

Hawaii 24/7

SHYLI Kicks Off Sustainable Hawaii Tour

January 24, 2012



The Sustainable Hawaii Youth Leadership Initiative launched the New Year with a weeklong Leadership Intensive including a three-day Sustainable Hawaii Tour.

The SHYLI Tour served as a preliminary community assessment of youth and green initiatives from sustainable agriculture, sustainable business, sustainable energy, sustainable housing, and sustainable living.

SHYLI's Leadership Intensive coincided with the Hawaii Island Economic Summit 2012 with more than 300 island leaders who chose education as their top priority -- with sustainability as another.

The first was sustainable agriculture with West Hawaii Explorations Academy's Green Team traveling to Malaai Gardens: The Culinary Garden of Waimea Middle School. Carved from the former Parker Ranch pastureland, the Garden supports student learning by integrating core curriculum (math, science, language arts, social studies and health, cultural learning and healthy life skills).

The Garden Classroom is guided by the ideals: I will be safe; kind and respectful; have an open mind; use my time well; and be my best self in the garden. In addition to sharing their beautiful plants, vegetables and herbs, Malaai Garden teacher Amanda Rieux shared how they use herbs like comfrey for poultices and for enriching compost.

At the Malaai Gardens, SHYLI's visiting faculty Josue Cruz, 23, shared how he had been inspired by the Sustainable Tour with the Youth Leadership Summit on Martha's Vineyard.

When he returned home to his island of Puerto Rico, he helped get a grant to create 100 school gardens with 150 teachers that benefited over 7,000 fourth-grade students.

"In just six months, students involved with the project increased their MCAS science scores, while learning about sustainable living," he said.

SHYLI is a local branch of the Stone Soup Leadership Institute whose mission is to develop educational tools and train young and emerging leaders to build a more sustainable world.

The next stop was sustainable energy and building at the internationally recognized Hawaii Preparatory Academy's Energy Lab. The 6,000 square foot facility is located where the greatest variety of renewable resources on the planet features a wealth of educational tools to facilitate 21st century learning environment. It is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum candidate and Living Building Challenge participant.

Sustainability Curriculum Facilitator Ming Wei Koh lead WHEA's Green Team on an impressive tour of the facilities and shared how students designed state of the art projects using their technologies.

Cruz was especially impressed with The Energy Lab's video conferencing technologies.

"This will allow our islands to stay connected as we develop projects together. Each one of you can have a dream for your life, your island and the world," he said. "Together we can build a more sustainable world for our families and our future."

SHYLI's first day focused on sustainable business with an interactive presentation by Guy Toyama at NELHA (Natural Energy Laboratory Hawaiian Authority) and site visits to solar power technology leader Sopogy, and OTEC, the world's premier ocean science and technology park growing sustainable industries by using sunshine, seawater and ingenuity.

"Hawaii's isolation and vulnerability is our greatest asset," Toyama said. "It forces our island people to shift into a new era of sustainable and self-reliant living. Upon meeting Josue and SHYLI members, I'm encouraged to see our youth leaders grab the ball and run to the goal with a sense of urgency."

Cruz was fascinated with the similarity of challenges and opportunities facing his island.

"The Island of Hawaii is really one of the leaders among the islands in sustainable development initiatives," he said. "While I enjoyed learning about them during the Institute's Youth Leadership Summit, it was awesome to personally visit them and meet the leaders of these great organizations and institutions."

The Sustainable Hawaii Tour was part of a weeklong SHYLI Leadership Intensive. The SHYLI Team first paid their respects to Deputy Mayor Wally Lau and met with potential partners like Nancy Redfeather and University of Hawaii, West Hawaii Center to explore developing a leadership certification program with college credits.

The tour began with a greeting from Keala Ching.

“In order to really capture sustainability, we have to begin to understand how one sustains themselves. Through self-reflection of who one represents, sustainability is accomplished,” Ching said. “By living life, knowledge is gained. Me Ka Hane Ka Ike, we learn by doing.”

Cruz traveled to Hawaii to help train SHYLI's new Project Coordinator Mariana Garcia. This summer he will serve again as the director of the Institute's Youth Leadership Summit training youth delegates from five islands to envision a better future for their lives and their world.

Cruz transformed his life from a depressed, obese, 15-year old C-D student to a healthy, happy, 4.0 under graduate, and first year law school aspiring to become the mayor of his island.

Cruz led the Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative team to envision the future of their island, researched best practices and created VYLI's 2020 Report for Sustainable Development that was presented at the 2008 APEC Youth Summit in Peru. The VYLI team got their mayor to donate 500 acres of land to create a green community.

SHYLI's Day 2 began with a guided visit to the Volcano National Park with Marsha and Howard Shapiro. As education director for Recycle Hawaii, Howard then introduced SHYLI's team to Recycle Keaau (KRRC), a recycling project that serves as a model for replicating recycling and reuse centers around the County of Hawaii.

“All of us with Recycle Hawaii greatly appreciate the goals of your organization and fully support your work,” he said.

At the Keaau Youth Business Center, the SHYLI team met with Director Trina Nahm-Mijo and Sound Recording Engineer Damon Williams. They learned about their youth-driven hands-on, interdisciplinary curriculum stressing project-based learning, community engagement, entrepreneurial training, and capstone assessment activities that integrate STEM curriculum and Digital Arts skill building.

“It was a pleasure talking story with Mariana, Josue, and Marianne,” Nahm-Mijo said. “I was especially struck by how our philosophy and mission of empowering youth was so similar. KYBC really looks forward to collaborating with their organization in the future. A hui hou.”

SHYLI's Sustainable Hawaii Tour culminated with an event hosted by Holly and Elia Algood at the Algood Bamboo Barn in Hawi. Guests included sustainability organizations like David Fuertes' Ka Hana Noeau and Susan Cox with Green Power Girl.

An educational slideshow about the building project explained how they are completely off the grid and use solar energy if there is no wind or wind energy from their windmill if there is no sun.

Their tilapia pond fertilizes the aquaponically grown spinach that feeds their chickens. Their recycled bus even serves as their office.

In April for Earth Day, SHYLI will join with The Grand Green Home Tours sponsored by the Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce and the West Hawaii Mediation Center.

“I believe that the Sustainable Hawaii Island Leadership Initiative can empower our youth with experiences to transform them into tomorrow's leaders by achieving personal dreams and by being stewards of our aina,” Algood said.

“We were inspired by everyone’s interest in collaborating to benefit our young people and support existing sustainability initiatives,” the institute’s director, Marianne Larned said.

SHYLI is now expanding its focus beyond its pilot program to partner with other educational organizations. Each month SHYLI will partner with others to support and expand programs.

In this way, it will serve as capacity building for existing organizations to engage more youth and develop their leadership skills. People are invited to nominate youth (ages 15-22) who are potential leaders from their communities.

“Young people hold the key to our future,” SHYLI’s Project Coordinator Mariana Garcia said.

“Our world is in trouble, and we are going to be the ones who will have to save it. It is imperative that we learn now, before it is too late.”

Learn more:

Sustainable Hawai’i Youth Leadership Initiative shyli.org