

## Case Study: Keeping Older Adults Safely at Home

### *Na Hoaloha - Neighbors Helping Neighbors*

### *Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii*

#### **Overview**

In Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii, a volunteer team is assisting older adults who are at risk of falling or at risk of eviction by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Na Hoaloha-Neighbors Helping Neighbors (<http://nahoaloha.org>) is a non-profit organization located in Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii that recruits and trains volunteers to provide compassionate care to homebound elders to enhance the quality of their lives and to help them remain independent. (Na Hoaloha means "loving friends" in Hawaiian).

The organization found a huge need for falls prevention education and assistance for "kupuna" (elders) at risk of a fall. Additionally, the organization saw a need for help with cleaning and de-cluttering the homes of elders living in low-income housing faced with eviction.

Now, thanks to a staff/volunteer collaboration, Na Hoaloha-Neighbors Helping Neighbors is developing a project to keep the kupuna safely at home. Their team, now a team of six volunteers, plans to reach out to the local community to gain additional recruits and resources in order to provide services to these at-risk kupuna.

#### **Challenge**

Seniors are landing in the hospital in record numbers due to falls in the home, and elders who are living in low-income housing facilities are having difficulty keeping their homes clean and clear of clutter, risking eviction if they do not meet HUD requirements during yearly inspections. Na Hoaloha staff heard from several of their low-income clients that they were afraid of being evicted, so Na Hoaloha decided to get involved.

#### **Solution**

Realizing the need was too complex for one staff member or volunteer to do alone, Na Hoaloha decided to recruit a self-directed team of volunteers to address these needs. They began by partnering with their local Aging and Disability Resource Center (Maui County Office on Aging) on a day-of-service project called "Have A Heart For Seniors", in which Habitat For Humanity, along with community volunteers, will be going into the homes of seniors to install night lights, remove throw rugs, install grab bars, put in toilet seat risers, and provide falls prevention education for those seniors identified at risk of a fall.

#### **Implementation**

As Na Hoaloha already has a large pool of volunteers who serve older adults within the community, Executive Director Gerri Shapiro, Volunteer Coordinator Betsy Scheller, and Office Manager Lori Busta were on board with the initiative. Six volunteers were selected as the core team, one of whom was a Na Hoaloha Board member.

The team decided to call itself Hale Aloha Team. "Hale" means house or home, and the team wants to share the "aloha spirit" in giving back to the kupuna by helping them maintain their homes. The six volunteers, as the core team leadership, plan to do the following:

- Tap community resources.
- Go into the community to secure teams of additional volunteers.
- Obtain buy-in from the kupuna.
- Provide assistance, information, and services to at-risk kupuna.

This Hale Aloha Team, with support from Na Hoaloha staff member Lori Busta, is spearheading the project. Currently, they are still in the planning phase.

### **Economic, Logistic, and Cultural Considerations**

On Maui, from a cultural perspective, it is especially important for the team to gain the support of the community. In spite of the need that exists among the kupuna, the team cannot immediately go in and begin filling the need. Networking and personal connections are very important on the island, which influenced which volunteers were chosen for the core team.

For example, one of the volunteers on the core team lives in the low-income senior housing facilities and has firsthand knowledge of the annual inspection process, while two other members of the team have construction and project management backgrounds. Another volunteer who is tied into the housing facilities was able to help the team secure an ongoing meeting space. Other members of the team have cultural connections to the community, which will allow them to tap into the community as a resource.

The core team's past employment, training abilities, and current involvement in the community will facilitate gaining support from community members. Connections through the church or the neighborhood will also help the team bypass any potential barriers that may lead to resistance from the individuals they want to serve. Addressing the economic, logistic, and cultural factors will help the Hale Aloha Team lay a strong foundation, enabling this project to be successful.

### **Costs, Funding, and Return on Investment**

Currently, this project is funded through Na Hoaloha's operating reserves. Going forward, there is discussion of seeking additional grant money for the ongoing costs of the project such as management, materials, and resources. There are very few direct costs at the moment, and the organization is hopeful that community support for either monetary funding or resources will be available in the future.

Costs include the following:

- A couple hundred dollars for meeting space.
- 15-20 hours of staff time has been spent on meetings and project development.

Maintaining this project requires long-term commitment from team members and continued team leadership. The project must be self-sustaining and self-directed, able to exist independent of the agency. Additionally, monetary resources and materials are needed to maintain this project. If the project can fill this need, it will be a huge return on investment. The county will save money from fewer falls that result in Emergency Room visits, while older adults will be happier at home and will not be evicted.

## **Outcomes (What got done!) and Impact (What difference did it make?)**

Following the PowerUP! training in July, the team has achieved the following:

- Recruited volunteers for the Hale Aloha Team who immediately took ownership and began collaborating. The core team has met once a month for three months for approximately two hours at a time.
- Created a charter for this project with a template provided at the PowerUP! training and began implementation.
- Partnered with the Maui County Office on Aging on a falls prevention day-of-service project.

The Hale Aloha Team decided this project will be an ongoing resource for older adults in Maui County.

## **Replication**

PowerUP!'s training and technical assistance, which allowed Lori to reach out to someone if and when she needed the coaching, made a difference to the project.

### ***What PowerUP! Training Provided for Lori and Na Hoaloha:***

- Understanding of the untapped potential retirees present, and the desire to be a leader of this in Maui.
- A good foundation in creating a self-directed volunteer team.
- Recognition of the need for clear communication between organizations and teams to ensure there are no miscommunications or misunderstandings and that there are clear expectations and direction on day one.
- Trust in the team to work the details out themselves and for the organization to not get caught up in the details.

Lori identified choosing the right team members—people who can be self-sufficient, self-directing, and interested in leading— as the main key to success. She suggests giving a team a specific focus or challenge to address, as something too broad may inhibit the process.

Lori also found you have to determine what motivates someone to want to participate in your organization's initiative. When you have individuals who are business-minded, the question becomes how you will get them to buy in to your organization's mission. Their volunteers all have personal connections to the kupuna as they have seen the need that exists. All of the core team volunteer members are believers in keeping people at home, which is also supported by Hawaiian culture, and they hope their actions will help ensure more older adults are able to stay safe in their homes. Further, the "aloha spirit" that brings people together and is ingrained in the island has contributed to the team's success.

### **What Was Accomplished that Would Not Have Been without a Volunteer Team?**

Prior to this initiative, the volunteers had been working one-on-one, autonomously, and nobody was addressing this need. Now, Na Hoaloha is bringing together a team of six volunteers who are venturing into the community to assist kupuna in increasing their home safety and in preparing them for annual inspections that will enable them to stay in their homes. The volunteers' teamwork and their personal and cultural connections will help this project succeed.