



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

**YLT EXPERIENCE & ATTRITION Brief**

**This brief covers the YLT experience and attrition learnings from MA'O's *Dialogues with Our Future Ancestors* alumni survey project.** Briefs are also available for education, workforce, socioeconomic, holistic health, and community connectedness outcomes, as well as the 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**

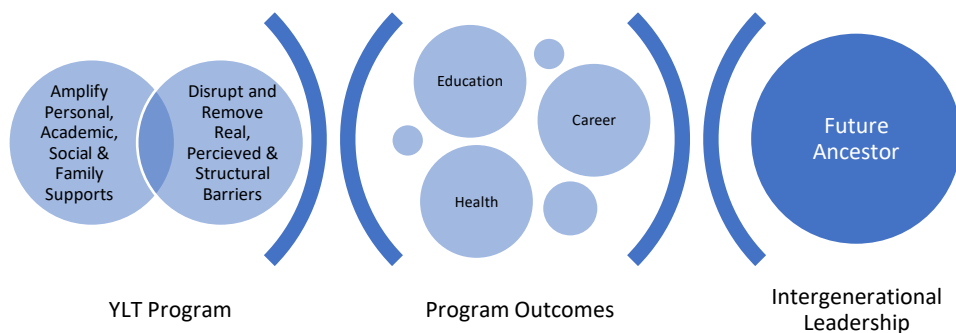
Since its founding in 2001, MA'O Organic Farms (MA'O) has witnessed that investments in the connection of youth to land and in the empowerment of youth leadership generate health, sustainability, and resilience with and for the community. In 2020 MA'O partnered with a team of evaluation experts and academic 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’O Organic Farms (an organic farm and home to the majority of YLT interns, referred to as “MA’O”) 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’O 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’O and DMED program tracks participate in a ramp-up program at MA’O Organic Farms and receive ongoing programmatic support from MA’O 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 METHODOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

The MA’O 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.<sup>2</sup>

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’O 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’O 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

## YLT EXPERIENCE

The purpose of the YLT program is to empower youth with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge required for matriculation to and graduation from college, while they participate in community-based social entrepreneurship, and practice aloha ‘āina (stewardship of the land) and care for the community. The programmatic approach used in the YLT includes:

- acculturating students to college attainment and lifelong learning
- maximizing peer-to-peer engagement and support
- balancing the provision of support with the giving of kuleana (work that requires responsibility)
- empowering youth to generate action-oriented goals
- providing individualized mentorship to participants
- reconnecting young people to Hawaiian culture and heritage

## YLT EXPERIENCE & ATTRITION – STUDY RESULTS

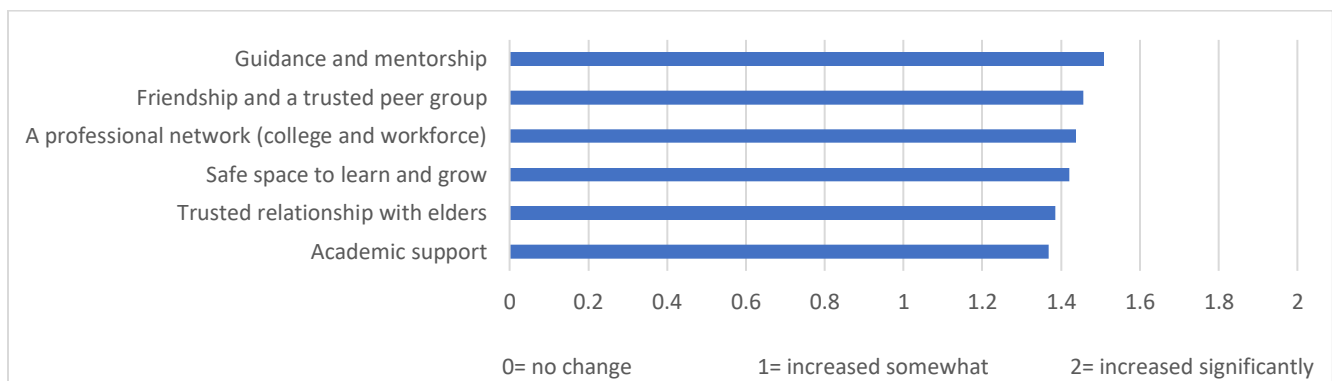
### Well-Being & Agency

In this section we examine the impact of the YLT program on participants’ from the vantage point of the alumni’s own perspectives about their experience in the program. When alumni were asked to recall their YLT experience and reflect on its subsequent impacts, two overarching themes emerged: an enhanced sense of agency and improved well-being. The majority of alumni also identified accessing resources through the program that have facilitated their success.

### Questionnaire Findings

Alumni reported substantial gains in support stemming from their participation in the YLT (see Figure B). This support included: guidance and mentorship, friendship and a trusted peer group, a professional network, a safe space to learn and grow, trusted relationships with elders, and academic support. There was no statistically significant variation between the increased support reported by those with or without an associate degree.

Figure B Increased Support Received Through the YLT



Alumni also attributed positive changes in their well-being to their participation in the YLT, most notably in the area of self-determination, followed by an increase in their hopes for the future, their confidence, financial responsibility, life, work, and school balance, and self-care. No significant variations were noted between cohorts or based on semesters completed (Figure C). Three areas of divergence between those who achieved their

associate degree and those who have not were statistically significant: hope about future and goals ( $P < 0.10$ ); confidence ( $P < 0.10$ ); and life, work, and school balance ( $P < 0.05$ ). (Table 1)

**We note here that the greatest reported gains in well-being are in areas where students have the greatest personal agency: self-determination, future hopes and goals, and confidence.** This reinforces the interview findings, in which participants emphasized how their agency grew through the YLT program (see p. 30). Meanwhile, in the areas that are more prone to influence by outside factors such as financial circumstances and family kuleana – financial responsibility; life, work, and school balance; and self-care – alumni reported slightly more modest gains. This raises interesting and challenging questions regarding the complex interplay between youth’s experience *within* the YLT program and their structural, environmental, and familial context, which can impinge upon and/or bolster individual experiences and outcomes.

Figure C Well-Being Improvements Attributed to the YLT

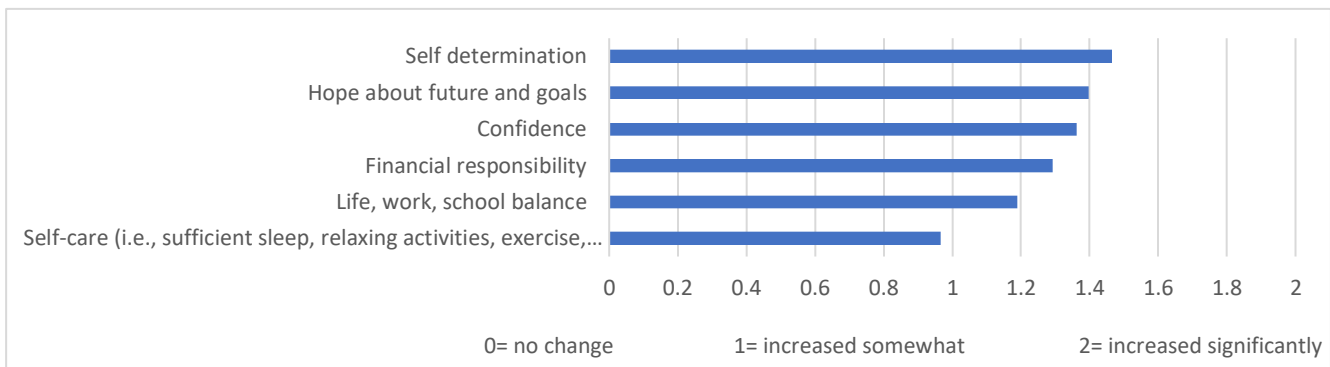


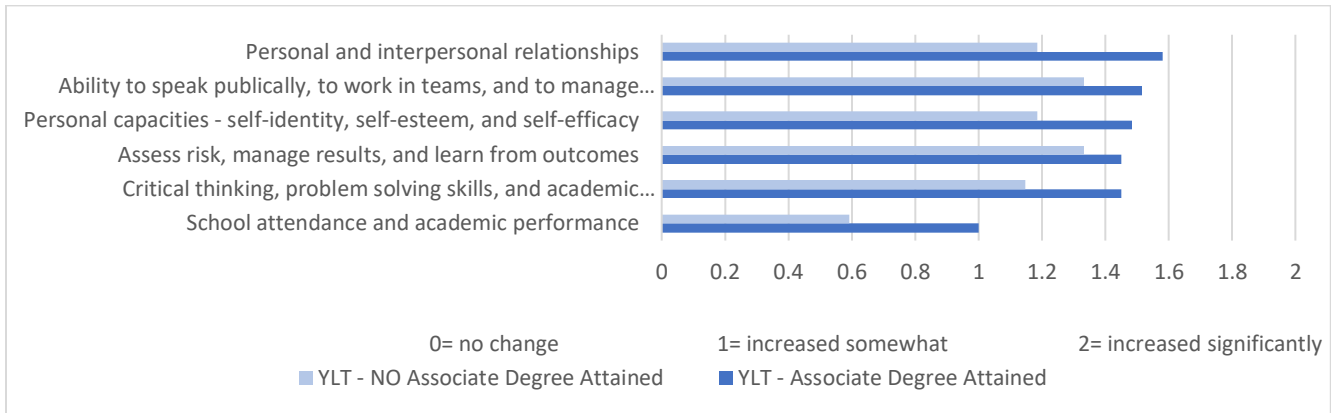
Table 1 Well-Being Improvement Divergence Between Alumni Who Did & Did Not Attain an Associate Degree

	Alumni Associate Degree Attained	YLT - NO Associate Degree Attained	Significance
Hope about future and goals	1.65	1.11	*
Confidence	1.55	1.15	*
Self determination	1.65	1.26	
Financial responsibility	1.45	1.11	
Life, work, school balance	1.45	0.89	**
Self-care (i.e., sufficient sleep, relaxing activities, exercise, eating well)	1.10	0.81	

Alumni also identified increasing their capacity through the YLT in areas critical to academic and future professional success. Their greatest reported gains were in the areas of interpersonal relationships; team work and public speaking; self-identity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy; risk assessment and learning from outcomes; and critical thinking and problem solving. Alumni also reported that their school attendance improved somewhat.<sup>3</sup> (See Figure D.)

<sup>3</sup> Figure E is an example of our process learning; in future analyses attributes included in any single question will be more clearly defined (to avoid conflating distinct topics), and better grouped.

Figure D Capacity Improvements Attributed to Participation in the YLT



We note that alumni who have not attained an associate degree indicated lower gains than those who have attained an associate degree or higher (Table 2). This divergence was statistically significant for four outcomes: improved personal and interpersonal relationships ( $P < 0.05$ ); and critical thinking, problem solving skills, and academic performance; personal capacities; and school attendance (all  $P < 0.10$ ). This indicates a clear relationship between the acquisition of skills and capacities acquired in the YLT and post-secondary graduation outcomes. We note that personal and interpersonal relationships were identified as the area of greatest gain for those who have attained a degree, which corroborates our experience that pilina between peers, across cohorts, and with staff and mentors, is a critical predictor of YLT participants’ academic success.<sup>4</sup> **Together, these results indicate that the YLT program contributes to participant persistence, as it mimics the ‘ohana role of providing resources, support, and relationships.** The question remains: why and how is this strong enough to balance or outweigh the challenges youth face when entering the program (e.g. insufficient academic preparation or financial pressure) for some, but not all YLT members? This surfaces the complex interplay between personal capacity, program competency, and environmental factors.

Table 2 Well-Being Improvement Divergence Between Alumni Based on Degree Attainment

	Alumni Associate Degree Attained	YLT - NO Associate Degree Attained	Significance
Personal and interpersonal relationships	1.58	1.19	**
Ability to speak in public, to work in teams, and to manage my finances	1.52	1.33	
Personal capacities - self-identity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy	1.48	1.19	*
Critical thinking, problem solving skills, and academic performance	1.45	1.15	*
Assess risk, manage results, and learn from outcomes	1.45	1.33	
School attendance and academic performance	1.00	0.59	*

Alumni also reported that the YLT resulted in increased engagement with their personal education goals, family connections, and self-advocacy. Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the program, alumni reported that during the YLT they worked in community and engaged in more aloha ‘āina/mālama ‘āina activities. They also reported positive, but slightly more modest, gains across a range of social, cultural, and community oriented activities. (See details in Figure E). There was no statistically significant difference based on program duration or cohort. However,

<sup>4</sup> In January 2021 the MA’O ‘Auwai team conducted a survey and series of focus groups with current Leeward Community College students, including those in the YLT and two LCC-led cohort programs. The students repeatedly identified peer, counselor, mentor, and staff relationships as vital to their academic persistence. O Ka Leo O Ka Manu report to the Stupski Foundation (February 2021)

there was a statistically significant divergence between those who achieved their associate degree and those who have not in two areas: advocating for your education ( $P < 0.01$ ) and pursuing further education ( $P < 0.05$ ) (see Table 3). This divergence is particularly notable given the direct relationship between these skills and the successful attainment of the college degree.

Figure E Increased Engagement During the YLT

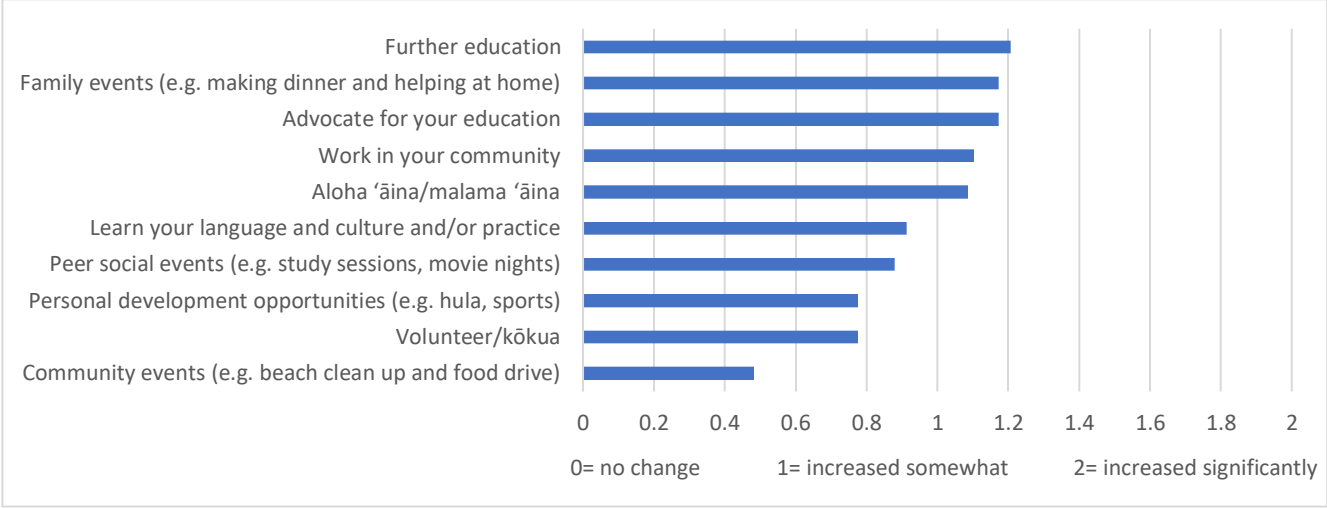
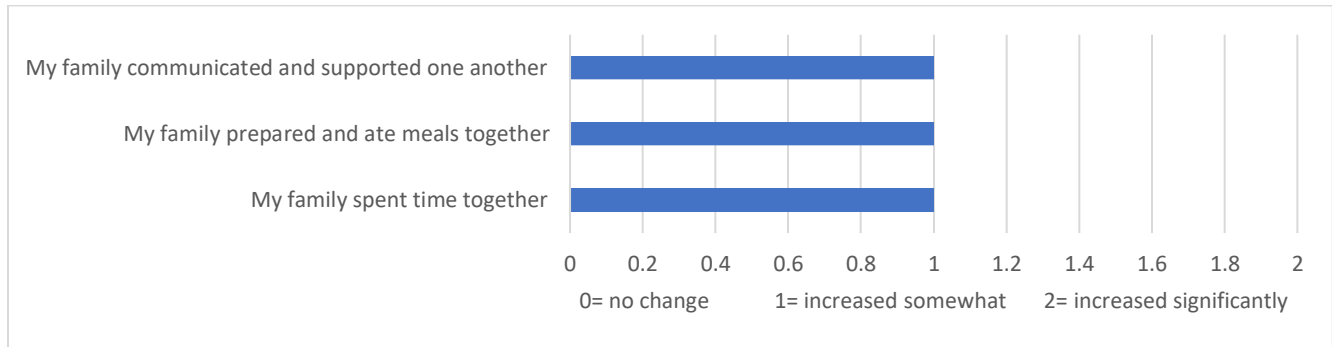


Table 3 Engagement Increase Divergence Between Alumni Based on Degree Attainment

	Alumni Associate Degree Attained	YLT - NO Associate Degree Attained	Significance
Further education	1.55	0.81	**
Advocate for your education	1.52	0.78	***
Aloha 'āina/mālama 'āina	1.29	0.85	
Family events (such as making dinner and helping at home)	1.23	1.11	
Work in your community	1.19	1.00	
Peer social events (such as study sessions, movie nights)	1.03	0.70	
Learn your language and culture and/or practice	1.03	0.78	
Volunteer/kokua	0.90	0.63	
Personal development opportunities (such as hula or sports activity)	0.87	0.67	
Community events (such as beach clean up and food drive)	0.48	0.48	

Finally, alumni reported that their relationships with their families improved somewhat as a result of their participation in the YLT. This was measured through self-reported increases in communication and support, preparation and eating of meals together, and spending time together (see Figure G). We note that this appears to reinforce the self-reported improvements in personal and interpersonal relationships noted previously (Figure F). This demonstrates the broader impact of the YLT program, and the capacity of the interns to act as agents of change in their families and social networks. This is, however, a distinctly second tier impact, with more muted improvements in family relationships than in the areas of personal growth discussed above. This likely reflects the YLT's emphasis on building the capacity of individual participants, and the fact that the program has historically not been geared toward direct engagement of participants' 'ohana. (See pp. 76-77 for further discussion of interns' suggestions regarding 'ohana engagement).

Figure F Improved Family Relationship Due to YLT



### Interview & Focus Group Results

The vast majority of interviewees reported that they had transformative experiences through which they deepened their self-determination. Specifically, the alumni described feeling empowered with a sense of agency over their decisions and choices about their futures. They attributed their personal growth, increased confidence, and strengthened work ethic to the leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills they learned through the program. Alumni also noted that the program connected them with resources and offered them a sense of community. One of the ‘ohana dialogue focus group participants distilled the experience as one of learning to advocate on their own behalf, work hard, and learn from their mistakes:

“ *the biggest thing I pulled out of MA’O was knowing your resources and your opportunities, and then kind of training yourself to make an active effort to take the opportunities that you have and set yourself up to build on the ones that you did take or your doors you might have opened. But not really expecting anything too. I guess it could be general work ethic. Work your ass off when you can, but don’t expect anything to be given to you even in the opportunities. But just try to keep building on your past successes and learn from the opportunities that you didn’t take or your failures.* (Focus Group)

“ *I feel a lot more independent (...) after going to MA’O and experiencing what I experienced. I think having just that drive to want to succeed, having that drive to want to get a job, having that drive to do things on my own. I feel like that is where MA’O was kind of the baby crib to get me out into the world. You know what I mean. Like, "Okay, let me just cradle you for a little bit, but go on and do your thing." I feel like MA’O has a lot. It instilled a lot in me. It is like crazy because I feel like I am only realizing it now that I am older.* (Interview Cohort 1-5)

“ *it definitely taught me to be my own person rather than continuously following after someone. It just taught me a whole lot, whether it be time management, whether it be leadership or getting what I need, to using all of my resources around me and using them, actually using them, (...) it might’ve been intentional for them to teach us, but it wasn’t my intentions going into the program. So it was a whole lot of just about everything a person should always learn growing up and becoming an adult.* (Interview Cohort 12+)

When the interviewees described building their interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence through the YLT, they spoke of learning how to treat others and themselves, learning how to ask for help, taking a positive attitude towards others and themselves, practicing self-care, treating others with kindness, having a positive attitude, being open minded, not making excuses, and finding purpose. They also discussed valuing and developing characteristics of confidence, determination, humility, love and respect, and patience.

“ *Having a connection or just knowing that there is a deeper sense of community. (...) one of the greatest things I think I got out of the program is just tapping into resources and learning that we really all need each other to survive. But literally, I think that MA’O has been kind of that foundation piece. Even though I was only in the program for, I want to say maybe like a year or so in school. But after that, I felt like, when I look back, a lot of times, it goes back a lot to our resources and sustainability. If Hawaii really wants to be sustainable it goes all back to the land. It goes back to the community and it goes back to people helping one another.* (Interview Cohort 1-5)

The vast majority of interviewees (19 of 21) also indicated having developed their aspirations through the YLT program; the most common goal was a specific career plan, closely followed by finishing college, with a smaller subset aspiring to grow food or build community. All 19 of 21 interviewees who discussed having strengthened their aspirations through the YLT attributed this in part to the leadership, work ethic, communication, and interpersonal skills that they developed through the YLT. The majority of alumni had also described specific academic and training for fulfilling their career aspirations, reflecting the confidence and self-determination instilled through the YLT.

“ *I learn to be more disciplined with my work. And making sure that I get everything done and turned in and on time. And one of the things that has stuck with me since I have left with MA’O is the mantra that Papa Aila would always tell us, "Love, respect and the willingness to work." He would tell us that at every check out. And being in the YLT, it is like, okay, I get it. I understand what Papa Aila is saying. But it does not really take effect until after you leave. And then you realize it is true. And so with everything that I have done thus far, I tried to do it with love, respect and a whole lot of willingness to work.* (Interview Cohort 1-5)

### Questionnaire Results

The alumni were also invited to share open-ended responses on the questionnaire about how the YLT experience impacted them; 24 participants responded. The themes that emerged from their comments echoed the interviewees’ description of the YLT program as a place of growth, most notably in the area of personal development. (See Table 4). Here we share several representative comments in the alumni’s own words.

“ *I learned more about myself, my potential, and challenges during my YLT experience.*

Theme: Personal Development (Cohort 12+)

“ *It has helped me to continue to grow food and grow young people to be forever in service to 'aina.*

Theme: Community (Cohort 1-5)

“ *YLT gave me a better understanding of our community and appreciate hard work.*

Theme: Community (Cohort 6-11.5)

“ *I met amazing people, grew strong bonds, made some of the best friends I've ever had, met my other half, able to achieve my Associates Degree.*

Theme: Relationships (Cohort 6-11.5)

Table 4 YLT Alumni Program Experience Themes (Open-Ended Questionnaire Responses)

Theme	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
personal development	14	58%
experience valued	5	21%
community	4	17%
relationships	3	13%
challenges	2	8%
<i>The total number of respondents is greater than the number who commented; some responses were coded as two themes.</i>		

“ *[YLT] taught me more about food than I deserved to know; taught me how to build relationships. Allowed us as young adults to connect and empower us from growing vegetables, to growing with one another.*

Theme: Personal Development (Cohort 6-11.5)



## ATTRITION & RECOMMENDATIONS

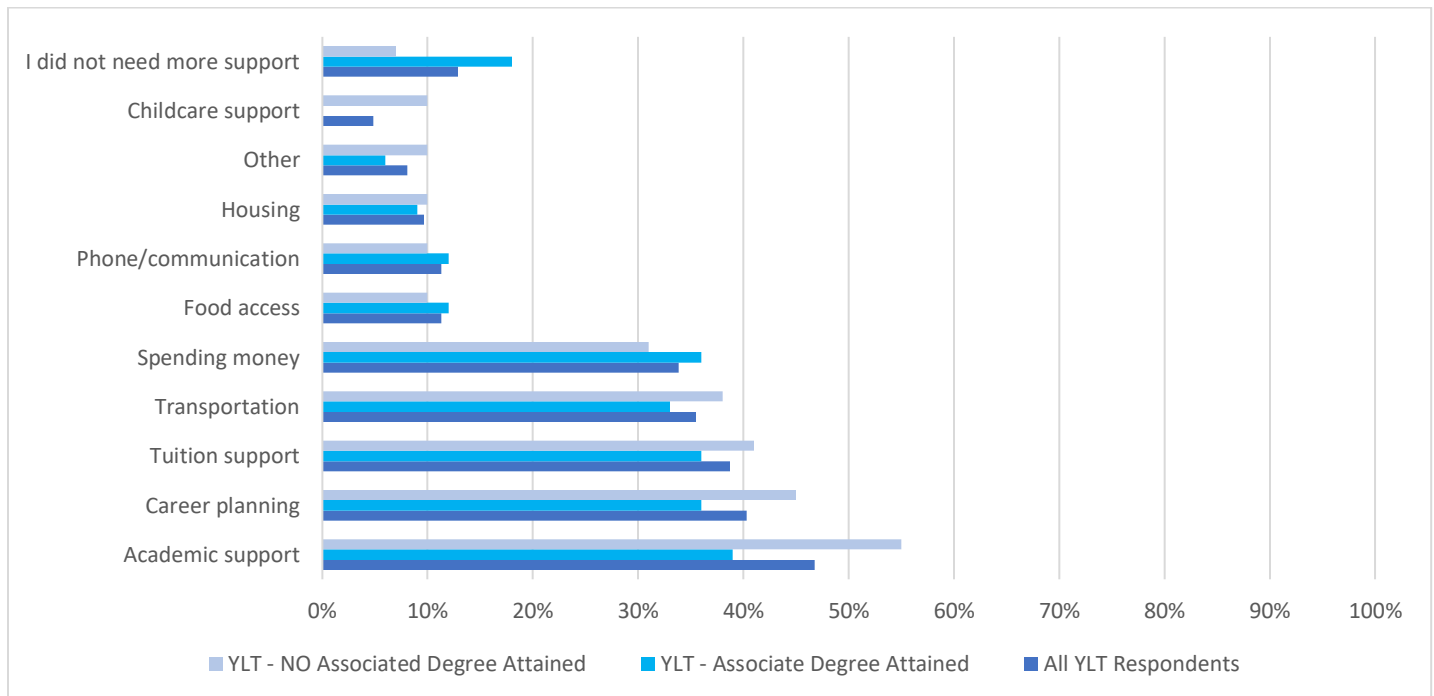
### Support & Attrition

As described earlier, of all 315 YLT participants in cohorts 1-12.5, 40% remained in the program for four or more semesters, while 31% stayed for 2-3 semesters, and 29% persisted for 0-1 semesters. This correlates with the 41% graduation rate for YLT participants – meaning that 59% of YLT participants who are eligible to have graduated have not (yet) achieved an associate degree.<sup>5</sup> To ascertain what pressures may have contributed to YLT attrition and failure to graduate, we asked alumni which types of support (if any) they needed more of while in the program. We also invited survey participants to share their recommendations for the ongoing refinement of the YLT program.

### Questionnaire Findings

**The respondents' greatest demand was for more academic support; this was particularly the case for those who did not attain their associate degree. More than a third of respondents also identified needing more support in the areas of career planning, tuition, transportation, and spending money.** Around 10% reported needing support for basic needs, including food access, housing, and communication technology. A small number of alumni noted that they needed childcare support, though it is notable that all (3) of those who identified this need did not attain their associate degree. This corresponds with our experience that it is difficult for participants (age 17-24 while in the YLT) who have their own children and struggle with insufficient childcare to persist in the program and graduate with their degree. About one fifth of YLT respondents who did achieve their associate degree said that they did not need additional support of any kind. (See Figure G.)

Figure G Areas In Which YLT Needed More Support



<sup>5</sup> Though the 40% graduation rate and 40% 4+ semester duration align precisely, these two groups vary somewhat. There are some individuals who remain in the program for fewer than 4 semesters, but who achieve their degree. This happens in a variety of ways; for example a student may transfer out of LCC and into UH Mānoa, leaving MA'O but continuing their studies, or a student may leave MA'O and continue their studies independently. Conversely, there are also YLT participants who persist for 4+ semesters at MA'O, but fall just short of attaining their associate degree.

## Interview & Focus Group Findings

To learn more about the challenges and pressures that can prevent YLT participants from persisting in the program and attaining their degree, we asked the five interviewees who left the YLT early about their reasons for doing so (including the three interviewees mentioned above who noted needing more childcare support).<sup>6</sup> We expected that they would mention personal and/or family health, financial pressures, academic challenges, and pressure to care for family members as sources of pressure. On a more positive note, we anticipated that some alumni would have left the program to pursue new opportunities.

The interviewees identified obstacles to finishing college, including: a lack of family support, immaturity, debt, and getting bored easily. However, four of the five stated that they still view a college education positively, and that their view was influenced by the YLT. One interviewee has since continued her studies and is now enrolled in a graduate school, which she attributes to having a supportive spouse.

Given that three of the interviewees who left the YLT early were from Cohort 1-5 and two from Cohort 6-11.5, they have had years to reflect since participating in the program. Notably, they all regret having left MA'O early, and shared their personal growth and insights about why they left and what different choices they could have made. Four alumni reported a single direct reason for leaving the YLT: medical reasons; suspended from the program and had transportation issues; suspended due to academic performance; and a shoulder injury from a car accident. One interviewee gave three reasons: they had a full-time job, were paying out of state tuition (which was not fully covered through the YLT), and had personal life stress. Three interviewees stated that they needed more family support, one of whom said her dad discouraged her from attending college and wanted her to be a server at Hooters to make money. Three individuals also said that their families do not value education. The theme that emerged from these conversations was that **most interns who left the program early did so due to a lack of family support**. All five early departees shared that they valued the program, despite not completing it.

“*I didn't [complete an AA]. (...) I totally regret that. (...) the program offers a lot of help and support (...) there's no excuse to fail because there's other people in your class that you can sit down with and do work together. I think my whole thing was more on the home support. That, I think is very important, especially for kids who are first generation college students, or just first year, just your freshman year in general. I think family support is a big thing, or at least having some kind of support at home. Even if it's not your family, just having some kind of support outside of the program and outside of, education-wise, plays a big role. (...) if you don't have a support, a strong support system at home, it does tend to fall into your school.* (Interview Cohort 1-5)

“*I didn't actually get my degree as I left a little bit earlier. But even then what MAO has taught me, like work ethic wise, I feel it's helped me with any job that I've been in. And it's helped me to go into more leadership roles in all the other jobs that I've had. So even though without the degree, yeah, it would have been nice if I had stuck it out. But things happen in everyone's lives. And we can still take what we learned from MAO and use it anywhere really. And apply it to not just work, but life in general. I love loving everyone, loving everyone at work, yourself, respecting others. Of course, willingness to work because (...) you can't really get anywhere if you're going to be lazy and not want to work, and work for what you have.* (Focus Group)

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<sup>6</sup> Four of the five interviewees who left early have not attained an associate degree; one returned to school after the program and is currently enrolled in an MA program. One additional interviewee finished the program but did not get a degree. This analysis on attrition focuses on those who left the program early. In retrospect we should have asked separate questions in the interview about why alumni left the YLT early, whether they finished their college degree, and what further education that have pursued.

We acknowledge that a sample group of five interviewees is not sufficient to draw generalized conclusions for the ~60% of interns who have left the program early. We note again that it was more challenging to (re)connect with alumni who stayed in the program for fewer semesters and/or have not completed their degree. We expect that this will continue to pose a challenge for future analyses, and are aware that additional efforts are needed to connect with and learn from the experiences of these individuals.

## Alumni Recommendations

### Interview Findings

The interviewee responses regarding the support and resource they needed or would suggest making available for future interns were phrased not as excuses, but rather as reflections about both the program and their own capacity. For example, one of the interviewees said that there could have been clearer communication about the roles, responsibilities, obligations, and commitment expectations of YLT participants, and suggested that clearer communication would help future YLT. This same interviewee also said that in retrospect she should have asked for more help.

The most commonly suggested resource for future YLT was the provision of more general guidance, with five interviewees discussing their own need and future interns' need for this kind of support. For example, the interviewee who left the program early due to transportation issues suggested that transportation would be a critical way to support future YLT, and then added that it would have been helpful to have more guidance as she tried to figure out how to be an adult.

**“** *I think that would have been really helpful at the time [to make] it more known to the interns that [staff and mentors] are there to talk to if you need it, if you need someone to talk to about your home life or about what you need. I think that was there, it was just not, I did not feel it was something that was easily approachable. I do not know if they do that now. (...) It is kind of a weird age where you are trying to be an adult, but you are not really so you are really comparing yourself almost, like, "I do not make enough money," or and then you are in school and that is a lot of pressure to be successful because you are kind of comparing. (...) I think that definitely needs to be there for people who are going through that transition from high school to college and becoming an adult.* (Interview Cohort 6-11.5)

One of the individuals who lacked family support suggested that MA'O could host family events, which she felt would get families involved and aware of what their children are doing, resulting in greater support for their pursuit of a college degree.

**“** *I think maybe what would possibly help more, is bringing in their family members of the YLT, because there was not a lot of that when I was there. (...) a formal invitation of saying, "Hey, we are going to have an event for the family to come and see what you do. (...) "Come and see what your kid does." (...) I think that would have helped me and my dad, as far as our relationship. And him just being more accepting like, "Oh, yeah. Okay, this is a good place for you." I know that some other interns did not have that support either. So, I think if the Kauhale had more events that involved their family members and friends. "Here is an invite. We are going to have a special event for them. They can check out the farm. See how things go. And just really get to meet the interns' mentors." Because that is what the older YLT is. They are mentors to these young, new graduates, or high school graduates. Then, they could see the bonds that the interns are creating and what they are learning.* (Interview Cohort 1-5)

Finally, one of the focus group dialogues included an enthusiastic discussion regarding the possibility for MA'O to host a reunion for past YLT participants, to reinforce bonds and connections amongst the alumni, and to foster a reconnection with MA'O as well.

### ***Recent Program Refinements***

#### **Engaging 'Ohana**

We note here that the alumni recommendations to engage families came from members of Cohort 1-5. This was the earliest iteration of YLT programming, during the Ho'owaiwai phase of the program (see Appendix C for phase details). YLT programming has recently evolved to better meet this need during the current Mā'ona phase (Cohorts 12+).

Prompted by greater than usual attrition in the first year of Cohort 13 (2018-19), we developed and deployed our first **'Ohana Day** in November 2019. Through this event we aimed to bolster family awareness and support for the youth and their academic journey. To this end we engaged interns and families together in simple farm hana (work) on the land and facilitating meaningful dialogue in a staff supported environment. While we were unable to host 'Ohana Days in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, we are eager to reconvene these events. **The alumni feedback highlights the importance of this kind of 'ohana engagement.**

In our experience, family-related attrition is often fueled by 'ohana pressure to leave school and work more hours, and familial demands to contribute to care of children, elders and ill family members. In this context, we have found focusing on the youth as a leader in their family is more productive than working to get the 'ohana to provide more support.

#### **Social-Emotional Learning**

In the Mā'ona phase (Cohorts 12+), we have also placed greater emphasis on social emotional learning and deepened our practice of trauma-informed care. The need for this support is evident in the alumni's requests for more guidance in their transition to adulthood.

## **SUMMARY & DISCUSSION**

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

In summary, alumni reported experiencing guidance and mentorship, friendship and a trusted peer group, a professional network, a safe space to learn and grow, trusted relationships with elders, and academic support while in the YLT program. They also attributed positive changes in their well-being to their participation in the YLT, including in the areas of self-determination, their hopes for the future, confidence, financial responsibility, self-care, and life, work, and school balance.

Alumni reported the most substantial gains *in areas where students have the greatest personal agency*, and more modest gains in areas that are more prone to influence by outside factors. This highlights the complex interplay between youth's experience within the YLT program and their structural, environmental, and familial context, which can impinge upon and/or bolster individual experiences and outcomes.

Alumni identified increasing their capacity through the YLT in areas critical to their academic and future professional success. Alumni who have not attained an associate degree indicated lower gains than those who

have attained an associate degree or higher, most notably in the areas of advocating for their education and pursuing further education. Alumni who have not attained an associate degree also indicated lower improvements in their personal and interpersonal relationships; critical thinking, problem solving skills, and academic performance; personal capacities; and school attendance. This highlights the relationship between skills acquired in the YLT and post-secondary graduation. Personal and interpersonal relationships were identified as the area of greatest gain for those who have attained a degree, which corroborates our experience that pilina between peers, across cohorts, and with staff and mentors, is a critical predictor of YLT participants' academic success.

These results indicate that the YLT program contributes to participant persistence, as it mimics the 'ohana role of providing resources, support, and relationships. The question remains: why and how is this strong enough to balance or outweigh the challenges youth face when entering the program for some but not all participants? This surfaces the complex interplay between personal capacity, program competency, and environmental factors.

Alumni also reported that their relationships with their families improved somewhat as a result of their participation in the YLT. These were, however, more muted improvements than in the areas of personal growth, likely reflecting the YLT program's emphasis on building the capacity of individual participants, and the fact that the program has only recently included direct engagement of participants' 'ohana.

When asked which types of support (if any) they needed more of while in the program, respondents' greatest demand was for more academic support, particularly among those who have not attained their associate degree. More than a third of respondents also identified needing more support in the areas of career planning, tuition, transportation, and spending money. The interviewees identified a lack of family support, immaturity, debt, and getting bored easily as obstacles to finishing college. Those who left the program early most commonly did so due to a lack of family support. We note again that it was more challenging to (re)connect with alumni who stayed in the program for fewer semesters and/or have not completed their degree. Additional efforts are needed to connect with and learn from the experiences of these individuals.