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Reflections of the Inaugural Kalākaua Lā Hānau at Mauiola Ke'ehi

Mapuana C. K. Antonio

*Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Health,
Department of Public Health Sciences,
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa & Native
Hawaiian Health, The Queen's Health
Systems, Honolulu, Hawai'i*

Finley Ngarangi Johnson

*School of Psychology, Te Herenga Waka -
Victoria University of Wellington, Aotearoa*

Joan Umiokalani Jensen

10 Heavens LLC, Hau'ula, Hawai'i

Brooke Kamaile Asing

*Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Health,
Department of Public Health Sciences,
University of
Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i*

Kēhaulani Kupihea

Mauiola Ke'ehi, Mauiola, Hawai'i

Taslim Alani-Verjee

Lakehead University

Peter Braunberger

Northern Ontario School of Medicine

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Abstract

Culturally grounded programs play a vital role in promoting health, healing, resilience, and wellbeing among Indigenous youth and communities. Mauiola Ke'ehi, a community-based program, integrates Hawaiian cultural education, environmental stewardship, and holistic health practices to support Hawai'i's communities, and especially, Native Hawaiian youth. Rooted in the Indigenous concept of mauiola, holistic health and wellbeing, the program fosters relationships while honoring ancestral wisdom and practices. This study presents evaluation data collected during the inaugural one-day event honoring King Kalākaua. Post-surveys (n=127) assessed

impacts across four major domains: connection to self; connection to community; connection to 'Āina including the land, fresh water, ocean, and anything that nourishes; and connection to Hawaiian culture. Evaluation data demonstrated positive results with 96% feeling more connected to oneself, 96% feeling more connected to community, 95% feeling more connected to 'Āina, 98% feeling more connected to Hawaiian culture, and 95% reporting improved wellbeing. Activities such as mo'olelo (storytelling), hoe wa'a (canoe paddling), and mālama 'Āina (land stewardship) were especially important in fostering these connections. Findings from this evaluation exemplify how Indigenous knowledge systems and environmental engagement foster resilience and leadership in youth. Recommendations include long-term programming to sustain outcomes and support cultural resilience and revitalization.

Keywords: Native Hawaiian youth, Indigenous wellbeing, connectedness, culturally grounded programming, ancestral wisdom

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Introduction

E mālama honua, i ola no ke kino | Take care of earth, and in turn our own health
This 'ōlelo no'eau (traditional Hawaiian proverb) reminds us of the importance of taking care of honua, mother earth, which extends to include 'Āina, or all that encompasses land including land, fresh water, the ocean, and the sky that nourishes and feeds us. On a deeper level, it also speaks to how people and the Earth are interconnected, and thus, when we steward and take care of the Earth, we also reciprocate life, health, and wellbeing to our own bodies. This logic extends to the

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future generations of our communities, our youth, who thrive when grounded in 'Āina, community, and culture. These notions are critical to advancing the health and wellbeing of our Indigenous youth, as are the connections that help develop resilience, which are essential for surviving and thriving as Indigenous peoples in these modern colonial contexts.

Culturally grounded interventions, services, practices, and programming are key to equitably supporting Kanaka 'Ōiwi, the Indigenous peoples of Hawai'i. For decades, Native Hawaiian scholars and practitioners have been creating movements and institutions to help deconstruct the enduring structural barriers to health and wellbeing that have been imposed on Native Hawaiian communities. Over the generations, these deeply rooted settler-colonial determinants of health, such as cultural genocide and land confiscation (Wispelwey et al., 2023) have engineered disconnection and ill-health in our communities. This highlights the importance of intentionally facilitating community reconnection with ancestral knowledges, lands, languages, and practices. Sustained and protected cultural, economic, political, and spiritual development is critical to supporting our Native Hawaiian communities to heal from the intergenerational trauma resulting from occupation of the Hawaiian islands.

Programs that aim to promote health and wellbeing for Native Hawaiian youth should offer intentional spaces and opportunities to reconnect with ancestral knowledge, strengthen relationships to 'Āina, and affirm cultural identity in the face of international, historical, and structural challenges and determinants of health (Kaholokula, 2017). This paper presents data from the Mauiola Ke'ehi inaugural one-day event honoring King Kalākaua in Mauiola, O'ahu, Hawai'i, a community-based event that integrates cultural education, environmental stewardship, and holistic health practices to promote youth wellbeing. This sacred space is located in present-day urban Honolulu and holds a rich history ranging to include a summer home to al'i (Hawaiian royalty) such as King Kalākaua, a place where Hawaiians navigate the ocean through canoe practices, a place where Hawaiians would engage in shark riding, and one of the last remaining fishing villages on O'ahu and in the surrounding area.

Native Hawaiian conceptions of wellbeing

The Native Hawaiian cultural renaissance, starting around the 1970's, laid the foundation for Kanaka 'Ōiwi scholars to revolutionize the way health and wellbeing are conceptualized and understood in Hawai'i (Kaholokula et al., 2020). The

recent decades have seen the emergence of various frameworks and models that are rooted in traditional Native Hawaiian worldviews. Examples of influential models and frameworks include Kūkulu Kumuhana (Lili'uokalani Trust, 2018; 2025), Pua Lili'u (Lloyd, 2025), Lōkahi triangle (Paglinawan, Paglinawan, Kauahi, Kanuha, Kalahela, & Pukui, 2020), Pilinahā (Odom, Jackson, Derauf, Inada, & Aoki, 2019), and the Ecological Model of Native Hawaiian Wellbeing (McGregor, Morelli, Matsuoka, Rodenhurst, Kong, & Spencer, 2003). These frameworks are grounded in similar values and concepts in that they all speak of health and wellbeing as being holistic, interconnected, spiritual, and very closely tied to 'Āina.

The Pua Lili'u Framework for example is a model of wellbeing first introduced by Kamehameha Schools in 2012 (Lloyd, 2025) and centers on five interconnected domains: Na'au: cultural and spiritual connection, Hale/Ohana: family and community relationships, Olakino: physical and emotional health, 'Imi 'Ike: learning and education, and Kumu Waiwai: resources. This framework has been used in various programs throughout the Pae 'Āina of Hawai'i and aims to support personal growth and healing; promote responsibilities in various areas of life; and empower kamali'i (children) and 'ōpio (youth) to build resilience, honor their

cultural heritage, and thrive as the future generations of Hawai'i.

These models share many similarities with health and wellbeing frameworks of other Indigenous communities from around the world. These deeply holistic, interconnected, land-based, and spiritual features appear in models from Aotearoa New Zealand (Durie, 1994; Heke et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2024; McLachlan, 2021; Pere, 1991), Australia (Kingsley, Townsend, Henderson-Wilson, & Bolam, 2013), and Turtle Island North America (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2020). The considerable overlap in many of these conceptualizations of wellbeing highlights the opportunity for us as Indigenous peoples to exchange knowledge and learn from each other. For example, approaches, interventions, policies, and tools that successfully uplift the health and wellbeing of First Nations communities in Canada could also offer valuable insights to those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia.

Fostering Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Youth Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of Native Hawaiian youth is best uplifted when taking strengths-based, community-based, and culturally grounded approaches (Antonio &

Chung-Do, 2015; Park et al., 2022). This was evidenced in a systematic review by Park and colleagues (2022) who analyzed 32 peer-reviewed studies focused on health and wellbeing interventions for Native Hawaiian youth with topics ranging to include education, substance use prevention, sexual health, violence prevention, and general health and wellbeing. The studies in this review demonstrated the importance of culturally grounded interventions that intentionally center cultural values and practices into their programming and study design. Cultural values, practices, and history were also cited as important factors that contributed to the positive development of Native Hawaiian youth (Park et al., 2022).

Developing cultural connections, engaging in traditional cultural practices, being connected to community, and feeling grounded in the land has been identified by multiple reviews as key to strengthening the health and wellbeing of Indigenous youth across communities in Aotearoa, Australia, Canada, and the United States (Anderson et al., 2022; Antonio & Chung-Do, 2015; Doery et al., 2022; Heid et al., 2022; Park et al., 2022). These reviews emphasize the importance of concepts such as balance, identity, intergenerational strength, and sense of belonging. The systematic review by Antonio and Chung-Do (2015) for example, reviewed studies

from across Turtle Island and Aotearoa, demonstrating the importance of centering cultural knowledge and community relationships in strengthening the wellbeing of Indigenous youth. Grounded in local Indigenous values and the Positive Youth Development framework, interventions from this review fostered connection, resilience, and skills that supported and uplifted the mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of young people.

Importance of Culturally Grounded Approaches

Culturally grounded programs are not only effective for youth, but they have also been successful in elevating the health and wellbeing of Native Hawaiian communities more broadly. A growing body of literature continues to support the importance of culturally-grounded and community-driven programs in promoting health and wellbeing among Native Hawaiians and Indigenous Peoples across the Pacific and in Turtle Island (Ho-Lastimoso et al., 2014; Keli'iholokai et al., 2020; Mau et al., 2021, 2024; Pihana et al., 2022). These initiatives not only foster physical health, but also cultivate identity and strengthen community resilience through culturally based values. For instance, 'Āina-based programs such as the Waimānalo Limu Hui engage community members in restoring

limu and Pāhonu, a traditional loko iʻa or fishpond for sea turtles, promoting healing through cultural practice (Kelíʻiholokai et al., 2020). These efforts promote not only environmental health, but also cultural renewal and community wellbeing.

Similarly, waʻa (canoe) programs have demonstrated success in promoting health and wellbeing through the restoration, revitalization, and reclamation of waʻa practices. For instance, the Nā Waʻa Mauō Marine Stewardship Program utilizes traditional Hawaiian outrigger canoes as tools to perpetuate ancestral ocean stewardship practices and cultivate a new generation of Native Hawaiian marine leaders (Pihana et al., 2022). The Hoʻomanaʻo Mau (everlasting memories) project also centers the waʻa as both a literal and metaphorical classroom to reconnect Native Hawaiians with their cultural heritage and empower community healing through hands-on traditional knowledge (Ho-Lastimosa et al., 2014).

Beyond localized waʻa initiatives, traditional Polynesian voyaging has served as a transformative practice in the revitalization of Native Hawaiian health and identity. The Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS), a key organization in this cultural resurgence, led the Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage (WWV), a 3-year open-ocean circumnavigation of the globe. The Mālama Honua WWV utilized traditional

navigational skills and values to foster global relationships, promote environmental awareness, and serve as a 'floating classroom' rooted in Hawaiian values and Indigenous knowledge (Mau et al., 2021, 2024). Studies exploring the perspectives of experienced voyagers and medical officers found that participation in oceanic voyaging enhanced holistic health and wellbeing—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—by connecting participants to ʻike kūpuna (ancestral knowledge), thereby strengthening community relationships and fostering mindfulness through engagement with the natural environment (Mau et al., 2021, 2024).

Mauliola Keʻehi and King David Kalākaua Lā Hānau

Guided by the Native Hawaiian concept of mauliola, a multidimensional understanding of health and wellbeing that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual balance, Mauliola Keʻehi is rooted in Indigenous epistemologies and place-based practices. The program offers place-based healing through cultural, educational, and environmental activities rooted in the sacred space of Mauliola in urban Honolulu. Mauliola Keʻehi emphasizes pilina (relationships) at multiple levels, including relationships and connections to oneself, to community, to

the natural environment, to ancestral knowledge, and specifically to knowledge of Hawaiian culture. By centering pilina, participants foster aspects of mauiola. Through mo'olelo (oral storytelling), cultural protocol, kilo kino (self-observation), and ocean-based activities like hoe wa'a (canoe paddling), youth participants cultivate a sense of purpose grounded in Hawaiian knowledge and their cultural responsibilities.

Through its collective programming, Mauiola Ke'ehi serves over 1,500 participants annually. Programming primarily reaches youth, Native Hawaiians, and other communities who continue to be impacted by historical and present-day trauma. A focal point of this manuscript is the inaugural one-day event hosted at Mauiola Ke'ehi, which celebrated the lā hānau or birthday of King David Kalākaua, an esteemed Hawaiian mō'i, or monarch, renowned for championing and advocating for the revitalization of Hawaiian language, arts, traditions, and practices. King Kalākaua's legacy of cultural revitalization continues to be celebrated with the annual Merrie Monarch Hula festival.

One of King Kalākaua's many contributions was reestablishing hoe wa'a, canoe paddling, which had previously been abolished for 50 years and was a main emphasis for this inaugural event. The King

David Kalākaua Lā Hānau event took place in November 2024 and serves as an example of providing an Indigenized space where youth experience a deepening of their pilina to Native Hawaiian leadership, values, and culture. Through this celebration, Mauiola Ke'ehi exemplifies how commemorative cultural events, such as the celebration of our alii, or Hawaiian royalty, can serve as a vehicle for wellbeing and intergenerational healing. The main purpose of this paper is to present evaluation data from the inaugural King Kalākaua Lā Hānau to explore the intersection of culture, community, and wellbeing. By doing so, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature that highlights the importance and impact of Indigenous-led and youth-centered programming.

Methods

Positionality of Research Team

The evaluation data presented in this paper was collected and analyzed by a combination of Indigenous scholars. This includes a Kanaka Maoli faculty at the local university, a Kanaka Maoli evaluator, a Kanaka Maoli graduate student, a Kanaka Maoli community leader, and a visiting Māori scholar. The team participated in the inaugural King Kalākaua Lā Hānau at Mauiola Ke'ehi as part of the staff and

volunteer team and represented a diverse range of Indigenous experiences. Evaluations were conducted by team with mentorship and guidance provided by the community mentor of this project (last author). The senior author of this paper (last author) also provided guidance for the entire evaluation process and ensured a pono evaluation process in Mauiola Ke'ehi.

Participants

Approximately 131 keiki (youth) and 107 adults attended this event. Specific organisations were invited to participate in this event, including Native Hawaiian and Pacific youth-serving organisations and organisations with at-risk youth, or youth with strengths and the ability to be resilient and thrive when tapping into their inner capabilities.

Measures

Participants were invited to fill out a post-survey to gather both quantitative and qualitative feedback about the event. The participants' experiences and perceptions were quantitatively explored by asking about their feelings of connection to four different domains including: 1) Pilina 'Ōiwi: Connection to oneself, 2) Pilina Kaiāulu: Connection to community, 3) Pilina 'Āina and Honua: Connection to 'Āina and mother Earth, and 4) Pilina 'Ike Hawai'i:

Connection to Hawaiian culture. The extent to which participants felt a change in these connections as a result of attending this event was captured using six Likert scale items. An example of one of these items is: "The activities you engaged in at this event strengthened your connection to our 'Āina. 'Āina includes all that encompasses the land (land, ocean, rivers, and the sky) and that which nourishes you." The survey also included an item that explored participants' overall sense of mauiola, or wellbeing, after their involvement in the event. The survey concluded with a final open-ended question inviting participants to share feedback and suggestions for future events.

Procedures

To assess the impact of Mauiola Ke'ehi's inaugural event of Kalākaua's Lā Hānau, post-surveys were administered to participants after they engaged in various morning and afternoon activities, including mo'olelo (storytelling) about Mauiola Ke'ehi, hoe wa'a (canoe paddling), hanu (breathing exercises), and participation in interactive education stations designed to deepen connections to Hawaiian culture, community, and ecosystems. Responses were collected by members of the research team, who distributed QR codes and physical paper survey copies. Photo documentation by the evaluation team also helped to capture the essence of the event

while cataloging a visual record of the event (refer to Appendix 1).

Results

A total of 127 participants took part in the survey, including 37 keiki from kindergarten through 12th grade and 90 adults. Adult survey respondents included parents or supervisors of youth and volunteers for the event. The survey response rates were 28.2% for keiki and 84.1% for adults. Of the participants who completed the post-survey, 65% (n=83) identified as Native Hawaiian. An additional 31% (n=39) were not Native Hawaiian but were residents of Hawai'i. Survey responses by item are presented in Table 1 and further described in the following paragraphs. Figure 1 provides a summary of youth survey responses for evaluation items by percentage in response. Figure 2 provides a summary of survey responses for evaluation items by percentage in response for all survey takers.

Pilina 'Ōiwi: Connection to Oneself

In other Mauiola Ke'ehi programming, Pilina 'Ōiwi is fostered through intentional opportunities to connect with oneself and know who one is (e.g., knowing who one's kūpuna or ancestors are, knowing one's culture, knowing one's 'Āina). When asked if the event strengthened connection to

oneself, 34 out of 37 (92%) youth respondents and 122 out of 127 (96%) of all survey respondents indicated agreement, with 38 of all respondents agreeing and 84 of all respondents strongly agreeing. Only four survey respondents reported feeling neutral, and one participant disagreed. The high agreement rate suggests that the event offered opportunities for connection to oneself through selected programmatic activities. This was further supported by the open-ended response section. One of the adult participants shared, "I hope we continue this cuz it's good not only to myself but for our next generation" (Hawai'i adult resident).

Pilina Kaiāulu: Connection to Community

In total, 33 out of 37 (89%) of youth respondents and 122 of 127 (96%) of all survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the event strengthened their connection to kaiāulu (community). This result suggests that the event was particularly effective in reinforcing the collective aspects of fostering a sense of Hawaiian community, while emphasizing the role of community in individual and cultural wellbeing. These findings were also contextualized within the open-ended feedback with quotes such as, "Wonderful event to bring Kanaka Oihi and Pacific

Islanders together for healing and wellness. Mahalo nui.” According to one of the youth participants, this event was “good to bring together the community” (Native Hawaiian youth). Another youth participant shared, “Good job!! for bringing the community out here and teaching them” (Native Hawaiian youth).

Pilina 'Āina and Honua: Connection to 'Āina

In terms of connection to 'Āina and Honua, approximately 86% (n=32) of youth respondents and 95% (n=121) of all survey respondents reported that the event enhanced their relationship to the environment. Specifically, 25 of all respondents agreed and 96 of all respondents strongly agreed that the activities deepened their sense of responsibility and connection to the natural world. These results demonstrate that 'Āina-based activities such as mo'olelo (storytelling), hoe wa'a (canoe paddling), and hands-on stations such as limu (seaweed) fostered a sense of connection to Honua, or Mother Earth, and thus the natural world, with the potential to influence environmental stewardship. The activity stations and activities were specifically identified as an important mechanism to foster a connection to 'Āina. For instance, one of the youth participants

shared in an open-ended response, “The events were good...and all people who paddled were happy ” (Native Hawaiian youth). Another participant shared, “Mahalo for the important education and teaching me different variety of limu [seaweed] the native and the invasive” (Native Hawaiian adult).

Pilina 'Ike Hawai'i: Connection to Hawaiian Culture

The results also demonstrated favorable feedback around connection to Hawaiian culture. About 92% (n=34) of youth respondents and 98% (n=124) of all survey respondents agreed (n=25) or strongly agreed (n=99) that the event strengthened their connection to Hawaiian culture. As described below, connection to Hawaiian culture was a salient theme that emerged from the open-ended responses. For instance, one of the youth said, “*Mahalo for doing this. It shows me a lot for Hawaii. 'Ōlelo No'eau="Ola ka 'Ōlelo Hawaii"* (Native Hawaiian youth). Another example quote includes, “It is events like this that help strengthen our ohana and opio. It allows us and encourages us to continue to perpetuate culture and our history” (Native Hawaiian adult).

Table 1 Survey responses by item.

Item	Youth responses (N=37)				Youth and adult survey responses (N=127)			
	Disagree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Agree n(%)	Strongly Agree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Agree n(%)	Strongly Agree n(%)
Pilina 'Ōiwi: Connection to Oneself	1 (3%)	2 (5%)	17 (46%)	17 (46%)	1 (1%)	4 (3%)	38 (30%)	84 (66%)
Pilina Kaiāulu: Connection to community	0 (0%)	4 (11%)	11 (30%)	22 (59%)	0 (0%)	5 (4%)	19 (15%)	103 (81%)
Pilina 'Āina and Honua: Connection to 'Āina	0 (0%)	5 (13%)	11 (30%)	21 (57%)	0 (0%)	5 (4%)	21 (16%)	101 (80%)
Pilina 'Ike Hawai'i: Connection to Hawaiian culture	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	14 (38%)	20 (54%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)	25 (20%)	99 (78%)
Overall Mauiola	1 (3%)	5 (14%)	12 (32%)	19 (51%)	1 (1%)	5 (4%)	25 (19%)	96 (76%)
Encourage a "hana hou" or repeat of this event in the future.	0 (0%)	4 (11%)	5 (13%)	28 (76%)	0 (0%)	6 (5%)	8 (6%)	113 (89%)

**Note.* In the table above, "strongly disagree" is not reported as 0 selected this item.

Figure 1.

Youth survey responses for evaluation items by percentage in response.

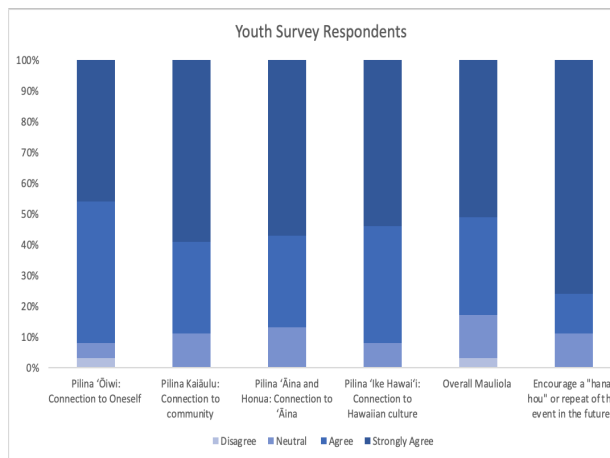
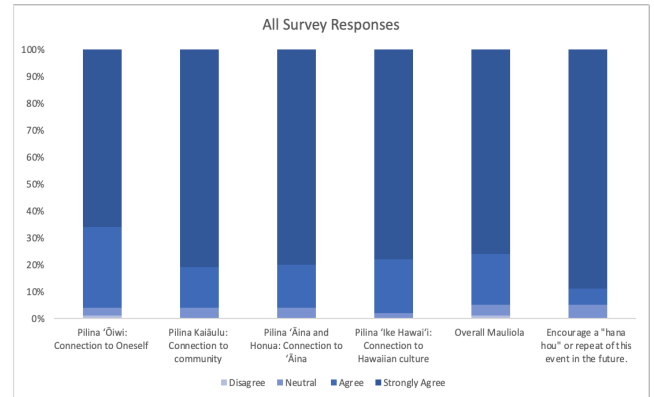


Figure 2.

Survey responses for evaluation items and all survey responses by percentage in response.



Mauliola and Open-Ended Feedback

In terms of overall mauliola, or optimal health and wellbeing, 83% (n=31) of youth and 95% (n=121) of all survey respondents felt their mauliola increased as a result of their participation in this event. Participants who responded to the open-ended question provided overwhelmingly positive feedback, with many expressing gratitude for the event and appreciation for the culturally grounded activities.

Honoring Mo'olelo.

A common theme in the feedback was admiration of the mo'olelo, or stories, that were shared during the event. Specific stories that stood out to participants included stories of this sacred space, stories of King David Kalākaua's

revitalization of hoe wa'a practices, and the importance of King Kalākaua's summer home being strategically situated at Mauliola. As described by one of the participants, "...staff brought forward an amazing event today, honoring mauliola a me ali'i Kalākaua. Hoe wa'a and other activities were aligned with this wahi pana and its history. Mahalo ā nui!!" (Native Hawaiian adult).

Perpetuation of Cultural Knowledge and Practices.

Other activities that were highlighted in the open-ended section of the survey included opportunities to learn more about native and invasive limu, Hawaiian history, and cultural practices like hoe wa'a (canoe paddling). These activities helped to foster the various pilina or sense of connection being explored, including connection to

oneself and connection to `Āina, while also fostering a sense of community and pride of one's culture and ancestral teachings. For instance, one of the participants shared: "This needs to be an annual event. Organized well. Culturally relevant. Brings the culture of old back to the forefront to be used in today's society" (Hawai'i adult resident).

Fostering the essence of aloha, pilina, and mālama `Āina.

Many expressed feeling moved by the aloha (deep love) and sense of community that was fostered through this event. The intentional opportunity to foster pilina and aloha with each other and the natural land was healing. For instance, one of the adult participants expressed:

I feel so much aloha and ha'aheo [pride] for my ancestors, for [leader] and Mauiola Keehi for sharing her mana'o [thoughts] of this moku [island]! At almost 61 yrs young, this was my very first time in a wa'a. I was missing out and now want to paddle regularly. Mahalo nui (Native Hawaiian adult).

Most importantly, many participants expressed the importance of gathering in `Āina as a healing space and the activities that were intentionally incorporated

throughout the day to foster overall mauiola. For instance, another adult participant shared "Mahalo nui for bringing us together for Mauiola Ke'ehi learning, healing, and working together. Mahalo [staff] for your community healing and leadership" (Hawai'i adult resident).

Youth development and leadership.

Specific feedback about youth development and leadership included opportunities for youth to learn about and perpetuate Hawaiian culture through the teachings and activities provided during this event. As one of the adult participants expressed "It is events like this that help strengthen our ohana [families] and opio [youth]. It allows us and encourages us to continue to perpetuate culture and our history" (Native Hawaiian adult). Another described the importance of these intentional events of fostering leaders who may gain knowledge in land and conservation efforts for our future generations. For instance, one of the participants shared "Mahalo nui for this fabulous event! We brought our Nā Kilo Kai keiki and 'ōpio! And I loved the history that was taught and the conservation education" (Native Hawaiian adult).

The importance of this event and future programming.

Overall, the feedback provided was favorable and positive, with many expressing a strong desire to make this event an annual event with sustained programming. Some expressed the importance of maintaining this type of event to maintain generational and ancestral knowledge. One participant explained: "I feel like I am welcomed back home from my kupuna. It is overwhelming. We have to keep coming back with our 'ohana" (Native Hawaiian adult). Others expressed the importance of sustaining these types of events to ensure cultural knowledge and practices are revitalized and reclaimed. While minimal, participants offered suggestions to improve future events, with a specific focus on incorporating more interactive workshops or sessions focused on Hawaiian language.

Discussion

The findings from this study and the evaluation of Mauiola Ke'ehi's inaugural King David Kalākaua Lā Hānau suggest the event was successful in fostering a multifaceted sense of wellbeing among participants in each of the areas of connection, including connection to oneself, community, 'Āina and Honua, and Native Hawaiian culture. The positive

responses from participants demonstrate the program's ability to strengthen connections to Hawaiian culture and values while simultaneously contributing to mauiola, or wellbeing. These findings align with other research that emphasize the importance of centering Indigenous wisdom, epistemology, and pedagogy in fostering youth development. For instance, Kawai'ae'a and colleagues proposed different cultural pathways for healthy and responsive learning environments based on insights and a writing committee that spanned to include kūpuna (elders), educators, curriculum specialists, researchers and administrators across three generations of education sectors (Kawai'ae'a, 2024). Their book highlights different pathways, guidelines, strategies, and recommendations to improve learning outcomes. In the context of this study, the interconnected pathways align with the goals of this event by cultivating future generations of leaders through experiences that are grounded in Hawai'i's ancestral wisdom and practices, while fostering cultural confidence, cultural identity, a sense of place, and wellbeing at large. The focus on connection to 'Āina reiterates the importance and the interconnectedness of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health between 'Āina and people. Activities such as hoe wa'a and mo'olelo not only provided participants with opportunities to connect with ancestral knowledge and

practices, but they also encouraged environmental stewardship. These findings align with other initiatives taking place across the globe, specifically with Indigenous youth (Severinsen & Reweti, 2019). In particular, findings from this study align with other research that emphasize the importance of centering Indigenous cultural practices, place-based teachings, and ancestral knowledge thereby addressing historical trauma and reducing health inequities (Yamane, Helm, 2022). As such, culturally grounded approaches are not supplemental but essential to the restoration of wellbeing and resilience among Indigenous communities. Overall, the positive survey results and open-ended feedback highlight the potential for similar events by honoring storytelling, the legacies of our Hawaiian monarchy, Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and community health. These positive findings also align with other research that integrate cultural and traditional practices with contemporary Indigenous youth. This approach to research may ultimately foster sustainability; cultural identity, pride, and revitalization; and holistic health, healing, and wellbeing in a space of self-governance and self-determination.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the various strengths of this event and programmatic evaluation, there are inherent limitations due to the evaluation being based on a single-day event. In particular, the short duration of this event restricts the ability to measure long-term impacts of the various domains. Thus, while a one-day event provides a snapshot of immediate reactions and experiences to this event, it is difficult to evaluate whether these impacts may be sustained. Future programming and funding should continue to support this event and similar initiatives to determine the sustained and long-term impacts on Hawai'i's youth, with specific attention to deeper connections to oneself, 'Āina, culture, and community.

Future programming can build on the success and lessons learned of this study, including re-evaluation and refinement of event programming and activities to meet the needs of youth as they evolve while ensuring the essence of this event continues to transcend in these spaces. Continued programming may also provide intentional spaces and opportunities to empower the next generation of leaders in Hawai'i. Feedback from this first event will be instrumental in shaping the future directions of Kalākaua Lā Hānau and other similar initiatives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mauiola Ke'ehi's inaugural Kalākaua Lā Hānau event demonstrates the potential of providing events and similar programming that is grounded in cultural values and practices, while promoting healing and community building among Hawai'i's youth, the future generations of Hawai'i. The positive feedback highlights the importance of community-driven and culturally grounded activities in strengthening connections to Hawaiian traditions, stories, and cultural practices, while deepening youth connections to the land and community. Through activities such as storytelling, canoe paddling, educational learning stations such as the limu (seaweed) station, and mindfulness exercises, to name a few, participants were able to reconnect with their cultural heritage and gain a renewed sense of purpose through fostered connections to themselves and the larger ecosystem of land and community. These experiences provide a foundation for building leadership among youth by empowering them to embrace the cultural practices and values that are central to Hawaiian ways of knowing. While the event was brief, it provided an authentic and intentional space to engage in activities that fostered cultural identity, pride, and resilience, thereby strengthening the health, healing and

wellbeing of Native Hawaiian youth and Hawai'i's youth at large.

The lessons learned from this inaugural event can be used to build sustainable programming and a framework for youth engagement in Native Hawaiian communities. While the one-day event showcased immediate success, there are opportunities to continue growing this event and similar experiences. By incorporating long-term community engagement and culturally grounded programming, Mauiola Ke'ehi has the potential to evolve this event into an annual event while perpetuating and revitalizing cultural practices and sustaining leadership development. The desire expressed by participants for future events suggests continued opportunities to grow Hawai'i's leaders while honoring sacred spaces and cultural traditions. This is particularly important when thinking about the hope for our future generations and the ways in which programming like the King Kalākaua Lā Hānau can foster health, healing, and wellbeing. Most importantly, such events underscore the transformative healing of place-based, culturally grounded programming and its role in nurturing the next generation of leaders who are grounded in Indigenous knowledge, culture, practices, and ways of being. The continued perpetuation of these practices

provides hope and optimism for Indigenous youth and our future generations to come.

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Appendix 1

Photo documentation of the Inaugural Kalākaua Lā Hānau at Mauiola Ke'ehi.



In the first image (left) two visiting scholars from Aotearoa learn about the wahi pana (sacred space) of Mauiola Ke'ehi. In the second image (center) students from the Department of Health Sciences from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa provide their kōkua (support) to Kalākaua Lā Hānau event. In the third image (right), Kēhaulani Kupihea, Executive Director of Mauiola Ke'ehi (center of photo) takes a picture with faculty from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, including a member of the research and evaluation team and a leader of the health activity station.

About the authors:

Mapuana C. K. Antonio, Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) is an Associate Professor and head of the Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Health Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She is a mother, wife, daughter, and sister intricately connected to generations of the future and past. Dr Antonio's work is dedicated to advancing the health and wellbeing of Native Hawaiians and Indigenous peoples. Her research takes a strengths-based, holistic, and community prioritized approach by bettering the physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellbeing of Native Hawaiians, with a specific focus on measurement and resilience.

Finley Ngarangi Johnson (Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Kahungunu) has ancestral connections to both Aotearoa and India, and has had the honour of working in Hawai'i as a visiting Fulbright graduate scholar. Fin completed his undergraduate training in Māori studies and psychology, postgraduate training in critical cross-cultural research methods, and doctoral research in Indigenous Psychology. Fin enjoys researching and practicing at the interface of Māori knowledge and psychological science, and is passionate about Indigenous health and healing. Fin's doctoral thesis explores ways

in which we can Indigenise survey design, development, and validation practices through the creation of a new self-report Māori wellbeing measure.

Dr Umiokalani Jensen, Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) is an evaluator and researcher from her one hānau or birthplace of Hau'ula. Through her company 10 Heavens LLC, she works primarily with Native Hawaiian and Native Hawaiian serving community organizations and educational institutions to promote, strengthen, and tell the stories of culture-based programs and education. Her research focuses on decolonial and Indigenous perspectives of family and community engagement and wellbeing of the individual and collective.

Brooke Kamaile Asing, Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) is a graduate student in the Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Health Master of Public Health program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her research explores wa'a practices and its role in shaping the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities.

Kēhaulani Kupihea, Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) is a proud mom of a differently-abled, neurodivergent 10-year-old, Kā'e'i'ula. She was firmly rooted in nā mea Hawai'i and worked as an archaeologist for the past two decades,

focusing on gathering mo'olelo (stories) of our kūpuna (ancestors). Genealogically tied to the sacred place of Ke'ehi, Kēhaulani answers this ancestral calling to steward and perpetuate the healing waters of Ke'ehi. She founded Mauiola Ke'ehi to share the 'ike (knowledge) of her Hawaiian ancestors and support transformative healing. Being neurodivergent herself, nature and the ocean is and has always been her medicine to maintain mauiola (wellbeing).