



**HUI HO'OMALU  
STATEWIDE  
RESOURCE  
ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE**

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# Building Connections

A Newsletter for Resource Families



Volume 3, Issue 4

July 2010

## 'OHANA CONNECTIONS CORNER

*For this 'Ohana Connections Corner I interviewed Abby Sylvester, a permanency social worker for the Diamond Head unit of CWS. Abby and I have worked on several cases together; here are some of her thoughts about the process.*

*—Wilma Friesema, OES  
EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing, Inc.*



### Making a Difference

*By Wilma Friesema & Abby Sylvester*

**Wilma:** Abby, given your experience of 'Ohana Connections, what do you think it brings to your casework?

**Abby:** There are two ways to answer that question. I think for the foster youth, 'Ohana Connections, at its core, gives them an understanding of their own history. Teens are naturally trying to figure themselves out; knowing who their family is and what happened in the past helps them make sense of their world. That's so important.



But even more than that, many of the youth I work with now realize there are people in this world who love them, support them, and will not forget them. People do grow and change, and while some family members may be unable to take custody, they can be emotionally supportive and encouraging of the youth. That, too, is important.

And then there are times when the youth can go back to live with family, which is wonderful. I've seen youth do a complete turn around because they're back with family. It gives me hope that the pain of the past doesn't have to define or rule the youth or their families. They can all heal and grow.

The second answer is personally, for me, it has made a stressful caseload feel more manageable. As social workers we're supposed to do family finding, and while I fully support that mandate, there's a lot that goes into bringing family back into a youth's life. You can't just make a few phone calls and throw people back together. They need help rebuilding their relationship.

The 'Ohana Connections program has helped with that rebuilding. You, Wilma, have helped with the reunion logistics, and keeping the youth's team of service providers on board and informed. If I had to make all the phone calls you do, plus do my regular work, there wouldn't be enough hours in the day. Besides that, you often buffer and work through tensions between parties, which is really helpful. Let's face it, a lot of families distrust CPS and have pain from the past that they still carry. Having you tell the family DHS really wants them to reconnect with the foster youth is less threatening and believable, I think. They can vent and work through their hurt and anger with you in ways I don't think they could with me, the social worker. That helps everyone move forward and lessens the "us versus them" mentality.

**Wilma:** I'm glad the program has been so helpful, but we both know there are times when 'Ohana Connections is a bumpy process, and doesn't turn out as we'd hoped. Do you have thoughts about that?

**Abby:** I think sometimes families have expectations that getting together is going to heal everything. They don't have an understanding of abuse and what it does to children. The family expects the youth to behave in ways that are familiar to them, the family, and are upset when their niece, nephew, or grandchild acts out. In turn, the youth often feel that the relatives just want them to be all better. It can be hard.

*(Continued on page 2)*

**HUI HO‘OMALU  
STATEWIDE  
RESOURCE  
ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE**

*The Hui Ho‘omalua Statewide Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) provides support to the resource family community through identifying ongoing needs, facilitating communication and by sharing resources.*

The Building Connections Newsletter is published four times a year to provide information regarding foster and adoptive care to resource families, service providers, and to the public.

**This newsletter may be viewed on the following websites:**

[www.hawaii.gov/dhs/protection/social\\_services/child\\_welfare/foster](http://www.hawaii.gov/dhs/protection/social_services/child_welfare/foster)

[www.pidfoundation.org](http://www.pidfoundation.org)

To be placed on the mailing list or if you would like to receive an electronic copy, please call 441-1125 (O‘ahu), 888-879-8970 (Toll Free) or E-mail: [RAC@pidfoundation.org](mailto:RAC@pidfoundation.org)

Partners in Development Foundation  
2040 Bachelot St.  
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96817-2433

**‘OHANA CONNECTIONS CORNER (cont.)**

I know you and I work with the families on these issues, but it’s a huge challenge, especially with youth who have experienced extreme and prolonged abuse. Their trust level is so low, and the families sometimes don’t have the tenacity or the capacity to work it through with them. I see the families trying, but it’s not the fantasy healing they had envisioned.



**Wilma:** For many, if not all families, it will be a life long journey to build and maintain those family ties. I’m wondering, what would you say to families, resource caregivers, other social workers, and youth about this process?

**Abby:** To families, please come forward, show up for these teens, and get the help you need to do it. Please work with DHS, EPIC, and the other service providers to help our foster youth. They really need you, and we do too.

To resource caregivers, I say thank you. While reconnecting with family can be a very exciting and happy time for the youth, it can also be emotional and bring back a lot of memories. I want to thank you for opening your hearts and lives to even more people, and helping the youth regain their family and roots.

To other social workers, I say don’t hesitate about putting in a referral. Don’t be afraid that it will just be more work; it’s been really helpful. ‘Ohana Connections adds another level of possibilities and opens up other options. It’s a very positive and deeply meaningful service for our youth.

And to the youth, some of you may be resistant or afraid of reconnecting with your family. Yet, deep down, at the very least, you probably want to know where they are and what they’re doing. You want answers to the past, and possibly a relationship in the present. I’ll bet most of you want your family.

For many of you, when you reconnect with family you’ll be with people who love you and share your roots. You’ll get answers and a better understanding of your history. It’s your right to know your family. If you don’t want to contact with them now, at least take their contact information for later. Someday you may want find them, but you won’t know where to start.

**Wilma:** Thanks for that ringing endorsement of the program, Abby. Any last thoughts?

**Abby:** ‘Ohana Connections really is a source of inspiration for my work. It’s helped me see what can happen when family is brought back into the lives of foster youth. I’m thinking of one case where the entire service team was at the end of our collective rope in dealing with the youth. She had been through every placement imaginable, multiple times. It wasn’t until family was brought back into the picture and she was living with them that she settled down. She’s now in college working toward a degree in nursing. She’s happy, healthy, and full of possibility and optimism. It’s a delight to see.

I’m glad there’s more of a push for family finding. It’s definitely a step in the right direction because it helps foster youth. They need to be kept safe, but they need their families too.

*EPIC ‘Ohana Conferencing is funded through the Department of Human Services  
For more information about ‘Ohana Connections work  
contact Wilma Friesema at EPIC ‘Ohana Conferencing, Inc. at 748-7921*

**Help! Looking For Stories!**

Would you like to share some helpful tips? Got an inspirational story to tell? Know of some useful resources in your community?

These are just some of the many possibilities that you can contribute to this newsletter. Please send them over so we can all benefit from each other’s wisdom!

We would also appreciate any feedback, comments and suggestions on ways that we can improve this newsletter so that it is useful to you. What would you like to see in it? Topics of interest? We look forward to hearing from you!

441-1125 (O‘ahu) ★ 1-888-879-8970 (Toll Free) ★ [RAC@pidfoundation.org](mailto:RAC@pidfoundation.org)



# Welcome to FPH's Resource Family Support Services Corner

By Chiyomi Chow, FPH RFSS Family Resource Specialist

Resource Family Support Services (RFSS) is funded through the Department of Human Services



FAMILY PROGRAMS HAWAII

## Ask the Warm Line



**QUESTION:** I know that foster care is just temporary, but I can't help but feel sad when children leave my home. What should I do? Is it wrong to feel that way?

**ANSWER:** The fact that you are sad is a good indication that you care about the children that come into your home. It is very common to grieve the loss of a child or a relationship, even if you knew from the beginning that it was temporary. Sometimes, these feelings may be overlooked or even frowned upon. The feelings are very natural though, especially when you think about the time you've spent with the child and the energy you've invested. You may go through a grieving process similar to losing a loved one, which may include the feelings of shock, guilt, pain, anger, depression, loneliness, and sadness before coming to acceptance and adjustment. Sometimes, it is helpful to remember that you were there for the child when he/she needed you most. Think about the difference that you've made in the child's life. It is also good to talk to other resource

families who have similar experiences, like attending a support group or talking to a mentor. Also, give yourself time to grieve. If you need a break before your next placement, let your licensing worker know. It's not easy to do what you do, but then again, most heroic acts aren't!



## Care to Share



Do you have something that a family could use? Do you care to share? Then here's a great opportunity to help children in foster care and their generous resource, adoptive or guardianship families.

"Care to Share" is a way for people to share their gently used items with resource, adoptive or guardianship families who need your support.

Examples of items requested include: smoke detectors, dressers, bunk bed, diapers, shoe shelf, toys, high chair, baby safety gate.

Examples of items currently available include: Cinderella suitcase, infant carrier, toddler potty, strollers, and women/teen/children's clothing in specific sizes.

For an up-to-date list of items by island, check out Care to Share at [www.FamilyProgramsHawaii.org](http://www.FamilyProgramsHawaii.org), under "Resources"



**Do you have a question??? Contact the Warm Line!**

**545-1130 (O'ahu) ★ 1-866-545-0882 (Toll-free for Neighbor Islands)**

**E-mail: [WarmLine@FamilyProgramsHi.org](mailto:WarmLine@FamilyProgramsHi.org)**

**Monday—Friday 8:30 am—5 pm**

## NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH EVENTS

May was National Foster Care Month. Wonderful events took place statewide, all with the same goal, to honor and thank the compassionate people who make a difference in the lives of Hawai'i's children and families.

### East Hawai'i

Each May during National Foster Care Month; East Hawai'i honors resource families with a Mahalo luncheon. This year's annual luncheon took place on May 1, 2010 at the Church of the Holy Cross. A moment was taken to recognize East Hawai'i's oldest resource caregiver, Charles (Chuck) Parker, 88, and his wife, Amparo Alvarez-Parker for their efforts throughout the years. We also applauded the caring commitment and continued support of our resource families with a proclamation that was read from Mayor Billy Kenoi's office. Lunch was catered by KTA Super Store, who also was generous enough to donate a cake for our luncheon. Starbucks donated coffee and local merchants donated flowers, gift certificates and many great door prizes for our resource families. Former foster youth under the guidance of

*(continued on page 10)*

Confident, hard-working, strong, remarkable, college graduate, former foster youth, resource caregiver and legal guardian for her siblings; these are all words that describe Wendy Peltier. Having just turned 24, she recently earned a Bachelor's Degree in Justice Administration and has her sights set on attending Law School. With the ultimate goal of becoming a family court judge, she would like to be able to help youth and families and give back to the community.

-Carol Morimoto, Partners in Development Foundation

## Ua Wehe 'Ia Ke Alaula - Breaking Chains

*A story about foster care and the challenges of teen life in rural Hawai'i*

Wendy Peltier experienced firsthand the devastating effects that drugs can have on a family. As a child, she never knew her father and she craved attention from her mother who was often high on drugs; it was not long before she and her siblings entered Hawai'i's foster care system. During her teen years, she turned to drugs and alcohol to numb her emotional pain but nothing could fill the void of being separated from her family. Wendy's story though is more about perseverance and resilience as she finds the strength to deal with the challenges that life has thrown at her.

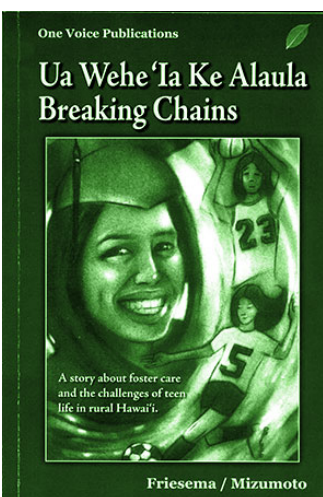
Wendy was actively involved in the Hawai'i Foster Youth Coalition where she had the opportunity to share her story through presentations so others could not only learn from her experiences but also be inspired by what she has done with her life. Little did she know that one day, she would be approached to tell her story in a book.

Wilma Friesema, an 'Ohana Engagement Specialist, with EPIC 'Ohana and Kim Hunter, founder of One Voice Publications, felt that Wendy's story would be perfect for the first book in a series titled, "People Like Me". One Voice Publications is a multi-lingual literacy effort that emerged from Kim's work with Hawai'i's incarcerated youth. These youth would often ask him for something to read that was real and inspirational.

They were not able to read at the high school level and Kim found there wasn't much literature out there that could meet their needs. Kim's goal is to produce a series of bilingual books in languages of Hawai'i and the Pacific that shares the lives of local people who have overcome adversity to achieve success.



Wendy Peltier



*Ua Wehe 'Ia Ke Alaula (Breaking Chains)* is Wendy's inspirational story. It highlights how drugs can tear a family apart and the struggles that Wendy faced in Hawai'i's foster care system. But, of even greater value is the message of hope that her story brings as we learn how this strong, courageous, young woman overcame the many challenges in her childhood and continues to move forward to reach her goals.

This 78-page story is written at a third-grade reading level. Written in English by Wilma Friesema, it is printed with side-by-side translations from Hawaiian to English by translator Jessica Kahealani Lono. Initially, Wendy was consulted on which language she felt the book should be written in. After some consideration, she thought about her own culture and felt the need to reach out to the Hawaiian community and youth in foster care. She recognized that many youth may not be able to read or speak the Hawaiian language, but felt this book may make them interested in learning it. Wendy also states, "I wanted to give back to the Hawaiian community that gave to me when I was growing up."

If you or your organization would like to purchase this book, contact One Voice Publications at: [info@onevoicepublications.net](mailto:info@onevoicepublications.net) or visit their website at: [www.OneVoicePublications.net](http://www.OneVoicePublications.net).

Today, there are times when Wendy can't believe how far she has come in her life and how much she has learned and grown over the years. After almost failing her junior year in high school, she is now a college graduate. One message she has for youth at risk is, "Never give up, the world is ahead of us. I never knew what to expect and I'm here today, graduated from college." She would also like to share with resource caregivers that, "It is important for foster kids to have someone that shows they care. Stay by their side no matter what; it is always important to let them know that you are thinking about them and that you care." Wendy would like to continue sharing her story with others. If you would like to have her as a presenter, you may contact her at: [wendypeltier@yahoo.com](mailto:wendypeltier@yahoo.com)

## MAHALO TO...

Do you know a DHS-CWS worker(s) that you would like to acknowledge for his/her exceptional work? Share their name(s) with us & what makes them so special so we can let others know how wonderful they are!

**Thank them today!**

441-1125 (O'ahu) ★ 1-888-879-8970 (Toll Free) ★ [RAC@pidfoundation.org](mailto:RAC@pidfoundation.org)

## 2010 Annual Conference for Resource Families: “Nurture Me and Watch Me Grow”

By Eva Chau, FPH Resource Family Support Services (RFSS) Program Manager

As service providers, we often talk about “planting seeds” when we refer to giving tools to kids in foster care to help guide them in the right direction. Resource families, however, have an opportunity to do more than just plant seeds. They can “create an optimal environment” for the children in their homes “to thrive and grow.” Faced with some of the challenges these children come with, how do you do that?

Barbara and Tom Naki spent the day explaining nurturing parenting at the Family Programs Hawai'i 2010 Annual Conference for Resource Families. Families attending the event learned the value of nurturing, the difference between behavior encouragement and behavior management, how to praise, how to create family rules, how to build personal power in children, the difference between discipline and punishment, the importance of the role of the nurturing father, and parenting from a multi-cultural perspective. The day was filled with information, good food, great networking with other families, prize drawings, and most of all being nurtured.



Families who take the time to nurture themselves, in turn, can do a better job of nurturing the children in their homes. Nurturing yourself can be done in many ways: taking some time for yourself regularly to rejuvenate, attending a training to learn new things, attending a group to create a support for yourself, or reaching out to family and friends for help. Families attending this free training had the added benefit of nurturing themselves by learning, networking, and utilizing childcare.

This training, as well as all RFSS trainings through FPH, are funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS). If you are interested in upcoming trainings presented by FPH in collaboration with the DHS, please visit our Event Calendar at our website: [www.FamilyProgramsHawaii.org](http://www.FamilyProgramsHawaii.org) (click on the Resource Tab and locate the Event Calendar on the left). If you missed this training and are interested in viewing it online or on 'Olelo, look for upcoming information on airdates on our website.

### About the Trainers:

Barbara and Tom Naki have been working with families for over 40 years. They teach and provide consultation for the Nurturing Parenting curriculum through The Institute For Family Enrichment (TIFFE). Barbara is the Director of Prevention and Education at TIFFE. She co-authored the Nurturing Parenting for Prenatal Families and the Multi-Cultural Parenting Guide's Hawaiian Parenting Component. Tom designed and teaches a culturally relevant curriculum that teaches men how to become nurturing fathers.



## “A Day in the Life of a Native Hawaiian Youth in Foster Care and Their Cultural Needs”



Presented by: Dr. Kimo Alameida

Resource caregivers with Native Hawaiian foster children will have the opportunity to understand the day in the life of a Native Hawaiian foster youth and learn how to provide them with an environment that is conducive to the formation of a positive ethnic and cultural heritage. Both Native Hawaiian and non-Native Hawaiian resource caregivers raising Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian children will learn how to increase positive learning opportunities, support healing and reduce any further trauma and cultural displacement for children in their care.

Childcare provided for registered keiki ages 3-12!

**This FREE training is open to all resource, adoptive, guardianship & kinship families**

See Calendar of Events on pg11 for dates/times

For more information or to RSVP, call 1-866-545-0882 (Toll Free) ★ 521-9531 x245 (O'ahu)

Dinner is provided!

*This training is put on by Family Programs Hawai'i RFSS & DHS ♦ Funding is provided by the Department of Human Services*

## T.H.E. Collaboration Presents: Better Start I Workshop

A training geared for Foster, Guardianship, Kinship, and Adopted Youth ages 13 and up



August 31, 2010 (Tuesday)  
Leeward Community College:  
Campus/Student Center  
5:30 pm—8 pm

### TOPICS INCLUDE:

- ♦ Career Exploration w/ Former Foster Youth & Community Members
- ♦ Leeward Community College & Aging Out Resources
- ♦ Kuder Career Planning Assessments
- ♦ Voter Registration

Childcare provided for registered keiki

Dinner is provided!

RSVP to the Warm Line at 545-1130 by August 24, 2010

(This training is held in conjunction with the resource caregiver training, “A Day in the Life of a Native Hawaiian Youth in Foster Care and Their Cultural Needs”)



## FOSTER PARENT COLLEGE

### *FREE Online Training for Resource, Guardianship, Adoptive and Kinship Families*



In January of 2010, Family Programs Hawai'i, Resource Family Support Services, began to offer online training through Foster Parent College (FPC) for families statewide. The training is free, self-paced, done from the comfort of your home and most importantly, specifically geared towards families who are caring for children that are or were in the child welfare system. The trainings offer a wide variety of behavior management and parenting strategies topics. For example, if you want to learn more about issues affecting the children you are caring for such as: autism, anger management, anxiety disorders, sexualized behaviors or eating disorders OR are caring for a substance abuse exposed infant or want more information on working with birth parents during visitation; Foster Parent College is for you!!!! Furthermore, FPC provides certificates that you can print for your records of the trainings that you have completed.

If you are interested in registering for FPC please contact the Support Groups & Training Coordinator, Paloma La Force at 808-521-3531 x251 or you can email her at [PLaForce@FamilyProgramsHi.org](mailto:PLaForce@FamilyProgramsHi.org). The following information is needed in order to register and participate in online training: ♦ First & Last Name ♦ Email address ♦ Phone number

Please feel free to look over the courses offered at [www.fosterparentcollege.com](http://www.fosterparentcollege.com). Don't forget the courses are FREE and SELF-PACED FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR OWN HOME!!! Below are testimonials from a few families who have taken advantage of this great opportunity:

"The opportunity to utilize the on-line training is a real plus for busy resource caregivers. As a full-time employee and 24/7 resource caregiver, taking time off work or away from home for training can be difficult. The convenience of doing on-line training on topics of immediate interest is very helpful. I like to use the time after the kids have gone to bed to learn about how to face the challenges we're experiencing at the present time. Most of the courses can be completed in an hour and the information downloaded and printed for reference later. Thank you to Family Programs Hawai'i for making this available to resource families."



"We have completed several different online classes and we have learned so much. Thank You for offering these studies. I especially like the convenience of being able to do it when I have time. Having four foster kids under the age of 7, I don't have a lot of free time so this is perfect for continuing education."



### **Q & A with Project Visitation: Sibling Visits for Children Separated from Brothers and Sisters as a Result of Involvement with the Foster Care System**



*By Sarah Fairchild Beaucage, Family Programs Hawai'i*

#### **What is Project Visitation?**

Project Visitation provides monthly visitation and special events for siblings separated by the foster care system on O'ahu and in West Hawai'i. The program is free.

#### **Who runs the sibling visits?**

Adult volunteers coordinate, supervise, and provide transportation for the visits. Volunteers must complete an orientation and a yearly background check through DHS. Paid staff supports the volunteers and plan events several times a year for the children to attend.

#### **Where do the visits take place?**

Project Visitation visits take place in the community. Volunteers plan fun, memorable outings where kids can be kids. Some popular Project Visitation activities include beach outings, picnics, bowling, the zoo, mini-golf, and ice skating.

#### **What children are eligible for Project Visitation?**

Project Visitation works with any sibling group separated by foster care, regardless of the current legal status of the children, including foster custody, legal guardianship, and adoption. If one or more of the children has turned 18 but lacks transportation, Project Visitation can continue to help make visits happen.

#### **How do I get my child into Project Visitation?**

If you have a child in your home who is separated from his or her biological siblings, please call 521-9531 ext. 242 to initiate visitations. All legal guardians will have to consent to visits.



## "THE BEAST"

By Michelle Sajona, FPH RFSS Program Coordinator, Parent to Parent Mentoring

The Parent to Parent Mentoring Program hosted 2 events this past year for Resource Caregivers. Mentors and Mentees and their families were invited to attend these events with the opportunity to network and meet new families and reconnect with ones they haven't seen for a while. At both of these events, the focus was on teamwork and communication presented through an interactive activity called, "The Beast" developed by Tony Alvarez, MSW. A very intimidating name for a pretty non-threatening activity. The idea of "The Beast" is for the "Builders" to replicate an intricate structure that only the "Visionaries" can see. The role of the "Runners" is to receive information from the Visionaries and pass it along to the Builders. Communication can only occur in designated areas. The participants were divided into teams of their choice and had a time limit of 15 minutes to complete the task.



The task in and of itself was a wonderful sight to see—not 'beastly' at all. The Runners ran back and forth between the Builders and Visionaries getting bits of information here and there. It was interesting to see how each person listened, explained, and clarified differently. Some used their hands to show where a particular item went. Some pretended to draw what it looked like. Some got really close to their teammates, not wanting the other teams to hear them. "Okay's," "uh-huh's," and nods were seen and heard throughout the activity to indicate understanding. Some even repeated what the person said to clarify the information. The participants, adults and kids alike, were so focused on their respective roles and appeared to want to do the best job possible. It was great to see teamwork and different communication styles playing out.

Throughout the activity, people were smiling and laughing while others were complaining and some just stood by watching their teammates. By the tenth minute, the Runners were walking with most of them out of breath. At the two minute warning however, they were back to running and scrambling to finish their perfect replica.

In the end, the teams were able to see each other's work. "Oh, that's where that goes," "No even look like the real one," "Ours looks the best." Whatever the comments were, they were used for the participants to process the experience. That being said, the point of The Beast was not so much how accurate their replica was to the actual structure, rather it was the process of how each person functioned in the role they were in and how they were able to communicate with their teammates to reach a common goal.

Some points of reflection that we asked our participants: How do you deal with a challenging task? Do you smile and laugh, do you complain, do you stand back and avoid the situation? What's your style of communication? And with that, how does your communication style work with others? Are you willing to change your way of communicating so that others will understand you better? The responses came from the perspective of Parents/Grandparents, Resource Caregivers, Mentors, Mentees, children, etc. and they were all different depending on the roles they played on a particular team.



These interesting discussion topics helped us think about how we need each other to function as we go about our day to day lives—communication being the key that links us together. Whether it be securing food for the day, removing a child from their home, attending an 'Ohana Conference, or driving to work; we need each other. More specifically, we need each other to replicate the vision of having a safe and nurturing home for Hawai'i's keiki. I believe that our Mentors and Mentees have taken this challenge and are working every day to reach this essential common goal.



## Fostering Successful Transitions into Adulthood

By Delia Ulima, EPIC 'Ohana, Inc. HYOI Coordinator

The transition into adulthood for teenagers is both an exciting and challenging time. It is a time of independence, a time to leave the comforts of home and family and venture into the world of school and work. For many, the anxiety over the unknown is buffered by the knowledge that there is a home and a family to return to and rely on for support.

For transitioning foster youth, however, there is little, if any, buffering. These youth, who have suffered trauma and often separation from their biological family, are left to fend for themselves with few or no assets, emotional support or career and independent living skills. For many, there is no 'home' to return to for Thanksgiving dinner or summer break. There is no one to call for help with the electric bill or advice on how to purchase their first car.

While the total number of children in foster care nationally has decreased every year for more than a decade, the number of youth aging out of foster care has continued to grow. More than 230,000 young people have aged out of care since 1999, ranging from 19,000 young people in 1999 to nearly 30,000 in 2008. In Hawai'i, over 150 youth age out of foster care every year.

(Continued on page 9)

## Fostering Successful Transitions into Adulthood (cont.)

National research has shown that, when compared with their peers, young people aging out of foster care face grim outcomes. Data has shown that 25 percent of them will become homeless and the same percentage will be incarcerated within two years. Only 58 percent will graduate from high school, with roughly 3 percent earning a college degree. Over 40 percent of these young adults will become parents within four years of leaving foster care and are twice as likely to have their own children placed in foster care.



The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative ("the Initiative") was created in an effort to address and provide for the unique needs of this population. The Initiative was created from a vision that every youth aging out of foster care should have access to the opportunities and supports needed for a successful transition to adulthood. To make the vision a reality, the Initiative committed itself to bringing together people and resources to help youth and young adults make the connections they need for permanence, education, employment, housing, health care, and supportive personal and community relationships. Incorporated in 2001 as a private foundation, the Initiative is presently funded by the nation's leading advocacy philanthropy for at-risk children and families--the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In Hawai'i, the Initiative has been named the *Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative* (HYOI) and is led and directed by EPIC 'Ohana, Inc., in collaboration with local funders and agencies.

Perhaps one of the most exciting components of the Initiative is the chance for current or former foster youth, ages 14 through 24, to become an Opportunity Passport™ participant. Those who enroll in this program will receive financial literacy training to teach them about budgets, savings, banking and acquiring assets. The youth who complete this training will be eligible to open two savings accounts; a personal account for their everyday needs and a matched Individual Development Account (IDA). The IDA is a savings account which the HYOI matches dollar for dollar up to \$1,000 a year for pre-approved asset purchases such as a car, rent deposit, a computer, health care or entrepreneurial endeavors. Opportunity Passport™ participants will also have access to Door Opener opportunities. A Door Opener expedites access to educational, employment, housing, health care, community and personal opportunities.

An additional opportunity is available in Hawai'i in the form of the Youth Leadership Board, known as the HI H.O.P.E.S. Board. This Board consists of about 10 current and former foster youth, between 14 and 24, who work with a Community Partnership Board to identify the Door Openers needed for foster youth. They receive stipends for their involvement, the opportunity to develop leadership and advocacy skills, and the chance to make a real difference in the lives of foster youth by providing a voice for them.



The HYOI seeks to enroll up to 50 youth a year in the Opportunity Passport™ program. If you would like more information on how to enroll as a Passport participant, participate on the Youth Leadership Board, or if you have any questions regarding the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative, contact Delia Ulima, HYOI Coordinator with EPIC 'Ohana, Inc. at (808) 748-7052 or email [dulima@epicohana.org](mailto:dulima@epicohana.org).

### ***Did you know...***

#### **DHS HAS BEEN AWARDED A \$1.35 MILLION FEDERAL GRANT TO ASSIST FOSTER CHILDREN BY STRENGTHENING FAMILY CONNECTIONS**

Even in this time of cutbacks, Federal money is being channeled into child welfare practices that are proving to be effective. In October of 2009, DHS received a total of \$1.35 million in new federal funding to improve the lives of at-risk children by strengthening family connections thus, reducing the need to remove children from their parents and place them in out-of-home foster care.

The Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, awarded the three-year grant to DHS.

"National research shows that children who must be removed from their biological parents – either temporarily or permanently – are safer, more stable, happier and better adjusted when placed with relatives," said Lillian Koller, Director of the Department of Human Services. "This federal grant will enable DHS and our community partners to do an even better job of enhancing the safety, stability and well-being of children by strengthening their immediate families and connecting children with their extended families."

DHS is using the new funding to create an Early 'Ohana Intervention program, which provides family finding and family connection services that lessen the need for foster care. If children must be removed from their parents for safety reasons, the program strives to place children with kin to preserve connections with their families and culture. DHS will also use the federal funds to launch the Enhanced 'Ohana Connections program, which will help children ages four to 14, who have been in foster care for long stretches of time, by promoting emotional ties with their extended family members that may lead to adoptions or guardianships. Up until now, DHS primarily focused this type of family connection service on children ages three and younger.

*(Continued on page 10)*

## FEDERAL GRANT (cont.)

These latest initiatives expand on efforts led by Lillian Koller and her staff since 2003 to work with community partners on implementing new strategies for protecting children and strengthening families. EPIC 'Ohana, Inc., under contract with DHS, is the community partner assisting with this new initiative.

Prior to this new direction, DHS removed children from their biological families at up to four times the national average with no improvement in safety outcomes. Today, the number of children in State foster care has dropped to a 16-year low, from about 3,000 children in 2003 to only 1,500 in 2009. In addition, the child re-abuse rate dropped during that same period from 6 percent to 3.9 percent, which is far better than the nationally accepted standard of 6.1 percent.

This new federal funding will also help DHS carry out its second Program Improvement Plan (PIP) for child welfare services. Each state has a PIP, developed in conjunction with the federal Children's Bureau, to promote continuous quality improvement in child welfare systems.



The Children's Bureau announced in March that DHS had successfully completed its first PIP by aggressively overhauling child welfare services in Hawai'i. This initiative involved five systemic improvements and more than 350 benchmark action steps, including implementation of nationally accepted best practices to improve the safety, stability and well-being of children.

For more information about these programs, contact: Laurie Tochiki at EPIC 'Ohana, Inc. at 218-6678

## NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH EVENTS (cont.)



Jennifer AhChong, Ho'ololi Mua No Ke Ola Senior Program (To move forward with Change in Growth) with Family Programs Hawai'i, were the key note speakers for the event. They talked about the challenges they faced in foster care as well as describing how resource families made a positive difference in their lives.

The luncheon was sponsored by the East Hawai'i Foster Parent Association and the East Hawai'i Friends of Foster Families, a coalition of foster care agencies including Family Programs Hawai'i, the Department of Human Services, Catholic Charities – Na 'Ohana Pulama and Statewide Resources Families, Hawai'i Family Court, Hawai'i Behavioral Health, Child and Family Services, Hale Kipa, The Salvation Army – Family Intervention Services, and Partners in Development Foundation-Hui Ho'omaluu.

### O'ahu

Resource caregivers and foster keiki were treated to a free dinner, training, and entertainment at Dave and Busters to celebrate National Foster Care Month. This was an afternoon filled with great food and fun for everyone! There was a plethora of amazing talent as keiki and families took the stage to showcase their exceptional abilities. Chris Golightly, an American Idol finalist and former foster youth, delighted the crowd with his story and beautiful voice then took some time to interact and take pictures with the keiki. Hawai'i beauty pageant contestants were present to help distribute gifts, crafts, and cake. This event was sponsored by donations and the fundraising efforts of various community agencies.

### Maui

The Pili Na Huelwai ~ "Bringing Our 'Ohana into Balance" event took place to send a big "Mahalo" to Maui's resource, adoptive, guardianship, and kinship 'ohana. There were a lot of great games and prizes for the keiki and families as well as an imu that was prepared for some ono food. The entertainment consisted of many talented individuals such as Uncle Richard Ho'opi'i, Greg Dela Cruz from the Neighborhood Place of Wailuku, and resource caregivers. Maui's Mayor, Charmaine Tavares, also stopped by to meet families and share in the festivities. Sign waving took place on 2 different days during May to raise awareness for foster care. Needless to say, there was a lot of cars honking, as a show of community support.

### Kaua'i

Kaua'i's Mayor, Bernard Carvalho Jr., presented a proclamation to recognize May as National Foster Care Month as well as acknowledging Hawai'i's keiki in foster care and the resource families who care for them. As stated in the proclamation, "Resource families open their hearts and homes with the understanding that all children and youth, including those living in foster care, deserve to grow up in a safe, stable and nurturing environment where they can benefit from lasting, positive relationships with caring adults."



*Kaua'i community representatives accept a mayoral proclamation celebrating May as National Foster Care Month*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### O'AHU:

- ★ Central O'ahu Resource Caregiver Support Group. 5:30 pm—8 pm. Aliamanu Community Cntr. RSVP to FPH at 521-9531 x245. ♦ July 22 (Thurs) ♦ Aug 28 (Thurs) ♦ Sept 23 (Thurs)
- ★ Waianae Resource Caregiver Support Group. 5:30 pm—8 pm. Waianae District Park. RSVP to FPH at 521-9531 x245. ♦ July 16 (Fri) ♦ Aug 13 (Fri) ♦ Sept 17 (Fri)
- ★ Windward Resource Caregiver Support Group. 6 pm—8:30 pm. Kailua Baptist Church. RSVP to FPH at 521-9531 x245. ♦ Aug 13 (Fri) ♦ Sept 10 (Fri) ♦ Oct 8 (Fri)
- ★ July 24 (Sat): Windward 'Ohana Carnival. 10:30 am—2:30 pm. Windward City Shopping Center (See discount coupon below).
- ★ Aug 31 (Tues): Training: "A Day in the Life of a Native Hawaiian Youth in Foster Care and Their Cultural Needs" by Dr. Kimo Alameda. 5:30 pm—8 pm. Leeward Community College. RSVP to FPH at 521-9531 ext 245 (See pg 6 for details).
- ★ Aug 31 (Tues): Better Start I Training. 5:30 pm—8 pm. Leeward Community College. RSVP to the Warm Line at 545-1130 (See pg 6 for details).
- ★ Waianae Training: "A Day in the Life of a Native Hawaiian Youth in Foster Care and Their Cultural Needs" by Dr. Kimo Alameda. Date/Time TBD. Ulu Ke Kukui in Waianae. Call FPH for more info at 521-9531 ext 245 (See pg 6 for details).

### MAUI

- ★ Maui Resource Caregiver Support Group. 5:30 pm—8 pm. Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center. RSVP to Kim Bowlin at 250-4457. ♦ Aug 19 (Thurs) ♦ Sept 16 (Thurs) ♦ Oct 21 (Thurs)
- ★ Sept 28 (Tues): Training: "A Day in the Life of a Native Hawaiian Youth in Foster Care and Their Cultural Needs" by Dr. Kimo Alameda. 5:30 pm—8 pm. Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center Annex Bldg. RSVP to the Warm Line at 1-866-545-0882 (See pg 6 for details).

### WEST HAWAI'I:

- ★ Kona Resource Caregiver Support Group. 5 pm—7:30 pm. Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity. RSVP to the Warm Line at 1-866-545-0882. ♦ Aug 2 (Mon) ♦ Oct 4 (Mon)
- ★ Aug 23 (Mon): Training: "A Day in the Life of a Native Hawaiian Youth in Foster Care and Their Cultural Needs" by Dr. Kimo Alameda. 5 pm—7:30 pm. Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity. RSVP to the Warm Line at 1-866-545-0882 (See pg 6 for details).

### EAST HAWAI'I:

- ★ Hilo Resource Caregiver Support Group. 12 pm—2:30 pm. Church of the Holy Cross. RSVP to Michele Carvalho at 987-5988. ♦ Aug 14 (Sat) ♦ Sept 11 (Sat) ♦ Oct 9 (Sat)
- ★ July 27 (Tues): Training: "A Day in the Life of a Native Hawaiian Youth in Foster Care and Their Cultural Needs" by Dr. Kimo Alameda. 5:30 pm—8 pm. Church of the Holy Cross. RSVP to the Warm Line at 1-866-545-0882 (See pg 6 for details).

### KAUA'I:

- ★ Aug 7 (Sat): Training: "A Day in the Life of a Native Hawaiian Youth in Foster Care and Their Cultural Needs" by Dr. Kimo Alameda. 12 pm—3:30 pm. Kauai Lutheran Church. RSVP to the Warm Line at 1-866-545-0882 (See pg 6 for details).

## WINDWARD 'OHANA CARNIVAL

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888-879-8970 (Toll Free)  
Fax: 441-1122  
E-mail: RAC@pidfoundation.org

The concept for the Statewide Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) was created by the Department of Human Services (DHS) as a means to support the resource family community. Hui Ho'omalua facilitates this committee comprised of adoptive parents, resource caregivers and various community agencies, all dedicated to providing services and support to Hawai'i's keiki and the resource families who care for them. The purpose of the RAC is to identify ongoing needs, facilitate communication, share resources, provide information through a statewide calendar of events and a quarterly newsletter and report on local projects and other topics of interest to benefit Hawai'i's resource families.

***This committee, the newsletter and many of the represented agencies are supported and funded by Department of Human Services contracts.***

RAC Committee Members:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i—Hui Ho'omalua  
Department of Health  
Department of Human Services  
EPIC, Inc. 'Ohana Conferencing  
Family Court  
Family Programs Hawai'i—Hui Ho'omalua  
Resource Caregivers  
Adoptive Parents  
Hawai'i Foster Youth Coalition  
Heart Gallery Hawai'i  
HOPE INC  
It Takes An 'Ohana  
Partners in Development Foundation—Hui Ho'omalua & Kōkua 'Ohana  
University of Hawai'i, School of Social Work

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