

# Meet Heather Hatchman of Ventura County

March 2025

Today we'd like to introduce you to Heather Hatchman

**Heather, we appreciate you taking the time to share your story with us today. Where does your story begin?**

My name is Heather Hatchman and I am the Founder and Executive Director of VISION Young Leaders' Academy. With an extensive background in psychology and education, I hold a Bachelor's degree in Psychology with an emphasis on Child Behavior and a Master's degree in Teaching and Education.

My journey began in the classroom, where I have dedicated 20 years to teaching in a community facing significant socio-economic challenges and directly witnessed the pressing need for providing access and opportunities to underserved youth. Throughout my own educational journey, I was fortunate to have amazing mentors, teachers, and coaches who set extremely high expectations. Striving to meet these expectations set an example of how adults can positively impact and help youth achieve their fullest potential.

Driven by a deep commitment to making a tangible difference, I founded VISION Young Leaders' Academy. The name of the organization reflects my belief in the power of vision and leadership: by seeing their future, youth can believe in it, and as leaders, they have the power to change their circumstances.

VISION Young Leaders' Academy aims to impact the community by nurturing and developing future leaders. I envision a community where every young person has the opportunity to realize their potential, break through barriers, and contribute positively to society. Through my dedication, I am transforming lives and building a brighter future for the youth of Ventura County.

**Can you talk to us a bit about the challenges and lessons you've learned along the way. Looking back would you say it's been easy or smooth in retrospect?**

While the road hasn't always been completely smooth, I believe that every experience has contributed to my growth. In any role, there are always challenges and adjustments to be made, and it's through those ups and downs that you truly learn and improve.

I founded this organization in 2019 with limited resources, no physical space to meet, and just nine members. Soon after, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and we were forced to pivot quickly, transitioning all of our activities to remote platforms. This was a major adjustment, as we had to find new ways to engage with our members and continue providing meaningful support despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

I have also faced personal challenges along the way. In 2022, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, which was a significant turning point in my life. Throughout my diagnosis, surgery, and treatment, it was incredibly important to me to remain present for the youth in our program. I wanted them to know that despite my health struggles, I was still here, still fighting, and still committed to supporting them. I made it a priority to continue running the organization, because I knew how vital our work is to the lives of these young people. It wasn't always easy, but I believe that by staying involved, I was able to show them resilience and the importance of pushing through adversity, no matter what life throws your way.

As we move forward, we face additional hurdles, such as recruiting new members and finding consistent meeting spaces. Securing donors and supporters to sustain the organization's operations has also been an ongoing challenge. While we've made strides in finding new resources, we are still actively looking to secure consistent donors and a permanent brick-and-mortar meeting place to support our growth and further our impact.

Despite these obstacles, we've worked tirelessly to adapt, and we remain committed to our mission. We are always open to welcoming new resources, support, and donations to help us continue to thrive and serve the youth in our community. The growth and resilience of the



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organization are a testament to our dedication and the invaluable support we've received so far.

**As you know, we're big fans of you and your work. For our readers who might not be as familiar what can you tell them about what you do?**

At VISION Young Leaders' Academy, we are dedicated to making our community a better place by nurturing and building the leaders of the future. Our mission is to mentor youth, guiding them toward a strong sense of self that will positively impact their community. We believe in the power of community and the importance of a supportive environment. To achieve our mission, we offer a variety of engaging and enriching activities including:

- Weekly Meetups: Regular gatherings where youth can connect, learn, and grow together.
- Monthly Hangouts: Fun and interactive events designed to build friendships and foster a sense of belonging.
- Field Trips: Educational and recreational trips that broaden perspectives and provide hands-on learning experiences.
- Athletic Teams: Promoting teamwork, discipline, and physical fitness through various sports activities and competitions.
- Community Service and Volunteer Events: Opportunities to give back and make a tangible difference in our community throughout the year.
- Guest Speakers: Inspiring individuals from various fields who share their experiences and insights, motivating youth and providing valuable learning opportunities.
- Quarterly Book Club: Encouraging a love for reading and discussion, helping youth expand their horizons.

At VISION Young Leaders' Academy, we invite everyone to join us in our efforts. Whether you're a young person looking for guidance, a parent seeking a supportive environment for your child, or a community member wanting to make a difference, there's a place for you here.

Together, we are building a brighter future, one young leader at a time!

What I'm most proud of is the journey I've taken in building this organization from the ground up. Starting it on my own and nurturing it into what it is today has been incredibly rewarding. But beyond that, I'm most proud of the strong relationships I've built with the members. I take great pride in showing them, every day, that I genuinely care about their success. I believe in their potential and am committed to doing whatever it takes to help them recognize it in themselves. The greatest reward for me comes when they feel that support and truly know I'm here for them. These relationships are the foundation of everything we do. What truly excites me is seeing members succeed. It's not just about long-term achievements, but about seeing growth and progress at any age. And when they return to share how much I have impacted their lives, it's a reminder that the work we do makes a difference.

What sets me apart is my deep commitment to being a consistent, positive presence in the lives of youth. Through both my teaching and my work with the organization, I strive to lead by example, showing young people the power of hard work, perseverance, and resiliency. I am not just someone who teaches or mentors—I am someone who invests in their success and growth, and that makes all the difference.

**Are there any important lessons you've learned that you can share with us?**

The most important lesson I've learned on this journey is the undeniable power of hard work, perseverance, and resiliency. These qualities are not only crucial to my own growth, but also to the success of the youth I work with. Challenges will always arise, but it's how we approach and navigate them that shapes our growth and progress.

Above all, I've learned that each day is an opportunity to grow, make a meaningful impact, and move closer to our goals. It takes vision to see the future we want and the belief that we hold the power to shape it. By embracing each day with optimism and determination, no matter the obstacles, we keep our journey moving forward. People make a difference, relationships matter, and ultimately, we are the ones who hold the power to change the trajectory of our lives.

