

‘Oaka means to open, to sprout, and to flash and signifies new beginnings or an energetic motion like that of lightning. **‘OAKA: ‘Ōpio Alliance for Kuleana Advancement** — is a youth designed and led coalition that advances equitable opportunities for youth and young adults on Hawai‘i Island to build capacity and activate their agency as change makers.

‘OAKA aims to address is the opportunity gap that exists, especially for those who reside in rural areas with a high percentage of households living in ALICE and poverty. If overlooked, these gaps hinder employment mobility, reduce civic engagement, and deepen inequity. ‘OAKA **invites** youth to participate, **invests** in youth’s ability to contribute, and **increases** youth’s opportunity to lead.

NEXT GENERATION LEADERSHIP

‘OAKA’s Core Team truly represents the best and brightest of Hawai‘i Island. Actively investing in their personal and professional development, leadership growth, and kuleana advancement, their actions align to the guiding principles of Vibrant Hawai‘i: equity and belonging, aloha, ‘auamo kuleana, and flexibility and learning that leads to transformation. **‘OAKA’s unique contribution to the landscape of youth development opportunities on Hawai‘i Island is simply this: there is no other islandwide network led by youth - for youth.** ‘OAKA’s Core Team includes Amylia-Rae Gandolf (North Hawai‘i), Benjamin Rudo (Puna Makai), Cole Fuertes (North Kohala), David Freund (Puna Mauka), Ku‘uhiapo Jeong (Puna Makai), Makamae Manious (Ka‘ū), and Makanaohaililani Ripley (Hilo).

‘OAKA’s initial engagement strategy included collaboration with Resilience Hubs, high schools, UH Hilo/HAWCC, and youth-serving organizations to host regional Youth Summits. Summit activities centered around identification of youth’s strengths and interests to provide youth with mentoring opportunities with seasoned, strategic leaders, through service learning opportunities. Throughout, ‘OAKA’s Core Team conducts After Action Reviews and self-reflection surveys which develop their skill in facilitating learning-focused discussions, establishing a culture of continuous learning, and gaining experience with tools and processes to produce consistent and high quality work so that youth have both ownership and accountability of their experience, contribution, and impact.



"It was a privilege to help cultivate powerful connections between people and place. I am in awe of the willingness of our youth to be a part of something much greater than themselves and I am hopeful and optimistic for the future of our Hawai‘i Island community."

Amylia-Rae Gandolf, Vibrant Hawai‘i Community Resilience Fellow

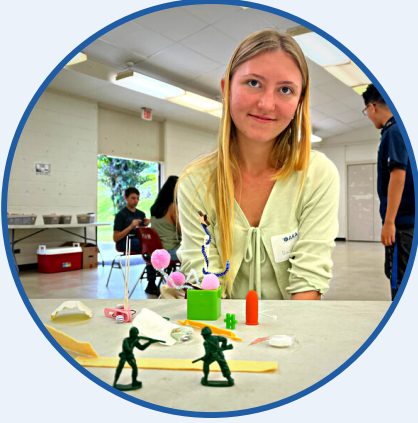
"We have seen a number of very intuitive individuals share their experience about what it means to be youth in this day and age in their own communities. What they [youth] shared, I am hoping, could be the foundation of change set forth for generations to come."

Cole Fuertes, Vibrant Hawai‘i Community Engagement Ambassador



GAINING INSIGHT INTO YOUTH PERSPECTIVE OF COMMUNITY

At each Youth Summit, the OAKA Core Team facilitated a 3D mapping activity inspired by The Presencing Institute to gain insight into youth's experience of community assets, strengths, and vulnerabilities, and barriers to youth engagement in civic, recreational, and social activities. Their reflections provide baseline data for OAKA and other youth focused programs to better understand barriers and opportunity gaps for youth.



- **What do you love about this sculpture of your community and what gives you frustration?**
 - "Our community has a chance to grow."
 - "There are multiple pathways to success."
 - "Reflective of different community roles that make up the whole."
- **What are the key conflicts and hard truths that you have to courageously face in this sculpture?**
 - "Intergenerational conflict."
 - "There is division between communities."
 - "Hard to keep the community together."
- **What is wanting to end or die in this sculpture? What wants to emerge or be born?**
 - "Isolation and fear; Freedom and independence."
 - "Lack of socialization; Connection, love, putting hardship aside with loved ones. Bring family together."
 - "Negativity and insecurities; Confidence and understanding."
- **If this sculpture could speak, what advice would it give you on the way forward?**
 - "I have what I need to break down the walls in my way and achieve my goals."
 - "Trust in your knowledge, trust in your voice, trust in the support of your community."
 - "There's people to fall back on when things get rough."

WHAT YOUTH WISH ADULTS UNDERSTOOD

Each Youth Summit hosted a learning circle that included community organizations and Resilience Hub partners. Youth participants interviewed community representatives to learn more about their organization, their personal leadership journey, and opportunities for youth to engage in service. In addition, youth were asked to share their answer to the question, **"What do you wish adults understood about your experience as youth?"** Below is a summary of their responses.

- "Being youth means making mistakes. Holding youth at the same standard as adults is unfair. Give us room to grow and learn. Allow for us to start with a clean slate; don't hold past mistakes against us."
- "I felt ashamed that I didn't leave Hawai'i, like I wasn't as good as my peers who went away."
- "We want adults to listen to us as individuals with ideas, passions, and visions."
- "We want the opportunity to connect with community, but need assistance."
- "I wish that adults understood the pressure we have to live up to the expectations of our parents."

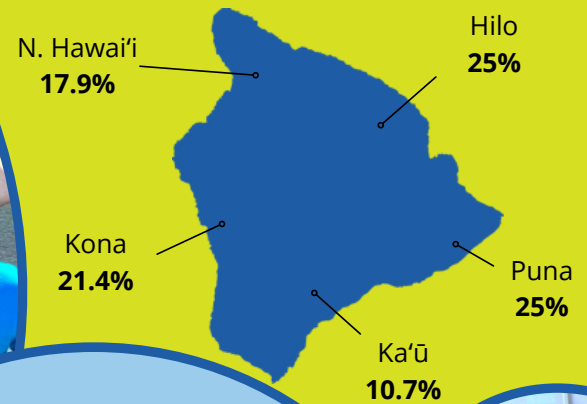


*"The youth were delighted to have their concerns heard by people who were eager to listen." Benjamin Rudo,
Vibrant Hawai'i Community Resilience Fellow*





SUMMIT PARTICIPATION



'OAKA Youth Summits were held islandwide beginning in August 2022 and ending in October. Summits aimed to increase a sense of belonging for youth ages 15-22 by providing opportunities to network, identify youth's personal skills and strengths, and explore opportunities to contribute to community resilience.



YOUTH SUMMIT IMPACT

96%

Built new relationships and deepened existing ones with the community.

100%

Learned something new about their community.

93%

Tried something new and are more open to trying new approaches/programs in other environments.

87%

Grew in their sense of belonging and connection to the community.

90%

Believe they have the ability to make their community a better place.

MAHALO TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Roxanne Cosier, Nānāwale Community Association, Inc. | Lily Cash, Kalani Honua | Iopa Maunakea, Team Pa'a | Gail Clarke, Arts & Sciences Center | Marcia Masters, Nā'ālehu Resilience Hub | Gail No'eau and Tiga Kailimai, Kailapa Community Association | David Anitok and Lucinda Brokken, Oceanview Marshallese | Dr. Farrah-Marie Gomes, University of Hawai'i at Hilo | Ross Pagat and Kathy Matsuda, Kohala Resilience Hub | Charis Higginson, Humanity Hale | Munaalofa Cook and Joel Talaro Holoholo Ministries | Landon Chinen and Mae'ole Quanan Lili'uokalani Trust | Nahaku Kalei, Hui Aloha Kīholo | Shawn Saito, Tūtū's House | Susan Maddox and Kamela Souza, Hōkūpa'a | Kūki'o Community Fund

"We received feedback that youth built new relationships and strengthened relationships with the community, grew in critical thinking and problem-solving skills, a sense of belonging and connection to their own community. ('OAKA Youth Summits are) truly the catalyst for empowering youth to enact change for their future." Ku'uhiapo Jeong, Community Engagement Ambassador



WHAT'S NEXT —

'OAKA 2023

We each hold one piece that is part of something bigger.



'OAKA has indeed sprouted - and took our breath away like an incredible flash of lightning. In 2023, youth and young adults can expect increased opportunities to gather and grow relationships with peers, engage with community leaders to design and lead initiatives to support learning and identifying career pathways, lend their voices and expertise to solve challenges faced by youth and young adults - and of course have fun and make memories all along the way.



More Information:

oaka@vibranthawaii.org

230 Kekūanāo'a Street
Hilo, Hawai'i, 96720

www.vibranthawaii.org/oaka

Vibrant Hawai'i 'OAKA Impact Report | 2022

All rights reserved.

This report may be downloaded free of charge, however, no part of the publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, without permission in writing by Vibrant Hawai'i.