

MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS: The Values Behind Family Engagement Practices Within the Child Welfare System



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We would like to thank the many agencies and individuals who have steadfastly supported the Fostering Connections Grant, the work of EPIC ‘Ohana, and the commitment to Family Engagement.

Funding and Leadership

Thank you to the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau for funding this project. Thank you to the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Services, and the leadership of Kayle Perez, Lee Dean, Cynthia Goss, Tracey Yadao, Amy Tsark, Lynne Kazama, John Walters and Rachel Thorburn. In addition, the support of the countless social workers, supervisors, administrators, and program managers of the Department is deeply appreciated.

EPIC’s ‘Ohana

Our EPIC family is now a large group of individuals, past and present, who have contributed in big and little ways to who we are today. For their many talents and vision, we’d like to thank our Founders: Judge Michael Town, Susan Chandler, Laurie Tochiki, Dawn Slaten and Arlynnna Howell Livingston.

In addition, we want to thank our first community partners Gail Hironaka at Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center, Mervina Cash-Kaeo at Alu Like, Richard Paglinawan at the Queen Emma Foundation, and the Wai‘anae Child Welfare staff who made up the very first “bungee” jumpers. And finally, though we cannot name everyone, we appreciate the many families, community service providers, foster youth and children, and our dedicated EPIC staff – all of whom have helped change Child Welfare practices in Hawai‘i. Know that your contribution is valued and precious.

This manual is dedicated to the children and families we serve, and to Arlynnna Howell Livingston whose leadership and values permeate our core.

In memory of Dale Haga and in appreciation for his devotion to the keiki and ‘ohana of Hawai‘i.



Authorship

Our EPIC ‘Ohana manual team was led by Wilma Friesema who took the team’s ideas and drafts and transformed those pieces with skill and heart. The manual team included: Julie Barshaw, Dayv St. Pierre, Alessandra Jann-Jordan, and Laurie Tochiki. Valuable editing and reflection was provided by Rachel Thorburn, Vernon Viernes, Pat Spencer, Susan Ogami-Van Camp and multiple EPIC staff.

Dear Reader,

In 2009, the Federal Children’s Bureau awarded the State of Hawai‘i Department of Human Services (DHS), along with 12 other national sites, a three-year grant under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. The purpose of the grant was to further the intention of the law and to conduct studies to determine the efficacy of family engagement. (By family engagement we mean reconnecting immediate and extended family to their kin in foster care, and including them in the decision making process related to the placement and care of the children.) The Hawai‘i DHS contracted with EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc. (EPIC) to implement the study and provide the services. A final report of that work is available online at: www.FosteringConnections.org/Hawaii. (Follow the link to HI: State of Hawai‘i Department of Human Services Family Connection Grant Summary.)

This manual is born from our experience implementing the grant and from EPIC’s history of advocating for family engagement within Child Welfare practices. At our first manual writing meeting our staff struggled with what to say and how to say it. After doing research, the team decided a manual detailing “how” to do family engagement work wasn’t necessary. An excellent and detailed implementation manual is available online at: FGDM Guidelines – American Humane Association.

Instead, we chose to write about the intention of this work. Why are the changes we try to bring about important? What are the values that fuel our efforts and how do we embody them? What wisdom from our host Native Hawaiian culture informs our practice and inspires our work?





Child Welfare Services around the country are going through a paradigm shift. A top-down, hierarchical approach is being replaced with a collaborative process that involves all stakeholders, including families, sitting at the decision-making table. As a values driven agency, this manual is our attempt to support the foundation of that shift by articulating the ground we stand on. It’s a ground influenced by the Māori of New Zealand, the enduring spirit of the Hawaiian culture, and the intimacy of island life where nearly every adult is called “auntie” or “uncle” by the young. It’s a ground influenced by the Hawaiian tradition of pono or goodness/uprightness which requires shared respect and responsibility. And, finally, it’s a ground influenced by many national innovators who have developed and continue to pursue best practices implementation within the Child Welfare System.

This manual is written for lay people who are interested in family engagement work, direct service providers, program managers, and administrators who wish to implement family engagement programs and strive to ensure the provision of quality services. In our work with families we have learned that using language that is accessible and straightforward is not only respectful, it is essential. In honoring that valuable lesson, this manual is written in an informal voice with as little academic or professional jargon as possible.

We hope you find these pages beneficial. We also hope our story and values spark your thoughts about the wisdom of your local culture, and the ground you stand on as your program grows and develops to fit the needs of your community. Much of what we say may be familiar and in alignment with your existing values, some may be new or said in a new way. At EPIC we’ve found having our values inform our work steers what we do and how we interact with people. It’s also our values that keep us in balance during rocky times and restores our passion when we feel spent. If this manual can help inspire that same steadiness and nourishment within you, the reader, we will be very happy indeed.

*Aloha,
The EPIC ‘Ohana manual team*

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Introduction

MOST OF US WOULD AGREE, without the courage and dedication of social workers who step into the ground zero of a family's pain many children would not be shielded from further abuse and neglect. Though Child Welfare Services (CWS) engagement is commonly experienced by families as intrusive, it is the state's intervention and supplemental services that help parents change their behavior. It is the seriousness of the CWS action that gives vulnerable children a chance for a more secure, healthy home life.

Making sure children are safe is *the* top priority of CWS and has been since the first legal case of child protection in 1874.¹ Historically, keeping children safe often meant removing them from their homes without any consideration for maintaining their family connections. However, in recent decades, Child Welfare practices have become increasingly responsive to children's additional needs for stability, love, and strong bonds with family, community members, and friends. Abuse and neglect are traumatic, but separation from one's parents and family, along with the often accompanying change in school, neighborhood, and even culture, is now recognized as causing emotional scars as well. Reducing these secondary destabilizing losses, while keeping the children safe, is the goal of all our family engagement work.

Because of the family's painful circumstances and the stress of the protective actions involved, promoting and maintaining family connections isn't always easy. A family may feel intimidated by the state's authority and power over their lives. Child Welfare workers, hearing conflicting accounts of abuse or neglect, may distrust the family and fear that they cannot provide adequate safety and support for their children. In addition, if a child has been in foster care for many years, reconnecting with family will have further challenges as the loss of shared and formative experiences creates a gap that can be difficult to bridge. Maintaining continuity and connection in a family that has been torn apart requires dedication and perseverance from everyone involved.

Here at EPIC 'Ohana, Inc. (EPIC) our commitment to family engagement is our lifeblood. 'Ohana means family in Hawaiian, and all that we do is geared towards empowering families and their children in foster care. While placement with family is frequently the outcome of our efforts, at times that is not a viable option. When it isn't, families are still given a pathway to connection and a seat at the decision-making table through our Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) process called 'Ohana Conferencing. Four EPIC programs – 'Ohana Conferencing, Youth Circles, Family Finding, and 'Ohana Connections – create opportu-

“Maintaining continuity and connection in a family that has been torn apart requires dedication and perseverance from everyone involved”

nities for the family and children to remain in contact, and for the families to play a supportive role in the children's development and transition into adulthood.

Engaging families involved with CWS is important and deeply gratifying work. We like to think of it as reweaving the family's cloth which has been torn apart by the abuse and the necessary state intervention. While the family cloth may never again be the same the crisis, if worked through, can make the family stronger and more resilient. Though their cloth may end up looking like a complex quilt, for nearly all our families their family connections are what they value most in life.

Since we believe ancestry and a family's cloth are so important, in this manual we want to describe our beginning, acknowledge our founders, and share the traditions and values that inform our development and practices. *Section One: History and Programs* describes our growing pains, provides a snapshot of how FGDM developed in Hawai'i, and is followed by a brief description of our services. *Section Two: Guiding Principles and Influences* discusses our values, cultural influences, and gives case examples of our values in action. As is standard practice, the names and identifying case details have been altered to ensure confidentiality.

Here, then, is our story and the values we believe are necessary to reweave family connections.

Section One: History and Programs

EPIC's First Birthday: Convening at Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center

HONOLULU, HAWAII, 1996. Dr. Susan Chandler is head of the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Judge Michael Town is the Senior Family Court Judge of the First Circuit. Both are interested in Native Hawaiian rights and are open to restorative justice practices as they relate to families.

Due to Dr. Chandler and Judge Town's advocacy, a two-year grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation is awarded to the Family Court, County of Honolulu, Hawai'i. Along with three other mainland counties, Hawai'i is tasked with developing and implementing a Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) model. Inspired by the 1989 New Zealand's "Children and Young Persons and Their Family Act," the grant is part of a larger Model Family Court "Diversion Project" sponsored by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.* The purpose of FGDM is to engage government, community, and family members to collaboratively reduce the number of children in care by recognizing and building on each family's strengths, empowering the family to respond to the needs of their own kin, and eliciting community support to bolster success. The goal of the grant is to develop a FGDM process for the nation.

"Heed not my weakness, nurture my strengths"

A year later Hawai'i is chosen to host a week-long meeting. Attending will be the other pilot project representatives, members of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Hawai'i Family Court judges and other court

personnel, CWS employees, community groups, and, perhaps most importantly, several Māori representatives from New Zealand - the original inspirers of the FGDM model. The leaders of the Wai'anae† community assist with the itinerary; approximately 45 visitors will attend.

The meeting is held in May of 1997 on the green lawn of Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center.‡ Cradled by the rugged and majestic Wai'anae mountain range of O'ahu on one side and embraced by lulling ocean waves on the other, local residents and community advocates welcome guests to a ceremony which is designed to herald a restitution of *pono* (goodness/uprightness) among the people. As the residents greet guests with *lei*, the tropical Hawaiian breeze carries with it a spirit of hope: hope for the restoration of justice for the families and children of Hawai'i who have been mistreated, and hope that now is the time to let go of blame, bring in understanding, and develop genuine partnerships between the government and the community.

A Hawaiian *kūpuna* (elder) offers a gift of an *oli* or Hawaiian chant: "*Ike aku, 'ike mai kōkua aku kōkua mai; pela iho la ka 'ohana*" – recognize others, be recognized, help others, be helped; such is a family relationship. With Mount Ka'ala in the distance, the *oli* speaks to the heart of what the Native Hawaiians have always known: that to have *lokaʻhi*, or unity and harmony, there must be reciprocity and balance with *'āina* (nature), *kanaka* (humankind), and *nā akua* (gods). The *oli* reminds the participants of their interdependence and the importance of respect and consideration.

* According to the Technical Assistance Bulletin, No. 1, April 2003, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, "The Diversion Model Court Project brought together four communities, led by juvenile and family court judges, to work collaboratively with other systems' professionals to develop community based plans to safely divert families from unnecessary court involvement and long-term foster care while addressing the needs of their families. Identified directions for change were: using community alternatives that address the complexity of family strengths to safely divert families from traditional child protective services; designing child protective services to be more responsive to the variety of families' and communities' needs; developing new partnerships between local communities and state agencies for the protection of children; and emphasizing court oversight of these efforts so that all members of child welfare, social service and justice systems are responsible for the outcomes."

† The Wai'anae coast is north of Honolulu on the island of O'ahu. It is the more affordable and therefore more "local" area of O'ahu, with a strong sense of community and identity. Poverty and generosity live side by side; while there is a large homeless population, there is also much community organizing and support.

‡ In 1909, Queen Lili'uokalani executed a Deed of Trust, which established a private foundation dedicated to the welfare of orphan and destitute children. Queen Lili'uokalani's Children's Center is a social service agency created to fulfill that trust.



The guests watch in awe as a demonstration of the *lua*, a traditional Hawaiian martial arts practice that uses spears and daggers, is performed. The powerful, dramatic movements and the forceful declarations announce that this gathering is taking place in a land with its own culture and strong heritage, a culture deserving of recognition and respect. The *lua* catches everyone's attention and energizes the gathering.

The Māori continue the ceremony with a presentation of a *haka*, a traditional ancestral war chant. This is the Māori's gift to the participants. Local residents watch closely for the visitors' responses to the vigorous dance performed with robust feet stomping and body slapping. "*Waihoa ko oku whengu, mauria mai ko oku painga*" – Heed not my weakness, nurture my strengths – the Māori implore as they contort their faces while showing off the whites of their eyes



and poking out their tongues. They recite the names of their ancestral lineage – honoring those that came before with cries for the resurrection of their vital traditions. Through their *haka* the Māori call for everyone present to take responsibility for the outcome of the gathering.

Arlynnna Livingston, who becomes the first Executive Director of EPIC, is a student of Tibetan Buddhism. She offers a Tibetan welcome: "*Ta Ya Tha Om Muni Muni Maha Muniye Soha*" – this is the mantra of the Buddha that asks everyone to have unbiased love and compassion for all beings; to actualize the six perfections of generosity, ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom; and to wish the six perfections for all sentient beings.

The mantra is repeated in the four directions with the intent of laying the foundation for all the blessings to take root. It is said the gathering is the beginning of a more compassionate, respectful process of family and community engagement that includes cultural communities, poverty communities, the courts, and state and national service providers. The mantra is invoked to bless the founding of 'Ohana Conferencing, Hawai'i's FGDM model, and everyone's continued efforts to reduce suffering.

Some of the guests experience this convening as intimidating; others are stunned and describe it as "most spectacular." In the end, however, everyone agrees it created an atmosphere that engaged the heart as well as the mind, and set the stage for a very productive week-long conference.



The Beginning: Family Group Decision Making Comes to Hawai‘i

PRIOR TO THE AWARDING of the initial grant and the above convening, the need for change in Child Welfare practices in Hawai‘i had been brewing. In 1995, the Hawai‘i State Legislature funded a committee to gather information from all the islands’ communities regarding the impact of the current Child Welfare practices on families. What they found was disconcerting. Throughout the state there was tremendous angst and frustration felt in local communities due to the lack of communication from state agencies when a child was removed. The fractured system would often let 30 days lapse between a child’s removal from the home and the first child-parent visit. Also, case information was rarely shared with other family members during that time. The families resented being left in the dark and felt unnecessary trauma was created for the children and the family. In addition, much like their Māori counterparts, Native Hawaiians felt culturally disenfranchised because they experienced disproportionately higher rates of CWS involvement than the general population. For the evaluators it became clear: to effectively modify the Child Welfare System in Hawai‘i, embracing the cultural values that resonated within the communities was critical if positive changes were to occur. The state had to meet people on their own turf.

This, then, was the rocky soil EPIC was planted in: families distrusted CWS, and CWS workers were apprehensive about sharing power. Dr. Chandler, DHS Director (of which CWS is a branch), said this about the typical social worker response, “Barriers were all inside CPS [Child Protective Services]. Staff members had a hard time giving up time to family. Social workers said, ‘I didn’t get a Master’s in social work to give decision-making power to the family.’”²

To respond to the misgivings on both sides, the founders of Hawai‘i’s FGDM model decided it was best to communicate directly with individuals and community groups. Three days of meetings were held with over one hundred participants that represented the spectrum of service providers and community members. Presentations on the Māori and Hawaiian traditions of conflict resolution and group decision making were given, as was a presentation on Western mediation practices. Breakout sessions with the participants followed, and from those discussions the core values and elements of Hawai‘i’s FGDM model were hammered out. ‘Ohana Conferencing (which will be described in detail later) began to take shape.

Having the beginnings of a model in hand, Dr. Chandler, Judge Town, and EPIC’s new staff -Arlynnna Livingston, and Laurie Tochiki (former Assistant Dean of the University of Hawai‘i William S. Richardson School of Law and EPIC’s current CEO) - realized it would first take tilling that rocky soil if there was any hope for ‘Ohana Conferencing to take hold. They began meeting with Child Welfare professionals, members of the Judiciary, other service agency providers, and community organizations (some of whom had formed to protest the way Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander families were being treated). With each encounter the team members listened, explored concerns, and asked for help to find solutions to the problems. As part of the ongoing conversation, ‘Ohana Conferencing was offered as an alternative approach to the status quo.

The team also worked to bring together community members, DHS staff, judges, and families who had “lost” children to CWS, so they could hear the families’ experiences and understand their pain and anger. The participants often described the meetings as transformative, as hearts and minds on both sides were opened with their deepening dialogue. Though there was still much distrust, there also was a growing sense of hope and a willingness to collaborate. The soil was becoming receptive for a new Child Welfare practice model to be introduced.

“The participants often described the meetings as transformative as hearts and minds on both sides were opened with their deepening dialogue”

Even with those glimmers of hope, in the early days of ‘Ohana Conferencing the Wai‘anae Child Welfare staff feared Arlynnna and Laurie would not be accepted because of the community’s long-standing frustration and anger. To gain trust, EPIC staff started with each individual family whom they approached respectfully and without judgment. As Arlynnna later described, “The first thing I did was call the family in advance of the conference and explain who I was and let them know that I empathized with their position. I’d say, ‘this must be stressful for you’ and recognize the challenges the family was facing.”³ The goal was to change individual and community perceptions by being a concerned, neutral ally, while validating the family’s strengths and their love of the children.

Likewise, in engaging social workers, EPIC staff began with the workers who were most receptive and whom they affectionately referred to as the “bungee jumpers.” These bungee jumpers immersed themselves in the model and were willing to share power with the family. Many shared that they were astonished at the families’ responsiveness and initiative, once the families felt listened to. Though there were risks, the bungee jumpers had courage and enthusiasm and were at the forefront of transforming the CWS culture from the inside out.

This change in attitude and an openness to a new way of re-

sponding to the crisis of child abuse and neglect was evident at the convening in Wai‘anae in May of 1997. It was there in the generosity of the Wai‘anae community as they embraced the mainland visitors and the island service providers – like the mountain range embraced the gathering – and welcomed them into their culture. It was there in the courage of the professionals who let go of their singular control and entered into a power sharing and responsibility sharing relationship with the families. It was this shift, inspired by the indigenous people of New Zealand, which helped change Child Welfare practices in Hawai‘i and beyond.

“The goal was to change individual and community perceptions by being a concerned, neutral ally, while validating the family’s strengths and their love of the children”

EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc. Program Descriptions

SINCE ITS INCEPTION in 1996, EPIC has conducted over 13,500 ‘Ohana Conferences. While there are still pockets of resistance, family engagement has become the standard practice for CWS within this state. Though power sharing isn’t always easy, as will be discussed later, a commitment to open communication and shared decision making between CWS and the families has helped reduce the number of children in foster care. According to the State of Hawai‘i, Department of Human Services, Management Services Office, Research and Statistics Unit, the annual monthly average of the number of children in foster care decreased 65% from 3,095 children in State Fiscal Year 2004 to 1, 078 children in State Fiscal Year 2012. Hawai‘i DHS has also substantially increased the number of children in relative/kin care from 38% to 52% from 2001 to 2012, and increased the reunification rate of children with their parents from 59% in 2006 to 65% in 2012.

Just as ‘Ohana Conferencing has grown, EPIC has grown and branched out to provide other services to the families and youth in the foster care system. In this section we want to give a brief overview of our EPIC programs and explain how they intertwine to provide support to the children and their families and encourage family engagement.



‘Ohana Conferencing

When the Māori pressed the New Zealand government to change their Child Welfare practices, the first innovation they advanced was the recognition that children belong not only to their immediate family, but to their extended families and to their culture.

This was reflective of the Māori’s *Whānau* decision making process⁴, a traditional cultural practice for problem-solving within families and the Māori’s system of governance. In their tradition, the emphasis is on repairing relationships and maintaining the health of the community rather than punishment of the offender.

The Native Hawaiians, like the Māori, also have practices that focus on relationships and community harmony. According to experts there are four common and distinct resolution practices within indigenous governance that differ from the traditional Western model. These are:

First, indigenous peoples’ conflict resolution practices prefer community consensus decision making rather than a single autocrat making all the decisions. Second, a reconciliation that is acceptable to all affected parties takes precedence to the punishment and isolation of the offender. Third, the purpose of the practice is not to “apportion blame but to examine the wider reasons for the wrong.” And fourth, “there is less concern with whether or not there has actually been a breach of the law and more concern with the restoration of harmony.”⁵

In Hawai‘i, the traditional practice of *ho‘oponopono* is similar to the Māori’s *Whānau* decision making process, and was looked to as a way to incorporate local values into ‘Ohana Conferencing. For Hawaiians, *ho‘oponopono* is a tool for atonement, for correcting errors, and for erasing the effects of past actions and memories that cause havoc and grief. While ‘Ohana Conferencing differs from *ho‘oponopono* in structural ways, the attitude of empowerment and collective problem solving, verses judgment and punishment, is at the heart of ‘Ohana Conferences.

All ‘Ohana Conferences strive to create an atmosphere of respect by providing participants a place to be heard and an opportunity to feel like a part of the solution. EPIC adheres to the fundamental principles established for FGDM; its conferences are fami-

ly-centered, strengths oriented, culturally competent, and community based. Its basic formula is simple: Respect + Strength + Problem Solving = a more balanced outcome. For those unfamiliar with the FGDM model, the ten steps we follow in all ‘Ohana Conferences are listed below.

In order to track the progress and follow-through of the agreements made, re-conferences are typically held every three months, or as often as is needed. All conferences attempt to bring together maternal and paternal sides of families, unless safety issues preclude that effort. Neighbor island and out-of-state relatives are encouraged to participate via conference calls or Skype. EPIC makes every effort to make the conferences as inclusive as possible.

The ‘Ohana Conference Agenda

1. Welcome – the welcoming is decided by the family. Conferences can open with a moment of silence, prayer, chant, or any other form the family chooses.

2. Introductions – all participants introduce themselves and how they are connected to the children. The Facilitator explains his or her neutral role and reviews the agenda, ground rules, and confidentiality. The Recorder, or note taker, is also introduced.

3. The purpose of the ‘Ohana Conference – this is usually described by the social worker and includes an update on the case specifics and direction.

4. Hopes and Dreams for the future – the immediate and extended family, supportive community members and service providers identify what they want for their children in the present and going forward.

5. Family Strengths – the family members and the professionals talk openly about the family’s strengths. The Recorder lists them and keeps them in

plain sight for the participants to see. This helps remind the family of their value and the resources they have to draw on as they deal with their family crisis.

6. Worries and Legal Issues – this is the time the family and professionals share their concerns for the children and the parents. Legal timelines are reviewed, and long-term outcomes of choices and behaviors are also laid out on the table. The purpose is not to judge, threaten, or punish, but to provide the correct information so there’s a clear understanding of the issues and informed decision making can take place.

7. Help and Services – family, community, and professional supports are identified. In the course of a conference, it’s not uncommon for the family to learn, for the first time, the full reason for CWS involvement. Likewise, the social worker often learns about family resources that can positively impact the case. As the problem is clarified and resources identified, the participants are more empowered to find workable solutions.

8. Private Family Time – this is an essential step in all ‘Ohana Conferences. All service providers and EPIC staff leave the room so the family can discuss, among themselves, how they want to address the safety and developmental needs of the children. Food and drinks are provided, and the family is allowed as much time as they need. The service providers are available to answer questions, but they are not part of the discussion.

9. Agreement – after the private family time is over, the group reconvenes and the family’s plan is presented and negotiated as needed. Tasks, timelines, and steps needed for completion are outlined. A copy of the agreement is written up and sent to all participants, along with a full report of all that was discussed at the conference.

10. Closure – the family members choose how they want to end the ‘Ohana conference. Hugs, handshakes, song, or prayer are common endings. Often a potential re-conference date is discussed.

Youth Circles

Though ‘Ohana Conferencing was helping to keep families together and reducing the number of children in foster care, significant numbers of youth were still aging out of the system ill prepared for adulthood and with few social supports. On a national level the statistics looked grim: one in five foster youth would be homeless after the age of 18; only 58% would graduate from high school by age 19 (compared to 87% of non-foster youth); fewer than 3% would earn a college degree by 25 (compared to 28% of all youth); and one in four would be incarcerated within two years of leaving foster care.⁶

In response to such a disturbing forecast, EPIC created its Youth Circle Program. Lorenn Walker, J.D., M.P.H. and EPIC’s CEO Arlynn Livingston spearheaded it’s development, in collaboration with the Department of Human Services, the Office of Youth Services, and others, such as Kay Wright, a master facilitator, and Insoo Kim Berg, the co-creator of solution-focused brief therapy. Begun in 2004, Youth Circles help transitioning youth plan for their future by identifying options and supports. “Circles” are available to any youth, ages 14 to 26, who are currently in foster care or who have aged out.



In addition to creating a tangible transition plan, the goal of the Youth Circles program is to empower the youth to develop their unique voice and take control of their life. In the process, the participants strive to help the youth see that they are not alone. In other words, the circle strengthens the youth by encouraging them to take a leadership role and by enhancing their social capital.

Social capital, in recent years, has been identified as one of *the* crucial indicators of success for transitioning foster youth.⁷ Social capital is made up of relationships that are woven into a personal web of support which provides a strong, secure foundation. It can include family members, friends, teachers, coaches, neighbors, church members, and co-workers – anyone the youth has a personal relationship with and trusts.

Social capital is typically built up over time because relationships and trust develop over time. Unfortunately, for many foster youth being in care makes building that capital difficult. Their connection to biological family may be limited or non-existent, and it’s common for them to frequently change foster homes, schools, and communities. With each move relationships with peers, teachers, resource caregivers, and neighbors are lost and have to be built over and over again. Add to this the foster youth’s uncertainty that the new placement will last, and the challenge of developing social capital becomes daunting. As Josh Grubb, a former foster youth said, “Probably the most traumatic experience was all the moving I did. Moving foster homes is one thing, but what I found very challenging was also moving schools, because I left a whole support system behind.”⁸

While there are a number of strategies to help foster youth build social capital, continuity and life-long relationships are essential. Studies have shown the most critical factor to help at-risk youth beat their dismal statistical odds is a solid, enduring connection with at least one caring, trusted adult.⁹ With a caring adult in their corner, foster youth have security and the knowledge that the choices they make matter to someone. Just having that one enduring relationship is often a powerful motivator. As Mike Penno, another former foster youth so poignantly said, “If you don’t have anybody that believes in you, how do you believe in yourself? That’s one of the biggest things that foster youth deal with: nobody cares if they succeed, so they think, ‘well, why do I care if I succeed,’ which is sad.”¹⁰

Youth Circles are designed to let the youth know they are believed in and that they are important. Circles are modeled after the ‘Ohana Conferences in both structure and intent. They are strength-based, solution-focused meetings which are youth driven. The youth chooses to have the meeting, decides who will attend, and even picks the food to be served. Like in the ‘Ohana Conference, the youth opens and closes the Circle in the way he or she wants. During the circle the youth identifies goals and, with the help of the participants, develops a plan to meet those goals.

The Youth Circle Agenda

1. Welcome – often just a “thank you for coming,” but sometimes a song, chant, prayer, or recitation of a poem.

2. Introductions – participants introduce themselves and say how they are connected to the youth. EPIC’s Facilitator and Recorder also introduce themselves and explain their roles.

3. Purpose and Guidelines – The Facilitator clarifies that the Circle is to help the youth develop a transition plan for when they leave foster care. The Facilitator asks participants to give positive support and comments to the youth and to respect confidentiality.

4. Accomplishments – the youth is asked, “What are some things you’ve done that you’re proud of and would like to share?” These are listed by the Recorder on large poster sheets which are posted on the wall. Participants can also add to the list of the youth’s accomplishments.

5. Youth’s Strengths – each participant is asked to identify the

strengths they see in the youth. The youth is also asked to identify any strengths not listed. These, too, are kept visible.

6. Youth’s Goals – both long-term and short-term goals related to housing, education, employment, and other transitional needs are identified by the youth and listed. No goals are too far out or shot down.

7. Group Brainstorms Resources – participants share ideas of resources to help the youth meet his or her goals.

8. Youth Selects Transition Plan – throughout the meeting the Recorder has been posting all the notes on the wall. During this step the youth marks, in order of priority, which steps he or she wants to take related to their goals. This becomes the transition plan. Food is also served at this time.

9. Youth Presents Transition Plan to the Group – in various categories: housing, education, employment, etc., the youth identifies their first, second, and third choices of actions or options.

10. Volunteers and Timeline are Established – participants volunteer to help the youth fulfill the plan. For example, a youth may be interested in attending a particular college. One participant may offer to tour the college with the youth. Another may offer to help him or her with the application process. Timelines are established and dates are set for completion.

11. Supporters – a support system is identified by the youth.

12. Follow-up Circle Date – a date for the next Circle is decided. This is particularly encouraged if the emancipation date is near.

13. Circle Closing – participants give words of encouragement to the youth and the youth closes the circle in whatever way he or she chooses. Post Circle, a report – which includes the notes from the meeting, telephone numbers, logistical supports identified, and pertinent community resources – is sent out to all participants.

Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative (HYOI)

Youth Circles have proven to be a valuable resource for transitioning foster youth. In 2009, EPIC also became the lead agency for the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative (HYOI) which further addresses the foundational needs of these young adults. HYOI is the local site for the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, and helps transitioning foster youth learn valuable skills such as financial literacy and leadership skills. It also supports the youth voice in advocating for systems change on a policy level. Two recent examples of the youth's public policy initiatives are advocating before the Hawai'i legislature for automatic State-funded health insurance benefits upon aging out of the foster care system up to age 26, and extending voluntary foster care support to the age of 21. As with all our efforts, the goal is to help this vulnerable population have a fighting chance to succeed and be happy, healthy adults.



In 2005, Arlynnna, EPIC’s CEO, and Amy Tsark, the CWS Branch Administrator, attended a conference on the mainland which would, again, help change CWS practices in Hawai‘i. The guest speaker, Kevin Campbell, was the founder and developer of Family Finding – a specialized process of family searching, identifying, and reconnecting family with children in foster care.

Kevin Campbell had a history of working with teenagers in foster care and he described them as the loneliest people on earth. “They are kids who are universally described as ‘hard to place,’.... All I could do was find them another foster family. And I knew in my heart that the 38th foster family wasn’t going to turn out much different from the 37th..”¹¹

Kevin was driving to work one day, listening to National Public Radio, when he heard a report on the International Red Cross’ family tracing strategies to help reunite families separated by conflicts and natural disasters. He was inspired by the report, and after hearing the broadcast he researched the Red Cross’ methods. He realized he could apply their search techniques to help foster youth find their lost families. In an interview with Voice, the magazine of the Casey Family Services agency, he talked about that early research and also the deeper meaning of the work. He shared:

I learned that the Red Cross’ strategies were developed in response to the Geneva Conventions, which ensured the basic human right to know the fate of missing family members. This work was called the Restoration of Dignity. Simply put, before peace can be restored, families of the missing must be promised by the government that efforts will be made to discover the truth about each missing person. Without this promise, lasting peace and economic and community re-development will not happen in affected states, communities, or families.

In the project sites where I worked with some of the loneliest and longest-waiting young people in foster care, I found a haunting similarity. The families of these youth had no idea what had become of them, and the young people knew nothing of their families. They had not forgotten one another and they were not healing.

This discovery led me not only to family-tracing techniques, but to an effort to work for the restoration of dignity for the families and young people in foster care. To accomplish this, we do two things: tell the truth to families and young people about what has been happening and offer each family member a chance to help.¹²

At the conference, Amy and Arlynnna instantly recognized another powerful tool to use to reduce the suffering of children and families in foster care. Even though families were engaged through ‘Ohana Conferencing, and social capital was supported and encouraged in Youth Circles, EPIC and CWS often had limited knowledge of, and access to, extended family members. Kevin’s search techniques opened up exciting new possibilities for healing. It wasn’t long before Kevin would teach his search techniques to service providers in Hawai‘i.

The first ‘Ohana Connections case and program development

Bronson Kalaniali‘iloa Ka‘aihue preferred to be called by his shortened Hawaiian name, Kalani. When Kevin came to Hawai‘i to teach Family Finding, Kalani was seventeen and had zero contact with his family. What he knew was this: he had been separated from his parents when he was three, his mother had died when he was six, he had no idea where his father was, his older brother Samson was somewhere on the mainland and he and Samson had lived with maternal relatives in Texas, but that had been eight long years ago.

Starting with very little family information from Kalani’s case file, Kevin demonstrated the internet search techniques and several possible relatives were located. During the break he encouraged Kalani’s social worker to call a paternal uncle.

The uncle, initially shocked to get such a call, was very interested and supportive. That was the beginning of a new chapter for Kalani.

At the onset of Family Finding, Kalani had lived in ten different foster homes. He described how he felt prior to the family engagement work, “For me, there really wasn’t a self. I just lived life as a blank because I didn’t know where I came from, where my parents were, where my family was. I didn’t really care what happened to me at that point, because I didn’t have anything to look forward to. Without my family I didn’t feel I existed. I didn’t want to exist.”¹³

The Family Finding efforts begun in November 2006 resulted

in the discovery of 110 relatives for Kalani within eight months. During that time, Kalani was able to reconnect with his father, brother, aunts, uncles, and cousins. He even discovered that one of his co-workers was his aunt. His days of feeling like a blank were over. As he later said, “I look forward to college. I look forward to my life as an adult, living by myself or with a companion, a family...growing up every day, learning new things, discovering new parts of myself,

emotionally as well as mentally. I like to hang out with family most of all.”¹⁴

Hawai‘i’s DHS Child Welfare Services Branch and the William S. Richardson School of Law sponsored the making of a video of Kalani’s story. The video has been shown throughout the US and is a powerful training tool for Family Finding. It can be viewed on YouTube or EPIC’s website: www.epicohana.org.

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In January of 2007 state funding was secured to launch an on-going Family Finding program within EPIC. As with ‘Ohana Conferencing, meeting with service providers and families directly, listening to their fears and concerns, and empowering participants by being strength-based and solution focused was key to building the program.

As EPIC’s team developed their Family Finding program, it evolved into two distinct programs: Family Finding, which conducts the internet searching and creates family lists; and ‘Ohana Connections, which works directly with the youth and family to facilitate their reconnection. The former, Family Finding, has proven itself to be an invaluable tool for ‘Ohana Conferencing as it enables EPIC and DHS to engage larger numbers of extended family as soon as a case enters the Child Welfare System. Today, all new CWS foster care cases are automatically referred to EPIC for Family Finding and an ‘Ohana Conference in compliance with the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. That act mandates that within 30 days of a child being taken into care “...the state shall exercise due diligence to identify and provide notice to all adult grandparents and other adult relatives of the child....”¹⁵ By focusing on maintaining family connections at the front end of a case, we can continue to reduce the number of children who enter care, as well as the number of days children stay in care before securing a permanent placement. Also, when family is identified early, more children are placed with relatives so the children experience fewer changes in placement and are saved from the emotional turmoil which often accompanies relocation.

The ‘Ohana Connections program also expanded. In 2007, DHS was awarded a three-year federal grant to expand the scope of service to children ages four to sixteen that had been in foster care for at least a year. DHS contracted with EPIC to provide the service, and that grant, which also funded the writing of this manual, was designed to both deliver service and research service effectiveness. For the grant, 120 cases were randomly selected to receive services, 120 were selected as a control group. The number of family connections as well as the type and frequency of contact was tallied at the onset, six month, and twelve month intervals. Some of the key findings include: 1) intensive Family Finding efforts and search methodologies were effective in identifying additional family members as potential supports to the child, 2) Enhanced ‘Ohana Connections increased the actual number of family members connected to the children in the intervention group, 3) the quality of the interactions, that is the number of direct vs. indirect contacts, was enhanced. As was mentioned in the opening letter, the resulting detailed report is available online at: FosteringConnections.org/Hawaii.

The federal grant also supported another experiment for EPIC, and another research project. Early ‘Ohana Intervention was created to enable ‘Ohana Conferencing Facilitators to meet with families right at the time their children were being removed from the home. Facilitators rotated being on 24-hour call; when an investigation occurred they met with the social worker immediately to help facilitate and support the family during their crisis. Some of the key findings include: 1) when an Early ‘Ohana intervention took place, children were less likely to be removed, 2) with an Early ‘Ohana Intervention, children who were removed, stayed in care for a shorter period of time, 3) within twelve months of an Early ‘Ohana intervention, more children were reunified, and fewer children remained in out-of-home non-relative foster care, 4) the earlier an ‘Ohana Conference took place, the sooner a child was reunified. Again, data was collected between a service and control group to demonstrate the program’s efficacy and is available in the report listed above.

In the sections that follow, as we share our values and the cultural influences that inspire them, examples of the ‘Ohana Connections and Early ‘Ohana Intervention work will be woven in to give a fuller picture of the work and its impact. While the examples will just be brief descriptions of actual cases, they will, hopefully, provide a picture of our values in action and what is possible when families are enlisted to help resolve their crisis.

Section Two: Guiding Principles and Influences

“If you want the system to change you need a very clear vision about what you are doing. It isn’t enough to intellectualize it; you must live in the model values of non-judgmental, compassionate, problem solving.”

—Arlynnna Livingston, EPIC ‘Ohana’s founding CEO

AT EPIC WE WERE FORTUNATE to have founders and a board of directors with a clear vision of principles and values that are essential for family engagement work. We were also fortunate to work in partnership with CWS administrators and line workers who shared that vision and promoted family engagement practices. Underlying that good fortune, however, was the reality that the practices of family engagement and group decision making were in alignment with Hawaiian cultural values and traditional methods of conflict resolution. Pulling family and community together to work out interpersonal differences had long been a practice in Hawai‘i. It was the impersonal, top-down, legal and bureaucratic interventions that were a jolt to the island community’s sensibility of fairness and balance.

In many ways family engagement practices were a natural fit for Hawai‘i, but as you can see from our history and growth it was, and continues to be, a work in progress. Today, Hawai‘i is a blending of many cultures and influences, yet it is the pulse of the native Hawaiian values that still beats strongly in these islands, even when they are not explicitly stated. In the following sections we want to describe the traditional and non-traditional values we draw on, and how they weave together as we engage with families and the various service providers within the Child Welfare System. Collectively, they are the rudder which steers our work.



*“You gave me back my
family, that I lost and
haven’t been a part of for a
while. Thank you”*

*—Family member
participant*

Value 1: Children have a right to know and be connected to their families

THROUGHOUT THE WORLD it is universally accepted that families are the building blocks of society. It's within our families that we feel loved and a sense of belonging; where we learn the intimate dance of give and take and are encouraged to become healthy, responsible adults. It's within our families that we learn to be an individual yet part of a group – which is an essential stepping stone to becoming a contributing citizen.

In the Hawaiian tradition, family has always been central to a sense of identity and spirituality. Traditional Hawaiian practices and teachings wove a deep relational wisdom into the daily lives and spiritual practices of its people. From the Hawaiian perspective, an individual no more stands alone on this island than a tree stands alone in a forest. Each of us is interconnected with the community surrounding us, and with our ancestors who have provided the seed and spark of life.

In the Hawaiian beliefs, *Akua*, the great spirit, is transmitted through one's ancestors and it is through them one is given the breath of life. Like the Māori, ancient Hawaiian chants were often recitations of the names of ancestors throughout many generations; invoking their names called in their strength and spirit. It also showed respect and appreciation for the past while acknowledging that the present is but a precursor to the future. Who a person is today is born from the past and will impact the generations that follow.

While the Hawaiian traditions are more rich and complex than can be discussed here, there is one teaching that captures the essence of 'Ohana Connections and family engagement work. That is the teaching of the *piko*.

Piko literally means belly button or umbilical cord, but it also refers to the essence or center that binds us to our family and ancestors. On a physical and metaphorical level it is the cord of life; providing us with nutrients from our mother, but also genetic, cultural, and spiritual nutrients passed down from our elders through our parents. It's the unspeakable primal connection we feel with our blood kin that courses through the very cells of our body. Just as developing fetuses cannot grow without an umbilical

“piko... refers to the essence or center that binds us to our family and ancestors... [it] is at the heart of our deepest sense of security and belonging. Through it we get our family's values, history, and love”

cord, children cannot adequately grow without a strong *piko* or attachment, and adults rarely thrive without a sense of belonging and rootedness. The *piko* is at the heart of our deepest sense of security and belonging. Through it we get our family's values, history, and love.

According to Hawaiian teachings, unresolved emotional issues, unbearable stress, drug abuse, or other personal limitations create knots, or *hihia*, in the *piko* which limit the flow of positive, nurturing energy and create an imbalance within relationships. Though there is still a family attachment, despite the hurt and tangled emotions, the quality of the connection is compromised, sometimes with only a thread of positive connection remaining.

The ancient Hawaiians developed a way to address this problem. As islanders, they were highly attuned to the necessity of *pono* (goodness/uprightness) in all aspects of life so they developed *ho 'oponopono* to work through the *hihia* (knots) within relationships. As a practice of reconciliation and forgiveness, *ho 'oponopono*'s purpose is to untangle the interpersonal knots of misunderstanding and conflict so connection and harmony can be restored. While the content of the conflict is important, the real focus is on healing the relationship.

As mentioned previously, 'Ohana Conferencing was born out of the FGDM process of the Māori, *ho 'oponopono*, and Western mediation practices. The work of family engagement can be summed up as the attempt to identify the *piko* (umbilical cord/attachment), and undo the *hihia* (knots) in that family's *piko* so that they can, once again, be attached and secure in their connection with each other. We've found the greater the disconnection – the more profound the abuse or neglect, or the longer the family has been apart – the larger the *hihia* in the *piko*.

‘Ohana Conferencing is a powerful tool in working through the *hihia*, however, there are times when ‘Ohana Connections work is required to do a more in-depth exploration of the historical knots in the connection and to provide close and on-going support to the youth and families to resolve them. This service is especially helpful when families fear re-engaging with CWS, or when there have been years of separation and the youth fears rejection by his or her family. Stressing the reality and validity of the family’s connection, despite the long separation, is an important foundational piece. A former therapist and *ho ‘oponopono* practitioner, who often worked with our staff, would tell families, “The *piko* is your tie to each other. No piece of paper, no order from the state can sever your *piko*. Only the family members can make that choice for themselves.”

This was an especially powerful message for Kealoha and her daughter, Pua. Pua was 16-years old when our Connections Specialist began working with her. Pua had entered care when she was six, and was in contact with only one sister who was living on the mainland. The last time she had seen other relatives was at her father’s funeral when she was seven. At that time it was wrenching to see the family; she didn’t know if she wasn’t living with them because it wasn’t “allowed” or because they had rejected her.

“The piko is your tie to each other. No piece of paper, no order from the state can sever your piko”

An internet search located 42 relatives, the majority of whom lived on O‘ahu and Maui. The family was excited about re-connecting with Pua, and after much preparation visits were set up with cousins, aunts, and grandparents on both islands. A highlight was when Pua, who believed her maternal grandmother had died long ago, discovered grandmother was still alive. “Is it really you, *Tūtū*?” Pua asked when she first hugged her grandmother tight.

Though all the new connections were very exciting, Pua confided she really wanted to see her mother. The Connections Specialist located Kealoha, Pua’s mom, and met with her several times. Kealoha was doing well; she was sober, working, and trying to find housing, but, she admitted, she struggled to maintain a stable life due to intermittent domestic violence and drug use. She was getting support and counseling, she said, which helped her feel optimistic that this time could be different.

The treatment team had concerns about Pua reconnecting with her mom, given Kealoha’s struggles, but they also knew it was important. Pua’s therapist, the *ho ‘oponopono* practitioner, suggested he and the Connections Specialist use *ho ‘oponopono* to create a safe space for a first meeting and to set the stage for further healing to occur.

The treatment team agreed. To begin, the therapist and Connections Specialist met with Pua and Kealoha separately to talk about the painful past, the *ho ‘oponopono* process, and what the mother and daughter hoped would be the outcome. Both Pua and Kealoha were instructed to make a gift to give to the other as was the tradition within *ho ‘oponopono*.

The preparatory meetings with Kealoha were especially important. Pua had some hard questions she wanted to ask her mom; it was likely much hurt and anger would be expressed. When Kealoha was forewarned of that possibility she became defensive and minimized her role in her daughter’s suffering. This alarmed the therapist as he feared Kealoha’s emotional fragility might cause her to invalidate her daughter’s experience, which would be yet another injury to Pua.

The therapist and Connections Specialist addressed this concern by talking to Kealoha about the fears and pain underneath her defensiveness. They assured her the *ho ‘oponopono* wasn’t about judgment; it was an opportunity for healing. The best way she could help, they said, was for her to listen to her daughter with an open mind and heart, and to take responsibility to whatever degree she could. They empathized with Kealoha’s guilt and the burden she carried, while stressing this was an opportunity to right some past wrongs.

Kealoha softened and said she understood. She agreed the Connections Specialist, whom she trusted, could remind her to stop and listen to Pua if she became defensive. The day of the *ho ‘oponopono* arrived. Kealoha and Pua ran to each other and hugged without a breath of hesitation. They both cried and said they were sorry. Kealoha reassured Pua she had nothing to be sorry about. “It was me who failed you,” she said.

When they were ready, the *ho ‘oponopono* began with a *pule* (prayer) to *Akua* (God) and the ancestors to provide the guidance, wisdom, and support so mother and daughter could heal their wounds. The therapist talked about the *piko*, and the profound bond that Kealoha and Pua shared. He also talked about the *hihia* and the purpose of the *ho ‘oponopono* session. This was the *kukula kumuhana* (identifying the problem) stage of the process.

The next step was the *mahiki*, or the time when the family talked about what happened. Pua was scared to speak up; Kealoha encouraged her, saying nothing she said would be wrong or too much. Gradually Pua began to describe the childhood abuse and subsequent pain of being in foster care. “Why did you hurt me so much?” Pua cried. “Why didn’t you take better care of me?”

Kealoha started to make excuses, but with a gentle reminder she quickly caught herself. As she listened, she responded to Pua with more and more empathy and stated clearly that Pua had just been a child. She and Pua’s father had failed, she said, and she was deeply sorry. Kealoha then shared some of her own childhood abuse experiences. This was done, not out of defensiveness, but as a way to give Pua a fuller understanding of the family’s pain and to share that she intimately knew the heartache of abuse. The *mihi* (time of forgiveness) followed. The therapist talked about how highly the Ancient Hawaiians valued forgiveness; once forgiveness was granted and received the matter was considered truly settled. But, he explained, both the request for forgiveness and the granting of it had to be sincere in order for *pono* (goodness/uprightness) to be restored. He acknowledged for Pua and

Kealoha, with their long history of separation and hurt, that forgiveness would likely be a long process. That day they were tak-

ing a beginning step, a choice of direction for both of them.

Kealoha admitted her *hala* (wrong-doing) and directly asked Pua for her forgiveness. Pua tried, several times, to say it was her fault, but Kealoha firmly told her she had been a child and she was innocent. Pua, through her tears, told her mom she loved her and that she was choosing to forgive her. Kealoha cried, and said she loved Pua and always had. Kealoha went over to Pua and held her tight as her daughter broke down and wept.

When Pua’s tears were spent, they shared their gifts – Kealoha gave her daughter a jacket, Pua gave her mom a framed picture. A prayer was offered. Food was shared, and a plan for their next contact was made. They both expressed gratitude for the *ho ‘oponopono* – a new experience for both of them – and said it had felt comforting and powerful to have their ancestral tradition be part of their coming together. As everyone ate and “talked story” (conversed) the *ho ‘oponopono* came to its own natural end.

Pua and Kealoha continue to have contact, four years later. They’ve had many ups and downs as they work through the old *hihia* in their relationship and contend with newly created ones. The *ho ‘oponopono* did give them a positive start, however, and helped them reclaim their love and attachment to each other.



EPIC strongly adheres to the truth so simply and elegantly captured in the concept of the *piko* – families are innately attached and will continue to have that unspoken bond unless one or the other has chosen to let it go. EPIC also believes in the empowerment of the family inherent in the idea of the *piko*. Even in families where parental rights have been terminated, many youth, like Pua, continue to have strong emotional ties to parents, siblings, grandparents, aunties, uncles, and cousins.

In addition to one’s biological family, in the Native Hawaiian system there is another family bond that is valued. In the old days, it was common practice to give the first born child to the grandparents to raise as a sign of love and respect. As time went on, that practice extended into the community; non-relative families would take in and raise children as their own. To raise a child in this manner was to make them your *hānai* son or daughter. *Hānai* means to adopt, to be close, to nourish, and to sustain. It was the Hawaiians’ way of offering nurturing and permanence to the children who were most vulnerable.

The practice of *hānai* continues on today, and in Hawai‘i it still conveys an intimate bond that goes beyond the ordinary. The State Legislature has even given placement preference to biological and *hānai* kin for children in care. In obituaries, *hānai* sons and daughters are listed as relatives of the deceased. To be a *hānai* son or daughter means you are embraced by that family and are in that family. You are recognized by the community as such too.

As we practice and promote the engagement of biological and *hānai* relatives, working through the *hihia* (knots) in the family's *piko* is often a bumpy and challenging process. Safety concerns, personal limitations, mental health needs, and unrealistic expectations are continually addressed each step of the way. Through the ups and downs however, we find adhering to the fundamental truth so eloquently captured by the ancient Hawaiians gives our work its own kind of *piko*. As we respect and embrace the perspective of the local culture, we become tied to the people and place that hold family connections as so primal. We, too, draw on and find strength in that deep reservoir of traditional values that elevate one's family ties to an essential ingredient for personal balance and well-being.

“As we respect and embrace the perspective of the local culture, we become tied to the people and place that hold family connections as so primal”

Value 2: Always treat others as you want to be treated

THOUGH THIS VALUE MAY SOUND FAMILIAR and seem simple, it embodies much of Hawai‘i’s cultural values and is a foundational tenet of our work. It’s through kindness and compassion that trust is built and power is shared. It’s through empathy and genuine concern that defenses are lowered and a course forward is discovered. And finally, it’s through collaboration with all stakeholders that solutions are agreed upon and everyone is invested in the outcome. All of which starts with each and every relationship.

In Hawai‘i, this value is captured in the spirit of *aloha*. *Aloha*, on its simplest level, is often used to say hello or good-bye, but its meaning runs much deeper. It also expresses affection, peace, compassion, and non-judgment, and refers to the breath of life shared between us. It is so central to the culture here we even have an Aloha Spirit State Law. While there are no penalties for breaking this law, it was enacted as a way to remind government employees to treat the people they serve with deep care and respect. Here is the law in its entirety:

.....

Hawai‘i Revised Statutes

§ 5-7.5 "**Aloha Spirit**". (a) "**Aloha Spirit**" is the coordination of mind and heart within each person. It brings each person to the self. Each person must think and emote good feelings to others. In the contemplation and presence of the life force, "**Aloha**", the following **unuhi laulā loa** may be used:

"**Akahai**", meaning kindness to be expressed with tenderness;

"**Lōkahi**", meaning unity, to be expressed with harmony;

"**Olu‘olu**" meaning agreeable, to be expressed with pleasantness;

"**Ha‘aha‘a**", meaning humility, to be expressed with modesty;

"**Ahonui**", meaning patience, to be expressed with perseverance.

These are traits of character that express the charm, warmth and sincerity of Hawaii's people. It was the working philosophy of native Hawaiians and was presented as a gift to the people of Hawai‘i. "**Aloha**" is more than a word of greeting or farewell or a salutation. "**Aloha**" means mutual regard and affection and extends warmth in caring with no obligation in return. "**Aloha**" is the essence of relationships in which each person is important to every other person for collective existence. "**Aloha**" means to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen and to know the unknowable.

(b) In exercising their power on behalf of the people and in fulfillment of their responsibilities, obligations and service to the people, the legislature, governor, lieutenant governor, executive officers of each department, the chief justice, associate justices, and judges of the appellate, circuit, and district courts may contemplate and reside with the life force and give consideration to the "**Aloha Spirit**". [L 1986, c 202, § 1]¹⁶

.....

Aloha is taken seriously by residents and is central to life here on these islands. To not have aloha means you are arrogant, self-centered, or disconnected from what matters most – caring about each other and honoring this land and its spirit.

We feel fortunate that *aloha* is still such a central tenet in our local culture. Though its lofty aspirations are not always obtainable or visible (especially in situations where tensions are running high and anger or distrust have taken the lead), it is a common value shared across the socio-economic spectrum. As family engagement practitioners, we know the best way to address conflict and embody *aloha* is to listen to people’s concerns with receptivity and open-mindedness, to converse without getting defensive or pushing our own agenda first.



In the family engagement process, *aloha* is often put to the test. When looking at the possibility of family involvement, for example, various conflicts can arise. Sometimes hearsay stories have portrayed relatives in a negative light. Sometimes the various service providers have separate agendas. We've found different people often have different ideas about the emotional needs of the children and what constitutes safety. We've also seen that most protectiveness comes out of a deep care and concern for the children.

We've found the two most common fears in engagement work are: the abuse will be repeated because the family system itself is sick ("the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" theory), and/or family engagement will disrupt a placement or sidetrack the case's direction if new family members are brought in. Both these fears were encountered in the 'Ohana Connections work with Kalei, Koa, and Rochelle, three children under the age of ten who were placed together in a non-relative foster home.

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At the time 'Ohana Connections work began, the children were not visiting with any relatives. During a meeting with Joan, the resource caregiver, the Connections Specialist learned the children often asked about two older siblings, Lani, 18, and Shane, 22. The children missed their older brother and sister and wanted to see them again.

Their social worker explained to the Connections Specialist visits weren't allowed because Lani and Shane were unsafe and inappropriate. She shared hearsay stories of their numerous problems, and expressed concerns about what their involvement might do to the stability of the children's placement. The children were doing well, she said, and she didn't want anything to disrupt their progress.

In family engagement work we believe it's crucial to not discard individuals based on hearsay. The Connections Specialist listened to the social worker's concerns and understood the children's vulnerability. She expressed appreciation for the social worker's protectiveness of the children. "I still think it's important to talk with the older brother and sister," the Specialist explained, "just so I can get a sense of how they're doing today." She assured the social worker she wouldn't take any action towards family connection without the treatment team's consent. Despite her skepticism, the social worker agreed.

Lani and Shane were excited to receive the call and agreed to meet the Connections Specialist the next day. Talking over their Starbucks coffee, the Specialist was struck by the sincerity

of Lani and Shane's love and concern for their younger siblings. They explained, with tears in their eyes, that their mother was a drug addict so they had basically raised Kalei, Koa, and Rochelle. They described helping with homework and cooking meals even though they were just kids themselves. They also expressed frustration that they had been ruled out from having visits. "Until today, no professional has ever met us," Shane said, his hurt and anger barely hidden.

The Connections Specialist assessed the stability of their current situation, sensed their genuineness, and developed a simple plan to advocate for sibling visits. She would propose to the social worker that Lani and Shane meet with the children's three therapists so their intentions could be screened and they could learn the children's trauma related triggers and how to handle them. From there, they'd work towards phone calls then visits.

The social worker was surprised when she heard the positive report about Lani and Shane. Though still skeptical, she agreed to take the recommended first step. The therapists, when contacted, also had their doubts and fears; these, too, were addressed by the Connections Specialist with understanding and respect. The therapists (who worked in collaboration) suggested two months of preparation would be needed. Multiple sessions were set up, but at the very first meeting (which was also attended by the Connections Specialist) the therapists easily concluded that visits with Lani and Shane should be approved. Over the next two months the therapists coached Lani and Shane about the needs of the children, and how to respond in ways that were constructive and safe. Possible scenarios were imagined. "How would you answer the children if they asked to live with you?" the siblings were

asked. Shane and Lani, with the therapists' help, formulated this response: *I love you and would love for you to come live with me, but right now I'm not in a situation where that can happen. You're in a good home with auntie Joan. I'm so happy she's taking such good care of you!*

During the months of preparation the treatment team communicated regularly. By the end, visitation guidelines were written and signed. These included the use of appropriate language, consistent communication with the team, and adhering to the agreed upon schedule. The children's es-

tranged maternal grandmother and aunt were also brought in and it was determined they could supervise the on-going visits, with the Connections Specialist assisting for the first month. As of this writing, the visits have been on-going weekly for six months and everyone, including the treatment team, has only positive things to say. Lani and Shane were able to develop a bond with auntie Joan, the resource caregiver, too – an important step since Kalei, Koa, and Rochelle are soon to be adopted by Joan and her husband. Everyone has agreed, Lani, Shane, grandmother, and auntie will remain a vital part of the children's lives.

By the time this case had begun, Hawai'i's CWS was well into the paradigm shift of family engagement and state and family collaboration. Yet family engagement wasn't readily embraced because of past impressions. We've found when encountering such barriers, *aloha*, clear communication, and gently encouraging the sharing of power are most effective. As with all change, it takes a living, on-going commitment to make the new paradigm work.

“...the best way to address conflict and embody aloha is to listen to people's concerns with receptivity and open-mindedness, to converse without getting defensive or pushing our own agenda first”

“We were able to come together in a neutral, non-judgmental manner to discuss these issues with one another that would have been difficult if we tried to do this on our own”

—Family member participant

Value 3: Power works best when it's shared

THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS, located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, are more secluded than any other place on earth. For centuries, the Hawaiian people lived on these remote lands with no contact with outsiders. They were completely self-sustaining, and in order to maintain self-sufficiency sought *pono* or goodness/uprightness in their relationship with nature, people, and spirit. Imbalance or disharmony was viewed as a threat to their social and natural ecosystem.

In the Hawaiian tradition *lokahi* means harmony, unity, or to be in agreement, and "...brings together the terms *laulima* (working relationship), *alu like* (working in harmony), *kuleana* (division of responsibility), *kūpono* and *hana kūpono* (working for a correct cause)."¹⁷ *Lokahi* (unity/harmony) doesn't mean sameness – everyone has their own talents and perspectives – but it does mean coming together to create positive, sustaining outcomes that serve the individual and greater community.

In order for *lokahi* to exist, individuals must be respected and power must be shared. Unfortunately, power sharing is often easier said than done, especially when systems are set up with clear lines of authority or liability issues are at stake. Within CWS the aversion to risk is often magnified by the fact that child protection is a field tethered to layers of liability and responsibility which fall directly on the social worker and Department of Human Services. If something goes wrong children could be hurt, the media can become involved, legal repercussions could be initiated, and jobs could be lost. With that in the background, sharing power and engaging family can feel like a high stakes gamble.

At EPIC we appreciate the risk and take liability concerns very seriously. Our goal is not to disrupt, but to enhance the work being done. We reassure the social worker and team members no significant steps forward are ever taken in isolation. All family

contact with the child is approved by the social worker and other appropriate team members before it is initiated. No plan decided upon in an 'Ohana Conference is ever put into action without the stated agreement and signature of the social worker and other participants.

"Our goal is not to disrupt, but to enhance the work being done"

To obtain *lokahi* (unity/harmony) with such hovering risk requires the attitude and practice of inclusiveness. In all our programs we try to work with the team of service providers and the families to bring about the most positive outcomes for the children. Many times that requires an on-going commitment to persevere together even when fears raise significant doubts. An example is the following case of Fila, a 17-year old youth who entered our 'Ohana Connections program in 2009.

Fila was first taken into care when she was twelve because of sexual abuse. She was living with her aunt Mary at the time, and it was the aunt's husband, John, who abused her. Within a year of entering care, Fila lost all contact with her family and began the cycle of foster homes, psychiatric hospitals, treatment centers, and back to foster homes. Within five years she went through 33 placements. Her treatment team was at a loss when it came to finding and creating a stable placement for her. Engagement with family had been tried at the onset, but it was reported the family was in denial about the abuse and deemed unsafe.

A Connections Specialist met with the team and heard their concerns. They were afraid the family might still not believe

the sexual abuse had happened, which would be devastating to Fila. Fila was prone to cutting herself and violent outbursts; they feared the family might not have the skills and knowledge to handle her mental health needs. Perhaps the family wouldn't follow through; Fila would then be even worse off than she already was. It was Fila's persistent desire to have contact with family and her willing social worker that swayed the team to give 'Ohana Connections a try.

The Connections Specialist met with Fila to get to know her, explain the 'Ohana Connections process, and talk about family. "Who do you want to have contact with?" the Connections Specialist asked. "My grandma and auntie Leilani," Fila replied, "I miss them the most."

The Connections Specialist located and called Leilani who was angry and distrustful from the start. “Why is the state calling me now?” she asked, after hearing a brief introduction. “You’re in trouble and now you want family to bail you out. Forget it!” she said with a click. A call back went unanswered.

Two days later the Connections Specialist made contact with Leilani again. She empathized with Leilani’s hurt and anger and asked about her past experiences with CWS. She asked how the family was doing without Fila and Leilani spoke of the hole they felt with her absence. Leilani agreed to meet.

For their meeting the Connections Specialist shared food – a tradition in Hawai‘i – and she and Leilani “talked story” (conversed). Eventually, they discussed the abuse and its lingering impact on Fila. Leilani said she understood how devastating it had been, and that the family wanted a chance to be supportive. Her sister Mary and her husband might still be in denial, she said, but she wasn’t nor was rest of the family. She knew the family could help Fila, they just needed a chance.

This was reported to the team, and they requested Leilani come to the next meeting. Leilani was scared and nervous before the meeting; she feared the family might be judged negatively all over again. The team was welcoming and kind, but they were wary of the family’s capacity to handle Fila’s intense behaviors. As the team talked about their concerns, and Leilani expressed her desire for the family to be respected and given a chance, a relationship sprouted. Leilani soon became an integral member of the team.

Shortly after the meeting, Leilani and Fila began having phone calls which led to visits. Grandma, who was now elderly and very disabled, lived nearby with her son and Fila spent time with them too. As the process continued, Leilani was impressed by the care and concern of “the professionals.” The team also had high praise for Leilani, and increasingly asked for her input in charting the case’s direction.

Fila, initially elated with the family contact, became more belligerent and reverted to her acting out behaviors as the option of moving in with auntie became a looming reality. This was the first big test for the team. Several service providers felt anxious and expressed fear the family couldn’t handle Fila. That made Leilani angry because she felt the family was, once again, being distrusted and marginalized. Throughout that difficult phase the Connections Specialist walked Leilani back from the edge of quitting several times. To everyone’s credit, the entire team kept communicating as they worked through their anxiety and hurt.

“I’m in a new life now and my auntie and family are helping me stay on track. They’re depending on me to succeed”

Six months after the case began, Fila moved in with Leilani. Several months later Leilani took legal guardianship. Since living with her auntie, Fila stopped cutting herself, never returned to a psychiatric hospital or treatment program, discontinued her medications, and graduated from high school. In a later interview, when asked what had changed, Fila said, “I don’t know, I just feel more settled inside. It’s like I can look back and say that was the old way I was. I’m in a new life now and my auntie and family are helping me stay on track. They’re depending on me to succeed.”

It can be said that *lokahi* (unity/harmony) was achieved on several levels in this case. The adults achieved it by working together and being inclusive. The service providers had to stretch by sharing their power and including Leilani as a team member; Leilani had to stretch to see the service providers as trying to help her niece and family. If either side had failed to do so, there would have been too much opportunity for distrust and misunderstanding to grow. As a result of their efforts, however, Fila was also able to have *lokahi* by regaining unity and harmony within herself and her connection to family.

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Repeatedly, we’ve seen when information and decision making power are shared, long held prejudices on both sides dissipate and mutual respect grows. Service providers typically experience family involvement as an asset not a liability, and the families usually experience the state and service providers as helpful and supportive. The result is the children’s number of placements and length of stay in the foster care system are greatly reduced, the families are more satisfied with the process and outcomes, and social workers feel more effective in reducing the pain and suffering of the children and their families.¹⁸

Value 4: It's All about the Children

IN HAWAIIAN THE WORD FOR CHILD is *keiki*. On the islands when we speak of *keiki* we're talking about children, but much more is communicated. *Keiki* carries with it a feeling of preciousness, protectiveness, and care. It's usually preceded by the word "our" rather than "the" which speaks to the intimacy of island life. *Keiki* belong to families, but they also belong to our island community.

Residents of Hawai'i are not alone in collectively valuing their children, and families everywhere have their traditions and support networks. In the Hawaiian tradition, with its belief in the transmission of spirit through the generations, the birth of each child is seen as a gift from the past into the present. This new life is publicly celebrated with the baby's first *lū'au* – a large family and community gathering whose size and expense can rival weddings and graduation parties. Stemming from a tragic past when few babies made it to their first birthday, baby's first *lū'au* is, as one mom writes, "... a way for us to connect with the traditions of our *kūpuna* (ancestors)... it's also a way for us to thank the people who have already done so much in his first year and to thank them in advance for all the things they will do for our son in the years to come. As they say, 'it takes a village to raise a child.'"¹⁹

Even with so much appreciation and collective support, however, some stressed parents still abuse or neglect their *keiki*. The parents are often overwhelmed, struggle with poverty and/or drug abuse, or have mental health issues. The extended family may have intergenerational conflicts, communication impasses between the maternal and paternal sides, or an array of other limitations. In family engagement work, no matter the depth of the family's pain, we've found it's essential to explicitly keep everyone's attention on the needs of the children. While that might seem obvious, it took many years and much effort for that focus to

"Keiki belong to families, but they also belong to the community"

become standard practice. In the early days of 'Ohana Conferencing, adult issues tended to creep in and dominate the conferences. CWS workers were trained to hone in on the parents' deficiencies. When adult and family issues consumed the focus, attention on the children was lost and conferences were easily derailed.

By maintaining the focus on the children the larger meaning and purpose of everyone's efforts are kept in the foreground. Almost every parent wants to do right by their children; almost every grandparent will move beyond their hurt and anger if it helps the grandchildren. At any particular moment, parents, family members, or service providers may have their own personal or interpersonal problems, but bringing attention back to the children reminds them of their responsibility to their *keiki*. Power struggles and denigrating others seem to naturally be kept to a minimum as a result.

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The case of Mary and Don, an Early 'Ohana Intervention case, demonstrates the value of being child focused. When the 'Ohana Conference Facilitator got the crisis call late one afternoon, she rushed to meet Mary, Don, and the investigating social worker at the local jail. At the time, Mary was in prison for the alleged child abuse.

During the crisis call, the Facilitator learned Mary and Don, the parents of six boys ranging in age from eight to sixteen, had been separated for a number of years and had a strained relationship. Mary was raising the boys on her own with little help from Don. Don, the Facilitator was told, was a quiet, distant dad. It was the 16-year old son, Charles, who claimed

his mom had abused him. Charles had limited contact with his father and wanted more.

When the Facilitator arrived at the jail the family engagement clock was ticking – the social worker had little time to secure emergency placements for all the boys. All she could find were separate non-relative foster homes for each of them if she was to place them by the end of the work day. The Facilitator pressed for time to find a family option.

The Facilitator talked with Mary through the bars of the jail cell to introduce herself and explain family engagement. Mary, upset and in crisis, said she didn't have anyone on the

maternal side who could take the boys and she rejected, outright, the idea of them going to paternal relatives. The Facilitator listened with empathy, and soon Mary began to calm down. Eventually she asked Mary to imagine how scared the boys would be to be separated from each other and placed in a stranger's home. It was then, Mary consented to contact with the paternal side.

Don was equally stubborn. The Facilitator struggled to build rapport with him; he would vacillate between shutting down and blaming Mary. He felt Mary was controlling and kept the boys from him. As Don began to open up, the Facilitator sensed how powerless and guilty he felt. She stressed the reality of not being able to change the past, but emphasized he could take action in that moment to help his boys. His cooperation could be an opportunity for him to exert some control and become more involved with his sons.

Don, too, calmed down and gave the Facilitator some family names and numbers. An aunt and uncle were found who were willing to take all six boys. The social worker did an immediate home visit so the boys could stay with their auntie and uncle that very night.

Within a week an 'Ohana Conference was held. The tension between mom and dad was thick. Mary felt she had been shouldering the responsibility of care for the boys and didn't want Don's help. She feared being let down by him again. Don was quiet, but stewing. It was clear he thought Mary was controlling and excluding.

It was during the opening step, when the family listed their hopes and dreams for the children that the emotional atmosphere changed. Talking about the boys' future set the tone

for the conference and reminded everyone that the purpose for coming together was to help the boys accomplish those dreams. As Mary heard the paternal family share their care and concern she softened and became more receptive to their involvement. She admitted it was too much for her to raise the boys on her own, and she was scared two of the middle ones might be joining a gang. As Don listened, he began to appreciate how strong and committed Mary was to their children. He stepped up and said he wanted to be a more active parent and shoulder the responsibility too. Aunts and uncles joined in and offered to mentor the boys and requested visits so Mary could have a break.



In the end, five of the boys returned to live with Mary. Charles, the oldest, went to live with his father – an arrangement both Mary and Don agreed to. The extended family was thrilled to be involved, and was committed to being a support to the boys and their parents. CWS determined the safety issues were resolved and closed the case shortly thereafter. In this case, like so many others, when the adults stay child-focused they are able to look beyond their own pain, prioritize the needs of the children, and see each other differently too.

“Talking about the boys’ future set the tone for the conference and reminded everyone that the purpose for coming together was to help the boys accomplish those dreams”

Value 5: We are all agents of change

NATIVE HAWAIIANS BELIEVE the energy of life infuses all things, animate as well as inanimate. They call this energy *mana*, and it is believed *mana* is what binds people, family, land, and the spirit world together. “*Mana* is reflected in the felt or experienced connection between the psyche and the many life forms around it (i.e., gods, nature, family) thus creating a sense of relationship – perhaps even obligation – to act or behave in such a way that the *mana* is increased, enhanced, and sustained and brought into harmony or *lokahi*.”²⁰ *Mana* is a spiritual energy and also a healing power. A person, by striving to be in balance (which includes being true to their deeper self), can either increase or decrease their *mana*. *Mana* is intimately tied to a sense of personal power and inner strength. For example, if a person is wise or has a great deal of integrity, they are said to have a lot of *mana*.

The ultimate goal for children in foster care is a stable and positive childhood in a permanent home, followed by a successful transition into healthy, happy adulthood. In other words, for the children to have the conditions which will help strengthen their *mana*, or core inner spirit, so they can have an authentic, fulfilling life. A western word that is less profound but also alludes to that inner spirit is the term *resiliency* – that inner capacity and strength to rebound and grow despite difficult and, often times, overwhelming circumstances. Resiliency isn’t solely something one is born with. It, like *mana*, can be cultivated through support, choices, and actions.

Resiliency is commonly understood to result from the interaction of risk and protective factors in a person’s life. In other words, if a child in foster care experiences multiple traumas and has very few protective factors such as a stable home or a trusted adult to rely on, that child is less likely to rebound from those experiences. Depending on the severity of the traumas, he or she will, in all likelihood, set off on a trajectory towards dropping out of school, job instability, homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse, or mental health problems.

Protective factors that encourage resiliency include “...the stability of the environment; the mental and emotional health of the child’s parents and or primary care givers; the strength of healthy relationships the child has developed with parents, other supportive adults and positive peers; the level of the child’s competencies in areas such as ability to problem solve, ability to read and ability to interact effectively in social situations; and, finally, the child’s perception of his/her abilities, which contributes to having positive and realistic goals and expectations for the future.”²¹

“If a person is wise or has a great deal of integrity, they are said to have a lot of mana”

Resiliency isn’t static – children can be resilient in one instance and not in another – it’s a fluid, on-going process. Children re-fuel and grow strong by drawing on the strength found in their relationships, creativity, culture, and environment. If they have adequate guidance, encouragement, and genuine connections they can regain their balance or sense of well-being through the steady comfort and reality check their relationships provide. It’s when they feel isolated and have to cope with an overwhelming and confusing world on their own that they are most susceptible to failure.

EPIC’s aim, through its various programs, is to help strengthen the resiliency of children and families that have been impacted by foster care. We do this by enhancing family connections, cultural rootedness, and knowledge of community resources. We also try to strengthen their *mana* or core inner spirit by highlighting their strengths and engaging them in informed decision making and solution focused processes. Whenever possible we strive to empower rather than disempower, engage rather than disengage, and give those who have been silenced an opportunity to speak and be heard.

When working with people of differing capacities and levels of resiliency, we know we can’t always control, or sometimes even influence, the outcomes. Even with our best efforts, the pain of the past may be too great to overcome. Try as we might, some youth age out of care with no close family ties, some add to those dismal statistics for former foster youth. That is part of the heartache of this work.

David, 17, is one such youth. David was separated from the maternal side of his family when he was an infant and was raised by his paternal family in the shadow of his father, a sophisticated pimp and drug dealer. David entered care at age nine due to confirmed neglect.

An internet search located maternal relatives in Northern California. David's grandmother, Patty, and his aunt, Karen, were thrilled to get the call. Patty always believed David would find them someday; she anticipated it would be when he was an adult and able to break away from his father.

Patty knew how powerful and controlling David's father was. She described Karen's early efforts to take infant David away from dad, and dad's threatening, intimidating response. Subsequent reports to the police and CPS went nowhere. The

family felt powerless to protect David, but had never forgotten him. Patty prayed for him daily, she said, and David was affectionately acknowledged at every family gathering.

Patty, a feisty woman in her early 50's, lived in a cabin about 10 miles outside of the nearest town. She worked as a nurse, loved hiking and nature, and was a devoted mother and grandmother. "My small family has its issues, but we're strong and close-knit," she asserted. "We'd be good for David."

David's mom, Cindy, a former drug addict and prostitute, was in a nearby prison and had been for many years. Patty reported Cindy's counseling and drug treatment were having a real impact. For the first time she felt her daughter was "really back" during their bi-weekly visits. Cindy was likely to be released within six months, she was doing so well.

Core Principles of Resilience

For young people in foster care, these core principles support the process of developing resilience:

Optimism - Young people are always capable of building resilience. Even though the cumulative effects of risk factors do impact their lives, there is never a "point of no return" for a youth. Research has shown that services and interventions have the potential to make a difference for all children and adolescents, even those with many risk factors.

Strengths-based - To develop resilience it is important to focus on the strength, rather than the shortcomings, of the youth in foster care. Resilience is also grown by encouraging and supporting their healthy development. Despite their multiple risk factors, youth in foster care often have many internal assets and external resources that can help them grow in a positive direction.

Broad context - Resilience comes from the youth's inner capacities and resources, but it also is built by their environment. For young people in foster care their siblings, extended family members, caregivers, mentors, teachers, coaches, and social workers can all help to offset their risk factors and develop resiliency.

Exposure level - The reality is, risk factor exposure does impact children. The "playing field" isn't level for all youth, especially for those in foster care who have likely experienced multiple traumas, poverty, separation from family, and the stigma of "being in the system."

Individualized experiences - The process of developing resilience is different for each individual and for different groups of adolescents. What is a risk or a protective factor for one young person or one group of adolescents will not necessarily be a risk or protective factor for another.

Group experiences - At the group level, developing resiliency may differ depending on whether the group is in a city or in the country, what gender they are, their age, and what their socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds are.

Ongoing support - A young person may be resilient in one situation, but not in another. Just because a youth is strong and seems to have a lot of protective factors, doesn't mean he or she doesn't need support. Just as we can't assume children or youth in foster care are ever a "lost cause," we can't assume they are so "together" that don't need our attention and help if they are to succeed.²²

David's treatment team was excited maternal relatives had been found. David was a challenging youth who had cycled through many treatment centers and foster homes. He was very bright and charming, but also "manipulative." He tended to view relationships for what he could get out of them, not for any connection, and if he didn't get what he wanted he could be threatening and abusive. While that wasn't surprising, given his childhood environment, there were moments David demonstrated genuine empathy and reciprocity which gave the team hope. Contact with the other half of his family just might strengthen and expand those positive capacities.

Weekly facilitated calls were set up between Patty, David, and the Connections Specialist, but soon grandma and grandson were talking beyond that allotted time. David was smitten. He wanted to live with grandma, that's all there was to it. It was hard for him to stay focused on school or attend to his responsibilities at his foster home. Patty, meanwhile, participated in team meetings via conference calling and had frequent private conversations with the social worker, guardian ad litem (GAL), therapist, and Connections Specialist. While she knew there would be real challenges with David, she, too, wanted David to come live with her. She had been through a lot with Cindy, she said, and her other daughter, Karen, was a strong support. They weren't strangers to difficulty or street-smart survival tactics; Cindy had put them through that for years.

It was arranged for David to visit with his family over the Thanksgiving holiday. To everyone's surprise, Cindy was being released from prison early and would also attend the holiday gathering. Many team discussions ensued, and while some questioned whether David was ready to meet his mom, experience suggested it was unlikely they could be kept apart. David and Cindy were both masters at getting what they wanted, and the pull of their connection was strong.

Instead, mom and grandmother were prepped to help create as safe a first meeting as possible. Patty agreed to keep a close eye on David; if there was any hint it was becoming too much for him she agreed to take him home immediately, even if that meant missing their turkey dinner. Cindy understood she had to be attuned to David and his needs, even when she was flooded with her own powerful emotions. David's therapist worked with David to help him get emotionally prepared by playing out different scenarios. A safety plan was drawn up and given to David and his family. It included contact information of all team members, several of whom agreed to be available at any time during the holiday weekend.

Patty sounded content and happy when she checked in with Connections Specialist the day after Thanksgiving. All had

gone extremely well, she said, and being together as a complete family for the first time ever had been wonderfully healing. Everyone expressed gratitude for David's presence, and the conversation at dinner was lively and joyful. Afterward, David and Cindy sat close on the couch and spent several hours looking through family photo albums. They kept touching each other's arm or leg, Patty noticed, as if they were making sure the other was real.

David spent four days with his family. Upon his return, plans for him to live with his grandmother began in earnest. A home study was conducted by a courtesy worker in California, and efforts were made to get supports in place. Patty enthusiastically attended the required classes, and located a therapist to help her stay strong and clear. Karen, David's aunt, became more engaged in the preparation and offered to take care of David too. In Hawai'i, David's therapist increased his sessions to give David support and emotionally prepare him for the change. The weekly facilitated calls between David and Patty continued.

"Our commitment, however, is to keep making the effort, despite the uncertainty, because the youth and families deserve their chance"

Three months after their visit, David moved to the mainland to be with his grandmother. The first month went smoothly, though Patty noticed David seemed to bristle slightly when challenged or asked to do things. He also talked *a lot*, but she was fine giving him the attention he craved. She was learning much about his past life and how his mind worked. Plus, she loved "just being his grandma."

As long as David surrounded himself solely with family, he was doing well. Eventually, however, he had to go back to school, make friends, and have time away from home. That's when David's behavior began to deteriorate. Though school supports were in place, David dealt with his insecurity by presenting himself as a street-smart punk to his peers. He was soon lying to Patty and breaking curfew. Patty challenged him and set limits, but David's hard edge came out. He swore at her and blew off her directives. The Hawai'i team and California therapists worked with David, but made little headway. They also talked to Patty and strategized how best to respond to David, which included methods to de-escalate his reactivity and alerting the police when he failed to come home. It was decided a residential treatment program was needed and David agreed to go. The logistics were being worked out when the final crisis hit.

One evening, David's anger spiked and he physically threatened Patty. She walked out of the house to protect herself and let him calm down. When she returned, the door was barricaded. Inside, David had destroyed some of her possessions. That was it; Patty no longer felt safe having

David in her home and or even her state. She feared if he stayed in California and entered a treatment program he would escape and harm her. She loved him and wanted to help, but didn't feel strong enough to break through to that hurt child inside of him.

David returned to Hawai'i and was placed in a therapeutic foster home. Much to the surprise of the team, he seemed slightly calmer and more mature than before he left. Though he was upset, he was beginning to talk about his goals in anticipation of becoming an adult. He had a Youth Circle to help develop his transition plan. Unfortunately, he continued to shift through several placements and, despite his increased engagement, he failed to finish High School or acquire his GED before he aged out.

The team worked to keep David and his maternal family in contact, but everyone – his cousins, aunt, grandmother, and mom – feared his deep rage. They wanted to be close, but felt that was impossible. They couldn't find the necessary ground of trust, they said. When the case closed, however, grandma was still tracking David and communicating with him on Facebook.

After his return, the team reflected on David's reunification with his family and questioned if more could have been done, which, of course, would always be the case. They also questioned whether reconnecting David with his family had been worth the effort since David was likely to take it as yet another rejection. Though they could never fully answers that question, the team, despite the heartache of the outcome, still believed more was gained than lost.

David, like many foster youth, was a young person faced with numerous challenges. If, as the adage goes, knowledge is power, then reality should ultimately be more healing for him than fantasy. In David's case, knowing his maternal family and hearing their version of the past, seeing and touching his mom, having experienced moments of real joy and love with his family – hopefully all of that would increase his inner strength, his resiliency. As his therapist stated, "Reconnecting with his maternal family matured David. Some important questions were answered, but it also gave him relational experiences we could never simulate in therapy. There are some things only family can do; only kin can make happen."

"...when we value and respect all the people we work with - the children, youth, families, service providers, and each other - and treat them with aloha, we are doing our small part to balance out trauma's painful legacy. We are helping to strengthen their inner spirit and resiliency"

We know we can't predict how our efforts will impact the youth and their families, or even what will stick with the youth in the long run. A dad, incapable of handling his angry, aggressive, teenage son may someday forge a relationship with his calmer, adult son. A youth whom we helped and encouraged, but who "messed up" and disappeared after aging out, may realize, one day, people really did care and believed in her. That memory, alone, might be enough to spark a belief in herself. We are always hopeful the deep wounds of the youth and families find some degree of healing, but ultimately are also accepting when they are not. Our commitment, however, is to keep making the effort, despite the uncertainty, because the youth and families deserve their chance.

Throughout this work we hold onto this: when we value and respect all the people we work with – the children, youth, families, service providers, and each other – and treat them with *aloha*, we are doing our small part to balance out trauma's painful legacy. We are helping to strengthen their *mana* and resiliency.

Value 6: It's also all about the relationship

WHILE WE KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE CHILDREN, the way we make progress in this work is to be attentive to the relationships we engage in. Because the abuse, neglect, or disenfranchisement of the children and their families happened within a relational context, we believe it's within relationships that healing occurs. As we listen and empathize with the emotions communicated beneath the words, as we highlight strengths while addressing challenges, we engage in reparative interactions that heal beyond the spoken exchange.

At EPIC, respect and humility are two core relational values we hold dear. While these values have been implicitly talked about in other sections, we want to explicitly highlight them here because respect and humility are so central to the Hawaiian way of being. Respect, on these islands, means more than admiring or being deferential, it's shorthand for an expectation to think beyond one-self. In the Hawaiian culture, "[t]he Native Hawaiian concept of self is grounded in social relationships and tied to the view that the individual, society, and nature are inseparable and key to psychological health."²³ It's commonly understood, with humility a person is more likely to fully listen to another instead of prematurely coming forward with an opinion or agenda. With humility

"...the goal is to meet the children and families where they are without judgment, understand their hurt and suffering, and help them recognize and build on their own strengths"

people are more likely to see eye to eye or at least find some points of agreement. Socio-economic disparities or ethnic differences lose their sting if genuine humility is present.

Likewise, accomplishments are praised and valued here, but boasting about yourself is *maha 'oi* or rude. *Ha 'aha 'a*, or humility, means more than being self-effacing; it means not holding yourself above another. *Ha 'aha 'a* helps us understand that no individual can do everything; all in the 'Ohana are needed. All are to be respected and supported for the talent and uniqueness they offer.

In family engagement work, we find approaching families with humility and respect is crucial because it:

- 1) *aligns us with the local and traditional values,*
- 2) *helps us recognize and value each individual's and family's strengths,*
- 3) *sets the foundation for the building of trust and an attitude of "we're all in this together," and*
- 4) *provides a reparative experience for people who have a history of being disempowered or traumatized.*

In many ways, approaching children and families with humility and respect is no different than being client centered in therapeutic terms. In both approaches the goal is to meet the children and families where they are without judgment, understand their hurt and suffering, and help them recognize and build on their own strengths.

Most of the families we work with are no strangers to trauma or the loss of power. Trauma, by its very definition, involves feeling powerless in the face of a threatening, overwhelming experience. While the pain, shock, and loss accompanying trauma contribute to its lingering emotional impact, it's the experience of powerlessness that rattles confidence and sets into motion defensive and distorted ways of being. It's the desire to never feel so powerless again that sparks hair-trigger reactivity or hard-shelled emotional withdrawal. For the children and families in the Child Welfare system, trauma is at the heart of the rupture in their family and is frequently intergenerational. The abusing parent is often a formerly abused child; the addicted, negligent parent is often someone who was disenfranchised or whose parents were addicts.

Such was the case of Ikaika, a father of two teenagers, Keoni, 16, and Makani, 17. Both boys were taken into foster care as toddlers because of neglect; both experienced a failed adoption and were returned to foster care as teens.

alcoholic and Ikaika was frequently beaten as a child. Ikaika began using drugs as a teen and only stopped when he was 40 and in prison. He had been clean and sober for 12 years when our Connections Specialist first contacted him. He was shocked by the call, but agreed to meet.

Ikaika, their dad, grew up poor and tough. His father was an

Ikaika appeared skeptical and defensive when he first entered the Connections Specialist's office. The Connections Specialist, a Caucasian transplant from the mainland, thanked him for coming, offered tea, and soon they were talking about his life, the boys, and the reconnecting process. Ikaika vacillated between relaxing into the conversation and picking his words carefully. He later admitted he had seen the Connections Specialist as the enemy, and was afraid she would just write him off as "the druggy dad." He was also focusing on how to get around her to get to his boys.

The Connections Specialist was impressed that Ikaika had previously managed a clean and sober house for men exiting prison. She noted he talked about his sobriety as "choosing life," and how much he wanted to see his boys again. She told him she respected and admired his strength and caring, but he was too defensive and distrusting to take in her praise.

After several conversations and a team meeting, the team agreed Ikaika could meet the boys; however, there was one issue that needed to be addressed first. Both Keoni and Makani were gay, and they had asked the Connections Specialist to disclose their sexual orientation to their father before there was any contact. She agreed, of course, understanding that a second rejection would be less painful if it was from a distance.

Ikaika had always been a fighter, and his religion was his anchor in sobriety. He was a devout Christian, loving, and thoughtful, but also macho and very fixed in his sense of right and wrong. Homosexuality wasn't acceptable in his worldview.

Ikaika didn't take the news well. He believed the boys had been sexually abused while in care – there couldn't be any other reason for them *both* to be gay – and he was angry at the system. He feared what others in his community might think. He was in disbelief and kept circling back to how it couldn't be true that his two boys were gay. He stood up, saying he wanted to either punch the wall or storm out of the office.

The Connections Specialist remained steady and encouraged him to stay and talk about it. She empathized with his shock and the loss of his idealized picture of his sons. As he vented, the Connections Specialist heard the guilt and powerlessness that was beneath the anger. Though she gently questioned his

conclusion about the origins of the boys' sexual orientation, Ikaika was adamant abuse caused their homosexuality. He felt at fault for not protecting them. She empathized with how painful it was to think of his sons as being so defenseless.

The Connections Specialist asked if the news was a threat to Ikaika's sobriety and assessed if he was in danger of hurting himself or others. Ikaika had calmed down enough to say he wasn't sure what he would do after he left her office, but he didn't want to hurt anyone. He might go drink, but he mostly wanted to be alone. After he left, the Connections Specialist called his sister, who was aware of the situation, to alert her to his vulnerability.

A few days later a calmer Ikaika dropped in to see the Connections Specialist. He had gotten clear about his priorities, he said, and he wanted to be there for his children no matter what. His God was one of love, he continued, so that's what he wanted to give his boys. It wasn't for him to judge.

He then apologized to the Connections Specialist and shared something else. The fact that she had asked him to stay and wasn't afraid of his anger had deeply affected him. At the time it had been very hard. He had felt exposed and feared what he said would be used against him to keep him from his sons. In that moment the Connections Specialist was, again, the enemy and the one who had the power.

Later, he realized, the Connections Specialist wasn't the enemy, and, more importantly, she didn't just see him as a former "druggy" who had messed up. He felt she understood his past mistakes. He finally felt safe, he said, because he knew she cared about his boys but now he knew she cared about him too.

Throughout their work together the Connections Specialist respected Ikaika for the many ways he was trying to lead a better life. She was careful to never distance herself from him through her professional position or language, but always related to him with care and concern. She didn't back away nor did she impose her viewpoint on him when the going got tough. As a result, Ikaika increasingly felt seen and understood, which helped him feel empowered and respected. He began to see the Connections Specialist and the entire team as a source of support. More importantly, he began to value himself more too.

Ikaika did meet his sons and their relationship, though bumpy, continues to grow. From the last report, he delights in their humor, raves about their intelligence, and takes pride in their big heartedness. He has an edge of discomfort about their sexuality, but that is fading. He says his heart still melts when they call him dad.

The positive ripple effect of attending to relationships by treating people with respect, care, and humility can't be overstated. Hawaiians have known this for centuries and still, today, hold onto those core values. At EPIC, it's at the very heart of what we do.

Value 7: Promoting informed decision making, while focusing on strengths and solutions, is the best practice

NAVIGATING THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM can be challenging under the best of circumstances and is much more difficult during a crisis. The requirements of DHS, the timelines of the courts, even the bureaucratic or professional language can be overwhelming to those unfamiliar with the system. Families may not understand why there are restrictions regarding contact with the children; they may not understand what is at stake if safety issues are not resolved to the satisfaction of DHS and the courts.

Unfortunately, as the previous case examples have demonstrated, it's not uncommon for families to feel distrustful. They understand CWS is trying to keep children safe, but what constitutes safety can be quite different from the two perspectives. For example, CWS draws a firm line: in a safe home no physical hitting is allowed. Many local families believe some corporal punishment is necessary to instill respect and discipline. They might not comprehend how their parenting style – which is effective with their children – could be detrimental to a trauma survivor.

In our work we help families navigate the system by encouraging questions and by explaining the state's requirements and the rationale behind them. We acknowledge some requirements can feel like an imposition or that the family is "guilty until proven innocent." We also explain the bureaucratic reality that the state's rules are often based on worst case scenarios and cannot be easily bent. While their family may be completely responsible and trustworthy, others aren't. We give them the small comfort that everyone engaged with the CWS has to jump through the same "hoops."

When a child is taken into care, the reality is the crisis can be either devastating or an opportunity for growth. All that we do at EPIC is aimed at helping people face their painful present and use the crisis to spur them towards a more positive future. Our work is to interrupt the cascading cycle of trauma, shame, and isolation.

Within the Hawaiian tradition of *ho'oponopono*, *pu'uhonua*, or a place of refuge, is recognized as an essential element for change or healing to occur. At EPIC we tangibly create *pu'uhonua*, in 'Ohana Conferencing and Youth Circles, but we also create an emotionally safe space or refuge whenever we interact with the families, children, and service providers with respect and *aloha*.

The following Early 'Ohana Intervention case is a demonstration of this. This case began on a Friday afternoon when CWS was called to investigate a report of neglect. EPIC's Facilitator also responded to the call and arrived to witness a house in filthy disarray.

Alicia and James, the tenants of the home, were parents of two young girls. James was an active duty Marine and though he lived with his family on the Marine base, his long hours of training kept him away from the family most days. Alicia had a history of mental health issues. Warning signs of a breakdown were starting to show, but James was too exhausted to notice. He knew the house was messy and Alicia was drinking, but he didn't have the energy to worry about it.

James was very upset the children were being removed. The Facilitator spoke with him and felt he was a capable, caring parent. The Facilitator explained the process of a CWS inves-

tigation and her role in trying to keep the children with family. James shared family names and contact information, all of whom were on the mainland. Family was called immediately.

The social worker decided it was necessary to remove the children and took them to an emergency shelter. Though it was Father's Day weekend, she did not allow James to visit his girls. The Facilitator continued to have contact with James



over the weekend, and together they talked with the extended family about the situation and discussed what might be done. The paternal grandmother immediately flew to Hawai‘i.

An ‘Ohana Conference was organized for Tuesday; a mere four days after the children were removed. Dad, grandmother, James’ Commanding Officer, and other service providers attended in person while several mainland relatives participated via a conference call. After the family’s strengths were identified and their hopes and dreams for the children were expressed, the social worker explained the department’s safety concerns and the reason for their course of action. She also explained the changes needed for the children to be returned home, and what would happen if they weren’t enacted.

James and the conference participants talked about how things had gotten to that point. Mom’s loneliness and inadequate supports had exacerbated her mental health problems. James felt guilty and berated himself for not paying attention to the warning signs. The family and service providers countered his guilt with the reality of the stress in his life, and how this crisis was really a wake-up call for everyone.

During their private family time, the family and the Commanding Officer (whom they invited in) came up with a plan of support. The girls would be enrolled in extended preschool and James would be released from his duties in time to pick them up. Paternal grandmother would stay on for a while and, if needed, would take a leave from work to stay longer. The children would never be left alone with Alicia until she had received adequate treatment and was deemed safe. The Commanding Officer said she would recommend James be reassigned to California where he could live closer to his family. The extended family was willing to be helpful in any way they could.

“When a child is taken into care, the reality is the crisis can be either devastating or an opportunity for growth”

A safety plan was developed that was acceptable to all, and the social worker agreed to inspect the home right after the conference. Over the weekend, James’ Commanding Officer and his mother had cleaned the house so the inspection went well. The children were returned home that day and CWS closed the case.

.....

In this case, James and his family were given concrete information and the tools necessary to take action. The ‘Ohana Conference provided the *pu‘uhonua* (safe space) to bring everyone together, but the Facilitator also provided James and the family a space of emotional refuge when she helped them through those initial difficult days. By doing so, the family’s innate strength was rallied to help them weather their crisis and keep the girls safe.

Value 8: Be transparent and accountable

IN THE SPIRIT OF INFORMED DECISION MAKING and shared power, EPIC is committed to operating in a transparent and accountable manner. We can't expect families and service providers to partner with us if we are less than straightforward. We can't expect others to be held accountable for their actions and decisions if we aren't responsible for our own.

As an agency, we strive to uphold the *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*, which parallel many of our values: service to others, social justice, respecting the dignity and worth of each person, recognizing the importance of human relationships, conducting one's self with integrity and competence. We firmly believe that results matter and that we owe our best efforts to the children and families we serve, the teams we work with, and to our funding sources.

We have a variety of systems in place to ensure quality control: documentation of all case-related contact and communication is entered into a database that is accessible to all EPIC employees; quarterly and yearly reports are provided to funding sources; staff supervision and management

meetings are held regularly. In addition, records of all the programs are reviewed to ascertain policies and procedures are followed, and that the quality of the work is of a high standard.

“We can't expect families and service providers to partner with us if we are less than straightforward. We can't expect others to be held accountable for their actions and decisions if we aren't responsible for our own”

An important equalizer with service providers and families are the reports generated by the 'Ohana Conferences and Youth Circles. These reports, given to all participants, are a tangible way power is shared by ensuring everyone receives the same information. In addition to the reports, we ask participants to complete evaluation forms after services are rendered across all of EPIC's programs. Family lists consisting of all known relatives and their contact information are also shared with appropriate participants. These lists, as well as the reports and evaluations, are saved in the database.

As a nonprofit organization, we regularly and openly convey to the public information about our programs as well as our mission, activities, accomplishments and decision-making processes. Information is easily accessible to the community and visible at our website, www.epicohana.org. We also have links to YouTube testimonial videos of the work we do and its impact; and, when requested, we provide presentations and webinars about EPIC's values and programs.

When EPIC first began, the biggest complaints from local families were:

- 1) *they weren't treated with respect,*
- 2) *they were shut out by the system, and*
- 3) *involvement with child welfare wasn't a fair process.*

We believe being transparent and accountable are important ways to demonstrate respect, openness, and fairness.

Information is power, and a willingness to be visible and responsible is welcoming and equalizing. We continually strive for collaboration and *lokahi* (unity/harmony) with everyone we work with.



*“Finding (or even just knowing)
family members is important because
it gives young people support &
healing that they may need.”*

*—Enhanced ‘Ohana Connections
participant*

Conclusion

ENGAGING IMMEDIATE AND EXTENDED FAMILY members to help keep their at-risk children safe is exciting and challenging work. It frequently requires involvement with a struggling family whose members feel exposed and defensive. For the family, facing the children's trauma and having a state bureaucracy and courts injected into their family life can be overwhelming and destabilizing. Likewise, the tightrope social workers walk between tough love (the safety issues *have* to be addressed) and support is not an easy one to traverse. Both sides may cling to what feels safe and familiar in order to maintain their balance, even though doing so is detrimental in the long run.

Finding the values, language, and practices to help maintain balance in the midst of the crisis is what EPIC strives for. We have found sharing power and information, being respectful and caring, staying focused on the children, and collaboratively finding solutions produces the best outcomes. We have also found it's important to not just be sensitive to our local culture, but to draw on its strength and wisdom. If our goal is to truly share power, then an integration of the values and wisdom the families and their culture already possess is an important element in balancing the scales. While we "professionals" have much knowledge

and information that is helpful, we are not the sole possessors of insight and truth. Acknowledging that has been key to achieving successful results in our work.

"...when we make the effort to understand what is important to people from their perspective, we can more easily find the common language that transcends cultural differences - the language of family commitment and love"

At EPIC, we feel fortunate Native Hawaiian values and practices are part of the lifeblood of these islands. Its heartbeat and pulse remains strong, even with the influx of Western and multi-cultural influences. However, as new arrivals from many diverse cultures make Hawai'i their home, we remain equally committed to listening and learning from their cultural wisdom. We have found that when we make the effort to understand what is important to people from their perspective, we can more easily find the common language that transcends cultural differences – the language of family commitment and love.

In your community the cultural values may seem less apparent or more diffused than what we have described in this manual. However, in all likelihood, they do exist even if they are hidden or have been glossed over. Chances are many families involved with the Child Welfare System have never been asked about their cultural values and sensibilities. If that is the case, meeting them on their turf – drawing on *their* wisdom and language – can go far in building trust and genuine collaborative relationships.

As we said in the introductory letter, we hope sharing our values and articulating the ground we stand on will inspire you to do so as well. Your ground may be similar or significantly different than ours. Your inspiration and language may sound familiar or foreign to our ears. However, we believe many voices, talents, and perspectives create the strongest safety net for the vulnerable children and families within our communities. We all are in this together, learning from each other and growing as we continue to evolve in our understanding of what truly makes a difference. As the ancient Hawaiians knew, restoring *pono* (goodness/uprightness) by helping to undo the *hihia* (knots) in a family's *piko* (attachment) was crucial for the well-being of their society as a whole. Our efforts to do so not only help heal the children and their families, they strengthen all of us.



Glossary of Hawaiian terms

Ahonui (ā-hō-nū-ī): Patience; to tolerate.

‘Āina (āi'-na): Land, earth.

Akahai (ā-kā-hai'): Modest, gentle, unassuming, unpretentious, unobtrusive, decorous; meekness.

Akua (ā-kū-ā): God, goddess, spirit, godly.

Aloha (ah-LO-ha): Love, affection, compassion, mercy, kindness, sentiment, grace, charity; greeting; loving, kind, charitable; to show kindness.

Alu like (ā-lū lī-ke): Work in unity. Work together.

E makua ana (e mā'-kū-a ā'-nā): Becoming an adult.

Ha'aha'a (ha'a-ha'a): To lower; humble.

Hala (hā'-la): Offense, fault; to sin.

Hana kūpono (hā'-na kū-pō'-no): To work towards being upright, honest, decent, proper, appropriate, satisfactory, rightful, reliable, qualified, suitable, advisable, advantageous, convenient, seemly, fit, natural, applicable; worth, excellence.

Hānai (hā'-na'i): 1. Foster child, adopted child; foster, adopted. 2. To raise, rear, feed, nourish, sustain; provider, caretaker (said affectionately of chiefs by members of the court).

Hihia (hi'-hī'-a): Entangled, interwoven, involved, perplexed, snarled, obscure and difficult to understand; kink, difficulty, problem, trouble.

Ho'oponopono (ho'o-pō'-nō-pō'-no): Family conferences in which relationships were set right through prayer, discussion, confession, repentance, and mutual restitution and forgiveness.

Kanaka (kā'-nā'-ka): Human being, man, person.

Kukula kumuhana (kū'-kū'-la kū-mu-hā'-na): Identifying the problem.

Kuleana (kū'-lē-ā'-na): Right, privilege, concern, responsibility, business, interest, ownership, affair; reason, function, justification.

Kūpono (kū'-pō'-no): Upright, honest, decent, proper, appropriate, satisfactory, rightful, reliable, right, just, fair, qualified, suitable, advisable, advantageous, convenient, fit, natural; worth, merit, excellence.

Kūpuna (kū'-pū'-na): Grandparent, ancestor, relative or close friend of the grandparent's generation, grandaunt, granduncle.

Laulima (lā'u-lī'-ma): Group of people working together; to work together, cooperate.

Lei (lē'i): Any ornament worn around the head or about the neck.

Lokahi (lō'-kā'-hi): Unity, agreement, unison, harmony.

Lū'au (lū'-ā'u): Hawaiian feast, named for the taro tops always served at one.

Maha'oi (mā'-hā-ō'i): Bold, impertinent, impudent, insolent, rude, forward, presumptuous, brazen.

Mahiki (mā'-hī'-ki): Treating the deep troubles.

Mana (mā'-na): Supernatural or divine power; authority; power, authority; privilege; spiritual.

Mihi (mī'-hi): Remorse, be sorry.

Nā akua (nā ā-kū-ā): Gods, goddesses, spirits.

‘Ohana (o-hā'-na): Family, relative, kin group.

Oli: Chant that was not danced to.

‘Olu'olu (o'-lu-o'-lu): Pleasant, nice, amiable.

Piko (pī'-ko): Navel, umbilical cord. *Fig.*, blood relative.

Pono (pō'-no): Goodness, morality, correct or proper procedure, excellence, benefit, true condition or nature, duty; proper, righteous, virtuous, in perfect order, correct, eased, relieved; should, ought, must, necessary.

Pule (pū-le): Prayer, magic spell, incantation, blessing, grace, church service, church; to pray, worship, say grace, ask a blessing.

Pu'uhonua (pu'u-hō-nū'-a): Place of refuge, sanctuary, place of peace and safety.

Tūtū (tū'-tū'): Elder, Tūtū wahine is grandmother, Tūtū kane is grandfather.

Whānau ('fa:nao) : The extended family or community; Māori's decision making process. (This is a Māori term, not Hawaiian.)

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Contact Information

For more information, please contact EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc.:

Honolulu Office

EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc.
1130 North Nimitz Hwy. Suite C-210
Honolulu, HI 96817

Telephone: 808-838-7752

Toll Free: 866-636-1644

Fax: 808-748-7919

Email Address: EPIC@epicohana.org

Website: www.EpicOhana.org

“Families are the foundation of our community, and their well-being is inextricably linked to the health and prosperity of the community, state, and nation. EPIC transforms the culture of Child Welfare practices through a respectful, collaborative, solution-oriented process that protects children, strengthens families, and enhances the health of the community.”

-EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.'s Mission Statement

