

# Fighting Substance Abuse

“For many years, the YMCA has been a leader in working with youth on drug abuse issues,” said President Don Anderson. “Today we have nearly 40 full-time staff members providing counseling and outreach services.”

In 1962, the board of the Kalihi YMCA founded the first outreach program to work with teen gang members in Honolulu. Over time, the Kalihi Y added adolescent substance abuse programs funded by state and federal government agencies. The Kalihi Y has been providing substance abuse services for O’ahu teens for over twenty years.

“Our philosophy is to provide positive peer and adult support for teens, both at their schools and in their communities,” said Tony Pfaltzgraff, YMCA Group Vice-President and Co-Executive

Director of the Kalihi YMCA. “We provide year-round support in order to reconnect them to family, school and recreational resources in the community.”

The Kalihi YMCA provides accessible, on-campus substance abuse counseling for O’ahu students who are having problems with dependence on substances like marijuana, methamphetamine (Ice) and alcohol. The abuse of drugs or alcohol is associated with increasing violence, early pregnancy, law violations, run-away behavior and

*Kalihi YMCA counselors (l. to r.): Carmael Stagner, Chris Dumlao, Ivan Mauga, Lori Alves-Rapoza, and Rey Fernandez.*



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*Tony Pfaltzgraff*

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victimization.

"It's a challenge, because teens who use drugs or alcohol tend to select peers who are also users," said Pfaltzgraff. "This increases the strength of negative peer influence and disconnects teens from family or friends who might be a positive influence." Teen substance abuse problems almost always coincide with failure at school and alienation from the family at home. Substance abusing teens are often left with no healthy adult relationships.

The Kalihi YMCA has developed a comprehensive, year-round program to provide services to middle and high school students at twelve O'ahu school campuses—whether school is in session or not. The twelve schools are Aiea High, Campbell High, Farrington High, Kailua High, Kaimuki High, Leilehua High, Moanalua High, Nanakuli High, Roosevelt High, Waialua High, Waianae High, and Waipahu High.

Teens who are in trouble with drugs or alcohol are often more at risk during vacations and school breaks. Year-round programs provide consistency and longevity for school- and community-based activities. Programs also provide teens with the opportunity to form healthy relationships with drug-free peers.

### **TREATMENT STRATEGIES**

"Traditional adult, Twelve-Step programs are often not effective with teens," said Pfaltzgraff. "What is effective is encouraging teens to face the consequences of their behaviors through their relationship with a mentoring adult."

The idea of school-community based programs is to bring treatment to the teens, not to wait

for teens to seek help outside their own communities. Students who are in trouble with drugs or alcohol can be referred to the program by anyone, including school counselors, teachers and administrators. In fact, the Kalihi Y has found that the longer their program has been on a campus, the more they get referrals from other students.

Each teen is given an assessment interview and rated for symptom severity. Group and individual counseling then focuses on helping teens to begin dealing with the consequences of negative behavior. Group work helps give teens the experience of relating to each other in a clean and sober environment. Teens in the program receive a basic drug education curriculum combined with a focus on social and personal skill building. Teens also take part in the "ropes" challenge course at the YMCA's Camp Erdman on O'ahu's North Shore. The program encourages positive, drug-free socialization. This combination of psychological and educational intervention and experience in the community has proven to be a powerful strategy for helping teens to find their way out of negative behaviors.

"What inspires me most," said Pfaltzgraff, "is the courage I see in the teens we work with. In order to stop using drugs, these young people often have to cut themselves off from their peers—friends they have known throughout their lives. I am impressed with how many teens are willing to risk isolation and loneliness in order to really change and become the person they want to be. We help them make that crucial decision to change, and then we stay with them, encouraging them and supporting them every step of the way."



# Substance Abuse Treatment Programs

## SCHOOL-BASED SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

Through funds provided by the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division (ADAD) of the State Department of Health, the Kalihi YMCA provides substance abuse treatment services in targeted schools throughout O'ahu. At-risk youth between the ages of 12 and 18 can participate in the program, receiving up to 96 hours of substance abuse treatment services. Enrollment is voluntary and program goals include abstinence, increased education about how drugs and alcohol can affect their lives, and problem-solving and relationship skills. The Kalihi Y has been able to develop long-term credibility with both staff and students at the schools where this program operates.

## COURT-RELATED SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

Through grants from the Office of Youth Services and the Hawaii Family Court of the First Circuit in Honolulu, the Kalihi Y operates substance abuse treatment services for the inmates of the Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility. The program provides assessment and appropriate treatment planning for youth who have patterns of substance abuse involved in their law-breaking activities. Follow-ups are done at three- and six-month intervals after completion of the program.

The YMCA also provides assessment, treatment and follow-up service to minors referred by the Family Court in Honolulu. These youth may not be incarcerated, but may be in need of close supervision and active substance abuse treatment to prevent recurrence of



*Kalihi YMCA counselors (l. to r.) Janet Leano, Amihan Tacazon, and William Cadena. The Kalihi YMCA has nearly 40 staff members working on substance abuse problems with teens at twelve public schools.*

legal problems and to improve the school and family situations of these teens. Services include assessment, individual and group therapy, recreational opportunities, and relapse prevention. Clients may continue in the program until clinically discharged.

## OUTREACH

The Office of Youth Services provides the Kalihi YMCA with funding for a community outreach program targeted at youth who are 10 to 18 years of age located in areas including Waipahu/Ewa, Aiea/Aliamanu and Kalihi/Palama. Youth receive services based on referrals from community members, school personnel, or their own peers. The program targets youth who are experiencing school failure due to

truancy, family, legal or delinquency problems. The program aims to connect these at-risk youth with existing resources in the community.

## AFTER SCHOOL TEEN DROP-IN PROGRAM

The YMCA After School Teen Droop-In Program is available after school for all teens who live in Kalihi and Wahiawa. The services are provided from the time school is out until early evening and on weekends. With activities focused both at the Kalihi Branch and in the community, these teens receive counseling, educational assistance, and experience with positive peer and adult relationships. The activities offered include study hall, dance classes, sports, arts and community volunteer services.