EDITORIAL ISLAND VOICES

Column: Break cycle of poverty at root causes

By Amanda Pump and Glen Kaneshige

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Glen Kaneshige

January is Poverty Awareness Month, and the newly released 2024 ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) in Hawai‘i Report reveals alarming insights: over 1 in 3 households statewide (37%) have considered leaving the state due to the

high cost of living and housing. Nearly one-third of Hawaii households are classified as ALICE, and nearly half (46%) of households below the ALICE threshold struggle with access to food.

Poverty in Hawaii is more than a lack of resources — it's a complex web of circumstances. It's a systemic condition shaped by chronic stress, health inequities, limited education and unstable living conditions — challenges that often exacerbate mental and physical health struggles. As the ALICE Report highlights, many families in Hawaii are living paycheck to paycheck, just barely above the federal poverty level, yet still unable to meet basic needs. For too many families, the cycle of poverty is generational, but it doesn't have to be.

At Child & Family Service (CFS), we approach poverty as a treatable condition, not a permanent state. Using the revolutionary Transition to Success (TTS) model, CFS addresses poverty by targeting the social determinants of health — the conditions in which people live, work and grow that profoundly impact their physical, emotional and financial well-being. Licensed TTS professionals provide families with personalized support, resources, coaching and mentorship to tackle the root causes of poverty and empower them with tools for long-term stability.

ADVERTISING

The program offers a proven path forward, creating stronger and healthier communities by addressing poverty's systemic causes. CFS participants have achieved remarkable results: 87% secured stable housing, 75% gained employment, 90% reported improved mental and physical health.

Just as importantly, they're breaking generational cycles of disadvantage and building brighter futures for themselves and their children. Systemic change is necessary to ensure that no family is left behind.

The consequences of poverty are far-reaching. When families lack access to stable housing, health care, or job opportunities, the ripple effects are felt across our entire state. Overburdened health systems, rising homelessness, and lost economic potential are just a few of the ways poverty weakens Hawaii's communities.

This Poverty Awareness Month reminds us that collective action is essential to create lasting change. State and local governments must prioritize funding for programs that deliver measurable, life-changing results. Businesses can partner with nonprofits like CFS to provide job opportunities, mentorship and resources for families striving for stability.

Hawaii's future depends on our shared commitment to thrive as a community. Together, we can transform lives, break generational cycles and build a brighter, more equitable Hawaii.

The ALICE Report is a call to action, urging us to address systemic barriers that perpetuate poverty. CFS invites leaders, organizations and community members to join us in ensuring every family in Hawaii has the opportunity to thrive. To expand

the reach of this groundbreaking model, CFS offers free TTS training to organizations across sectors (see childandfamilyservice.org/tts). Organizations can provide sustainable, proven solutions to combat poverty and support Hawaii's communities.

The future of Hawaii depends on the actions we take today. Let's rise to the challenge and create a legacy of resilience for generations to come.

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1 COMMENTS