

### **Career Preparation for West Hawaii Youth**

In West Hawaii today, there are many opportunities available to students who wish to pursue secondary education, including community college, community organizations, and community scholarship foundations. However, if the reality is that the majority of our local high school graduates enter the workforce rather than the college classroom, then why have we emphasized college preparatory programs over career programs that would help the majority of graduates succeed? As a community we can help all of our local youth achieve their goals by equipping them with the tools they need to assess their skills, discover their passions, and transition smoothly into the workforce.

Just as college-bound students plan ahead and take specific courses to prepare themselves for secondary education, students who wish to work after high school should direct themselves to a field of interest and pursue it. During their high school years, all students should focus on discovering what they enjoy, what they excel in, and ultimately what they are passionate about. They should also make the effort to learn in high school the basics of personal finance and the job market. Effort must come from the students' end first; they must demonstrate initiative by taking personal responsibility for their future before being helped by their school and community.

If 62% of West Hawaii high school graduates do not pursue higher education, then West Hawaii high schools focus disproportionately on college preparation. We have provided plenty of resources and support for college bound students. If the reality is that the majority of graduates are not attending college, then why can't we provide these students with the opportunities they need to reach their goals? More high schools should introduce career path programs that allow students to search for potential fields of interest, then study deeper in their

chosen disciplines. These career path programs would allow students to take more career-specific courses and “test drive” their chosen occupations. Through such programs, high schools also have the opportunity to recognize individuals who are hardworking and skilled in specific careers rather than just academic high achievers. Whether it may be college or construction work, students must have a goal and plans to achieve it.

Small businesses such as Auto Body Hawaii could utilize this local talent by creating more internship programs for West Hawaii youth. The internships programs could begin as part-time work during high school and then transition into full-time employment upon graduation. They could either be limited to short-term programs simply for experience or long-term employment with the chance of promotion depending on the employer and employee. In any case, they would be ideal test runs for both the recent graduates and community-minded local businesses to try something new. When a good match is found, the partnership is mutually beneficial; graduates receive valuable first-hand experience and the chance to network, while local companies benefit from the graduates’ enthusiasm to work.

Take my story for example. I was fortunate enough to be offered a marketing internship at a local helicopter tour company this summer. There I learned the basics of business while shooting aerial photography, designing brochures, and creating sales presentations for the company. I was passionate, productive, and loved what I did, and my employers were pleased with my work. It was the perfect fit. I am certain that if other local companies were willing to try such an internship program, they would find motivated, young individuals who are a perfect fit for them.

There exists a wealth of hard-working and innovative young candidates here in our local community. Enabling them to transition smoothly into the workforce is a matter of preparation

and exposure. It is my hope that through high school career preparation and local internships such as those I have described, these motivated young people can discover their skills and interests. Hopefully these opportunities will encourage high school graduates to discover their passions and prepare them for a brighter future.