

LOCAL NEWS

Marin nonprofit outlines plan for \$42M donation from MacKenzie



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Billionaire philanthropist MacKenzie Scott arrives at the Vanity Fair Oscars party on March 4, 2018, in Beverly Hills, Calif. (Evan Agostini/Invision/AP)

A San Rafael nonprofit organization that received a \$42 million donation from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott last year will increase its reach and boost its financial aid and support to low-income students over five years.

The organization, 10,000 Degrees, announced the plan on Wednesday. The nonprofit prepares high school students for college and then shepherds them through graduation toward careers.

The organization said that by 2031, it will reach 155,000 new students from low-income backgrounds. That includes connecting 100,000 more high school students with college access programming, as well as 20,000 additional college students with scholarships and career guidance.

In addition, 10,000 Degrees will support 5,000 more college graduates in getting high-paying jobs. The organization, now in eight Bay Area counties, will also expand across five more areas in and outside of California, according to the statement.

“The past few years have been really hard for students, especially students from low-income communities or students of color,” said Traci Lanier, executive vice president of 10,000 Degrees. “Not only the rhetoric around educational opportunity and the value of college, but the very real policies that are constricting services and funding at college and universities.”

She added that the organization has staff and alumni embedded in all Marin public high schools and at College of Marin and Dominican University of California in San Rafael.

“There’s so much bad news,” said Lanier, a Novato resident and a 25-year employee of 10,000 Degrees. “I hope this can be good news for students and families as they try to figure out their journey through education.”

The gift from Scott, the ex-wife of billionaire Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, was the largest donation in the 45-year history of 10,000 Degrees, Lanier said.

The five-year plan aims to increase high school students reached from 11,000 now to 20,000 by 2031; double the number of college students supported from 5,000 to 10,000; increase college students engaged in career success programming from 30% to 80%; increase scholarships awarded from \$9.8 million to \$15 million; and increase the amount of free financial aid leveraged from \$70 million to \$160 million.

Other goals are to improve the number of bachelor’s degrees attained for both four-year college students and for those who transfer to a four-year college after two years at a community college.

“This strategic plan builds on what we know works and challenges us to do more for students from low-income backgrounds, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college,” Kim Mazzuca, president and chief executive officer of 10,000 Degrees, said in an email.

“Even here in Marin, one of the wealthiest counties in the country, too many students lack the financial resources and guidance to pursue a college degree. We can change that,” Mazzuca said. “To date, we’ve already awarded 29% more scholarships to Marin students compared to last year.”

Kaith Monterroso, a resident of the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael, said 10,000 Degrees supported her financially and with counseling through four years at Marin Catholic High School and while earning a bachelor’s degree in nursing at Dominican University, where she graduated in December.

A few months ago, she was hired as a nurse at a pediatric clinic in Marin. She attributes her career success not only to financial support from 10,000 Degrees, but also to mentorships, networking, resume and interview help and other services that were supplied by the nonprofit.

“The 10,000 Degrees community never gave up,” said Monterroso, 23. “10,000 Degrees helped me to be part of the medical system so that I can now serve Marin County.”

Marin education leaders said they were thrilled to learn of the plans unveiled by 10,000 Degrees.

“10,000 Degrees has been an incredible partner in the success of so many of our students over the past 20-plus years,” said Jonathan Eldridge, president of College of Marin. “At a time when large numbers of students continue to face real obstacles to achieving their educational goals, the investments in their new strategic plan could not come at a better time for Marin students.”

Nicola Pitchford, the president of Dominican University, said, “Dominican University of California and 10,000 Degrees share a deep commitment to expanding access to higher education and creating pathways to social mobility.”

“Through many years of partnership, we have worked together to advance educational equity across Marin County by empowering students to overcome barriers that might otherwise stand in the way of earning a college degree,” she said.

Superintendents at the Tamalpais Union High School District, San Rafael City Schools, the Novato Unified School District and the Shoreline Unified School District all expressed gratitude and praise for the work of 10,000 Degrees.

“We deeply value partners like 10,000 Degrees who help ensure that a student’s financial circumstances do not limit their opportunity to pursue higher education,” said Tracy Smith, the Novato superintendent.

Carmen Diaz Ghysels, the San Rafael superintendent, said, “As one of 10,000 Degrees’ original partners, we are grateful for their longstanding commitment to helping our students navigate the path to college and access the resources they need to succeed.”

“We are thrilled about their expanded investment, which will help more students overcome barriers to higher education and thrive beyond high school,” she said.

Matt Dunkle, the superintendent of the Shoreline Unified School District, said it is “grateful to 10,000 Degrees for expanding the financial assistance and educational guidance that can open doors for our Tomales High School students to college, career training, and other opportunities after high school,”

Courtney Goode, the Tam Union superintendent, said: “Education is fundamentally about fostering a sense of hope and opportunity in the lives of our students. We are glad to have 10,000 Degrees as partners in our work and look forward to our continued collaboration.”