

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF HIGHER EDUCATION



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 before them. Foster youth in Hawai‘i have many higher education scholarships and grant opportunities available, some that are exclusive to them. One such opportunity is the Victoria S. & Bradley L. 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 foster youth about their strengths and help them realize their potential. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Encourage your youth 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 more scholarships later.
- Accompany them to events designed to help them learn about colleges and how 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). It can be found on-line at fafsa.ed.gov. Check the web to find free workshops available to help students apply.
- Take your foster youth on college campus’s tours.
- Help youth put together a plan and assist them in going through the necessary steps to actualize their goals. A tool for this process is EPIC `Ohana’s Youth Circles. They are youth led and designed to bring the youth’s supporters together to help the youth develop a plan that best suits the youth and their talents. Contact them on Oahu at (808)358-222 or toll free at 1-866-636-1644 from the neighbor islands.
- Help foster youth connect with other foster youth with similar goals.
- Download ITAO’s *Resources Available for Foster Youth and Former Foster Youth* at ittakesanohana.org.

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 over \$14,000 a year:

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