

# **Waimānalo Youth and Family Collaborative: Multisector Collaboration Built on Cultural Strengths**

How do community groups form a partnership that uses cultural strengths to prevent violence among Native Hawaiian youths?

## **The Challenge**

Waimānalo is one of several communities that are home to a large number of Native Hawaiians on the most populated Hawaiian island, O‘ahu. Waimānalo’s rich history of native settlement and the continuation of strong cultural values and practices make it a unique place.

However, a history of United States influence has challenged the native culture in terms of values and family structure. A number of organizations in Waimānalo work to build positive youth development opportunities. Until recently, these groups had no formal partnerships or systematic approaches to working together to address violence.

## **The Solution**

Through the concept of ‘Ohana, community groups in Waimānalo have found a good way to work together and use traditional Hawaiian cultural values and strengths to address youth violence. ‘Ohana is the Hawaiian tradition of family and extended family.

One of the first milestones occurred in 2007. Five of the youth-serving organizations and other concerned members of the community met with staff from the Asian/Pacific Islander (API) Youth Violence Prevention Center at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa to discuss how they could collaborate. Their goal was to find a way to address the challenges those youths and their families faced, including violence associated with underage drinking and drug abuse. The first meeting was so successful, they decided to meet monthly in 2008 and invite other groups serving youths in Waimānalo.

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## **Waimānalo Youth and Family Collaborative Board of Directors**

May Akamine (Waimānalo Health Center)  
Roy Brooks (Nā Pono No Nā ‘Ohana)  
Ramona Chinn (Hui Ola Pono)  
Keoki Fraser (C.H.A.M.P.)  
Deanna Gonda (Ke Ola Hou)  
Ilima Ho-Lastimoso (God’s Country Waimānalo)  
Gordon Mattos (Friends of Waimānalo)  
Tai-An Miao (API Center)  
Stephen Morse (Blueprint for Change)

*“Every child filled with hope, grounded in cultural wisdom, and thriving in their family, community and society.”*

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Partners from different organizations received training in, then launched a program called *Strengthening Hawai'i Families*. There were two parts to it: providing support for youths and their families, and giving lessons in communication and conflict resolution. *Strengthening Hawai'i Families* gave all the community partners a chance to work together, to bond, and to see the benefits of collaboration.

Thanks to the success of *Strengthening Hawai'i Families* and other joint programs, the community moved forward in 2009 by creating a strategic plan. The partners registered the Waimānalo Youth and Family Collaborative (WYFC) with the State of Hawai'i.

The WYFC board meets monthly and hosts various educational activities and meetings throughout the year. This allows time to build and sustain relationships, review plans, and problem-solve as needed.

## Results

WYFC comprises many community partners willing to offer support and services, including the City and County of Honolulu, the State of Hawai'i Department of Health, the public school system, and the API Youth Violence Prevention Center. Together, WYFC partners have achieved two key goals:

1. Creating a structure for ongoing networking and collaboration. The 2009 strategic plan offers WYFC partners' vision for working together. The plan provides for board leadership, meeting times and purpose, member roles and responsibilities, and strategic planning updates.
2. Starting WYFC Center, which offers a variety of youth services. WYFC Center opened its doors in Waimānalo in 2010. WYFC now has a physical presence in the heart of the community where partners work together in five areas: 'Ohana, health promotion, education, youth development, and recreation. Modeled on a similar project with indigenous youth in New Zealand, WYFC strives to be a "one-stop shop" for all programs and services offered by its partners. They include:
  - A mentoring program with after-school tutoring
  - Health and athletic programs
  - Learning activities to promote traditional values and cultural practices
  - In-school interventions
  - *Strengthening Hawai'i Families* and other prevention and intervention activities.

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## Strategies for Sustaining the WYFC Partnership

- WYFC meetings honor values and practices found in traditional Native Hawaiian culture. Meetings may begin with a blessing from an elder and conclude with a prayer or song. A shared meal provides important time to "talk story," relax, and eat together.
  - Each WYFC activity gives participants a valued "take-away." It can be a skill learned, new knowledge, an affirmation of their common vision, or a stronger relationship.
  - WYFC allows for various levels of involvement, because partners differ in organizational development, personal commitment, interests, and strengths.
  - When WYFC starts a joint project, the partners reach out to find groups with relevant interests and abilities to help.
  - WYFC does not compete with partners for funding.
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WYFC partners will review their priorities every year, while remaining a networking group that shares resources and learns together. Visions for future cooperation include:

- Greater shared resources
- Shared office and program space
- New partnerships to expand the range of opportunities, services, and resources for Waimānalo youth and families.

*The Hawai'i Chapter of the American Planning Association awarded WYFC the Community-based Planning Award in 2009. The award "recognizes a citizen-based and initiated planning effort that establishes and enhances a sense of awareness of a community's character, values, and aspirations."*

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