



'Ohana is Forever

RefleXtions: Honoring Our Past, Present, and Future

July 15, 2016 • Ko'olau Ballrooms • Kaneohe • Hawai'i

Keynote Speakers



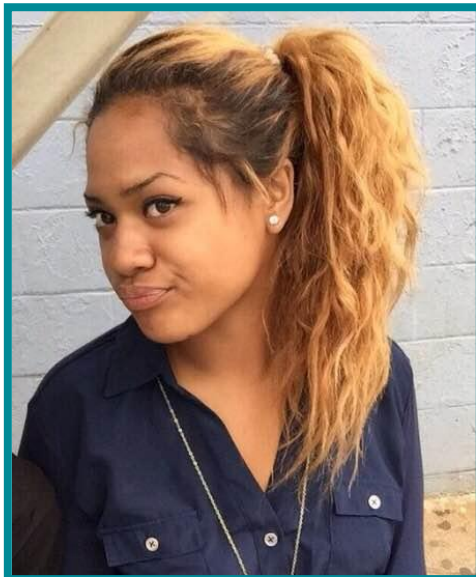
Makani and Brianna Kema-Kalewahea both grew up in Hawai'i. Makani was adopted from foster care into an adoptive family of six children, including his brother, a female cousin and three other boys. All the children suffered abuse in the home, which continued after the family moved to Arizona. At age 18, Makani courageously took action to protect his siblings and stop the abuse, then made sacrifices to become their caregiver so they would not be separated in the child welfare system. He created a home for the children while he was a full-time student playing on his college football team. His high school sweetheart, Brianna, moved to Arizona, and together they cared for the younger siblings after becoming licensed foster parents at only 19 years old. With assistance and support from various organizations and individuals, the couple found extended family members who wanted to help. The three oldest children were fostered by these extended family members in Washington and Texas. Makani and Brianna married in 2014 and adopted the two youngest children. Shortly after the adoption, the family moved back to Hawai'i. Makani and Brianna are continuing their education at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and they strive to become advocates and examples of "malama kekahi i kekahi" (caring for one another), pono (justice), 'ohana (family), and aloha (compassion).

Emcee Information



Keola Limkin (Ola) is a former foster youth. Always admiring the beautiful yet deadly Wailuku River, he grew up in Hilo, Hawai‘i along side of five younger brothers and a younger sister. Ola and his siblings were split into three separate homes when he was 15. As the hānau mua (oldest child), he took up the responsibility of excelling at Hilo High School and at household duties. Even though high school years evoked some suicidal ideation, Keola focused on his mission to serve his community and to be a blessing to others.

In 2015, Keola graduated from the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo with his bachelor’s degree in psychology and communication. He has served on the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board for over 4 years and is currently working as a WRAP Youth Partner for EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc. We are lucky to have him leading us today!



Lemuta Utu is 16 years old and currently in foster care. When Lemuta was 14, she started skipping class and generally getting into trouble at school. When she moved into her current resource home, her resource caregiver gave her, as Lemuta calls it, “the speech” about how important education is. She took this to heart and started attending class, doing the work, and found she actually enjoyed school. She finished a seven week summer school class this summer in just two weeks! Lemuta has caught up on her credits to the point that she is now able to start her senior year at Castle High School on August 1.

Lemuta is interested in pursuing work to help youth like herself. We believe she will be very successful in this and anything else that she sets her mind on doing.

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Conference Presenters

HI H.O.P.E.S. (Hawai'i Helping Our People Envision Success) Youth Leadership Board is made up of current and former foster youth between the ages of 14-25 from O'ahu, Maui, Kaua'i, East Hawai'i, and West Hawai'i. They provide the "youth voice" for the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative (HYOI) and serve as the Youth Advisory Council to Child Welfare Services (CWS). Their work includes advocacy for public policy and systems reform, education about the experiences and needs of foster youth and collaboration with CWS, Family Court, and other key community partners, as well as young people, to improve well-being and outcomes for all young people in Hawai'i impacted by foster care.

Bella Finau-Faumuina is an educator, musician, entrepreneur and a proud wife and mother. She is the former founder, CEO and Creative Director for Creative Native Crafts, a local Hawaiian scrapbook manufacturing company that developed island-themed craft and scrapbooking products. She's educated hundreds of people over the years on the importance of preserving personal and family history through creative mediums.

Dr. Jaiya John was born into foster care in New Mexico, and has served organizations, agencies, schools, and initiatives globally for 26 years. He is an internationally recognized speaker, author, poet, spoken word artist, and youth mentor. Jaiya is the founder of *Soul Water Rising*, a global human mission that has donated thousands of Jaiya's books in support of social healing, and offers scholarships to displaced and vulnerable youth. He is a former professor of social psychology at Howard University, has authored numerous books, and has addressed over half a million professionals, parents, and youth worldwide. Jaiya is a National Science Foundation fellow, and holds doctorate and master's degrees in social psychology from the University of California, Santa Cruz, with a focus on intergroup relations and identity development. As an undergraduate, he attended Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, and lived in Kathmandu, Nepal, where he studied Tibetan Holistic Medicine through independent research with Tibetan doctors.

Mervlyn Kitashima draws on her experiences as a teenage mother, mother of seven, grandmother of thirteen and wife of 39 years to speak at institutes; universities and colleges; state and national conferences on education, prevention, juvenile justice, and student assistance; and numerous schools, organizations, communities, and churches. Once labeled an "at risk" child, Ms. Kitashima was a participant in Emmy Werner's ground-breaking research referred to as "Kauai Longitudinal Study on Resilience." Mervlyn shares her personal account of the factors that contributed to her ability to overcome the odds, helping us to understand the resiliency research at the core of many prevention and educational programs, while discussing the protective factors shown to positively impact families.

Dr. Manulani Aluli-Meyer works in the field of indigenous epistemology and its role in world-wide awakening. Professor Aluli-Meyer obtained her doctorate from Harvard (Ed.D. 1998) by studying Hawaiian epistemology via language, history, and the clear insights of Hawaiian mentors. She is a world-wide keynote speaker and has published extensively on the topic of native intelligence and its synergistic linkages to quantum sciences, transformational evaluation practices, and to liberating pedagogy. Her book, *Ho'oulu: Our Time of Becoming – Hawaiian Epistemology and Early Writings*, is in its third printing.

Jenna Robinson believes music and poetry are the perfect tools to heal from trauma and grief, for they empower people to reclaim their past. After the passing of her brother in 2010 Jenna taught herself how to play over eight instruments and turned to open mics for musical therapy. She has performed across the U.S. as a street musician and as a member of several national slam poetry teams. Jenna holds a B.A. in History and Ethnic Studies from the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa. Her poetry performances and workshops are centered on cultural and queer identity, grief, trauma informed care, historical re-education, and community building. Jenna currently works for Girls Court at the Hawai‘i State Judiciary. She also works with several youth based organizations to inspire the therapeutic nature of writing and spoken arts performance and will be starting graduate work in the Expressive Arts Therapy program at CIIS this Fall in San Francisco.

Street Jamz Hip-Hop Mara Bacon Chang is an educator, dancer, and choreographer. She has choreographed for several artists and has helped people from all walks of life move, dance, and get fit for many years. She founded and is the director of Street Jamz WeRkouT, a fitness program that incorporates street dancing into a fun and cardio driven means to feeling good while WERKING out.

Judge Bode Uale was the first family court judge appointed in the United States of Samoan descent. He is currently the lead judge of the O‘ahu First Circuit Family Court of Hawai‘i Juvenile Division. Judge Uale has a strong interest in foster youth and has played a pivotal part in the ‘Ohana is Forever conferences. He was raised in Laie, Hawai‘i and graduated with a degree in political science from Brigham Young University–Hawai‘i and later earned a Juris Doctorate in 1984 from the University of Hawai‘i . Uale and his wife are the parents of four children.

Mama T is a passionate advocate of using sustainable practices to grow food organically and use food as medicine. "Ancient ways in modern days" is her motto. She was brought to Hawai‘i 12 years ago from San Diego on a singing tour. She quickly fell in love with the islands, the people, and the Aloha way of life, and feels very blessed to call Hawai‘i home. She teaches *FOOD as Medicine* classes throughout the islands and opens her own pop up restaurant every Friday, called Mama T’s Ital Kitchen. She’s a private chef for celebrity clients and feeds the houseless once a month at the Next Step Shelter in Kaka‘ako. Mama T has a background in early child development and directed inner-city youth programs in San Francisco and San Diego. Her passion is to teach healthy ways to eat and live and advocates that choosing native foods free of pesticides or processed with chemicals is imperative for sustainable health.

Rachael Wong, Director of the Hawai‘i Department of Human Services, received degrees from Princeton University, the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Rachael is committed to open communication, accountability, honesty, and respect for all. These values and commitments are coupled with the goal that guides almost everything she does professionally and personally: to improve quality of life for others.

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