

# HI H.O.P.E.S. ISSUE 12

## The HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative

The Initiative works to ensure young people who have experienced foster care — primarily between ages 14 and 26 — have the relationships, resources and opportunities they need for success. We do this by working with public and private partners at the state and local levels to improve policies and practices, promote youth voice and engagement, apply evaluation and research, and create community partnerships. Our work creates opportunities for improved outcomes and well-being for young people in the areas of permanency, education, employment, housing, health, financial capability and social capital.

## The HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board

The HI H.O.P.E.S. (Hawai'i Helping Our People Envision Success) Youth Leadership Boards are made up of young people between the ages of 14 and 26 who are currently in or formerly in foster care. The boards serve as the Youth Advisory Council for DHS-CWS and the youth voice for the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative. Their roles are to advocate, educate, and collaborate to improve outcomes for foster youth. They receive training, meet monthly, participate in the Community Partnership Hui, work groups, presentations, and events. There are boards on O'ahu, East and West Hawai'i, Kaua'i, and Maui.



Statewide HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board

## FOSTER CARE 101

Children and youth enter foster care through no fault of their own. Although safety and protection are the main reasons for involvement with the system – separation from family, and the life they knew can be traumatic and result in grief, anxiety and confusion.

Many children and youth are placed with relatives, while others go to general licensed homes or shelters. Large sibling groups may be separated and youth may not see their parents, siblings and other family members for long periods of time. They are often moved to new schools or neighborhoods and may become disconnected from their established social circles.

Young people in the system have to juggle their childhoods with visitations, new rules, restrictions, and many other challenges that come with being a foster youth. Since their parents have an open case with the State of Hawai'i Child Welfare System (CWS) and Family Court, foster youth also have to acclimate to assigned team members, such as social workers, guardian ad litem (GAL)/court appointed special advocates (CASA), judges, therapists, and other service providers.

Through years of experience in the foster care system, the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board members have navigated the ups and downs of life as a foster youth. As educators and advocates, we know first-hand the importance of knowledge, transparency, communication, and voice in the decisions made on our behalf.

Our goal is always to pave a better path for foster brothers and sisters that come after us so that they may live a life filled with hope, healing and every imaginable success.

This edition of the Youth Advocacy Document is aptly entitled "Foster Care 101." It highlights critical issues and supports that ALL foster youth need and deserve.



Presented by the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Boards, the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative, the Department of Human Services-Child Welfare Services and EPIC 'Ohana

## OUR VOICES



*"When entering foster care, youth don't know what to expect. They don't know what to do, so they should be informed on everything,*

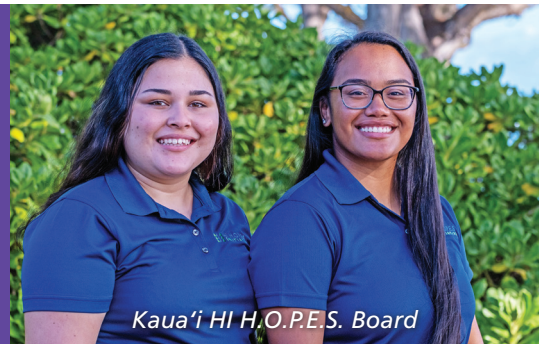
*not just the basic stuff.*

*The system needs to be updated and improved. It needs to be able to provide for youth, not just for placement. Social workers should ask youth what THEY want because they are the soul of the system. Speaking from lived experience and others who have been through it --youth in foster care have been through a lot.*

*I feel like the system didn't do its job of helping kids, especially in placing them in homes that are safe and comfortable for them.*

*Social workers should keep in mind that these kids need to know what is happening with their family, siblings, court cases and school. They need to believe that they were born with the ability to change a youth's life".*

## The Foster Care System



Kaua'i HI H.O.P.E.S. Board

## THE ISSUE

Entering foster care is traumatic. Youth can experience grief, loss, and fear as they are separated from home, family and often their neighborhood, school, and friends. In addition, the foster care system can be confusing and frustrating. Foster youth should have a basic understanding of the child welfare system as it relates to them. They should know why they are in care, their parents' case status, the roles of the case management team, relevant timelines, their rights as a youth in care and their legal status. Foster youth should also be informed on what to expect while living in a foster home, the plans for their educational stability, visitation and opportunities to connect with family.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Be transparent with young people. Keep them informed in an open, honest, respectful, and clear manner. They can "handle" more than people give them credit for.
- ▶ Communicate often with young people. Be accessible to them when they call or text. See them often and listen to what they need and want.
- ▶ Include youth in decisions made about them. Voice and choice are critical to their well-being.
- ▶ Treat young people with dignity and focus on their strengths. Young people deserve a team that is caring, supportive, and skilled in understanding and responding appropriately to trauma, healing, and the developmental stages of youth.

## FOSTER CARE 101: Who is part of the young person's team?

**Social Worker (CWS):** The State of Hawai'i, Department of Human Services Child Welfare Service (CWS), has temporary or permanent custody of a child in foster care. A social worker for CWS is primarily responsible for a family's case when they are involved in the foster care system. Their work involves case planning and timelines, arranging services for parents, facilitating placement and family visitation, and general well-being of children and youth in foster care.

**Judge:** A Family Court Judge has jurisdiction over a family's case and, in partnership with CWS and legal representatives (GAL/CASA/Attorney), has responsibility over the legal components of a case, including timelines, permanency options, as well as oversight over the children's well-being.

**GAL/CASA:** Court appointed special advocates (CASAs) and guardians ad litem (GALs) are appointed by judges to ensure that the needs and best interests of children or youth in juvenile or family court are fully represented. CASAs are trained volunteers; GALs may be attorneys or trained volunteers.

**Resource Caregiver:** A resource caregiver (foster parent) is a licensed caregiver for children and youth placed in their home through the foster care system. Their primary role is to provide a safe, nurturing home for the children, attending to day-to-day needs and work alongside CWS to support family connections.



# Court Engagement



Maui HI H.O.P.E.S. Board

## THE ISSUE

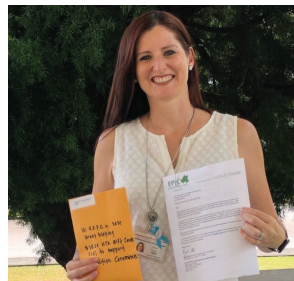
Foster youth have a right to appropriate legal representation, attend their court hearings and speak to a judge. They need to understand what is happening with their case and the roles of a Judge, GAL, CASA, and social worker, and a private attorney or probation officer if they have one. Engaging youth in the court process supports their ability to be informed, participate in their case, advocate for their needs and receive support for their overall well-being.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Youth need to know and be able to contact their social workers, GAL, CASA, and attorneys.
- ▶ Include young people in their case planning.
- ▶ Youth should know their judge and feel comfortable coming to court to speak to them. Judges likewise should build relationships of trust and get to know the youth.
- ▶ Help young people become familiar with Child Welfare Services and Family Court processes that relate to them, including court protocols and timelines.
- ▶ CWS, GAL and CASA should encourage, support and prepare young people to attend court. This includes arranging for excusal from school and providing transportation.
- ▶ Resource Caregivers should work with the youth's team to support young people before, after and even during a hearing if the youth asks.
- ▶ Don't underestimate or try to "protect" young people from coming to court. They feel powerless when they don't have a voice in their own lives. They know and can handle more than people often give them credit for, and have a right to be supported through whatever emotions they experience.



HI H.O.P.E.S. and EPIC 'Ohana worked with CWS and community partners to provide Pandemic Care Kits for youth in foster care.



Karlan Osorio, East Hawai'i CWS Section Administrator receives grant-making funds from East Hawai'i HI H.O.P.E.S. for Transition Court Ceremonies for youth again out of foster care.

## OUR VOICES



KEKOA

*"When I first entered care, I had no idea about the court process. I remember being 12 years old in foster care with my little sister.*

*She was returned to our biological family. Meanwhile, I went to an interim home and multiple foster homes after. I was lost, confused, angry and depressed. My social worker kept giving me false hope. My GAL gave me the opportunity to speak with the judge before court. That changed my life. I understood timelines, requirements, dos and don'ts. I learned more of my rights and I finally understood when, why and how to get back home ASAP."*



ANASTASIA

*"I think it is very important for youth to go to court, be involved in their hearings and speak to their judge. I had both a foster care and a juvenile justice case. I wanted to be involved in my case, be in the know, and to not have a middle person relaying information about me to the Court. It was important for me to hear what other team members had to say about me and to make sure that it was accurate because I experienced others saying things about me that were incorrect."*

## OUR VOICES



VANESSA

*“Having the courage to advocate for yourself is a good trait youth should know because what they want and need is important. They need to know*

*that they have rights in care because most kids don’t know about their rights, or weren’t informed. I know that when I was in care, I advocated for myself by knowing about my court case. I talked with my guardian ad litem and my therapist about things that I needed. Advocating for yourself is a one-man or one-woman job because others won’t listen or advocate for you even if that’s their job. I remember sitting down in school and always meeting with my social worker to ask her about things that were going on. In these discussions, I asked her about the things she did and did not do.”*

## Self-Advocacy and Rights in Care



O’ahu HI H.O.P.E.S. Board

## THE ISSUE

Foster youth have a right to advocate for their own lives and need supporters to help them do so. They need to be aware of their rights while in care and know how to access the Pono Process (the grievance process) should they have a concern about their rights. Having a voice is critical to the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of young people in foster care.



## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Ensure that all young people in foster care know their rights, as well as what and how to access the Pono Process. Have their social workers explain their rights and have them sign the Bill of Rights form.
- ▶ Repeat, repeat, repeat. Everyone on a young person’s team should know and remind young people of their rights. The Foster Youth Bill of Rights should be posted in court, in shelters, on social media and shared at meetings, activities and events involving foster youth.
- ▶ Youth partners can be very helpful in supporting young people in court and on their case planning team.
- ▶ Connect youth with self-advocacy training and ask them what they need and want. Listen, honor, and support them in making decisions for their own lives.

## FOSTER CARE 101: What is the Bill of Rights and the Pono Process?

### BILL OF RIGHTS:

All children and youth in foster care have rights. The Foster Youth Bill of Rights became law in Hawai’i in 2018. This law outlines rights relating to safe homes, family connections, educational stability, communication with social workers and judges, normalcy, discrimination and access to resources. Social workers must review these rights with a young person, age 14 and older, and have them sign a document indicating that they understand their rights.

### PONO PROCESS:

When a young person in foster care feels that their rights are not being upheld, they can access the Pono Process. They may ask questions, be connected with resources or file a formal grievance through this process. Team members will work together to address their concerns.

For more information, videos and for youth to file a grievance, go to [www.ponoprocess.org](http://www.ponoprocess.org).



# Normalcy and Social Capital



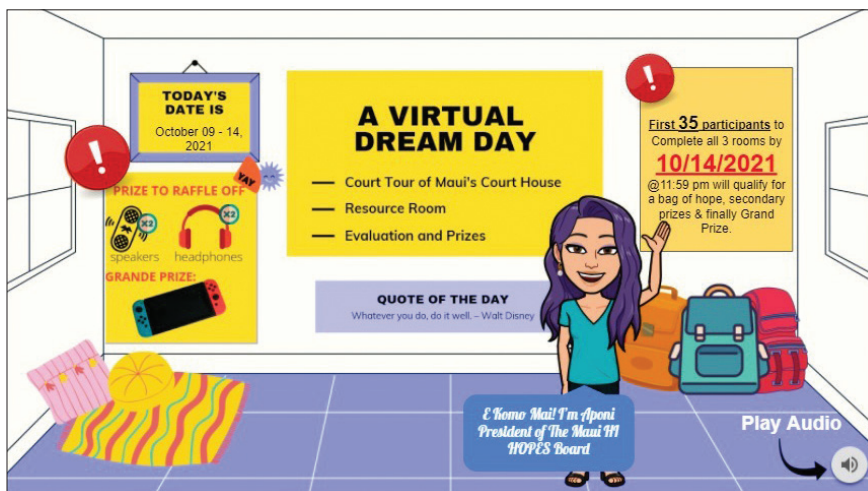
East Hawai'i HI H.O.P.E.S. Board

## THE ISSUE

Foster youth need a robust support system that includes biological and self-identified family, friends, and community supporters from school, sports, church, culture, work, etc. Normalcy allows young people to engage in age-appropriate activities and relationships.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Help young people build their social capital by allowing them to spend time with family, friends, and community members.
- ▶ Allow young people the space and support to engage in a wide range of opportunities and “normal” activities that peers their age participate in.
- ▶ Educate young people on their rights to engage in extracurricular activities and connect them to resources.
- ▶ Support and honor sibling connections.
- ▶ Provide normalcy/prudent parenting and foster youth rights training to all social workers, GAL, CASA, resource caregivers, service providers, and judges.



Maui HI H.O.P.E.S. Board held the annual Dream Day event virtually.

## OUR VOICES



MELISSA

*“I was so fortunate to have opportunities to create a strong social capital support system for myself through the church, school, and extracurricular activities. I now have incredible life-long relationships.”*



JESSICA

*“In foster care, sometimes that’s all you are to people, a foster kid. It’s a big label, especially in school. You can get treated like that is all you are and nothing more. Normalcy allows us to be something more because a label does not define who we are. Normalcy provides the feeling of just being a kid – the freedom to do extracurricular activities we love or to explore life.”*



DAYSHA-LYNN

*“Everyone talks about “normalcy” and how that may look like youth participating in extracurricular activities. But, not everyone knows what and how normalcy feels like to youth in care. Youth may feel like acting out at first or isolating themselves until they feel comfortable communicating. Resource caregivers need patience because they won’t always get the shy, smart kid. Maybe they’ll get a rebellious child. Normalcy needs to occur on the youth’s time.”*

## OUR VOICES



KHOLBY

*"When I was in foster care, I was never a part of the discussions about permanency and where I wanted to stay. When child*

*welfare asked the day prior or an hour before the court if I wanted or liked their plan, I would say, "no." Regardless of what you're going through in foster care, it is always important to speak up for yourself. It is important because your future could be decided for you."*



GERLYN

*"While in care, I felt like I wasn't enough. I knew that even though my parents didn't want me, I wanted to be loved, accepted, and*

*respected for who I am. I didn't want to just be "the foster kid" because I knew I am so much more than just a label. Having a sense of identity can help youth with self-worth."*

# Permanency and Identity



## THE ISSUE: *Permanency*

Foster youth have a right to understand their legal status, what "permanency" means, and to have a say in decisions made about them. Relationships don't need a legal status to be meaningful to a young person. Building and maintaining relationships of trust and support are critical to the overall physical, emotional, and mental well-being of young people.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Ensure young people in foster care stay connected with family and friends through regular visits, phone communication, social media, and other life events.
- ▶ Keep siblings together. When siblings are separated, ensure that they have regular, meaningful opportunities to connect.
- ▶ Involve young people in their case planning and court, especially when it comes to decisions being made about their placement and legal permanency.

## THE ISSUE: *Identity*

Foster youth can struggle with their identity while in care. They may be removed from their neighborhoods, placed with strangers, transferred to new schools, and separated from cherished relationships.

A sense of identity builds self-worth, confidence and promotes overall well-being. Foster youth need to be engaged with people, opportunities and supports that honor and help them develop their cultural, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social identities.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Treat youth in care as more than just a case.
- ▶ Support youth in care with exploring and practicing their identity.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for young people to spend time with peers, groups and activities that support the healthy development of their chosen identities.
- ▶ Connect young people with cultural mentors and activities that support their identity.



# Mental Health and Self-Care



## THE ISSUE

Foster youth experience trauma and loss. They have the right to safe, appropriate, and accessible mental health support and self-care opportunities that will help them to be healthy, heal, and thrive. Healthy relationships and activities, connection to healing cultural practices, and development of strong social capital can all contribute to the mental well-being of a young person.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Include young people in decisions being made about their mental health. This includes therapy, any prescribed medications, regular medical care, and evaluations.
- ▶ Relationships are healing and critical to the long-term well-being of young people. Support the development and maintenance of healthy relationships with family, friends, and the youth's social circle.
- ▶ Normalcy promotes the mental well-being of a young person. Engaging in developmental, cultural, and age-appropriate activities and relationships can support healthy risk-taking and healing.

### FOSTER CARE 101:

## Preparing for young adulthood

Foster youth often experience instability and challenges that can impact their formative years and their lives as young adults. Healthy relationships and strong social capital are important for young people. Providing post-high school opportunities and resources in financial education, housing, medical and mental health, employment, education, and mentoring, can significantly increase their chances of being healthy, stable, and successful young adults in their communities.

Foster youth who emancipate at age 18 may participate in Imua Kākou, extended voluntary foster care, which provides monthly stipends, medical, and case management until age 21. Other young adult resources include independent living (IL) services, higher education payments and Educational Training Vouchers (ETV) for post-high education, as well as Youth Circles for transition and life-planning.

## OUR VOICES



APONE

*"I truly believe in the value of mental health and self-care. When I was in foster care, I was in therapy, and it helped a lot because I was able to talk about my trauma. I did not take self-care seriously while I was in care because I felt that it was not important. Now that I am an adult, I take it seriously. I pamper myself all the time by reading books, taking my health supplements, and by hanging out with friends. I recommend that youth in foster care prioritize their mental health and self-care because they only have one body. Having a voice is also important because sometimes others won't know until you speak up. Even when you do and they don't listen. Do the right thing no matter what and don't stop until you are heard."*



Kaua'i HI H.O.P.E.S. Board Community holiday event





2021 - 2022 Statewide HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board

## 2021 HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards' Highlights

- ▶ Virtually attended the 11th Annual HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit.
- ▶ Broadcasted "Voices of Hope" fundraising virtual event from the Hawai'i Theatre to raise awareness and funds for the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative.
- ▶ Co-hosted the 15th annual 'Ohana is Forever Conference virtually.
- ▶ Coordinated drive-through and in-person activities such as Teen Days, COVID Kit distributions, Sibling Connections and holiday events statewide to support foster youth and their families.
- ▶ Coordinated virtual and in-person Board bonding activities.
- ▶ Held CP Hui meetings throughout the year with community partners on O'ahu, Maui, Kaua'i, East Hawai'i and West Hawai'i.
- ▶ Disseminated grants totaling over \$15,000 to support current and former foster youth across Hawai'i.
- ▶ Participated in several panels, presentations, committees, meetings, and task forces with CWS, Family Court, service providers and community stakeholders throughout the year.

## MAHALO TO OUR FUNDERS (2021-2022):

- Victoria S. and Bradley L. Geist Foundation
- State of Hawai'i Department of Human Services
- Hawai'i Community Foundation
- Atherton Family Foundation
- Stupski Foundation
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- The Davis Levin Livingston Foundation
- HMSA Foundation
- Bank of Hawaii Foundation
- County of Hawai'i
- Kamehameha Schools
- Hawaiian Electric
- Pamela and Scott Searcy
- The Wade and Harue McVay Family Foundation
- Laurie Tochiki
- Carolyn K. N. and Bob Y. K. Wong Foundation
- Carolyn K. N. Wong
- First Insurance Company of Hawaii
- Mutual of America Financial Group
- Arlynn and Michael Livingston
- Taketa 'Ohana Fund
- Ava Koepper & Koepper Kahiau Fund
- Pam Funai
- Earl & Margery Chapman Foundation
- EPIC 'Ohana Board of Directors
- HCF-Nadao & Mieko Yoshinaga Family Fund



Voices of Hope Broadcast from the Hawai'i Theatre



East Hawai'i Board Painting Activity



O'ahu Swag Bag for Virtual Painting Activity

Maui Board Bonding Activity



epichana.org  
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