



IT TAKES AN

Ohana

Supporting foster and adoptive families since 1971

E PŪLAMA NĀ KEIKI

"Cherish the Children"

April 2009

Volume 14, Issue 2

DHS Higher Ed Board Payment Application Deadline for Former Foster Youth Age 22 to 26 is June 30, 2009!

Recent changes to Act 198 extends the age of eligibility for former foster youth to 22 for the Hawai'i Department of Human Services (DHS) Higher Education Board Allowance Program which pays youth \$529 per month for living expenses while attending college or vocational training for up to 60 months. Former DHS foster youth who turned eighteen under the placement of or who were adopted from the Hawai'i DHS system may be eligible.

Youth can check on their eligibility by calling the DHS hotline at (808) 832-5300, the Hawai'i Foster Youth Coalition at (808) 255-8365 or their last social worker. ***A grandfather clause allows former Hawai'i DHS foster youth age 22 to 26 to also be eligible for this benefit but they must apply before June 30, 2009!***



Our New Name & Location

We have undergone two important changes since our last newsletter. The first is we changed our name from the *Hawai'i Foster Parent Association* to *It Takes An Ohana*.

Secondly, we are fortunate to be one of the organizations in the recently renovated Weinberg Kukui Center. There we are joined by others working to create brighter futures for Hawai'i's children & youth.

Our new contact information is:

It Takes An Ohana
245 N. Kukui St., #201
Honolulu, HI 96817
Website: www.ittakesanohana.org
Email: info@ittakesanohana.org
Our phone remains (808) 522-1016



Spotlight on Dr. Kimo Alameda Presenter for 2009 Annual Foster Care Conference

It Takes An Ohana (ITAO) is collaborating with Family Programs Hawai'i, DHS and Hui Ho'omalua to bring you this year's foster care conference, *My Home, Our Home; Cultural Considerations in Foster Care*, presented by Dr. Kimo Alameda.

When Judith Wilhoite, ITAO's executive director, first met Dr. Kimo, she heard him speak on the issue of increasing cultural awareness and competency for diverse youth at the Disproportionate Minority Contact Conference.

"At the time I was aware of the disparities of Native Hawaiian children in foster care, however when Dr. Kimo spoke, I was deeply impacted," says Wilhoite, "He helped me understand the depth of inequities with Hawai'i's host culture and other vulnerable populations and strengthened my commitment to our work at ITAO."

Thus began a working relationship between Wilhoite and Alameda that has supported the emergence of "*In the Rainbow: Cultural Best Practice in Foster Care*", an ITAO booklet

written by Dr. Kimo, dedicated to helping resource parents who may have a different culture than the children in their care.

"I made a commitment to writing this piece," says Dr. Kimo, "Because when placed in a home with a very different culture, a child has yet another hurdle to overcome. After suffering the trauma of being abused or neglected, he or she is placed with a family who practices can be foreign."

He adds, "The key to ensuring positive outcomes for children in out-of-home care is to increase the protective factors and decrease risk factors. Culture is a huge protective factor. Like spirituality, culture can serve as a buffer to emotional distress. By acknowledging the culture strengths and resources within a child's ecology, the resource parents and team are better equipped to provide the needed support to the child."

See page 6 for conference details. You can receive a copy of this booklet by attending this year's foster care conference or by contacting us at (808) 522-1016.

MORE THAN CHILD'S PLAY

by Lynne Waihee

Did you know that play is important to the development of your child?

Consider how play helps a child:

- Develop physical skills. Gross motor skills as well as fine motor skills increase as children engage in such activities as climbing, running, grasping, and handling small toys.
- Develop cognitive contents. Through play, children learn to solve problems, learn concepts (color, numbers, shapes), enhance their memory skills, and increase their attention spans. They also move on to higher levels of thought as they play in a more stimulating environment.
- Develop language skills. As children play and interact with others, they advance from playing cooing games to telling make-believe stories and jokes and improving their verbal skills.
- Develop social skills. Children learn to cooperate, negotiate, take turns, and play by the rules as they play. As a result, children learn the roles and rules of society.



Help your child enjoy the read-aloud experience as play by extending your reading to him or her to include such activities as:

- Singing (including making your own musical instruments)
- Doing a craft
- Cooking or baking
- Chanting, reciting poetry
- Going on excursions
- Writing letters
- Acting out a story
- Buying books at the bookstore or thrift shop

Older children can also benefit from play. What more exciting way to learn than doing something fun? Engage your older children by reading meaningful text to them, followed by such activities as writing to their favorite authors, writing letters to the editor on important hot issues, writing and performing skits based on a story that was shared, writing their own books, creating visual arts to expand

on a subject, writing poetry, performing slam poetry, researching and sharing little-known facts, visiting sites where children can learn by observation or participation,

In an age when sound bites are a way of life and attention spans are short, play can appeal to children and make learning desirable and fun.

It's time for recess!

It Takes An 'Ohana 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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Please send comments and change of address to:

ITAO

245 Kukui St., Suite 201

Honolulu, HI 96817

(808) 522-1016

Judith Wilhoite, *Editor*

The comments of individual are not necessarily those of ITAO.

ITAO is a non-profit organization registered with the Hawaii State Dept. of Commerce and Consumer affairs.

www.ittakesanohana.org
info@ittakesanohana.org

Memory Enhancement: Helping the Child with FASD* Learn & Remember

By Teresa Kellerman

John remembers things that are associated with strong emotions (joy, excitement, fear, etc.) This is true of most people, but even more of children like John who are affected with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). There may be limits to what level of learning they can achieve in certain subjects, especially math. John could learn his multiplication tables through 7, but he forgot them the following session. To this day, he cannot remember what 2 X 4 is.

When helping a child with FASD learn something, we first need to do an assessment to see where he/she is functioning and start there, not at age level or grade level, but at the developmental level for that child at that time.

Once we get the child to remember (routines, rules, lessons, etc.), we must still consider that once they learn something and it is in their head, they may or may not be able to retrieve it on any given day. For example, one day they might remember and another day they might not, all depending on neurological function at the moment.

Memory processing is a neurological function that does not work well in children with FAS disorders. There may be limits to how well the child can process information. It is important to recognize and accept these limits so as not to burden the child with unnecessary frustration and stress. Find an activity or subject that the child enjoys, a mode of expression for which the child has talent (drawing, singing, painting, playing music, etc.) and encourage the child to learn new ways to express the talent that are pleasant and comfortable for the child. Music is one of the best ways to enhance memory for the child with FASD and everyone will enjoy the lesson!

Ways to help FASD affected keiki with memory:

- Present the child with information that is simple and concrete.
- Show the child, do the activity with the child.
- Read to your child each day
- Repetition, repetition, repetition
- Practice, practice, practice
- If it's an "off" day, don't pressure the child, wait for a better day.
- Use visual cues along with verbal cues (symbols, signs, charts)
- Teach one skill at a time, one step at a time.
- Hands on activity, sensory and tactile (water paint, play dough)
- Encourage exploration and creativity
- Include nature and real life experiences
- Music, rhymes (clapping, tapping, singing)
- Play matching games
- Less distractions, quiet environment (make cubby out of big box)
- One-on-one with eye contact
- Avoid fluorescent lighting or visually stimulating environment
- Freedom to move about without having to sit still
- Cheerful reinforcement (verbal encouragement)
- Frame work visually (place worksheet on a food tray or outline work area with tape)
- Appropriate and effective medication (ADHD meds like Adderall and Ritalin)
- Avoid additives in your child's diet (no MSG, food coloring, NutraSweet)

This article is reprinted with permission by Teresa Kellerman.

*FASD, or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, are birth defects caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.

- Children with FASD are often found in foster care unrecognized or misdiagnosed. They are commonly regarded as noncompliant, uncooperative, and unmotivated because traditional approaches used when working with them often do not work.
- Alcohol is more damaging to a developing fetus than crack cocaine, heroin or marijuana.
- A diagnosis of FASD equates to permanent brain damage. However, there are strategies that can help a person's brain compensate for the damage.
- To learn more about FASD, come to the DOH Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Office's **FREE, STATEWIDE** workshops presented by Dan Dubovsky, L.S.W. See page 6 for workshop details.

Helpful Websites: www.nofas.org • www.toolboxparent.com • www.come-over.to/FAS/

Reweaving `Ohana Connections

by Wilma Friesema

Resource parents, more than most, know how much it hurts children when abuse and neglect rips their family apart. For some families the tear can be attended to and mended quickly. In others, the family's fabric is torn and left in tatters, leaving the children with only threads of memories to hold on to.

Many foster children, with the help and support of loving resource parents, weave healthy new relationships. Others struggle to make their way despite heightened fear and distrust. Nearly all foster children harbor questions about their biological family and a longing to reestablish ties. At the very least, they want the power to decide whether to have family contact or not.

In response to this need, EPIC `Ohana Conferencing began the `Ohana Connections program in 2007. Funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS), the program has three components. The *Keiki Placement Project* locates the families of children under four years of age entering child protective services. The *`Ohana Finding Program* locates extended family for children of any age when an

`Ohana Conference is requested. The *`Ohana Connections Program* locates family and assists in reconnecting adolescent foster youth with their families. Family members are located via internet searches, direct outreach, and CPS record mining.

Kahi's* case is a *Keiki Placement Project* example. Kahi's mom, Mary, gave birth to Kahi while in prison. Mary didn't tell her family on the mainland because she believed they were angry. She also refused to supply any family contact information, but EPIC staff did an internet search and located her parents and found that the parents' anger had dissipated long ago.

Mary's mom wrote a letter; it shocked and touched Mary to receive it. More letters and calls were exchanged, followed by an `Ohana Conference. Currently, Mary's parents are in the licensing process to take custody of Kahi, with Mary's blessings. The foster parents are supportive too, sending pictures and baby updates to the grandparents.

Not all cases result in the placement of children with family, but unexpected, positive results can

still occur from the *`Ohana Finding Program*. Leialoha was in a bad way when she gave birth to her baby girl. She had previously lost custody of two sons due to drug addiction and neglect. The boys' adoptive parents took custody of the baby too. Lei's boyfriend denied paternity. She was all alone.

When EPIC staff contacted her and explained `Ohana Finding, Lei burst into tears. "Why," she asked, "didn't someone do that for me when I was a little girl?" Lei had been separated from her parents when she was five. Fortunately, she was placed with two brothers, but she lost contact with everyone else. She knew her father's name, but not her mother's.

An internet search produced a dated address for Lei's dad, John. EPIC staff went to the house and surprisingly John still lived there. John had turned into a solid, responsible adult. He was thrilled with the possibility of seeing Lei again. He also supplied a long list of relatives, including Lei's mom.

Mom was contacted and she, too, was excited. She also had family names and contact information.

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Mahalo to Our Donors, Sponsors & Supporters!

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Twenty-five people attended Lei's `Ohana Conference. There the facilitator asked everyone to say their name, relationship to Lei, and share one memory they had of her as a child. By the time everyone spoke there wasn't a dry eye in the room.

Lei made significant progress, but never regained custody of her daughter. The baby stayed with her brothers and their adoptive parents. Lei and her birth family are now working on mending their family.

The *`Ohana Connections Program* typically works with older youth in permanent custody; EPIC began working with 17-year-old Kaleo and his two younger siblings after his social worker requested help. Kaleo's father had died ten years earlier and his mother was a homeless drug addict. A maternal uncle took legal guardianship of the children, but it was later discovered he physically abused them. The children were removed.

A CPS record search produced the name of paternal grandmother, Ann, and an internet search found her in Oregon. When contacted, Ann was in total disbelief. She last saw the children at her son's funeral. Though she wrote and sent packages, there had been no response. The uncle moved and gave no forwarding address. DHS couldn't give Ann the information either.

For ten years Ann prayed she would see her grandchildren again. She eagerly described the many aunts, uncles, and cousins the children had on the mainland. EPIC staff arranged for her and the family to have phone contact with the children.

Within two months, Ann, two aunts, and two uncles flew to Hawai'i. EPIC arranged for a meeting space to bring the family, foster parents, and social worker together. Excitement and anxious anticipation ran high for everyone.

Hugs and tears soon turned to laughter and questions as the children poured over the large piles of pictures the family had brought. Stories about their dad flowed easily and comfortably. Precious baby pictures were placed in three stacks to be taken home and cherished.



Ann had another gift, a remarkable scrapbook for Kaleo that was made by his first grade teacher.

"Though I've moved a lot since your father died, I always kept this book, hoping I would give it to you someday," Ann told Kaleo as she handed him the book. On the cover was his handprint. Inside were photographs of him in school, along with his actual childhood drawings. Kaleo was speechless, but his face glowed as he slowly turned the pages. Tears glistened in Ann's eyes as she watched her dream become reality.

These are just three of the many family connections stories. Because of the support and encouragement of many caregivers, these families were brought together and mending became possible. For Mary, Lei, Kaleo and their families the mending isn't always easy, but the pain of separation, the joy of reunion, and the challenges of reunifying are strands of shared experience they're now weaving into a renewed family tapestry.

*The names and key identifying information within this article have been changed to respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved.

Wilma Friesema is an EPIC `Ohana Engagement Specialist. For info about the `Ohana Connections Program call Wilma at (808) 748-7921 or go to www.EpicOhana.org.

Training & Support Opportunities

MY HOME, OUR HOME; CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN FOSTER CARE

Dr. Kimo Alameda will guide parents in exploring parenting options that promote & enhance the cultural identities of the children in their care.

Conferences run from 9 am to 3 pm.

Dates & Locations:

April 18 -O`ahu -Honolulu Country Club

April 23 -Kona -Outrigger Keauhou Beach Resort

April 30 -Kaua`i -Aloha Beach Hotel

May 7 -Maui -Maui Arts and Cultural Center

May 14 -Hilo -Hilo Hawaiian Hotel

Continental breakfast and lunch will be provided.

Conference free & open to all resource families

Registration: You can find registration brochures on our website at www.ittakesanohana.org as well as a link to FPH's on-line registration form. You may also contact the FPH Warm Line @ 808-545-1130 or toll free from the neighbor islands at 1-866-545-0882.



TECHNIQUES FOR OPTIMIZING SUCCESS IN OUR SYSTEM OF CARE:

IDENTIFYING & WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS (FASD)

Children with fetal alcohol exposure have been an invisible population whose behavior is often misconstrued for noncompliant or unmotivated. Presented by Dan Dubovsky, a FASD Specialist who has presented nationally & internationally on FASD, this FREE workshop will help identify interventions that can increase positive outcomes in school & at home.

Workshops run from 8:30 am – 4:00 pm

Dates & Locations:

May 27 -O`ahu -Kapiolani Community College, Ohia Auditorium

May 28 -Hilo -Hilo State Office Building, Rooms A/B/C

May 29 -Kaua`i -Wilcox Community Hospital

June 1 -Maui -Maui Community College, Ka Lama Building, room 103

June 2 -Kona -Kona Community Hospital, Conference Room 3

June 3 -Molokai -Dept. of Hawaiian Home Lands, Office of Hawaiian Affairs

June 4 -O`ahu -DOH, State Laboratories, 2725 Waimano Home Rd.

Lunch provided, but you must RSVP

Registration: Contact Catherine at (808)733-9018 or catherine.sorensen@doh.hawaii.gov. Registration forms also available at www.ittakesanohana.org.

Boogie Down: Fun in the Sun! `Oahu Summer Resource Family Picnic @ Hawaiian Waters Adventure Park
Date: Saturday, June 27 **Time:** 10:00 am – 3:00 pm. Invitation coming to your mailbox soon or find one at www.ittakesanohana.org. Presented by Family Programs Hawai`i & Department of Human Services.

2009 NATIONAL FOSTER CARE APPRECIATION MONTH EVENTS

East Hawai`i:

May 15 -Sign Waving for National Foster Care Month: 4 - 5:00 pm Kamehameha Ave. on the Bay Front

Maui:

May 25– 5th Annual Treasured Keiki Day: 10 am. Resource Families will enjoy a day of fun at the Maui Golf & Sports Park. RSVP to Lisa @ 243-8653

O`ahu:

May 3 -Foster Parent/Resource Family Appreciation Talent Show & Dinner: See back cover for details.

May 8 -Proclamation & Ceremony at Hawaii State Capitol: 4:30 pm- Sign Waving to Follow

May 9 –Windward Mall: 11 am to 3 pm. Center Stage Entertainment, Foster Youth and Foster Parent testimony. Activity Booths for the whole family! Contact Sonya Zabala for more info at 441-1104.

West Hawai`i:

May 16 - 2nd Annual Foster/Resource Family Appreciation Luncheon– 11:30 to 3 pm. Halewai Pavilion, Kailua-Kona. Lunch, prizes & entertainment for the entire family. RSVP to Susan Acacio @ 885-5043.

This is a time to thank all who work to help Hawai`i's keiki ~ MAHALO for the part you play!

Better Start Workshops Help Transitioning Youth Get Ready for Adult Life

Pursuing a higher education degree for anyone can be confusing, overwhelming, and complicated. Fortunately for Hawai'i's foster, guardianship, and adopted youth, college dreams now have a better chance because there is a series of trainings called **Better Start**.

A brainchild of T.H.E. Collaboration*, the **Better Start** series offers foster and former foster youth resources and support as they transition out of care via a series of three workshops held annually.

Better Start II, the second series of the workshops, offers youth the opportunity to make connections, get help filling out FAFSA forms, GEIST scholarship forms, UH applications, and even one's own personal statement, all in *one* day.

"There was so much enthusiasm & high demand from the youth that we ran **Better Start II** twice this year! We strongly encourage resource parents to help their foster youth find & utilize these types of benefits." says Judith Wilhoite, Executive Director of ITAO.

One participant, Andrea Frietas, wants to study psychology at Windward Community College. For her, **Better Start** was offered just at the right time. She says, "I understand now how to apply and learned there is no reason you can't go to college if you want to. I also learned that there are programs available to



Genny Silva and Andra Frietas take time out of their spring break to take the first steps in actualizing their college dreams.

help me pay for college. I wasn't sure about it at first, but getting the tools today really helped me."

We send a big MAHALO to Aileen Lum-Akana in the Finance Office at Leeward Community College (LCC) for allowing us to use the LCC computer lab and Lee Dean at the Hawai'i Department of Human Service Independent Living Program for making sure each youth left with a \$20 gift card. Both have been champions of this program

T.H.E. Collaboration holds this series annually. To find out when these workshops & other training opportunities are being held, go to the ITAO website at www.ittakesanohana.org. Upcoming events are listed in chronological order on the home page. Even better, you and your youth can sign up to receive news about upcoming trainings via e-mail at the ITAO website.

**T.H.E. (Transition Housing Education) Collaboration includes representatives from Catholic Charities Hawai'i, EPIC, Inc. E Makua Ana Youth Circle, Family Programs Hawai'i, Hale Kipa, Hawai'i Foster Youth Coalition, Heart Gallery Hawai'i, It Takes An 'Ohana & Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center.*

Better Start III

Training for Foster, Adopted & Guardian Youth
Ages 13-18

Date: May 22, 2009

Time: 5:30—8:00 pm

Location: Halawa District Park

RSVP by calling Jennifer Cilfone @ 521-9531 x 297

- ♥ Featuring a Panel of Former Foster Youth in College to Discuss their Journeys Towards Success
- ♥ Aging Out Resources Provided for Foster Youth

ATTENTION RESOURCE PARENTS:

Resource Families Support Group will also be held at Halawa District Park during this time. Presented by Family Programs Hawai'i & DHS
RSVP to 521-9531 Ext 245

Check out these great youth resources:

EPIC, Inc. **E Makua Ana Youth Circle:** (808) 358-2222

Family Programs Hawaii **eXcel** Program: (808) 349-8906

Hawai'i Foster Youth Coalition: (808) 255-8365

Kapi'olani Child Protection Center **Survivors Offering Support (SOS)** foster youth info line: (808)535-7708

Keeping It Real

I've been parenting since 1984, and for the most part, I think I've gotten pretty good at it. Just about every time I start thinking I'm reaching that pedestal reserved for "expert" parents, however, one of the wonderful kids who has been blessed to have me for a mom decides to knock me down. So after I get up and dust off my wounded pride, I again grow in wisdom. One thing I've figured out through the years is that though we will not always get things right, no matter how hard we try, we cannot let mistakes undermine our commitment to children.

Over the years we've made some colossal mistakes. At the time, we felt we were doing the right thing. Only later did it become abundantly clear that we'd been on the wrong road all along. I reveal this not as a confession, but as a way to help parents accept that we must sometimes give ourselves permission to mess up. And that's hard, because when we commit to fostering and adopting, we know the gravity of our choice. We are entrusted with children's lives, and if we fail in some way, they may pay a high price.

The danger in acknowledging the potential cost of mistakes is that the fear of failing a child can paralyze parents and keep them from acting at all. Imagine if Martin Luther King, Jr. had decided that marching in Washington was too risky. The only way to change things in this world is to keep a worthy goal in sight and move steadily toward it. We may stumble along the way and grieve over our mistakes, but we can't ever stop reaching for the goal.

Mistakes Happen

Over the years, many of my children have come to me after suffering the trauma of multiple broken attachments. One of the hardest was Dan. Born to a schizophrenic mom, Dan was still an infant when he went to live with an aunt who loved him dearly and cared for him until a freak riding accident cut her life short. Dan, just three years old, then moved in with his maternal grandmother. The two bonded and he did fairly well until Grandma became too ill to parent.

At age seven, Dan moved in with another aunt who didn't really want him, but felt obligated to her mother. Grandma died when Dan was 10, and the aunt—who did not know how to handle his worsening behavior—promptly put him in foster care.

After bouncing through several emergency foster placements, Dan landed with us. Just 11, he was a quietly angry youth who chose to challenge our family rules and norms through passive-aggressive misbehaviors. For example, Dan suffered from enuresis, but did not respond to typical behavioral interventions such as taking care of the mess himself. Instead, he would wet the bed, then ball up his wet clothes, and stash them somewhere in his room. Before long the smell of the nasty clothes would inform us of his actions.

Dan would not clean his room. He would go in there as if to clean and sit. If someone sat in the room with him he would poke around but accomplish nothing. The patience required to outwait his stubborn refusal was enormous. Too often, the odor and frustration would drive us to take care of the problem ourselves.

Dan didn't care about consequences. He had no friends, no treasured possessions, and nothing about which he felt passionately. Nothing worked. He also had a penchant for stealing. When we would finally clean his room, we'd find hidden stashes of junk he'd pilfered from other kids in the house—fishing lures, a Matchbox car, someone's necklace, trading cards, a toothbrush that didn't belong to him. None of it was valuable or significant; it was simply a passive-aggressive way to get hidden anger out. If someone said something he didn't like, he'd just take something of theirs and keep it.

Dan challenged us every day, but we believed in our hearts that he desperately needed someone to commit to him. We sought help from the best attachment therapist in town. We did attachment parenting, had an all-day intensive therapy session, and began the adoption process. Dan, 14 at the time, wasn't really interested in ad-

By Lori Ross © 2008

ressing his problems. While we were making arrangements for the family to spend a month at a special intensive treatment center, he decided he didn't want us to adopt him. Without Dan's consent, the court could not grant our adoption petition. He blocked his own adoption.

At that point, our hurt and anger took over. We decided that Dan needed to be somewhere else. It seemed there was nothing else we could do for him, particularly if he wasn't committed to changing. We gave up. When Dan most needed us to continue to love him through his rejection of us, we failed him as everyone else had.

After he left our home, Dan continued to move through the system. He lived at a group home for three years, then landed in residential treatment where he stayed until he aged out of care. Not too long ago I saw his name in the newspaper. He'd been arrested for snatching a high-school girl and holding her against her will in the woods near the school. He was charged with felony assault and felonious restraint, and is on his way to big people jail. We weren't the only ones who failed Dan, but we were among those who did, and the consequence of that failure was costly for Dan as well as society.

I'd like to tell you that this was our only failure, but that is not true. Despite our best efforts, we've failed to reach children lots of times in 20 years. Two years ago, one of my children decided to run away. She left home, without any planning, and went off to live with a boyfriend about whom I knew nothing. She rejected me as her mother, she rejected our family, and she left a stable and mostly pleasant home situation for one that offered far less than I wanted for her.

Given her childhood trauma, time in foster care, and stated preference for a black adoptive mother (something I will never be), it would be logical for me to expect, understand, and accept her rejection of me. I had survived the painful guilt over Dan, and should get it by now, right?

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After four years of trying to reach my daughter, I believe I have a pretty clear understanding of the thinking errors, poor self-esteem, and trust issues that my daughter has. But expecting and accepting rejection just isn't something I'm good at, no matter how much practice life hands me. But this time, we have left the door open for her to return, and told her in no uncertain terms that we love her and she will always be part of our family. We can thank Dan for helping us realize the importance of loving our daughter even as she rejects us.

Moving Past Mistakes

So, if foster and adoptive parents must routinely expect to fail and accept rejection, how can we possibly stay motivated to continue parenting? One thing that keeps me moving toward that pedestal, even when I'm knocked backward, is my intrinsic optimism about life. Like most parents, there are times when I get pretty disheartened, but life has a way of showing me pretty clearly that things ultimately work out the way they should.

Faith helps with this. I firmly believe that there are reasons for everything in life, and that all the children in my life are on individual life journeys. I have only a brief chance to help equip them for that journey. Each finds his or her way, distinct from one another, and not always where I would have chosen. Sometimes, though it hurts, their journey leads them away from me. Luckily, most of the time, even those who stray far from home eventually find their way back.

Another way I process tough times is to search out the value of the lesson I'm being taught. My recent family trauma with the daughter who quit our family has helped me to see that my parenting self-esteem—which has to stay positive if I am to be of any use to anyone—is at risk each time one of my children decides to reject me. The same is true for many foster and adoptive parents. Maintaining positive parenting self-esteem, even in the face of rejection, or in spite of mistakes we make along the way, is a skill we must develop.

To keep my spirits up, I recognize that self-esteem cannot simply be given from

one person to another. Lord knows I have spent years trying to somehow give self-esteem to my children, along with good decision-making skills and a host of other sterling qualities. But a child must develop self-esteem naturally by achieving successes at solving problems, overcoming challenges, and dealing with setbacks. Life, all on its own, provides plenty of opportunities to help everyone develop self-esteem.



This is good news. Everyday ordinary good parenting practices, like those we learn in our pre-service training classes, should create an environment in which children can feel secure, learn to like and respect themselves, and consider themselves worthwhile and competent. When that doesn't work—and it won't work for everyone—it isn't necessarily a failure on our part. It just didn't work for that child.

Another way to feel good is to build into your daily routine the practice of helping others. My therapy, for the failures, sadness, and rejection, is to help other foster and adoptive families along their journey. Each of us can find something to do that aids or supports others. Even news of a positive outcome can buoy families during troubled times.

Take Nathan. He joined us at age 13 with his older sister (the one who recently left). His self-esteem was low,

and we struggled with his behavior for a couple of years. But, as time went on, he just clicked with our family. He began to thrive in our stable, loud, busy, and sometimes chaotic home, and discovered a love for acting—something that inspired him to complete high school and go on to college.

About a year ago, he decided to do something for kids with similarly rough starts in life. Since then he has spoken to child welfare professionals at two national conferences and taken a job working with an adoptive family and their severely emotionally disturbed five-year-old. Nathan told me that he feels like he needs to give something back for all he has been given.

When people approach me after hearing him speak, and tell me I've done a great job with Nathan, I don't know how to respond. I haven't done anything special; all the normal stuff just worked for him. He is a gift that was bestowed on me for a short time. I'm confident he'll be a gift to the world for much longer.

No one has the secret to life all wrapped up. We all struggle with uncertainty and insecurity. The hurdle that foster and adoptive parents face is the extreme challenge of staying positive as we work with one of the saddest and most horrific of all human tragedies: child abuse and neglect.

The reality is that we can only do the very best we can. The way to survive rejection, sadness, failure, loss, and grief is simply to continue to do the best we can. Sometimes good foster and adoptive parenting works beautifully and kids who come from terrible trauma make great choices and create joyful lives. Other times the road is long and hard.

Lori and her husband have cared for more than 400 foster children. They have 24 forever children—5 by birth, and 19 through adoption. For the past 17 years, Lori has been a teaching foster parent for the Missouri Children's Division, and is the executive director of the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association.

Article reprinted from the Fall 2008 issue of *Adoptalk*, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children. Contact them by phone at (651)644-3036 or visit their website @ www.nacac.org.



Money Matters



Our former foster youth tell us repeatedly, “Help us manage our money!” In response, we have teamed up with Hawaii Community Assets (HCA) & the Hawaiʻi Foster Youth Coalition (HFYC) to train both youth and their resource families on “Money Matters” using the Hawaiian Community Assets *Kahua Waiwai Ōpio ~ the Foster Care Edition*.

To lead this effort, we are working with our trainer, Da Dolla Diva. She was just 17 and the youngest of four when her father died. Overnight, her world turned upside down.

“My mother sought refuge in her religion and gave an unspeakable amount of money away to her church. There were some funds left for an inheritance. However, my siblings and I had no access to it, except for a \$5000 dollar social security benefit that was given to minors who had lost a parent” says Da Dolla Diva. Without much training in personal finance, I literally spent it all in a snap on friends, dinners out, and clothes. In the end I dropped out of school since my mother ceased support for my schooling and I’d spent all of my benefit.”

She laughs a bit in embarrassment when she reflects on her past, her bills, her large student loans and says, “This is why HCA and the Kahua Waiwai pilot program for foster youth and parents is so important to me...like many foster youth, I know what it feels like to be dealing with loss, being alone, making mistakes with money and having no proper guidance. I want to make sure it turns out differently for the families and youth we support at It Takes An `Ohana (ITAO).”

ITAO will be piloting the Kahua Waiwai for resource families through April, May, and June. We are requesting support from resource families who would be interested in helping shape and tailor this program to their needs. Contact ITAO to book a *Kahua Waiwai Ōpio Foster Care* presentation in your community at 808-522-1016 or at info@ittakesanohana.org.

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

~ Mahatma Ghandi

ITAO Toolkits for Parents

It Takes An `Ohana (ITAO) is proud to announce that it has started distributing its series of toolkit booklets for parents & extends its gratitude to all resource families who took the time to attend the trainings presented in recent months. We also thank Family Programs Hawaiʻi, the Department of Human Services and the Hawaiʻi Court Improvement Program for helping us bring these trainings to the community.



Katie Bennett, JD, MSW, presenting to resource parents.

“I was so encouraged,” says Judith Wilhoite, ITAO’s executive director. “Trainings like these are important to help resource parents understand the needs of the keiki in their care as well as the systems they work with. A good example is the recent “Making Your Voice Heard” trainings that used the *Caregivers and the Court Guide* toolkit. There parents learned why it is important to attend their foster child’s court hearings, the pros and cons of submitting court reports, how to prepare their youth for going to court and more.”

Even for foster parent veterans, trainings can prove to be useful. “Though I know quite a bit about accompanying my kids to court, I like the *Caregivers and the Court Guide* toolkit because it has so much information in a nutshell!,” says Susan Acio. She plans to use the guides for future foster parent trainings in Kona.

To receive one or more of the following toolkits, contact us at (808) 522-1016 or info@ittakesanohana.org.

- *Caregivers and the Court Guide*
- *In the Rainbow: Cultural Best Practice in Foster Care*
- *Permanency for Hawaii Children in Foster Care*

SUPPORT OUR GROWING `OHANA!

Please join us today and help support Hawai`i's families taking care of keiki & youth in out-of-home care. ITAO is an independent, nonprofit organization funded by generous private foundations & individual donors like you. Please consider making a contribution or participating in one of the creative opportunities listed below. You can also donate on-line at www.ittakesanohana.org. We truly appreciate your support!

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Yes, I want to support quality foster care for Hawai`i's children. Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift of:

- \$10
 \$15
 \$20
 \$25
 \$50
 \$75
 \$100
 Other \$ _____

Send form to **It Takes An `Ohana**, 245 North Kukui St., Suite 201, Honolulu, HI 96817

| | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| Payment Method: | <input type="checkbox"/> Check enclosed <input type="checkbox"/> Please charge my VISA or MasterCard | |
| | <small>Card Number</small> | <small>Cardholder's Signature</small> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> My company will match my gift—the necessary form is enclosed. | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, please send me the next four quarterly newsletters, mailed directly from the ITAO office. | |
| ❖ This gift will be acknowledged in the ITAO Bulletin unless requested otherwise. | | |

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Aloha Mortgage & Finance, Ltd., a kama`aina company for over 20 years, is dedicated to our communities during these trying times.

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Purchases made at *Amazon.com* through links from our website result in a portion of your total *Amazon.com* purchase being given to us. These funds are used to support our publications, advocacy and programs. ITAO only receives this money if you shop through one of the links on ittakesanohana.org.

Other ways you can help:

- ♥ Become a foster parent by contacting Hui Ho`omalulu at 441-1117 or toll free from the neighbor islands at 1-888-879-8970.
- ♥ Support legislation for a quality foster care system.
- ♥ Volunteer your time.

Mahalo for Your Kōkua!



IT TAKES AN

Ohana

Supporting foster and adoptive families since 1971

E PŪLAMA NĀ KEIKI
ITAO Newsletter
245 North Kukui St., Suite 201
Honolulu, Hawaii 96817

This newsletter is supported, in part, by the

JAMES & ABIGAIL CAMPBELL FAMILY FOUNDATION

NEW website address: www.ittakesanohana.org

MAY IS NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH

O`AHU FOSTER FAMILY APPRECIATION DINNER & FOSTER YOUTH TALENT CELEBRATION

Share your talent! Event to showcase the talent of youth in foster care.



COME FOR DINNER, PRIZES & FUN

Location: Planet Hollywood
2155 Kalakaua Ave., Honolulu

Date: Sunday, May 3

Time: 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm

3:00 pm ~ Foster Youth Talent Show

4:30 pm ~ Bowl of Light Training

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm ~ Dinner

Free Family Appreciation Dinner will be served for Resource Families.

(\$10.00 per person for Service Providers.)

To Register Your Talent and/or RSVP:

Call the Family Programs Hawai`i (FPH)

Warm Line at 545-1130.

Free

Event sponsored by the O`ahu Foster Care Training Committee

See Page 6 for more National Foster Care Month events

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