

## ***Conservation Practices and their Impact on Hawaiian Well-Being among Youth***

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### **Abstract**

Research with Kupu alumni included the examination of the relationship between land, culture, health and Native Hawaiian well-being. In this process, using qualitative measures (NVIVO) to analyze youth speeches and journals, we sought to measure the level of impact that Kupu had on youth in terms of health and wellness, however at the conclusion of our work we learned much more than initially planned. We learned three ways Kupu youth believed that their lives had been impacted as a result of their guided land practices and experiences. Kupu alumni expressed an increased sense of pride. As a result of their experiences, youth were positively impacted in the daily routines of their lives. They also noted positive changes in self such as improved self-confidence. Youth noted an increased sense of purpose. Kupu alum shared that their eyes were opened to the value of touching land in changing their mindset on education. They also shared an enhanced motivation to improve and change the current education system to include more land cultivation practices for younger children. Kupu alumni also responded that their experiences had given them an increased recognition of Identity and cultural heritage. Alums expressed an increased effect on their connection to others/family, their history and an increase appreciation for life and sharing their lives with others. In sum, we learned that listening to youth voices, both expressed in written and oral formats, is essential to sustaining knowledge of land, culture and health from generation to generation and for Hawaii's future.

Keywords: Conservation, Culture, Hawaiian Well Being, Health, Youth

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## **Introduction**

As we began writing this report, we committed ourselves to being explicitly honest. Standing firm in our truth, we now know the information contained in this report only scratches the surface of the following three qualities of Hawaiian health and wellness: a) what is one's place of knowing, b) how does one's experience inform their health behavior, and c) how can excellence surrounding one's own health and wellness be shared (*aka: 'auamo kuleana + ho'opono*).

In this project, we worked collaboratively with Kupu alumni to examine the relationship between land, culture, health, and Native Hawaiian well-being. Specifically, we looked to measure the individual and collective level of impact that Kupu has had on youth in terms of health and wellness, which we believed would involve increasing knowledge about land conservation and culture. We wanted to better understand and recognize more about the significance of touching land and its effect on culture and education among youth. Furthermore, we sought to determine how touching land, as a Kupu alum, has impacted the overall wellness of Native Hawaiian young adults.

At the start of our project, we simply hoped to bring Kupu alums together to share and learn more from each other's experiences regarding local land conservation practices. We also wanted to hear from this community of youth on how these practices could improve an individual's overall wellness in terms of health and social conditions. However, after our 18-month project, we not only gained valuable feedback on conservation practices and ways youth can engage others to improve health by touching land, we also confirmed that alums are living examples of Kupu's two-fold mission of "preserving land while empowering youth." Evidence of our findings, that *pride, identity* and *purpose* among Kupu alums contribute to the relationship youth have to the land and to each other were revealed in our review of Kupu graduate artifacts and the peer research mentoring process.

### **Main research question:**

*What is the impact of cultural restoration and revitalization of Native Hawaiian health and wellness among youth?*

### **Secondary Questions:**

Our secondary questions arose from preliminary discussions with Kupu alum who were interested in furthering their work in land conservation and cultural restoration. These questions helped to guide the formation of our project into three phases.

- How do we show that knowledge of conservation among Kupu alum is transcultural/trans-historical/transformational?
- How do we assess the quality of the relationship alums have with Kupu?
- How do we quantify the place-based education alums have received from Kupu?

- How do we expand Kupus pipeline of employment for youth interested in working in land conservation across the state?
- What is needed to expand and then to sustain this project?

This project can be described in three phases. In the first phase of this work, two opportunities were created to foster the development of relationships among Kupu alumni and university partners and also to chart a course for this work. These two opportunities involved Kupu alumni, staff and UH West O‘ahu faculty coming together to touch land. The first opportunity was a group service project, (Moku ‘o Lo‘e Service Project) held at Coconut Island in Kāne‘ohe Hawaii. The second event was held at Kupus Ho‘okupu Center (formerly known as the Net Shed) in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. During both of these collaborative opportunities, *Mā‘awe Pono* was used as the “research methodology” to inform the path for project participants to find solutions to issues of cultural restoration and revitalizing health and wellbeing among Native Hawaiian youth.

During the second phase of this project, interested alumni, who attended one or both of the gatherings above, self-identified as wanting to learn more about drawing conclusions on the impact of local land conservation experiences among youth. Alumni were then introduced and welcomed into the peer research mentoring aspect of the project. Finally, alumni used the new skills gained in the peer research mentoring program to evaluate artifacts (qualitative data) of Kupu graduates.

## **Summary of Findings**

### *A. A peer mentoring program established*

After opportunities for relationship building were made, ideas were provided on plausible next steps for a group of Kupu alumni to get involved in the research process. Over the summer of 2018, five Kupu Alumni were trained on how to utilize the qualitative software program, NVivo. Kupu Alumni attended four workshop trainings (May 2018-July 2018) on the software. The trainings covered workshops on types of data, content analysis, steps for using NVivo, and drawing conclusions from the qualitative data.

One of the most applicable and sustainable products of our work was the initiation of a peer research mentoring program in qualitative research. Our project used a peer led approach to foster learning among a group of Kupu alums. Together they were introduced to qualitative data techniques in a workshop-based setting. They then used the techniques they learned to dig deeper into their understanding of the impact of Kupu in their lives. Using a peer led design provided an avenue for peer engagement, and influence during the duration of our work. This approach was useful toward uncovering how youth viewed health and wellness at the conclusion of their Kupu programs.

The goal of each workshop training was to identify how qualitative data could be analyzed using NVivo. Kupu alumni reviewed available data by first reading artifacts (e.g. individual Kupu graduate journals and speeches from Kupus Hawai‘i Youth Conservation Corps Community Program- a program designed to provide youth with

a hands-on, outdoor field experience in land conservation) and then searching for reoccurring themes in the data. After being fully trained, Kupu alumni inputted the data into NVivo to help with verifying and maintaining accuracy of the results from reading each artifact.

At the conclusion of the trainings, peer researchers self-identified several themes related to cultural restoration and the significance that youth touching land has on culture and education. (See a snapshot of the themes below in Figure 1.)

**Figure 1. Peer Research Mentoring Themes**

Question	Categories-- Responses to the question were sorted into:
What level of impact does Kupu have on youth in terms of health and wellness?	Positive Changes in daily routines: waking up on time, access to food
	Work as Fun: wellness tied to joy, le'ale'a
	Pro Social Behavior: see value in volunteering, helping others, etc
	Positive Changes in Self: Increase in Self Confidence, see value in self, decrease in anger etc
How do Kupu youth recognize that touching land has significance on culture and education?	Learn New Things: first time learning, seeing or doing something connected to culture and education
	Educational Achievement: completing level of education they thought they couldn't, completing educational goal
	Changing Mindset about Education: viewing their abilities differently
	Educational Plans for the Future: wanting to continue on in their education
	Culture as Education: seeing land/culture as the teacher
How has touching land as a Kupu alum impacted the overall wellness of Native Hawaiian youth and young adults?	Sharing with Others: participants teaching others/positively impacting those outside of the program by sharing Hawai'i's land and natural resources
	Connection to Others: Increased sense of community within the program

Based on a review of artifacts, the peer research mentors (who were also Kupu Alumni) reviewed fifteen graduation speeches, five reflections, and ten “great stories” as they are called, in the form of written narratives. Findings revealed that Kupu Alumni largely believed that Kupu had the following three impacts on their lives:

- 1) A positive impact on the daily routines of their lives, positive changes in self and an increased recognition of purpose in life
- 2) Opened their eyes to the value of touching land in changing their mindset on education and motivation to improve/change the current education system
- 3) An increased effect on their connection to others/family, increased appreciation for life and sharing with others.

B. *Increase the engagement and interaction of people with the ‘āina correlates with increased social consciousness*

Our project demonstrates and supports the idea that there is value in touching land among youth. A review of artifacts from Kupu graduates further demonstrates that the mission of Kupu has been changing the mindset of youth on education and motivation to improve/change the current education system. Youth want to see more opportunities for education that requires interaction with ‘āina. Moreover, as evidenced by those who were a part of the peer research mentoring program, providing opportunities for touching ‘āina together increases connection to others/family and ultimately raises social consciousness.

### **Favorite Youth Quotes that Bring Forth Key Highlights and Insights**

A. *Kūlia i ka nu‘u*

“I came here at first with low expectations of myself, and I doubted that I would make it to graduation because prior to Kupu I had never completed any plans I had made for myself. I had low self-esteem, hung out with the wrong type of people, believing they cared, and followed others with no real sense of who I was as an individual. From the day I joined Kupu until now, I have seen both small and profound changes in my thinking and values. Now I strive to be the best I can, I am persistent even when times are hard, the people I choose to hang out with are pretty positive (probably because I’m almost always hanging around at the Net Shed), and I actually have confidence in the choices I make and in myself as a person.” (Community Program Participant 2017)

An increase in self-confidence and self-worth were seen in many participants after successful completion of the Kupu Hawai‘i Youth Conservation Corps (HYCC) Community Program. Native Hawaiian health and wellness is improved when connection to ‘āina and community is reestablished. Mental health is often not spoken of because the connection to physical health is so much more obvious, but the wellbeing of the whole individual is essential for true health.

B. *I ulu no ka lālā i ke kumu*

“A wise team leader once told us that the best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago; and the next best time is now. We have truly grasped the essence of that mana’o through the bittersweet satisfaction of makaluhi. This poetic phrase simply translates to “tired eyes”- specifically those of the people who have been working hard on a community project. Experiencing makaluhi and admiring progress made after a hard day’s work has not only grown our relationship stronger to the land, but also with our community members and ultimately, with ourselves.” (Community Program Participant, 2016-2017)

Mālama ‘āina work puts the kumu back in kumu. It reminds us of the origins of the word. That without strong roots, a solid foundation and base, the main stalk or kumu would simply be unable to weather the storm. Culture, land and sea, these have always been our teachers.

C. *‘A‘ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho‘okahi*

“When I first started the Kupu HYCC program, I thought I would never reach my goal of getting a C-BASE diploma. I thought I was just going to fail and disappoint myself again. I was scared of failure. My mother always said that failure was a part of success. I didn’t listen to her.” (Community Program Participant, 2017)

Cultural restoration and revitalization of our ‘āina, that which feeds us, has the capacity to not only positively impact the ‘āina and our lāhui, but also to powerfully change the individuals caring for their communities. Not only do these individuals see their environment differently, but they view themselves differently. After completing a six-month program with Kupus HYCC Community Program, members spoke differently about the importance of education and their ability to be successful in educational settings.

D. *‘Ike aku, ‘ike mai, kōkua aku, kōkua mai, pela iho la ka nohona ‘ohana*

“The staff and peers here became my family. They filled this gaping hole I have had inside my heart for such a long time.” (Community Program Participant, 2017-2018)

Mālama ‘āina work teaches its students about the reciprocal nature of life. Upon completing their Kupu experience, members spoke of an increased sense of community within the program and a better understanding of what it takes to build and maintain a connection to others. The vast majority of our Community Program participants have at least one or, in many times, several of the following as part of their reality: 1) incarcerated parent of family member; 2) houselessness, or in and off of the streets; 3) substance abuse in the household; 4) domestic violence in the household; 5) deceased parent or guardian; 6) in the foster care system; or 7) a single parent household.

Their experience of caring for and being cared for by the ‘āina allows them a safe place to practice building positive relationships and the potential to end a powerfully negative trajectory they were simply born into.

E. *Summation of Key Highlights and Insights*

The above highlights capture the strengths of Kupu as an organization in regards to the pride, purpose and sense of identity that it instills in youth.

**Project Strengths**

*We identified the following three (3) strengths of our project with Kupu:*

1. PRIDE

Organizations like Kupu provide the infrastructure and space for youth to acknowledge, accept, and understand their health and wellness in order to help with openness - often times indirectly.

2. IDENTITY

To feel connected is to feel that you belong- Organizations like Kupu provide space

for youth to create relationships with people, land, and themselves. Relationship affects one's health and wellbeing. If you ask an alumni what their greatest moments were during the program, chances are it involved building new relationships.

### 3. PURPOSE

Experiences with 'āina provide alumni with the confidence to pursue their passions.

## **Conclusions “Our Kuleana”**

### *A. Lessons Learned*

There are many ways of knowing. The challenge is being expansive rather than restrictive in how we understand what we see, hear, feel, and learn through our research. What questions are asked matters. Where the questions are asked matters. When the questions are asked matters. How the questions are asked matters. Who asks the questions matters. Why the questions are asked matters. We were intentional about the process of questioning in order to understand how 'āina impacts Hawaiian wellbeing, culture, and education. We also reflected on past questions and looked at how we can improve our questioning to better capture the life-changing experiences that doing mālama 'āina work has on our young adults.

Research is better together. Having a Hui of Alumni Researchers led by an experienced mentor, Dr. Camonia Graham-Tutt, created community in what can be an isolating data-filled world.

Emma (Kupu Alumni Researcher) was hired under this funding mechanism to continue this research and during this time was able to persuade her team on the value of continuous analysis of qualitative data at the conclusion of Kupu programs. Together the Hui of Alumni Researchers reviewed the artifacts and uncovered the positive impact the Kupu mission has on youth of providing hands-on experiences in land conservation. Kupu Community Program has purchased NVivo and will continue to use this qualitative data analysis software to understand the experience of participants and how the program can evolve to fit changing needs.

### *B. Next Steps*

We plan to compare the ideas found in this work on the value of touching land among youth to existing public policies that are being implemented elsewhere, and compare them to legislative proposals that were not enacted (yet).

We would generally like to look at addressing state laws to create better pathways for Kupu alums to work in conservation jobs with the state.

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Study Title: 'Imi Na'auao: Hawaiian Knowing and Wellbeing

A research project to affirm the qualities of Hawaiian health and wellness

HD Photos



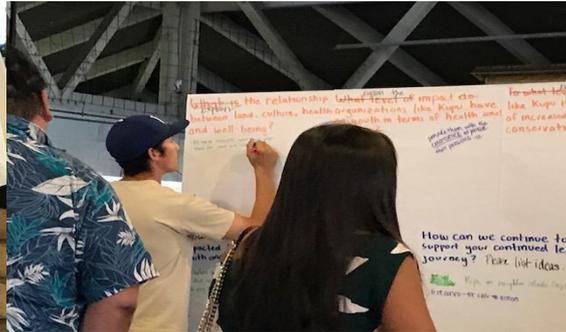
Kupu Alums @ Coconut Island



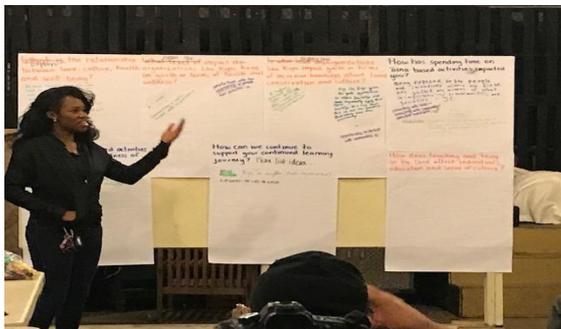
Camonia R. Graham-Tutt @ Coconut Island



Kupu Alums @ Netshed



Kupu Alums @ Netshed



Camonia R. Graham-Tutt @ Netshed



Kupu Alums @ Netshed

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