

This award pays tribute to the enduring legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who brought forward community values and strategies to promote compassion and love among diverse communities. Additionally, it acknowledges his commitment to utilizing nonviolence as a transformative means for communities.

2026 Peace Makers

Marcus Hobbs
Dan Knapp
Ngim SaoSamkhan
Pat Dixon
James Suazo

Bios:

Marcus Hobbs

Marcus Hobbs is a Long Beach–based community leader, educator, and the Founder and Executive Director of Project X LB (PXLB), a nonprofit organization dedicated to meeting people where they are and creating pathways toward healing, dignity, and belonging. PXLB began by providing free community laundry access through its Loads of Kindness initiative, supporting families experiencing financial hardship. What started as a practical act of care became an entry point for deeper conversations around stability, trust, and unmet needs, and has since evolved into comprehensive, healing-centered programming for youth and families across Long Beach.

Through PXLB’s SHIFT framework: Support, Heal, Inspire, Flourish, Transform, Marcus partners with schools and community organizations to create safe, affirming spaces where young people can express themselves, build emotional awareness, and process their lived experiences. A core element of this work is the use of art, reflection, and creative expression as tools that allow youth to communicate what they feel when words are not enough, helping transform pain into insight and supporting healthy emotional development.

A graduate of California State University, Long Beach, Marcus is currently pursuing his Master's Social Work at Howard University, where his training is grounded in the Black Perspective, emphasizing cultural wisdom, collective care, and community-led solutions. This lens deeply informs his approach, centering relationships, honoring lived experience, and addressing root causes rather than simply responding to symptoms.

Dan Knapp

Dan Knapp has dedicated over a decade to serving the Conservation Corps of Long Beach, where he currently serves as Executive Director and CEO. Throughout his career—most of which has been spent within the Conservation Corps movement—Dan has been guided by a deep commitment to equity, community empowerment, and service. He leads a diverse and experienced team, ensuring that CCLB operates in a mission-driven and community-responsive way. With an unmatched familiarity with Conservation Corps programs across the country and a deep knowledge of the field, Dan's leadership has helped CCLB flourish and expand its impact. His work reflects the values of service, justice, and peace that this award honors.

Venerable SaoSamkhan Ngim

The Venerable Saosamkhan Ngim, residing at Wat Khemarak Buddhikarama (Willow) since 2019, is a highly respected Buddhist monk and community leader whose lifelong dedication to the Buddha Dhamma exemplifies the principles of peace, compassion, and service championed by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Through disciplined monastic practice and compassionate spiritual leadership, he has worked tirelessly to uplift communities and foster harmony, justice, and mutual respect.

Deeply committed to preserving Khmer Buddhist traditions, Venerable Saosamkhan Ngim also extends his service beyond cultural and religious boundaries, promoting peace, nonviolence, intercultural understanding, and social responsibility. His teachings emphasize compassion, wisdom, ethical conduct, and reconciliation, offering guidance and hope to individuals and families during times of joy, hardship, and transformation.

In recognition of his humility, moral integrity, and tireless service to peace and community unity, The Venerable Saosamkhan Ngim is honored as an MLK Peace Maker, reflecting a shared legacy of spiritual leadership, service to humanity, and unwavering commitment to a more just and compassionate society. His affiliation with Wat Khemarak Buddhikarama (Willow) since 2019 continues to inspire the community and support the preservation of Khmer Buddhist traditions in the region.

Pat Dixon

Patricia Dixon has more than 30 years of experience in the private foundation and nonprofit sector. She has served for 27 years as Executive Director of California Aquatic Therapy & Wellness Center, Inc., DBA Pools of Hope, initially joining the organization as a member of its Board of Directors.

As Executive Director, Ms. Dixon is responsible for the overall management of the facility and staff, oversight of therapeutic aquatic and wellness programs, resource development, and the creation and implementation of innovative community-based initiatives. Under her leadership, organizational revenue has increased by more than 500 percent, while client participation has grown by 75 percent.

During her tenure, Pools of Hope has significantly expanded its community impact. In addition to its life-changing therapeutic aquatic programs, the organization now offers comprehensive wellness services, including a weekly food pantry that provides groceries to more than 20,000 residents annually; asthma screenings and education for over 10,000 school-aged children; and annual Back-to-School and Holiday Toy and Food Giveaway events serving more than 2,000 children and families each year.

Ms. Dixon's leadership and dedication have been instrumental in establishing Pools of Hope as the premier provider of therapeutic aquatic and wellness programs aimed at improving the health and quality of life of underserved individuals in the community.

Prior to joining Pools of Hope, she worked in philanthropy and disability management. In 2009, Ms. Dixon was honored as a Woman of Distinction by the California State Senate's 25th Senatorial District, presented by Senator Roderick D. Wright. She currently serves on the boards of several nonprofit organizations.

James Suazo

James Suazo (he/him/his) is a 35-year-old reader, writer, organizer, and abolitionist who identifies as queer, Latinx, and Jicarilla Apache. James was born, raised, and politicized in occupied Tongva and Acjachemen land known as modern day Santa Ana, California and has lived in Long Beach since 2011. James's activism began at the age of 18 when he started organizing fellow bus riders to advocate against public transportation cuts during the Great Recession. Since then, he has contributed to and led student, community, and electoral organizing efforts to address poverty, housing, transit justice, education equity, justice reform, and racial justice.

James has dedicated the last 11 and a half years to organizing with Long Beach Forward, a multicultural and multigenerational grassroots organization and third space building community knowledge, leadership, and power to advance racial, spatial, economic, and educational justice citywide.

Since 2021, James has played the role of Executive Director at Long Beach Forward to lead community-centric fundraising, leadership development, and strategic planning. James earned a Bachelors in English Education from California State University, Long Beach in 2013 and was selected as an Activist-in-Residence at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy in 2025. James has and continues to learn from, train, and mentor organizers locally and nationally as part of his personal commitment to building a better world.