



**DIALOGUES WITH OUR FUTURE ANCESTORS**  
*An Inquiry into the Well-Being of MA'O and Kauhale*  
*Youth Leadership Training Program Participants 2003–2020*

**COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS Outcomes Brief**

**This brief covers the community connectedness outcome learnings from MA'O's *Dialogues with Our Future Ancestors* alumni survey project.** Briefs are also available for education, workforce, socioeconomic, and holistic health outcomes, as well as the YLT experience, and evaluation process learnings. The YLT is a holistic program; for a thorough understanding of the program and its interrelated outcomes, we encourage you to refer to the other briefs, and to the report in its entirety, all posted on our website.

**DIALOGUES SUMMARY**

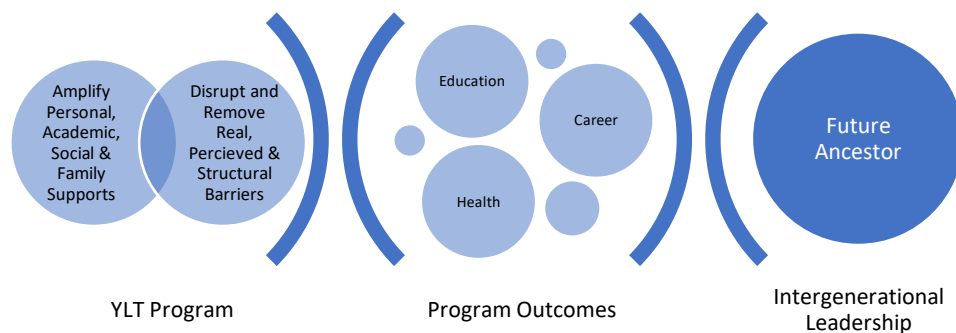
Since its founding in 2001, MA'O Organic Farms (MA'O) has witnessed that investments in the connection of youth to land and in the empowerment of youth leadership generate health, sustainability, and resilience with and for the community. In 2020 MA'O partnered with a team of evaluation experts and academic partners to develop and deploy a multi-faceted 'alumni survey' with the intention of thoroughly and systematically analyzing the effects of its core Youth Leadership Training (YLT) college internship program on participants, and by extension on the community. Our goal was to investigate the hypotheses embedded in MA'O's theory of change regarding the immediate and cascading individual and communal changes that stem from educating and empowering youth.

The Dialogues With Our Future Ancestors project was grounded in MA'O's long-held practice of inquiry, reflection, and refinement: **the feedback loop for our kuleana to our future ancestors.** It was undertaken as a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project, through which MA'O staff, evaluation experts, and academic researchers contributed their unique expertise and experience. This application of the practices of makawalu (seeing through many perspectives; literally 'eight eyes') and kilo (direct observation, generally as a practitioner) affirmed much of MA'O's experiential knowledge, while productively complicating some standing assumptions, and inviting new questions and perspectives.

**YLT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM & THEORY OF CHANGE**

MA'O's theory of change posits that a social enterprise can mimic the strengths of an 'ohana (family) by providing material, intellectual, and emotional support, educational resources, and workforce training. The YLT program helps youth find their purpose, connect with their culture and history, develop knowledge and skills, grow and mobilize personal and professional networks and partners, and pursue educational and workforce opportunities that lead them, their families, and the community toward cultural, social, economic, and spiritual resilience. This grows **future ancestors** dedicated to leadership, rooted to place, and committed to their community.

Figure A YLT Theory of Change



The YLT program encompasses two program tracks housed in separate educational and enterprise settings: MA'Ō Organic Farms (an organic farm and home to the majority of YLT interns, referred to as "MA'Ō") and Searider Productions (a digital media initiative at Wai'anae School, referred to as "DMED"). Together, these two programs are called the Kauhale. The Kauhale YLT interns from both MA'Ō and DMED receive comprehensive educational and social wrap-around services, which include counseling, academic advising, and referrals to other social services. They also receive financial support in the form of a monthly stipend and tuition waivers for University of Hawai'i, Leeward Community College (LCC). All Kauhale YLT interns in both the MA'Ō and DMED program tracks participate in a ramp-up program at MA'Ō Organic Farms and receive ongoing programmatic support from MA'Ō education staff. The overlapping two-year cohort structure is core to the program structure: an intern starts as a novice, looking up to the 'elder' interns for guidance, expertise, and proof of what is possible, after which they in turn progress into the elder role and take on kuleana (responsibility) for the success of those who follow.

### STUDY METHODOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

The MA'Ō Alumni Study comprised four components: two focus groups, an online questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and the collection of biometric data and biospecimen samples.

The **total YLT alumni population (n=315)** is made up of YLT participants in Cohorts 1-12.5, regardless of how long they stayed in the program and whether they received their associate degree.<sup>2</sup>

The **alumni questionnaire respondents (n=62)** includes all those who provided a complete response to the online survey questionnaire. This represents **20%** of the total alumni population. The demographic differences between the sample and parent alumni groups suggest that the questionnaire results may not generalize to all YLT participants, particularly those who stayed in the program for a shorter duration, did not attain a post-secondary degree, did not elect to stay on at MA'Ō for further internship or staff opportunities, or participated in DMED.

The **interviewees (n=21)** did one-on-one interviews in addition to completing the online survey. They represent **7%** of total alumni population. The interviewee population was more likely to have graduated with a degree and to have stayed at MA'Ō longer, which may have skewed the interviews to reflect a generally more positive interpretation of the YLT program experience.

Comparisons are made throughout the analysis between the alumni questionnaire respondents (n=62) and a **Wai'anae peer group (n=157)**. The Wai'anae peer group aligns closely with the alumni population across the key characteristics of age, gender, household income, and household size.

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<sup>1</sup> The complete description of the study methodology can be found in the Process Brief, and in the full report.

<sup>2</sup> Some participants in Cohorts 13 and up were still active in the program at the time of the project, and as a group they could not yet be considered to have completed the YLT. Members of C13 and up who had already left the program were invited to participate.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS IN THE YLT CONTEXT

The YLT program is grounded in a communally-oriented and culturally-rooted approach to youth empowerment and mentorship. It is designed to help youth develop a sense of purpose, connect with their culture, and to build and mobilize networks. Program curriculum is intended to empower youth to connect with their culture and history, in particular with native Hawaiian culture and the history of Wai‘anae moku (region). The experience is also intended to foster a commitment to the well-being of the broader community. It is believed, then, that YLT participants will:

- 1) Value mo‘olelo – social and cultural narratives
- 2) Demonstrate cultural connections
- 3) Hold high aspirations for community
- 4) Practice community service and community engagement
- 5) Engage civically
- 6) Be culturally rooted

## COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS OUTCOMES – STUDY RESULTS

### Mo‘olelo – Social & Cultural Narratives

As noted above, the YLT is grounded in a culturally-rooted approach to youth empowerment and mentorship. Program curriculum is designed to empower youth to connect with their culture and history, and particularly with the native Hawaiian culture and history in Wai‘anae moku. For this reason, we anticipated that alumni would report having developed a greater appreciation for mo‘olelo, and social and cultural narratives through the YLT. We understand social and cultural narratives to encompass the stories that a community uses to structure and give meaning to its shared history and contemporary experience, along with shared origin and creation stories, myths, and fables that together weave a communal values framework.

### Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire responses affirmed this hypothesis: **86% of alumni indicated an increase in their appreciation for cultural narratives.**<sup>3</sup> (See Table 1.) We note that the 46% who reported a *significant* increase in their appreciation is a less robust outcome than the 70% of alumni who reported a *significant* increase in their appreciation for ‘āina (see p. 59). Given the wording of our questions, it is not possible to determine whether this was driven by participants already having a higher appreciation for cultural narratives than for ‘āina prior to joining the program, or if the program is more impactful in driving appreciation for ‘āina than cultural narratives.

Table 1 Increased Appreciation for Cultural Narratives

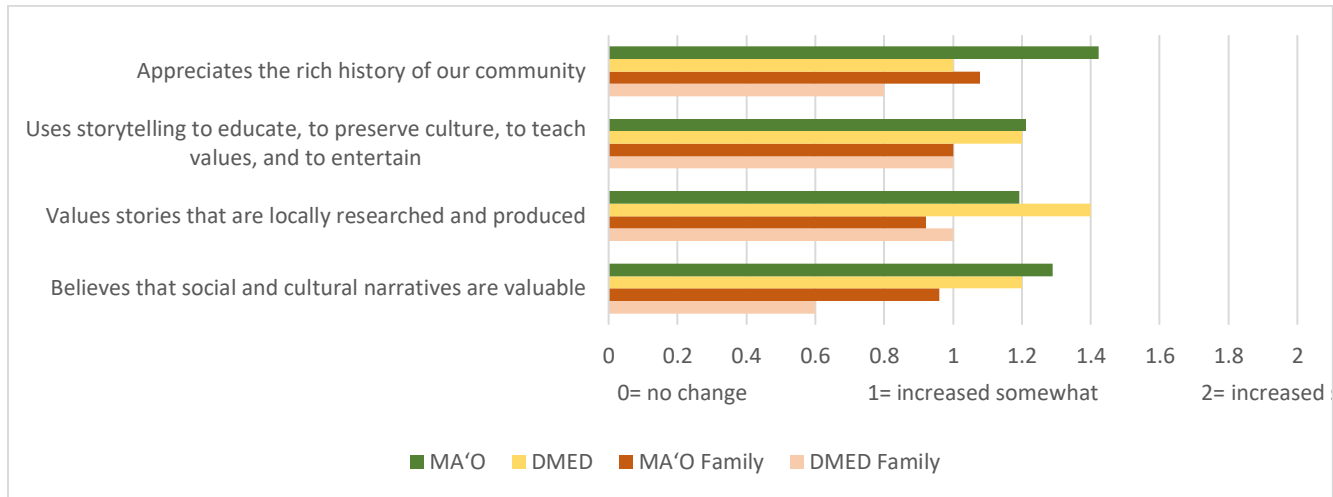
Appreciation of Cultural Narratives	# YLT Alumni (n=62)	% of YLT Alumni
Increased significantly	26	46%
Increased somewhat	23	40%
None	6	11%
Decreased somewhat	1	2%
Decreased significantly	1	1%
Unknown	5	5

It is notable that MA‘O and DMED participants reported a similar increase in their appreciation for cultural narratives (see Figure B). This suggests that the value of cultural narratives, and particularly an appreciation for the community’s history, is clearly imparted through MA‘O programming, even though the work content is not as explicitly geared toward developing storytelling skills as in the DMED track. Alumni also reported that their

<sup>3</sup> These percentages were arrived at by taking an average of the alumni responses to the eight items related to social and cultural narratives.

families' appreciation for cultural narratives increased due to their participation in the YLT, though again at lower rates than the interns' own attitudinal changes. As noted earlier in this analysis, this indicates a broader, second tier impact of the YLT on youths' 'ohana.

Figure B Increased Connection to Cultural Narratives Due to the YLT - MA'O & DMED Tracks



### Focus Group Findings

Notably, several participants in the 'ohana dialogue focus groups discussed developing their storytelling skill while in the YLT, a skill that has empowered them to share their experiences with others.

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*I believe strongly **what this program has done for me is building my morale and my storytelling** because by just doing that, it has inspired so much more people. Just coming in as an 18 year old **speaking in front of audience of hundreds of people, just by sharing that, you see how much people you can influence just a small local boy from, from beautiful Waianae.** (Focus Group)*

“

*I think for me the storytelling wasn't so much like cultural storytelling or historic storytelling, was just our own personal MA'O level. (...) Just finding what our story was and telling that, and I believe that's what we're here doing today. And that's the thing that I think was instilled in me with the idea of storytelling. But yeah. **So when I think of storytelling I think of more personal storytelling, sharing of my relationship and my experience, rather than historical or Hawaiian storytelling.** (Focus Group)*

### Cultural Connection

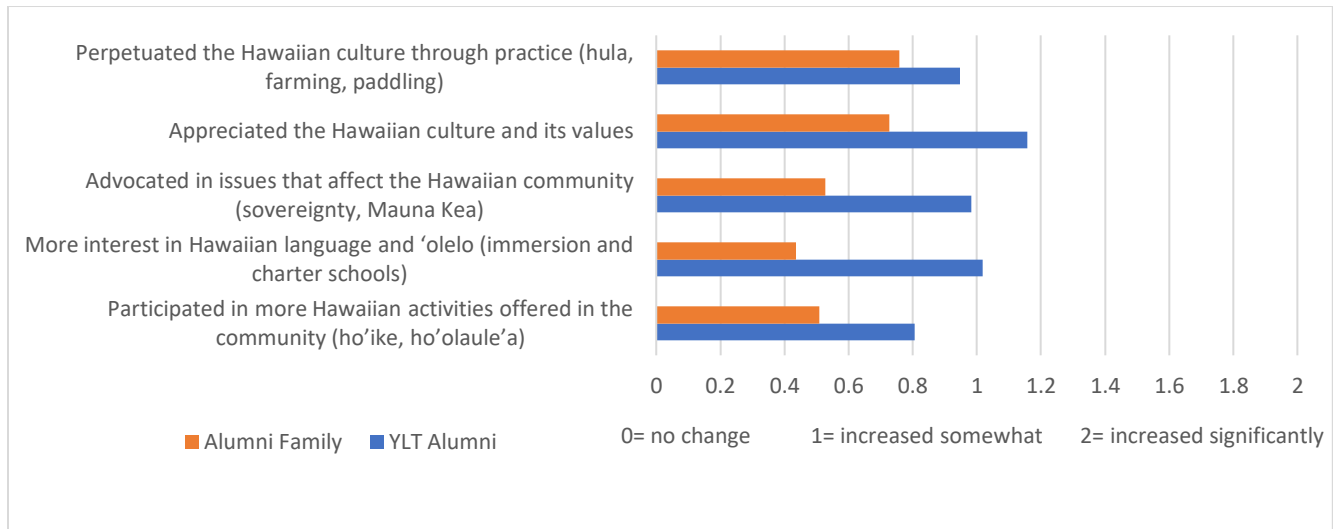
Related to the social and cultural narrative outcomes explored above, we anticipated that YLT alumni would report increased knowledge and appreciation for Hawaiian culture due to their participation in the YLT.

### Questionnaire Findings

**The alumni did report positive changes in their knowledge and appreciation for Hawaiian culture, however the increase on these measures was relatively modest compared to the other areas of YLT-driven change** (i.e. personal capacity and agency, well-being, skills acquisition, appreciation and practice of food sovereignty, etc.). Similarly, participants reported that the YLT experience exerted a mild positive influence on their families' appreciation for Hawaiian culture. (See Figure C.) It is not clear whether this is because interns and their families already had a high degree of appreciation for Hawaiian culture before the program, or if the program's impact has

been less significant in this area. Future inquiries are required to develop a more nuanced understanding of these outcomes.

Figure C Increased Knowledge & Appreciation for Hawaiian Culture Attributed to the YLT



**Community Aspirations**

Finally, given the YLT’s emphasis on kuleana to communal outcomes, and the program’s emphasis on mentoring youth to become community leaders, we anticipated that alumni would report that their aspirations for the community had grown due to their participation in the YLT. To assess for this, we asked alumni how their hopes and their families’ hopes for the community changed as a result of their time in the YLT.

**Questionnaire Findings**

**The alumni attributed a substantial deepening of their and their families’ interest in community change due to their participation in the YLT** (see Figure D). It is notable that the alumni reported the same degree of change for themselves and their families. The YLT’s impact on their ‘ohana attitudes and aspirations for community was strongest example of the YLT program’s influence on participants’ social networks (seen also in the areas of appreciation for ‘āina, practice of food sovereignty, etc.). Many interviewees articulated this aspiration as an intergenerational hope for their ‘ohana present and future (see pp. 49-50).

Figure D Increasing Community Aspirations Through the YLT



**Connection to Community**

Our first question in this area was to determine whether alumni feel connected to community – which could be defined either as their current community of residence or a community other than where they live (could be another place, or a non-place-based community).

## Questionnaire Findings

**72% of alumni reported a current community connection. Of the 45 respondents who reported a current community connection, 93% report that connection to be to Wai‘anae, with the remaining 7% identifying with another community (whether place based or not).** (See Figure E.) Notably, only four respondents living outside of Wai‘anae responded to this question, 50% of whom reported still feeling connected to Wai‘anae. (See Table 2.) However, the non-Wai‘anae population is too small to enable meaningful inquiry into differentiation of community connectedness outcomes between Wai‘anae and non Wai‘anae residents.

Figure E Alumni Community Connectedness

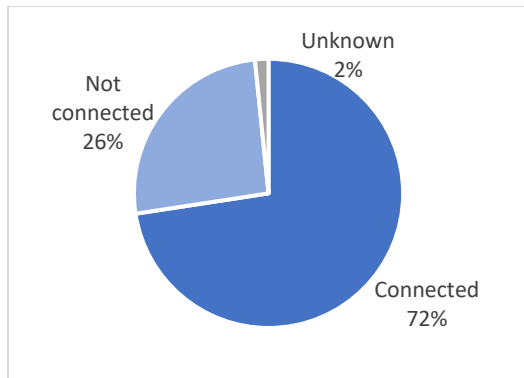


Table 2 Community of Connection & Community of Residence

Community of Connection	Current Residence		Total
	Elsewhere	Wai‘anae	
Other	2 (50%)	1 (2.4%)	3 (6.7%)
Wai‘anae	2 (50%)	40 (98%)	42 (93%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 (100%)</b>	<b>41 (100%)</b>	<b>45 (100%)</b>

We explored the depth and nature of the alumni’s community connection using the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2), which is a well accepted quantitative measure of community connectedness.<sup>4</sup> Although prior studies have demonstrated that the SCI is a valid measurement instrument and a strong predictor of behaviors, including participation in communal activities, it should be used with caution, as every community is different and comparisons across communities should be avoided due to the heterogeneity of individuals and communities. The index is composed of a Likert scale for 24 key attributes, which provide an aggregate sense of community that can be broken down into four critical attributes: membership, influence, meeting needs, and a shared emotional connection. In other studies, communities such as schools and cities have scored an average SCI-2 between 24 and 61.<sup>5</sup>

In this analysis the alumni had an aggregate score of 37 on the index, which is in the range with other communities’ averages. The older cohorts exhibited a stronger sense of community, with cohorts 1-5 scoring 39.17, cohorts 6-11.5 at 36.64, and cohorts 12+ at 35.69. (See Table 3.) However, we note that the differences between cohorts are not statistically significant, perhaps due to the small sample size. When we looked at the four key attributes of the index, we found that older alumni had scored higher for the ‘meeting needs’ attribute - e.g., their needs are met by the community, and people in the community share similar needs, priorities and goals – relative to younger cohorts 12+. Cohort 1-5 also have a stronger sense of membership (e.g., belonging in their community) and influence (e.g., ability to change things) relative to younger cohorts. Notably, no differences across cohorts were observed for the alumni’s shared emotional connection to the community.

<sup>4</sup> “The Sense of Community Index (SCI) is one of the most frequently used quantitative measure of sense of community in the social sciences. It has been used in numerous studies covering different cultures in North and South America, Asia, Middle East, as well as many contexts (e.g. urban, suburban, rural, tribal, workplaces, schools, universities, recreational clubs, internet communities, etc.). The SCI is based on a theory of sense of community presented by McMillan and Chavis (1986). <http://dl.icdst.org/pdfs/files/f458f0f15016819295377e5a979b1893.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Chavis, D.M., Lee, K.S., & Acosta J.D. *The Sense of Community (SCI) Revised: The Reliability and Validity of the SCI-2. Paper presented at the 2nd International Community Psychology Conference, Lisboa, Portugal (2018)*

Table 3 YLT Alumni Community Connectedness on the SCI-2 Index

Cohort	Overall	Reinforcement of Needs	Membership	Influence	Shared Emotional Connection
1-5	39.18	9.12	9.82	9.18	11.06
6-11.5	36.65	9.24	8.18	8.35	10.88
>12	35.69	8.85	8.46	7.69	10.69

We also invited alumni to further explain their current or desired community connection via open-ended responses in the questionnaire, and in the one-on-one interviews. The picture that emerges from these articulations of community resoundingly affirms that **the majority of alumni feel a deep and abiding sense of connection to the community of Wai‘anae, regardless of where they live currently.**

Of the 34 alumni who provided open-ended responses on the questionnaire, the majority described feeling connected currently and/or desiring a deeper connection. Those who felt connected described this connection as time spent giving back to the community and to specific organizations, as well as a feeling of knowing and being known by others in the community. The alumni also articulated their connectedness as a sense of pilina with each other and pilina to the ‘āina. Several of those who do not currently feel connected recollected prior feelings of connection, for example, *“Right now I am outside of my home connection of Waianae but I hope to build it stronger as each time I come back I cry and feel for my home.”* (Cohort 6-11.5)

We also asked those who felt connected to the community where they lived to indicate their community of residence. Of the 29 alumni who responded to this question, over two-thirds feel connected with a community in Wai‘anae moku (see Table 4). The other participants responded that they felt connected to the communities where they reside. Of the eight respondents who identified that they felt connected to a community other than where they live, 76% still feel connected with Wai‘anae or MA‘O (see Table 5).

Table 4 Community of Connection & Residence

Community	# of respondents	% of Respondents
Wa‘ianae	14	48%
Nānākuli	3	10%
West Side of O‘ahu	2	7%
Outside of Hawai‘i/Not specific	6	21%
Other Hawai‘i	4	14%

Table 5 Community of Connection for Non Wai‘anae Residents

Community	# of respondents	% of respondents
Wa‘anae	5	63%
MA‘O	1	13%
Hilo	1	13%
Hawaiian Air	1	13%

Over 100% due to rounding

Ten alumni reported that they do not currently feel connected to community. Seven of these individuals reported that they had previously felt connected to community, but had lost this connection due to moving out of Wai‘anae and/or leaving MA‘O (see Table 6). Notably, none of the alumni who reported missing a connection were from cohorts 12+.

Table 6 Reasons for Loss of Connection

Theme	# of respondents	% of respondents
Moved out of Wai‘anae	4	57%
No Longer at MA‘O	1	14%
Other	2	29%

## Interview Findings

The themes that emerged from the questionnaire open-ended responses were echoed in the interviews, with the majority of interviewees confirming that they identify with their community of residence and/or Wai‘anae (including those who have left Wai‘anae). More than half of the interviewees also identified an organization as a source of community, including the seven individuals still affiliated with MA‘O in post-YLT roles, all of whom identified MA‘O as one of their communities. Other, non-MA‘O, responses included a child’s school, a church group, a city council, and a job at a food co-op. Five of the interviewees said that their connections to community are grounded in the relationships they have with others and the ‘āina; these five individuals are all still at MA‘O in post-YLT roles. **Notably, all 14 interviewees who identified having meaningful work explained that the sense of community they derived at work contributed to why their work is meaningful.**

“ *building the relationships with customers at the farmers' market, but also the co-producers, to the restaurant workers, and the grocery store clerks and stuff like that. It's a different kind of experience from being friends with your coworkers and stuff like that. I think that really, **having those interactions regularly really made me feel like I was a part of the community.*** Interview Cohort 6-11.5)

“ *The land is important. It's a huge part of me. Honestly, if I couldn't live on this side anymore, if I had to leave, if something happened to our side of the island or the land, I'd probably cry. I'm very, very solid with my part of the island. Even when I go out, if I travel, I could never stay away for a long period of time. I could never live somewhere else. There's an ache, yeah? An ache that I want to come home, I want to be here. I want to be on my island, on my side, in my community. I like to see my mountain range shaped like that. Other places that I've stayed, it's not the same.”* (Interview Cohort 1-5)

“ *Okay. I guess, so what's coming to mind right now, specifically for my work in the farm, I think, definitely, being connected to nature, whether that's through farming or hiking and stuff like that. Just being in touch with nature is really important to me, and then also I guess relationships. That could be family relationships, but also through the farm, relationships with (...) the people I work with, for sure, because we see each other regularly, so those relationships are pretty firm, but I think also **the opportunities that I've gotten to kind of become a part of the community (...) when we sell produce to co-producers.*** (Interview Cohort 6-11.5)

Interviewees also expressed having developed a strong sense of community while in the YLT, a community that encompassed their fellow interns, MA‘O and the broader Wai‘anae community:

“ *I live in the city now and not a lot of community stuff happens where i am due to covid. I did feel connected in Hawaii but here in New York it is different.* (Open-ended response Cohort 6-11.5)

Six (29%) interviewees explained that they no longer live where they identify their community, which for all of them was MA‘O and/or the wider Wai‘anae moku. There was an exception, with one person who has left Wai‘anae finding community where she now lives. **This reiterates the closeness that YLT participants feel with Wai‘anae, regardless of their current community of residency.**

“ *this isn't about just growing food either. Right? **It's about creating this community of people where you feel welcomed and loved and safe, and that you're working together for this greater thing.** This thing that's bigger than yourself.* (Interview Cohort 6-11.5)



“*When I lived in Wai’anae it was easy to feel connected because I was near family in a familiar place. Living in Waipahu I don’t have family or friends near so I don’t socialize.* (Open-ended response Cohort 1-5)

“*I felt the most connected when I was a part of MA’O. Being able to work farmers markets, knowing that I’m a part of a community that’s giving back to my own community. However, I don’t feel like I’m giving back to my community at all. There are volunteer opportunities that my current job offers now but with the pandemic, it’s hard to contribute to anything.*” (Open-ended response Cohort 6-11.5)

“*Once upon a time, yes [I did feel connected to community]. Unfortunately, I became disconnected after experiencing the cruel disposition of neighbors and immediate misjudgments/biased classification of worth they made of me simply because I was houseless.* (Open-ended response Cohort 1-5)

### Community Service & Engagement

Given the YLT emphasis on developing a communally-oriented worldview, we anticipated that a majority of YLT participants would report participating in community service and other forms of community engagement.

#### Questionnaire Findings

In fact, a quarter of alumni reported that they volunteer at least one to three times a month, while a third reported that they volunteer less than once per month. (See Figure F.) This latter category could include some who volunteer several times a year; this option should be more clearly articulated in future analyses. We also asked alumni which types of communally-oriented activities they engage in; Table 7 identifies the percent of respondents who pursue each type of activity at least once per month. **Of particular note: 49% of respondents state that they engage in aloha ‘āina / malama ‘āina activities, and 39% participate in cultural and/or traditional practices at least once per month.**

Figure F YLT Alumni Volunteerism

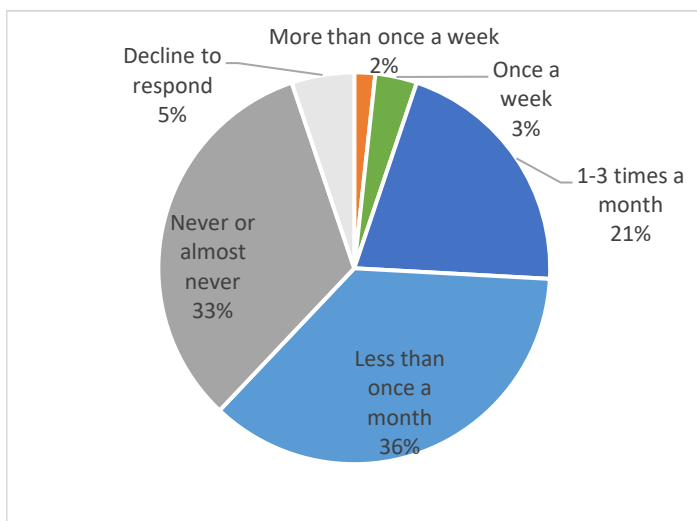


Table 7 YLT Alumni Current Community Engagement

Characteristic	N = 49
Family events e.g., prepare meals together)	84%
Work in your community	67%
Aloha ‘āina/malama ‘āina	49%
Learn your culture and/or traditional practices	39%
Learn your language	29%
Volunteer/Kōkua	27%
Community events and/or organizing such as beach cleaning or food drive)	24%
Religious meetings or services	24%
Make financial or in kind donations to political, cultural or social causes	14%
Community groups	10%
Self-help groups	8%
Provide written or in person testimony to elected officials neighborhood board, legislature, etc.)	8%
Participate in sign waving or marches for political, cultural or social causes	6%

Threshold = once a month or higher

When asked to provide open-ended responses regarding spaces outside of work where they found purpose, 57% of respondents identified community engagement as an important source of meaning in their lives. This was consistent across the cohorts. Types of engagement identified included volunteering, cultural activities, and school and church activities.

For those who responded that they do not have spaces outside of work where they find meaning, most attributed this to being too busy working or attending school. One such respondent who is in a post-YLT role at MA'O said that this meaning is found in the mālama 'āina work at MA'O:

“*No, my life is immersed in the farm and all the work it entails. Although the farm is the single space representing where I find purpose, in this single space my purpose is divided into multiple spaces. I find purpose in our Malama Aina work, the mentorship of interns, feeding our families/community/island. (Cohort 1-5)*

### Interview & Focus Group Findings

As noted above in the section on meaningful work (pp. 41-44), several interviewees and 'ohana dialogue focus group participants reported that they find meaning in volunteer work and community service, rather than in the workplace. One focus group participant directly linked their volunteer efforts to their time at MA'O:

“*So the job that I have, I wouldn't say that it's meaningful, but **the work that I do outside of my actual job I consider to be meaningful work. You know, volunteering with my community.** There's a program where we feed anyone who just needs food. It's like you buy or share for 20 bucks and they get a hundred to \$150 worth of food, and that's once a month. And then, just volunteering wherever I can. **That, to me, is meaningful even though it's not a job title. And a lot of the volunteer work I've learned from working with MA'O. So I still feel like, I'm still doing meaningful work, even if I'm not being paid for it, which, to me, is a bigger... I guess, bigger impact on community around me.** (Focus Group)*

“*I feel as if a part of who I am today, is in part because of the lessons/teachings/connections I've had within my community. Because of **this I feel it is my kuleana to give back to this community in the same way its given to me.** (Open-ended response Cohort 1-5)*

“*I participate once a month with the food bank of Hawaii to pass out food during their food drive within my community. Covid-19 has impacted many and I am fortunate to still be employed and make ends meet at this time. Others in my community are hurting. The food drive means that they are being provided for in some capacity. (Cohort 1-5)*

“*I used to be a youth leader for my church for many years and now that I'm married I am currently reaching out to young adults and families in our community. (Cohort 1-5)*

### Civic Engagement

Historically, the community of Wai'anae moku, comprising State House Districts 43 and 44,<sup>6</sup> has had some of the lowest voter turnout rates in the state. This was again the case in the general election of 2020, which drove the highest statewide turnout since 1998.<sup>7</sup> Statewide, 69.6% of registered voters voted, compared to 55% in District 44 and 58% in District 43 – the worst and third lowest turnouts of any districts in the state, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> District 43 includes Ewa Villages, Kalaeloa, Honokai Hale, Nanakai Gardens, Ko Olina, Kahe Point, Nānākuli, Lualualei, and parts of Mā'ili. District 44 includes Mākua, Mākaha, Wai'anae, and parts of Mā'ili.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hawaii.newsnow.com/2020/11/04/hawaii-general-election-voter-turnout-was-best-its-been-since/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://histategis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=8d2be18a163f4e5b88acb176d6bb9407>

Given the YLT’s emphasis on community engagement and practicing personal agency to contribute to communal outcomes, we anticipated that YLT alumni would vote in higher numbers than their peers.

**Questionnaire Findings**

To examine this hypothesis, we asked alumni how likely they were to vote in the (then upcoming) November 2020 election (the survey was deployed in October 2020). In December 2020 we then compared the percentage of alumni who said that they were “certain to vote” or “most likely to vote” against the actual turnout in Wai’anae moku and statewide in the November 2020 election. We found that 63% of alumni planned to vote, which is indeed higher than the turnout of registered voters in Wai’anae moku (55% and 58% in the two districts), though this is still a slightly lower rate than the statewide population (70%). (See Table 8.) Meanwhile, 18% of alumni said they would not or probably would not vote, and 12% did not reply.

Table 8 YLT Alumni Voting Rates, Compared to State & District

	YLT Alumni	State of Hawai’i	Wai’anae District 44	Wai’anae District 43
<b>Voters</b>	63%	70%	55%	58%

*YLT alumni: those certain or most likely to vote;  
State and District data is actual turnout of registered voters*

**Cultural Rootedness**

As noted previously, the YLT experience is culturally-rooted and includes the celebration of cultural practices such as oli (chants) and mo’olelo (stories and histories). We expected that this would lead to youth’s ongoing interest in and practice of culturally-oriented activities (native Hawaiian and/or other cultures), even after the program’s conclusion. Examples of such practices include ‘ōlelo Hawai’i and other ancestral languages, hula and other forms of dance, cultural activities, and interest in genealogy and history. To learn about this, we asked alumni about their individual and family *current* engagement in cultural activities.

**Questionnaire Findings**

**The alumni responses affirm that the majority of all alumni continue to engage in Hawaiian and/or other cultural practices and activities in the present.** (See Figures G and H.) The greatest number of participants (20-60%, depending on the activity) reported participating in culturally rooted activities and practices along with their families. A substantial subset (15-40%) indicated that they pursue these activities as a personal, not family practice. A minority (5-15%) reported that they do not participate in these activities, but that their families do so.

Figure G YLT Alumni Participation in Hawaiian Cultural Practices

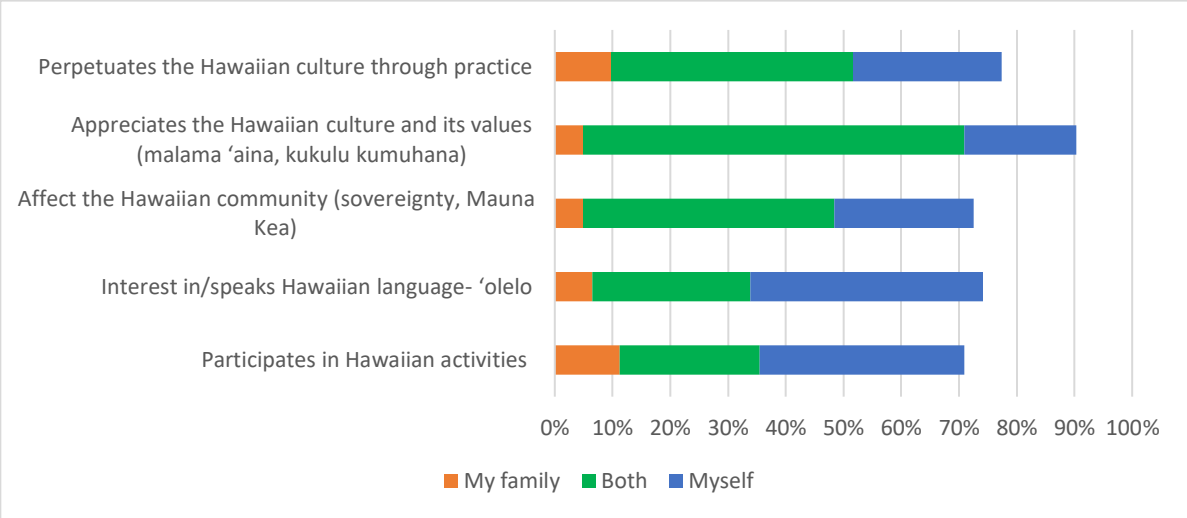
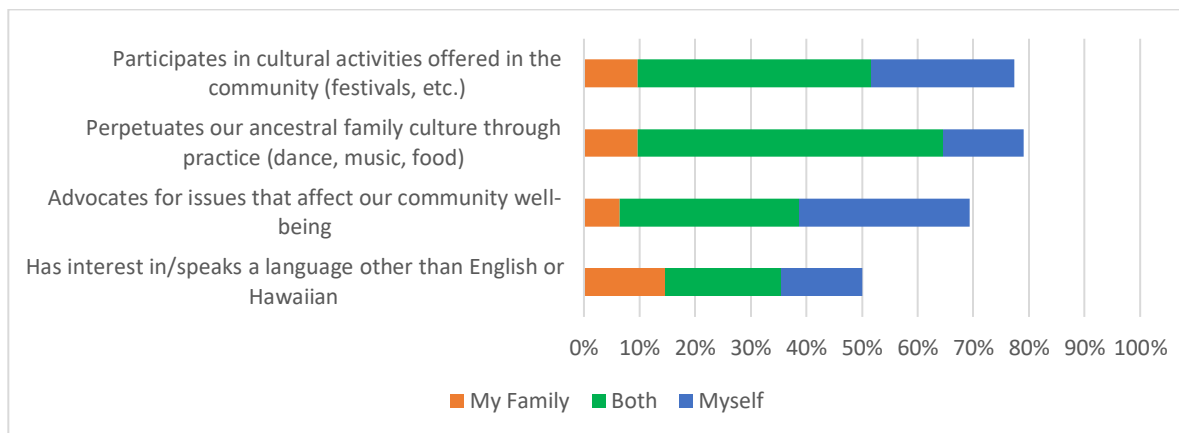


Figure H YLT Alumni Participation in (non Hawaiian) Cultural Practices



### Interview Findings

Interviewees referenced appreciation for and engagement with culture throughout their discussions, often in relation to the practice of growing food for community (see p. 69). Here we highlight two examples of interviewees who described deepening their cultural identity and rootedness through the YLT, and for whom this is vital to their role as current and future parents.

“ (...) *finding our identity as a Hawaiian and being in MA’O, it was more of the bringing it out and seeing how, knowing who I am as a Hawaiian and connecting to the land while working there. It gave me more of a sense of who I was as a Hawaiian person. And I noticed I became more of like... I wouldn't say activist. I'm not one of those go out and stuff, but just to teach my kids or prior to having my son, teaching my nieces and nephews and my younger siblings about the importance of knowing who we are and being one with the land, and how that, it does play into our Hawaiian culture was being connected to the land. Not just saying we're connected, but like actually hands in dirt and feet in mud kind of action.* (Interview Cohort 1-5)

“ *So we had the work ethics, health and fitness. Oh, culturally, that was another big one. I always was connected with my culture, but not as much as I was until MA’O, probably because maybe I was younger or something. I don't know. Maybe that's why I never really paid attention to it. But when I got into MA’O and I started being around it more often started hearing it every day. Learning new things, being exposed to all of that stuff or actually going hand in hand with the cultural stuffs too. Not hand-in-hand, hands on. Then that helped me connect more. And that definitely impacted my life because I see things differently now. I see more to the world. I'm not just tunnel visioned with everything. And so that definitely impacted me that way, and it impacted me on how I want to raise my future kids, my family.* (Interview Cohort 12+)

### SUMMARY & DISCUSSION

In summary, we found that the majority of alumni feel a deep and abiding sense of connection to the community of Wai’anae, regardless of where they live currently. Many alumni also feel connected to MA’O as a source of community. Most of those who do not currently feel connected to community reported that they lost their sense of connection due to moving out of Wai’anae and/or leaving MA’O.

The respondents attributed a substantial deepening of their and their families’ interest in community change due to their participation in the YLT. Their description of the YLT’s impact on their ‘ohana attitudes and aspirations for community was strongest example of the YLT program’s influence on participants’ social networks (seen also in

the areas of appreciation for ‘āina, practice of food sovereignty, etc.). Many interviewees articulated this aspiration as an intergenerational hope for their ‘ohana present and future. As an indicator of community engagement, alumni reported their intention to vote at a slightly higher rate than the actual turnout among registered voters.

Respondents also credited the YLT for driving an increase in their appreciation for cultural narratives and growth in their knowledge and appreciation for Hawaiian culture. The majority of alumni reported that they continue to engage in Hawaiian and/or other cultural practices and activities in the present. Interviewees referenced their appreciation for and engagement with culture throughout their discussions, often in relation to the practice of growing food for community. Half of alumni indicated that they currently engage in aloha ‘āina / mālama ‘āina activities at least once per month, while more than a third engage in cultural and/or traditional practices at least once a month.

Several overarching themes that emerge in the education outcomes are reflected elsewhere in the study. We highlight them here, and encourage readers to look for these themes in the other briefs and/or full report:

- YLT youth exert an influence on their family members, thus amplifying the impact of the YLT program across social networks. This points to the role of social networks, which arose repeatedly throughout our analysis. This was evident in the changes to YLT participants’ ‘ohana attitudes and behaviors in multiple areas (from community aspirations to ‘āina appreciation to food sovereignty practices), which alumni attributed to their participation in the program. It is also reflected in the alumni’s reports of inspiring others to attend college and eat more vegetables. These findings reinforce the promising early findings of the Maui Ola Study that indicated a YLT multiplier effect.
- Given the resounding affirmation from alumni that their appreciation for and connection to ‘āina increased through their participation in the YLT, we note that the positive outcomes stemming from the YLT may also be attributed to youth’s development of this fundamental pilina with the land itself as ‘ohana. We see in this the living embodiment of the following dimension of our theory of change: as *an ‘āina-based learning environment in which outcomes matter, youth at MA’O connect to their place as a matter of identity, self-esteem, pride, relationship, and connection to both individual and collective purpose and context.*