

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS

FROM FOSTER CARE TO ADULTHOOD: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative (HYOI)* helps young people make successful transitions from foster care to adulthood. HYOI works with young people and community partners to improve outcomes relating to education, employment, health care, housing, social capital, permanent relationships, and financial capability. HYOI offers the Opportunity Passport™, an asset building strategy that includes a matched savings account.

Social capital consists of the network of relationships we have with key people in our lives (family, friends, classmates, neighbors, co-workers, etc.) and the exchange of emotional, social, and material support that these relationships provide.¹ People with high levels of social capital are happier, healthier, and more resilient to stress.² Social capital is important for the healthy development of all young people and is especially critical for youth in foster care and those transitioning to young adulthood.³ While in care, youth may become disconnected from family members and social networks in their schools and communities due to multiple placements, school changes, or time spent in group settings. Many foster youth experience trauma and loss, which interferes with their ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships. However, young people who develop strong social networks and lasting relationships with a caring adult or mentor show many benefits when they exit care, including better mental and physical health, greater self-sufficiency, and reduced risk of arrest.⁴ Making sure that young

people in and leaving care have the skills to establish and maintain stable and supportive relationships helps to promote their productive capabilities and improves their chances for success throughout the life course. As a result, recent practice and policy recommendations for transition planning call for a specific focus on building social capital.⁵

Using data from the April 2014 administration of the Opportunity Passport™ Participant Survey (OPPS)* in Hawai'i, we explored whether social capital is associated with well-being in the areas of health, housing, education, work, and financial capability. Our sample included 221 emerging adults: 116 were 18–20 years of age, and 105 were 21 and older. To measure social capital, young people were asked about permanent relationships with caring adults; the availability of emotional and material support from family members, peers, and community adults; and the extent to which they provide support to others. Young people with low versus high social capital were compared. We found that those with higher social capital showed advantages in terms of housing, medical care, and finances (see the reverse side for details).

Policy and practice recommendations to help ensure that young people have healthy and supportive relationships include:

- placing siblings together and, if this is not possible, facilitating sibling connections for those in and exiting care;
- facilitating consistent and respectful connections with kin and biological family members;
- connecting young people with a range of mentors, caring adults and cultural networks;
- encouraging normal, developmentally appropriate activities, such as spending time with friends and participating in recreational and social activities;
- supporting youth in care and emerging adults to develop relational competencies; and,
- providing resource caregivers serving transition-aged youth with training and education around trauma, social capital and the need for healthy risk taking.⁶

¹ Adler, P. S., & Kwon, S. (2002). Social capital: Prospects for a new concept. *The Academy of Management Review*, 27, 17-40; Astone, N. M., Nathanson, C. A., Schoen, R., & Kim, Y. J. (1999). Family demography, social theory, and investment in social capital. *Population and Development Review*, 25(1), 1-31; Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 95-121.

² Leung, A., Kier, C., Fung, T., Lung, L., & Sproule, R. (2011). Searching for happiness: The importance of social capital. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 12: 443-462.

³ Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2012). *Issue Brief #2. Social capital: Building quality networks for young people in foster care*. St. Louis, MO: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

⁴ Ahrens, K. R., DuBois, D. L., Richardson, L. P., Fan, M., & Lozano, P. (2008). Youth in foster care with adult mentors during adolescence have improved adult outcomes. *Pediatrics*, 121, 246-252; Daining, C., & DePanfilis, D. (2007). Resilience of youth in transition from out-of-home care to adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 1158-1178; Munson, M. R., & McMillen, J. C. (2009). Natural mentoring and psychosocial outcomes among older youth transitions from foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 104-111.

⁵ Golonka, S. (2010). *The transition to adulthood: How states can support older youth in foster care*. Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best practices; Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2012).

⁶ Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative (2014). HI H.O.P.E.S. *Youth Advocacy Document*. Honolulu, HI: EPIC 'Ohana Inc.; Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2012).

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH **LOW** SOCIAL CAPITAL

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH **HIGH** SOCIAL CAPITAL

HOUSING



43%

of young people, age 18 – 20, lived in 3 or more domiciles in the past year



72%

of young people, 21 & older, have ever couch surfed



55%

55% of young people, age 18 – 20, have safe, stable, affordable housing



24%

of young people, age 18 – 20, lived in 3 or more domiciles in the past year



52%

of young people, 21 & older, have ever couch surfed



74%

74% of young people, age 18 – 20, have safe, stable, affordable housing

HEALTH

34%

of young people, 21 & older, did not seek medical care when needed



17%

of young people, 21 & older, did not seek medical care when needed



FINANCIAL

CAPABILITY



91%

of young people, 21 & older, have a bank account



100%

of young people, 21 & older, have a bank account

53% \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$

of young people, 21 & older, had enough money to cover expenses in previous month

75% \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$

of young people, 21 & older, had enough money to cover expenses in previous month

* HYOI is a co-investment site of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. OPSS is a data collection tool created by the Casey Initiative and used by all its partner sites in 18 states. For more information, visit the EPIC 'Ohana, Inc. website at <http://epicohana.org/>. Suggested citation: DeBaryshe, B. D., & Stern, I. R. (2015). *Successful transitions from foster care to adulthood: The role of social capital*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, Center on the Family.



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