



*The Garden Island Newspaper on Kaua`i carried a special feature in September 2001 entitled "What is Your Anti-Drug?" The intent was to seek responses within the community about what past times, beliefs, approaches, etc. worked for various people to give them something better to do than take recreational drugs. The following was QWERTY founder, Mark Carey's submission- an article on a fascinating long-term study of children's lives on the island of Kaua`i.*

## **Adult Recognition: an Anti-Drug**

Mark A. Carey, M.A.

Kaua`i can be proud to have been the home of a remarkable study conducted over a period of forty years by Emmy Werner, a public health researcher, and Ruth Smith, a clinical psychologist. This landmark study, among the most extensive of its kind, examined the lives of nearly every child born on the island in 1955 and their parents. Almost a third of these children were subject to some significant family problem: poverty, health problem, handicap, poorly educated parents, family alcoholism, violence, instability, or mental illness which might put them at "high risk" for unwanted pregnancy, mental-health problems, school problems, or legal problems as they matured. These "at-risk" children were followed up at various intervals through adulthood. While two-thirds of them did develop the predicted problems by the age of 18, one-third did not. What was it about this last group of kids that allowed them to weather the odds against them and allow them to emerge as successful, happy adults?

This unbeaten group of children had many factors in common. They tended to be outgoing and likeable children with at least average intelligence. More were girls than boys and many were the oldest child. Most remained closely tied to their primary caregiver for their first year. Each one developed a close, personal bond with an adult other than their parents. This adult might be an older relative, a teacher, a youth group leader, or religious leader. Often the adult played a significant role in recognizing and supporting a particular talent in the child: a music teacher, a kumu hula, or a sports coach. Their talent or hobby gave them a sense of confidence, a constructive activity outside the home, and a sense of hope.

Drug use was not a focus of this extensive study, but the lesson to be learned is obvious. Kids are drawn to drugs when there are problems at home and when they experience a lack of positive adult attention. Making an effort to reach out to our children, recognizing their talents, and supporting those talents by connecting them with other caring, responsible adults who can serve as models or mentors to bring out the best in those young people is sure to be among the best "anti-drugs" available.

Mark A. Carey is a Learning Specialist at Kaulele Education Services in Kapa`a and founder of QWERTY Education Services, Inc. He believes in the power of relationship-based tutoring to enhance the lives of both struggling and successful students.