

Find What Inspires You

By: Jayson Hawthorne

At sixteen years old, my life already seems full of ups and downs. The successes I've had wouldn't be possible without the love and support from family but also the volunteers that dedicate their time to teach and help me grow. These people have affected me greatly and made me the person I am today. Volunteers like my coaches who have spent hours training me, teachers who have given up their lunchtime to tutor me, or my Relay for Life captains who lead our team all have one thing in common. They sacrifice their personal time to help those in need. The only payment they've ever desired was the gratitude that I gave them for helping me.

In 2011 a close childhood friend, Kai, was diagnosed with brain cancer and doctors found a medulloblastoma, or brain tumor, had grown at the base of his skull. He was only nine years old. It was the first time I saw the devastating effects of cancer. However, I also witnessed the love and effort given by everyone that volunteered to help Kai and his family through this difficult time. It made me understand what it meant to volunteer and how it feels to give without expectations.

This inspired my mother and friends to create Team Stompers, a Relay for Life team with over twenty families that dedicate their time to fundraise for the American Cancer Society (ACS) and bring awareness about childhood cancer. I believe we've made a difference helping families on Kaua'i who are fighting against it. ACS representatives have told us that because of our volunteer efforts we have brought positive energy to their events and shown families not to hide from the disease. The power of hope that one day there will be a cure shines from our team. We have raised thousands of dollars for cancer research and spent many volunteer hours

at events. I am a Youth Captain for our team and oversee all the kids. Many of us have seen our older family members battle this disease. Today, thankfully, Kai is cancer free. The support of his team has helps him get stronger every day.

Seeing people come together for a cause that they are passionate about has made an impact on my life and has inspired me. Volunteering is all about finding something that you care about and the desire to help that person or cause without thinking about getting anything in return. I encourage the youth of our community to find something that moves them and look for a way to get involved. It could be a simple beach clean-up or help create a non-profit organization for those less fortunate. Whatever it is that inspires them they need to just go for it. Volunteering is an excellent way to prepare them for what we'll face in the future as well as keep our faith in humanity. You are never too young to help and even the smallest gesture can make a big change.