

To whom it may concern 2015 JUN -1 AM 8:18

For a 14-year-old girl growing up in Waianae was not the ideal place, but having her family made everything worthwhile. Going back and forth between private and public school made it hard for her to make and keep friends. When she was 13 years old she finally found a balance between friendships and family. Then suddenly her world came to a crashing halt when her mom was taken home. Being 14 years old and having her soul mate ripped from her grip she could not believe what her life has turned into.

Well that young 14-year-old girl was sadly me, Johna Leedy. As my life slowly turned to the worse I just couldn't believe what was happening to me. Turning to alcohol and going out with my so-called "friends" was how I tried to comfort my pain. I would push away my family and true friends only to make negative decisions with my new friends because I felt like I did not have a positive outlet to turn to. Finally when I was appointed 100 community service hours by the court it was only then did I feel like the light was shining on me to make better life decisions. Having to go through the JDAI (Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative) program at the Boys & Girls Club- Waianae Unit was one of the most eye opening experiences I could have went through at that time. My home life was no where near as good as my Club experiences at the time, home was a place filled with loving memories that only hurt me more when I would reminisce about them. Knowing that my home used to be filled with love and joy then having to realize that everyone was just hurt and upset with life, it was an unhealthy environment.

Before the JDAI program my schedule was depressing. Getting up for school in an empty house then coming home to no one just going straight into my room, which by then was starting to feel like a jail cell with 4 walls, a bed, and just myself. So being appointed 100 hours of community service was more sweet then bitter. Having a place I had to be at for 3 hours a day was the perfect thing to force me to get out of bad habits. Instead of going straight home alone or going somewhere with my new friends it was mandatory for me to be at The Club. A little while after I started my hours I began to feel like a better person, getting back on a positive track. I was in a mentoring program where I had one specific member that I had to mentor weather it was with schoolwork or with what was going on in their life. Having a young child looking up to me made me feel like I needed to move more towards the right path because I didn't want her to go through the hard ships I had to go through. Also being at The Club more often gave me the structure that every teen needs, even if they won't admit it, the staff were welcoming and made me feel loved and even the other younger members made me feel better because I was a role model to them and I felt like they seen something in me even before I saw it.

What could I say; the members just grew on me. If it wasn't for the Waianae Boys & Girls Club having the JDAI program I honestly do not know where I would be today. The JDAI program was my wake up call to living a better more positive lifestyle. After completing my community service hours I easily transitioned into their Leaders In Training (LIT) program that is a unique leadership development experience provides

opportunities for youth. Youth participate, both in and out of the Club, in activities in three focus areas: academic success, career preparation and community service. With the guidance of an adult advisor, Leadership groups aim to have a positive impact on members, the Club and community. After some time of being a participant and proving myself I became the president of the program. After becoming the president my eyes opened wider, searching for more opportunities to "broaden my horizon". From becoming the LIT president to a Youth of the Year (YOY) participant which is BGCA's premier recognition program for Club members, promoting service to Club, community and family; academic success; strong moral character; life goals; and poise and public speaking ability.

The program is most effective when used as a year-round tool for fostering young people's character, personal growth and leadership qualities. My life was taking a big turn for the better. After serving as a LIT president, YOY participant, a JR Staff over two summers I finally earned my place as a Staff member of the Waianae Boys & Girls Club. I am proof and proud to say that without the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative program I would not be where I am today, a successful, proud, and happy person.

Johna Leedy
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Boys & Girls Club Of Hawaii- Waianae