

Lifeplan - a journey of choices, decisions and consequences

By Cathey Tarleton

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One year ago, the very first group of Lifeplan mentors, 60 educators and volunteers, graduated from a training class, ready to kick off the new, innovative Lifeplan youth mentoring program for Hawaii Island. On Friday, April 8th, they celebrated their first anniversary in a special reception at the Outrigger Keauhou Beach Resort.

“I think it is great,” said Kohala Middle School (KMS) teacher Erika Blanco, “It helps them see how much they can do now—as far as building networks, building their resume. It helps them choose the direction they want to go, even if their dreams change.” All of Kohala Middle School eighth graders, 48, will have successfully completed Phase 1 of the Lifeplan program by the end of the school year.

“What’s been really nice, is how the curriculum folds into high school,” said KMS Principal Jeannette Snelling. “We have been looking for something that would help that transition. It introduces them, helps them start thinking about it,” she said. “And we have the best group of community volunteers, from Day One.”

Participants had a chance to share their experiences and accomplishments, and awards were presented to volunteers, schools and supporting organizations. Recipients included DOE North and West Hawaii Area Complex Superintendent, Art Souza, Honokaa High School, Kealakehe High School, Kohala Middle School, Five Mountains Hawaii, Hawaii Community Foundation and the Lifeplan Institute of California, accepted by Dr. Andrew Mecca.

Mecca is the founder of California Mentor Foundation and Lifeplan Institute, and former drug czar for the state of California. Mecca and his wife, educator Dr. Kate Mecca, who are part-time Hawaii Island residents, were present at the reception to share in the success stories and awards. A respected authority in the field of mentoring and youth risk factors for over 40 years, Mecca’s book, *Lifeplan: Tools Every Teenager Needs to Thrive, Not Merely Survive*, is based on strong research showing that mentoring helps improve youth success. At the event, Dr. Mecca shared an advance copy of his newest book, *A Plan for Life: Why Every Young Person Should Have a Lifeplan*. In the book, he features a Case Study on Lifeplan Institute Hawaii Island (LIHI), which is the first community-wide collaborative effort in the nation to embrace the program and be licensed to independently provide training and materials. In the book Dr. Mecca acknowledges several leaders in North and West Hawaii for their efforts to launch Lifeplan.

“Hawaii is the only state in the U.S. that has a law saying every young person graduating from high school has to have a transition plan,” said Mecca. “And that’s where Lifeplan comes in. Lifeplan is a journey of choices, decisions and consequences.”

“Lifeplan Institute did a very large survey,” he said. “Of 50,000 kids surveyed, 90% stayed in school, did not become teen parents or use drugs... It is very worthy of our investment of human capital.”

LIHI, a project of Five Mountains Hawaii, grew from the Lifeplan Institute, begun by Mecca. LIHI’s mentor training and highly successful summer pilot program last year allowed them to bring the Lifeplan curriculum into Honokaa and Kealakehe High Schools and Kohala Middle School this fall.

“This has really been such a blessing,” said Robin Mullin, Executive Director of Five Mountains Hawaii. “It is an honor and privilege for our organization to be the steward of this program.” Mullin announced that Lifeplan had welcomed 98 adult volunteers in its first year of operation, accumulating more than 4,500 volunteer hours and 500 hours of staff time.

As for student outcomes, Mullin said that results were measured in a survey of attitudes conducted at the beginning and end of the Lifeplan Phase 1 curriculum. For example, where only 18% of students rated themselves “high” as far as “optimism” at the outset, by the end of the program 98% felt they had good expectations for themselves and who they are. And, although only 58% of those surveyed felt “confident” in the beginning, at the conclusion 95% had confidence they could thrive as a teen.

But the numbers don’t express the energy in the room, the newfound poise and self assurance of the students.

“Lifeplan helped me figure out what I want to do,” said Myra Gonzales, a senior at Kealakehe. “I was one of those students who thought ‘maybe I’ll just stay home.’ It helped me figure out my values, my strengths, and what I want to do. I wouldn’t be graduating this year without Lifeplan because I was a slacker.”

Alec Ka’ai of Kealakehe said, “Before I was in Lifeplan I was not motivated, I didn’t do much... Lifeplan brought out who I really was. Now I can help other students who were like me.”

After a pause, another young woman made the decision to stand up, come from the back of the room and tell her story.

“I like Lifeplan, and how it helped me to identify my goals and dreams,” said Kehau Amantiad, 17. “I actually had a baby this year,” she said. “But it wasn’t a setback. My son pushed me, and now I am a senior and I’m going to be graduating with all A’s.” There were tears in her eyes but her smile was bright. “I just don’t know why you guys didn’t start earlier,” she said.

LIHI is a collaborative community effort, run mostly on volunteer support. LIHI plans to train more Lifeplan group mentors, and recruit expert guest speakers and adults willing to become personal mentors for a teen after the group program concludes. For more information, please email info@lifeplanhawaii.org or call the Five Mountains Hawaii office, 887-1284.