look forward to our group mentoring sessions that are always so lively and engaging.

How do you feel CIR is impacting the community of Richmond?

CIR is providing an opportunity for students to reach their potential. It is a program that pays back to the community when students return to their Richmond roots after college. We have examples of former CIR students who have graduated college and return to work with CIR either as part of the staff or as volunteer mentors. I see CIR continuing to grow and evolve as we find new ways to engage students and mentors.

How CIR is a Critical Part of the Richmond Promise Initiative

We interviewed Jessie Stewart, Executive Director of Richmond Promise, about her thoughts on CIR and how we are such a critical part of the overall Richmond Promise initiative

As some of our readers may not be up to speed about RP, how about a brief overview of the program?

Launched in January 2016, the Richmond Promise is a community-wide college success initiative in Richmond, California. Through collaborative partnerships, and intentional programmatic interventions the Richmond Promise aims to ensure all students in Richmond excel from high school to higher education, attain a post-secondary degree, thrive in a career field of their choice, and become a leader of positive change in their community. The Richmond Promise is committed to supporting multiple pathways to college and career and students may use the Richmond Promise scholarship at any 2-year, 4-year, or Career Technical Education program. Our scholars represent 18 high schools across West Contra Costa and this fall we will have over 1000 scholars across 82 college campuses.

Our work aims to address barriers to college success through four main strategies:

- Annual scholarships of \$1,500;
- Peer mentoring for ninth graders;
- Summer college success workshops and office hours;
- College campus peer support networks;

How do you know of CIR and what are your thoughts on our program?

You can't walk into Richmond High without getting to know College Is Real. I've had the opportunity to learn about CIR and observe the individual and collective impact it has made with its students. CIR does an excellent job serving the whole student – academically, socially, and emotionally. The individualized and holistic support cannot be replicated, and it differentiates CIR from other college access programs.

We feel so fortunate to count CIR as one of our aspirational partners. I say aspirational because CIR embodies many of the components that we know are critical and transformational for college readiness. College Is Real is doing the incredible work early on to prepare students to not only see themselves as college-going, but also to ensure they have the additional supports to be academically prepared, competitive, and admitted to a college of their choice.

The logo for the Richmond Promise features the word "RICHMOND" in large, bold, orange capital letters. Below it, the word "PROMISE" is written in a slightly smaller, bold, orange capital letters. The letter "O" in "PROMISE" is replaced by a teal exclamation mark, giving it a unique and dynamic appearance.

A Huge Thanks to Our Staff & Board!

Over the past few years we have been so fortunate to have Destiney Norsouvanh working with us on a part-time basis as a Program Assistant while taking courses at Contra Costa College. Destiney, who began her college career at UC Santa Barbara, will be returning there next month to complete her studies in Sociology with a minor in math and science education. Destiney has been integral to the success of the program at RHS and she will be sorely missed. We couldn't be more proud of Destiney and wish her the best of luck -- and we are keeping our fingers crossed that she will return to CIR after graduating UCSB.

Hayley Blake will also be leaving the CIR staff to complete her post-graduate education degree and become an elementary school teacher. Hayley has been instrumental in improving our mentoring program on all fronts from helping to recruit new mentors, to regular communication, to coordinating our new group mentoring program and to making sure the mentoring ran smoothly. She also was responsible for CIR's social media program, implemented the new CIR website, and produced our recent video which tells the CIR story in a powerful and impactful way.

While we will sorely miss both Destiney and Hayley, we are well on the way to ensuring a smooth transition with the hire of new staff to assume their responsibilities. You already read about Fabian Martinez earlier in this newsletter. His role as Assistant Director will focus on supporting Angie on projects and helping with our expansion at De Anza and the beginning of the CIR program at Kennedy High School. He is also assistant soccer coach at RHS. We expect the search for an additional staff person will be completed shortly.

Board members:

Brad Blake (Founder and President), Greg Chabolla, Jim Hulburd, David Millstein, Susan Lopera Overton, Nick Sclavos, Renton Squires, Robert Telles, Pascal Yammie

Staff:

Angelica Arriaga, Senior Program Director

Damaris Franco, Program Director

Fabian Martinez, Assistant Director

David Millstein, Volunteer Executive Director

How You Can Help

How to Become a Mentor

The best way to get involved is by becoming a mentor to our students!

We have three mentor models: individual, group, and virtual.

- Individual: you will be paired with 1-2 students and meet with them monthly, usually during lunch at their school
- Group: you will join other mentors monthly after school to meet with a larger group of students
- Virtual: you will have the ability to “e-meet” with your mentee(s) from any location

To learn more about mentoring please email cirrichmond@gmail.com or visit our mentor resource website [here](#)

How to Donate

College Is Real, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization with **Tax ID: 20-8651702**. All donations are tax deductible.

If you are interested in making a donation, please do so via our PayPal page [here](#) or make your check out to "College Is Real" and mail it to:
College Is Real, c/o Brad Blake, 550 Hartz Ave. S-200, Danville, CA 94526.



Interested in contributing to CIR? Visit our website at www.collegeisreal.org