

Family finds mission at YMCA

The four Hussey kids relied on the group -- and now they have joined their father in helping others grow

By Nancy Arcayna

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Noa Hussey grew up in Palolo housing surrounded by gangs, drugs and racial tension. Fortunately, he had strong familial support and YMCA programs that kept him off the streets.

"It would have been easy to fall into the bad stuff, but we didn't," Hussey said. "My family was really involved with the sports programs -- basketball, softball, track and volleyball. It was an interesting way to spend time with your family."

Hussey, now the program director at the YMCA Kaimuki-Waiialae branch, feels like he is able to give back to kids in similar situations. His family shares his sentiment, with his triplet sisters and father also holding positions at the YMCA. His mother is not directly employed by the YMCA, but volunteers there on a regular basis.

They all believe in the establishment's mission of helping kids with their values. "The vehicle we are using may be basketball or volleyball, but they are learning life skills," Hussey said. "People think it's weird that we all work at the Y, but we grew up with it." Hussey said.

Noa's father, Kellett Hussey, became involved with the Palolo Project nearly 20 years ago, establishing sports and other programs for the community. "No one wanted to come into the valley. There were lots of gangs, some murders," he said. "Nobody really knew how to deal with the gangs. We treated them like normal people and got them involved in the program. They helped coach the kids, and in return, they wanted a weight room. They worked really hard for it and it's still being used today."

Kellett took the kids out of the neighborhood to compete at other schools and locales.

"We started with a track team of about 40 kids. We ended up with a 80-member track teams and for two years, we took the state championships," he said.

"The Y is all about kids succeeding. Teams respected us," he added. "Winning is not the top priority ... it's about doing your best and having good fun."

FUN IS EXACTLY how his daughters describe their many experiences with the YMCA.

Tahra Hussey said she appreciates working at the same establishment as her three siblings. She has fond memories of participating in various sports programs led by her father.



Lined up in the bus are Hussey family members, from left, Noa, sisters Tahra, Sarah, and Rachael, mother Marvis, and Kellett.

"We started volunteering in eighth grade. Helping him coach was good fun," she said. "We also helped with the haunted house because my brother was the teen program director. And, we helped with the Great Aloha Fun Run; we still do."

Sarah Hussey works in the after-school programs for the Kaimuki-Waiālae branch as a group leader. She guides kids through an array of activities including cooking, swimming, crafts, indoor and outdoor games. It's the camaraderie of sleepovers that she enjoys most.

"It's fun to do the all-nighters. We have dinner, watch movies and have midnight snacks," she said. "The shy kids normally stay awake and talk about things. I'm normally shy myself but talking to the kids has helped me speak more confidently."

For Rachael Hussey, the challenge of playing varied sports is among her favorite memories. She now works in the YMCA's Kahala A+ program and continues to help her father with coaching duties.

"Without the sports programs, I wouldn't be who I am today," she said. "Through sports, many people blessed our lives and guided us, and we learned life skills.

"For example, listening is crucial. Reaction time is important ... you need to be able to think on your feet. Sports helps build both physical and mental endurance, self-esteem and confidence."

"THE BIGGEST deal was that the Y was there every day," Kellett added. "Our girls grew up with the kids who went through the program. We never thought about it being beneficial for us. We were having too much fun," he said. "We were teaching life lessons, like how to work hard on the court and transfer those skills to school."

Marvis Hussey, Kellett's wife, established a literacy program "before it was popular to have a reading program" in the Palolo housing complex.

She lured them with specialty lollipops and soon had a following.

"I'd carry around a bag of books and they would line up," she said. "I gave them everything that I offered my own kids -- help with homework, poetry time, reading and tutoring.

"Some of the weak ones wouldn't come, but I'd go hunt them down," she said. These days, she often crosses paths with adults who participated in her after-school program, who thank her for having taught them to read.

Noa was impressed by his mother's ability to reach out to the community. "It was much more than a reading program," he said. "Between the 10th and 15th of the month, money is tight in housing. There was a kitchen upstairs and Mom would make beef stew and chili and feed all of the hungry kids."

Sharon Ishida, office manager at the YMCA Kaimuki-Waiālae branch, is a fan of the family's.

"We are very fortunate to have them," she said. "They are incredibly humble individuals. They are willing to share with anyone who needs them, whether they are strangers, co-workers or their best friends. They really walk the talk showing compassion and dedication through actions."



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