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What Joining the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition Has Done For Me
 By: Blake Lanoza

Aloha, my name is Blake Lanoza. I am a Youth Outreach Coordinator with the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition. I am a nineteen year old former foster youth and have successfully transitioned out of the foster care system. Someone once told me about a club or something for foster youth. I wanted to get involved with other former and current foster youth like myself. Along with connection, I also wanted to get involved to find contacts so I could get an occupation that dealt with foster youth. That way I would be closer to accomplishing my dream of becoming a Social Worker.

Now, it has been nearly a year since I began my search for the coalition, and not only have I become a member, I am an employee. The coalition has given me an occupation, help and council with my education, and a constant feeling of satisfaction knowing that I help youths that are going through some of the same things that I have. People get to see what I am capable of doing, and I get quite a few employment and internship offers. The coalition has in fact brought me a lot closer to my goals than I ever imagined. I continue to work for HFYC, and am soon to start my sophomore year at Hawaii Pacific University, where I will be pursuing a degree in Social Work.

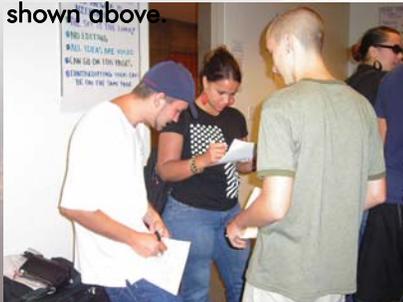


HFYC Independent Living Conference

On Saturday, April 28, 2007, HFYC held an Independent Living Conference at the Pacific Beach Hotel, during the annual Hawaii Foster Parent Association Conference. This is where current and former foster youths formed a panel and presented on the challenges of transitioning out of care. Former foster youths Wendy Peltier, president of the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition, and Blake Lanoza, Youth Outreach Coordinator staff



for HFYC, presented on everything from college tuition to medical coverage. Along with a presentation on transitioning, surveys, and discussions, the youths took part in games and activities as shown above.



(Above) Independent Living Conference Participants participate in an activity called Snowball.

(Below) Participants get in to groups and discuss their experiences in foster care.

Better Lives for Foster Youth

One activity we did was called Snowball. Youth wrote on a piece of paper five things that would make their life better in the foster care system. The result was a wish list that HFYC turned into recommendations to the foster care system. Through the entire assortment of items listed by the youth, HFYC chose one to focus on in this newsletter. It really stood

out and was repeated the most. What the youth said would make life better was more compassionate, trusting, and sensitive foster parents that are

there for the kids rather than taking kids for the money. They thought foster parents could use more training and possibly drug screenings. Also, if the parents are insufficient and the home unsafe, youth need an easier way to report it. Another one was having a preview of the family for a better match. Lastly, one thing that would improve the lives of our youths would be equality between biological children and foster or adopted children. These

things were chosen for the article based on how many times they were seen in the surveys, which was many. These are the heartfelt wishes of Hawaii's foster youth.

Can Foster Youth Attend Their Court Hearings?

During the Independent Living Conference, a worker made a comment about foster youth not being able to attend their permanency hearings. After this, HFYC took on the task of finding a dependable source to educate us on the matter. We talked to Faye Kimura, the co-project Director of the Hawaii Court improvement project. Here are her comments on the subject. "Foster Youth's should be

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(Above) Coalition President, Wendy Peltier, and former board member, Keli Lloyd make a court room pose.



Upcoming Events

In the months to come, there will be many events that the coalition will be involved in. One will be the “Ohana is Forever: Ensuring Permanency and Family Connections for Hawaii’s Keiki Conference.” This is taking place on Friday, July 20th, 2007. The main goal of this conference is to encourage permanency and family connections for foster youth. Then, we have the Hawaii Foster youth Coalition’s “Summer Leadership Training, which will happen on each Island this summer. Participation is limited to 15 youth so hurry up and

Local Chapter Meetings

The Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition’s latest mission has been to start beefing up and reviving all of the state’s local chapter meetings. Now that summer is here and everyone’s schedules are opening up, we can hold more meetings. The coalition is always looking for new members and, along with free food and fun, members who lead and set up meetings



(Above) Coalition members and facilitators pose at the end of last years Summer Leadership Training.

(Top Corner) Coalition youth leaders gathering at the state capitol for National Foster Youth Awareness Month.

receive fifty dollar honorariums. Yes, you can get paid if you help. If you have any questions or concerns, if you want to attend, or know someone who does, call Blake Lanoza, Youth Outreach Coordinator at (808) 203-4721.

We hold meetings on the four main Islands and in local communities. If you are on the Big Island, then contact Reina at (808) 895-8530.

If you are on Maui, you can contact Mark at (808) 281-3052.

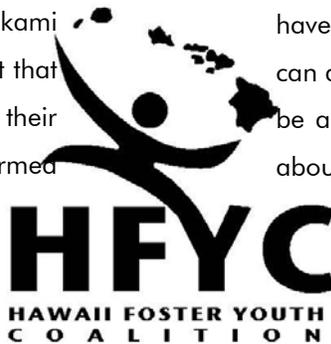
We are looking for a contact person on Kauai. If you would like to help out, contact Kathy at (808) 255-8365.



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expected to attend their court hearings”, says Kimura. She also stated that the youth should be there to hear what is going on with their lives, and if they want to attend , they should let their GALs know about it. Kimura said, “ Unless the judge finds it in the youth’s best interest to not attend there is no reason why they shouldn’t be there”. During the interview she made a reference to Revised Hawaii Statute 587-73 on Permanency Plan Hearings stating that youths 14 and older are allowed to attend their permanency court hearings. We talked with Judge Paul Murakami who shared it may depend on the judge but that most judges will allow youth to attend their hearings. Some workers may be misinformed

about the rules. The Judge strongly stated that youth can and should attend their hearings if they want to. HFYC encourages youth to ask to attend and if you are denied by anyone other than your Judge, then write a letter to your Judge who only wants to do what is best for you. Judge Murakami said that if Judges don’t hear from the youth, they may not be able to make decisions that reflect the youth’s needs and wishes. HFYC will have a youth advocate go with you to the hearing if you want some company. Some of us have been to our hearings and some have not. The fact is that youth are allowed to and can attend their permanency hearing. Youth should be a part of their case planning and speaking up about their needs. You have a voice. Speak out!



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apply. Through this workshop, we hope to teach our members important presentation, facilitation, and above all leadership skills. You will learn to advocate for yourself. In the months to come, there will be other training events like Independent Living Conferences on each Island. We are creating ways for youth to come together and connect with each other while at the same time learning stuff that could make life easier and help you succeed. We need to work together to improve our lives and make foster care better. If can, can. If no can, we can!

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