



Keiki Heroes Empower Hawai'i's Children To Stay Healthy

By Hawai'i STEM Community Care Team

Community First is a Hawaii Island based nonprofit founded in 2014 by Barry Taniguchi. We serve as a neutral forum for the Community to come together to find solutions to improve health and lower medical costs based on the Community good. We believe that healthcare is caring for health and not just treating disease and caring for health is “All Our Kuleana.”

We want to recognize Keiki Heroes, a community education campaign led by volunteers to empower keiki to adopt healthy practices that reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other viruses. The project is funded entirely by the Hawai'i Island community, ensuring the materials are available free of charge to schools, businesses, and community organizations.

Keiki Heroes' messages also align with the State Department of Health guidelines and supports the Department of Education's school reopening guidance.

Since its launch in mid-August, Keiki Heroes distributed 18,000 activity books, 4,700 posters and 2,500 coloring sheets to elementary schools, public libraries, community organizations, and businesses across Hawai'i Island along with public service announcements airing on radio stations.

Keiki Heroes' first round of materials focuses on three key concepts:

1. How to wear a mask properly
2. When to wash hands.
3. How to be a Keiki Hero.

The materials introduce two keiki “superheroes,” Kai and Hoku, who empower keiki to do what they can to protect themselves and others in these turbulent times.

"As a foundation supporting educational opportunities for our community, we were excited by Keiki Heroes' solution to reducing COVID-19 risk at schools," said Cary Boeddeker, of the Waikoloa Foundation. "We are passionate about raising awareness and increasing access for Hawai'i Island educators to use this curriculum to help keep our community safe."

Keiki Heroes Programs

Keiki Heroes partnered with KTA Super Stores in September to launch two weeks of giveaways through social media. Keiki submitted coloring and photo contest entries online, and winners received \$20 gift cards and other fun prizes.

The Keiki Heroes team is currently developing an extended activity book, including the Keiki Heroes story that will be distributed through Vibrant Hawai'i's Resilience Hubs and the County of Hawaii. Local artist and author, Yuko Green, created the art for the project that incorporates Hawaiian imagery and shares important messages about how to stay healthy for Hawai'i Island keiki.

Keiki Heroes on Halloween

Halloween is right around the corner and presents a special challenge for our community. While we all yearn for normalcy, the reality is that the COVID-19 pandemic demands that we adjust to keep our keiki and community safe. Keiki Heroes recommends that we find creative ways to make Halloween fun without having to trick-or-treat, an activity that poses additional risks to our community.

There are a variety of engaging ideas on how to celebrate Halloween in a safe, socially distanced way. Parents can host "gingerbread" haunted houses or pumpkin carving contests where they share in video competitions with their friends. Keiki can hunt for Halloween treat bags in their backyard. Residents can still decorate their homes and yards to create the festive atmosphere but put up signs that indicate treats will come back next year. Start a "Halloween Boo" tradition (search online for examples) with people within your "bubble." Pods can host costume parades in their neighborhood. Children in a pod can drop off invitations to neighbors and kupuna inviting them to watch the costume parade from the safety of their own homes. With a little creativity, Halloween can be safe and fun.

To contribute to our community's Halloween fun, Keiki Heroes is planning to share ideas for fun and socially distanced activities throughout October on social media. Details will be announced @keikiheroes on Facebook and Instagram. To learn more about Keiki Heroes or donate, visit www.keikiheroes.org.

Editor's note: Each Wednesday, the Tribune-Herald is publishing a story about individuals, groups or organizations that have helped make life better for others in our community during the COVID-19 pandemic.