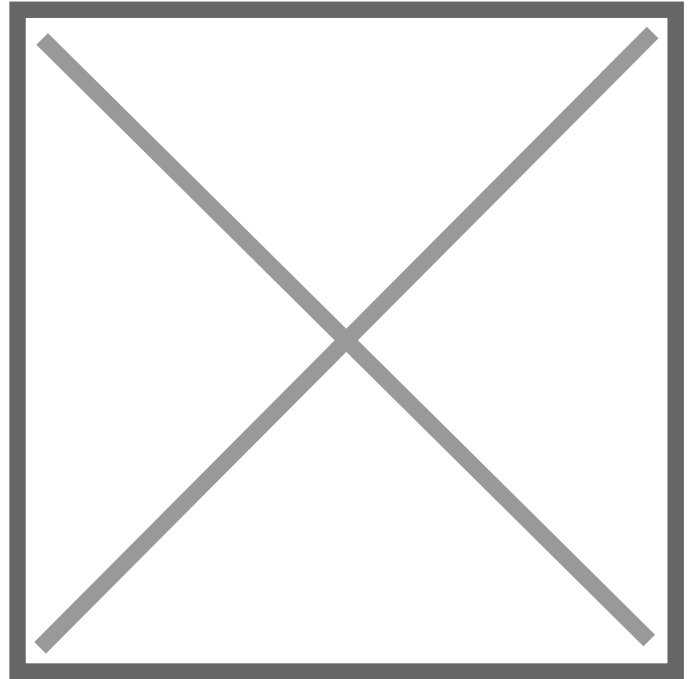
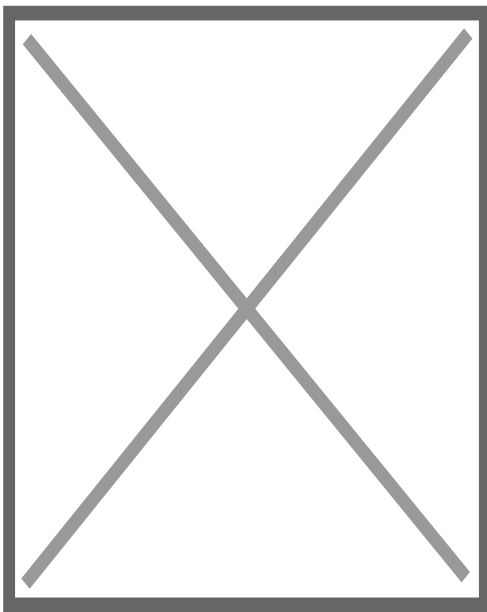


Doing the most good...for youth

Program participant receives national award

Army program helps youth turn his life around.

by Daniel de Castro –



Keanalu Chartrand

About four years ago, Keanalu Chartrand had a serious reputation of being “real bad” around the small town of Hilo. He was hanging out with the wrong crowd, getting into heavy street fights, stealing, and later, even selling drugs.

“I had to survive on the streets, you know,” he admits. “I didn’t want them picking on me, so I had to pick on them. I wasn’t the biggest kid around, so I had to punch harder.”

After many warnings, Keanalu didn’t leave the authorities with any choice, so the door finally slammed on him. He spent a year at the Ko’olau Youth Correctional Facility where he said his survival skills kicked in even harder so he could win his peers’ respect and be on top of the food chain.

The world of violence around him took a heavy toll. He realized he really didn’t like himself, and he took it out on everyone. After spending time at the youth detention center, the courts sent him to The Salvation Army’s Family Intervention Services youth residential program.

“The Salvation Army was a big thing in my life. The place is a gift,” he says. “It was a wake up call and I learned that the only way to be free was to get away from all that got me into trouble in the first

<https://caringmagazine.org>

place.”

Keanalu, now 19, never imagined that four years later, he'd be nominated and selected to receive the prestigious National Spirit of Youth Award in Washington, D.C. The award is given annually by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice to recognize a young adult who has made great strides through involvement with the juvenile justice system, has overcome personal obstacles, and is today making significant contributions to society.

“My life is so different today,” he exclaims. His days are full, making up for his dark, troubled past. He's attending college with a goal of earning a doctorate degree in psychology. He has immersed himself in volunteer activities that help troubled kids, including being a speaker and chair of his school's Youth Empowerment Project. He's also a peer counselor at a youth recovery center. On top of it all, he works as a support specialist for Goodwill helping the mentally challenged reach their personal goals.

There's another new addition to his life today. He has a 7-month-old son who has become the center of his life. “I'm living for my kid. I know that I'm affecting him with whatever I do and the choices I make. And I know I would never go back.”