

Don't Turn A Blind Eye On Kids In Need

"I always wondered why somebody didn't do something about that, then I realized I was somebody." -Lily Tomlin.

Everybody should be able to help people and make a difference in their community. One of the biggest problems in Hawaii is the number of kids who are facing difficulties at home or don't even have a proper home. These kids, people like you and me, really, have nobody to turn to and no one to ask for help. They struggle with schoolwork and homework but at the same time they are dealing with crippling family situations that most of us are lucky enough not to go through. We are bystanders in the battles that they fight every day. But wouldn't it be better for everyone if we stepped in and helped?

Clarence T.C. Ching was born on June 2, 1912 on the island of Kauai. His parents were Chinese immigrants and he had ten siblings. He attended Saint Louis School where he was an outstanding student and developed an interest in philanthropy and helping others. He went on to build housing developments and became a part of several organizations that helped people, proving that a humble beginning was no match for someone with a good heart and a clear vision for the future. He started the Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation dedicated to helping others. One of the goals of the Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation is "to assist in the care of the needy, the destitute, the sick, and the aged". The problem of kids facing difficulties at home and struggling at school is definitely something that the Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation would help with and make a difference in.

The problems that some of Hawaii's youth face may seem far away and to a lot of people, it's just " the type of thing you hear on the news". But to these kids, it's not just close to their

lives; it *is* their life. Sixty five percent of struggling or homeless teens and kids in our state were simply born into these situations because their families are experiencing trouble. It wasn't their fault and they didn't bring this on themselves. On top of that, eighty percent of homeless or troubled teens, some as young as 13, resort to joining gangs and taking drugs. But most of all, kids in these situations are 4 times more likely to drop out of school. After that, getting into another school is highly unlikely; they will probably end up with children of their own later on and put their children in the same situation as themselves, creating a never-ending cycle.

This problem could go two very different ways. We could choose to join together and help our youth, or we might continue to do nothing and expect somebody else to be the change that we want in our islands. In 50 years, we might see a 14 year alone on the streets and we might not even blink because we've become used to seeing kids without homes and who are struggling, stressed, and have given up. But there's always a choice we can make and the future of our islands can be changed.

My idea is to create an afterschool program with a safe environment where kids can come to talk about their problems to those who are willing to listen and help them. They have a safe place among people who care about them and can help them make better decisions. Teachers, parents, and just about anyone can volunteer to help these kids. These afterschool programs can be set up in several DOE schools, especially those that a lot of homeless or struggling kids attend. This program can be named "*Ho'omaka Hou 'Ana*" which means "*New Beginnings*" in Hawaiian. Younger children can learn to interact with others and make friends that will be there for them the rest of their lives. They can receive help with homework or schoolwork as well so they can stay in school, thus ending the cycle of struggling kids in the future. For teenagers

(ages 14-17), they can build on other vocational skills that they are passionate about. With the skills they develop, they could get a job that can get them off the streets. For physical well-being, these kids can volunteer in their communities such as working in community gardens or cleaning up parks and beaches around them, introducing a sense of belonging to their communities and an obligation to give back to those around them. Ho'omaka Hou 'Ana will ultimately be a safe place with loving people where our youth always can pursue activities that will help them later on in life, while also being positive members of our community. This will be a nonprofit program run by volunteers and donations; we need the help of the Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation to fund this program.

If these steps are taken, the future of Hawaii and its youth will look a lot brighter. In 50 years, there will be kids of all ages, some out in the world living better lives with their families, others still in the Ho'omaka Hou 'Ana program but no longer hopeless, and instead, taking their own steps toward a brighter future. These same kids will become adults with a stable family situation and I strongly believe that someday, the problem of struggling children and teens will end for good. Remember how there was supposed to be a "somebody" who would make our future and the future of those around us better? Well, I think that somebody is all of us, because together we can make a difference and it's time to take action.