HI H.O.P.E.S. (Hawai'i Opportunities through Partnership, Education, and Support) is a youth advocacy initiative that focuses on developing youth capability through education, opening a bank account, and receiving matched funds for assets. The HI H.O.P.E.S. initiative helps young people leave foster care and become successful adults in their communities. The initiative works closely with the Department of Human Services, Family Court, the legislature, other young people and community members to pass laws and regulations that support young people transitioning from foster care to independent living.

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. One way to change these outcomes is to provide them with financial education and opportunities to save money through an individual development (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 reported being employed and having stable housing.

Our Recommendations
- Provide all young people with developmentally appropriate financial literacy training.
- Make Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) available to all current and former foster youth ages 14 through 26 by building partnerships with financial institutions within their communities.
- 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 repair.

Our Voice
“When I aged out of care, I had tons of credit card offers in the mail. I never fully understood the terms. I ended up with hundreds of dollars of charges and a declining credit score. If I had been offered financial literacy classes at an earlier age, I could have made a better informed decision.” - Nellie, East Hawai’i

“My family and I are very grateful to the Opportunity Passport Program’s IDA. We were able to move into our very first apartment and purchase a vehicle. Having a place to live was the foundation for our future success. Having a car to take my children to school/childcare and to get myself to work and school has made our lives so much easier.” - Noy, O’ahu

Imua Kākou
“moving forward together”

In 2013, the HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards worked closely with the Department of Human Services, Family Court, the legislature, other young people and community members to pass a bill which would extend voluntary care to 21. Governor Abercrombie, a proponent of the bill, signed Act 252 into law on July 1, 2013.

What is Imua Kākou?
Imua Kākou, which means “moving forward together” in Hawaiian, is the name chosen by the young adults for the voluntary care to 21 program in Hawai’i.

Who is Eligible for Imua Kākou?
- Young adults who aged out of DHS foster care
- Young adults placed in legal guardianship or adopted after age 16

What are the Benefits of Imua Kākou?
- Medical and dental coverage
- Living assistance payments
- Resource assistance
- Support from a case manager

Hi H.O.P.E.S. receive Hawai’i’s Child and Youth Advocate of the Year Award.

2013 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 National CASA Conference.
- Participated in legislative testimony that led to the passage of Act 252, to extend voluntary foster care to age 21.
- Made grant funding $15,700 for supports to foster youth.
- Held third annual HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit on Oahu.
- Formed and trained HI H.O.P.E.S. board on Maui.
- Awarded Hawai’i’s Child and Youth Advocate Award.
- Received training at Youth Leadership Institute (MO) and Fall Convening (Florida).
- Mahalo to our HYOI Funders: The following Foundations: Victoria S. and Bradley L. Geist, Attenion Family, Hawai’i Community, McInerney and Nakao, Waring, Doc Buyers Fund, Bank of Hawai’i, Office of Hawaiian Affairs and Individual Donors

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The Hawai’i Youth Opportunities Initiative is a partner site of the national Jim Casey 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 helps Our People Envision Success (HYOI) through a Youth Leadership Board is made up of young people in transition between the ages of 14-28 who are currently in or formerly in foster care. The board provides the ‘youth voice’ for HYOI by identifying the needs of transitioning youth and advocating for policy changes and increased opportunities. They receive training, meet monthly, participate in the CP Hui and collaborate with community partners. There are HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards on O’ahu, in East and West Hawai’i, Kaua’i and Maui.

How do Young Adults Qualify for Imua Kākou?
Participants must voluntarily consent to the program and meet ONE of the following requirements:
- Working on a GED/diploma or equivalency credential
- Enrolled in college, vocational or trade program
- Participating in an employment program
- Working at least 80 hours/month
- Medically disabled

Is Imua Kākou like Foster Care?
No! This program is here to support young people to transition successfully into adulthood. Participants will have a range of living options, decide whether to go to school or work and can exit and re-enter the program anytime before age 21.

When does Imua Kākou begin?
Imua Kākou will start up later this year. Throughout 2014, HI H.O.P.E.S. boards will be working statewide with DHS to inform young people and their supporters about this program and how to participate when details become available.

2014 Edition
Presented by: The HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Boards, the Hawai’i Youth Opportunities Initiative and EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc.
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. Access to transportation is important and connects us to work, education, good housing and resources.

Our Recommendations

- Help us begin to 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.
- Transitioning foster youth should receive priority access to government subsidized housing.
- Improve access to private-sector housing by identifying units for rent and providing financial assistance for security deposits, rent and utility deposits.
- Raise awareness about and connect us with the people, services and resources that will provide us with employment, housing and transportation supports so that we are able to become self-sustaining, successful young adults.
- Ensure that social workers or other caring adult provides us with packets which include applications and information for affordable housing and Imua Kākou.
- Housing options should be close to public transportation.
- Provide financial capability so youth can build credit which affects their housing eligibility.

Our Voice

“I understand how hard it is to obtain affordable housing as a former youth with only the higher education money as an income because I lived in a house with no electric and no water for a month and a half. Whenever I looked for another home, I didn’t income qualify. When I did find a home, all my money went towards rent, it was not easy.” -Patricia, Kaua‘i

“Living in the real world is tough! The hardest part was finding housing that was within my budget. After one year, I finally got out on my own with the help of a great support system and my hanai family.” -Tiffany, Maui

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. 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 aid in the building of healthy relationships with community members that will help us achieve our goals.

Our Recommendations

- Ensure stability for young people regardless of relocation.
- DHS-CWS and resource caregivers should support foster youth to participate in recreational, school, community, faith-based and family activities.
- 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 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

“We all need a support group to depend on. My support group was my family, school and friends. They created a way for me to succeed.” -Samantha, Maui

“When I was in foster care, I linked up with ILP services to help me transition out of high school. Without the help of ILP workers, social workers and foster parents, I don’t think I would have accomplished a lot. I graduated high school, enrolled in college and work part-time. These people and relationships in my life and community have helped me reach my goals.” -Rico, Kaua‘i

“Not being in my home community while in foster care was hard because I was raised with the people there. My foster mom, GAL, social worker and I worked together to find ways to keep connected with my community. I was able to see friends and family daily and I am truly grateful!” -Tia, Maui
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 school districts and allow regular and consistent contact.

Our Recommendations
- Place siblings together in foster care. When that’s not possible, help them maintain family and community connections by placing them in the same school and/or community.
- Support efforts to maintain consistent sibling connections by ensuring frequent visits, phone calls, and other forms of communication.
- When appropriate, support adult siblings as legal guardian of younger siblings in care.
- Support consistent and respectful connections with self-identified kin and biological family.
- Connect every foster youth age 14 or older with a mentor or other permanent, caring adult.
- Help youth develop and maintain healthy relationships with a support network, including resource caregivers who could be lifelong connections.

Our Voice

"To me, having that one foster parent to support me through my good and bad times really meant a lot." - Kalaikamala, O'ahu

"Having been blessed with a great social network, I was able to create relationships that turned my life for the better. I had mentors to mentor me, role models to help set standards to my life and foster parents who showed me true love. If not for these connections, I’m afraid I’d be lost." - JR, West Hawai'i

"I made a really strong connection with my ILP worker. If it wasn’t for her support throughout my time in foster care, I would have given up on myself. I’m thankful she is still around to love and support me. “ - Kapua, West Hawai'i

HOPE # 5
Every young person will have an adult to rely on for a lifetime and a supportive family network.

HOPE #2
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. On a national level, only 57% of former foster youth under 24 have health insurance, compared to 78% of their counterparts. In Hawai‘i, 90% of young people ages 18 to 24 have health insurance. 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 Medicaid and Dental coverage for foster youth up to age 26.
- Provide ongoing information sessions throughout the State informing young people of the new changes and services 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 (resource caregivers, adoptive parents, guardians, Independent Living Providers, DOE, community colleges, Youth Circles, and other youth serving agencies) on new Med-Quest policy change.

Our Voice

“When I aged out of foster care, applying for medical coverage was a tumultuous process. Without the help of my foster mother, I don’t think I’d be insured. Aside from that, I was denied coverage when reapplying because I supposedly did not submit the required paperwork in time when in actuality I did not receive anything in the mail. If there’s a much easier process when applying and reapplying then it would encourage young people to be medically insured.” - Gernani, O'ahu

“I recently had to re-apply for MedQuest after stepping down from my full-time job to return to school. It gave me a sense of security to know I could apply for and receive medical benefits. With the passage of Medicaid to 26 for former foster youth, we will be more likely to apply for insurance if we feel like we will actually get the benefits.” - Nellie, East Hawai'i
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 and transportation to promote retention and completion of education.
- Establish a contact person for former foster youth to connect with at each community college on O‘ahu, Maui, Kaua‘i, East and West Hawai‘i.
- Educate high school faculty/community about educational needs, challenges of foster youth.

Our Voice
“I was blessed to have an outreach provider help me develop a plan to attend college, apply for the dorms and to help me execute that plan.” Keola, East Hawai‘i

“Before I aged out of foster care, I never wanted to further my education. However, I had several people who made sure I knew all the benefits about going to school. We made appointments to register for school and scholarships. Now, I am in my fourth semester in college making my way towards my business degree—I even made the Dean’s List. I was able to do this because of all of the support I had. Otherwise, I would never have registered for school.” -Rachel, West Hawai‘i

“After aging out of foster care the main focus for me was education. Focusing on education kept me on the right path and opened doors to greater opportunities.” -Briana, East Hawai‘i

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
- 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.
- Provide employment opportunities, mentoring, internships, and soft skills training for us while we’re still in care. Supportive adults should help us with resumes and take us to job fairs.
- Develop and educate community relationships that provide employment and continued skill building for us after we exit foster care and become young adults.
- Provide and advocate for opportunities for us to obtain a driver’s permit and license in care.

Our Voice
“When I was 15, I was in a program which taught me the skills to obtain a job. I got a job at 16, which gave me a feeling of independence, responsibility and money management skills. I’m grateful for the training. I have two jobs and help family and friends with employment.” –Karen, West Hawai‘i

“I started working when I was 12 under the table doing construction work. I gained working experience and had money in my pocket. Recently, I finally got a state I.D., which made it easier to get a job and now I’m a cook.” –Filipe, O‘ahu

“While I was in care, I was fortunate to be aware of programs and trainings that assisted me in gaining employment and interpersonal skills.” –Sassy, O‘ahu
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**Our Voice**

“Having been blessed with a great social network, I was able to create relationships that turned my life for the better. I had mentors to mentor me, role models to help set standards to my life and foster parents who showed me true love. If not for these connections, I’m afraid I’d be lost.” - JR, West Hawai’i

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HOPE #1

The Issue

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Our Recommendations

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- Transitioning foster youth should receive priority access to government subsidized housing.
- Improve access to private-sector housing by identifying units for rent and providing financial assistance for security deposits, rent and utility deposits.
- Raise awareness about and connect us with the people, services and resources that will provide us with employment, housing and transportation supports so that we are able to become self-sustaining, successful young adults.
- Ensure that social workers or other caring adult provides us with packets which include applications and information for affordable housing and Imua Kākou.
- Housing options should be close to public transportation.
- Provide financial capability so youth can build credit which affects their housing eligibility.

Our Voice

“I understand how hard it is to obtain affordable housing as a former youth with only the higher education money as an income because I lived in a house with no electric and no water for a month and a half. Whenever I looked for another home, I didn’t qualify. When I did find a home, all my money went towards rent, it was not easy.” -Patricia, Kaua‘i

“Living in the real world is tough! The hardest part was finding housing that was within my budget. After one year, I finally got out on my own with the help of a great support system and my hanai family.” - Tiffany, Maui

HOPE #6

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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. 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 aid in the building of healthy relationships with community members that will help us achieve our goals.

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Our Voice

“We all need a support group to depend on. My support group was my family, school and friends. They created a way for me to succeed.” -Samantha, Maui

“When I was in foster care, I linked up with ILP services to help me transition out of high school. Without the help of ILP workers, social workers and foster parents, I don’t think I would have accomplished a lot. I graduated high school, enrolled in college and work part-time. These people and relationships in my life and community have helped me reach my goals.” -Rico, Kaua‘i

“Not being in my home community while in foster care was hard because I was raised with the people there. My foster mom, GAL, social worker and I worked together to find ways to keep connected with my community. I was able to see friends and family daily and I am truly grateful!” -Tia, Maui
### HOPE #7

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. One way to change these outcomes is to provide them with financial education and opportunities to save money through an individual development (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 reported being employed and having stable housing.

#### Our Recommendations

- Provide all young people with developmentally appropriate financial literacy training.
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#### Our Voice

“When I aged out of care, I had tons of credit cards. I never fully understood the terms. I ended up opening a bank account and credit repair. My family and I are very grateful to the Opportunity Passport Program’s IDA. We were able to move into our very first apartment and purchase a vehicle. Having a place to live was the foundation for our future success. Having a car to take my children to school/childcare and to get myself to work and school has made our lives so much easier.” —Nellie, East Hawai’i

#### Imua Kākou

“In 2013, the HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards worked closely with the Department of Human Services, Family Court, the legislature, other young people and community members to pass a bill which would extend voluntary care to 21. Governor Abercrombie, a proponent of the bill, signed Act 252 into law on July 1, 2013.

What is Imua Kākou? Imua Kākou, which means “moving forward together” in Hawaiian, is the name chosen by the young adults for the voluntary care to 21 program in Hawai‘i.

Who is Eligible for Imua Kākou?

- Young adults who aged out of DHS foster care
- Young adults placed in legal guardianship or adopted after age 16

What are the Benefits of Imua Kākou?

- Medical and dental coverage
- Living assistance payments
- Resource assistance
- Support from a case manager

How do Young Adults Qualify for Imua Kākou?

- Must have been offered financial literacy classes at an earlier age.
- Had been offered financial literacy classes at an earlier age.
- If I had been offered financial literacy classes at an earlier age, I could have made a better informed decision.” —Nellie, East Hawai‘i

### The Hawai‘i Youth Opportunities Initiative

The Hawai‘i Youth Opportunities Initiative (HYOI) helps young 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. Youth Leadership Board is made up of young people between the ages of 14-26 who are currently in or were formerly in foster care. The boards provide the ‘youth voice’ for HYOI by identifying the needs of transitioning foster youth and advocating for policy changes and increased opportunities. They receive training, meet monthly, participate on the CP Hui and collaborate with community partners. There are HI H.O.P.E.S. Boards on O‘ahu, in East and West Hawai‘i, Kaua‘i and Maui.

### Hawai‘i’s Child Advocacy Document

The Hawai‘i Youth Opportunities Initiative (HYOI) helps youth leave 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.

### Hawai‘i’s Child Advocate Award

-H.O.P.E.S. Board on Maui.
-H.O.P.E.S. Summit on Oahu.
-Funded the Voluntary foster care to age 21.
-Voluntary foster care to age 21.
-Participated in legislative testimony that led to the passage of Act 252, to extend voluntary foster care to age 21.
-Made grant funding $15,000 for supports to foster youth.
-Held third annual HI H.O.P.E.S. Summit on Oahu.
-Formed and trained HI H.O.P.E.S. board on Maui.
-Awarded Hawai‘i’s Child and Youth Advocate Award.
-Received training at Youth Leadership Institute (MO) and Fall Convening (Florida).
-Mahalo to our HYOI Funders.
-Community, McInerny and
-Office of Hawaiian Affairs
-Presented by: The HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Boards, the Hawai‘i Youth Opportunities Initiative and EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc.

### Hawai‘i Youth Opportunities Initiative

The Hawai‘i Youth Opportunities Initiative is a partner site of the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.