



Planting the Seeds of Higher Education...

As the world continues to change, the need to have a quality education to compete in our society is more important than ever. Many of us deliver this message to our children from the time they are very young. This may not be the case for your foster youth. He or she may have never heard the words “When you go to college...” or “You can be whatever you want to be.” Instead, they may have had negative messages delivered to them such as “You’ll never amount to anything” or “You’re going to end up in prison just like your father.”

It is up to us to help them see the possibilities that lie before them. Foster youth have many higher education scholarships and grant opportunities available, some that are exclusive to them. One such opportunity is the Victoria S. & Bradley Geist Foundation Scholarship. Foster youth can qualify for this grant regardless of their grade point average. However, most scholarships are competitive, meaning our youth must maintain a grade point average of at least 2.7 to apply. So how can you help? Talk to your youth about their strengths and help them realize their potential. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Encourage them to do well in school NOW and explain that it is important to keep their grade point average up so that they can qualify for scholarships later.
- Accompany them to events designed to help them learn about colleges and to apply for financial aid so that you both learn about the opportunities available to them.
- Help them fill out their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon as possible. It can be found on-line at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Check our website to find free workshops available to help students apply.
- Introduce them to a professional in the community who works in the field your youth is interested in. This will take some of the mystery out of the route to success and allow them to hear first hand about the struggles and successes others have faced in pursuit of their dreams.
- Take them on college campus’s tours.
- Help them put together a plan and assist them in going through the necessary steps to actualize their goals.
- Help them connect with other foster youth with similar goals. (A good resource for them to do this is the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition @ 255-8365.)

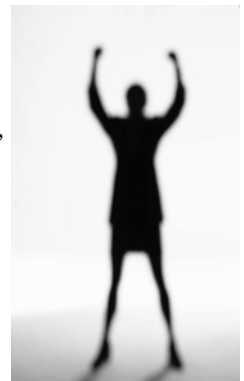
An example of a valuable piece of information learned while attending a “Senior Night” at a local high school is that if your foster youth decides to attend one of the community colleges in the University of Hawaii system, they can, in essence, get paid to go to college. How can that be, you ask? First, Hawaii’s foster youth may qualify for some or all of the following resources which can add up to a little over \$14,000 a year:

- Victoria S. & Bradley Geist Foundation Scholarships.
- Pell Grant
- Department of Human Services Higher Education Board Allowance
- Education and Training Voucher

Additionally, if their college application is submitted in a timely manner to the school, our community colleges often have additional monies that they give to students in need, which might mean their tuition is paid in full. They can then use their scholarship funds to pay for books and living expenses. The above does not even take into account other abundant scholarship opportunities available.

There is much to learn so that we can support our youth as they plot their course and actualize their plan. *Let’s guide them through this phase of growth in order to help them fulfill their full potential.*

Visit our website @ www.hawaiifosterparent.org for more scholarship & resource information.



“Everything Means Something to Me...”

By Kim Stevens

“Everything means something to me,” spoke a young teen on the video promoting child-specific recruitment for adolescents. She goes on to say that she watches and listens intently; for signs that she is loved and signs that she is unlovable. Not surprisingly, she tells us that most often the *unlovable* evidence comes out ahead. Another young man relates that the messages in residential settings are often confusing. If cooperative and pleasant, he is seen as manipulative; silence is labeled stubbornness; and honesty, oppositional behavior. A third teen reports that his records are full of terms like Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Bipolar and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, but no mention of poet, athlete, giver of great hugs – all labels he applies to himself.

Child welfare practice is refocused on *youth voice* these days. Engaging youth in advocacy projects, conference panels and keynotes by youth, adolescent permanency projects, and various mentoring models all evidence this positive shift. As adults we are being asked to look at our practice and habits, honestly evaluating their efficacy. We still have some way to go. As we continue to join with youth on their path to adulthood, they are telling us how we can do a better job in parenting, treatment and permanency work. A universal plea is that we stop labeling youth and truly become more forthcoming about their strengths and positive attributes.

Shortly after my daughters were adopted, the one who had been in care since birth was given a second grade assignment – the dreaded “life line.” We called her social worker who spent hours pouring through the records to find mention of first steps, first words, and notable milestones. What she found instead was a chronology of enuresis, suspected “deficiencies,” disrupted placements, and behavioral diagnoses. Not one mention of a tooth coming in, her brilliant smile, or any of the “firsts” that most children have recorded in baby books and in their parent’s memories.

Several years ago a group of aspiring young actors and poets put together a revue of sorts for a series of child welfare conferences and training sessions. All participants were adopted or in foster care. In writing the original pieces, themes about labeling and biases against foster kids kept emerging. “I Am, I Am Not” incorporated all the performers experiences of reading their records, attending service plan and educational meetings, or simply moving through the world. “I am strong; I am not your labels;” “I am a dancer, I am not ‘foster trash;’ are only two of the messages these youth shared.

continued on page 5



The Story Behind the HFPA Logo

Foster parent Cid Newsome created the HFPA logo in 1996. Cid always liked Hawaiian quilts and thinks of them as a natural representation of family. She chose to incorporate the hibiscus into the design because it is the state flower. Instead of the traditional leaves, Cid created a design featuring two boys and two girls. She says, “I chose to include children in the design because foster parents are taking care of the children of Hawaii. In a way, we are “quilting” them into our family. Foster children become an integral part of our family and the quilt design represents the ability to take pieces (different people) and patch them together to make a whole. Note: Children and flowers are both represented in Hawaiian by the word pua.

The Hawaii Foster Parent Association offers resources and information to those in the community concerned with protecting the interests of children and youth in out-of-home care, while providing responsible advocacy.

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Judith Wilhoite, *Editor*

The comments of individuals are not necessarily those of HFPA.

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Why Foster Youth Runaway by Blake Loranzo

Hi, My name is Blake Lanoza. I am a former foster youth and advocate for the rights, futures and well being of the foster of Hawaii. There are many issues that affect both foster youth and their underrated caregivers, who put their hearts and homes on the line every day. The issue I'd like to talk about is foster youth running away.

Why do foster youth runaway? This question plagues our foster parents, GALs and child welfare workers. Youth run away for all sorts of reasons. Things like verbal, physical and/or sexual abuse can trigger running away. But there are also other reasons, some more subtle than others.

I have never run away, but I was triggered at times and wanted to. I was in an abusive foster home for about five years. The one thing that prevented me from running away was my foster siblings. I didn't want to leave them because I felt that I was responsible for their well-being. This is part of my story and just one of the many stories of Hawaii's amazingly resilient former and current foster youth. Through interviewing former foster youth, whose identities will remain anonymous, I have learned many things about why foster youth run away.

Through discussion and debate, I have looked at different points of view. I have heard many different stories and explanations from my interviewees. One of the youth told me that she ran away because she had no more answers and no one to stand by her side at her hardest times. Others felt like outcasts, unequal and unloved, subject to favoritism or nepotism (in the respect that the family showed a bias toward their biological children). I learned that one reason youth ran was because some thought they would be able to take better care of themselves on the street. Some thought they didn't need a family that repeatedly said they knew what the youth was going through.

Another thing to think about is that a lot of youth still have their biological families to run to. Some youth said that they ran away because they wanted to see the parents or siblings.

This may seem weird, but it is actually common for youth in foster care to deliberately do something bad to see if parents will give up on them and kick them out or turn them over to the authorities, which is what happens in many cases. It seems that youth run away for many different reasons. Instead of trying to come up with a pound of cure, I want to focus on the ounce of prevention.

What can foster parents do to prevent youth from running away? In the words of the interviewees, "love them, just as you would your own." Some foster parents treat their birth children better than their foster youth. That just isn't

right. Equality amongst members of the family, even the foster youth, let's the foster youths know that they are truly welcome. Foster youth can easily tell when a family is faking it. Another thing foster parents can do is be caring and truly listen. The problem with communication is that while someone is talking you are processing and ultimately judging what they are saying. Also you may be thinking of what you are going to say, which gets in the way of the one thing that we are supposed to be doing when someone is talking to us, listening.

I think that listening is the best thing we can do for children who have been taken from their families. Stay away from labels. Do not judge foster youth who are already stigmatized. You want to be on the side of your youth. Youth want to be trusted and so do foster parents. Judging a youth will get your relationship off to a wrong start.

Some youths run away to take control over their lives. Don't try to rule them. Be a parent, not a boss. As a youth, I was irritated by the fact that the parents tried to rule the house with an iron fist, which I realized later was abusive. Foster youth know who the parent is.

What If your youth runs away? If you take back your youth after he or she runs away, not only are you *not* giving up on them. You are loving them. Some may argue that if they do it once they may do it again. Statistically, this seems true. But every runaway youth is either running to something or away from something. Don't be the one they run from. Be the one they run to.

One thing that does not work is when the family punishes the youth along with the justice system. Some people call this Double Punishment. There are many alternatives to double punishment. One could be ho'oponopono. If your youth runs away show concern, don't give up on him or her. As I said earlier, youth run away for many reasons. No matter what that reason may be, you may be their last chance at a normal life or even their overall survival.

HFPA would like to take this opportunity to thank Blake for all he gives back to the community. He is a tireless advocate for foster children and youth.

He is also a very talented musician. Here is Blake performing for the crowd at the 2007 HFPA Conference.



Stress Management and Childhood Trauma Training on Maui

Scott Seto, DHS

In sponsorship and collaboration with the Hawaii Foster Parent Association, Foster Family Programs of Hawaii and Maui Child Welfare Services, Tito Del Pilar of the Andrus Children's Center of New York conducted a training on Stress Management and Child Trauma.

Held on November 14, 2007 at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center this training focused on how to deal with the everyday stress in the field of Child Welfare. More than 40 people, including Foster and Adoptive parents and various Maui Community providers expressed high praise for Mr. Del Pilar's presentation. Community providers in attendance included Child and family Service, About Face and Community All Stars program of the Paxon group, Neighborhood place of Wailuku, Keiki Kokua of Maui, Maui Family Court, Maui Community College, Queen Liliuokalani Child's Center, Maui, Women helping Women and Maui Youth and Family Services.

Thanks goes out to the Mark and Debi Roling foundation for contributing to room rental fees, Hawai'i Foster Parent Association for covering speaker fees and Foster Family programs of Hawai'i for covering food cost. Special thanks to Lisa Belongie and Scott Yoshida of Maui Child Welfare Services, Special Services Unit who helped coordinate this event.



Tito Del Pilar presents to resource families on Maui

Holiday Party for Kauai's Foster Children

Marcia Ota, DHS

Children and families gathered at the Convention Hall on December 5 for a Holiday Party for foster children and other children affected by child abuse and neglect. The children enjoyed good food, fun games and activities, such as crafts, a balloon artist, Happy the Clown, bowling, face painting and a visit from Santa. Volunteers from many agencies, clubs and individuals made this eighth annual party a huge success: Hale `Opio Kaua'i, Inc., Department of Human Services, foster parents, Department of Health, Department of Education, Catholic Charities Hawaii, Hawaii Behavioral Health, Queen Likiuokalani Children's Center, Child & Family Service, Kauai High School Key Club, Olelo Christian Academy, Kula High School Interact Club, and Colin Wilson & the Kauai Fire Department.

The party was coordinated by the Kauai Foster Care Training Committee, a group of foster parents and public and private human service agency personnel. The mission of this organization is to enhance the lives of foster children by providing nurturing, support and training for their caregivers.

The Rotary Club of Kapaa was a major sponsor of this event. Other supporters included Kukuiula Development Company, Kauai Children's Justice Grant, the County of Kauai, Violet & Michael Bucuo of Duct-Ter Sheet Metal and the employees of the Sheraton Kauai.



DHS Craft Table. From top: Hollie Morrow, Naomi Navarro, Maile Texeira & Laynette Kealalio.

At foster care reviews and permanency planning meetings for teens, it is always concerning to hear the litany of items the teen has to show compliance around. Somehow in the intervening years between coming into care and becoming an adolescent, the adult actions and decisions that prompted the foster care placement in the first place have morphed into an assessment that the *youth* is the one who now must change.

Further, even within family settings – foster or adopt – kids are often identified in terms of their deficits, even at times to the exclusion of their names! How many times do we hear a parent or caregiver use the expressions “my RAD kid,” “he’s ADHD,” or “my daughter is bipolar.” In these expressions, children lose their identities and we lose our focus on strengths, even as child welfare experts are dictating strengths-based services as best practice.

Children hear the way we speak about them or other children. They read our actions as well. And they are already confused and worried about their genetic and environmental histories. Will they grow up to be like their birth parents? What is so wrong with them that they cause families to reject them? Will they be able to succeed? Will they be happy? Could they ever be parents? Our young people need all the encouragement and support we can give them. For many years, they will need us to provide the positive words and beliefs that they don’t have for themselves.

The practice of labeling kids dehumanizes them. As it is, the larger community does not understand what it is to be a foster child. When we use labels to describe and categorize children, whether fighting for the services and supports they need or raising awareness among teachers, neighbors and family, we give tacit permission for others to label them as well.

As people with developmental disabilities have

taught us, it is important to put the person before the challenge. Rather than say, “my autistic daughter,” instead try, “my beautiful artist Cassandra, who struggles with connecting to people.” It’s not “Ben is ADHD,” but “my soccer star Ben, who tries to find a way to use that same energy in school that gets him cheers on the field” or even “my eldest is living away right now, trying to figure out what adulthood means to her,” for the grown child who has left home for reasons unknown.

The language we use allows others to use it for or against our children. I know having learned from mistakes I made in the past. Being the mom who was willing to believe her kids could do something wrong and know that her kids did need more than other kids, I made it easy at times for others to blame my children, to lower expectations, or to make assumptions. Over time, I came to realize that my children needed me to be their greatest fan and supporter.

Several years ago, I consciously decided to never say anything negative about my children in public. At school conferences, when the teachers and administrators would worry about lack of effort or impulsivity, I stopped colluding with them about the challenges of ADHD. Instead I thanked them for acknowledging how capable my child is and went on to say how proud I am of this child’s obvious joy at being in school among his peers and with his athletic abilities. I thanked them for making an environment where he could be happy and enthusiastic and went on to suggest that a more kinetic way of teaching seemed in order. The difference it has made in his schooling, his social life, in me and in HIM, is incredible.

Kim Stevens has worked with foster youth for many years and is currently the Community Champions Network Program Manager for the North American Council on Adoptable Children.

*Reprinted from **Fostering Families Today**. You can see more articles like this at www.fosteringfamilies.com.*

Updated Federal Tax Benefits Guide

The **National Foster Parent Association** along with **Casey Family Programs** and the **IRS** have collaborated to produce a 2007 Tax Benefits for Foster, Adoptive Parents and Kinship Caregivers guide. This resource guide is filled with links to reference material and explains basic rules and offers tips on ways that foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers can claim deductions and credit available to them.

Download your FREE copy at www.NFPAonline.org.



*If you want
your children
to be
intelligent,
read them fairy
tales.*

*If you want
them to be
more*

intelligent, read them more fairy tales.

~ Albert Einstein

Hallow Wine Tasting held at Downtown @ the Hawaii State Art Museum Provides Support to HFPA

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Upcoming FREE Events:

Re-Energizing the Traumatized Brain in Children

Presented by Dr. Steven Choy

Kailua- February 19 at the Kailua Untied Methodist Church
and again in

Honolulu- February 26 at the Kalihi Union Church
RSVP to 521-9531 Ext. 226

Attachment 101

Presented by Keith Kuboyama, LCSW

Kailua-Kona- February 25 at Kapiolani Child Protective Center
and again in

Kapaa - March 3 at the All Saints Episcopal Church
RSVP to (Toll Free): 1-866-545-0882

Schedule & info for all four above workshops: 5:30 pm—8:00 pm
Childcare will be provided for children ages 3—12.

Dinner will be provided and begins at 5:30
Trainings and childcare will be from 6:00—8:00



Be sure to check our website frequently to see all the exciting training and support group opportunities available for families and professionals statewide:

www.hawaiifosterparent.org



Inside This Issue	
Planting the Seeds of Higher Education	Page 1
Everything Means Something to Me...	Page 2
Why Foster Youth Runaway	Page 3
Neighbor Island News	Page 4
Updated Federal Tax Benefits Guide Website Information	Page 5
Hallow Wine Tasting Supports HFPA	Page 6
Donors Support HFPA	Page 7