

HI H.O.P.E.S. ISSUE 11

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 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.



FACING A PANDEMIC WITH HI H.O.P.E.S.

In 2020, the world as we knew it changed drastically due to COVID-19. From quarantine, stay-at-home orders, face masks, social distancing and uncertainty regarding the virus, to loss of jobs and, for many, loss of life, the pandemic's impact has been global.

People struggled with employment, housing, paying bills on time, balancing work and school from home, and separation and worry about loved ones.

Foster youth have been especially vulnerable for several reasons. Even without a worldwide pandemic, many young people in foster care feel isolated from their family, peers and community. As for young adults with lived experience, some often find themselves without the financial and emotional supports they need to thrive.

Despite the challenges of the past year, the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Boards navigated the storms of the COVID-19 pandemic with the same commitment to educate, advocate and collaborate for the well-being of current and former foster youth.

Meetings and trainings such as Town Hall, Teen Days, HI H.O.P.E.S.' 10-Year Anniversary Celebration and the annual 'Ohana is Forever conference moved to virtual formats.

From pandemic enhancement funds to drive-thru COVID Kit disbursements, outreach efforts pivoted to address basic needs for young people affected by the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

Throughout the changes brought by 2020, we worked with even more fervor and devotion to meet young people where they were at.

The Pono Process, which provides a platform for youth-in-care to assert their rights, launched mid-pandemic. Self-advocacy training was also developed and piloted, and community collaboration continued stronger than ever.

We are proud of the passion, dedication and hope our young leaders brought throughout one of the most challenging eras in recent history.

Mahalo nui loa to our HI H.O.P.E.S. boards and all of our partners who work tirelessly to ensure the voices and needs of young people are heard and honored. You bring us all hope!



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

CALEYENNE



"The pandemic has honestly had such a negative impact on my life. I think my mental health is at its overall lowest

that it has ever been. I was let go from my job (without) knowing if I would ever be hired back. Every day I feel like I'm waking up and trying to prepare for something that has no true end in sight."

ANASTASIA



"Going from contact with friends, family and coworkers every day to zero contact with anyone was a

hard adjustment. It started getting harder for me to want to do simple things for myself such as eating or brushing my teeth regularly. I needed something that I could rely on and vice versa. That is when I got my first two kittens, Noche and Onyx. It has been the best decision I have ever made."

KEKOA



"My life changed a lot due to the pandemic. I stopped working out for months and didn't spend much time with

any friends or family. This took a toll on my mental health until I learned to adjust to the new norms."

PATRICIA

"During the pandemic, I was able to really start understanding my mental health on a deeper level. The pandemic allowed me to slow down, as I was able to work from home and really ensure that I was taking care of my well-being in order to properly show up to do the work that I am passionate about."

Physical and Mental Well-Being



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

THE ISSUE

Young people with foster care experience suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at higher rates than the general public. They were particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many reporting feelings of hopelessness, anxiety and depression.

Those in foster care were disconnected from family, friends and other sources of social capital when in-person parental and sibling visits were put on hold. Additionally, social and community connections, along

with access to some medical and mental health supports, temporarily ceased or shifted with school closures and the move to virtual classrooms and health services.

Ensuring that young people in care — as well as those who have aged out of foster care — have access to mental health supports and connections to family, friends and activities is critical for the well-being of young people, both in life and especially during times of crisis.

43% of foster youth experienced a negative impact on their mental health.

36% of Native Hawaiian young people reported a negative impact on their mental health.

Source: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Opportunity Passport™ Participant Survey, October 2020

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

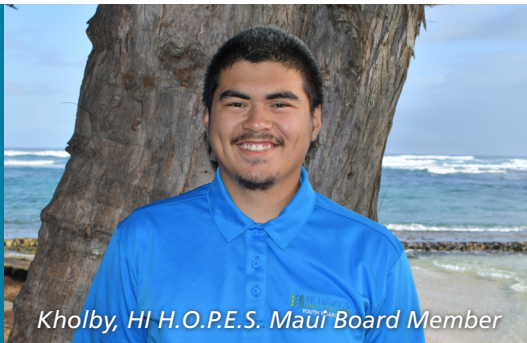
RESOURCE CAREGIVERS:

- ▶ Provide young people with reliable information about the COVID-19 pandemic, health resources and vaccines. Lack of accurate information and support may cause young people to imagine situations to be worse than they really are.
- ▶ Educate and assist children, teens and young adults on the importance of preventative measures to stop spread of the COVID-19 virus.

FOR SOCIAL WORKERS:

- ▶ Ensure young people in care have access to mental health services such as a therapist, counseling and other supports.
- ▶ Set regular check-ins with youth-in-care. Ask them how they are doing in their home and at school, and ask if they need physical or mental health support.
- ▶ Ensure young people stay connected with their family members in-person, when possible, or at least through regular virtual communication (mobile phone, social media, etc.).

Social Capital and Permanent Connections



Kholby, HI H.O.P.E.S. Maui Board Member

THE ISSUE

Young people in foster care experienced an even deeper level of disconnection during the pandemic. With stay-at-home orders in place, their visits with family were stopped altogether. Those who did not have access to a mobile phone or social media were unable to connect regularly with family and friends.

According to a national survey conducted for the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative by Child Trends in 2020, 30% of young people with foster care experience lacked access to internet connectivity during the pandemic.

When sports and other extracurricular activities ceased and education went online, foster youth felt more isolated than ever. If they were in homes that were not a good fit for

them, it was a particularly difficult time.

Building and maintaining relationships of trust and support are critical for the overall physical, emotional and mental well-being of young people and young adults impacted by foster care. Many of them lack strong financial and social capital, which are very important for young people to have in order to thrive and weather the storms of life.

Helping young people in care stay connected to loved ones and involved in healthy activities can yield positive outcomes in the areas of education, physical and mental health, employment, and housing as they become young adults.

“This pandemic has affected me by having to wear masks and social distance, being on lockdown, and having events cancelled, and I’m also not a big fan of connecting virtually.”

- Kholby

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Ensure young people in foster care stay connected with family and friends through safe and accessible means (e.g., mobile phones, social media, socially distanced activities).
- ▶ Support students with staying engaged in their schoolwork as well as connecting with counselors and other school and extracurricular activities, as appropriate.

- ▶ Check in with young people daily to see how they are doing.
- ▶ Be kind and positive.
- ▶ Provide supports for young adults to have internet access, mobile phones, laptops or other electronic devices needed for school, work and social connections.

OUR VOICES

KEVIN



“During the pandemic, I felt overwhelmed, upset and unsure of what to expect. I tried to do my best to focus on what I could do for others and myself to keep safe.”

JESSICA



“I feel like now it just feels weird to say hello and hug people who are close to you, like family and friends. I sure do miss that feeling of warmth and love without it feeling like it’s something bad to do. . . because I care about the people around me and their safety, whether I know them or not.”

PRICILLA



“When everything shut down and we had to quarantine . . . in-person visits with my parents stopped. When I finally got to see my family and friends in person it made me feel more grateful for them and made me realize how much I took for granted the time we were able to spend together.”

JENNIFER



“While I was impacted in negative ways, I had a great thing happen. During COVID, I was fortunate enough to have EPIC ‘Ohana’s help in locating my biological father. I discovered I have eight older siblings who welcomed me. . . I was reunified and finally felt a sense of belonging.”

OUR VOICES

TUAN



"The pandemic blew up in March 2020 and I was honestly quite scared because of the uncertainty of the situation.

However, there have been some ups. My workplace transitioned to a work-from-home format and that has saved me time with commuting. It also really gave me time to think about my physical and mental health, and that motivated me to pick up running again."

APONI



"I was very fortunate to secure my job during the pandemic and still be able to provide for

myself and family. This pandemic has tested my limits and my relationships, but I got through it and gave birth to a beautiful baby girl."

CATALINA



"COVID-19 has affected my life by losing a job I very much enjoyed in the restaurant industry. I have been out

of work for almost a year now and have had to go on unemployment for the first time in my life. I have, however, been able to focus on my educational goals and well-being."

Employment and Financial Capability



O'ahu HI H.O.P.E.S. Board

THE ISSUE

Young adults with foster care experience in Hawai'i were impacted in significant ways during the pandemic.

55% reported loss of employment or work hours since the beginning of the pandemic, compared to a national average of 39% for young people with foster care experience (Child Trends, 2020).

Due to financial hardships, living situations for many became unstable, resulting in housing displacement or disruption.

Economic instability also impacted their ability to provide for childcare and access basic necessities, such as food, utilities and paying their mobile phone bills.

Many young people who emancipate from care have experienced educational instability, limited work experience and disrupted family connections, making them particularly vulnerable during these unprecedented times.

According to a recent survey, 55% of former foster youth in Hawai'i reported a negative impact with their employment during the pandemic, compared to a national average of 39% for young people with foster care experience.

Source: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Opportunity Passport™ Participant Survey, October 2020

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Disseminate updated information about pandemic-related resources and assistance for young adults who have been impacted by foster care.
- ▶ Provide webinars, workshops and resources to assist young people with employment and financial support.
- ▶ Ensure young people in care have access to enhancement funds.
- ▶ Allow young people in care to have work experience so they are better able to support themselves as young adults.

Housing



Patricia, Kaua'i HI H.O.P.E.S. Board Member

THE ISSUE

The pandemic impacted employment for many young adults who support themselves. This, in turn, affected their housing stability, especially if they did not have family or friends who were able to provide them with supports for housing, utilities or basic necessities.

In Hawai'i, 33% of former foster youth surveyed indicated that they were short on rent during the pandemic, and 34% struggled with money for food and other basic needs (Child Trends, 2020).

Unemployment benefits took a while to get to many people in

Hawai'i. Although there were some community resources and a moratorium on rent payments in place, young adults were not always aware of these opportunities or did not want to be left with a large debt to pay when rent suspension ended.

It is very important for young people who have been involved in the foster care system to have access to education, employment opportunities, permanent relationships and community resources because all of these factor into housing stability.



"Due to COVID, my hours at work were cut. Bringing home money for rent, the electric bill and the phone bill, etc., became even harder for me to pay. . . . I get scared I'm going to lose my house because I can't make payments."

- Kimberly



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Ensure that young people emancipate from foster care with stable housing.
- ▶ Connect young adults with independent living support to assist with housing, transportation and other basic needs.
- ▶ Disseminate housing-resource information widely on social media and other methods.
- ▶ Educate young people on how to access and utilize housing and other resources.
- ▶ Check on young people in care to make sure their physical and mental health needs are being met in their homes, especially during a pandemic.

OUR VOICES

EHUKAI



"I was living on Kaua'i and my girlfriend, who was pregnant, was on O'ahu. I was fired from my job because COVID-19 shut down our store. I decided to move islands to be close to my girlfriend. The pandemic impacted doctor visits and her medical care. I got housing support with a local service provider and was able to get a job with EPIC 'Ohana and then with Hale Kipa."

DEZA-RAE



"This pandemic has affected me in a few ways: a decrease in work hours, feeling more anxious and sad, and it delayed my going to graduate school. Thankfully, I have been blessed to still live where I am at and do not pay a lot in rent. Though I was not getting paid initially, I did get paid at a later time, and with the monies in my savings account I lived off of it to pay my bills. I have a new job at EPIC 'Ohana. I realize that everyone is experiencing different realities now and I know that mental health and self-care is of the utmost priority right now, too."

KIMBERLY



"Due to COVID, my hours at work were cut. Bringing home money for rent, the electric bill and the phone bill, etc., became even harder for me to pay. . . . and I get scared I'm going to lose my house because I can't make payments."

OUR VOICES

VANESSA



"The pandemic impacted my life in a negative way. Online learning became a challenge and I was worried about graduation.

This was my last year of high school and I had to spend it at home. The pandemic also affected my employment, with less hours for work."

CHASSIDY



"The year 2020 has had a tremendous impact on our lives in all areas. From having to adjust to our

new normal with work, education, parenting to everyday living. Thankfully, I have employment, but I did become my family's main source of income. My education became challenging at times because of the distance learning for both me and my daughter, and working from home, but I am completing my Associates degree and applied for a Bachelors degree program for Social Work in Fall 2021.

MAZIKEEN



"The COVID -19 pandemic . . . has been both good and upsetting for me. It has given me time to evolve as a person in

a great way and going through this pandemic has also resulted in changes to my regular schedule which took time to adjust to. It has given me many opportunities to better myself and my mental and emotional health has grown.

Education



THE ISSUE

The pandemic presented educational challenges for many people, from young school-aged children to college students.

Virtual education challenges included low or no internet connectivity, limited or no appropriate electronic devices, little or no in-person academic support, decreases in positive peer connection and social engagement, and difficulties transitioning to virtual learning.

This resulted in low academic performance and widened the educational attainment gap for students from vulnerable populations.

In Hawai'i, one survey found that within seven months of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 18% of former foster youth who were attending college or other vocational and educational

programs were forced to drop out of school (Child Trends, 2020).

Students who are parents experienced difficulties with childcare as well as additional responsibilities helping their children with their own virtual learning and changes in school schedules.

Young people currently in care were particularly vulnerable during the pandemic because they were already separated from loved ones and may have had limited resources and positive outlets.

Prioritizing the physical, emotional, mental and educational well-being of youth in care is critical, as are educational and other supports for college-aged young adults.

"A Hawai'i survey revealed that within seven months of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 18% of former foster youth who were attending college or other vocational and educational programs were forced to drop out of school."

Source: Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Opportunity Passport™ Participant Survey, October 2020

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Provide resources for educational success, including laptops, technology, school supplies, meal programs, tutoring and academic counseling services.
- ▶ Ask young people what they need to stay engaged academically and socially. Provide study space and congratulate them on the little successes of each day.
- ▶ Connect young adults to supports related to education, housing, employment and child care.

Keeping Hopeful During The Pandemic

Maui and Kauai Virtual Graduation Celebration



'Ohana is Forever Invitation



O'ahu Board Virtual Paint Activity



Maui Holiday Event



East Hawai'i Holiday GiftBasket Drive-Through



HI H.O.P.E.S. 10 Year Anniversary Celebration



2020 Statewide HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board

2020 HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards' Highlights

- ▶ January: Held 10th Annual HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit at Camp Mokuleia.
- ▶ April: Hosted a virtual HI H.O.P.E.S. Town Hall that focused on pandemic supports.
- ▶ June: Organized virtual Graduation Celebration events for youth in foster care graduating from high school.
- ▶ July: Assisted in the launch of the Pono Process with Child Welfare Services to support foster youth rights.
- ▶ July: Hosted the 14th annual 'Ohana is Forever Conference virtually.
- ▶ September: Celebrated the HI H.O.P.E.S. 10 Year Anniversary with a virtual event.
- ▶ Collaborated with community partners to host virtual Teen Days throughout the year across the State.
- ▶ Coordinated drive-through events to disburse COVID-19 Tool Kits and holiday sibling packets in East Hawai'i, Maui and O'ahu to current and former foster youth.
- ▶ Disseminated grants totaling over \$15,000 to support current and former foster youth across Hawai'i.
- ▶ Raised and disbursed over \$11,000 of pandemic enhancement funds to young adults ages 18-26 for basic needs.



Maui Holiday Drive-Through Event



'Ohana is Forever Youth Panel

East Hawai'i COVID Toolkit Drive-Through

HI H.O.P.E.S. VIRTUAL TOWN HALL

A TALK STORY SESSION TO PROVIDE SUPPORT AND HOPE TO CURRENT AND FORMER FOSTER YOUTH DURING THIS COVID-19 PANDEMIC

★ ★ ★ Featuring ★ ★ ★
 HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Board Leaders
 Elladine Oleava, Branch Administrator, State of Hawaii Child Welfare Services
 Laurie Tochiki, CEO, EPIC 'Ohana Inc.

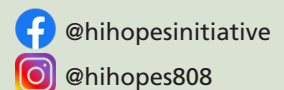
WHEN: APRIL 15, 2020
 TIME: 3-00PM
 REGISTER AT <https://bit.ly/39KmbZv>
 EMAIL hihopes@epicohana.org FOR MORE INFORMATION

THIS EVENT IS OPEN TO ALL INDIVIDUALS AND WILL FOCUS ON HEARING THE NEEDS AND VOICE OF YOUNG PEOPLE. ADDRESSING THEIR QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, AND SHARING SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES.



MAHALO TO OUR FUNDERS:

- 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. Wong and Bob Y. K. Wong Foundation
- Carolyn K. N. Wong
- First Insurance Company of Hawaii
- Mutual of America Financial Group
- Arlynna and Michael Livingston
- Taketa 'Ohana Fund



HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative 1130 N. Nimitz Hwy. Ste C-210 Honolulu, HI 96817

Jeanne Hamilton (808) 218-6875 jhamilton@epicohana.org
 Delia Ulima (808) 748-7052 dulima@epicohana.org