

Big Island Youth Lead the Way to Sustainability

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By Roger Harris

“We can’t just keep taking... we have to replenish, recycle, renew and preserve – not just our resources but also our culture,” said Trevor Tanaka, one of the delegates selected on May 15 by the Sustainable Hawaii Youth Leadership Initiative (SHYLI) to attend a Youth Leadership Summit on Martha’s Vineyard in June.

The Initiative’s mission is to inspire young people to envision, plan and create a more sustainable future for their lives and their island. SHYLI emerged from 17-year-old Wainani Traub’s dream for our island. Last summer, she served as Hawaii’s first delegate to the Stone Soup Leadership Institute’s 7th Youth Leadership Summit for Sustainable Development. She returned with a vision and shared her dreams with her school, West Hawai’i Explorations Academy’s Green Team:



A’ohe hana nui ke alu ‘ia

No task is too big when done together by all.

Teens on the Big Island say that they choose to take charge of their futures by decreasing pollution, becoming more environmentally aware, being mentors for younger children, restoring native Hawaiian culture, and increasing peace and aloha.

Trevor Tanaka, a junior at Konawaena High School, wanted to be a delegate this year because he feels a lack of understanding about sustainability and the connection it has with our way of life, especially on an island. “It is important for young people to understand that in order to survive in today’s world, we need to be educated about balancing the needs of our growing economy, keeping our land healthy, and preserving our natural resources.”

Trevor will be joined by four other youth delegates from Hawaii Island, including Allie Kitchens, a junior at Kealakehe High School, who volunteers at Habitat for Humanity. “My dream is to be part of changing the world by designing sustainable buildings for the future,” said Allie.

Makana Tavares, a junior at Kanu o ka Aina New Century Public Charter School, is eager to share his enthusiasm for the maintenance and management of the environment through meaningful social action. “Hawaii is my home and I want it to remain a pristine source of life for its growing population. In order for this to happen we need to make a collective move toward a greater emphasis on sustainability on the island. It’s our future and I want to be a part of the change that sees Hawaii, and the entire world, ascend to new heights of environmental responsibility.”

Manoa Johansen, a student at Hawaii Community College who aspires to study Environmental Studies/Land Management, said, “I dream that my island, especially the people of my island, prosper and live as one. Hawaii is made up of many unique individuals that represent their ancestors very well. I dream that not only the people live to the best of their ability amongst each other, but for them to live prosperous amongst the environment that they come from.”

Kynan Kawai, a junior at Kamehameha Schools Hawaii, looks forward to putting the information learned at the summit into the community. “I will try and pass it on to other people so that a message about sustainability could be widespread,” said Kynan.

During the Youth Leadership Summit, the SHYLI delegation will create action plans in these five areas: sustainable agriculture, sustainable building, sustainable business, sustainable culture, and sustainable energy.

They are putting their heads together for ways we can become more sustainable, ranging from what we consume, how we consume it and how our community can become more connected – in tune with nature and environmentally friendly. These future leaders have immense potential to inform and mobilize the masses and serve as a dynamic link and vibrant lifeline between the generations and various cultures in Hawaii.

For more information on our forward-thinking youth, see: <http://shyli.org>.