

HI H · O · P · E · S ISSUE 13

YOUTH ADVOCACY DOCUMENT 2023 EDITION



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

SUPPORT CONNECTIONS TO PEOPLE, PLACE AND CULTURE FOR FOSTER YOUTH

Our keiki in Hawai'i are made up of a beautiful array of ethnicities and backgrounds. Our community reflects this diversity and the influence of various cultural traditions, customs and values.

Cultural identity is often a critical piece of a person's identity that is related to ethnicity, nationality, religion, genealogy and geography. It shapes their worldview, beliefs, values, practices and norms of their communities. Studies show that strong cultural identity is tied to lower rates of depression, anxiety, isolation and other mental health challenges. For children and youth, a strong sense of cultural identity contributes to mental health resilience, higher levels of social well-being, self-esteem and coping skills.

Children and youth in foster care experience trauma, separation from family and community, and lower levels of social well-being compared to the general population. Due to this disruption, foster youth often have lower cultural-identity strength than those who did not experience foster care. Connections to people and place are important. Keeping children and youth in foster care connected to their culture, 'ohana and community can impact them in the following ways:

- ▶ Strengthened cultural and familial ties ('āina/land, genealogy, beliefs, values, traditions, language, dance, food, etc.).
- ▶ Positive outcomes for mental, physical, cognitive and spiritual health.
- ▶ Higher levels of social well-being, social connections and personal identity.

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Child welfare practitioners should examine how they can best support strong cultural identity and connections for foster youth. Hawai'i is one of only four states providing a right to cultural activities in their foster youth bill of rights. Hawai'i Revised Statute 587A-3.1 (10) – Rights of children in foster care; states that "children in foster care have a right to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural and social activities."

There is much that can be done by child welfare practitioners to support this important area of personal development and overall well-being. The normalcy and prudent parent standard established by the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 and incorporated into Hawai'i State law in 2016 addresses cultural identity, familial and community connections in court, and case planning. This legislation requires that cultural practices, foods, connections and other activities that support a youth's cultural identity be supported.

The Child Welfare System cannot do it alone. Community support systems – including extended family, schools, service providers, church and cultural groups – can provide the network young people need to remain connected to people, place and culture.

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 connections.

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 were formerly in foster care. The boards serve as the Youth Advisory Council for DHS-CWS and the youth voice for the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative. Their roles are to advocate, educate and collaborate to improve outcomes for foster youth. They receive training, meet monthly, and 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

CONNECTIONS TO *People*

OUR *Mana'o*

When we enter foster care, we are separated from family, friends and sometimes entire communities. It is critical to our mental, emotional, spiritual, cultural and physical well-being to maintain pilina, or relationships, with our people. Ask children and youth with who and how they want to stay connected. Design and implement policies, practices and engage community to ensure that we remain closely tied to those we love and who cherish us in return.

**'Ike aku, 'ike mai,
kōkua aku, kōkua mai;
pēlā ihola ka nohona 'ohana:**

Recognize others, be recognized,
help others, be helped;
such is a family relationship.



CONNECTIONS TO *People*

OUR *Mo'olelo*



KYSHA
West Hawai'i

"One of my favorite memories growing up was watching the Merrie Monarch Festival at home with my family. Every year, we would stay up each night watching

the competition until it was over while feasting on local food and desserts! I hold traditions and stuff I did with my family close to my heart. Doing these with another family would seem wrong in my heart."



PRECIOUS
East Hawai'i

"Picking 'opihi with my dad is one of my favorite cultural memories. I used to pick 'opihi with my dad almost every time we went to the beach from when I was little.

We used to pick 'opihi and eat it fresh right there on the rocks. I remember taking it home to cook on the grill with shoyu. It was the best! Being put in foster care made a big impact because I never got to do that anymore. It was just something that my foster parents never did. One of the things that could have helped me continue this part of my culture would be staying in contact with my biological family."



BLAKELEE
Kaua'i

"I spent a lot of time with my grandma, who is full Hawaiian. My papa, who passed away before I was born, was full Filipino. Grandma would always make Filipino

food and everything she made would be so good! She would always make sure her kids and grandkids ate. When I went into foster care, I missed home because it was different – especially hopping from home to home. The one thing I did get to do, though, was visit with my grandma. Every time I visited, she would always make Filipino foods, including two of my favorites, chicken papaya and pork adobo."



JESSICA
Kaua'i

"Being around people helps us regulate our emotions and increases our self-esteem and empathy.

Having a connection with people improves our mental, physical, and emotional health."

"Being around people helps us regulate our emotions and increases our self-esteem and empathy."

- Jessica



CONNECTIONS TO *Place*

OUR *Mana'o*

Home is where the heart is. For young people who experience foster care, being removed from the people and places we find familiar and comforting makes us feel lost and disconnected.

In Hawai'i, 'āina is very important and is closely tied to ancestry, identity and culture. Keep young people in their neighborhoods and connected to communities to which they have familial and heart ties.

He ali'i ka 'āina, he kauwā ke kanaka:

The land is a chief, man is her servant.

OUR *Mo'olelo*



JENNIFER
Kaua'i

"It is important to have a connection with people and place because when you are going through a hard time, you would have someone to go to and rant to and let it all out."

with people, place and 'āina. I always say I feel like a baby bird whose wings were clipped long before they could flourish. I truly believe that if someone had listened to my needs beyond the physical ones and helped me build lasting connections, my foster care experience would have been completely different."

people and place, and can also cultivate feelings of having a pu'uhonua, somewhere to run to or find the strength to keep going. This is the type of connection that is needed for youth in foster care who have faced numerous amounts of loss."



ANASTASIA
O'ahu

"When I first moved back home to Hawai'i, I lived on the North Shore of O'ahu with my papa. I've always had a strong passion for agriculture so some of my favorite

and most treasured memories are from this time during my childhood. Growing up, I was rarely indoors. I spent most of my time planting vegetables, picking fruits, caring for livestock and listening to my papa tell the mo'olelo (stories) of our family property. Being taken and placed into foster care during such a monumental time in my life disrupted what grounded me as a whole being. I lost myself completely and as an adult still find myself struggling to connect



MELISSA
East Hawai'i

"No house or structure could ever feel like home. Especially when they are replaced so often, year after year, in foster care. For me, there is one place where I always felt a bond. It's where I spent most of my years growing up – Puna, on Hawai'i Island. Every part of Puna is home to pivotal moments of my adolescence and places I shared with my parents holding good memories. In foster care, I was placed in a few homes outside of the Puna area. It's crazy how being only a few miles away can make all the difference to a feeling of belonging. Connection can be a matter of life or death – especially a connection to



DAYSHA-LYNN
Kaua'i

"It is important to keep young people connected to people and places because as we change and go through trials, we tend to lose sight of the important people and

places. And sometimes, we really do forget where we belong and who we are. Having stability to keep young people grounded will eventually build healthy communication."

"My grandma's house is my home. My heart is there even though I don't live there."

- Blakelee

CONNECTIONS TO *Culture*

OUR *Mana'o*

We are connected to many ethnicities and cultures in Hawai'i. It influences our sense of self, how we think, act, speak and live. Our values are tied to who, where and how we were raised and what we hold as meaningful. Children and youth in foster care need to be placed in homes and with people who honor their cultural practices and beliefs and keep them connected to things that help them thrive. Policies and practices in CWS, Family Court and with resource caregivers and service providers that honor our traditions and heritage will empower us and promote our healing and overall well-being.

I ka wā ma mua, ka wā ma hope:
The future is found in the past.

OUR *Mo'olelo*



KACIE
O'ahu

"Growing up, I had a lot of Filipino traditions and ate Filipino food. My family would speak Tagalog or Ilocano to me and we would always have family parties every weekend. My cultural

and traditional practices were impacted in foster care because my hānai family was Hawaiian. My foster mom was very accepting of this and would sometimes even make Filipino food. I would help the family with things that were culturally Hawaiian and we ate a lot of Hawaiian food. It was helpful that they were accepting and taught me many things. But this sometimes made me sad because I know I am not Hawaiian and feel I won't be able to relate to them in that way. I wish I'd learned more about my Filipino culture or how to speak Tagalog and Ilocano so I wouldn't feel so out of place when I visit my blood family and I wouldn't struggle with my cultural identity."



KHOLBY
Mau

"My favorite cultural memory from childhood was the food, hula, and playing and training like the old Hawaiian warriors once did. Except for some things in school, I wasn't able to practice my

culture in foster care. I had the motivation to dig deeper into my culture but needed the inspiration and support to do so in foster care."



KEKOA
East Hawai'i

"One of my favorite memories was watching my grandma, who was 100% Puerto Rican, jamming to her cultural music in the kitchen while cooking gandule rice and

pasteles. In foster care, I didn't experience many cultural traditions or foods, except at one foster home. Every night, we would make Filipino dishes together and I really enjoyed the

process as well as the food. It would have helped if I was asked by my resource caregivers about the types of food my family would make traditionally or cultural things I was accustomed to growing up."

MELISSA
East Hawai'i

"One of my favorite memories is waking up to my mom singing along to her favorite Hawaiian songs on the radio. She would often share with me how some of these songs had a connection to our family and why she sang with such passion. This daily ritual with my mom, however, changed after I entered foster care. My mom and older sister were the keepers of the culture and my connection to culture and tradition. It would have been helpful while growing up in foster care to have access to my relatives, and to programs and opportunities, so I could've learned more about my culture, stayed connected to my family, and cultivated pride for my heritage."



13TH ANNUAL HI H.O.P.E.S. SUMMIT



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



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



Maui HI H.O.P.E.S. Board



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

'Iole Stewardship Center (Kohala, Hawai'i Island)

The HI H.O.P.E.S. Board holds a statewide retreat called the Summit every year. Boards receive training, attend workshops, strengthen bonds, and plan for advocacy efforts and community activities in the year ahead. The 2023 Summit was held in Kohala on Hawai'i Island and focused on connections to people, place and culture. Board members participated in cultural protocols, learned from cultural practitioners and went on huaka'i (field trips) to historic places centering on place-based mo'olelo (stories/legends). Throughout the weekend, youth leaders discussed and journaled about concepts of leadership, pilina (relationships), legacy and cultural identity. They each wrote a personal letter to CWS about their takeaways from the Summit. It was a weekend filled with powerful experiences centered on the critical need for foster youth to develop and maintain healthy, supportive relationships to people, place and culture.

E 'ōpū ali'i: Have the heart of a chief.

What kind of a leader do you want to be?

"The 'ōpū ali'i that I want to be is a student, so I can learn from others. I am not perfect. But when people see me, they will know I started from the bottom and worked my hardest to get where I am."

"I want to be a strong, hard-working, disciplined leader that leads by example but is also encouraging and empathetic."

"Leadership is about collaboration and inspiring others to do their best work."

"I want to be the kind of leader who admits when they are wrong and when they have made mistakes and then learn from them."

"I hope to be a versatile leader who is able to adapt my leadership style to any situation. I hope to be confident in my own abilities so others can draw energy to uplift themselves."



Kamehameha Statue, Kapa'au



Pu'ukoholā Heiau



13TH ANNUAL HI H.O.P.E.S. SUMMIT

What legacy do you want to leave?

"I plan to leave a footprint like my fellow leaders before me. We have some big shoes to fill."

"Trust, love and patience. These are three things I lacked growing up from the people I needed them from the most."

"To be a person that is always there for people and always with open arms."

"My ability to help others no matter the situation or capacity."

"One who led a life of dedication to service. A life devoted to helping others. For me, serving others is the ultimate act of kindness and one with the power to have a ripple effect on society."

What kind of kupuna (grandparent/ ancestor) would you like to be?



"I hope to be filled with so much mana'o (thought) and strength for my mo'opuna (grandchildren). I want to teach them their culture and where they came from so they can keep their culture alive."

"I want to be a kupuna who broke generational curses and traumas. I want to be my future grandchildren's shoulder and backbone. I'd like to share memories I've lived and honor the people that I've loved that passed."

"I would be one to share the values passed on to me."

"I would like to be the kind of kupuna that embodies a sense of safety, love and aloha."

Dear CWS ...

"The experience I had this weekend was one I'll never forget, learning about things in the Hawaiian culture and feeling a connection with the 'āina and the people here. It is important for foster youth to have, create and build connections to people and place because being connected to people allows us to work on our mental, physical and emotional health."

"Something that definitely stood out this weekend was the connection to people and places such as Pololū Valley, people and the heiau. The pōhaku (stones) used to build the heiau were, to me, a foundation for working together. I was amazed by how much all of us individually connect to the culture of this place, mind and body."

"We learned about belonging and where we come from. Your sense of belonging comes from others. A lot of foster youth in the system sometimes don't get the opportunity to know where they came from nor have a place to call home."

"This is what CWS needs to do – support young people in being connected to our people, places and identity in order to promote a better child welfare system. Our child welfare system should be one that cares for the young people and families they serve."

"I studied the heiau this weekend trying to learn how my ancestors created it hundreds of years ago. One man inspired 10,000 others to do something he couldn't have done alone in multiple lifetimes. I realized the power one man can have with the right heart, power and vision. I truly believe this applies to all aspects of life and especially the CWS system. We must come together like a village, with a vision bigger than ourselves."



Pololū Valley



Training with Alapaki Nahale-a



2022 HI H.O.P.E.S. Statewide Board's Highlights

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



- ▶ Attended 12th annual HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit in person.
- ▶ Co-hosted the 16th annual 'Ohana is Forever Conference in person.
- ▶ Coordinated drive-throughs and in-person events statewide, including Teen Days, Sibling Connections and Holiday Events, to support foster youth and their families.
- ▶ Held CP Hui meetings throughout the year with community partners on O'ahu, Maui, Kaua'i, and East and West Hawai'i.
- ▶ Disseminated grants totaling over \$15,000 to support current and former foster youth across Hawai'i.
- ▶ Participated in several panels, presentations, committees, meetings and task forces with CWS, Family Court, service providers and community stakeholders throughout the year.
- ▶ Board members were selected to participate in national conferences and leadership opportunities, including the Youth Leadership Institute with the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, Maryland.

MAHALO TO OUR FUNDERS (2022-2023):

- 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 Searcy
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- EPIC 'Ohana Board of Directors
- Nadao and Mieko Yoshinaga Family Fund of the Hawai'i Community Foundation
- Weinberg Foundation
- HEI Charitable Foundation



O'ahu Sibling Holiday Bash



Kaua'i Holiday Event



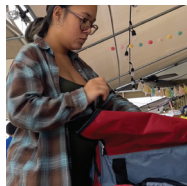
East Hawai'i Sibling Celebration



'Ohana is Forever 2022



Summit 2022



West Hawai'i Bags of Hope



Maui Dream Day



epicohana.org
hihopes.org

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