



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

**EDUCATION Outcomes Brief**

**This brief covers the education outcome learnings from MA'O's *Dialogues with Our Future Ancestors* alumni survey project.** Briefs are also available for workforce, socioeconomic status, holistic health, and community connectedness 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**

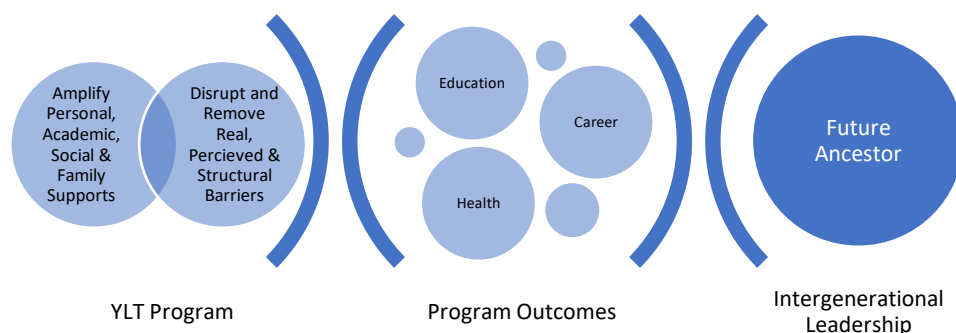
Since its founding in 2001, MA'O Organic Farms (MA'O) has witnessed that investments in the connection of youth to land and in the empowerment of youth leadership generate health, sustainability, and resilience with and for the community. In 2020 MA'O partnered with a team of evaluation experts and academic 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.

---

<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.

## EDUCATION IN THE YLT CONTEXT

In the YLT learning is framed as a kuleana – a responsibility that is simultaneously a right and a privilege – as well as a value, an asset, and a culture. Teaching is not confined to the classroom and is connected to practical applications and community implications. Youth quickly become teachers in their own right, fostered by the near-peer mentorship embedded in the internship structure. The YLT is designed to help youth value formal and informal learning, and to complete their post-secondary studies. Participants receive academic counseling conducted in partnership with Leeward Community College, and develop social bonds within and across cohorts.

Through the YLT, youth learn to persist in their post-secondary studies, and to understand the personal and professional value of their formal education and informal learning. Participants receive substantial staff support, including regular academic counseling informed through our partnership with LCC. They also support one another through the bonds developed within and across cohorts. It is believed these factors will lead participants to:

- 1) Value education, life-long learning, and ‘āina based learning
- 2) Attain degrees at a higher rate than their peers
- 3) Have further education aspirations
- 4) Inspire others to attend college

## EDUCATION ATTAINMENT OUTCOMES – STUDY RESULTS

For context, **47%** of survey respondents self-identified as first-generation college students. This compares to **24%** of LCC students enrolled in 2020.<sup>3</sup> While data is not available for LCC Wai‘anae Moku campus (the campus attended by the vast majority of the YLT interns), it is anticipated that they more closely align with the YLT population. Throughout the following analysis of education outcomes, first generation students matched their non-first generation peers on all measures.

### Valuing Education

The YLT is intended to develop participants’ holistic and ongoing appreciation for education and learning, and to foster a college-going culture among participants, their families, and social networks. This reflects the value of ho‘ona‘auao, which situates the accrual of knowledge and practice as an educational journey wherein learning happens everywhere. We expected, therefore, that alumni would recognize the importance of a college degree, and, beyond that, value life-long and ‘āina-based learning.

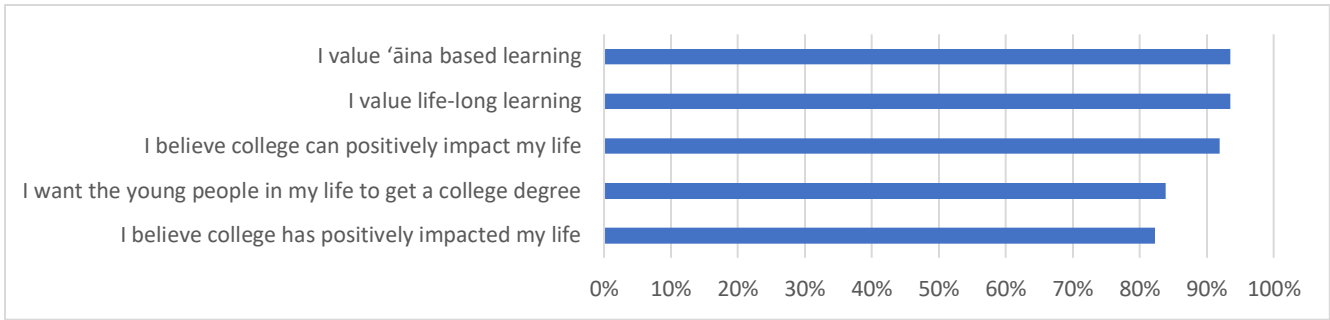
**The survey responses affirm that the vast majority of YLT alumni view education as an asset and value college, ‘āina-based, and life-long learning for themselves and others.** (Table 1)<sup>4</sup> There was no statistically significant difference in the valuation of life-long learning based on time in the program, which may be attributed to the highly uniform responses. While 82% of alumni respondents believe that college has positively impacted their lives and want the young people in their lives to get a college degree, we note that a minority (18%) feel ambivalent or negative about college education. Future analyses should focus on what is fueling this ambivalence, including the role of the barriers that alumni identified elsewhere in the study, including need for more family support, and financial pressure. Additional possible drivers to explore in future inquiries include poor experiences with instructors and/or the educational institution, the financial burden of going to school rather than working full time, and a lack of professional opportunities after receiving a degree.

---

<sup>3</sup> Enrollment Table 5 – Selected Student Characteristics Leeward CC – Fall 2020 – All Ethnicities – All Majors. Provided by LCC Chancellor Dr. Carlos Penalosa, February 2, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Responses on a 5-point Likert scale were resolved to a yes/no scale - ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ were identified as a “yes.”

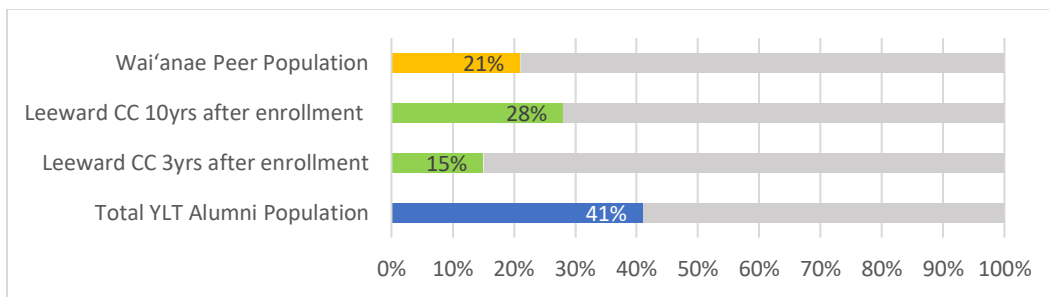
Table 1 Value of Education to YLT Alumni



### Degree Attainment

As expected, YLT participants attain their associate degree at a substantially higher rate than their peers at LCC, with a cumulative YLT graduation rate<sup>5</sup> of 41%, compared with LCC's 15% three years after enrollment.<sup>6</sup> YLT participants also substantially outperform their age-matched Wai'anae peers (n=157), 21% of whom have an associate degree. (See Figure B.) 19% of alumni respondents confirmed achieving additional certifications and professional credentials, in addition to their post-secondary degrees.

Figure B Comparative Associate Degree Graduation Rates



YLT alumni have also gone on to achieve further college degrees<sup>7</sup> at a higher rate than their age-matched peers in the Wai'anae community. (See Figures C and D.)

Figure C YLT Alumni Highest Degree Attained

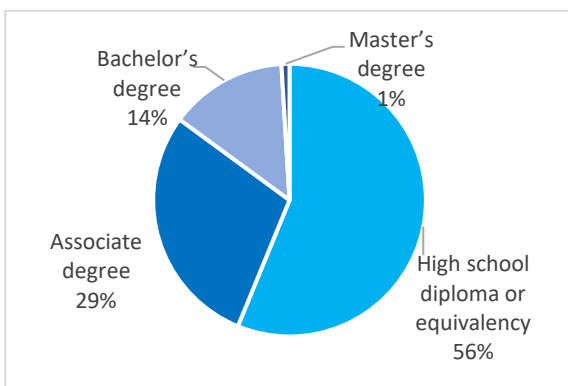
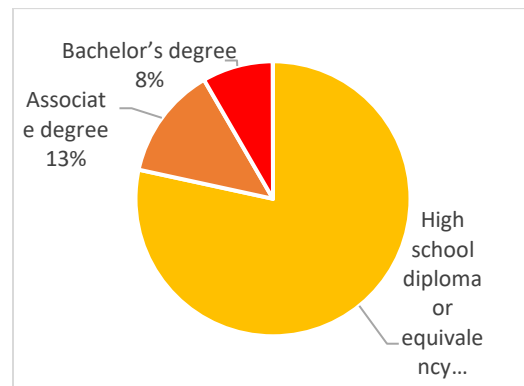


Figure D Wai'anae Peers Highest Degree Attained



<sup>5</sup> Associate degree attainment figures were calculated using MA'O administrative data for the complete alumni community in cohorts 1-12.5 (n=315), rather than the more limited questionnaire respondent data set. MA'O tracks degree completion for all alumni, using data from UH and the National Student Clearinghouse. This includes all degrees earned, regardless of the number of semesters required to graduate. The majority of YLT interns graduate within 2.5 semesters; a small subset complete their degrees later.

<sup>6</sup> LCC grad rates for students enrolled 2005-15. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/facsimile.aspx?unitId=141811&goToReportId=6>

<sup>7</sup> Further degree attainment analysis is likewise based on MA'O administrative data for the total alumni community (n=315).

To better understand the YLT experience, we asked alumni if they changed their college major during or after their participation in the program, and if so, why. Fifty-eight alumni responded to this open-ended question, 48% of whom reported that they did change their major. This percentage was consistent across the cohorts. Their stated reasons for the change focused on finding their interests and learning about themselves. In their written responses many alumni noted the role of the YLT program in helping to find their interest and learn about themselves.

Table 2 Reasons for Changing College Major

Theme	Total yes respondents	Percent of yes respondents
found interest, learned about self	14	52%
life experiences	9	33%
other	4	15%

“*While in the program and college I got a better understanding of myself and what I wanted to do in my future. This influenced my decision to change courses even though I would have to start from scratch.*

Theme: Found interest, learned about self (Cohort 1-5)

“*I was exposed to different people and opportunities thanks to the networking that I was able to do while at Ma'o. This allowed me to branch out and try different things and find what I'm good at and passionate about.*

Theme: Found interest, learned about self (Cohort 1-5)

### Education Aspirations

The vast majority (82%) of alumni stated their desire to achieve an additional college degree, regardless of their current degree status (Figure K). Over a third of respondents currently aspire to achieve a baccalaureate degree, and another third aim to attain a master’s degree. We note the increase in respondents’ aspirations as they progress through their post-secondary education, as well as their slightly higher education aspirations the longer they stayed in the program, though this was not found to be statistically significant. (Table 13.)

Figure E Alumni Aspiring to a Further Degree

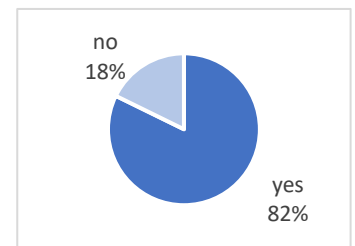


Table 3 Education Aspirations Increasing with Degree Attainment

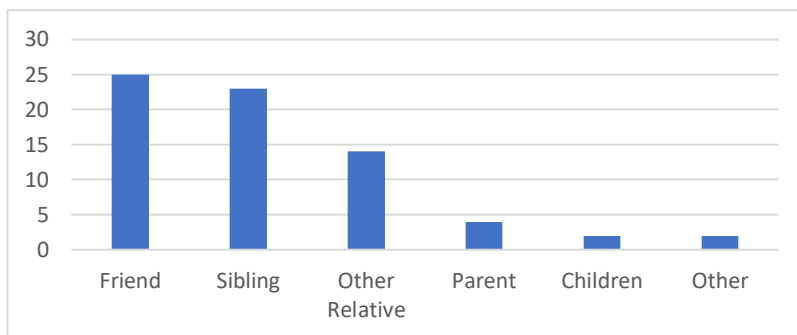
Degree Aspired To	Current Degree Status					Total
	High school diploma or equivalency	Associate Degree	Bachelor’s Degree	Master’s Degree	Other	
Associate degree	7%	0%	0%	0%	33%	5%
Bachelor’s degree	35%	63%	0%	0%	33%	35%
Master’s degree	12%	21%	83%	0%	33%	29%
Doctorate degree	0%	5%	8%	50%	0%	5%
Other	15%	0%	0%	50%	0%	8%
Unknown	31%	11%	8%	0%	0%	18%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

## Education Multiplier

As noted above, the YLT is intended to foster an intergenerational college-going culture among participants, their families, and social networks. To determine if the program is effective in this regard, we asked alumni if they have inspired others in their lives to attend college, and, if so, who they had inspired.

**60% of alumni respondents said that they have inspired at least one other person to attend college.** About 40% identified having inspired a friend and or sibling, while a quarter said they had inspired another relative. The intergenerational impact was also evident in another way: four alumni indicated that they had inspired their own parents to attend college. Figure L identifies which individuals survey respondents have inspired to attend college. The 60% of respondents who said that they have inspired someone else to attend college identified a total of 70 individuals who they have inspired, representing a multiplier impact of 1.13. This is another strong indicator of the amplification of the YLT program through participants' social networks. To learn more about the program's efficacy in establishing a college going culture among participants' families and social networks, future inquiries should include follow up conversations with the individuals who were identified as having been inspired through which we can identify the parameters of such influence.

Figure F Individuals YLT Alumni Have Inspired to Attend College (T10)



“*[I am] a role model for my siblings and my cousins. And also for my family because I am the first child to go to college (...) I am not only doing it for myself but also for my younger siblings who will be like, "Okay, since you can do it, we might as well try to do it, too, because now we have somebody who has done it before."* (Interview Cohort 12+)

### Interview Findings

The vast majority of interviewees stated that their families had already valued college education, prior to their participation in the YLT. Nearly half said that the YLT experience further strengthened their families' positive view of college education, and 19% stated that they had inspired their siblings to attend college. We note here the difference between a family 'valuing' education and the reality of a young person successfully matriculating into and persisting in college. This is an area for further investigation, as it was not clear from the interview conversations how or the degree to which the YLT experience influenced families' support of the participants during their college journey, and/or the decisions of siblings to attend college. Interviewees also noted that their YLT peers and those ahead of them in the program served as powerful examples of the possible – and that they in turn served in that capacity for the younger interns as they came up. We see here another example of the YLT program serving in the 'ohana capacity for participants.

“*I never thought that I can do the things that I am doing now. (...) Like go to school, be able to finish my associate (...) I am also thinking of going to West O'ahu now that I never thought I would [go to] a university or even to a college after high school. So, I just never thought I would do [these] things without learning all the process [at] MA'O. They make it look like it is a normal thing like, "Okay, what are you going to do after this?" (...) I feel like the YLT really, [pushed] you, like, when I moved [up], there is always a new student coming in. And [when] there is a new student there, they look up to the older students. So, when you have that, it is like you want to do better for them, too, because they trust you, because you teach them, you give them advice (...) like the second cycle of learning and sharing because they inspired me and I inspired them and just keep doing the same thing over and over.* (Interview Cohort 12+)

## SUMMARY

In summary, YLT participants achieve substantially greatest post-secondary success than their peers at LCC and in Wai‘anae. They achieve associate degrees at more than double the rate of their LCC classmates, and go on to achieve further college degrees at a higher rate than their peers in the community. The survey participants affirmed that they view education and learning as an asset, and the vast majority desire to achieve additional post-secondary degrees, aspirations that grow as they continue their educational journey. A majority of participants have inspired at least one other person to attend college. Interviewees noted the powerful role that YLT peers play for one another as examples of the possible.

## DISCUSSION

**Analysis of this and the other survey data and narratives affirms the core tenets of the YLT theory of change: youth can be empowered to grow into powerful agents of change, who create tangible examples of the possible for each other, their families, and their communities, thereby laying the foundation for intergenerational transformational change.**

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 the 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 reflected in the alumni’s reports of inspiring others to attend college. These findings reinforce the promising early findings of the Maui Ola Study that indicated a YLT multiplier effect.
- Pilina (relationships) to one another, to family, and to ‘āina are vital to helping youth flourish. Echoed throughout the analysis, this was particularly clear in the relationships and pilina that youth identified as critical to their success during and after the YLT. Notably, this includes the relationships between youth within and across cohorts, which effectively mimic the kaikua‘ana and kakaina (elder and younger) sibling relationship. We highlight the importance of the overlapping two-year cohort 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 for the success of those who follow.