

# Kanani Goes to Washington

Kanani Kaeo, Waiola Clinic Team Office Manager, was selected by AAPCHO (the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations) to be a speaker at their February 23 conference (Cultivating Traditions of Wellness: Building Sustainable Health Care Homes) in Washington, DC. The Health Center nominated Kanani to speak on workforce development as she has been both a recipient of workforce development and now a provider or educator to continue developing a valuable segment of our workforce. Kanani was one of the highlights of the conference with her confident presence and genuine, heart-warming story. We want to share Kanani's story with all our employees. Rich and several of our board members attended the AAPCHO conference with Kanani and then they all continued on attending the NACHC (National Association of Community Health Centers) conference and visiting with our congressional delegation. Kanani will also share her reflections on her week in Washington, D.C.

## **KANANI'S STORY: Presented at the AAPCHO Cultivating Traditions of Wellness: *Building Sustainable Health Care Homes* Conference**

I was born in Hawaii on the island of Oahu and raised in Nanakuli Valley Homestead. A proud graduate of Nanakuli High & Intermediate "public" school which is the only public school on Hawaiian homeland property.

My mama, Thelma Leina`ala Kawaakoa Jeremiah, the eldest of twelve children was born in Hana, Maui and delivered by her dad, my papa man Kawaakoa. Mama was a very hard worker from when she was a child. She quit school by the ninth grade to work and help support her family. She was very strict with us when it came to education, home and church. She was the enforcer and disciplinarian of our home and never needed dad's help for that because she had everything under control.

My dad, Herman Harrigan Ka`ihu`okalaniopuu Jeremiah, was born in Honolulu and raised in Papakolea by both of his parents and he had three older brothers. My dad is a good man who worked very hard to take care of our family.

I used to think how lucky mom was to have someone like my dad who didn't beat her, curse at her, or force her to do things. All I knew is how good he was to her and her to him. They instilled family values, discipline and respect. They are the link to my existence and I am so grateful to have them for parents. Although at times they were strict, I knew it was because they loved me and it was for my safety and well being.

I now live in Waianae Valley Homestead with my husband, Dwight Kaeo, and four children, Kanani, Kuaika, Kalani and Keala. They are everything to me and they give me strength to go on each day.

In 1986, a year after my graduation, I visited the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center (WCCHC) with a cousin and her children. While sitting in the Emergency Room, someone recognized me and asked me a question. Eh, you Jeremiah right? YEAH. What you doing now? You working? NO. You like work? OKAY. Fill out one application and turn `em in tomorrow. OKAY.

I did just that and turned in my application the very next day and I also decided to volunteer. After my first day of volunteering, I was hired as a full-time temporary receptionist in the Central Registration department, filling in for someone who had just started her maternity leave.

Back then, I didn't realize that this was the very beginning of my career. It wasn't easy - and in fact, it was challenging. When my temporary position ended I became a call-in, working full time for almost a year. Someone told me, things are going to get better, just hang in there and I'm so glad I did, because as I continued to work the odd shifts without complaining and after many requests, I finally got a full time permanent position. This experience increased my determination and desire to learn anything and everything about my job at WCCHC. It is a privilege to work with and meet so many great people who made a difference in my career and life. People shared their knowledge, life experiences, and offered me advice that helped me to grow personally and professionally. I appreciate what I have - the opportunity to learn different things, share what I've learned, and accept constructive criticism which helps me to keep improving.

As a Receptionist, I was able to learn and perform multiple duties by registering patients for our outpatient clinics and the Emergency Room. Back then there were about a hundred forms that had to be filled out in addition to entering data into our billing system. I collected payments as a Cashier; answered the telephone and was also the PBX Switchboard Operator. I created, pulled and filed charts as a Medical Records Clerk, and assisted the uninsured and under-insured in our Patient Services Department.

In 1991, I was promoted as the Central Registration Supervisor. My responsibilities were to train all new hires, manage eight frontline receptionists, monitor and evaluate their daily performances, enforce policy and procedures and increase patient satisfaction.

In 1994, I accepted a Medical Receptionist position for one of the Satellite clinics that had just opened in Waianae. I was ready for a new challenge and a new beginning.

It took me over 13 years to earn \$10.00 an hour. When I hear people complaining I don't like it. I tell em, eh! You not happy here then please go someplace that going make you happy - pointing to the door. It's not about you, it's not about me, but it's all about our patients and our Health Center and what we can do to help. I truly believe that if you are not happy where you're at and have a bad attitude, it's time for you to move on.

I have dedicated many years of my life serving our patients, our people, our community, and our families at WCCHC and I don't plan on leaving any time soon. I am very proud to be a part of such an awesome organization. In fact, I plan to work at WCCHC until I retire.

I am currently the Team Office Manager for Waiola clinic, which is one of the four Satellite clinics. Waiola has four Family Practitioners; 3 Doctors and a Nurse Practitioner. They do almost everything for our families of all ages except for OB-GYN care. Our support staff includes 6 Medical Assistants and 6 Medical Receptionist.

I am responsible for the clinic's daily function and operations, quality patient care and satisfaction, provider and support staff coverage and Quality Improvement measures, monthly team meetings and managing the program budget.

I completed the Graduated Competency Program (GCP), a workforce development program at the Health Center that was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. My coursework included courses offered through Leeward community college and other courses developed by the Health Center staff. Course work includes: Electronic Medical Records, Corporate Compliance, Business/ Finance, Quality Improvement, and Information Technology. The GCP allows WCCHC staff to remain on campus in Wai'anae, complete specific coursework while on company time (yes, we get paid for going to school) and improve our knowledge, skills and abilities to be better workers, qualify for new jobs and offer better care to our community.

After completing the program I received a Certificate of Completion in Business Technology. It was an honor for me and many other students to be the first in our family to receive a college certificate. Our graduation ceremony included cap and gowns and a reception with entertainment and pupus.

Now, with added skills and confidence I am interested in continuing my education and working towards entering into a Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program.

In the meantime, my supervisor selected me to be a Receptionist Educator. In this role, I am responsible to prepare curricula and testing for clinic receptionists for a minimum of five (5) core competencies each year. During the biweekly sessions, interaction and group participation is encouraged. I've learned that the best way to communicate and work with support staff is to listen to their questions, concerns, and suggestions. The important thing is to follow up and resolve any unanswered questions. Also, after each session, minutes are forwarded to the medical receptionist's and their managers to review.

For me, WCCHC has always been an ohana environment. Our patients, providers, staff and their family have become a part of my life. I can not take all the credit for my accomplishments when there are so many individuals who made a positive impact in my life.

I, as an individual will work harder and take longer to reach my goals. However, as a team we can get things done efficiently and effectively by working together in agreement as one.



Rich Bettini, CEO at the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center (right), and a board member from a community health center on the Big Island of Hawaii (left), congratulated Kanani (center) on an excellent presentation.