

# HI H.O.P.E.S. ISSUE 9

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

The HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative (HHI) helps youth leaving foster care become successful adults in their communities. We work with young people and community partners to improve access to education, employment, health care, housing, social capital, family relationships, and financial stability.

## 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 14-26 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 HHI. 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.



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



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

## MAKING THINGS PONO FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

On July 5, 2018, Governor Ige signed Act 105, providing rights for children in foster care.

**A "Pono Process" to Ensure Rights are Honored and Upheld.** The creation of a grievance process accompanies the Act 105 statutory rights. HI H.O.P.E.S. will work with CWS and stakeholders on this effort in 2019. It is critical that things are done in a right or "pono" manner for children and youth in foster care. The following core values serve as a guide when developing the grievance process:

- Youth friendly: Easy to access and easy to understand
- Youth voice/engagement: Young people heard and involved
- Free from retaliation: Young people not punished or removed for filing a grievance
- Timely: Action on the grievance process will occur quickly and efficiently
- Respectful and empathetic: Staff who handle the grievances will be respectful and helpful in supporting young people bringing the grievance
- Neutrality: Separate "navigator" to receive and field initial grievances
- Communication and Transparency:
  - 1) Youth and relevant parties notified of action taken and
  - 2) Results of grievance or request conveyed in a timely manner
- Accountability and Authority: Chain of command, panel or decision-making team can hold people accountable
- Confidentiality: The information about young people filing a grievance will remain with appropriate parties and not be used to disparage the young person involved.



HI H.O.P.E.S. and Governor Ige Foster Youth Rights Bill Signing Act 105, July 5, 2018



## HOPE #1 – HOUSING

Young people will have safe, stable, and affordable housing with access to transportation, work and school.

### OUR VOICE

STEPHANIE



*“Having safe, stable housing is crucial to all, especially for those aging out of foster care.*

*Utilizing the HI H.O.P.E.S. Match program helped pay for my down payment and first month’s rent to secure housing of my own.”*

NOY



*“Reliable transportation is crucial for me and my two young children. It helps me make a living and eases*

*the burden of an already hectic life. By having a reliable form of transportation, my children also have the opportunity to establish social capital by participating in sports and extracurricular activities. We are so grateful for the HI H.O.P.E.S. Match program for helping us to purchase our first vehicle.”*

SAMANTHA



*“I was very fortunate to receive resources and information for housing options through a transition plan.*

*Knowing that I had options for housing put me at ease and I could focus on my work and education.”*

### THE ISSUE

Safe, stable, and affordable housing should be a priority for all young people aging out of foster care. Nearly 19% of Hawai’i young adults with foster care experience surveyed in 2017 reported that in the previous six months they had either been homeless or couch-surfed.

Nationally, one in four young people who have been in foster care experience homelessness within four years of exiting care. Without safe or stable housing, young people may face challenges in receiving an education, finding employment,

accessing physical and mental health services, and reaching self-sufficiency and permanency.

Starting youth-led transitioning planning at the age of 14 will support young people by assuring the transition from care includes a place to live and a permanent adult connection.

Priority access to subsidized and private-sector housing should be provided. Access to transportation is important and connects young people to work, education, good housing and resources.

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*“Without safe or stable housing, young people may face challenges in receiving an education, finding employment, accessing physical and mental health services, and reaching self-sufficiency and permanency.”*  
.....

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Young people have priority access to safe and affordable housing on all islands.
- All foster youth aging out of foster care should have a stable, safe, affordable place to live and a permanent connection with a caring adult.
- Help us build social capital while we are in foster care so we have relationships and resources that can help us with housing when we become adults.
- Encourage financial capability so we can build credit. Provide access to

- programs that match for housing deposits, rent and utility deposits.
- Inform us of all housing options, including access to private-sector housing.
- Housing options should be close to transportation. Educate us about transportation resources and options.
- Ensure that social workers and other supportive adults provide us with packets that include applications and information about affordable housing and Imua Kākou.

## HOPE #2 – EDUCATION

All current and former foster youth ages 14 through 26 are aware of and assisted with their post-secondary education and higher education resources and vocational training options.



Tuan  
BS in Computer Science, Minor in Mathematics

### THE ISSUE

Education provides young people with more options for stable employment and increased earnings.

Nationally, only 8% of former foster youth complete a two- or four-year degree by age 26. Only 4% attained a degree from a four-year school compared to 36% of the general population.

In Hawai'i, one survey indicated that only 7% of former foster youth earned a two-year degree

and 5% earned a four-year degree.

Having adequate financial and educational support will increase young people's chances of completing a college degree, which will increase their opportunities and earnings. Adequate housing and transportation, support from counselors and mentors, academic planning and tutoring are important to their success, as well.

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Help us prepare for post-secondary education and training by helping us obtain our high school diploma or GED, filling our applications and ensuring that we know about all of our educational and financial resources.

- Inform and expose current and former foster youth to post-secondary educational opportunities in and out of the state, as well as the possibility of obtaining a graduate degree.

- Start preparing us for post-secondary education and training by age 14.

- Educate high school staff and the community about the educational needs of foster youth.

- Establish an education mentor for us at each community college and university to assist us in reaching our goals.

- Provide Youth Circles to help us with planning for educational pursuits.

- Provide connections to resources in the community and various post-secondary institutions to support us with counseling, tutoring, housing and transportation to promote retention and completion of a certificate or degree.

- Help us access, understand and apply for educational assistance, including Imua Kākou, higher education payments, scholarships, ETVs (education training vouchers) and financial aid.

### OUR VOICE

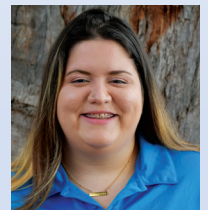
KEKOA

*“Education has always been a challenge for me. Going through the system, I have realized that post-secondary education will result in having freedom to live the life I’ve always wanted. Education is the way out.”*



MELISSA

*“Education is the key to unlock the door to our future. Thankfully with the help of Imua Kākou, I am able to obtain the support and resources I need to succeed in my post-secondary education. Through this help, I have been able to continue to pursue a degree in Political Science and Administration of Justice from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo.”*



PATRICIA

*“College did not seem like an option for me as a former foster youth. I am so grateful to have had the necessary mental, emotional, and financial support to pursue a college education. Earning my bachelor's degree in social sciences, with a concentration in psychology, opens many doors for future endeavors. This achievement also allowed me to show my daughter anything is possible through hard work, support and determination, no matter what your situation may be.”*

.....  
*“Having adequate financial and educational support will increase young people's chances of completing a college degree, which will increase their opportunities and earnings.”*  
.....



# HOPE #3 – EMPLOYMENT

Current and transitioning foster youth will be provided with opportunities to gain work experience and obtain job skills that will assist with future employment.

## OUR VOICE

TIFFANY



*“I was able to get my worker’s permit so I could start working when I was 14. Without*

*learning all the skills I did on my first job, I don’t think I would be in the professional work field I am in now.”*

RACHEL



*“I have always had multiple jobs that helped me gain a wide skill set. Through years of hard work*

*and learning new skills, I was able to start my own landscaping business. I am grateful for the support and opportunities provided to me by family and friends over the years. Without them, I wouldn’t be as successful as I am today.”*

PATRICIA



*“When I was in foster care, I was not allowed to have a job. I also lacked the proper*

*employment readiness skills, such as interviewing and creating a resume. When I didn’t obtain the job I applied for, I was very discouraged. Thankfully, I was able to obtain the job readiness skills I lacked and now have two amazing jobs I love.”*

## THE ISSUE

Most young people seek some form of employment when they exit foster care, whether or not they pursue higher education.

While in care, young people need the support and opportunities to gain work experience (paid or unpaid) so that they can find gainful employment and earn a living wage.

In Hawai’i, approximately 15% of young people who experience foster care are not working by the age of 24 and 45% don’t earn enough to rise out of poverty.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Help us build our social capital. Opportunities to build relationships in the community can provide us work experience and long-term employment.
- Mandate that vital documents be provided before exiting foster care (e.g., birth certificate, government ID, Social Security card). We need these to obtain employment, education and housing.
- Adults should be supportive in helping us seek and maintain employment. Provide employment opportunities, work readiness programs, training, mentoring, internships and soft skills training for us while we are still in care. Help us with resumes and take us to job fairs.
- Provide and advocate for us to obtain a driver’s permit and license, while still in care.
- To secure and sustain employment, provide access to internet, email and cell phones.
- Under the prudent parent standard, resource caregivers should be able to help us seek employment and obtain a worker’s permit and other items necessary to become employed.
- Provide resources and training youth need to gain healthy work habits to help them maintain job stability.

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.....

## HOPE #4 – HEALTH CARE

All young people who transition out of foster care at adulthood will have access to information about and receive Medicaid and dental coverage up to age 26.



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

### THE ISSUE

Medical coverage is a basic necessity for foster youth to become healthy, successful adults. Between **35% and 60%** of youth in foster care have at least one chronic or acute health condition that needs treatment. Young people in care have experienced trauma. As a result of that trauma, young people who have experienced foster care are **twice as likely** to have mental health problems and higher rates of drug usage.

In 2013, a Hawai'i Medicaid policy was changed to allow youth who aged out of foster care access to medical coverage up to age 26. However, many young people and professionals are unaware of these changes, and the resources that may be available may be going unused, even if young people are eligible and need them.

### OUR VOICE

APONI

*"As a young mother, I always worry about not having medical, but after I aged out of care, I realized I will have medical so I am able to stay healthy for my son."*



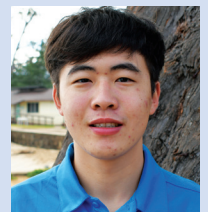
DEZA-RAE

*"Knowing that I am covered and have health insurance is super important. Recently, I found out that I was not covered and received a \$2,000 bill. Thankfully, through connections with HI H.O.P.E.S. Match program, we were able to recover that bill and I was reassured that I am covered."*



TUAN

*"My medical coverage was dropped, even though I was eligible until age 26. I want young people to have easy access to this information and hope professionals stay up-to-date on medical coverage policy regarding young people who age out of foster care. I am fortunate that I am a part of the HI H.O.P.E.S board which helped me reach out to the appropriate people to address this issue."*



*"Medical coverage is a basic necessity for foster youth to become healthy, successful adults."*

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide automatic enrollment into Medicaid and dental coverage for foster youth up to age 26.
- Social workers and guardians ad litem should provide information and enroll us PRIOR to our exiting foster care.
- Provide us with a resource card that includes the phone numbers and addresses of Med-Quest offices, with contacts who can help us apply, check on our status, or direct us to someone who can.
- Establish a contact person in the health care community to help us access services.
- Ensure that young people receive information about clinics that provide free or income-based medical services.
- Educate community stakeholders on new Medicaid/Med-Quest policy changes affecting former foster youth.



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

# HOPE #5 – PERMANENCY

Every young person will have at least one adult to rely on for a lifetime and a supportive family network.

## OUR VOICE

ANASTASIA



*"In January 2019, I made one year in my foster home and school. One year ago, I couldn't have imagined I would be as far along as I am now. I'm surrounded by so much support! I'll be graduating soon and having stability in my life really means a lot. I am thankful for the permanency and people around me that made everything possible."*

KRYSTAL



*"Having a permanent home really helped me build stronger relationships with friends, family, and peers. It also helped relieve some of the stress and fear of having to pack up and leave to another home."*

JACOB



*"When leaving my biological family, I didn't have anyone that I knew I could turn to for help. However, I now have both of my resource caregivers that I know I can turn to at any time for help. I feel so lucky to have support from them."*

## THE ISSUE

Permanency is having a supportive adult or a network of caring adults and peers while we are in care and when we exit care. It is critical to our success as young adults to strengthen our connections with family as well as adults who can serve as supporters.

Peer relationships with others in and out of foster care can be a significant source of mutual support, guidance and help.

Sibling connections are very important to us. Our siblings represent the longest, most enduring relationships we have. Maintaining these connections is critical to our stability, self-worth, emotional and mental health, and social capital.

Having these permanent relationships helps lessen our anxieties and fears and makes a traumatic transition into foster care easier.



*"Having these permanent relationships helps lessen our anxieties and fears and makes a traumatic transition into foster care easier."*



## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Help youth develop and maintain healthy relationships with a support network, including resource caregivers, who could be lifelong connections.
- While in care, young people should have intentional supports to develop their relationship skills.
- When a young person enters foster care, they should be involved in planning and deciding where they live, who their supports are, what their goals are and how these things will happen.
- Place siblings together in foster care. When that is not possible, help them stay in the same neighborhood or school and support efforts to maintain consistent sibling connections by ensuring frequent visits, phone calls, and other forms of communication.
- When appropriate, support adult siblings who choose to act as a legal guardian to their younger siblings.

# HOPE #6 – FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

Young people are provided with opportunities to develop financial capability through education and financial coaching, as well as assistance in opening a bank account.



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

## THE ISSUE

Young people aging out of foster care may not have learned how to manage money and may leave care without basic financial skills.

Many have difficulty finding housing, a job, and undertaking educational and training opportunities due to the lack of knowledge about financial resources.

Statistics show that former foster youth are less likely to have a bank account. One way to change these outcomes is to provide them with financial education and opportunities to save money through a matched savings account.

Financial training can help young people with financial management, access to mainstream banking and saving money for assets. Another way to change outcomes is to provide young people with a financial coach to help with their financial goals.

Young people who experience foster care should be afforded similar opportunities as their peers, such as having resources to rent an apartment, purchase a car, and attend college or other training.

Young people who purchase assets are more likely to be employed and have stable housing.

## OUR VOICE

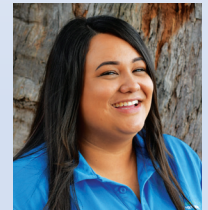
JASON

*“During my time as a foster youth, I was able to purchase my first car, a yellow Dodge Neon named Betty. But after I aged out, I wanted to attain bigger financial goals. With the financial literacy class I went to, I now am planning to move to Vegas when I’m 21.”*



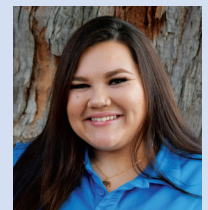
KAPUA

*“With the HI H.O.P.E.S. Match Program, I was able to pay off my student debt to my college and now have the freedom to go back to school when I’m ready. I’m also more aware about how to budget and manage my money.”*



BILLIE-ANN

*“I feel that financial capability is one of the most important factors to living a successful independent life. Unfortunately, youth aging out of foster care often lack the knowledge and skills to not only manage their monies, but also to plan for their future. Services like HI H.O.P.E.S. match savings allow opportunities for youth to still earn and save money while in care. They also provide guidance for those who take the initiative to seek a better financial future for themselves.”*



## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide us with developmentally appropriate financial literacy training.
- Make matched savings accounts and financial coaching available to all current and former foster youth ages 14 through 26.

- Secure funding for specific matched asset purchases that will assist us with our transition into adulthood. Matches should be provided for housing deposits, transportation, medical and educational expenses, investments, business start-up, credit building and credit repair.

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*“Young people who experience foster care should be afforded similar opportunities as their peers, such as having resources to rent an apartment, purchase a car, and attend college or other training.”*

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# HOPE #7 – SOCIAL CAPITAL

Young people will have lifelong, supportive relationships in the community that help them achieve their personal goals and help them to be thriving, contributing members of the community.



'Ohana is Forever Conference, HI H.O.P.E.S. with Hawai'i Community Foundation's Micah Kane and Amy Luersen

## OUR VOICE

VANESSA



*"Social capital is when you have people in your life and community*

*who support you in what you do. When I attended Moanalua High School, all my friends and teachers helped me to move on and helped me focus on what the future will bring. This is important to everyone in foster care because they all deserve the opportunity to have people support, encourage and nurture them."*

LALEA

*"Being in care and creating positive relationships with people helped me find a secure network of people who cared for my well-being and without them I would not be where I am today."*

ALISON



*"Social capital is such an important component in a young person's life. My main*

*social capital is my family. I am extremely grateful to have such a supportive family connection even though I'm in foster care. They helped me to continue to focus on myself and reach my goals in life."*

## THE ISSUE

In Hawai'i, recent data showed that young people with strong social capital had better housing, health care and financial outcomes.

Young people build social capital with their family, school, neighborhood and peers. It is essential for all young people, especially those transitioning from foster care into adulthood.

With the support of social capital and permanent relationships that last a lifetime, young people will build a strong foundation that helps them heal and grow.

Emancipating young people without legal connections and support leaves them vulnerable and can hinder healing and progress. They need support from family, peers, child welfare professionals and at school to help them achieve their life goals.

This support will expand their opportunities, promote healthy risk-taking and create healthy relationships that will help them achieve their goals.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- DHS-CWS, Family Court, Resource Caregivers and others should receive annual training and continued education around trauma, social capital, implementing normalcy and prudent parenting standards, as well as the need for healthy risk-taking and positive youth development.

- Ensure that we maintain stable relationships regardless of our placements.

- DHS-CWS and resource caregivers should support our participation in recreational, school, community, faith-based, cultural and family activities and provide reasonable funds to support these efforts.

- Help us to identify and nurture a wide range of relationships with adults, as well as to maintain healthy peer and family relationships that can last a lifetime.

## 2018 HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards' Highlights

- Educated, advocated and collaborated with key community partners throughout the year regarding improvements within the foster care system and supports for transitioning foster youth.

- Presented at 'Ohana is Forever Conference, Teen Days and statewide HI HOPES events.

- Conducted trainings and presentations for GAL/CASA, social workers, judges, resource caregivers and youth on foster youth bill of rights, normalcy and prudent parenting.

- Collaborated with community stakeholders to support legislation for a Foster Care Bill of Rights that was signed into law on July 5, 2018.

- Made grants totaling over \$15,000 to support foster youth across Hawai'i.

- Held eighth annual HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit on O'ahu.

- Participated in national conferences and meetings in Baltimore, Washington D.C. and San Antonio.

### MAHALO TO OUR FUNDERS:

Victoria S. and Bradley L. Geist Foundation

Hawai'i Community Foundation

Davis, Levin & Livingston Fund

Doc Buyers Fund

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Office of Hawaiian Affairs

Department of Human Services



epicohana.org  
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