

TESTIMONY from Anastasia Neumann

Aloha everyone, my name is Anastasia Neumann, I am 21 years old and spent around four years in the juvenile justice system as well as foster care in Hawai'i before I emancipated at age 18.

Where are you now?

I currently serve on the JJSAC (Juvenile Justice State Advisory Council) as the chair of the youth committee. I also work at EPIC 'Ohana full-time as the Pono Process Navigator (alongside Melissa, who is the lead) and I'm also the President of the Oahu HI HOPES Youth Leadership Board.

Challenges faced?

Like most youth involved in any system, I faced many challenges.... For me, being a dual involved in two system made it even more difficult.

Unlike and like so many youths, I didn't have much family and being in the system wasn't of interest to me. I bounced around a lot I went from homelessness to group homes, and ultimately ended up in a juvenile detention facility.

Did you know?

Once a young person is arrested even for non-violent crime or status offense, they are more likely to remain involved in the juvenile justice system which may also increase the likelihood of involvement in the adult criminal justice system. This is why diversion is important!

Native Hawaiians are overrepresented in the juvenile justice's system. Almost 45% of young people in the system are Native Hawaiian. They have historically been arrested, incarcerated and on probations at higher rates than other ethnic groups.

As a more healed adult reflecting on my past experiences, I now realized I felt lost and hopeless and craved the sense of belonging to people, aina (land), and community.

What worked well?

Although there were many challenges, there was also many things that worked well.

After I was released from the detention center, I was placed into a group home and needed to be enrolled into school once again.

There I was placed at Kapolei High School in the Ho'ola Leadership Academy which is a Hawaiian Studies and Natural Resources based program. At the time, this was something I didn't know I needed but being connected to a school who values aligned with my own personal ones really touched me. As a result, I become an honor roll student, graduated on time, became active in my communities, and even started a career based on the very thing that held me back for so long.

I am 25% Native American and I have no Hawaiian blood in me, yet I identify heavily with the roots and traditions my family planted here long ago. Without the consistent love and support of everyone around me I wouldn't be as grounded and sure of who I am as I am today.

Another factor in my success was having a dual team juvenile and Child welfare work so closely and well together. This allowed for consistent and reliable information, which in turn assisted in tasks being completed expeditiously. This also allowed me the opportunity to build genuine relationships with my team including the judge, which again, assisted me in and allowed me to feel comfortable enough to show up to court, be informed of what's going on and advocate for myself.

Recommendations I have today:

*Involve youth in their court hearings and encourage youth to learn about self-advocacy and implementing that into their daily lives.

*Invest in diversion programs and early intervention strategies that are culture and community based.

This also reduces the stigma around juvenile justice system involvement, reduces the likelihood of future contact with law-enforcement, reduces court caseloads, detentions, out-of-home placements and improves

relations between youth, community, and systems.

It also reduces costs by preserve resources for youth who pose a greater public safety risk or have greater needs for services.

Thank you so much for you time and listening today!