

Proactive Support to Prevent

A collective "oooh" could be heard in my fifth and eighth grade classes as the DARE (Drug Abuse and Resistance) officer presented all her deadly weapons. The officer not only let my peers "check out" her gun, but also taught us about society's enthralling taboos: alcohol and drugs. On the contrary, the officer smashed all excitement around the taboos by underlining that drugs and alcohol lead to death or jail. For a fifth grader, the idea of death or jail is extremely scary; although this was a personal experience, I'm quite confident that my classmates and thousands of other fifth and eighth graders experienced my same fear. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2013, 18.9% ($\pm 3\%$) of Hawaii's high schoolers used marijuana within 30 days of the survey. Approximately $\frac{1}{5}$ of high school students in Hawaii were using marijuana-- impairing their memory and body, hindering their problem-solving skills, and hurting themselves. It's confusing why the fear of drugs, specifically marijuana, that was instilled into students, twice, didn't carry on into high school.

There are many reasons why the fear of marijuana didn't carry on: lack of punishment, peer pressure, experimentation, etc. However, a major factor that enervated the trepidation of marijuana for high school users resulted from personal issues. This is problematic because marijuana is a gateway drug; meaning marijuana opens the door for its users into "heavier" drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine (a major substance problem in Hawaii). The already present methamphetamine problem in Hawaii won't lessen in 50 years unless we fix a few hinges-- starting with marijuana. In addition, according to Newsweek, marijuana-smoking high schoolers are 60% less likely to finish high school than non-smoking high schoolers. The portion with no high school diploma will have a difficult time getting a job in the modern and future world. To obtain a wholesome and successful population in Hawaii, the marijuana-smoking adolescent problem needs to be addressed.

One way to weaken marijuana's hold is to target Hawaii's keiki, parents, and teachers. Hawaii needs to get its keiki involved into "passions," which decreases their chances of turning to marijuana.

Most marijuana users often feel that the effects of marijuana are outweighed by the issues in their lives. In these cases, marijuana isn't necessarily the root of this problem, but rather an alternative to deal with stress. Drawing from a personal example, a good friend, despite her knowledge of the harmful effects, used marijuana because she enjoyed having the "out-of-body experience." She was alienated, but I knew isolation wouldn't help her or any marijuana user. Concerned, I asked her if marijuana was her escape from reality. After all, why did she need marijuana if life "in her body" was happy? She was offended, but confided that she didn't know how to deal with her issues. She started attending counselling sessions, and got involved with yoga-- a passion that helped her quit marijuana and find a healthy outlet. My friend demonstrates how "passion" in Hawaii's keiki would be beneficial. Finding a passion allows people to create a solution for life's many stresses. Yoga enabled my friend to confront her personal issues and avoid turning to marijuana. In addition, many programs aimed at reducing marijuana-use in youth implement hobbies to get students to stop using marijuana. The Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care utilized sports, hobbies, and other forms of recreation to end the use of marijuana in their targeted group. Positive effects were seen with the group. The MTFC concluded that hobbies--"passions"-- are correlated to decreased use of marijuana.

But, how do we get the keiki to find their passions, especially at such a young age? The key is to experiment with different hobbies. Elementary schools have diverse programs available like A+ which involves many different types of activities: art, drama, sports, games, etc. However, these programs vanish in middle and high school. The search for a passion comes to an end when middle and high schools expect

their students to find their own ways to explore talents. More supplementary programs need to be created for high and middle school students.

In addition, teachers and parents/guardians need to provide support their keiki to try new things. According to the NEA Policy Brief, when families and teachers work together to support learning, students do better in school. This support can easily be applied to other realms outside of academics, since not everyone's passion is scholastic. Parents and teachers need to understand this. Therefore, a workshop dedicated to supporting children should be created where all parents and teachers must attend. Parents will attend the workshop when their child enters elementary school and again when he/she enters middle school. Teachers should attend every five years. The lecture will highlight that support and nurture for the keiki is vital. By allowing keiki to explore various talents, a healthy outlet for stress is provided in the form of "passions". Therefore, students will be less likely to pursue marijuana for stress-relieving purposes.

This solution, alongside other solutions, will directly decrease marijuana use and indirectly decline methamphetamine use and high school dropout numbers in Hawaii's future. At the same time, Hawaii's keiki will discover their passions that can help them live a fulfilling life.

Clarence T.C. Ching was extremely ambitious. However, he came from humble beginnings, and if not for his parent's support, he could have easily resorted to marijuana. They moved to Oahu to provide him a better education; from this, it can be assumed that they wanted him succeed. With this support, Mr. Ching cultured multiple passions. His passions are seen in his ambition that allowed him to prosper and positively impact Hawaii. He perfectly exemplifies what support can do-- initiate passion to prevent marijuana and drug abuse alike.