Power Scholars Inspire Community Support

When 21 Bank of Hawaii staff members convened at the bank’s downtown offices to host their “mentees” from Central Middle School and their university student leaders from the Atherton Y, they brought more than their brain power. They, along with other Bankoh employees also interested in helping, purchased and donated food items to the first meeting at the bank’s Café Blue cafeteria, to help the students reach their goal of establishing a food pantry to provide weekend food for fellow students who more than likely must rely on weekday school lunches as their main meals.

These business partners are all-in supporting the Central Middle School Power Scholars, an initiative of our Nu’uanu YMCA Branch and the nearby school, where the majority of students are challenged financially and academically. The Y Power Scholars program started with a summer academy, in which the scholars exceeded their goal with a three-month gain in both literacy and math, helping to close the summer achievement gap.

“This is a time in the development of life when the power of mentoring is enormous to both the human spirit and to our society,” says Cassidy Inamasu, Nu’uanu Y Senior Program Director of Youth Development. “School Principal Anne Murphy and Vice Principal Katchia Gethers approached us about a mentoring program and it took off from there.”

The Y engaged Atherton Y college mentors to add their perspectives as well to help students with goal setting, accountability and career path planning.

Added Inamasu, “Now Central Middle students are receiving guidance and support from both university students and professionals who share their perspectives and experiences so students can envision the path to success for themselves.”

According to Scott Fujii, Vice President and Community Reinvestment Act officer for Bank of Hawaii, the Central Middle School program represents the collective impact of our community working together. “The vision and commitment of the school leaders is impressive, and we are thrilled to provide whatever support is necessary for the students to be successful, in school and in the future.”

“Middle school is such a pivotal time in the development for youth, and the people you surround yourself with can greatly impact who you become. With the chance to be a positive role model, I just had to do this. We’re here to help them gain the skills for success in whatever they do, such as goal setting and communication. We want to empower and encourage them that no matter their background, they are capable of doing anything they set their minds to do.”

---Kellie Goya, University of Hawaii student majoring in biology

“When I’m surrounded by young people, I feel young too. The vibrancy of kids is amazing. I remember being mentored by others myself as a youth. You learn that it’s not just about you, it’s about working with others to share the limelight and accomplish things you can’t do on your own, through good teamwork and building good relationships. I also encouraged one of my mentees to post his written goals where he can see them all the time, so he can make them happen.”

---JP Alonzo, University of Hawaii graduate student in public administration

“Working with students in the program really renewed and ignited my passion for education and teaching. I was able to focus on building relationships with these students who have so much promise and potential when given the opportunity to believe in themselves along with the academic side of a curriculum that looks at where they are, where they need to be, and closing that gap, to help them be successful in life.”

---Katchia Gethers, Central Middle School Vice Principal
Civic Lessons Last a Lifetime

Waialua High School student Case McKinley had a reputation around school as the kid who would get riled up watching political news. His science teacher suggested that he get involved with the Y Youth and Government (YAG) program to channel that passion and to learn to use his voice more effectively.

Entering his third year in the program, Case served as a Senate delegate and keynote speaker for this year’s 66th YAG mock legislative session. He will graduate this June and in the fall will be packing his bags to attend college as a member of the Harvard College Class of 2021.

YAG is a way to engage students in public policy debates, to teach them about local government and civic discourse, and to boost their confidence. 76 middle and high school students introduced and debated 38 bills this year. 92% of Y student legislators said the program made them more confident, and 88% wanted to become more involved in community issues.

The program also includes a Youth Press Corp. One of those youth reporters was “May” from Waianae, who completed the YMCA school-based substance abuse treatment program and made the decision to turn her life around. She found a voice for her passion for writing, covering the progress of bills in the session.

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“The program has meant a lot to me,“ she said, “helping me with my self-esteem as well as my self-confidence and my ability for public speaking.”

Our future is bright with young leaders like Case and May.

Read news coverage of the 66th annual YAG session (KGMB: https://youtu.be/fwDX4x5xZ5w, KFVE: https://youtu.be/fwDX4x5xZ5w) and Mike Broderick’s editorial piece on civic engagement: https://goo.gl/wl755T

There’s No Limit to Success

Actress Lucille Ball once said: “If you want something done, ask a busy person to do it.” The more things you do, the more you can do.

Mililani High School freshmen and “Y-Lifers” Joie and Krysta would agree.

Inseparable friends and teammates, they are leaders in the YMCA Youth and Government program and are in their second year as delegates in the Let’s Get Together Hiroshima Student Exchange Program, the longest running Y exchange program in the nation with a 50-year history.

Joie and Krysta, along with other teens from the Mililani Y, are also helping to facilitate a group of Wahiawa middle school students tackle problems like homelessness and hunger in their community.

And if that’s not enough, they pay it forward at the Y’s Annual Support Campaign call night, sharing their story to help raise money so that other teens will have the same opportunities.

“At school, I see a lot of students going down the wrong track and have personally seen kids I know – when they started with the Y Youth and Government – completely turned around,” says Joie.

Krysta adds, “I definitely think substance abuse is a big problem for teens, and at our school, but the Y has a lot of opportunities to meet more friends and have a good time without thinking about, or being tempted by, all of those negative behaviors.”

To learn more about success stories like Joie and Krysta, view our Annual Support Campaign video: https://youtu.be/lsyXM87rF4

Opening More Doors at Atherton Y

Earlier this year we announced an agreement for the sale of our Atherton YMCA facility near the University of Hawaii (UH) at Manoa to the UH Foundation, to be used for expanded student housing. The sale, which will close in April, enables the YMCA of Honolulu to continue our work with youth — just across the street.

For a nominal fee, we will lease office space in the Student Services building at UH Manoa to continue our work, including Y mentoring programs.

“Atherton Y programs help our youth to become cause-driven leaders in the community,” says Atherton Y Branch Executive Director Ananda Chou. “We challenge our UH student leaders and the children they mentor to grow beyond their comfort zones and prepare them for college and their future careers.”

In the last year alone, Atherton Y mentoring programs included:

- Engaging 108 college student leaders who mentored 400 children and teens, volunteering more than 7,000 hours.
- Three College Camp sessions served a record 37 mentors and 100 campers, including a new Waianae/Nanakuli College Camp.
- Alternative Seasonal Break sessions for 63 college students in environmental stewardship statewide and in the Philippines.
- Student-led projects for 175 college students included building a learning garden at Kumuola Foundation, restoring the Manoa Cliffs and hosting a Thanksgiving dinner.
- Launching the Y PacLeaders Program to connect college students with mentors in their field of choice.

Programs like these go well beyond the facilities that house them. For their capstone project, the inaugural graduating class of Y PacLeaders worked with children in the Kuhio A+ program to learn about sustainability and make their own hydroponics systems.

Opening the door a little today can make a big difference tomorrow.