

CHILD SAFETY, SECURITY & OPPORTUNITY

Systems-Change for the Next
Generation Summit

THURSDAY, JULY 16, 2026

10:00 AM - 12:00 PM CT
VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM

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HOUSEKEEPING

This event is being recorded.

All registrants will receive the slides, shared resources, and recording link after the event.

Please ask questions and engage with today's event using the Q&A function.



WELCOME

Dr. Bob Sanborn

*President & CEO,
CHILDREN AT RISK*





KEYNOTE

Dr. Monique Miles

*Vice President, Aspen Institute,
Managing Director, Aspen Forum for Community Solutions (Aspen Forum)
Director, Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF), Aspen Institute*





The Aspen Institute · Forum for Community Solutions

From Survival to Belonging to Thriving

Building communities where every young person knows they matter

Dr. Monique Miles

Vice President, Aspen Institute

Director, Opportunity Youth Forum

Child Safety, Security & Opportunity Summit · July 16, 2026

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Think of one adult who changed the trajectory of your life.

Not because they had the perfect credentials, the perfect program, or all the answers — simply because they saw you.

 In one word:

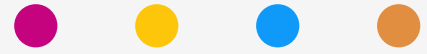
What made that person unforgettable?

Kind · Consistent · Hope

Believed · Patient · Safe

Love · Present

“Someone who stayed.”



Before any of us ever needed a system...

we needed a human being to connect with.

Organizations experience **systems.**

Young people experience

relationships.

Agencies experience **issues categorically.**

Young people experience

life.

And life doesn't arrive neatly organized into departments. It arrives all at once.

A YOUNG WOMAN IN TEXAS

De'Asia Wiggins

Then, our categories:

Foster youth · Trafficking survivor

Opportunity youth · Justice-involved · Disconnected

She moved through systems designed to protect children — yet often required children to navigate those systems themselves.

Today, who she's becoming:

Studying political science.

Providing therapeutic services to young people.

Shaping national policy to prevent exploitation.

She hopes to transform foster-care so the next generation has a different experience than she did.

WHAT CHANGED

Someone asked a different question

INSTEAD OF...

“What's wrong with you?”

THEY ASKED...

“What gifts do you have that the rest of the world needs?”

Every movement for justice begins when we stop defining people by what they've survived — and start investing in who they can become.

What would it take for every young person to know that they matter and be supported to thrive?

40+ communities

across urban, rural, and Indigenous, places — reconnecting young people to education, employment, purpose, and civic life through the Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Forum.

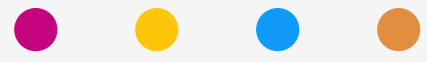
Here in Texas

The Texas Opportunity Youth Network brings this work alive — Amarillo, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, the Rio Grande Valley, San Antonio, and beyond. When adults work together, young people together it's possible to transform the future.



Young people do not experience systems. **They experience life.**

Whether they are safe. Whether they belong. Whether anyone expects them tomorrow. Whether they can imagine a future. Whether someone believes their gifts matter.



Belonging is not simply a feeling.

Belonging is infrastructure.

When we build communities where young people are seen, understood, needed, and loved — every dream becomes possible.

Every young person deserves...

1 Safety

The presence of people who make you feel protected — not just the absence of harm.

2 Belonging

Knowing someone would notice if you didn't arrive. Being loved before you've earned it.

3 Healing

Trauma should never become an identity or only story. Healing lets possibility re-enter the room.

4 Opportunity

Real opportunity — education, work, housing, care, and the chance to dream.

5 Purpose

Not just a paycheck. A reason to keep going. A meaningful life.

6 Agency

Lived experience is not anecdotal — it is expertise. Govern alongside young people.

Never organized by agency

She didn't wake up saying “today I'm interacting with foster care,” or “today I'm engaging health and human services.” She woke up asking:

Am I safe?

Does anyone care about me?

Can I trust anyone?

Can I imagine a future?

Those questions are never organized by agency. Neither should our answers be.

WHAT'S ALREADY POSSIBLE

Texas communities are rewriting the story

Organizing around young people instead of institutions.

Amarillo

Brought together partners who had never before shared responsibility for these young people.

Central Texas

Grew from one county to seven — opening tuition-free ACC access for youth in Pflugerville.

Corpus Christi

Elevate 361 unites education, workforce, and justice partners in one place.

Dallas

The nation's first re-entry center for justice-involved youth — dignity over stigma.

El Paso

Centre Future welcomes young people 7 days a week. Hope doesn't keep office hours.

San Antonio

NXT Level shows what municipal leadership looks like for a city's most vulnerable youth.

From served — to leading

5,000+

young people reconnected to education, employment,
and critical supports through local innovation.

But here's what captured my attention:

**So many became leaders in their
own communities.**

Young people once described by what happened
to them are now helping shape what happens
next. That isn't just a program. That's democracy.

FROM THE RESEARCH

Narrative is infrastructure

The stories we tell shape the systems we build.

Tell stories of deficits...
we build systems that manage deficits.

Recognize their gifts...
we build systems that cultivate human potential.



Policy is love, organized at scale.

Every transportation decision **is a belonging decision.**

Every housing decision **is a safety decision.**

Every workforce decision **is a hope decision.**

Every education decision **is a purpose decision.**

Every budget is a moral document. It tells us whose future we believe is worth investing in.

Three invitations

01

Become translators

You hear stories legislators never hear.
Translate what you witness into policy
that changes what's possible.

02

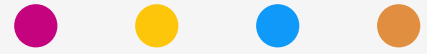
Become bridge builders

Young people live interconnected lives
— our systems should too. Collaborate
faster than problems compound.

03

Become possibility builders

Offer your imagination: see it in them
before they can and hold hope until
they can hold it themselves.



Most of us cannot change the lives of 500,000 opportunity youth.

But every one of us can change the life of one.

Communities are transformed one relationship at a time. One young person at a time. One courageous decision at a time.

That is how Amarillo changes. Corpus Christi. Dallas. El Paso. Houston. The Rio Grande Valley. San Antonio. That is how Texas changes.

Every child deserves to wake up believing...

I matter.

I belong.

My future is worth investing in.

Not because we changed one system — but because, together, we changed the story.

Thank you.



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Panel Discussion

Translating Community Voice into Action



Shannon Epner
Project Coordinator,
CHILDREN AT RISK
Moderator



Dr. HaeSung Han
Co-Founder & Chief
Clinical Innovation and
Strategic Projects,
Poetic



Stephanie Pienta
Director, Opportunity
Youth Initiatives,
United Way of San Antonio
& Bexar County



Felida Villarreal
President & CEO,
VIDA Careers



CASE STUDY

Systems Integration: Federal Policy & Child Risk

Krystal Gómez, J.D.,

Managing Attorney, Texas Immigration Law Council



Panel Discussion

Translating Community Voice into Action



Caroline Roberts, J.D.
**Sr. Director of Policy &
General Counsel,**
CHILDREN AT RISK
Moderator



Jason Sabo
Founder,
Frontera Strategy



Courtney Chavez, J.D.
**Director, Opportunity
Youth Initiatives,**
United Way of San Antonio
& Bexar County



Andrea Sparks, J.D.
**Director of Government &
Strategic Relations,**
Buckner International

**HELP US DRIVE CHANGE –
SHARE YOUR STORY TODAY.**



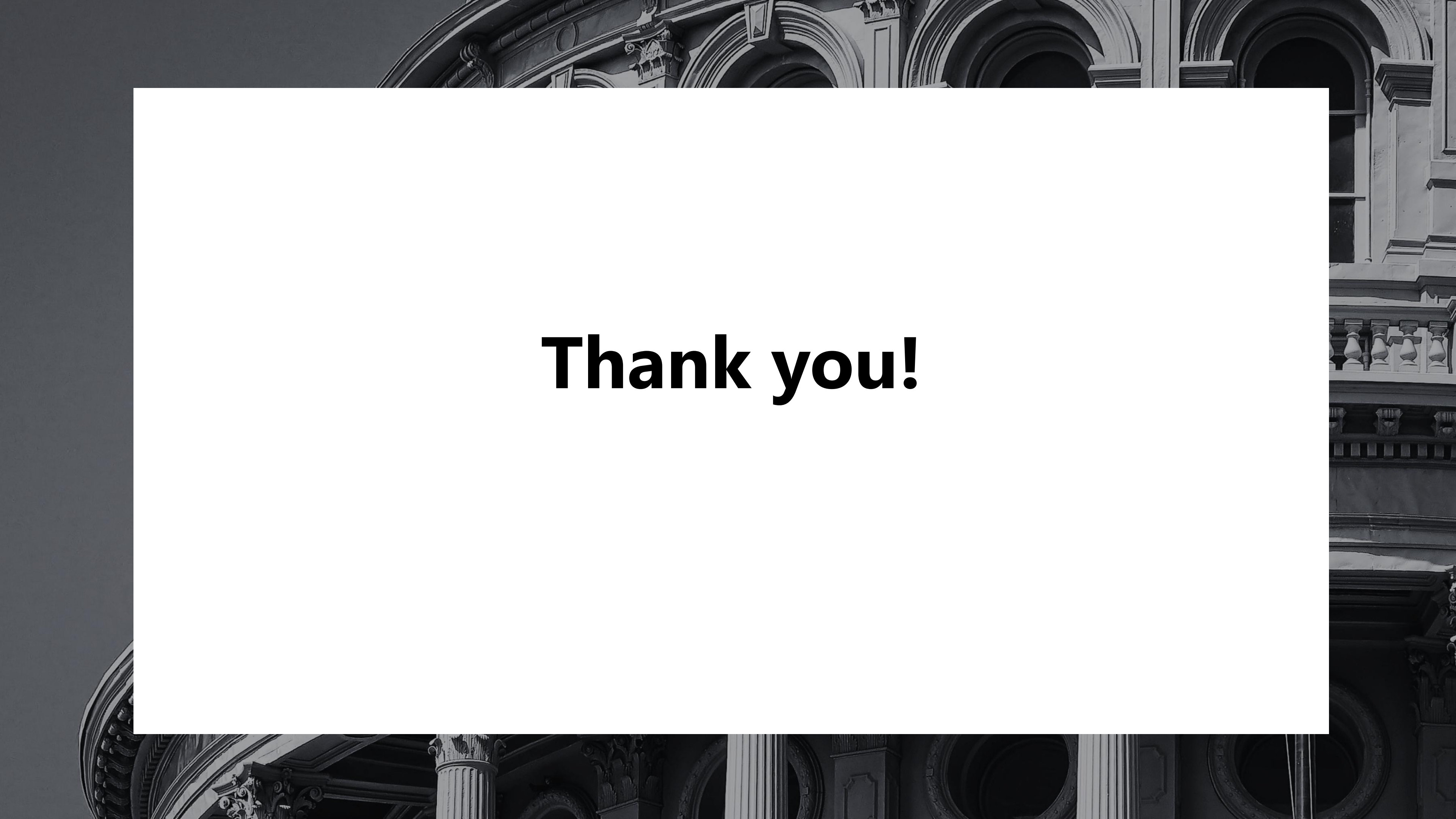
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**PLEASE HELP US IMPROVE
FUTURE PROGRAMMING BY
COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!**



A grayscale photograph of a classical building facade, featuring large columns and arched windows, serves as the background. A large white rectangle is centered on the page, containing the text.

Thank you!