

SPEAK Smart

Enhancing Education—From Waipahu to Wai‘anae and Island-Wide

Empowering an entire community starts with a strong, clear vision. For educators and students in Waipahu, that vision includes fostering positive change through media literacy, starting with their schools and branching out to the community at large. ‘Ōlelo plays a role in this vision. The opening of the ‘Ōlelo Community Media Center (CMC) at Waipahu Intermediate School represents an exciting new resource—providing students and residents with convenient access to video production training and equipment to tell their stories.



Students review footage with Waipahu CMC Manager Sparky Rodrigues.

Over the past few years, ‘Ōlelo has worked extensively with Waipahu schools through Tech Trekkers, an after-school media program that began as a partnership between Waipahu Elementary and ‘Ōlelo. Teachers recommend students into the program, many of whom are from families with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who speak English as a second language. English language learners comprise nearly half of Waipahu Elementary’s enrollment, with Samoan, Tongan, Tagalog, Ilocano, Visayan, and various Micronesian languages (Chuukees, Yapese, Marshallese, Kosraen, Pohnpeian) among the approximately 20 languages represented on campus. Students who qualify for free or reduced lunch comprise more than three-fourths of the school’s population. Through interviewing community leaders and producing videotaped programs that air on ‘Ōlelo, the Tech Trekkers are overcoming language

and cultural barriers, practicing critical communication skills and developing the confidence to reach out to fellow students and the community.

“They may not pursue careers in multimedia or journalism, but our Tech Trekkers are emerging from the experience with perseverance, self-discipline and confidence,” says Michelle Okinaka-Kwong, Waipahu Elementary technology resource teacher. “They encounter adversity and challenges, but they’re capable, and they can do it.”

“I’ve seen a lot of emotional growth in the students,” adds Daryl Jean “DJ” Kamaka, also a tech resource teacher at Waipahu Elementary. “It’s not only about learning technology and communication skills. It’s about inner growth and feeling good about yourself.”

The Wai‘anae Model

The Waipahu ‘Ōlelo educational partnership model was first introduced and proven in Wai‘anae. ‘Ōlelo’s partnership with Wai‘anae High School, Leeward Community College, and area community groups led to the opening of ‘Ōlelo’s Wai‘anae CMC. By providing access to video production resources, the Wai‘anae CMC empowers students and community members to share their stories on community television.

Additionally, ‘Ōlelo’s annual Summer Media Program, which has its roots in Wai‘anae, is an intensive experience that trains students in video production basics. It also exposes them to their cultural heritage and values. The students often emerge as engaged, motivated learners, eager to put their communication and technical skills to the test.

“The powerful thing is seeing it from the youth,” said Candy Suiso, program director for Searider Productions, Wai‘anae High School’s integrated journalism and multimedia program. “They’re reaching out and promoting

‘Ōlelo’s Youth Xchange Empowers Students to Speak Smart

‘Ōlelo’s Youth Xchange statewide student video competition started in 2003 to encourage dialogue among Hawai‘i’s students on community issues. Topics often covered in the video entries include: drugs, drunk driving, suicide, health and the environment.

In its fifth year, participation in Youth Xchange grew exponentially. A total of 459 entries from 70 schools on O‘ahu, Hawai‘i Island, Kaua‘i and Maui were submitted in the 2008 “Speak Strong” Youth Xchange contest—a 50% increase in video submissions and a 27% increase in participating K-12 schools from the previous year.

Each year winning schools receive Sony digital video cameras, and all entries are aired on ‘Ōlelo’s channels and across the state. The videos can also be viewed on ‘ŌleloNet, ‘Ōlelo’s video on demand service, by visiting www.olelo.org and clicking on the ‘ŌleloNet icon.

More than a contest, Youth Xchange creates a way to engage, educate and empower students and provides them with a compelling voice for positive change and community well-being.

Wai‘anae in a positive way through the skills they’ve learned at school and ‘Ōlelo. They’ve been empowered and are choosing to use the media *their* way. Wanting to prove themselves in positive ways—it’s viral.”