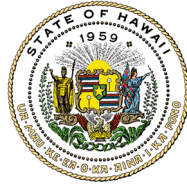


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MEDIA RELEASE

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Hawai'i Youth Challenge Academy holds first in-person graduation since COVID-19, receives accreditation.

HONOLULU — Two weeks ago the Hawai'i Youth Challenge Academy at Kalaeloa was proud to recognize the accomplishments of its 83 graduates from Class 56 at the Academy's first in-person graduation ceremony since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Class 56 is also the program's first graduating class in Hawai'i to graduate with a 100% post-program employment rate, and official accreditation status by Cognia, which represents 21,800 public and private education systems across the United States.

"You are here tonight because of your determination and strength to get things done, for yourself and others," said First Lady of Hawai'i Dawn Amano-Ige, who opened the ceremony. "You have made our community a better place through your restoration and conservation projects. The work you did contributes to a more sustainable Hawai'i and preserves our community."

Some of the notable achievements of the 83 cadets of Class 56 include 500 hours of academics (per cadet), 4,728 collective hours of community service, volunteering at events for veterans, and inaugural Youth Empowerment events at Kuhio Park Towers and Pālolo Valley Homes, where more than 1,000 pounds of food, household goods, and clothing were distributed to underserved families.

"What is important for each of you to know is that you have given yourselves a second chance. Each of you has the potential to achieve greatness, to be anything you want to be," said Congressman Kai Kahele, who was also in attendance. "And from this day forward, never look back. Set your sights on the next horizon, the next great challenge, and be the person you want to be."

With each cadet having obtained employment or enlisting in military service before graduating, they will be well-equipped for future endeavors, leaving the program with their American Red Cross CPR/First Aid and AED and OSHA certifications. Some cadets also became certified as American Red Cross Lifeguard Professional Rescuers, forklift operators, and in culinary exploration. The Academy's new accreditation status also means that current and future cadets will have more options when it comes to career paths.

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“Accreditation means meeting high-quality standards at all times with contemporary perspectives to give our students the best educational opportunities,” said Bruce Oliveira, Director of Civil-Military Programs for the State of Hawai‘i Department of Defense. “YCA accreditation means our graduates have greater access to federal loans, scholarships, higher education, and military programs that require education from an accredited school.”

Following graduation, Cadet Ioane, who aspires to work in the culinary field, received an award from First Lady Ige at Washington Place on Friday, May 27th, for his Sweet Potato Pot Pie recipe. Developed for the Hawai‘i Team Nutrition Local Recipe contest, which is part of the National School Lunch Program, the recipe will be integrated into school lunch menus in an effort to highlight the diverse cuisines of Hawai‘i that contribute to the state’s unique cultural landscape.

The Youth Challenge Academy’s mission during its 22-week in-residency program is to intervene in and reclaim the lives of 16-18 year-olds who have left traditional high school settings, teaching them values, life skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as productive citizens. This award-winning program has been recognized as one of the nation’s most effective and cost efficient programs for targeting youth who are at the greatest risk for substance abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquency, and criminal activity. The 22-week Residential Phase is followed by a year-long mentoring relationship with a specially trained member from each youth’s community.

View the graduation ceremony video here:

<https://fb.watch/dp9h6etwmt/>

Attached photo: Cadet Ioane of Class 56 accepts an award from First Lady of Hawai‘i Dawn Amann-Ige for the Hawai‘i Team Nutrition Local Recipe Contest at Washington Place. May 27, 2022, Honolulu, HI.

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