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Education helps her find methods of helping others

By [Michael Tsai](#)

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The undergrad work in political science, the Juris Doctorate, the career in sales and marketing, even marriage and motherhood — for Larie Manutai they're all facets of a larger education.

And for the 34-year-old Kapiolani resident, one measure of a worthwhile education is its ultimate benefit to other people.

"Education helps you get where you want to," Manutai says. "But it doesn't just have to be for us. We can use it to help other people, too."

Indeed, it was a desire to help the disenfranchised that spurred Manutai to study law; her interest in how to operate a nonprofit that led her to current work at the Polynesian Cultural Center; and her long-held concern for teenage mothers that inspires her plans for the future.

Manutai says she was born and raised in Laie. Her father came from Tonga to study at the former Church College of Hawaii (now Brigham Young University-Hawaii). There he met his future wife, who hailed from Molokai.

Manutai says her values are grounded in her early experiences growing up in Laie, where everyone knew each other by name and where a family in need was a community concern.

Manutai earned a bachelor's degree in political science from BYUH and a law degree from the University of Hawaii's William S. Richardson School of Law.

After spending a year working with Volunteer Legal Services Hawaii, Manutai took a sales job with the Polynesian Cultural Center. She recently transferred to the center's Waikiki office, where she handles mainland and international sales.

Manutai said she loves her work, in part because it has given her an in-depth understanding of how successful nonprofit organizations operate — knowledge that she has used to help other local nonprofits find funding and operate more efficiently.

Manutai, who also works part time practicing family law for a local firm, hopes to one day use her different areas of expertise to provide low-cost legal advice and services to young mothers.

"There are a lot of young women out there who need help with legal issues like custody or child support, and there just aren't that many programs out there to help them," Manutai says. "They're vulnerable, and they get swayed easily by friends and family. I want to help them find the right services and make the right decisions."



Manutai is supported in all her various endeavors by husband Abe, in whom she says she has found the perfect combination of honesty and kindness. The couple has been married for five years and have a 3-year-old son, Pati.

"It's not easy balancing work and being a mother, but I love it," Manutai says. "I love watching my son grow, and I think the experience has given me more empathy for what other people go through."

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