

Pōkā Laenui
86-641 Pu`uhulu Rd.
Wai`anae, HI 96792
Tel: 200-2682

The following document was originally prepared in response to a request for his views on developing children's services for the `Ohana Project, a Federal Grant received by the Department of Health, Children and Adolescent Division. The paper was delivered at Ko`olina Resorts. Pōkā, at the time, was a volunteer attorney on the Board of Directors of Hale Na`au Pono. He subsequently became its Executive Director in 1997 and remained there for 17 years when he resigned on his 67th birth anniversary. The paper was redistributed as a planning and strategy tool.

9 July 1993

IMAGING A NEW DAY
IN WAI`ANAE

Stand on the side of Farrington Hwy. opposite Tamura store and watch people walking on the sidewalk, across the parking lot or in or out of the doorways. See how people walk? Some look down at the pavement being careful where each step is taken. Others look straight ahead negotiating around cars, people and shopping carts. Still others are looking far into the distant, searching for mountaintops or rainbows – yet all sharing this same place at this same instant under observation.

Imaging a new day in this place we share now called Wai`anae calls upon each one of us to seek the far distance where we are able to stand on mountaintops or under rainbows and live our utopia. It challenges us to dream, it dignifies our dreaming, and this public dreaming makes the reality of these dreams come a bit closer by the process of communalizing the dreams. It negotiates between and around obstacles. But these various styles of moving ahead can more easily become aligned when we can share the dreaming and perhaps the dream itself.

The Task Force should be the conduit for this communal dreaming, a place where we can put aside all our short and middle minded obstacles and objections and allow our dreams to flow over all of the hurdles we cannot yet overcome.

Because we share a common concern over the mental health of the Wai`anae community, we have a natural starting point, a place of reference for the dreaming. But we are not bounded by this reference. Indeed, I believe we could not be bound by mental health concerns and really dream. We will naturally experience an exploration into the many facets of life in Wai`anae, and even life outside of Wai`anae. We will need to adopt the spider web matrix of our imaging a new day in Wai`anae, a matrix which ties in a huge variety of areas of life, interconnected with each other, pulling and tugging to one extent or another, one or another part of our daily lives.

Permit me to image the Wai`anae I see from the focus of our community's mental health. Begin with a child non-conforming in behavior to the standards of the community by molesting

physically and mentally children younger and of the opposite sex.

That child's place in the spider web has a negative impact upon each of the family members who share the same household. It has an impact of each of that child's victims and each victim's household. It may have an impact upon the child's classroom environment, upon the teacher(s), upon the school, and may spread out to neighbors, social services, courts, hospitals and jails.

Isolating and treating the child to conform to the standards of conduct of society under the present treatment mode is problematic. Why? Most likely, the child will not get treatment because the child will not be identified until it's too late for treatment; if identified in time, the child may not get services because of the lack of funding for the "professional" service called for under the present mental health regime in effect by the State of Hawaii; and if the child is able to obtain the "professional" services to the extent the present mental health model calls for, the child will be tossed back onto that spider-web which has been tugged and disturbed that the healing of those other affected points of the web have not been accomplished.

Thus, the mental health model which tries to address the "best interest of the child" fails to see the child in the social, economic, spiritual and cultural setting from which he comes. The newer theory of "beyond the best interest of the child" which realizes that the child's family must also become part of the treatment, is also not adequate because it again sees the family as an isolated entity, not seeing it as part of a still greater community of families, of employers and employees, of neighbors, aunts and uncles, as a mixture of cultures, etc. The medical/psychological models fail before they can start because they are premised upon and operated by those who come not from the Wai'anae culture but from a foreign place. That failure becomes ingrained by the judicial system with lawyers and judges who are just as much strangers by both background and training.

How do we take back control over the treatment, care and love of our children? How do we develop a Wai'anae response to wellness of this community injured by this child's acting out? And if we can somehow "heal" the child, have we taken care of the cause which brought about this behavior? If not, have we really healed the community so that another child will not be similarly affected? How do we move beyond individual healing and understand that we can never have healthy individuals living in an unhealthy community?

That child has probably learned very well! The child's actions, we would most likely find, was very consistent with norms of that child's "community." His prior victimization called for giving continuing life to the cycle of victimizing and so the child passed it along. All around society, victimization, getting even, pay-back is applauded. Can we mend the child and not the "entertainment" which focuses on this child as its target, as its market? Can we try to develop new rules for entertainment and not take a fundamental look at and change in the system of laissez faire economy? Can we change the economy and not look at the legal/constitutional structure of the society which glorifies individual initiative above all else? Where does it stop? How deep does the root of this "poisonous tree" go? What is the soil that feeds it? It is the deep

culture upon which the social structure is built, from which the economic structure attaches, and the legal structure is created to protect. If we are going to make fundamental changes, we need to begin with a reexamination of the deep culture of Wai‘anae. Not the old culture, not the mixture of cultures, but the underlying system of belief and action upon which our society operates. If we are going to make fundamental changes, we must be ready to take on the challenge to dream of another deep culture to which we need to move.

Analyzing the fundamental culture, dreaming a new culture, talking about the dream are all part of the initial stages of the empowerment of the community we need to undergo. But there is nothing more empowering than actualization. Only then will we begin the coordination between planning and execution and execution and planning and planning . . . So we need to plan the actualizing, from the step by step approach, to the long distance foresight approach.

There is no starting or ending point, no entry or exit, just a spider web like motif of life which makes up the Wai‘anae community. We could begin our discussion from an economic plan to an educational one or a program to take over the media. Because our commonality is mental health concern, I propose we begin with a plan to develop a new approach to mental health in Wai‘anae.

We begin by examining the underlying culture which gives rise to the present system of mental health treatment, see what's good and what's not for us in this community. The private-ness and individualism mentality of the society has gotten out of hand. While we need to respect a healthy degree of private-ness of individuals and families, we cannot continue with the logic that as long as we can raise good individuals, automatically, the society will turn out good. The reason this thinking does not work is because in the struggle for individual "good", the society suffers as a whole. It's like a crowd watching a parade. The one with the initiative who brings a step-ladder with him has come out "good". But when everyone else brings a step-ladder, the "gooder" society is back where it was at in the beginning. It just cost the society a lot of step ladders and falling downs and trampling upon. The guy who brought the first step ladder never considered the people around him and how they would be "diminished" although they were not in any way "lowered" by Mr. Ladder stepping up above them!

But where is that society's voice, which says, "Hey clown, get down! You're screwing up the rest of us." You won't find it in the crowd, especially one in which are posted signs encouraging step-ladders and sidewalk shops making money selling them.

In Wai‘anae, how has things gotten to the point where that deep culture of individualism has so affected us, where we allow such things as privatization of huge chunks of land go to waste or non-use while many of our people so desperately need land to maintain health? How is it that those people most in need of appropriate treatment are often-times the last to get it, if at all, yet those who are able to afford private treatment or has somehow been able to assert him or herself effectively, gets the services? How is it that the sources of healing are so far removed from the people in greatest need? And how can we undo these things?

Let's shift paradigms for a moment. Let's get away from the current system and underlying culture. Imagine Wai'anae where we have taken back those huge acres of land that are now unused or otherwise abused.

Makua valley, previously leased to the U.S. military, reverts to the State and placed in the hands of the Wai'anae Wellness Society, a society which has been able to canvas the community and brought about a new dream of activism in which we redefined the meaning of the term community resources and identified them as our children, youths, parents and grand-parents. This wellness society has been managing the valley for the last five years using the cultural concept of the land as the first and foremost natural healer of the community and each of her individuals. Over these five years, people initially trickled into the valley part-time, to grow a garden here, attend a class there, spend some relaxing weekend getting back to the land. But over the years, the valley became a source of pride and cultural identity, then a place of cultural rejuvenation which infected the surrounding schools and businesses.

One of the specific activities of the wellness society was to carry out traditional healing methods for those who had been acting out in the schools. While the methods were called traditional, it did not hesitate to make use of Eastern and Western technology nor to adjust some of its traditional methods whenever it was deemed appropriate. One of the healing methods was the system of ho'oponopono, family healing which integrated a spiritual, psychological, and cultural dimension to the process. In some instances, it was found that the "family" did not exist in the traditional way. Many were without "dads" or had them only part-time or only recently. Family members at times did not sufficiently identify as family, did not have a common sense of identity, a common regard for the leader who would act as the ho'oponopono guide. Many families had to be built or rebuilt. Makua offered the place for rebuilding. The wellness society was able to gather the human resources from Wai'anae who could join in the family patch-up activity.

Patch-up came in many different forms depending on the individual family needs. The land offered opportunities for working together on common family plots, growing vegetables such as taro, squash, and beans and fruits such as papaya and watermelons. The great pride in these families, which resulted from these plots seemed to be the real harvest! It also included a community plot where families who had not "worked" with one another and continued to have inter-family problems first worked and learned some common skills in being together and respecting the land. The common plots usually had elders and other highly respected people who would gladly take the time to "talk story" with individuals. Usually, they were found to do more listening than talking. Someone suggested just putting up a listening pole where people could sit alongside or on and just talk! It seems the people doing the talking always felt better, even if they were scolded by the kupuna.

If they wanted to, families could sleep overnight, on the ground or in whatever makeshift shelter they could arrange.

Participation was always voluntary. No court-ordered referrals were accepted. Some basic rules of the place were strictly enforced: No non-prescribed drugs, no weapons, no fighting, no plotting crimes, no cops. Enforcement was generally accomplished at the valley get-together which took place once a week and which everyone who anticipated coming to the valley that week had to attend. The talking circle was sacred. The tone was set by the kupunas who led the circle, talking about the good and bad. One part of the talking circle was dealing with enforcement of the rules, where one or another kupuna would raise the subject of so and so who came to the valley drunk one day, to meet with his jail mate to talk about pulling a job, and how that conduct diseased the valley community, giving everyone associated with Makua bad vibes. Others talked about it openly, criticizing, explaining, excusing, and reaching consensus themselves or if not, a decision by the kupuna of the appropriate remedy, the worst being banishment from the valley.

Families were not the only ones who came. Many people came as individuals. Some wanted to be with family or just to family with others. Some were, over a period of time, "hanai-d" into families. A special place for individuals was recently built by the community to provide a place for them.

Sometimes a Western oriented psychiatrist would meet with an Eastern psychology master and a Kupuna to discuss approaches to wellness for individuals, families or groups, reasons for particular types of conduct, recommendations for further treatments, etc. Generally, the person or family, which was the subject of their discussions would accept the conclusions of this group or fashion their own remedy, using the insight from these various models of wellness. Much of the healing came through prayer intermingled with hands on treatment including massage, preparation of your own medication from local herbs, etc.

The most difficult aspect of operating the wellness society at Makua was getting the people to leave. Generally, the "staff" felt that they would leave when their spirit was healed as well. When they did leave, there were none who returned on a "need to" basis. Every time an individual or family left to join the wider Wai'anae community, it was the start of another new day in Wai'anae.