



IT TAKES AN

Ohana

Formerly known as the Hawai'i Foster Parent Association

E PŪLAMA NĀ KEIKI

“Cherish the Children”

December 2009

Volume 14, Issue 3

Resilience: Every Child Has Promise

~ by Marianna Sheehan & Judith Wilhoite

Resilience: the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity and develop social competence despite exposure to severe stress – a quality we want for all children. And one that is very important for the children in our lives who have been affected by out-of-home care. Those attending the 2009 Child Welfare Law Update Conference in July were privileged to learn what helped Hawaii’s own Mervlyn Kitashima.

Mervlyn grew up on Kauai enduring many challenges and was considered an “at risk” youth, yet she has blossomed into a strong, happy, productive member of our community. When asked what made the difference for her, she shared four protective factors, all of which have been validated by research done by Dr. Emmy Werner’s Kauai Longitudinal Study.

By providing these protective factors to the children in our care, we may be able to alter, or even reverse, negative outcomes and enable the children and youth in our care to circumvent life stressors and go on to live a life of promise. The four factors are:

Caring and supportive people and places: Every child needs at least one caring, supportive adult who gives caring unconditionally. The more adults in a child’s life who give this unconditional caring, the better. For Mervlyn, the people who made the biggest difference in her life were her grandmother, her elementary school principal and an administrator at Kamehameha schools.

Growing up, Mervlyn remembers hearing people say that because she was Hawaiian she was nothing. Her elementary school principal was the first person Mervlyn remembers telling her differently. He said that because she was Hawaiian, she could do anything she wanted to. This began to instill in her a sense of hope and a shift in the way she thought about her future.



Mervlyn Kitashima & Ipo Lynch Ma`e at Law Update Conference this summer

Her grandmother was someone Mervlyn always knew she could go to when things were difficult at home. She knew she would always be welcome and that no matter what condition she came to her grandmother in, she would not be turned away. Her grandmother showed her that she was lovable. For many children in out of home care, this is the belief so many children struggle with the most. When people continually give them up, when they are moved from home to home without explanation, they often believe it is because they are unlovable. The evidence in their lives of being unwanted backs this belief up. Tell the children in your home you love them and that they are lovable. Create new evidence for them.

Finally, an administrator at Kamehameha made it possible for her to finish her education after having become pregnant out of wedlock. This administrator went to bat for her, changing the schools policy that until then, prevented female students from continuing their education after becoming pregnant. This administrator helped to further instill in her what her

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Parenting a Drug or Alcohol Exposed Child

By Children's Research Triangle's Ira J. Chasnoff, MD & Sharon Williams, RN

Foster and adoptive parents who bring into their home an infant or child who was exposed to alcohol or other drugs during pregnancy often have difficulty knowing how to care for the child & how to meet his or her needs. Although many of the children have significant problems that require assessment & treatment by a trained professional, foster & adoptive parents are on the front line in managing the child's behaviors on a day to day basis. This brief article reviews some basic steps that can be taken in the home that will guide the child onto the road of managing his or her own behavior rather than relying on external controls.

Infants

Infants whose mothers used alcohol or drugs during pregnancy can be very fussy and will cry for a long time with a high-pitched cry. Others will fall into deep sleep and become irritable when you try to wake them. They may be difficult to feed and appear not to like to be held or touched. Eye contact is very disturbing to some of the babies.

For some, they are hypersensitive to loud sounds. This can be very upsetting to a new parent. Will this baby love me? Will we be able to bond? These are natural questions. Here are some ways to help comfort your infant.

Don't let your baby get over-upset and frantic

Watch for early signs that your baby is getting upset: yawning, sneezing, hiccupping, coughing, jitteriness, skin color changes, refusing to look at you. When your baby sends out these distress signals, stop what you are doing and give him some time out to recover.

Do not follow your baby's face when she averts her eyes and turns her head. The human face is a very powerful stimulus and can be overwhelming to your baby. This does not mean your baby is rejecting you, just that she cannot handle so much stimulation at that time.

If your baby keeps crying and isn't able to stop, quietly and gently soothe her.

Wrap her snugly in a light blanket with her arms across her chest or at her sides. Hold your baby wrapped in the blanket and rock back and forth. Be sure to hold the baby securely, one hand on the buttocks and the other on the back. Move the baby gently up and down. Some times it helps to have the baby face away from you. Avoid high intensity fluorescent lighting. Some older infants calm down with heavier, more weighted blankets.

Sometimes a frantically crying baby will not be able to suck on a pacifier until she has calmed down a bit. When she begins to calm down, offer a pacifier. It is helpful to offer the pacifier at times throughout the day to help decrease stress hormone levels and meet the baby's oral sensory needs. It is better to meet these needs now, for it could help lessen the child's irritability as she grows older.

Be careful to calm your baby in ways that he can tolerate.

Babies need stimulation. When the baby is awake and calm you can work on getting him used to your face and voice by smiling, making eye contact, and talking softly. But just use

one kind of stimulation at a time. Be sure to watch for any signals that your baby is getting upset. Play with your baby when he is ready – not just when you want to. It is important for parents to understand and follow the baby's behavioral cues.

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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Visit www.childstudy.org for more information & www.ntiupstream.com for information & resources that include:

- *The Nature of Nurture: Biology, Environment, and the Drug-Exposed Child* by Dr. Ira J. Chasnoff.
- *FASD Across the Span of Childhood* by the staff of Children's Research Triangle.
- *Cause & Consequence: Behavior Management Software for Children with Behavioral Difficulties* by Dr. Ira J. Chasnoff.
- *The Mystery of Risk*, Dr. Chasnoff's new book that is coming out next summer.

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As your baby gets use to you, increase the amount of stimulation you give her.

Talk, sing, smile, rock or move your baby's arms and legs very gently. Her cues will tell you what she likes or doesn't like. When the baby is calm, unwrap her to allow her to move her arms and legs freely. Wrap her up again if she starts showing any signs of distress. It is important to encourage your baby to spend time on her tummy several periods each day.

Toddlers & older children

As a child who was exposed to alcohol or other drugs during pregnancy gets older, behavior problems may begin to show up. In general, alcohol- and drug-exposed children have problems with organizing themselves and may become frustrated very easily if things don't go their way. You may notice that your child:

- Has trouble paying attention.
- Is bothered by other noises or objects in a room so that he can't concentrate.
- Is impulsive and lashes out at others, often for seemingly no reason.
- Can't follow a whole series of instructions.

These kinds of problems can affect the way a child learns in school and may result in poor reports from the teacher and trouble in getting along with other children. There are some things you can do to help your child organize his behavior and his response to assigned school work.

Give your child a "comfort corner" at home to go to when he needs it.

Find a place in your home that he can set up as his own area. Have a favorite blanket or toy there so that when he starts to feel overwhelmed he can get away from the cause of frustration or anxiety.

Keep to a set schedule as much as possible.

Start the day at the same time each day and establish routines in getting



ready for school, coming home from school, having dinner, doing homework. Prepare your child well in advance for any changes from that routine.

Pay special attention to transition times.

Children with problems organizing their behavior often will have difficulty moving from one activity to another. Give your child a warning at least ten minutes ahead of time when it is time to stop playing and come to dinner.

Avoid the rush of last minute pressures.

Let your child pick out the next day's clothes the night before, and lay them out ready for the morning. Get up early enough each morning so that she doesn't have to rush to get ready for school.

Set up a certain area for homework, free of distractions.

Give your child a desk or table to work on his homework. Make sure the area is free of clutter, radios, and television. Use a source of "white noise" such as a vacuum cleaner, fan or air conditioner to block out other noises around the house.

Not all alcohol- or drug-exposed children show these kinds of problems. But when they do, you can make a big difference in how everything works out. Parents who take care of a difficult child get a special satisfaction when the child begins to learn and succeed, because they know for certain that their caring made a big difference to a child.

Dr. Chasnoff is President of the Children's Research Triangle (CRT) and a Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago. He is one of the nation's leading researchers in the field of maternal drug use during pregnancy and the effects on the newborn infant and child. Sharon Williams is a registered nurse and the Hawai'i State Director for the Children's Research Triangle. She has worked extensively with Dr. Chasnoff in Hawai'i & on the mainland.

Save The Date

Friday, March 12, 2010
8:30am - 4:30 pm
Waimea, Hawai'i

The Nature of Nurture: Identification, Diagnosis and Treatment of Children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders Conference with Dr. Ira Chasnoff.

Questions? Contact Sharon Williams at
(808) 885-0501 or
swilliams@cr-triangle.org

Continued from page 1 elementary school teacher began to years before, a belief that she could do anything she wanted to and that she was worthy.

Just one adult who loves or cares for a child unconditionally is enough to make the difference between a child “making it” or not. That person may be a family member, older sibling, teacher, coach or other caring adult. That person may be you. All children need positive voices to counteract the negative ones in their lives.

Opportunities for participation in meaningful activities: In this context, meaningful activities are those in which build a sense of self. For Mervlyn, these activities included student government, glee club and intra-murals. These activities created evidence she was talented, good at things, worthy and valuable and these new feelings took the place of “not feeling worth anything”.

The more we teach children, the more opportunities they have to learn new and different things, the more skills they have, the more confident they become and the better their choices in life will be.

Work and responsibilities: Children given the opportunity to develop a strong work ethic, a “stick-to-it” attitude, even in the face of adversity, have important tools to fall back on when things get tough. Children who are given work and responsibilities are more resilient because later in life they are able to persevere when things are difficult. They are able to follow through and accomplish tasks and goals when others give up, quit or get bored.



Preparing family meals can help youth build resilience

Growing up, many of the responsibilities and chores for upkeep of the household fell on Mervlyn and her siblings. These skills have carried Mervlyn throughout her life as she completed her high school education, raised 7 children and then went back to school to earn her college degree in her 50's.

A sense of purpose, a sense of hope: For many children in out of home care and “at risk” youth, this sense of purpose and hope often comes from religion, faith and/or spirituality. Having something to believe in (spiritual strength) gives them a reason to hang on when there is no one in their lives to rely on. A belief that God (or whatever spiritual deity they have been exposed to) loves them, can provide them with the means to get through these challenging years in their lives and prevent them from feeling completely alone and hopeless. Religious communities often provide stable people in the lives of children (Sunday school teachers, ministers, priests, etc.) who say positive things such as “you are great”, “we love you” and “God loves you”. These are extremely

powerful messages for a child who does not hear them anywhere else in their lives.

A passion for one's heritage and culture in combination with exposure and involvement in cultural activities and organizations can also provide similar or the same sense of hope and purpose. It can instill a sense of pride and worth from identify-

ing with a particular group or culture.

So as you can see, there are many different ways to contribute to a child's development of resilience. Children need to not only hear they are lovable, worthy, valuable and that there is hope for a positive outcome in their lives, but they also need the opportunity to create evidence of these facts. These opportunities lie in spending time with an adult who cares unconditionally for them, participating in activities that are meaningful to them, completing work and chores and being a part of a community that teaches hope. Think about how you can provide these opportunities for the children in your life and take action on them. If you need support and information on how you can provide these opportunities, contact It Takes An `Ohana.

Marianna Sheehan is a former foster youth. After working with the children of Hawaii for 6 years as a physical therapist, she is now the director of rehabilitation at a skilled nursing facility in Pacifica, CA.

Judith Wilhoite is the executive director of ITAO. Over the years she & her husband, Norman, have fostered both young children & teens.

Family Interaction: Norma Ginther Drives Honolulu On The Expressway To Permanency

by R. Malia Taum-Deenik, Esq.

On July 20th, Norma Ginther arrived in Hawaii with her jump drive revving and ready to go. Ginther, ZERO TO THREE's national consultant on family contacts, shared her 3 decades of child welfare experience over 5 days with staff from the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Judiciary, and the Department of Health (DOH), the legal community, community providers and foster parents. "I held

every position in Child Welfare Services, except janitor and Director[.]...but I returned more children to their families or to a permanent home as a foster parent," Ginther said. She attributed her family's willingness to work directly with birth parents as the reason for the outcome difference.

By having birth parents engaging in well-planned, frequent contact with their children, while doing normal parenting activities with instruction and support, many parents became more confident and competent parents.

Having a lot of contact with parents set up in the beginning of the case is important to assess the quality of the child-parent relationship and to identify parental strengths and weaknesses. Children benefited from consistent and appropriate contact with their parents, lessening the trauma and anxiety they were experiencing due to being removed from their parents' care, and case workers had more opportunities to



Patria Weston-Lee, Carol Makainai, Rebecca Cheung, Norma Ginther, Cindy Shimabukuro, Judith Wilhoite & Arlina Wong at the 2009 Child Welfare Law Update Conference

assess the parent-child relationship, the parents' needs and reassess permanency goals.

Ginther supervised birth parents in her home allowing evening and bed time rituals with their children, like bathing and reading to their child each evening. For school children, birth parents would do homework with their child in the Ginther home. "When kids are placed in foster care, we run parents off, the DHS worker and foster parents take over the child's life. Parents can meet foster parents at the children's medical appointments and should participate in their children's therapy. Parents can register their child for school, and should attend all school functions and conferences, both good and bad. Why do we cancel a visit when the child is sick? Every parent should have to care for their sick child."

For teen parents, Ginther established a rule that the young mothers in her home sit with their child daily at least 20 minutes. "You

can't give, what you didn't get, some parents need to be shown and told how to hold and look into their child's faces. Nurturing their child was not natural for them," said Ginther.

One activity, birth parents and foster parents can do at the beginning of a case are Life Books. A Life Book chronicles the child's life, with the child's and family photos, shot records, school records, and an accurate case history of the child's

entire foster care experience. "Kids need the information, it's the child's connection to their own history," said Ginther. Ginther told the story of her own adopted daughter's fantasy that Ginther was her birth mother. Without the details, children will fantasize a story that seems more concrete, Ginther explained. Ginther only learned of her daughter's fantasy when her daughter was interviewed as an adult.

While here, Ms. Ginther was filmed with two foster parents in a video session. She and the two resource caregivers talked about the benefits of working with birth parents. Show times and, once available, links to view the show on-line, will be posted on *It Takes An Ohana's* website, www.ittakesanohana.org.

Malia is the Community Coordinator for the ZERO TO THREE Court Team for Maltreated and Neglected Infants and Toddlers in Honolulu. For more information, contact Malia at Mtaum-deenik@zerotothree.org.

Training & Support Opportunities

BETTER START I FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18

This is a Great Opportunity for Foster Youth Ages 14 to 24 to Receive Help with Creating a Plan for a Bright Future!

The Kuder Career Assessment (KCA) will be given to each youth to help youth strengthen their focus & motivation about their future. The KCA allows them to narrow down 3 occupational choices and helps them to develop an educational plan geared toward their occupational choice. In addition, aging out resources will be presented and the youth will have the opportunity to explore options available to them.

Date: December 18, 2009 **Time:** 10:00 am—2:00 pm

Location: Kukui Center, 245 N. Kukui St., Honolulu

RSVP: Call Jennifer at 521-9531 x 297 by December 16th.

FREE Lunch & Snacks provided.

Training sponsored by T.H.E. (Transition Housing Education) Collaboration, a committee that includes representatives from EPIC Foundation, EPIC `Ohana Conferencing, Family Programs Hawai`i, Hale Kipa, Hawai`i Foster Youth Coalition, It Takes an `Ohana, Heart Gallery Hawai`i, Queen Liliuokalani Children`s Center, & University of Hawai`i Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work.



Door Prizes include an iPod nano, Udown T-shirts & Longs Gift Cards

BETTER START II FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2010

This training is for foster, guardianship, and adopted youth preparing for college or a vocational program. Youth will get help filling out the FASFA form on-line, writing a personal statement and information about scholarships.

Time: Dinner served at 5:30 pm, Training 6 pm to 8 pm

Location: Leeward Community College

RSVP: Call Jennifer at 521-9531 x 297 by February 1

FREE Dinner & Raffle Tickets for Door Prizes provided

This training is sponsored by T.H.E. Collaboration. (See info above.)

What Youth Should Bring With Them:

- Social Security Number,
- Current address,
- Tax return or W-2 form,
- If adopted, bring parent`s 2009 tax return or W-2 form,
- If applicable, alien registration card.

Attention Parents & Caregivers!

See training information below for Parent/Caregiver Training being held at the same time & location to learn how to help the youth in your home make a successful transition into adulthood.

Door Prizes

HELPING TEENS MAKE GOOD DECISIONS FOR THE FUTURE & SUPPORTING THEM TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2010 ~ TRAINING FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Time: Dinner served at 5:30 pm, Training 6 pm to 8 pm **FREE** Childcare for children aged 3 to 12 years

Location: Leeward Community College **RSVP:** Call Jennifer at 521-9531 x 297 by February 3, 2010

SPEAKERS: JENNIFER O'DONNELL & FORMER FOSTER YOUTH PANEL

Jennifer has her B.A. in Sociology and has worked with youth in the foster care system in both Hawai`i and Indiana. Currently she is a facilitator for EPIC E Makua Ana Youth Circles. The youth panel will speak to what their former foster families did that helped them transition to adulthood.

This training is brought to you by the Foster Care Training Committee (FCTC) that includes representatives from Catholic Charities Hawai`i, Child and Family Service, Department of Human Services, EPIC `Ohana Conferencing, Family Programs Hawai`i, Hale Kipa, Inc., Heart Gallery Hawai`i, HOPE INC, Inc., It Takes an `Ohana, Kokua Ohana, Partners in Development Foundation & the University of Hawai`i Training Academy.

Holiday Blues Tips List for Foster Youth by Youth of The Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition

The Holidays can be a very hard time for those separated from their families or who don't have families. Lots of people talk about how stressful the holidays can be. But foster youth REALLY understand just how tough it can be for young people in foster care. How do we know? Because we've been there. So we've put together these tips for youth in foster care, developed by young people who know first-hand what it's like.

- Connect with your biological families by sending holiday greeting cards. *Be respectful of a foster family's privacy and check with them to see if you should place the return address of their house on the envelope or if you should use an alternative, like the address of the DHS (some people may have concerns about the safety of the home if too many people have the address).*
- Get involved with youth/peer support groups. *Contact the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition at 808-545-5683 or at fosteryouthspeak@gmail.com, Kapiolani Peer Mentoring Program at 808-535-7700 (toll free from neighbor islands at 1-888-535-7790) or FosterClub, a national network for young people in foster care, at www.fosterclub.com.*
- Connect with a church. *If you belong to a church, check into all the holiday activities that might be going on and join in! Activities around the holidays might include social gatherings, caroling, volunteer efforts, and more.*
- Stay connected with friends and hanai family.
- Engage in Traditions. *You might want to start new traditions of your own.*
- Do some volunteer work in the community.
- Make homemade gifts.
- Express your feelings to someone you trust.
- Make a scrap book for bio family.

And here are some tips from FosterClub's youth (fosterclub.com):

"If you are sad or anxious about the holidays, just try to fully embrace the family you are with. Try to embrace their traditions and ways of doing things, you might enjoy yourself. It is ok to miss your family, try to get some contact with them. Just try to have fun and enjoy the things that you will be doing."

— FosterClub member Deborah , age 21, in foster care over 13 years

"Know when you are an adult you will illustrate the importance of family and do everything you can to spend time with the ones you love. Because of your bummer holidays in care I know you will go the extra mile to make holidays as special as possible. You will see the joy in your children's eyes; acquire recipes from friends, and share stories with supportive adults."

This part of your life may be painful and it will also be short. You will be one of the most fun people to spend a holiday with because you will most likely want to do as much as possible to make it as significant as possible!

Now that I am an adult I have already created new holiday traditions with my partner. We always play a board game on New Year's Eve and I make special fudge for my friends and family. Christmas is one of my favorite times because my friends come home from college and we have get togethers at my place.

I am sure you too will create your own traditions. Our experiences can make us stronger, brighter & more motivated individuals!"

— FosterClub member Shawn, age 21, in foster care 4 years

The Hawai`i State Department of Human Services Adopts New Terminology

We thought it would be helpful for you to know that the Hawai`i State Department of Human Services (DHS), in order to better reflect current terminology used at the federal level, has recently made the following changes:

- "Foster Families" are now referred to as "Resource Families"
- "Foster Parents" are now referred to as "Resource Caregivers"

Resource caregivers are an indispensable resource in caring for and providing safe homes to children placed in foster care by the State. We thank you for all that you do and want you to remember that your love and caring is making a huge, positive impact on not only the future of the children in your home, but in all of our futures. *Mahalo!*

The High Cost of Emancipation

By Lori Groves and James Kenny

Mike was in seven foster homes before being emancipated. He had been taught the required skills for “independent living”: how to find a job, rent an apartment, balance his checkbook, cook, and so on. He was happy to say goodbye to his final foster home the day after his 18th birthday, but left with no place to go. Mike lived in the park for two weeks, and then went to live with his aunt. She helped him find a job. He left again when she was arrested. He lost his job and went back to live in the park. By coincidence, he met up with his second foster family. They took him in & helped him find another job & a new apartment. Unable to pay the rent on his minimum wage job, he was evicted.

Mike had a high school degree, with no real job history, with no place to live, and with no family. He tried to get himself arrested at one point so he could get a good meal. By the time he was 24, he had spent all but 18 months dumpster-diving and living in the park and in shelters when there was an empty bed.

Mike’s story is not uncommon. Of the 287,000 US children who exited foster care in 2005, over 25,000 (9%) were “aged out” or emancipated without a permanent home. (AFCARS) Youth emancipated to independent living from foster care are more likely to become....

HOMELESS: Sixty-five percent of emancipated foster youth leave the system with no place to go. Fifty percent will become home

less within the first 18 months. Twenty-seven percent of the homeless populations were former foster children. (www.childrensrights.org)

MENTALLY ILL: According to the Casey Young Adult Survey from 2005, emancipated foster children were 2.8 times more likely to have psychotic problems & 2.5 times more likely to suffer from paranoia. Another study found that former foster youth were twice as likely as U.S. military veterans to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. (www.heysf.org)

CRIMINALS: One shocking statistic shows that 70% of all State Penitentiary inmates have spent time in the foster care system. Other studies report that 30 to 40% of foster children have been arrested since they exited foster care. Over one-fourth have spent at least one night in jail and over 15% had been convicted of a crime. (Alexander & Huberty, 1993; Courtney et al, 2005; Barth, 1990). This compares with only 3.2% of the general population who were on probation, in jail, or on parole in 2005. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

UNEMPLOYED AND POOR: Less than half of former foster children are employed 2 ½ to 5 years after leaving foster care. Only 18% have maintained employment for at least one year. A recent study found that emancipated foster youth earned an average of \$6000 per year, well below the national poverty level. Emancipated females are four times

more likely than their age-mates to receive public assistance. (www.heysf.org and www.childrensrights.org).

PREGNANT: Females emancipated from foster care are four times more likely to become single parents prematurely than their counterparts. According to a mid-west study, nearly half of the emancipated foster women had been pregnant at least once by the age of 19, compared to only 20% of their peers. (Casey, 2005).

SCHOOL DROPOUTS: Youth in foster care are less likely to graduate from high school. In fact, the national statistic says the only 46% of former foster youth complete high school as compared to the 84% of the general population. (www.heysf.org). Of the youth who have aged out of foster care and are over the age of 25, less than 3% have earned a college degree compared with 28% of the general population. (Casey, 2007).

No wonder that emancipated foster children end up poor and homeless in disproportionately large numbers. Emancipation to independent living without a permanent home frequently leads to disaster.

Children need stability and permanence. A child cannot grow and develop without a firm and unchanging base. Even a less-than-best home is preferable to being shuffled around, never knowing where you belong. Children can adjust to almost any situation. They cannot adjust when they

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don't know what will happen next or where they will be tomorrow. One cannot spring forward from a moving base; one can only hang on and hope for stability at some later time.

One year in a child's life is a long time. When you are in third grade, it's a long time until lunch. Federal and state laws require that a termination of parental rights be filed no later than 12-15 months, the maximum interlude allowable for impermanence. The choice between reunification with the original legal parents and adoption must be made wisely but within a reasonable time.

Yes, we may teach some adult living skills, but statistics show that this is far from enough. It is like baking a cake without the flour, providing all the required ingredients but not the essential item. We have provided the tools without the necessary basic structure. Frills but no grounding.

Few of us are able to live alone for long, especially not beginners. So why do we let this happen? First, the teen has a say and freedom is what the teen often wants. He or she naively believes that a life with no rules will be ideal. What the teen fails to consider is that he will still be a "free" adult at age 18. Being part of a permanent family does not change his adult status.

Finally, foster homes are hard to find for children over age ten. Knowing what happens to many emancipated foster children, we need to change our tactics and re-think home-finding for children in care, especially older children. Not simply redouble our efforts, but seek out new ways to search for possible permanent homes. Pat



Arthur & Allene Uesugi with the youngest members of their 'Ohana, the Country Kids

O'Brien in New York ("You Gotta Believe") offers one such approach. His agency finds permanent homes for children 10 and older. Instead of starting with the available pool of approved foster homes, he begins with the young person. "Who do you like? Who likes you?" It might be a grandma, a neighbor, the child's teacher, probation officer, coach, therapist, or the parent of a friend. That person will get a call. They are told of the young person's attachment, and are invited to a weekly meeting. If the adult is interested, the process of foster parent licensing might begin. YGB begins with the interests of the child rather than searching the list of already available foster families.

Conclusion

Independent living is an oxymoron. We all need one another. Let us proceed with diligence and urgency to give our youth a better chance at a happy life that includes a caring family and meaningful work at a living wage.

This article was originally written by Lori Groves and James Kenny for Adoption in Child Time, Inc. (ACT), which promotes early permanence for children in out-of-home care. While operating in Indiana, ACT addresses issues which are of concern nationwide. Learn more at <http://adoptioninchildtime.org>.

Editors Note: Extending Foster Care Support to Age 21: While we applaud the Department of Human Services (DHS) efforts at finding a permanent home for every child, there are over 100 youth in Hawaii who "transition out" of foster care every year. Thus, we are happy that DHS is looking at the Fostering Connections Act that was passed about a year ago on the federal level that offers financial help to states that allow youth to remain in care to age 21. (There is evidence additional life skills develop between age 18 and 21. Learn more at www.chapinhall.org.)

It is important to understand your views on this subject to guide Hawaii's future decisions about providing that additional support. Please take our online survey at www.ittakesanohana.org and earn a chance to win a gift card.

Project Visitation: Supporting Sibling Relationships

~ by Sarah Fairchild Beaucauge

Healthy connections with close biological relatives preserve a sense of identity and history, reduce feelings of loss and abandonment, and can enhance self-esteem for children affected by out-of-home care. Project Visitation, now a program of Family Programs Hawai'i, works with any sibling group separated by foster care, regardless of the current legal status of the children, including foster custody, legal guardianship, adoption and, in certain cases, young adults, to stay in touch by providing monthly visitation and special events for them. Sibling visits also provide extra respite time for the resource caregiver (formerly known as foster parent).

Currently, Project Visitation serves sibling groups on Oahu and the Kona area of West Hawai'i. Any

interisland transportation to Oahu or West Hawai'i would have to be arranged by the State or by the legal guardian.

Children genuinely value spending time with their siblings and catching up with each other. Reconnecting and bonding after shared traumatic experiences is beneficial and can help children move forward successfully. Many children in foster care run away to find their siblings. Having a consistent sibling visit schedule may improve the child's adjustment into your home. In cases where siblings may be reunited in a future placement, sibling visits may help make that transition smoother. Also, there is a high-rate of homelessness among children who transition out of foster care. The more healthy relationships a foster child maintains, the better chances she will have for a successful life.

What to consider before sibling visits begin:

Be supportive of visits. It is meaningful for children to know that you approve of their siblings. Help your child get ready emotionally, as early as possible. Give him a few weeks to get adjusted to the idea of seeing his siblings. Ask him: When was the last time you saw your siblings? How do you feel about this? Be available for questions. Be aware that siblings may not be excited to see each other at first. Reunification can bring up feelings of guilt, blame, fear, abandonment and victimization surrounding the events leading to removal from their biological family. Let your child know it is okay to have these emotions but emphasize the importance of maintaining the sibling relationship. Usually these feelings dissipate after a few visits, if not the

first visit.

Never take a visit away as a punishment or use a visit as a bargaining chip. Children have a right to see their siblings. They should not have to negotiate, argue or perform well in order to see their own brothers & sisters. For children in foster custody, visits are often court-ordered.

Always remember to be considerate of the Project Visitation volunteers assigned to your family. Keep in mind that they are volunteering their time. Return phone calls at your soonest convenience. Be as flexible as possible with scheduling. Share pertinent information about current behavioral and medical issues. Be upfront about expectations and restrictions with volunteers. If you have to reschedule a visit, let the volunteer know as soon as possible.

What to expect after a visit:

Sometimes your child may regress, act out or seem sad after a visit because it may be emotionally stressful for them. However, as the relationship continues, these reactions usually improve. Just be supportive. It may be difficult and you may be tempted to stop visits. The child shouldn't get in trouble for having a hard time after a visit and visits should not be withheld. It is healthy for a child to learn to work through his feelings and rebuild his sibling relationship. Children usually become more comfortable with visits after a while.

If you have a foster child in your home who is separated from his or her siblings and you would like to initiate visits, please call Sarah at Family Programs Hawai'i at 521-9531 ext. 242.



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Ohana

Formerly known as the Hawai'i Foster Parent Association

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

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JAMES & ABIGAIL CAMPBELL FAMILY FOUNDATION

Please tell us what you think! Resource caregivers (formerly called foster parents) can earn a chance to win a \$50 Visa Gift Card by completing a short survey at www.ittakesanohana.org

Housing Opportunity for Former Foster Youth



Please help spread the word! The Department of Human Services, City and County of Honolulu and Hale Kipa are collaborating to help former foster youth access affordable housing through the Family Unification Program (FUP). FUP participants receive a Housing Choice Voucher, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that allows the participant to rent a home in the community from any landlord.

Participants pay between 30% and 40% of their monthly-adjusted income towards rent and utilities with the balance paid by the Section 8 Program. *Income includes wages and social security, etc.; it does not include Higher Education funds.* The housing assistance is for a maximum of 18 months.

To be eligible, youth must be:

1. Upon application, must be between the ages of 18-21 (has not reached 22nd birthday), who was in foster care on or after their 16th birthday.
2. Currently lack adequate housing.
3. Pass Public Housing Authority/Department of Community Services eligibility criteria.
4. Willing to develop Transitional Plan and have a monthly meeting with Hale Kipa Case Manager that focuses on supportive services.
5. Willing to fulfill other FUP obligations which include completing employment, rental portfolio, financial literacy etc. classes. This may be done by enrolling in Hale Kipa, DCS or other community classes.

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Contact Jaque at 589-1829 x 202 or email jaq@halekipa.org for an FUP Application.

