

PALS

by Laura Fouquette

PALS, which stands for Peer Assisted Listeners & Leaders, is a new class on campus this year that provides students, especially freshman and transfer students, with a non-threatening and confidential peer support system. These 29 students, led by Profe Krogh, aim to facilitate school unity and a positive high school environment through individual peer assistance.

Last spring, teachers were asked to nominate students in their classes who they thought were good role models, and each of the nominees was sent an invitation to apply. Because of the large amount of applications received, not all students were chosen for interviews. Profe Krogh spent an entire week every day after school interviewing students. Although the interview process was long, it was necessary to choose the right people for this program because, Krogh says, “When you’ve got the right people, you don’t need to tightly manage. You only need to guide them, lead them, and teach them.” All of the students in the PALS class are extremely driven, and Krogh insists that they have more control over the class than she does. “The class wrote their own syllabus and even created how they’re going to be graded,” says Krogh, “Creativity flourishes in the absence of limits.”

The PALS class is extremely diverse, including kids from all different realms of the school: athletics, conservatory, band, etc. Krogh says “a diverse group was necessary in order to reach all of the kids with different interests at CCA.” Despite being involved in different

activities, all PALS are very self-motivated and share a desire to make change at CCA through positive interaction. Senior Grant Gilbreth saw PALS as an opportunity to give back to the school: “When I came to CCA as a freshman, I didn’t have a lot of friends and often felt lonely. As a PAL, I want to help the kids who feel lonely like I used to.” Similarly, Junior Nadia Perry says she “wishes there was a class like PALS when [she] was a freshman” because she had no one to turn to when she was in an argument with her best friend.

Senior Alli Reissmann says that “being in a class in which well-being is a priority feels natural” because she, along with the rest of the PALS class, has always been the kind of caring person concerned with the well-being of those around her. Reissman says that people often “have the bad habit of giving way too much advice when a friend shares a problem,” and that PALS has taught her that “there is beauty in knowing that just by honestly listening to someone, you’re already lessening their load.”

During the first two weeks of school, PALS underwent intense training in active listening and crisis management. Perry says “I have learned how to communicate effectively and how to reach out to people who might not feel comfortable asking for help when they need it.” They learned to ask open-ended questions and listen without judgment. They respect boundaries in every conversation and let the other person guide the interaction. PALS understand what it means to be truly heard



and that sometimes people only need another person to sit down and listen to them. PALS aren't there to give students advice; they are just someone to talk to. The most important thing about the PALS program is that everything is completely confidential. PALS are absolutely prohibited from talking to anyone else about what a student shares with them, with the exception of special circumstances such as self-harm, abuse, or criminal activity; PALS are required to disclose these exceptions to confidentiality before the conversation starts.

Profe Krogh begins each day in class with inspiration in the form of a quote, story, or video, which leads the class into a thoughtful discussion. Krogh explains how "a short two minute video can be so impactful and make them think of new ideas." PALS plan creative, fun ways for students to be forced to interact with one another and build bonds. During the first week of school, each PAL's first assignment was to befriend a student sitting alone at lunchtime. This helped the PALS practice the communication skills they learned in class while forming a new friendship and making someone else more comfortable at a new school. Krogh also led the class in many team-building activities in order to build bonds and make the class comfortable enough to share things from their own lives. "They needed to understand and practice what it feels like to be vulnerable themselves before they can engage in conversations with kids often coming from very vulnerable place," explains Krogh. As a result, the class has become much like a family. Nadia Perry says "it helps you realize who you really are and what makes you, you." As PALS help students individually and promote positivity school wide, they grow as individuals and as a class. Grant Gilbreth says "it's really important to me because those skills are something that I can apply every single day to build new relationships."

PALS is also in charge of Challenge Day this spring and is involved with many other programs on campus. This year PALS is collaborating with TEDxYouth@SanDiego, Be The Change Club, ASB's Outreach Committee, Jeremy Sewell's ROP Stagehand Tech class, and Slate Club, among others. By supporting CCA's various programs, Krogh says they are helping "to expose



freshman to the greatness and awesomeness of CCA" from the very start in the hopes that some of them will be inspired to get involved. In the spring, PALS will go beyond the borders of CCA to our district's middle schools to make eighth graders more comfortable about the possibility of coming to CCA.

If you desire to meet with a PAL or know someone who could use some help, there are many ways to get in contact with a PAL. There are printed call slips available in the counseling office as well as online call slips on the PALS website (under the Programs tab on the CCA website). Soon, the PALS website will have a short bio of every PAL, including a picture and email if someone wants to talk to a particular PAL. Teachers, counselors, and students can also refer a student to PALS. Every Friday PALS wear their PALS shirts to help students identify who they are around campus. If you see one of them around, say hello and introduce yourself; they love talking to new people. You can arrange to meet on campus with a PAL in a safe place to talk about virtually anything: stress, academic pressures, social problems, anxiety, or anything else you need. Reissmann says that the best part of PALS is that they "can share our experiences with other students in the hopes of them realizing that whatever they are facing, they're not facing it alone."

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