

States Engaging Human Need with Community Partners: Innovation for Homeless in Hawaii

Hawaii may seem a paradise, but living in paradise has a price. Many people are unable to afford housing, rendering them homeless. Recent studies have placed the homeless population in Hawaii at more than 6,000 people, including many children. Governor Linda Lingle has responded to this by declaring the homeless situation a state of emergency, and has opened up new shelters across Oahu by providing emergency funds to help already overburdened nonprofits provide safe places for the homeless. The Governor is also looking to leverage the monies provided with private funds to increase affordable rental units, eliminating one of the largest barriers to getting families off the beaches and out of parks and into homes.

Ohana Family of the Living God (OFLG) has developed an innovative service delivery model where initial contact with the client supports positive reinforcement through care and compassion. OFLG realized that the transient nature of the homeless made it difficult to link clients to the appropriate services. In response to this they have come up with the concept of "Initial Contact" services, which is a staging area where homeless can take shelter and the services would be brought to them. This new program uses yurts, or compact lightweight temporary shelters originally used by nomad tribes in Central Asia which are highly efficient in maximizing strength while using minimal materials. This program will provide immediate shelter for approximately (48) families and (160) individuals. This was an innovative solution for an organization with minimal government funding to provide shelter in a safe Ohana (family) setting while still being able to provide necessary services to reintegrate people back into society.

OFLG was not the only organization applying innovative solutions to mitigate homelessness. H-5, or Hawaii Helping the Hungry Have Hope, is another organization that is maximizing resources and providing help to the homeless. Believing that it is essential that every person be given food, rest, and a sense of hope, H-5 came up with the mobile shelter idea. H-5 asked a local tour company to donate buses that they were going to retire and turned them into mobile shelters. They roll into predetermined areas with large homeless populations and set up shop for the night. They provide dinner at night and breakfast the next morning. As the buses leave in the morning for their cleaning and maintenance, H-5 stays in the area and provides programs to teach life skills, social skills, job training, and more. H-5 believes that they not only provide much needed shelter, but also opportunities for their recipients to volunteer, work, and feel worthy once again.