EPIC `OHANA, INC.

EPIC `Ohana, Inc. is a non-profit organization. EPIC is not a part of Child Welfare Services (CWS). Our job is to organize and facilitate `Ohana Conferences, Youth Circles, `Ohana Finding and `Ohana Connections. EPIC helps families and CWS talk, plan, and make decisions.

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Mission Statement
Families are the foundation of our community, and their well-being is inextricably linked to the health and prosperity of the community, state, and nation. EPIC transforms the culture of child welfare practice through a respectful, collaborative, solution-oriented process that protects children, strengthens families, and enhances the health of the community.

BACKGROUND
EPIC `Ohana, Inc. is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 Hawai`i corporation devoted to `Ohana Conferencing, Youth Circles, `Ohana Finding and `Ohana Connections. EPIC began with `Ohana Conferencing in Honolulu, Hawai`i in July 1996 as a collaborative effort by the Hawai`i Department of Human Services-Social Services Division, and the Waianae community on the island of O`ahu. `Ohana Conferencing is a family group decision-making process, adapted from the Polynesian model of problem-solving developed by the Maori people in New Zealand to better address issues of child abuse and placement of children in foster care. Parents, extended family members and Child Welfare staff work together in a facilitated meeting to collectively problem solve and plan for the safety of children and the development of service plans to strengthen parents.

EPIC `Ohana, Inc. began offering E Makua Ana Youth Circles in Hawai`i in 2004. The program provides a group process for youth to celebrate their emancipation from foster care and to assist them in planning for their future. In 2007, EPIC `Ohana, Inc. developed and implemented `Ohana Finding and `Ohana Connection services. `Ohana Finding includes an extensive search for family members and other kinship support for children and youth entering foster care or who have lost connections with family while in foster care. `Ohana Connections seek to restore family connections so that every foster child has relationships that will last a lifetime.

In 2009, EPIC was chosen as the lead agency for the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative in Hawai`i, a national effort to create successful transitions to adulthood for youth aging out of foster care. That same year, EPIC and the Hawai`i Department of Human Services received a three-year federal grant to conduct research on and provide services for Early `Ohana Conferencing and Enhanced `Ohana Connections.

EPIC `Ohana, Inc. provides services statewide with full and part-time staff on O`ahu, Maui, Kaua`i and Hawai`i Island and physical offices in Honolulu, Kahului and Hilo.
**EPIC \`OHANA INC. SERVICES REQUEST FORM**

Please: 1) Check off all desired services, 2) Fill out form as best you can, 3) Detach, 4) Mail to EPIC \`Ohana Inc.

- **OHANA CONFERENCE**
- **YOUTH CIRCLE**
- **OHANA CONNECTIONS**

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*Information specific to \`Ohana Conferencing or Family Connections only.*
**Information specific to Youth Circle only.*

**EPIC \`OHANA PROGRAMS**

**\`OHANA CONFERENCE**

\`Ohana Conferencing is a collaborative effort that brings together CWs, service providers, families, extended family and the support system of children who are involved with CWs. Families know their own strengths, issues, and resources and this process provides families a voice. In an \`Ohana Conference, families work with CWs and use what they know to make the best decisions for the safety of their children and create a plan for strengthening the family. The \`Ohana Conference is voluntary and is a positive, solution-oriented process.

An EPIC coordinator works with the family to make arrangements for the conference. A location that is convenient for the family is chosen and food and drink are provided for participants. An EPIC facilitator runs the conference and an EPIC recorder will take notes that will be turned into a confidential report and provided to the Court, CWs and conference participants. The purpose of the conference, goals for the children, family strengths, concerns, services and timelines are discussed during the conference. The average \`Ohana Conference takes 3-4 hours. Re-conferences are arranged as necessary.

**E MAKUA ANA YOUTH CIRCLE**

The Youth Circle Program serves current and former foster youth in Hawai‘i. The program provides a group process for youth to celebrate their emancipation from foster care and to assist them in planning for their independence. A Youth Circle is solution-focused and optimistic. The Circle focuses on hopes and dreams for the future and how the youth’s goals may be attained. DHSS provides funding for youth aged 16 through 26 who are in foster care or who are receiving DHSS higher education benefits. Additionally, Victoria S. and Bradley L. Geist Foundation grant allows former foster youth 18 through 24 who aged out of foster care to have a youth circle, even if they are not receiving higher education benefits.

The Youth Circle program is a voluntary process. Once a referral is received, EPIC assigns a facilitator who will assist in coordinating and facilitating the Circle. A pre-circle meeting or phone call will take place. The facilitator helps the youth identify family, friends, mentors or others who will provide them a lifetime support system. These individuals are invited to attend the Circle. A convenient location and time are chosen, as well as the type of food the youth would like at the Circle. Circle participants will generate options for housing, education, finances, employment, documents (i.e., birth certificate, social security card, etc.), transportation, and physical and emotional health. The youth will choose the plan to pursue and identify those who will assist them in carrying out that plan. A summary of the Transition Plan will be provided to the youth and the participants shortly after the Circle is held. A Youth Circle typically takes between 2-3 hours. The youth may choose to have re-circles.

**\`OHANA CONNECTIONS**

When a child is removed from his or her family, family connections can be damaged or lost. Every child entering foster care has a right to know their family and maintain their family connections. Like all children, they deserve to feel stable, secure, and loved. The \`Ohana Connections Program was developed to: 1) find and engage family members and other kinship support for children and youth entering foster care, and 2) find and engage family members for children and youth who have lost family connections while in foster care. \`Ohana Connections work is team work. While EPIC staff spearheads the process, social workers, resource caregivers, Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), therapists, foster youth, and family members all play an important role in the Connections effort. Each contributes their expertise, active engagement, and support throughout the process. There are four key stages in \`Ohana Connections work: \`Ohana Finding, Team Building, Engagement and Planning. Because of the nature of the work, the process typically takes six months to a year, but may take longer.

**\`OHANA FINDING**

This family finding method locates and identifies family members and other kinship support for children and youth entering foster care or who have lost connections with family while in foster care. An extensive search is conducted using case mining, internet searches and other information gathering techniques. Family members are contacted and a family list is created to document and track family connections. This service is utilized to support all EPIC \`Ohana, Inc. programs, including \`Ohana Conferencing, Youth Circles and \`Ohana Connections work.