

TESTIMONY from Isaiah Roberts

Aloha! I am Isaiah Roberts. I am 17 years old and I'm the oldest of 3 boys. I was born in Hilo, raised in Kona, and currently residing in OV in the middle of nowhere. I am also employed at Barking Dog LLC doing fencing and carpentry. I joined Liliuokalani Trust which is founded by our dear Queen. when I was a Freshman in High School and was part of Pilimai, which helped me to learn about my culture. I also learned how to play different instruments which really evolved my passion for music. Couple months later, I became a part of the Youth leadership council where I learned communication skills.

But as a Freshman in High School, I struggled because I was shy. When I'd ask questions in class, the teachers would overlook me. I was uncomfortable in school and didn't want to be there! So I shut myself off, stopped asking questions and skipped school at any given opportunity. 3rd semester came around and Covid hit Hawai'i, resulting in school going virtual. I was already behind and now even more, teachers were NOT supportive. Luckily, LT was still available and providing services during the pandemic. By the time 11th grade came, I was a "Junior with Freshman credits". I then realized, I had missed my entire High School experience-socially, academically, all of it! I needed an outside experience. I needed to be ready for the "real world"

So, inspired by my cousin, I decided to enroll in the Youth Challenge Academy, a quasi-military based program which would earn me a Hi-set diploma in 22 weeks. It would also give me the "outside experience" I was missing. YCA required that I have a mentor. Thankfully, Uncle Landon accepted, and supported me throughout the program. While in YCA, I decided to attend college, so Uncle Landon worked with me and my counselor to make that happen. Upon graduation at age 16, I received my diploma and was accepted into HawCC Palamanui Campus' Culinary program..WITH A 2 YEAR SCHOLARSHIP!

After graduating, I moved to OV and juggled school with work. Work became my first priority in order to assist in providing for my 2 younger brothers. I fell behind in school and once again, Uncle Landon and LT were able to provide electronic devices to assist me with schooling. Now, I am participating in the Queen's Jubilee, learning about Digital Media. My brothers have also joined LT and are participating in the Queens Jubilee with me. My brothers and I are in the after school program with LT and one of the challenges we face is transportation.

LT and Uncle Landon have shown me the importance of mentorship by providing it for me throughout my years with them. To have a mentor is to have someone to look up too, someone to support you, someone to encourage you to be a better version yourself! To be a mentor, one must be integrous, honorable, and respectful . Mentorship is important because it provides a support system for haumana and keiki. The support and mana'o I have gained from LT has helped me to build confidence and has played a crucial role in most of my life decisions. Now, as a young man, I strive to be that mentor and light for my younger brothers. I look forward to seeing and experiencing the growth in the making.