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*For this edition of 'Ohana Connections Corner I interviewed a youth whom I will call Fila. (She asked that I not use her or her family's real names.) Fila is a 17 year old youth who entered foster care when she was 12 because of sexual abuse. Prior to that time she had been living with her aunt Mary, and Mary's family. It was her auntie's husband who abused her. Fila had a very difficult time in foster care. Since reconnecting with the rest of her immediate and extended family however, she has made a complete turnaround. Below is a glimpse into her story.*

*–Wilma Friesema, OES  
EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing, Inc.*

## **Breaking the Cycle**

*By Wilma Friesema & Fila*

**Wilma:** Fila, how many placements have you been in since you entered foster care?

**Fila:** 33 total, I think.

**Wilma:** Why so many? Were you having a hard time in your foster homes?

**Fila:** Those are tough questions to answer; most foster homes were good, a few were bad. Most foster parents tried to help me but I didn't want their help. I didn't want to listen.

**Wilma:** Why did you push them away and not listen?

**Fila:** My social worker wouldn't tell me what was going on. A trial was supposed to happen, but I wasn't told anything. When I was taken into foster care I completely lost contact with my family. I felt scared and angry, but that was too hard to put into words so it came out in my actions. I felt like I had to deal with things on my own so I shut everyone out.

I ran away once when I was 13 so I could see my family. My GAL (Guardian ad Litem) found out that I ran to family and asked the judge to talk to me. The judge told me I needed to finish the sexual abuse treatment program I was in before I could see my family. It all went downhill after that. I ended up in Kahi Mohala Treatment Center. I got into a pattern: Kahi Mohala, foster home, Queen's Hospital Family Treatment Center, Kahi Mohala or another treatment center, then back to a foster home until things blew up again. I was angry and I'd mostly hurt myself, but sometimes I'd lash out at others. That's why I went through so many placements.

**Wilma:** Was that because of your separation from family?

**Fila:** That and the abuse itself.

**Wilma:** Recovering from sexual abuse is hard to do; being separated from your family seems like it made it that much more difficult. What were your thoughts about your family when you were apart?

**Fila:** I regretted that I had said anything about the abuse and turned my uncle in. I didn't expect the fallout. I really missed everyone. It felt like I was being punished because the trial never happened and I was the one who was taken away. Now I can see I did the right thing, but back then it didn't feel that way.

**Wilma:** Let's talk about the family connections process. When your new social worker approached you about it, what was your reaction?

**Fila:** I was sixteen at the time, and my therapist was already helping me contact my uncle -- not the one who abused me. I also found my brother on the internet and we were connecting online. But that was it. I have a very big family, but I was still separate from them. I wanted to see more of my family.

**Wilma:** Who were the people you were most longing to contact?

**Fila:** My grandmother and auntie, Leilani.

**Wilma:** I found your auntie Leilani who, to be honest, had a lot of distrust of "the system" when I first contacted her. We were able to work through that and Leilani began to meet with your treatment team and work toward having visits with you. Do you remember what your first contact with auntie Leilani was like?

**Fila:** I was in the Aloha Care Center at the time and I remember feeling clueless. I didn't know what to say. I was excited but it also felt awkward. After a little while though, it got easier. It didn't seem to take too long for us to go from day visits to overnights at my auntie Lielani's house. Now I live with her full time and my bouncing around days are over. I haven't returned to the hospital or any treatment program since she took custody of me, which was about five months ago.

**Wilma:** That's quite a change! How did you break the cycle?

**Fila:** I don't know; I just feel more settled inside. Now I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. I'm focusing on graduating and I'm staying out of trouble. It feels pretty good. I guess I feel more secure. Since moving in with auntie I get along better with people too. In the past when other kids bugged me I'd either beat them up or cuss them out. I had a short fuse. Now, I don't get as ticked off as before. 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.

**Wilma:** Was it at all hard to reconnect with your family?

**Fila:** At first I was afraid that I wouldn't be protected, but now I know I'll really be ok. Also, everyone else in the family knew what to do and how to act with each other, but I didn't. It took me a while to feel like I fit in. The hardest part was returning home and seeing my grandmother. It was a shock. She had changed so much. She was in a wheelchair and couldn't even feed herself. The whole family was taking care of her. About three months after I moved in with auntie my grandmother died. I'm glad I had a little time with her, and that I was able to be with my family when she left us. It would have been awful if I had never seen her again.

**Wilma:** I'm so sorry about your loss. Before we close, is there anything else you'd want to share?

**Fila:** If you're a foster youth it's really important to keep in touch with your family -- it's your right. Even if you can't go back to live with family, at least stay in touch with them. They're so important!

*For more information about `Ohana Connections work contact Wilma Friesema at EPIC `Ohana Conferencing, Inc. 748-7921*