

Youth Alliance's focus is Maui Nui

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WAILUKU – They may be tomorrow's leaders, the 32 students enrolled in the 2006-07 Youth Alliance that was organized by Focus Maui Nui to bring together youngsters from around Maui County to study issues affecting their community.

“It's an opportunity to voice our opinions on certain issues going on in Maui County, while we bond with other students from other schools in becoming advocates for our communities,” said Monica Garcia.

A Baldwin High School junior, Garcia said she joined the Alliance after a peer education teacher suggested that it might be a worthwhile activity.

The program is supported by a number of Maui businesses, including Maui Land & Pineapple Co., a corporate sponsor. MLP hosted a Kapalua Resort student retreat, where they were provided information on the company's agricultural and resort operations as well as its management of the Puu Kukui Watershed Preserve.

Students participating in the program meet monthly to visit sites and conduct activities designed to introduce them to business and governmental operations. Focus Maui Nui seeks to promote community awareness through education and programs that allow individuals to understand how they can effect changes.

It's a program that appeals to Garcia, who already is thinking of studying law as a way to make a difference after completing a college career.

Born and raised in Kihei, the 17-year-old said she is concerned that Maui is being overdeveloped.

“I think the biggest concern I had when I was growing up was with overdevelopment. When we go to the beach, it's tourists all over, and more development kept bringing more tourists,” she said. “I understand it is important to our economy, but I think we need to figure out a way that we can maintain the economy that doesn't mean more development. I think we can't rely on tourism to continue to grow.”

With the Youth Alliance program, she said she has engaged in discussion sessions with other students to create a project that they believe can provide information or make a difference in their community.

There have been no conclusions reached, yet.

“The biggest thing I'm learning from Youth Alliance is that youth do have a voice in the community and that we can make a difference if we work together,” she said.

Besides from Baldwin, the students are from Kihei Public Charter, King Kekaulike, Lanai, Maui, Molokai, Lahainaluna and St. Anthony high schools, and Seabury Hall.

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