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## **Vibrant Hawaii** **A collective impact movement to reduce ALICE on Hawaii Island**

By Janice Ikeda

In 2015, the Aloha United Way published "ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in Hawaii." Updated in 2017, the data shows that 44 percent of our Hawaii Island 'ohana with children younger than the age of 18, and 45 percent of kupuna older than the age of 65, are ALICE.

Fifty-five percent of the total households on Hawaii Island are either ALICE or living in poverty.

ALICE is an acronym for "asset limited, income constrained, employed." With limited liquid assets such as cash or a savings account, ALICE households are especially vulnerable when faced with emergencies such as costly car repair, natural disaster or health issue.

With 62 percent of jobs in Hawaii paying less than \$20 per hour, and more than two-thirds of those paying less than \$15 per hour, many households are income constrained. A full-time job that pays \$15 per hour grosses \$30,000 a year, which is less than half of the Household Survival Budget for a family of four.

In 2018 — inspired by the success achieved throughout a 10-year period by Vibrant Communities Canada, an action-learning, collective impact approach that resulted in 10 percent local reduction in poverty — stakeholders representing Hawaii Community College, Kamehameha Schools, Blue Zones Project-Hawaii, the state Department of Health and the County of Hawaii came together to form Vibrant Hawaii — a collective impact movement of multi-sector stakeholders committed to a structured approach to achieve social change.

The Vibrant Hawaii movement began with engaging stakeholders equally represented across public, private, social service and lived-experience sectors. Members of the team conducted interviews to broaden awareness of ALICE data and identify values, hope and a vision for change shared by all sectors of our community.

Through this process, several themes emerged.

First, stakeholders share a deep concern for ALICE households and are eager to identify barriers and find solutions. There is, however, a need and an opportunity to multiply the impact and efforts of initiatives through cross-sector collaboration and mutually reinforcing activities. This is the unique position of Vibrant Hawaii.

We learned that working families struggling to make ends meet do not identify with being "poor."

We learned the phrase "broke but not broken."

ALICE households are hardworking, resourceful and respond with incredible generosity when presented with opportunity to contribute to the broader community. Remember the outpouring of support as our community responded to Tropical Storm Iselle and the 2018 lava flow — and consider that more than 55 percent of those community members were, themselves, struggling to get by.

Most importantly, we learned ALICE households do not need more of the American dream rhetoric that suggests success is achieved through hard work — many ALICE households already have two or three jobs. How much harder could they possibly work while also remaining true to their value and priority of caring for their family?

We learned ALICE households need access to resources, continued opportunities to contribute to our community and choice. These needs are articulated in the motto of Hawaii Community College's chancellor, Rachel Solemsaas: "Give fish, teach how to fish and ensure there are enough fish in the ocean."

The next step of Vibrant Hawaii is to bring multi-sector groups together in North, South, East and West Hawaii to expand the community conversation and begin to identify actions to mobilize communities and increase the 45 percent — the number of Hawaii Island households who live above the ALICE threshold.

A Google search of "how to start a movement" quickly pulls up a TED video by Derek Silvers in which he breaks down the steps of a movement — the courage needed by leadership and, more importantly, the courage demonstrated by those who join the movement to build the momentum for change.

Join us.

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