

Hawaii 24/7

Waimea Student Shares Sustainable Summit Experiences

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Six days isn't a viable window of time in which to develop a plan to change the world. Neither is six months, six years, or even six decades.

Those involved in the Youth Leadership Summit for Sustainable Development, though, are an indomitable force in spurring the conversations that will contribute in various ways to global change.

I'm absolutely sure of this because they already have.

This weeklong Summit was an opportunity for sharing -- of places, cultures, and approaches to innovative thinking and acting. What left the greatest impression on me was the realization of the innate commonality inherent among island peoples, regardless of geographical location.

All of us youth shared a unique perspective on our islands, whether Martha's Vineyard, Vieques, or Hawaii, that was reflected in our lifestyles and our histories. This common ground was a springboard for starting conversations and building connections across the oceans that separate and define us.

As we discussed being bound by the sea, further reinforced the necessity of our accelerated transition toward self-sufficiency.

I was floored by the fact that Martha's Vineyard boasts no national franchises or chains. Contrary to popular belief in these golden days, McDonald's is not essential to survival.

This holds promise to a gradual transition towards increasing local business to stimulate island economies, allowing a rare opportunity for the tourist industry to support the people who make its existence possible.

We were presented with the chance to share all of our cultures at the summit and thus gained insight into the journeys, struggles, and accomplishments of the resident natives of the Wampanoag Tribe; the fragile grasp that Viequesenses try to maintain their Taino roots, and even the difficulty facing African-Americans in identifying a clear cultural foundation, for their long-term heritage.

Discussing how to sustain our culture stirred in me a deep sense of gratitude for my kulaiwi (my homeland) and the people who have given me the desire to be an active participant in the preservation of Hawaii, a place steeped in tradition and an unwavering cultural identity.

I feel so fortunate to have this perennial foundation as a definitive aspect of my personality. Realizing this only lit the fire within me to learn and share all that I can.

I was astonished by everyone's responsiveness to the sharing of Hawai's island traditions. It was very encouraging and humorous at times to be among people eager to make lei, or learn an oli, or try li hing mui for the first time.

This open-minded willingness really facilitated the breaking down of barriers. It was the basis for the bonds that are the lasting result of our collective experience.

This spirit of enthusiasm also permeated the individual goals we set for ourselves, our island, and our world. Every delegate has goals, which may not be set in stone, but that they exist at all is what is most important.

As a person not yet sure of my path I was inspired by the ambitions of my peers, some to work in local agribusiness, be a pediatrician, and even one day become president.

The clarification and vocalization, rather than the solidification of these dreams is the goal of the Summit, which serves as an environment in which we shared our hopes and began to create a plan towards bringing them to fruition.

At the center of this Summit were the ideas of improvement and evolution, whether in the area of environmental sustainability, global relations and standards of living, or personal five-year planning. In less than a week I feel like I was given greater visibility into the type of world that I want to be a part of building.

The type of world that will grow slowly in the midst of global conflict, but will grow nonetheless if the voices represented at this Summit are the ones building it.

We talked often about the seventh generation, and assessing our actions as they affect our successors hundreds of years into the future. The people involved in this summit really put that into perspective for me and made me think about the past and how we are the seventh generation once carefully, or perhaps not so carefully considered by our own ancestors.

The results of their actions have been manifested in the lives we lead today and this makes me contemplate more closely the future I want to be instrumental in creating for those forthcoming.

Our actions bear a much greater weight than we think and this Summit experience has impressed upon me a desire to enact the positive existence that will define this generation as the people who thought about and made changes to not only accommodate, but to shape the future.

-- Makana Tavares, KANU (Kanu o ka Aina Learning Ohana), Waimea

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