

# HEALTH through ACTION



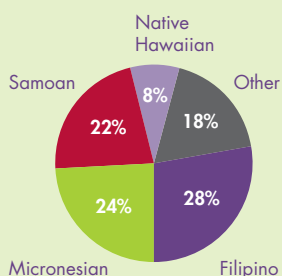
## HONOLULU—Early Childhood Development Project

A few miles from downtown Honolulu, the Kalihi Valley is Hawai`i's gateway for new immigrants from Asia and the Pacific. Some 93% of Kalihi Valley's population is of Asian American and Pacific Island ancestry; 38% is foreign-born. The Valley has the state's highest percentage of non-English or limited-English speakers. Kalihi Valley's Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander residents have created a dynamic social fabric, constantly adapting to the challenges of accessing health care, housing, food, and social services.

### FOCUSING ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Because of overwhelming evidence that early childhood sets the stage for future educational success, health, and well-being, the Lei Hīpu`u o Kalihi Project focuses on the care and development needs of young children and the health and well-being of their families.\*

#### People served by KKV Comprehensive Family Services are mainly:



Led by Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services (KKV), the area's community health center, the Project's goals include supporting the community to be a healthier, happier place to raise children.

To be healthy in all senses of the word, families must live in healthy communities. Thus the Project works to help the entire community be strong and vibrant,

by addressing the interconnected social determinants of health and well-being. Families transitioning between cultures, especially, need an array of high-quality social services that reflects their diversity and values.

"Community health centers are at the heart of health care for the community," says Dawn Mahi, Project director. "Through this Project, we are looking at health in a holistic way to support our most valuable resource—our children."

### NEED FOR A NEW SERVICE MODEL

Licensed child care centers or pre-schools are too expensive for most Kalihi Valley families. Instead, they rely on informal "kith and kin" child care provided by family, friends, or neighbors. Because families' home-country cultural supports have been

Photos (l to r): Dawn Mahi, HTA Project Director; community garden developed by KKV; participant in group exercise class; participants in a Talk Story session, aimed at family strengthening. Photographs © Eugene Tanner Photography; except far left, © Adam Stoltman.

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## ‘ĀINA MEANS LAND. HO‘OULU ‘ĀINA MEANS TO GROW LAND AS WELL AS TO GROW BECAUSE OF THE LAND. THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY IS THAT THE HEALTH OF THE LAND AND THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE ARE ONE.

disrupted and kith and kin providers are often isolated, it is difficult for new community members to know how to prepare children for school. As a result, by age three, nearly half of children from vulnerable families in Kalihi Valley show signs of language delay. By the time they enter first grade, almost half are deemed by their teachers as “unfit to learn.”

### CULTURE AND COMMUNITY COMING TOGETHER

KKV Early Childhood Leadership Council members meet monthly to discuss how their individual organizations can work together to support the development of all the community’s children. The Council has three goals:

- *To address systemic barriers in accessing social services*  
Members of the Chuukese, Samoan, and Native Hawaiian communities participated in focus groups to identify some of the service barriers they face. For example, families may not be aware of the availability of basic services, or service providers may not speak their language or allow enough time during appointments to accommodate language and cultural differences. When this occurs, families do not receive needed services in a timely way.

- *To promote cultural competency among providers who serve the community*

Parents from many Pacific cultures traditionally view teachers as respected educational experts and are reluctant to interfere in their children’s classroom, school, and homework activities. Teachers in a U.S. system can become frustrated by this lack of parental engagement. Through the partnerships created as part of this project, the Hawai‘i Literacy Children’s Library at Kuhio Park Terrace (a public housing project) started an organic garden that has become an innovative, interactive, and supportive “classroom” where families and teachers engage, share their diverse cultural heritage, and learn the importance of literacy and school readiness.

- *To promote families’ access to cultural supports*  
When families first come to the United States from the Pacific and Asia, they have difficulty understanding and adjusting to complicated U.S. health and social service systems. Churches, cultural organizations, and extended family can guide newcomers as they navigate these systems. Without access to such cultural supports, many families become isolated and disconnected from their community and their culture, which has a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of everyone in the family, especially the children.

Thanks to the Leadership Council’s efforts, says Mahi, “the work of individual organizations now is connected to our larger initiative in a coordinated way. We can deliver a single message advocating policies that support families with young children.”

### PROJECT INNOVATIONS FOR BUILDING STRONG AND HEALTHY FAMILIES

The KKV Lei Hīpu`u Project supported creation of the state’s first Medical-Legal Partnership for Children, working with the school of law at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. This innovative family law advocacy program helps families with housing applications and wrongful evictions, issues of employment discrimination, and access to public benefits, child care, and child support.

KKV’s Ho`oulu `Āina project coordinates family and community activities at the 100-acre Nature Park in Kalihi Valley as part of a community-based cultural health and environmental program. It offers opportunities for community gardening, exercise, and a greater connection with the land and nature.

### KKV EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP COUNCIL MEMBERS, 2010

- David Derauf, MD, Executive Director, Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services (KKV)
- Chris Derauf, MD, Director, Division of Community Pediatrics, University of Hawai‘i Department of Pediatrics; Pediatric Consultant, KKV
- Puni Freitas, KKV Ho`oulu `Āina Volunteer and Community Education Coordinator
- Dawn Mahi, Director, Lei Hipu`u o Kalihi, KKV
- Innocenta Sound-Kikku, Program Coordinator, Lei Hipu`u o Kalihi, KKV; Vice-chair, Micronesian Health Care Advisory Coalition
- Jennifer Doong, Program Specialist II, Parents and Children Together
- Leilani Kupaho-Marino, R.N., Keiko o ka `Āina Family Learning Centers
- Tamara Martinez, Hawai‘i Literacy Program Coordinator
- Dina Shek, J.D., University of Hawai‘i Richardson School of Law
- Christina Simmons, Family Center Program Director, Parents and Children Together
- Ace Tufu, Kalihi Program Coordinator, Hawai‘i Community Action Program
- Ed Yonamine, Deputy Director, Good Beginnings Alliance

\* The project, directed by Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services, is one of eight coalitions in the four-year, \$16.5-million Health Through Action national program funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and developed in partnership with the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum.

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