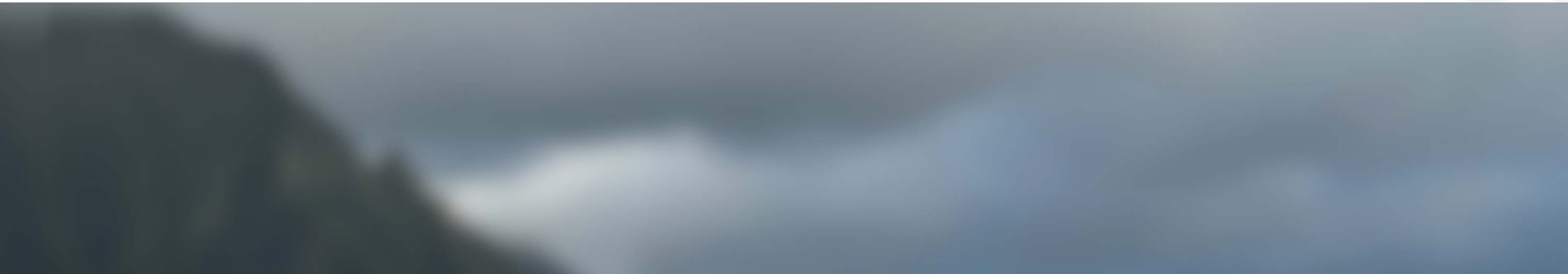


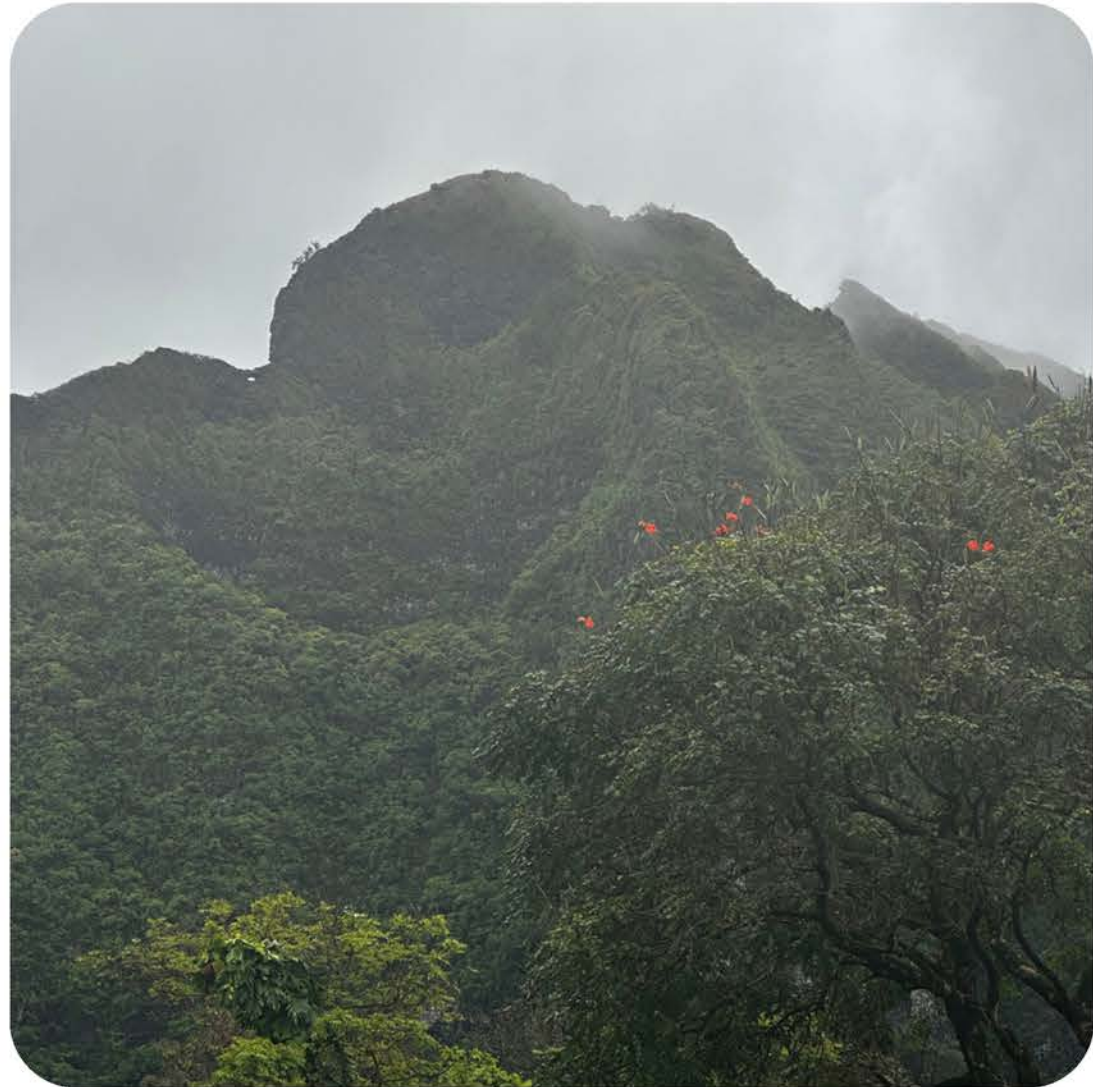
YOUTH VOICE REPORT YEAR 3

Harold K.L. Castle Foundation
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prepared by 'A'ali'i Alliance

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Background

To better understand the experiences, aspirations, and challenges faced by opportunity youth, the Harold K.L. Castle Foundation (Castle Foundation) partnered with 'A'ali'i Alliance to engage with these young people from December 2023 to March 2024.

Opportunity youth are defined for this initiative as individuals aged 17-24 who are not currently enrolled in post-secondary education and are not currently affiliated with any formal institutions or networks.

The goal of this initiative was to provide a platform for these youth to share their perspectives, thereby helping to shape future support of the Castle Foundation and broader community.

The Process

- 15 youth on O‘ahu and Hawai‘i Island
- Individual conversations only, no group conversations
- 30-45 minutes in length
- Ages 17 to 22
- Parental consent given for two youth under age 18
- All youth were provided \$50 in appreciation for their time
- Recruitment started with ‘A‘ali‘i Alliance partners, family members, and any youth suggested by a participant



Youth
Participants

15

O‘ahu & Hawai‘i Island
Ages 17 to 22

Key Questions



01

Post-Secondary Plans

What did you imagine yourself doing after high school? Do you spend time thinking about the future? What are you hopeful for?

02

Supports

What or who are your primary supports? Where would you feel most comfortable getting supports to achieve your goals?

03

Needs

What do you need right now to help you plan? What do you wish you had? Do you feel pressure about the future?

04

Additional Questions

What questions should we be asking about your needs for the future?



FINDINGS

Hopes while in High School

While responses varied, the majority of youth expressed more confusion than excitement about the future while they were in high school. Some had early hopes for college, but obstacles like cost often felt insurmountable. Those not interested in college appeared uncertain about what to aim for and were unsure of any alternatives. One consistent theme across all responses was the lack of clarity on how to find answers to their questions or comfort with their uncertainty.

- “Something other than college.”
- “Military.”
- “Didn’t think about it much.”
- “College at first, but dissuaded due to cost or other barriers.”
- “Just get through high school.”

Feeling pressure about what they should do

In general, most felt some pressure from their families to go to college or choose a career path, but the pressure did not significantly influence their decision making. Most of the pressure came from themselves, manifesting as confusion and anxiety about how to connect their aspirations with a clear pathway. Some youth shared that much of the societal pressure to go to college or get a job subsided once they left high school.

- “Sometimes I feel like I'm behind, like I should be on a different path, but everyone has their own path in life.”
- “When I was in high school I did feel pressure to go to college because a lot of my friends were going, but now that I'm away from that I don't feel that pressure.”
- “Sometimes I think that if I don't decide soon to do something else besides just work at a restaurant I'll never do it.”

Where youth go for support and advice

Youth seek advice and support from those closest to them because this support is often patient, empathetic, and readily available. They rely on individuals such as family members, co-workers, and significant others who are willing to guide them without judgment. However, the value of this advice and support is limited by the capacity of these individuals. Furthermore, while loving and kind, these supporters may not be the best sources of information.

- “I had guidance from my grandparents and uncle.”
- “My cousins and my brothers. I find it kind of hard to ask for help outside of my family if I have a family that is always in my corner.”
- “My first person I go to advice for is my boyfriend.”
- “One of my co-workers became a [certified professional], and she is a mentor for me”
- “I like going to people who are living what I want to do.”
- “One of my old coworkers at my old job helped and mentored me.”

hopes for the next 5 years

Most of the youth were optimistic about their futures and express strong desire to pursue careers aligned with their interests. However, it was clear that at least half lack career guidance and support to enter these careers. They all understood that achieving their career goals would require dedication, sacrifice, and time; the primary barrier wasn't a lack of commitment or effort. They seemed eager to engage in the process but struggled with knowing where and how to begin, and whom to turn to for guidance.

- “I think my goals are to be happy and find a source of income to sustain me and get some little treats. I don't need to be rich.”
- “My main goal now is to be an entrepreneur, to start my own business. I pressure myself to start my own business.”
- “I know people who are artists, and in high school, I would get A's in art so I knew I was probably headed that way. I started doing art commissions.”
- “Once a week or so, the question comes up to me, but I still don't have an answer.”

Youth needs and wishes

Overwhelmingly, the youth expressed that they wish they had two primary things - more money and better guidance. They want to have the privileges that money creates: the ability to take risks (attend college; entrepreneurship), access to new experiences that can inform their path, and fewer day-to-day responsibilities so they have the space to dream and plan.

- “I do know I need to learn to save money so I can save for college tuition if I go.”
- “I wish I had more money. Scholarships.”
- “Ways to get money in general. More money makes it easier to plan. Also learning how to save money.” “I wish there was something that helped you find your interest.”
- “It would’ve been good to have the chance to learn about what even exists for jobs and think about how those might be or might now be a match for me.”
- “I think what would have been helpful is more options (in high school). I felt like there were only 2 options. Go to college or work. I wish I would have known about other paths.”
- “I wish I wasn't shy around people I wanna learn from. I want to ask more questions and learn.”

Questions we should have asked

The youth would have liked more questions asking them about the barriers they face. They wanted to be asked why they chose the path they chose. Above all, they wanted to be able to tell their stories and have someone really listen.

- “A question I wanted to be asked is why I dropped out.”
- “Maybe ask me, 'What was the biggest challenge that was out of your control; your biggest barrier?' ”
- “I like the support question. I feel like It's hard to find the appropriate support. I wish there was a better way for us to find support. It's hard to find it. I didn't know any of the right places to look.”
- “What the person needs in order to help them shift from being a student to being an adult. School tells us to ‘be ready’ but no one is really ready for that, and there is not much guidance.”



**INSIGHTS &
RECOMMENDATIONS**

What Opportunity Youth Want You To Know



We want to be seen

Youth feel not enough people listen to their stories or to what is in their hearts



Don't cast unfair judgement

Their perspectives and experiences are easily judged, discounted, and invalidated



Listen, don't just advise

People give advice when youth need listeners to help sort thru their thinking so they can have a better sense of who they are

Recommendations: Dreaming of the Future

“I feel like in HS, there is a strict agenda for kids to go to college, I wish there was someone there to tell me that I don't have to go to college, you can do this, or that.”

- Youth had hobbies, interests, talents, capabilities in high school, but not many outlets for finding the path for these interests. There needs to be a new way to define what “acceptable” careers are and how to find out about them.
- The only paths were college or work in low wage retail or the food service industry. They need people or programs to shape a path suitable to their talents, interests, experiences.
- There seems to be a dark cloud over them when it comes to paying for college - that could be real or perceived - but the negativity, fear, or unknown creates a large enough barrier that it prevents them from acting on going to college. This does not mean they need more FAFSA completion days. This means people need to talk about how to pay for college in different ways, particularly for this group.

Recommendations: Navigation & Support

“I wish there was a better way for us to find support. It's hard to find. I didn't know any of the right places to look.”

- The support needs to be relevant, empathetic, and right in their face.
- Families can provide some degree of support, but families are limited in their capacities to help.
- Trusted relationships matter; having more than one trusted relationship helps. Anything too far removed is not going to help.
- They will turn to and rely on the folks who are willing to guide them without judgment and be patient with them as they grow and learn. This includes co-workers, family members, and significant others.

Recommendations: Support Continued

“[We need] resources without tons of strings attached.”

- Youth need cash. The lack of cash is not only hurdle to planning for college, its a hurdle to dreaming about college
- College needs to be free and with no access barriers
- They need exposure to a much wider variety of careers
- They need help understanding the perspective that their pathway is the right pathway for them, and that their experiences right now are valuable
- They believe they need to “get on the right path” rather than seeing that their current path as valuable
- There are too many messages around them suggesting that their path is not a good path or is the wrong path
- They receive these messages as condescending, hurtful, and judgemental but try not to show it



**HOW THE COMMUNITY
CAN SUPPORT OUR YOUTH**

What 'ohana can do to help...

- Continue to listen to and support the youth in your life and ask them questions about how they feel about the future.
- Avoid trying to intervene without them asking for help.
- Help 'ōpio connect to mentors in the community who they can go to for career support.
- Talk to other mākua and kūpuna about what careers are available in your community, not to share these with your 'ōpio, but simply to know about things going on in your community.

What educational institutions can do to help...

- Expand opportunities for young people to explore as many passions and interests as possible
- Partner with community organizations to provide internship or career exploration opportunities for youth
- Be a hub of information on what youth can do in the future
- Convene opportunities for youth to hear about college in a much more low stakes way, potentially with later career professionals who did not take paths directly to college
- Continue to provide counseling and mentoring support for youth to share their stories
- Advocate for pathways to community colleges that are low barrier and low cost for students in your community
- Ensure that every youth receives dedicated support in developing a viable post-high school plan before they graduate high school

What organizations/businesses can do to help...

- Provide community-based opportunities for career exploration and internships in partnership with schools and programs
- Mentor, employ, or train young people and support others who do the same
- Support and help educate 'ohana members as they help young people navigate careers
- Message post-high paths in ways that focus on connecting youth to their interests, not as a fear-driven, high stakes decisions that present a limited set of options
- Hire from within the community to provide economic opportunities for youth looking to stay close to home
- Use trusted relationships with families to share best practices in helping children plan for post-high school. A trusted source can make these sensitive conversations more effective.

Final Reflections

- Young people, in general, are hopeful and excited for the future
- They remain optimistic and motivated even without clear and consistent support
- They see the future as bright and this vision could be achievable if they can get clear and consistent support and guidance
- They need better messaging about what an “acceptable career” is: narrow definitions will narrow how they dream
- They want acknowledgement that college is financially well out of reach for a majority of the youth in underserved communities. They know this early on. In the absence of a promise for free college, they want adults to stop pitching college as the only goal after high school.
- If we want all youth to go to college, we have to provide the resources for college
- Youth in underserved communities need more exposure to different career paths
- Most youth are aware of only a handful of jobs; if we want to tell them that college is important, we need to show them all the jobs available

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