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Maui's Youth Face Unique Challenges—Are We Prepared to Make a Difference?



Community Report by What Makes You Feel Beautiful (WMYFB)

This report highlights the findings of comprehensive research into the challenges impacting youth, particularly those in small island communities like Maui. It concludes with a list of resources referenced throughout. End of Year Report for 2024-2025

What Makes You Feel Beautiful (WMYFB) Mission and Purpose of the Report

At What Makes You Feel Beautiful (WMYFB), our mission is to uplift and support youth, especially young women, by fostering resilience, self-worth, and opportunities for a brighter future. Recognizing the unique challenges of growing up in isolated, small-island communities like Maui, WMYFB is dedicated to creating a supportive and inclusive environment. Through programs like MAUI GEMS and FLY (First Love Yourself), we provide mentorship, mental health resources, and guidance to break cycles of poverty and social isolation, empowering youth to shape their destinies with confidence.



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Why This Report Matters

This report brings to light the realities faced by Maui's youth, particularly those from low-income families, as they encounter obstacles to their educational and emotional development. Challenges such as geographic isolation, limited resources, and cultural barriers compound the effects of economic hardship. By understanding these pressing issues, WMYFB can take informed, targeted action to support the community in addressing them.

Together with the community, we can create a nurturing space for Maui's youth to grow and thrive. This report forms the foundation for expanding our programs, strengthening outreach, and building valuable connections to improve outcomes for youth on Maui.

Why We're Releasing This Report and Seeking Support

With the support of our community, we're committed not only to recognizing these issues but also to actively working toward solutions. By publishing this report, we hope to raise awareness and inspire community-wide action. **Every donation, volunteer effort, and shared word contributes to making Maui a nurturing and supportive place for youth.** We invite you to join us in our mission, helping ensure that every young person on Maui has the resources, guidance, and support to overcome adversity and thrive.

Report: Understanding the Unique Challenges of Youth from Low-Income Families on Maui

Introduction

Youth growing up in small island communities like Maui face unique challenges shaped by geographic isolation, economic constraints, and limited resources. What Makes You Feel Beautiful (WMYFB) is dedicated to addressing these challenges by providing programs that empower youth to build resilience, embrace self-worth, and create brighter futures.

Through programs like MAUI GEMS and FLY - First Love Yourself, WMYFB is working to combat the effects of poverty, limited educational access, teenage pregnancy, sexual violence,



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and social isolation. By understanding these issues in depth, we can better serve our community and create lasting change for Maui's youth.

Key Findings on Challenges Faced by Youth in Small Island Communities

Impact of Low-Income Backgrounds on Youth Development

- **Educational Gaps: Are We Leaving Our Youth Behind?** Youth from low-income families often face barriers to quality education. Overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and fewer extracurricular opportunities contribute to an “achievement gap.” This disparity can continue beyond high school, limiting career and income potential.
- **Mental Health Struggles: A Hidden Crisis?** Economic stressors increase risks of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and social exclusion. Youth from low-income backgrounds may also face stigma and bullying, which can lead to feelings of isolation.
- **Increased Risk of Teenage Pregnancy: Can We Break the Cycle?** Research shows that teenagers from low-income families are more likely to experience unplanned pregnancies due to limited access to family planning, healthcare, and sex education. Early pregnancy can restrict educational and employment opportunities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

WMYFB Response: MAUI GEMS offers mentorship, educational support, and career development to combat these educational and social gaps.

Challenges Faced by High School Students Experiencing Teenage Pregnancy

- **Educational Setbacks: What Future Awaits Teenage Parents?** Teenage parents face significant challenges in completing high school. Time constraints, financial pressures, and limited resources often lead to higher dropout rates, affecting long-term economic stability and career opportunities.
- **Mental Health Impact: Are We Overlooking Support?** Teenage parents experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. With limited social support, they can feel isolated, affecting mental well-being.
- **Cycle of Economic Hardship: Can We Offer a Better Way?** Without education or stable employment, teenage parents face financial instability, often creating similar struggles for their children.



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WMYFB Response: The FLY program emphasizes mental health support, SEL (Social and Emotional Learning), and family involvement to support these youth in breaking out of the cycle.

Effects of Sexual Violence on Youth Mental Health and Relationships

- **Mental Health and Trauma: How Can We Help Survivors Heal?** Sexual violence can lead to PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other mental health struggles, often accompanied by flashbacks and feelings of shame.
- **Relationship and Trust Issues: What Support Do Survivors Need?** Survivors may find it difficult to build close relationships and experience social withdrawal, which can lead to lasting feelings of isolation.
- **Risk of Re-victimization: Can We Break the Cycle?** Without adequate support, survivors are more vulnerable to future victimization, affecting their ability to establish healthy boundaries.

WMYFB Response: MAUI GEMS and FLY provide safe, supportive spaces for youth to access mental health resources, build resilience, and create positive connections.

Unique Challenges Faced by Youth Raised on Small Islands Like Maui

- **Isolation and Limited Opportunities: Are We Creating Enough Paths to Success?** Youth on small islands often face geographic isolation, with fewer educational and career options. Limited resources can lead to “brain drain” as young people leave in search of greater opportunities.
- **Environmental Awareness and the Future: Are We Listening to Our Youth?** Many youth on Maui are keenly aware of environmental issues, such as climate change, due to their direct impact on island life and future prospects.
- **Health and Mental Well-being: Are Our Youth Supported?** Limited healthcare access means many youth struggle to find adequate support for mental and physical health needs. Feelings of isolation, combined with a lack of services, can lead to increased substance use and risky behaviors.

WMYFB Response: Our programs focus on building community networks that provide mentorship, resources, and connection to help youth feel grounded and supported on Maui.



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Our Approach: WMYFB's Programs Addressing These Challenges

WMYFB's initiatives, MAUI GEMS and FLY - First Love Yourself, address these issues with a holistic approach:

- **Educational and Career Support** MAUI GEMS provides mentorship, career readiness training, and pathways to higher education and employment opportunities, equipping youth for successful futures.
- **Mental Health Resources** Both programs offer access to mental health resources, workshops, and counseling to help youth manage stress, build resilience, and develop healthy coping skills.
- **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** FLY incorporates SEL, focusing on emotional awareness, relationship skills, and confidence-building. This foundation empowers youth to face future challenges and fosters self-love.
- **Family and Community Support** FLY provides SEL-based support for families, strengthening communication, empathy, and resilience to create a supportive network for youth growth.

Together, MAUI GEMS and FLY are building a network of support, ensuring Maui's youth have the tools, resources, and encouragement they need to succeed.

Key Takeaways and How You Can Help

This report underscores the real, pressing challenges faced by youth on Maui. With geographic isolation, economic constraints, and social pressures, our young people are navigating a uniquely difficult path. By joining us, you're helping create a community that supports these youth in overcoming challenges and finding their strength.

Join WMYFB's Mission [Support](#), [volunteer](#), or spread the word—every effort counts. Together, let's build a Maui where youth feel valued, supported, and ready to shine.



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Resources

The information and statistics provided in this report are supported by research from the following sources:

- **National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP):** Research on the impact of poverty on youth education, mental health, and life outcomes. ([Website: nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org))
- **Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Book:** Annual data on child well-being and the impact of economic hardship. ([Website: aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org))
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS):** Data on teenage pregnancy, mental health, and sexual violence among adolescents. ([Website: cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))
- **RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network):** Information on the prevalence and impact of sexual violence on youth. ([Website: rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org))
- **UNICEF Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Report:** Research on unique challenges faced by youth in small island communities. ([Website: unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org))
- **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):** Research on the impact of SEL on youth outcomes. ([Website: case1.org](http://www.casel.org))
- **MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership:** Research on the effects of mentorship on underserved youth. ([Website: mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org))