



DIALOGUES WITH OUR FUTURE ANCESTORS
An Inquiry into the Well-Being of MA'O and Kauhale
Youth Leadership Training Program Participants 2003–2020

WORKFORCE Outcomes Brief

This brief covers the workforce outcome learnings from MA'O's *Dialogues with Our Future Ancestors* alumni survey project. Briefs are also available for education, socioeconomic status, holistic health, and community connectedness outcomes, as well as the YLT experience, and evaluation process learnings. The YLT is a holistic program; for a thorough understanding of the program and its interrelated outcomes, we encourage you to refer to the other briefs, and to the report in its entirety, all posted on our website.

DIALOGUES SUMMARY

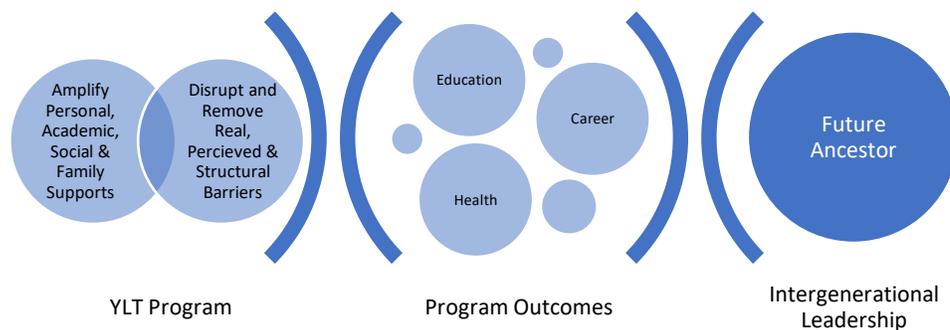
Since its founding in 2001, MA'O Organic Farms (MA'O) has witnessed that investments in the connection of youth to land and in the empowerment of youth leadership generate health, sustainability, and resilience with and for the community. In 2020 MA'O partnered with a team of evaluation experts and academic partners to develop and deploy a multi-faceted 'alumni survey' with the intention of thoroughly and systematically analyzing the effects of its core Youth Leadership Training (YLT) college internship program on participants, and by extension on the community. Our goal was to investigate the hypotheses embedded in MA'O's theory of change regarding the immediate and cascading individual and communal changes that stem from educating and empowering youth.

The Dialogues With Our Future Ancestors project was grounded in MA'O's long-held practice of inquiry, reflection, and refinement: **the feedback loop for our kuleana to our future ancestors.** It was undertaken as a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project, through which MA'O staff, evaluation experts, and academic researchers contributed their unique expertise and experience. This application of the practices of makawalu (seeing through many perspectives; literally 'eight eyes') and kilo (direct observation, generally as a practitioner) affirmed much of MA'O's experiential knowledge, while productively complicating some standing assumptions, and inviting new questions and perspectives.

YLT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM & THEORY OF CHANGE

MA'O's theory of change posits that a social enterprise can mimic the strengths of an 'ohana (family) by providing material, intellectual, and emotional support, educational resources, and workforce training. The YLT program helps youth find their purpose, connect with their culture and history, develop knowledge and skills, grow and mobilize personal and professional networks and partners, and pursue educational and workforce opportunities that lead them, their families, and the community toward cultural, social, economic, and spiritual resilience. This grows **future ancestors** dedicated to leadership, rooted to place, and committed to their community.

Figure A YLT Theory of Change



The YLT program encompasses two program tracks housed in separate educational and enterprise settings: MA'Ō Organic Farms (an organic farm and home to the majority of YLT interns, referred to as "MA'Ō") and Searider Productions (a digital media initiative at Wai'anae School, referred to as "DMED"). Together, these two programs are called the Kauhale. The Kauhale YLT interns from both MA'Ō and DMED receive comprehensive educational and social wrap-around services, which include counseling, academic advising, and referrals to other social services. They also receive financial support in the form of a monthly stipend and tuition waivers for University of Hawai'i, Leeward Community College (LCC). All Kauhale YLT interns in both the MA'Ō and DMED program tracks participate in a ramp-up program at MA'Ō Organic Farms and receive ongoing programmatic support from MA'Ō education staff. The overlapping two-year cohort structure is core to the program structure: an intern starts as a novice, looking up to the 'elder' interns for guidance, expertise, and proof of what is possible, after which they in turn progress into the elder role and take on kuleana (responsibility) for the success of those who follow.

STUDY METHODOLOGY¹

The MA'Ō Alumni Study comprised four components: two focus groups, an online questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and the collection of biometric data and biospecimen samples.

The **total YLT alumni population (n=315)** is made up of YLT participants in Cohorts 1-12.5, regardless of how long they stayed in the program and whether they received their associate degree.²

The **alumni questionnaire respondents (n=62)** includes all those who provided a complete response to the online survey questionnaire. This represents **20%** of the total alumni population. The demographic differences between the sample and parent alumni groups suggest that the questionnaire results may not generalize to all YLT participants, particularly those who stayed in the program for a shorter duration, did not attain a post-secondary degree, did not elect to stay on at MA'Ō for further internship or staff opportunities, or participated in DMED.

The **interviewees (n=21)** did one-on-one interviews in addition to completing the online survey. They represent **7%** of total alumni population. The interviewee population was more likely to have graduated with a degree and to have stayed at MA'Ō longer, which may have skewed the interviews to reflect a generally more positive interpretation of the YLT program experience.

Comparisons are made throughout the analysis between the alumni questionnaire respondents (n=62) and a **Wai'anae peer group (n=157)**. The Wai'anae peer group aligns closely with the alumni population across the key characteristics of age, gender, household income, and household size.

¹ The complete description of the study methodology can be found in the Process Brief, and in the full report.

² Some participants in Cohorts 13 and up were still active in the program at the time of the project, and as a group they could not yet be considered to have completed the YLT. Members of C13 and up who had already left the program were invited to participate.

WORKFORCE IN THE YLT CONTEXT

Given MA'O's commitment to fostering community-based economic development, and to empowering and educating youth, we expect that the YLT alumni will experience improved workforce outcomes that will extend to their current and future families, and the community. Through the YLT program participants develop agency, self-determination, and confidence, build skills and knowledge, and grow personal and professional networks. They also attain post-secondary degrees and develop workplace competencies that are expected to lead to greater professional opportunities and mobility. As a result, we anticipate that YLT alumni will access meaningful and remunerative work in which they can exercise leadership. It is therefore anticipated that YLT graduates will:

- 1) Develop workplace competencies and skills
- 2) Access sustaining careers and meaningful work
- 3) Engage in leadership
- 4) Have increased wages

WORKFORCE OUTCOMES – STUDY RESULTS

Workforce outcomes for YLT participants must be viewed in the broader context of Wai'anae moku. Wai'anae was traditionally home to a strong and cohesive community that produced adequate food for its people while managing its land and water resources sustainably. Today Wai'anae is home to the world's largest and most densely populated community of native Hawaiians, who make up 60% of the community, compared to 20% statewide. The community also reflects the rich cultural legacy of plantation-era migration and more recent arrivals from Micronesia and beyond.

While it should be a vibrant rural community, Wai'anae has been undermined by decades of underinvestment following the cultural and economic violence of colonialism. Much of the population is mired in intergenerational poverty that is fueled by a historic severing of land and people and perpetuated by a lack of educational attainment and economic opportunities. Wai'anae reflects and concentrates many of the challenges faced by Hawai'i at large: a cost-of-living crisis, one of the highest per capita homeless populations in the nation, a lack of resiliency in the face of climate change, and a vulnerable import-dependent food system. The region's poverty is entrenched in the relationship between low educational attainment and low income, with 16% of the region's adult population lacking a high school diploma (11% statewide), and 88% lacking a Bachelor's degree (69% statewide).³ This leaves well-paying jobs out of reach for the majority, relegating 25% of the community to living under the 100% federal poverty level, compared to the statewide poverty rate of 11%.⁴

In the following section we explore alumni insights regarding their acquisition of workplace skills and competencies while in the YLT program, followed by an analysis of their post-program outcomes in the areas of: careers and meaningful work, leadership, and wages.

Workplace Competencies & Skills

As described previously, the YLT program is embedded in a working enterprise wherein youth work part-time. In this context, participants receive specific skills training to empower them to fulfill their individual and collective kuleana (responsibilities) to the enterprise, and general mentorship to equip them to succeed in their current and future career. We therefore anticipated that alumni would report having developed workplace competencies and skills during their time in the YLT.

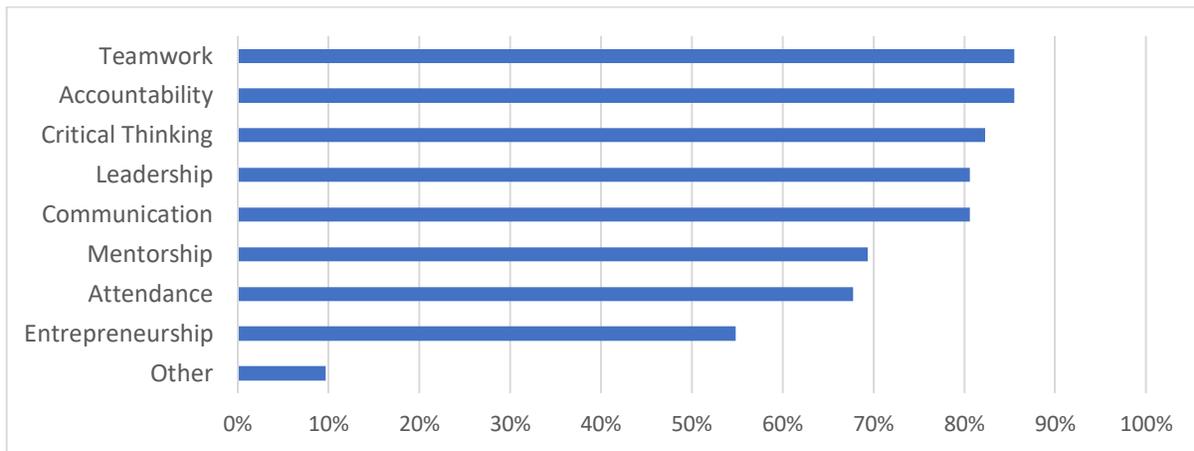
³ *US Census 2016 American Community Survey*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Questionnaire Findings

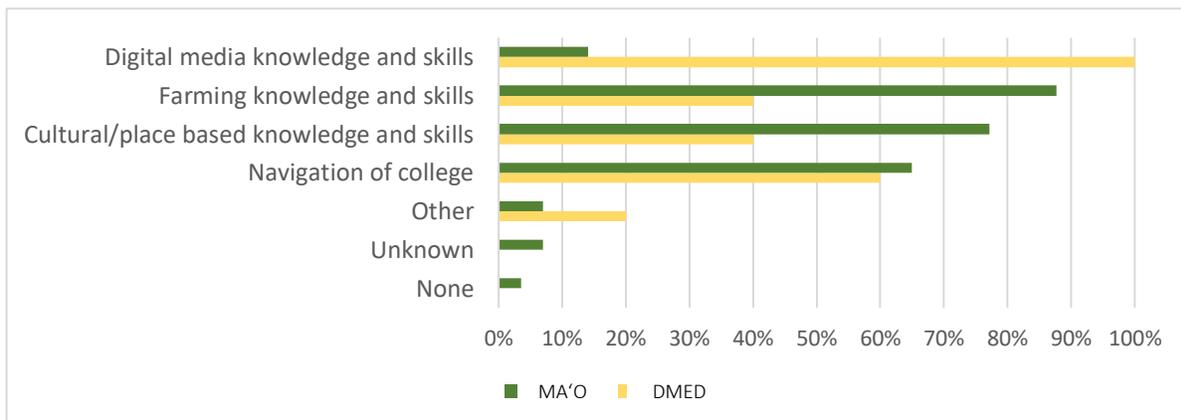
Our expectation regarding workplace competencies and skills was resoundingly affirmed by the questionnaire data, as outlined below. **The vast majority of alumni reported that they developed workplace competencies during their time in the YLT.** Between 80% and 90% of questionnaire respondents reported strengthening their competency in the areas of teamwork, accountability, critical thinking, leadership, and communication. A significant majority also identified gaining mentorship and attendance competency, and more than half noted strengthening their sense of entrepreneurship. No significant variations in this competency acquisition was noted between cohorts, based on semesters completed, or MA'O/DMED program track. (Figure B) We note here that participants' self-reported capacity improvements in areas including interpersonal relationships, public speaking, and problem solving (discussed above, pp. 27-28) are also relevant in the workplace.

Figure B Workplace Competencies Developed Through the YLT



Alumni also reported significant skill acquisition during the YLT. No significant variations were noted between cohorts or based on semesters completed. However, there was a substantial divergence between the MA'O and DMED outcomes, reflecting the different program content and work experience in the DMED and MA'O program tracks. (See Figure C.) 100% of DMED participants reported acquiring digital media skills. 88% of MA'O YLT reported acquiring farming skills and 77% reported developing their cultural/place-based knowledge and skills. Notably, 40% of DMED YLT also identified having developed farming and cultural/place-based skills, which can be attributed to their time working at MA'O during the shared ramp-up program. The majority of both MA'O and DMED YLT reported developing college navigation skills.

Figure C Skills Developed in the YLT - MA'O & DMED Tracks



Interview & Focus Group Findings

The evidence of skill acquisition through the YLT that emerges from the questionnaire responses outlined above was affirmed and further detailed through the in-depth interviews and 'ohana dialogue focus groups. Though the interviewees were not asked directly if and how the skills they acquired in the YLT apply in their lives now, the interview responses to relevant questions were analyzed to assess for this impact. In retrospect, this should have been asked as a question in itself during the interviews.

All 21 interviewees identified at least two skills they learned in the program that they continue to apply in their lives today. Of the 28 different skills identified, the most common ones include: leadership, hard work ethic, interpersonal skills, skills related to local food, feeling connected to community, punctuality/meeting deadlines, and time management.

Interviewees who identified having gained leadership skills through the YLT described this primarily as the ability to be role models. Those who focused on having learned a strong work ethic spoke of having to wake up early and engage in hard labor while at MA'O, which gave them a sense of confidence that they were capable of hard work. They came to value this as a result of their experiences, and are applying it to their lives today at work and school. Alumni who highlighted having developed a sense of community through the YLT commonly referenced learning about interdependence with others, particularly as it relates to culture and/or growing food. Those who specifically referenced gaining local food-related skills spoke about growing their own food and making informed food purchasing choices (see further discussion in the food sovereignty discussion pp. 58-60). Those who identified gaining interpersonal skills made reference to their current application of communication skills in the workplace. For example, when asked how they deal with challenges and difficulties today, interviewees identified discussing problems with others, taking a positive attitude, self-care, asking for support, thinking through problems, dealing with issues directly and immediately, and applying time management skills. This emphasis on the post-program applicability of interpersonal skills was echoed in the focus group discussions, too:

“ *a big part of the YLT and then going through the process was developing interpersonal relationships and learning how to not only interact with people professionally, but interact with other people in the work environment outside that. (...) because [our time on the farm] wasn't easy or smooth, and it allowed me to develop skills to either cope or settle that kind of stuff and just having the pressure and the feeling of accomplishment when doing a hard task.*
(Focus Group)

Interviewees also mentioned the confidence they gained through the YLT to seek professional and workplace opportunities that they didn't see themselves pursuing prior to the program. Of particular note are several interviewees' comments about the way in which they learned to apply specific skills in ways that are grounded in values and serving the community. Future inquiries should further explore this link between how developing an individual's skills can lead to structural change.

“ *Even my talking, I was super shy before but now because of the different opportunities to talk to people that they placed me in, presentations, talking to the people that donate to us or partnerships that we have because they are all top dog people. (...) MA'O actually puts you in these positions. **I would not say they throw you in the water and now you are going to swim, but that is basically how it is.** They will be like, "Oh, can you talk to this person and they are actually they want to know about our youth because and that is it. They also share your story." So that is kind of the times where it is you kind of step up, **even the roles specifically on a farm, we have to step up. I feel like we are kind of pushed out of like our comfort zones to actually continue to grow and in that process we learned a lot of different skills.** (Interview Cohort 12+)*

“*this isn't about just growing food either. Right? It's about creating this community of people where you feel welcomed and loved and safe, and that you're working together for this greater thing. This thing that's bigger than yourself. I learned crop rotation. I learned about plant spacing. And I learned about fertilizing. And I learned how to properly wash, and how to be a good sales person at the market. And how to have conversation with people. But that is not all that model is about. That is definitely a part of it. **Growing food is the foundation right. Growing food but it's, who are you growing food for? And what community are you a part of? And also learning a little bit about yourself and the values and the morals that you have.** So I think that those are the biggest things that I learned. But real, tactical, tangible things (...) I remember talking to Uncle Gary about how to actually be a farmer. Right. And the things that you think about as a farmer. But in the same breath, who you're supporting as a farmer and what it really means to grow food for a community.” (Interview Cohort 12+)*

There also appears to be a strong relationship between the skills and education alumni learned from YLT and the hopes that they have for future generations. Interviewees articulated this connection between the skills they acquired and the hopes they have for future generations in several areas, including: treating others with love and respect, growing local sustainable food, and having a strong work ethic. This again points to the possibility for individual skill building to lead to systemic, intergenerational change.

“*So we had the work ethics, health and fitness. Oh, culturally, that was another big one. I always was connected with my culture, but not as much as I was until MA'O, probably because maybe I was younger or something. (...) But when I got into MA'O and I started being around it more often started hearing it every day. Learning new things, being exposed to all of that stuff or **actually going hand in hand with the cultural stuffs too. Not hand-in-hand, hands on. Then that helped me connect more. And that definitely impacted my life because I see things differently now. I see more to the world. I'm not just tunnel visioned with everything. And so that definitely impacted me that way, and it impacted me on how I want to raise my future kids, my family.**” (Interview Cohort 12+)*

Careers & Meaningful Work

We anticipate that the academic degrees attained by YLT participants will lead to more satisfying work with higher wages. In addition, we expect that the skills and knowledge accrued during the YLT will be valued in the workplace, and that alumni will serve in positions of leadership. While some of the skills learned at MA'O are specific to farming (and specific to creative media in the DMED track), many other skills such as leadership and entrepreneurial literacy, are transferable and relevant in any field.

Through this survey design and analysis process our understanding of what “sustaining careers” means has evolved substantially. The alumni survey has constructively complicated our perspectives and assumptions about how financial stability, opportunities to lead and mentor, and work that serves the community are all vital elements of meaningful work.

Questionnaire Findings

MA'O's hypothesis that YLT alumni will work in “community-enriching, community-serving” professions and positions was supported by the questionnaire data, with 66% of respondents currently serving in such roles. See the breakdown in Table 1, which reflects alumni's most recently held position (current as of October 2020).

Table 1 YLT Alumni Careers in Community-Serving Sectors

	Social services, community nonprofit	Mental & Physical Health	Food & Agriculture	Education	Public Service	Self-employed (entrepreneur)	TOTAL
Number of respondents	6	3	24	4	2	2	41
Percent of respondents	10%	5%	39%	6%	3%	3%	66%

This analysis was based on the details that alumni provided about their three most recent jobs, including employer, position title, duration of employment, and wages. We identified and coded for seven community-enriching sectors: community-serving social services/community nonprofit; mental and physical health; food and agriculture;⁵ education; public service; self-employed (to reflect entrepreneurial emphasis of the YLT); and conservation. While some jobs were coded under multiple sectors, they were then filtered to identify a single primary sector. Notably, for this survey participants understood ‘job’ to be any role that received financial compensation. Future inquiries will differentiate between paid internships and staff/employee positions.

We note in particular the 39% of respondents who are serving in the food and agriculture sector. Here we caution that the composition of the questionnaire respondent group may be skewing these results somewhat, as 48% of the respondents continued in a post-YLT role at MA’O (another internship, apprenticeship, or staff role), compared to 15% of the total alumni population. This indicates this group’s disproportionate interest in the food and agriculture sector, which we see reflected in the high percentage of questionnaire respondents pursuing careers in this field. As noted earlier, the ongoing MA’O expansion has presented a greater number of such post-YLT opportunities since 2018. This may therefore also suggest that as these positions open up in Wai’anae there is an overall increase in the number and percentage of individuals pursuing careers in food and agriculture at MA’O and beyond. Future inquiries are required to further explore these nuances.

Finally, though we were interested in whether alumni work in the community of Wai’anae, the questionnaire did not ask for the geographic location of their workplace, and so did not allow for this analysis. And though duration in employment is also of interest, this analysis has been reserved for future inquiries.

Interview & Focus Group Findings

Alumni’s experiences with meaningful work were explored further in the one-on-one interviews. **17 of the 21 interviewees identified having meaningful work and/or described how they find meaning in their work.** Analysis of the interviews revealed clear intersections between alumni’s source of meaning, their connectivity to community, and their description of the YLT experience and skills they accrued in the program.

“*For me, being part of something bigger than myself is a meaning in life, like a life career, which is what I have right now. I am all organic farms, and this is a live career where I am properly using natural resources for the benefit of humankind and enforces culture. We are indigenizing the mindset and instilling it in the youth of a community that was frowned upon for many many decades in Waianae. Soldier them up in the railroad where they will eat you alive. Being a part of something that uses organic agriculture as a venue, checks all the boxes of the greater good than just oneself. Plus, it is hard work. At the end of the day, I really get satisfied with the hard work.*” (Interview Cohort 12+)

⁵ Included all alumni working in restaurants/fast food if they are involved in food prep.

The interviewees consistently explained that community adds meaning to their jobs. Nearly half of the interviewees find meaning in their jobs because they are supporting community either through education, advocating for youth, providing housing, or having relationships with the community. A third explained that their jobs are meaningful because they are growing sustainable food that perpetuates culture, which they also connect to educating youth, building relationships, and/or building community. Notably, all of those expressed find meaning in growing food currently work at MA'O in post-YLT roles (HYLT interns, apprentices, and staff).

Interviewees also described cultivating community in their work in ways that reflect the skills that they developed while in the YLT, including interpersonal growth, communication, offering support, growing food, and developing a sense of community. Future analyses regarding work outcomes should delve deeper into how skills learned in the program are being applied on an ongoing basis at work and at home.

Of the four (19%) interviewees who did not address or were not asked about meaningful work, one chooses to be a stay at home mother and finds meaning in her children and volunteering; the other three are in college, one of whom finds meaning mo'olelo/storytelling and community, one in relationships, and the other in writing. One of these interviewees, who finds meaning in God, said that while she doesn't have meaningful work, she makes meaning out of her work.

One of the 'ohana dialogue focus group prompted a discussion amongst several alumni who do **not** find their current work meaningful. One of the participants instead finds meaning in volunteering with a community feeding project (see discussion regarding volunteering on p. 70). Another described being on an ongoing journey to discover meaningful work, and along the way finding ways to build meaning with community:

“*At the time that I was working at MA'O, I had no idea what I wanted to do. lots of ambitions, but couldn't decide. And that's kind of why I didn't succeed, just not enough... Well, for me, just guidance in where I was going to go as far as meaningful work. And even now, I'm definitely not living my dream job, or anything like that, but I'm still discovering that path actually. (...) I think doing maybe work that it's not your dream job, but still learning how to be happy, I think is everyone's goal, just being able to survive, but be happy with the people that you surround yourself with. Again, being a part of communities and giving back. (Focus Group)*

Several interviewees touched on the factors that made it easier or more difficult to find meaningful work: two mentioned that the University of Hawai'i at West O'ahu Sustainable Community Food Systems degree inspired their career choices, one mentioned that the social network developed through MA'O was helpful, and one's family owns a business, while one interviewee mentioned the obstacle of a very long commute time.

As the survey participants are in their early careers (questionnaire respondents' average age was 27 and the interviewees skewed slightly younger), we also asked interviewees about their future career aspirations. The **vast majority of interviewees articulated specific career aspirations, and had plans in place to fulfill their goals. Their career choices represent a wide variety of particular job preferences, but reflect a clear interest in education, health (broadly defined), and community-serving roles.** Desired careers included: teacher, professor, social worker, police officer, fire fighter, vocational rehab counselor, and healthcare worker. Outliers want to work in careers related to business and interior design.

Leadership

Given the leadership emphasis within the YLT program, we expected that alumni would be serving in leadership roles in their places of work, as indicated by title/position. However, it was difficult to ascertain leadership using the titles provided by respondents. In future, a simple question regarding supervisory responsibilities should be

asked. It was also anticipated that alumni would serve as leaders in their work, regardless of their position or title.⁶ To get at this more nuanced perspective of leadership, alumni were asked whether they considered themselves to be or have been a leader in any of their past three jobs, regardless of their title or position.

Questionnaire Findings

84% of alumni respondents considered themselves as a leader, while 8% did not and 8% did not respond to this question. The majority described this as leading, teaching and mentoring others, while others identified servant leadership and taking initiative. Table 2 breaks down the leadership themes that emerged from open-ended responses on the questionnaire.

Table 2 YLT Alumni on What Leadership Means

Leadership Theme	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Leading others	27	51%
Teaching	11	21%
Servant leadership	6	11%
Taking initiative	6	11%
Other	5	9%

I have always seen myself as a leader in the community because I enjoy serving individuals and families everyday. I also like to share my knowledge and wisdom with the next generation of leaders. Theme: Servant Leadership (Cohort 1-5)

I don't like waiting around for orders to be given. I am proactive and will take the lead if no one is stepping up. Theme: Taking Initiative (Cohort 6-11.5)

I enjoy the feeling of teaching others. By helping them to learn the process in the best, and smartest way possible.

Theme: Teaching (Cohort 1-5)

I take the initiative to get things done and help others to solve their problems. I feel reaffirmed when coworkers seek my assistance and knowledge as it shows they trust and are confident in me. Theme: Taking Initiative (Cohort 1-5)

I was able to be in a position in which I could influence and inspire others to achieve more and seize the opportunity.

Theme: Leading others (Cohort 6-11.5)

Interview Findings

The interviews echoed and expounded on the self-perception of leadership shared by questionnaire respondents. As noted above, many interviewees noted leadership as one of the primary skills they developed while in the YLT, and discussed their application of this skill in their current work.

“*I learned from MA'O, the main thing that they always carry over is the love, respect, and the willingness to work. That's one of their biggest ideals there. You've got to come with the love, and you have to be respectful to yourself, to your peers, to the place that you're always coming into. Then you have to be willing to put in that hard work, too, if you want to be successful. It starts with yourself and doing what you can. I used to say this a lot when I was at the farm for the younger peers, it's, "You can't do what you can't see." You cannot ask somebody to be a leader if they don't know what a leader is supposed to look like. In that aspect, you need to perpetuate all of those aspects of a leader so they know exactly what you mean when you tell them, "Yes. I need you to be a leader. I need you to step up and to take on that responsibility." (...) To people who don't know it, you cannot ask them to be a good man if they don't know what a good man is supposed to look like in their life. You cannot ask them to be that leader or that role model if they don't know what that looks like. You have to teach them what that looks like.” (Interview Cohort 1-5)*

⁶ Alumni leadership, meaning, and purpose outside of the workplace are explored in the Community Connectedness section, pp. 63-73.

Wages

The household income for YLT participants provides important context for this analysis of alumni wage outcomes. The average annual household income for the youth's families in the 2019 cohort of Summer Ramp Up interns (which is representative of past cohort demographics) was \$76,764, with a household size of 5.3.⁷ This yields a per capita income of \$14,467, which is below the community average of \$18,944 (Wai'anae) to \$21,104 (Ma'ili), and just 45% of the statewide per capita income of \$32,511.⁸

Questionnaire Findings

Alumni were asked on the questionnaire to provide their current household income; 49 respondents provided this information.⁹ There are too many confounding variables in household income for it to be a useful gauge of individual alumni wage or financial well-being outcomes; for example some alumni still live with their parents, while others are living solo, and still others have started families of their own. Given this, alumni household income noted in Table 3 serves merely as a contextual indicator. Of particular note: 20% of alumni have a household income of less than \$25,000.

Table 3 YLT Alumni Household Income

Income range	Total
Less than \$25,000	20%
\$25,001 to \$50,000	10%
\$50,001 to \$75,000	24%
\$75,001 to \$100,000	20%
\$100,001 to \$125,000	12%
More than \$125,000	12%
Total	100%

Alumni wages were assessed based on the details provided for their most recent job; annual and hourly earnings were normalized. In the case of hourly wages, this required assuming full-time hours, though this may not be accurate for all individuals. Future analyses of wages should gather cleaner earning data to allow for more robust conclusions.

We anticipated that higher degree attainment would yield higher wages, as is evidenced in census data for the general population in Wai'anae and elsewhere. However, a comparison of alumni wages for those with and without the associate degree revealed no statistical difference between the two and did not sustain this hypothesis (Table 4). We also expected that wages would increase with alumni's age; this was borne out, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 YLT Alumni Wage by Degree Attainment

Degree Attainment	Mean Hourly Wage
Non-Associate	\$18.80
Associate or higher	\$18.40

Table 4 YLT Alumni Wage By Cohort (Age)

Cohort Group	Mean Hourly Wage
1-5	\$19.31
6-11.5	\$19.00
>12	\$15.40

Given alumni's higher degree attainment compared to their peers, it was expected that alumni would have higher wages than average for their peers in the Wai'anae community. Unfortunately, it was not possible to do an analysis with a similar peer group, as the census does not break down wages by age. The only comparison that was possible is against the mean individual (nonfamily) wage for the full Wai'anae population (see Table 6). While (annualized) alumni wages are lower than the Wai'anae mean, it is difficult to determine whether this is driven by the relatively low age of the alumni (average 27 years old), or some other factor(s). The alumni's career choices also posed an interesting complicating question; how does the high percentage of alumni working in nonprofit, food and agriculture, education, and public service sectors impact earnings?

⁷ MA'O administrative data, derived from tax returns or W2s provided by interns upon entry to the SRU program.

⁸ US Census Bureau

⁹ One of the focus group participants pointed out that they did not know the income of others in their home, so they did not know how to answer this question. We anticipate that other respondents faced the same challenge with this question.

Wage and earning outcomes remain an area for fruitful study in future analyses, with much learned from the process in these initial survey and interview responses. In particular, we are eager to explore how YLT-enabled networking and relationship building enable access to meaningful and remunerative work, as well as how Wai‘anae’s relatively rural nature and the work available within the community impact earnings and professional choices.

Table 6 YLT Alumni vs. Wai‘anae Earnings

	Alumni Average Earnings	Wai‘anae Mean Earnings
Annual wages	\$ 38,609	\$ 48,114

Focus Group Findings

In one of the ‘ohana dialogue focus groups several alumni participants pointed out that they found the questions about household income and wages in the questionnaire to be reductive, and not representative of their own understanding of their socioeconomic status and worth to their families and communities. They pointed out that a sole focus on financial outcomes was also not reflective of the values that they had developed while in the YLT.

“one of the questions was about my household income. (...) but I just feel that MAO gave us something that's a little bit deeper than a household income. (...) **We wouldn't measure our socioeconomic status based on our household income. I think we have a much richer sense of worth within our community, within our families.** And then just within the greater economic scheme of things, based on what we learned from MAO. (Focus Group)

“I think that's the one thing that I really took from MAO was: you have to work for what you want and **your worth is more than what you bring in, in cash. What you can provide for your family, doesn't just come from money.** I think that's what I would like to expand upon and the socioeconomic portion of the questionnaire. (Focus Group)

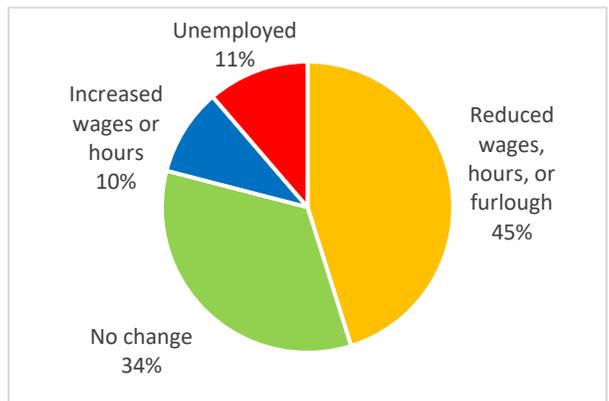
COVID-19 Impacts

It is noteworthy that the survey was deployed in the fall of 2020, which was a period of very high statewide unemployment, driven by the COVID-19 crisis (14% in October 2020).

Questionnaire Findings

When asked if and how the pandemic had impacted their employment, questionnaire respondents reported mixed impacts: 11% lost their jobs; nearly half had reduced wages or hours, or had been furloughed; 34% reported no impact; and 10% were working more hours or receiving higher wages (Figure D).

Figure D COVID-19 Impact on Alumni Employment



Interview Findings

None of the 21 interviewees experienced job loss due to the pandemic. Out of the eight people who reported a change in jobs or hours, six people are working more hours, while two people found new jobs. Nine people talked about how a change in their social and family life has been difficult and six people describe having less local food access due to their local farmers’ markets being closed. Other affects included adjustments to job duties or new COVID protocols at work and change in daily activities, mainly being more time spent on the computer. More than half of interviewee discussions regarding COVID impacts reflected individual resiliency, with eight reporting having had a positive shift to their mindset and three describing making an effort to purchase local food in response to the pandemic.

SUMMARY & DISCUSSION

In summary, alumni reported developing workplace competencies and skills while in the YLT, skills that they continue to apply in their lives today. Respondents reported strengthening their competency in the areas of teamwork, accountability, critical thinking, leadership, and communication. A significant majority also identified gaining mentorship and attendance competency, and more than half noted strengthening their sense of entrepreneurship. Several interviewees discussed how the YLT taught them to apply specific skills in ways that are grounded in values and serving the community. There also appears to be a strong relationship between the skills and education alumni learned in the YLT and the hopes that they have for future generations. This points to the possibility for individual skill building to lead to systemic, intergenerational change.

The majority of respondents are working in “community-enriching, community-serving” professions and positions. Over a third are working in the food and agriculture sector. While this can be partially attributed to the disproportionate number of respondents who continued in a post-YLT role at MA’O (indicating their interest in the sector), this also correlates with a greater number of post-YLT opportunities created through MA’O’s expansion since 2018. This may suggest that as job opportunities in food and agriculture expand in Wai’anae, there will be an increase in the number and percentage of individuals pursuing these career pathways.

The interviews revealed clear intersections between alumni’s source of meaning, their connectivity to community, and their description of the YLT experience and skills they accrued in the program. Interviewees also reported gaining confidence through the YLT to seek professional and workplace opportunities that they didn’t see themselves pursuing prior to the program. The vast majority of alumni respondents considered themselves as a leader in the workplace, regardless of their position or title. The majority described this as leading, teaching and mentoring others, while others identified servant leadership and taking initiative.

Wage outcomes were mixed, without a clear relationship between the YLT and higher wages or degree attainment and higher wages. More than half of respondents experienced job loss or wage/hour reduction due to COVID-19. The data was difficult to interpret due to confounding factors, and wage and earning outcomes remain an area for fruitful study in future analyses. In particular, we are eager to explore:

- How do alumni’s career choices (a high percentage of alumni work in nonprofit, food and agriculture, education, and public service sectors) impact earnings?
- How does YLT-enabled networking and relationship building enable access to meaningful and remunerative work, and how does Wai’anae’s relatively rural nature and the work available within the community impact earnings and professional choices?

Several overarching themes that emerge in the education outcomes are reflected elsewhere in the study. We highlight them here, and encourage readers to look for these themes in the other briefs and/or the full report:

- YLT alumni have tremendous hope and aspirations for the well-being of their current and future ‘ohana, often grounded in an articulation of cultural and community-centric values and a commitment to carrying forward a strong work ethic. Most resonant were the many affirmations of the MA’O philosophy of “love, respect, and the willingness to work.”
- MA’O effectively serves as an extension of ‘ohana for youth participants, facilitating the generational transmission of knowledge, skills, and capacity.
- There is a complex interplay between youth’s experience in the YLT program and their structural, environmental, and familial context, which can impinge upon and/or bolster individual outcomes. This interplay surfaced repeatedly throughout our analysis, for example in access to career opportunities.