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Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i Policy Initiative

Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Forum Convening: A Policy Intern's POV

(Leah Delos Santos) Attending the Opportunity Youth Forum Convening in Austin, Texas was an incredible experience for me. I learned not only about our own opportunity youth-serving organizations here in Hawai'i, but also those across the nation. Shifting the perspective from our local work to that of a global movement and effort has instilled a greater level of motivation and inspiration that I will direct toward our work in policy. And hearing from youth leaders themselves has brought invaluable insight for new ideas and areas of focus. I am deeply grateful to all of the youth and young adults who shared their stories and have offered their help in our future projects.

We participated in various workshops, site visits, plenary panels, as well as had some delicious meals! The workshops introduced new concepts and pathways to approaching different aspects of our work, such as mental health; belonging, meaning, wellbeing, and purpose; policy advocacy; rural areas and disaster response; networking; how to meet with funders; dismantling adultism; and more. One of the most interesting and engaging parts of the convening was our site visit to American YouthWorks, an Austin non-profit organization offering alternative education and career training programs for opportunity youth. Oh, and all of the Texas Mexican and BBQ food wasn't bad, either!

As a new youth lead with OYAH, I am striving to expand my reach with our organizations, helping out wherever and whenever I can. What we do for our youth and communities is, as I learned in Austin, much bigger than any of us can imagine. I only hope to be a larger part of such amazing work going forward.



Photos of different group activities at the American YouthWorks site visit.

L: Healthcare core
R: Construction core



Leah Delos Santos, middle top row, pictured with other youth leaders at the inaugural OYF Youth Summit.