

HI H.O.P.E.S. ISSUE 10

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 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 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.



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

Living a Legacy

A DECADE OF HI H.O.P.E.S.

In 2020, the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative celebrates 10 years of educating, advocating and collaborating for foster care reform, youth empowerment and increased supports for young people. HI H.O.P.E.S. demonstrates that youth voice changes hearts and minds and that youth-adult partnership results in significant policy and practice reform. Our HI H.O.P.E.S. youth boards set out to “leave a legacy” a decade ago, and they continue to live the legacy through their work, vision, passion, leadership, courage and community partnerships.

The HI H.O.P.E.S. Match program plays a critical role in the Initiative and provides concrete financial support for young people experiencing foster care after the age of 14. The program provides support through financial literacy training and bank accounts at the Bank of Hawaii. The Match program also delivers matching funds for developmentally appropriate asset purchases for education, housing, transportation, medical care, business start-up expenses, and credit repair. All HI H.O.P.E.S. board members become HI H.O.P.E.S. Match participants. Many have utilized the program to make asset purchases that help them live more fulfilling lives.



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



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

HOPE #1 – HOUSING

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

OUR VOICE

APONI



"Being a young mother and always being on the road, having a car was always so crucial for me. My first car was stolen so I wasn't able to take my son to his appointments and where he had to go. I saved up enough money to do a HI H.O.P.E.S. match, and with that help, I was able to purchase a car that I'm still driving to this day."

ANASTASIA



"Turning 18 in the foster care system is scary. There will always be that fear of not knowing what to do or where to go. Thankfully, before I emancipated, my social worker connected me to a case manager who has helped me every step of the way. Today I can say I am completely independent and no longer fearful of the future."

TIFFANY

"When I aged out of care, I didn't know who to ask about housing options. Luckily, my grandparents allowed me to rent from them until I was ready to find a home of my own. I worked before I got my license and my grandma gave me a ride to work. I saved money and bought a car in cash after I got my license. If I didn't have my car, I would feel like a burden."

THE ISSUE

Safe, stable, and affordable housing should be a priority for all young people aging out of foster care. In Hawai'i, sixteen percent of young adults with foster care experience surveyed in 2018 reported they had either been homeless or couch-surfed during the previous six months. Nationally, one in four young people who have been in foster care experienced homelessness within four years of exiting care. Without safe or stable housing, young people face challenges in receiving education, finding employment, accessing physical

and mental health services, and reaching self-sufficiency and permanency. Starting youth-led transition 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 crucial to connect young people to work, education, good housing and essential resources.



"Turning 18 in the foster care system is scary, there will always be that fear of not knowing what to do or where to go."



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Make certain young people receive priority access to safe and affordable housing on all islands.
- ▶ Ensure all foster youth aging out of foster care 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.
- ▶ Help us secure housing options close to transportation, and 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, transportation 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, higher education resources and vocational training options.

THE ISSUE

Education provides young people with more options for stable employment and increased earnings. Nationally, only 4 percent of former foster youth complete a bachelor's degree compared to 36 percent of the general population. In Hawai'i, one survey indicated that only 7 percent of former

foster youth earned a two-year degree and 5 percent earned a four-year degree. Having adequate financial and educational support will increase a young person's chance of completing a college degree, which will, in turn, increase their opportunities and earnings.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Prepare us for post-secondary education and training by helping us obtain our high school diploma or GED, filling out our applications and ensuring that we know about all of our educational and financial resources.
- ▶ By age 14, start preparing us for post-secondary education and training with youth circles, connections to resources in the community, counseling and tutoring, and other opportunities.
- ▶ Educate high school staff and the community about the educational needs of foster youth.
- ▶ Establish an education mentor at each community college and university to assist us in reaching our goals.
- ▶ Inform current and former foster youth of post-secondary educational opportunities in and out of the state, as well as options for obtaining a graduate degree.
- ▶ Help us access, understand and apply for financial assistance, including Imua Kākou, higher education payments, scholarships, ETVs (educational training vouchers) and financial aid.



"College, trade school or vocational training can lead to a career that helps young people achieve their financial goals and supports their well-being."



Patricia, Bachelor's in Social Sciences/Psychology

OUR VOICE

STEPHANIE



"Education is so important for everyone and helps open the door to increased opportunities. I earned my bachelor's degree in English and journalism, which set me up for successes in my field."

DEZA-RAE



"When I was younger, I never really knew about college and never knew that I had the chance to go. I am now earning a bachelor's degree, but without the help of higher-education payments, I would have struggled financially."

PATRICIA

"Education can be challenging for youth who have experienced foster care. Most of the time, we feel unprepared to enter college due to not having the proper resources. The key to education success for our young people who have experienced foster care is ensuring they are connected to all the necessary resources. They also need people they can rely on to celebrate their educational successes and help them get past roadblocks. I know that if it wasn't for my supporters, I would not have successfully graduated with my bachelor's degree."



HOPE #3 – EMPLOYMENT

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

OUR VOICE

TUAN



“My foster family always encouraged me to have a good work ethic. I had two internships and a summer project when I was in college. After graduation from college, I was able to find professional opportunities and was never unemployed.”

JASON



“In high school during Sophomore year I was lucky enough to learn how to make a resume and do mock interviews. As a foster youth my first job was at Wow Wow Lemonade in Kihei. The skills I learned in school helped me get the job I needed during foster care. Having a job helps you learn how to be independent by making and saving your own money after you age out of foster care.”

CHASSIDY



“During my time in foster care, I was able to get my worker’s permit to work at the age of 15 ½. I was given the resources I needed to navigate and build a great resume. Today, as a mother, having a stable job is very important.”

THE ISSUE

Whether or not they pursue higher education, most young people seek some form of employment when they exit foster care. While in care, young people will be offered support and opportunities to gain work experience (paid or unpaid) in

order for them to find stable employment and earn a living wage. In Hawai’i, approximately 15 percent of young people who experience foster care are unemployed by the age of 24, and 45 percent do not 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 (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, trainings, 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 in care.
- ▶ Provide access to internet, email and cell phones to secure and sustain employment.
- ▶ Under the prudent parent standard, resource caregivers should be able to help us seek employment and obtain a worker’s permit and other necessary items to become employed.
- ▶ Provide us with resources and training we need to gain healthy work habits and to help us maintain job stability.

“Steady and meaningful employment is a critical piece of well-being for all young people, providing necessary income, social connections, and personal pride and satisfaction.”

HOPE #4 – HEALTH CARE

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

THE ISSUE

Medical insurance coverage is a basic necessity for foster youth in order to become healthy, successful adults. Up to 60 percent of youth in foster care have at least one chronic or acute health condition that is critical to address. 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, the Hawai’i Medicaid policy was changed to provide youth who aged out of foster care access to medical coverage up to age 26. However, many young adults and professionals are unaware of these changes. Available resources often unused by young adults who are eligible and need them.

“Young people with foster care experience need access to comprehensive, coordinated, reliable and high-quality mental and physical health services . . .”

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Provide automatic enrollment into Medicaid and dental coverage for foster youth up to age 26.
- ▶ Provide information and enroll us PRIOR to our exiting foster care if you are a social worker or Guardian ad Litem.
- ▶ 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.



OUR VOICE

CALEYENNE



“Trauma is real. As a young adult, I was unaware of the impact trauma had on my mental health. When ready to face some of these issues, I was very grateful to have Medicaid coverage to provide me with the supports I needed to address my mental health needs and well-being.”

KEKOA



“I had many health problems that required attention due to a serious accident in 2019. Knowing I am covered until I am 26 is a huge relief. I would have had to pay thousands of dollars without medical insurance.”

PATRICIA



“Medical coverage is vital to a young person’s well-being. Knowing that I had medical coverage until the age of 26 and dental coverage until the age of 21 allowed me to take care of my health and well-being so that I can show up at my best for myself and my family.”



HOPE #5 – PERMANENCE

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

OUR VOICE

VANESSA



“Permanency is and will always be important to everyone who is in care or has exited out of care. I’ve been in two foster homes. Having been in care taught me so much. I’ve found my forever home after one year in care, and I feel like having this type of home and people to rely on is the most important thing in life.”

PRICILLA



“Having a permanent home provides the good feeling of weight off your shoulders and finally feeling like you belong. Also, knowing that you’re not alone helps your confidence.”

LALEA



“Having permanency helped me build a realistic plan for aging out of foster care. I was given the opportunity to be an active voice in my case plan. I was also able to keep the assigned workers who were on my case while I was involved with family court.”

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 with 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. Recent Hawai’i data showed that young adults who exited care and who lacked permanency were more likely to experience homelessness and have fewer financial capability skills.

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. Hawai’i data from 2019 showed that 35 percent of sibling groups in foster care were not placed together.

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

“Permanency is and will always be important to everyone who is in care or who has exited out of care.”

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Help youth develop and maintain healthy relationships with a support network, including resource caregivers, who could be lifelong connections.
- ▶ While in care, ensure young people have intentional supports to develop their relationship skills.
- ▶ When a young person enters foster care, ensure they are 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.
- ▶ Use a Permanency Pact, where appropriate, to ensure young people have adult supporters who will provide specific healthy, involved and consistent connections.

HOPE #6 – FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

Young people are provided with opportunities to develop financial capability through education, assistance in opening a bank account and support for matched-asset purchases.



Maui 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 other 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.

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, attend college or other vocational training.

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

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

“Young people who have experienced foster care may lack exposure to financial experiences and have less adult support than their peers . . .”

OUR VOICE

TIFFANY



“With the assistance of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Match program, I was able to come up with the first month’s rent and deposit for the home I am currently in and my previous home. It is difficult with the high price of housing, so the match helped tremendously.”

KHOLBY



“The financial literacy class helped me learn how to open an account and how to manage finances. The class also offered a matching fund bank account and so much knowledge about credit and balancing finances. You can use your matched savings for a lot of things. I totally recommend this class to anyone ages 14-25.”



HOPE #7 – SOCIAL CAPITAL

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

OUR VOICE

ELIZABETH



“Social capital helped me in care a lot. Patricia from the HI H.O.P.E.S. board helped me to do better

and always knew the right things to say and how to help me with my problems. My brothers also helped me a lot by being encouraging and proud of me. Without these key people and their support, I would not be the successful person I am today.”

MELISSA



“While in care and during my transition into adulthood, social capital was the key for me to thrive

when my home life was so uncertain. I was able to create trusting relationships with my peers and adults in my community.”

KIM



“Social capital is a key element for every foster youth in care and in life in general. Social capital is my

backbone, whenever I feel like I have no hope left in me to fight. I have my permanent foster family to lean on for help in where and who to go to for housing, support and encouragement.”

THE ISSUE

In Hawai'i, recent data showed that young people with strong social capital have better housing, health 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, young people build a strong foundation that helps them heal and grow.

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

This support will expand their opportunities, promote positive relationships with healthy risk-taking that will transition them into successful adulthood.

“Social capital is a key element for every foster youth in care . . . it is my backbone whenever I feel like I have no hope left in me to fight.”

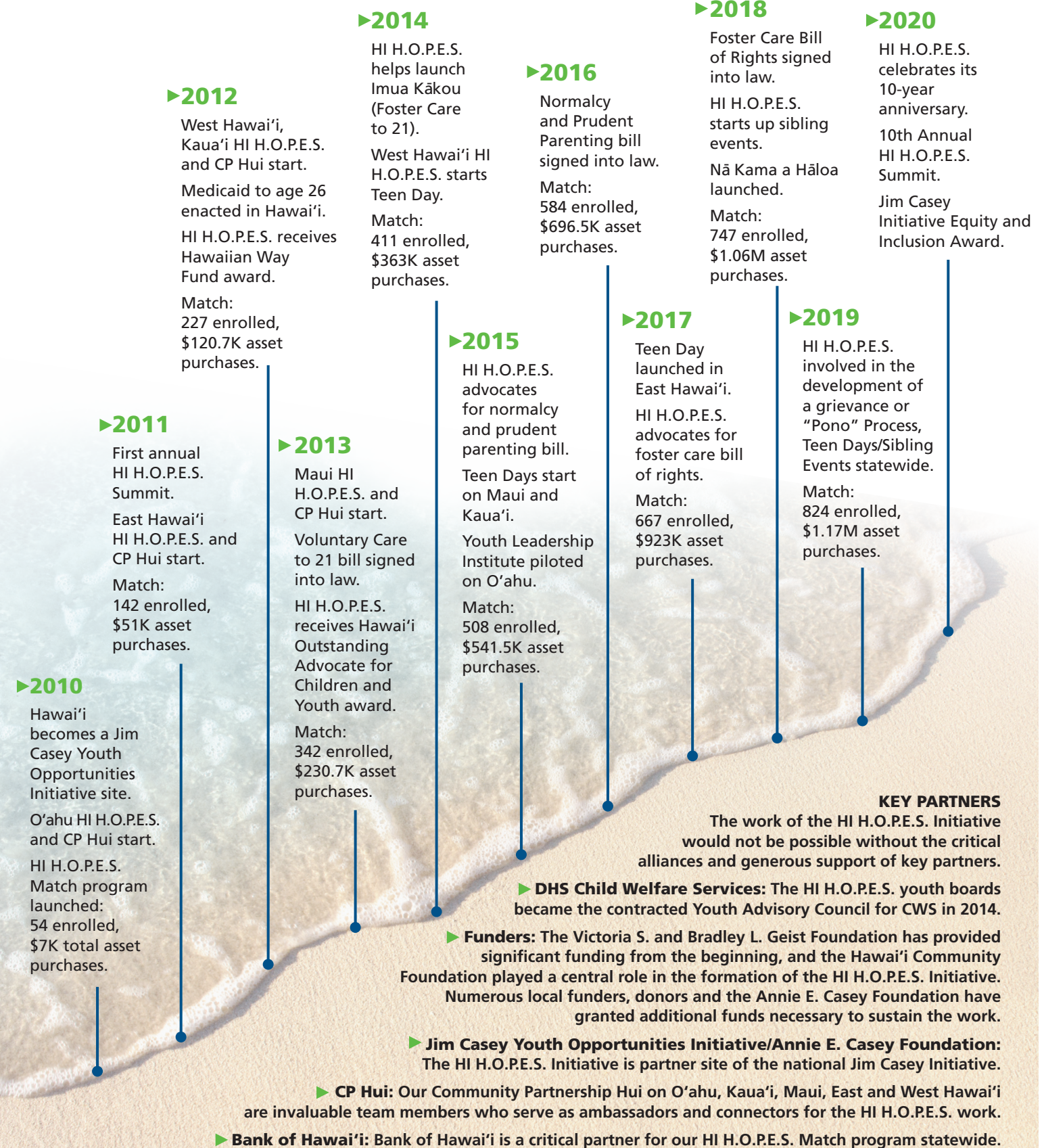
OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Make certain that the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the department's Child Welfare Services staff (CWS), Family Court, resource caregivers and others receive annual training and continued education around trauma, social capital, implementing normalcy and prudent parenting standards and the need for healthy risk-taking and positive youth development.
- ▶ Ensure that we maintain stable relationships regardless of our placements.

- ▶ Require DHS-CWS and resource caregivers to support our participation in recreational, school, community, faith-based, cultural and family and sibling 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.

Living a Legacy

A DECADE OF HI H.O.P.E.S.



HI H.O.P.E.S.
STATEWIDE BOARDS
2010 - 2020



2010



2011



2012



2013



2014



2015



2016



2017



2018



2019



2020

Living a Legacy

A DECADE OF HI H.O.P.E.S.



2011



2013



2013

Left to Right:

HI H.O.P.E.S. O'ahu Board members with Department of Human Services Director Patricia McManaman

2013: HI H.O.P.E.S. Board Members receive the Hawai'i's Outstanding Advocate for Children and Youth Award. Pictured here with CP Hui members, Scott Fujii (Bank of Hawaii) and Pam Funai (Hawai'i Community Foundation).

On July 1, Governor Neil Abercrombie, pictured with members of the O'ahu HI H.O.P.E.S. Board, enacts the bill providing extended voluntary foster care to age 21.



2013



2016



2018

Left to Right:

Celebrating the passage of the Voluntary Care to 21 legislation.

June 29, 2016: Governor David Ige, pictured with members of the O'ahu HI H.O.P.E.S. board, enacts the bill establishing normalcy and prudent parenting rights for foster children and youth.

July 5, 2018: Governor David Ige, pictured with members of the O'ahu and West Hawai'i HI H.O.P.E.S. boards, enacts the Foster Youth Bill of Rights.



Back row, L to R, Toby Taniguchi (KTA), Jeanne Hamilton (EPIC), Sossity Rapozo (Salvation Army), Robin Benedict (East Hawaii Friends of the Children's Justice Center), Melissa Mayo (HI H.O.P.E.S.), Kamaile Miyasato (EPIC)
 Front row, L to R: Raquel Gali (Salvation Army), Mark Galloway (CWS), Darien Nagata (Family Court), Mitch Odo (EPIC), Ros Viernes (CWS)

2019 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 H.O.P.E.S. events.
- ▶ Conducted trainings and presentations on foster youth bill of rights and the grievance process for GAL/CASA, social workers, judges, resource caregivers and youth.
- ▶ Partnered with community stakeholders to host statewide HI H.O.P.E.S. sibling connection events.
- ▶ Assisted in designing the grievance, or "Pono Process," to support foster care rights.
- ▶ Participated in "Nā Kama a Hāloa" efforts to support permanency for Native Hawaiian foster children.
- ▶ Made grants totaling over \$15,000 to support current and former foster youth across Hawai'i.
- ▶ Held ninth annual HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit on O'ahu.
- ▶ Participated in national Annie E. Casey seminars in Baltimore and D.C.



2020 HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit



'Ohana is Forever 2019

MAHALO TO OUR FUNDERS:

- Victoria S. and Bradley L. Geist Foundation
- Hawai'i Community Foundation
- Department of Human Services
- Davis, Levin & Livingston Fund
- McVay Foundation
- Annie E. Casey Foundation

A DECADE OF GENEROSITY

Mahalo to our current funders (listed above) and donors and funders who have contributed to the work of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative over the past decade.

- Anonymous Foundation
- Bank of Hawaii Charity Walk
- Bernard & Susan Welk
- Bernice & Conrad Von Hamm
- Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation
- Dennis Palmieri
- Doc Buyers Fund
- Doc Society
- Giza Makana Fund
- Jack's Fund
- Jodi Lam
- Ludtke & Brown
- McInerny Foundation
- Office of Hawaiian Affairs
- Rotary Sunrise of Lahaina
- St. John's Episcopal Church
- Taketa Family Funds
- Tony Taniguchi Memorial Golf Tournament
- Walk the Talk
- Yoshinaga Foundation