The Issue

Social capital is made up of networks and relationships that support healthy development and is essential for all young people, particularly those who are aging 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. Support our participation in activities and our connections with family and peers. This will broaden our opportunities, promote healthy risk-taking and aid in the building of healthy relationships with members of the community that will help us to achieve our goals.

Our Recommendations

- DHS-CWS and resource caregivers should support foster youth to participate in recreational, school, community, faith-based and family activities.

- Support young people to connect with a wide range of adults as well as to maintain healthy peer and family relationships.

- Resource caregivers who serve transition-aged foster youth should receive annual training and education around trauma, social capital and the need for healthy risk-taking and youth development activities.

The Hawaii’i Youth Opportunities Initiative

The Hawai’i Youth Opportunities Initiative helps youth leaving foster care become successful adults in their communities. We work with youth and community partners to provide access to education, employment, health care, housing, family relationships and community connections.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative was created in 2001 from a vision that all young people leaving foster care should have the opportunities and support needed for a successful transition to adulthood.

Hawai’i was chosen as a Jim Casey Initiative site and started in 2010 as the Hawai’i Youth Opportunities Initiative (‘HYO’I), with EPIC ‘Ohana Inc. as the lead agency. The HYOI works with a youth leadership board (HYOI), and a Community Partnership Hui (‘CP Hui’). The CP Hui is made up of community members who can provide opportunities and access to supports for transitioning foster youth in areas such as education, employment, medical coverage and housing.

The Opportunity Passport™ program is an important component of the HYOI. Participants receive financial literacy training and learn about budgeting, saving, banking, and credit.

Upon completing the training, the participants receive stipends and open two savings accounts at Bank of Hawai’i. One of the accounts is an Individual Development Account (IDA).

These IDA accounts can be matched up to $1,000 a year for asset purchases for education, transportation, a housing deposit, medical expenses, business start-up and investments.
HOPE #1

Automatic enrollment for Medicaid and dental services will be provided to all young people who age out of foster care up to age 26.

The Issue
Medical coverage is a basic necessity for foster youth to become healthy, successful adults. On a national level, only 57% of former foster youth under 24 have health insurance, compared to 78% of their counterparts. Our peers may now be covered under their parents’ health care insurance until age 26. As wards of the State, we are asking for the same support. In Hawaii, 90% of young people ages 18 to 24 have health insurance. A recent poll of former foster youth in Hawaii showed that only 59% of them had some sort of coverage, while 41% did not have or did not know whether or not they had medical coverage. That means we are not accessing resources that may be available to us, even if we are eligible and need it. We very often don’t know where to apply, how to apply and how to access care. Ensuring that medical and dental coverage extends beyond foster care by automatic enrollment will guarantee that we have access to these critical supports when we need them.

Our Recommendations
- Provide continued Medicaid coverage for foster youth by automatic enrollment up to age 26.
- Provide dental coverage for foster youth up to age 26.
- Ensure that all foster youth who age out of foster care receive information regarding their coverage, as well as how and where to access health care services.

Our Voice
“No one knows what is in store for them in life; health is just one of those things that people need to have no matter who they are, where they come from, or who their parents are. We all want to be treated fairly and equally, so why don’t we get the same benefits as youth who are NOT in care?” - Brenda

“Today, I’m 22 years old. I have yet to have my wisdom teeth removed and I have certain health issues that go unattended. I don’t have medical. Automatic enrollment into medical and dental up until age 26 will ensure that all youth who age out of care will have healthier lives. It will give us one less thing to worry about. I know how it feels to stay up at night in pain, worrying if I will be able to work tomorrow, worrying if the pain will stop, or if I want to be stuck with a medical bill that I cannot afford to pay.” - Ipo

HOPE #6

Programs and supports that provide job skills and employment opportunities will be provided to current and transitioning foster youth.

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 72% of their counterparts. They also earn significantly less than other young people their age. 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
- Provide employment opportunities, mentoring, internships, and soft skills training for us while we’re still in care.
- Provide an advocate and opportunity for us to obtain a driver’s permit and license in care.
- Ensure that we obtain our personal and vital documents before exiting foster care (birth certificate, ID, social security card). We need these to obtain employment, education and housing.
- Develop community relationships that provide employment and continued skill building for us after we exit foster care and become young adults.

Our Voice
“Having a job at 17 was one of the best things that I ever chose to do. It gave me a sense of responsibility and consistency because now I had this schedule to rely on and as long as I was reliable there would be a reward, my paycheck!” - Nellie

“Youth who are not in care are able to work legally at 16. Prior to that, they are exposed to job opportunities through their social capital, whether baby-sitting or mowing lawns. We fail to understand the vital role employment plays during adolescent years. We fail to expose youth in care to the tools for applying for and maintaining jobs because of liability, schedule conflicts and transportation issues. By providing youth in care with opportunities and supports that provide job skills, we better equip them to be successful adults.” - Ipo
The Issue
When we age out of foster care, we need stable, safe, affordable housing. National statistics show that 40% of former foster youth will experience some form of homelessness by age 24. Homelessness increases our exposure to substance abuse, mental illness and physical abuse. Support youth-led transition planning by age 16 and make sure that we are released from care with a place to live and a permanent adult connection. Priority access to subsidized housing and access to private-sector housing should be provided. Opportunities to further our education, pursue employment to sustain ourselves and financial education is vital to our success. Independent living programs and the option to remain in foster care until 21 are important options.

Our Recommendations
- Help us begin to develop our transition plan at age 16 prior to transitioning from foster care.
- Make sure that we don’t leave foster care without a stable, safe, affordable place to live and a permanent connection with a caring adult.
- Transitioning foster youth should receive priority access to government subsidized housing.
- Improve access to private-sector housing.
- Connect us with the people, services and resources that will provide us with financial education, employment and housing supports so that we are able to become self-sustaining, successful young adults.

Our Voice
“Having safe, stable, affordable housing is a key component to success. Where would YOU be right now if you didn’t have a house?” - Gernani

“Being a foster youth, your placement isn’t always stable. Having someone in your life who can be that stability is invaluable. I met my mentor when I was 15 and to this day she is usually the first one I want to call in both good times and bad. We have lunch dates and we send each other Christmas cards every year. I always joke about who I call when I don’t know how to cook something, but even little things like that are important.” - Nellie

“I’m glad that I was able to have monthly visits with my mom and my siblings while I was in high school. Having regular visits made me feel secure because I was able to check on my family often.” - Keola

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

The Issue
Having a supportive network of caring adults and family while we are in care and when we exit care is critical to our success as young adults. Support our connections with family and kin, as well as adults that can serve as mentors or permanency. Sibling connections are very important to us. Our siblings represent the longest, most enduring relationships we will ever have. Maintaining connections with our siblings in and out of care is critical to our stability, emotional and mental health and self-worth and adds to our social capital. Remaining with our siblings helps to lessen our anxieties and fears and makes the traumatic transition into foster care a little easier. If we are separated, keep us in the same districts and allow regular and consistent contact.

Our Recommendations
- Place siblings together in foster care, when possible.
- Support efforts to maintain consistent sibling connections by ensuring frequent visits, phone calls, and other forms of communication.
- Support maintenance of siblings and community connections by keeping youth in the same school district or neighborhood.
- Support practice of adult siblings as legal guardian of younger siblings in care, when appropriate.
- Support consistent connections with self-identified kin and family.
- Connect every foster youth age 14 or older with a mentor or other permanent, caring adult.

Our Voice
“Having safe, stable, affordable housing with access to transportation to work and school.

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

“Having safe, stable, affordable housing is a key component to success. Where would YOU be right now if you didn’t have a house?” - Gernani

“All I know is when I didn’t have a home, I wasn’t the least bit concerned about my future. Housing is core for all youth. Without a home, it’s nearly impossible to focus on post-secondary education, employment, relationships, or physical and mental well-being. Providing affordable and safe homes for all youth who transition out of foster care on all islands promotes healthy and successful adults and will decrease negative statistics and stigmas that haunt all youth that age out of care.” - Ipo

“I’m glad that I was able to have monthly visits with my mom and my siblings while I was in high school. Having regular visits made me feel secure because I was able to check on my family often.” - Keola
The Issue

Education provides young people with more options for stable employment and increased earnings. Only 3% of former foster youth complete a four-year degree and 6% complete a two-year degree by age 24, according to national studies. Help us prepare for post-secondary education and training early. When it is time for post-secondary education and training, help us with applications and make sure we know about all of our educational and financial resources. Having adequate financial and educational supports will increase our chances of completing a college degree, which will increase our opportunities and our earnings. It is also important for us to have adequate housing, support with counseling, mentoring, academic planning and tutoring, as well as someone to share our challenges and achievements with.

Our Recommendations

- Prepare foster youth for post-secondary education and training starting at age 14.
- Help us apply for and access all information about educational assistance (Higher Ed payments, scholarships, ETVs (Education Training Vouchers) and financial aid).
- Provide connections for resources in the community and various post-secondary institutions to support us with counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and finding affordable, stable housing to promote retention and completion of education.

Our Voice

“Education is the foundation for our future. As a single parent, I need a good education to provide a better life for my daughter. I wouldn’t be able to do it without financial and housing support. Without education, we will not succeed.” - Noy

“I believe that every youth should be aware of all their options when it comes to post-secondary education. We need to be assisted and motivated just as much as when we were in care….” - Brenda

The Issue

Most foster youth are not prepared to leave foster care at 18 or 19. Like most young people our age, we still need stable housing, as well as emotional and financial support to become healthy, successful young adults. National studies show that former foster youth who have a stable home were more likely to finish a college program or technical school. Providing us with the option to remain in developmentally appropriate foster care up until age 21 gives us continued support as we transition into adulthood. Studies show that extending foster care to 21 resulted in increased college attendance, increased earnings and decreased unintended pregnancies, usage of public assistance, homelessness and incarceration. States have the option to extend foster care under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Currently, there are a number of states that have extended foster care to 21.

Our Recommendations

- Create a task force to conduct research, discussions and planning around what developmentally appropriate extended foster care would look like in Hawai‘i.
- Engage DHS-CWS, current and former foster youth, resource caregivers, family court, GALs, service providers and other identified state and county agencies in the planning process.
- Provide the option for foster youth to remain in extended care and receive supports up to 21.

Our Voice

“Giving us the option to stay in care or stay “home” during those critical years could really be the difference to make or break someone’s future.” - Nellie

“The extension of foster care until age 21, as an option, will promote success in all of our brothers and sisters in care. It will allow us to engage in healthy risk-taking, with support from our self-defined families, preparing us to make healthy decisions as adults.” - Ipo
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- Make sure that we don’t leave foster care without a stable, safe, affordable place to live and a permanent connection with a caring adult.
- Transitioning foster youth should receive priority access to government subsidized housing.
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Our Voice

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HOPE #2

The Issue
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Our Recommendations

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- Support maintenance of siblings and community connections by keeping youth in the same school district or neighborhood.
- Support practice of adult siblings as legal guardian of younger siblings in care, when appropriate.
- Support consistent connections with self-identified kin and family.
- Connect every foster youth age 14 or older with a mentor or other permanent, caring adult.

Our Voice

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HOPE #1

The Issue
Medical coverage is a basic necessity for foster youth to become healthy, successful adults. On a national level, only 57% of former foster youth under 24 have health insurance, compared to 78% of their counterparts. Our peers may now be covered under their parents’ health care insurance until age 26. As wards of the State, we are asking for the same support. In Hawaii, 90% of young people ages 18 to 24 have health insurance. A recent poll of former foster youth in Hawai‘i showed that only 59% of them had some sort of coverage, while 41% did not have or did not know whether or not they had medical coverage. That means we are not accessing resources that may be available to us, even if we are eligible and need it. We very often don’t know where to apply, how to apply and how to access care. Ensuring that medical and dental coverage extends beyond foster care by automatic enrollment will guarantee that we have access to these critical supports when we need them.

Our Recommendations
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• Provide dental coverage for foster youth up to age 26.
• Ensure that all foster youth who age out of foster care receive information regarding their coverage, as well as how and where to access health care services.

Our Voice
“No one knows what is in store for them in life; health is just one of those things that people need to have no matter who they are, where they come from, or who their parents are. We all want to be treated fairly and equally, so why don’t we get the same benefits as youth who are NOT in care?” - Brenda

“Today, I’m 22 years old. I have yet to have my wisdom teeth removed and I have certain health issues that go unattended. I don’t have medical. Automatic enrollment into medical and dental up until age 26 will ensure that all youth who age out of care will have healthier lives. It will give us one less thing to worry about. I know how it feels to stay up at night in pain, worrying if I will be able to work tomorrow, worrying if the pain will stop, or if I want to be stuck with a medical bill that I cannot afford to pay.” - Ipo

HOPE #6

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 72% of their counterparts. They also earn significantly less than other young people their age. 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
• Provide employment opportunities, mentoring, internships, and soft skills training for us while we’re still in care.
• Provide an advocate and opportunity for us to obtain a driver’s permit and license in care.
• Ensure that we obtain our personal and vital documents before exiting foster care (birth certificate, ID, social security card). We need these to obtain employment, education and housing.
• Develop community relationships that provide employment and continued skill building for us after we exit foster care and become young adults.

Our Voice
“Having a job at 17 was one of the best things that I ever chose to do. It gave me a sense of responsibility and consistency because now I had this schedule to rely on and as long as I was reliable there would be a reward, my paycheck!” - Nellie

“Youth who are not in care are able to work legally at 16. Prior to that, they are exposed to job opportunities through their social capital, whether baby-sitting or mowing lawns. We fail to understand the vital role employment plays during adolescent years. We fail to expose youth in care to the tools for applying for and maintaining jobs because of liability, schedule conflicts and transportation issues. By providing youth in care with opportunities and supports that provide job skills, we better equip them to be successful adults.” - Ipo
Young people have supportive relationships in the community that help them achieve their personal goals.

The Issue
Social capital is made up of networks and relationships that support healthy development and is essential for all young people, particularly those who are aging 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. Support our participation in activities and our connections with family and peers. This will broaden our opportunities, promote healthy risk-taking and aid in the building of healthy relationships with members of the community that will help us to achieve our goals.

Our Recommendations
- DHS-CWS and resource caregivers should support foster youth to participate in recreational, school, community, faith-based and family activities.
- Support young people to connect with a wide range of adults as well as to maintain healthy peer and family relationships.
- Resource caregivers who serve transition-aged foster youth should receive annual training and education around trauma, social capital and the need for healthy risk taking and youth development activities.

Our Voice
"Prior to aging out of foster care, I was assigned a transition specialist at the age of 16 who would oversee my successful transition to adulthood. After I turned 18, I would see him on a weekly basis. From there, I worked with him to accomplish educational goals and take and aid in the building of healthy relationships with members of the community that will help us to achieve our goals."

The Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative
The Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative helps youth leaving foster care become successful adults in their communities. We work with youth and community partners to provide access to education, employment, health care, housing, family relationships and community connections.

The HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board
The HI H.O.P.E.S. (Hawaii Helping Our People Envision Success) Youth Leadership Board is made up of young people between the ages of 14-24 who are currently in or were formerly in foster care under the State of Hawaii Department of Human Services-Child Welfare Services. All participants must have been in foster care at least one day after 14. There are currently HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards on Oahu and in East Hawaii, with Kona, Maui and Kauai forming boards by the end of 2012.

The HI H.O.P.E.S. board plays a vital role in providing the ‘youth voice’ for the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative. Their work includes identifying the needs of transitioning foster youth, educating stakeholders, advocating for public will and policy changes and administering grant-making activities which benefit foster youth. The Boards receive training, meet regularly, participate on the Community Partnership Hui and collaborate with other youth groups.

The Opportunity Passport™ program is an important component of the HYOI. Participants receive financial literacy training and learn about budgeting, saving, banking, and credit.

Upon completing the training, the participants receive stipends and open two savings accounts at Bank of Hawaii. One of the accounts is an Individual Development Account (IDA).

These IDA accounts can be matched up to $1,000 a year for asset purchases for education, transportation, a housing deposit, medical expenses, business start-up and investments.