

Theory of Social Change

Growing up in Hawai‘i, I was immersed in a multicultural environment rich with diversity, collective care, and cultural pride. But beneath the aloha spirit and tight-knit community, I witnessed systemic inequities—poverty, cultural erasure, and intergenerational trauma that disproportionately affected Indigenous and immigrant families. Moving to Massachusetts for college didn’t distance me from these realities—it sharpened my awareness of them. The displacement I saw in gentrified Boston neighborhoods echoed what I had seen back home. The cultural disconnection among immigrant youth mirrored my family’s negotiations with identity and belonging. These parallels sparked a fire for justice, not just as an abstract ideal but a daily practice.

My commitment to social change is grounded in addressing the intersecting injustices of poverty, cultural loss, and systemic neglect, especially toward multicultural and multilingual communities. Through my studies in Psychology and Community, Youth, and Educational Studies (CYES), I’ve learned how early trauma, educational disparities, and institutional racism compound to create intergenerational barriers. But I’ve also understood that healing and transformation are possible, mainly when the community leads.

My journey has always been deeply personal. I didn’t grow up with the luxury of a carefree childhood. From a young age, I had to take on adult responsibilities: cooking for my family, managing medications, and driving to doctor’s appointments, all while keeping up with school and social life. I had to choose between caring for my elders and attending a friend’s party—learning early on that love often looks like sacrifice. These moments shaped not just my capacity for care but also my understanding of how much families like mine shoulder, often invisibly.

I've come to believe that care itself is a radical act. When we tend to one another, especially across lines of marginalization, we resist systems that thrive on neglect. That belief led me to co-found a grassroots organization supporting low-income families in partnership with local nonprofits. We've raised funds and resources—technology, school supplies, clothes—for over 200 families through this. This work affirmed what I already knew: that meaningful change starts in community, with relationships, trust, and shared responsibility. It reminded me that even in a “fucked-up” world, we can be part of the solution.

I also serve as a Lead Counselor Coordinator at Winner's Camp: The Hawai'i Leadership Academy, where I work with youth from foster homes or difficult life circumstances. Through ropes courses, empowerment sessions, and cultural learning, we help teens reclaim a sense of possibility and community. The Hawaiian concept of Keauhou, or “new beginning,” is central to our work. We don't just offer support—we create spaces for transformation.

My theory of social change is relational and intersectional. Structural transformation is inseparable from personal healing. As bell hooks teaches, love is a political force. Paulo Freire reminds us that change happens through praxis—reflection and action in constant dialogue. And Indigenous Hawaiian values like pono (righteousness) and kuleana (responsibility) guide me to think about justice not only as resistance to harm but as restoration of balance and care across generations.

My experience as a woman coming from a working-class household gives me a dual lens: I understand community warmth and institutions' coldness. I've navigated island collectivism and mainland individualism, cultural pride and the pressures of assimilation. This positionality makes me both an insider and outsider—a bridge between systems and the people they fail. Academic theory alone cannot teach the deep knowledge that comes from lived experience or

being in the story.

I'm exceptionally committed to uplifting youth seen as "different" because of race, language, gender, or culture. Too often, educational systems isolate them instead of affirming them. I've seen how English-language learners are tracked separately, how culturally relevant arts are dismissed, and how "difference" is punished rather than celebrated. But I believe these identities are not deficits but sources of insight, creativity, and strength. Recognizing this is key to dismantling the norms that perpetuate inequality.

I envision my future in nonprofit and community-based work, where I can support youth and families through trauma-informed, culturally rooted programs. I want to design curricula, influence policy, and build spaces where people feel seen, supported, and powerful. Social change is not just a matter of systems—it's about how we live, love, and show up for one another.

This theory of change is not final—it's a living document, evolving as I grow. But what remains constant is my commitment to care, justice, and collective liberation. I carry the lessons of my ancestors, the strength of my community, and the belief that even small acts of care can ripple into transformation. We don't need to fix everything. But we do need to begin—together, with intention, humility, and hope.