

2016

Edition

HI H.O.P.E.S.

YOUTH ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

6

The Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative

The Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative (HYOI) 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 capability.

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 Board is made up of young people between the ages of 14-26 who are currently or were formerly in foster care. The board serves as the Youth Advisory Council for DHS-CWS and the youth voice for HYOI. The board's roles are to **advocate, educate and collaborate** to improve outcomes for foster youth. They receive training, meet monthly, participate in the CP Hui, work groups, presentations and events. There are boards on O'ahu, in East and West Hawai'i, Kaua'i and Maui.



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

Well-Being for Foster Youth:

Federal Law Requires Hawai'i to Implement "Normalcy and Prudent Parenting Standard"

For young people who experience foster care, it can feel anything but normal. Young people have emphasized that they often did not receive things that they needed to develop and thrive—healthy relationships, connections with family and friends, a sense of belonging, guidance from adults and participation in extracurricular, social and cultural activities.

Things that their peers enjoyed, like sleeping over at a friend's house, playing sports, dating or obtaining a driver's license, were important adolescent milestones that they often missed out on. Research shows that participation in extracurricular and social activities can change the life course for many young people, and prepare them for a successful transition to adulthood and enable them to develop and broaden supportive networks that can continue to adulthood.

The *Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014* is a groundbreaking federal law designed to promote well-being and normalcy for youth in foster care. The Act directs state child welfare agencies, contracted providers, and courts to facilitate age-appropriate experiences for these youth and to promote normalcy/permanency.

What is Normalcy?

Feeling like a 'normal' adolescent can encompass several factors: being part of a caring family, meaningful relationships, developing friendships, participating in extracurricular and everyday activities, making decisions and mistakes with the support of caring adults and not being singled out as a 'foster or troubled' youth, but as an individual.

What are Some Barriers to Normalcy?

Some barriers to normalcy for foster youth include restrictive child welfare policies and practices, group homes, multiple placements, a culture of "no", inability to maintain relationships, lack of decision-making opportunities, limited funds and the stigma of foster care.

What is the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard?

This provides resource caregivers with more authority and responsibility to parent young people in their care. The standard takes into account the health and safety of a young person and considers their developmental needs when allowing them to participate in extracurricular, cultural and social activities.

What are States Required to do to Implement Normalcy and Prudent Parent Standards?

Some requirements include: training and support for resource caregivers/providers, ensuring young people engage in age and developmentally appropriate activities, youth age 14 and older participating in their case planning and providing them a list of rights.



HOPE #1: HOUSING

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

The Issue

When we age out of foster care, we need stable, safe, affordable housing. In Hawai'i, 39% of young people surveyed in 2015 reported that they experienced homelessness. Nationally, 37% of former foster youth experience some form of homelessness by age 24. This increases our exposure to substance abuse, trauma, and harmful environments. Support youth-led transition planning by age 16 and make sure that we transition from care with a place to live and a permanent adult connection. Priority access to subsidized housing and to private-sector housing should be provided. Access to transportation is important and connects us to work, education, good housing and resources.

Our Recommendations

- Help develop our transition plan at age 16 prior to transitioning from foster care.
- All foster youth aging out of foster care should leave foster care with 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 young people can build credit and provide access to programs that match for housing deposits, rent and utility deposits.
- An array of housing options, including access to private-sector housing should be identified.
- Housing options should be close to public transportation.
- Ensure that social workers or other supportive adults provide us with packets which include applications and information for affordable housing and Imua Kākou.

Our Voice

“Housing is a huge part of someone’s livelihood, especially if you are a foster youth aging out of care. After one and a half years of searching and living in a small studio, I finally found a big enough place for my family that is affordable and safe.”

-Patricia, Kaua‘i



“I had moved to O’ahu to attend community college but did not plan on being homeless. At the time, I was staying with a family member but we were not seeing eye to eye and I was kicked out. I had just spent the last of my money on rent and utilities and had nowhere to go. Luckily my independent living case manager helped me find a transitional boys home where I was able to stay as I got back on my feet.” *-Glenn, East Hawai‘i*

HOPE #2: EDUCATION

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



The Issue

Education provides young people with more options for stable employment and increased earnings. Nationally, only 3% of former youth complete a four-year degree and 6% complete a two-year degree by age 24. In Hawai'i, one survey indicated that 62% of former foster youth have some college education but only 15% have finished some type of degree. Help us prepare for post-secondary education and training by helping us obtain our GED or high school diploma, filling out applications and ensuring that we know about all of our educational and financial resources. Having adequate financial and educational support will increase our chances of completing a college degree, which will increase our opportunities and earnings. Adequate housing, support from counselors, mentors, academic planning and tutoring is important to our success, as well.

Our Recommendations

- Start preparing foster youth for post-secondary education and training at age 14.
- Help us access and apply for educational assistance: Higher education payments, scholarships, ETVs (education training vouchers) and financial aid.
- Provide Youth Circles to help with planning for educational pursuits.
- Provide connections for resources in the community and various post-secondary institutions to support us with counseling, tutoring, housing and transportation to promote retention and completing our education.
- Educate high school staff and the community about educational needs of foster youth.
- Establish an education mentor for former foster youth at each community college and university.

Our Voice

“Being involved with my case worker and working with a counselor helped me see my options and resources I needed to aid me in going back to school.” -*Samantha, Maui*



“With help from my independent living program case manager, ***I was aware of all my post-secondary resources and options.*** This has been a great help in pursuing my BA in journalism and English at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.”
-*Stephanie, O'ahu*

HOPE # 3: MEDICAL & DENTAL COVERAGE

All young people who age out of foster care will receive information and access to medical and dental coverage.



The Issue

Medical coverage is a basic necessity for foster youth to become healthy, successful adults. One recent Hawai'i survey showed that 81% of former foster youth under 26 had health insurance, compared to 87% of their peers. 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, young people are often not aware of these changes. They are not accessing resources that may be available to them, even if they are eligible and need it. Provide young people with the proper information regarding the change so they know where and how to access medical coverage and medical care.

Our Recommendations

- Provide automatic enrollment into Medicaid and Dental coverage for foster youth up to age 26.
- Social workers should provide information/enroll foster youth PRIOR to their exiting foster care.
- Provide young people with an INFORMATION CARD which includes the phone numbers and address of Med-Quest offices and a point person's contact information who can help them apply, check on their status, or direct them to someone who can.
- Establish a contact person in the health care community to help young people access services.
- Disseminate free/sliding scale clinic information.
- Educate stakeholders in the community on new Medicaid/Med-Quest policy changes affecting former foster youth.

Our Voice

"When I aged out of foster care, I was really confused as to whether or not I had health insurance. I got strep throat and had to go to the hospital and it was then that I found out I was covered, which was a huge relief!" -*Catalina, Kaua'i*



"Aging out of foster care, ***I fortunately had an amazing independent living worker that walked me through the process of applying for medical coverage.*** He even drove me to the Med-quest office to turn in my application! It would be such a blessing to see other youth not have to struggle with the issue of not having insurance." -*Jade, East Hawai'i*

HOPE #4: 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.



The Issue

Most young people seek some form of employment when they exit foster care whether or not they pursue higher education. National statistics show that youth exiting foster care have incomes below poverty level after leaving care. Statistics also show that by age 24, only 48% of young people who aged out of care were working, compared to 75% of their counterparts. They also earn significantly less than other young people their age, \$8,000 annually compared to \$18,000 for the general population. We need opportunities, while we're in care, to gain work experience. Allowing us to work while in care and providing us with mentoring, internships and soft skills training will help us develop work ethics and connect us with employers and opportunities to grow and obtain skills that will help us gain and maintain employment .

Our Recommendations

- Mandate that vital documents be provided before exiting foster care (birth certificate, 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, mentoring, internships, and soft skills training for us while we're still in care. Help us with resumes and take us to job fairs.
- Provide opportunities to build relationships in the community that can provide work experience and long-term employment to young people exiting from foster care.
- Provide and advocate for opportunities for us to obtain a driver's permit and license in care.
- To secure and sustain employment, provide access to internet, email and cell phones.

Our Voice

“When I was in care, I was grateful my foster mom let me work through high school. This let me see what it took to hold a job along with other useful skills. Now I'm looking to open my own business. -Rachel, West Hawai'i



“When I was in care, **my foster parents encouraged me to find jobs to start building my professional connections and resume.** Today, my resume includes two technical internships with Gemini Observatory and Submillimeter Array and a Fellowship with Foster Care to Success. -Tuan Gian



“Programs like Imua Kākou has helped me with bus passes to get to work and school on time and with driving lessons.” -Lyu, Maui





HOPE # 5: PERMANENCY

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

The Issue

Permanency is having a supportive adult or a network of caring adults 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 mentors. 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; it also adds to our social capital. 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.
- Connect every foster youth age 14 or older with a mentor or another caring adult.
- Place siblings together in foster care. When that's 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, give support to adult siblings who choose to act as a legal guardian to their younger siblings.
- Support respectful connections with self-identified kin and biological family.

Our Voice



“My best friend is my permanent relationship. She has been there since day one of being in foster care. Given, there have been many supportive adults in my life, but my best friend has supported me through thick and thin. I consider her as my hanai sister.” - Karen, West Hawai'i

“Gaining permanency with my foster dad was really awesome because I developed strong relationships with his brother and with his friends.”
-Keola, O'ahu



HOPE #6: FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

Young people are provided with opportunities to develop financial capability through education, opening a bank account and receiving matched funds for assets.



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, finding and keeping a job, taking care of their health, and undertaking educational and training opportunities, and they often end up experiencing financial and legal trouble. Statistics show that former foster youth are much 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. It can help young people learn financial management, access mainstream banking and save money for assets. Young people in foster care should be afforded similar opportunities as their peers such as having the resources to rent an apartment, purchase a car, and attend college or other training. Data shows that those who purchased assets are more likely to report being employed and having stable housing.

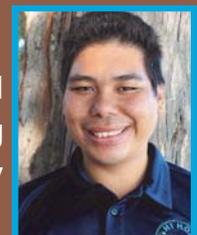
Our Recommendations

- Provide all young people with developmentally appropriate financial literacy training.
- Make matched savings accounts available to all current and former foster youth ages 14 through 26.
- Secure funding for specified matched asset purchases that will assist young people with their transition into adulthood. Matches should be provided for housing deposits, transportation, medical and educational expenses, investments, business start-up and credit building and credit repair.

Our Voice



“While attending financial literacy classes, ***I learned creative ways to budget and save money.*** I also opened an Individual Development Account (IDA) that I plan on using to help me buy my first car.” -*Kaitlyn, Kaua'i*



“When I took my first Opportunity Passport Program class, it was very interesting when I learned how we could build and repair credit. For my first asset purchase, I am paying my education debt at the community college on my island so I can continue on with my education goals.” -*Brayden, Kaua'i*



HI H.O.P.E.S. O'ahu Board members presenting at Annual Family Court Symposium

2015 HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards' Highlights:

- Met with and presented to key community partners throughout the year to discuss recommendations for supporting transitioning foster youth
- Presented at Ohana is Forever Conference, Teen Days and College Nights
- Conducted trainings for GAL/CASA, social workers, judges, resource caregivers and youth on new Normalcy/ Prudent Parenting law
- Developed "Powered til 26" communication campaign/ outreach efforts for Medicaid benefits for former foster youth
- Made grants totaling over \$15,000 to support foster youth
- Held fifth annual HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit on O'ahu
- Participated in/presented at national events in Texas, Baltimore, Missouri and Florida

Mahalo to our HYOI Funders
The following Foundations:
 Victoria S. and Bradley L. Geist,
 Atherton Family, Hawai'i
 Community, McInerny,
 Clarence TC Ching,
 Davis, Levin, Livingston
 and Doc Buyers Fund
 Bank of Hawai'i
 Office of Hawaiian Affairs
 Department of Human Services

Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative

1130 N. Nimitz Hwy.
 Ste.C-210 Honolulu, Hawai'i 96817
Jeanne Hamilton
 (808) 218-6875
 jhamilton@epicohana.org
Delia Ulima
 (808) 748-7052
 dulima@epicohana.org



HOPE #7: SOCIAL CAPITAL

Young people will have lifelong, supportive relationships in the community that help them achieve their personal goals.



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

The Issue

In Hawai'i, recent data showed that young people with strong social capital had better housing, health care and financial outcomes. Social capital is made up of networks and relationships that support healthy development and is essential for all young people, particularly those who are transitioning out of foster care and into adulthood. Sources of social capital include family, school, community and peers. The foster care experience often disrupts several of these sources, leaves us vulnerable and can hinder our healing and progress. We need support to participate in activities that maintain connections with family and peers. This support will broaden our opportunities, promote healthy risk-taking and create healthy relationships that will help us achieve our goals.

Our Recommendations

- DHS-CWS, Family Court and Resource Caregivers should receive training about implementing the reasonable and prudent parenting standards.
- Ensure young people maintain stable relationships regardless of their placements.
- DHS-CWS and resource caregivers should support foster youth to participate in recreational, school, community, faith-based, cultural and family activities and provide reasonable funds to support these efforts.
- Support young people 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.
- Resource caregivers should receive mandatory annual training and education around trauma, social capital, normalcy/prudent parenting and the need for healthy risk-taking and positive youth development.

Our Voice

"My current foster family is very supportive of my having social interactions. **My foster dad is always trying to get me into sports, clubs and anything that deals with other people and being social.**" –Ace, East Hawai'i



"By participating on the youth board and working with community partners, I met the branch manager for Bank of Hawai'i and he helped me get a job at his branch. I now have been there over a year and received a promotion within 8 months." –Tiffany, Maui