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## For teen coordinator, the Y answers many life questions

Given the dynamism of the contemporary employment landscape, it's worth an appreciative nod when someone approaches a quarter-century with the same organization — especially if that person is only 29 years old.

Granted, Jay Nishimura wasn't exactly thinking pre-employment training when he spent his first chlorine-infused summer splashing around at the Leeward YMCA. Nor was he necessarily scouting office space when he later served as a junior leader at the Y's Kaimuki-Waiālae branch.

Yet while there are many who have served at the YMCA of Hawaii longer than Nishimura, it's hard to imagine anyone with a deeper connection to its life-shaping values and traditions.

"When I was in the teen program, we had more than 100 people, but we were all one big family," Nishimura says. "I try to re-create that feeling with the teens I work with now. For me it goes back to our mission of strengthening the community, developing youth and promoting good health."

If the nonprofit company line flows easily from Nishimura's mouth, it is because the Y has been a treasured constant throughout his life.

Nishimura started out in the youth program, served as a junior leader as a teen, then worked with the A+ after-school program at the

Kaimuki YMCA while going to college.

This summer, Nishimura graduated from the University of Hawaii with a degree in family resources, a major that has practical application to Nishimura's current position as teen coordinator.

Last month Nishimura joined two other counselors and a group of teens on a biennial exchange visit to Hiroshima. The visit had special resonance for Nishimura, whose nisei grandfather worked at Red Hill and, like other Japanese-American contractors, was detained on suspicion of being a saboteur after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Nishimura said he was gratified that the trip allowed his young charges — who spent a full year preparing to go — to experience meaningful cultural interaction while reaffirming lessons on mutual understanding and respect.

A new set of lessons will come into play this weekend as the teens take part in the Y's Youth in Government Program.

"It's a touchy age," he says. "But it's also an age where you can make one of the biggest positive impacts on helping them grow in a positive direction. They have a lot of passion and ideas, and I just want to help provide them a place where they feel safe and comfortable to try new things and discover who they want to be."