

Taking Root – Growing Youth Empowerment for Island Sustainability

Humanities Guåhan was one of two recipients of the 2019 Schwartz Prize for "Most Outstanding Public Humanities Programming" for its youth initiative *Taking Root: Growing Youth Empowerment for Island Sustainability*. This is Humanities Guåhan's first Schwartz Prize award in our organization's history, and we are very proud! Click [here](#) to read this year's Schwartz Prize press release.

"This is a council who knows their people and place, and are doing the work that needs to be done in their communities." --review panel judge

In 2018 Humanities Guåhan launched *Taking Root: Growing Youth Empowerment for Island Sustainability*, a youth initiative for at-risk Guam public middle school students who trace their heritage to Guam, the CNMI, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Marshall Islands. The project ran from June to October 2018 and engaged students in the environments and cultures of Guam and Micronesia through exploratory hikes and fieldtrips; workshops in creative writing, art, and photography; cultural programs and exchange; Pacific focused conservations, activities and lessons; and workshops and mentoring on youth-led community action.

The project sought to empower youth to identify the critical roles they play in sustainable development, cultural and environmental preservation and community building in Micronesia. To do this, the *Taking Root* initiative encouraged diverse islander youth to share knowledge and work collaboratively and creatively to identify challenges and solve problems around cultural and environmental change through physical activity, civic engagement, and greater cultural and ecological awareness. Humanities Guåhan collaborated with a team of scientists, environmentalists, humanists, educators, and traditional experts to develop a rigorous educational program focusing on natural and cultural resources, climate change, capacity building and life-skills development, as well as meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

After engaging in a three-week curriculum that included classroom instruction, cultural workshops, hikes and farm visits, film and discussion events, and clean up and restoration activities, the participants mapped and identified needs within the community and established goals and an action plan for their own youth-led community project to address local challenges around the global crisis of climate change. These findings were used to develop, produce, promote, and facilitate Guam's first Youth Sustainability Conference. The Conference provided an opportunity for the *Taking Root* participants to share their experiences and community action plan with their peers, while also allowing for a larger audience to engage with the different partners and components of the project. Participating youth were inspired to create and then engage in practical solutions to the challenges Guam and the rest of Micronesia face in relation to their social, cultural and physical environments. Their engagement with the values, ideas and actions that are central to a participatory democracy is necessary for a sustainable future for our island and region.

To make this project possible, Humanities Guåhan received critical grant support from the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Insular Affairs under the Technical Assistance Program, and established important partnerships with the Guam Department of Education, Guam Community College Reach for College Hagu'i Kuleho Program, the University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability, George Washington High School Marine Mania, NOAA Coral Reef Monitoring Program, Asahi Abai Palau community, as well as with indigenous CHamoru and Micronesian scholars, cultural experts and community leaders. We also received invaluable corporate sponsorships from Hertz Guam/Triple J Enterprises and PCR Environmental, Inc.

Due to the enormous success of the Taking Root initiative, Humanities Guåhan is actively seeking financial support in order to continue the project and launch, *Taking Root in Micronesia: Growing Youth Empowerment for Island Sustainability*. Together with our partner organizations and education specialists, we aim to further develop the program initially launched in 2018 and teach extended curriculum plans on Community Action, Natural Resources of Micronesia, and the Cultures and Histories of Micronesia.