

# Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services

HONOLULU, HAWAII

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Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services (KKV) is a Federally Qualified Health Center with 160 personnel and nine sites. With a mission to work “toward healing, reconciliation and the alleviation of suffering in Kalihi Valley, by serving communities, families and individuals through strong relationships that honor culture and foster health and harmony,” KKV leverages the SDH through a variety of efforts while linking residents with one another, with the land, and with Hawaiian culture. Examples include establishing Hawaii’s first domestic abuse shelter; integrating legal assistance into the medical setting; providing social services, cultural orientation, crisis intervention, ESL classes, and health care to Laotian refugees; connecting people with a source of gently used clothing; offering sewing classes for middle and high school girls that live in public housing projects to develop job skills and their self-esteem; providing access to loans to encourage community development; supporting an elementary school band program; and nurturing trust and relationships among residents through “talk story” (a Hawaiian expression used as a noun or verb to mean “an informal chat”) and the growing, preparing, and sharing of food. KKV has also partnered with the community to develop a nature preserve, including community gardens and reforestation efforts which make exercise a natural part of the daily life for residents. KKV has also supported the successful passage of a formal commitment make Honolulu a bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly city, and developed a youth bicycle exchange program that refurbished and provided nearly 2,000 bicycles to and installed 20 bike racks in the community over the course of four years.

In 1972 leaders from local churches and the community formed Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services (KKV) to address the unmet health and social service needs of residents in Kalihi Valley, Honolulu, Hawaii. The organization began with a staff of five to connect residents to existing agency resources. Eventually KKV began to provide health care services directly and has grown into a Federally Qualified Health Center with nine sites and 160 personnel. In 2010, KKV served over 10,000 urban community residents through approximately 40,000 visits. The CHC predominantly serves residents of Asian or Pacific Island descent, particularly Filipino, Micronesian, and Samoan community members, as

well many other Asian and Native Hawaiian patients. Forty-three percent of patients are enrolled in Medicaid, 37 percent are uninsured, 15 percent are covered by third party insurance, and 96 percent or more live at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

## KKV Efforts to Leverage the Social Determinants of Health

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From the beginning the health center has been addressing the social determinants of health (SDH) by listening carefully to and reflecting community values. KKV considers its identity as a health care provider second to its role as a community organization that is responsive to the needs of residents. Its mission, which sets it apart from many other FQHCs, is to work “toward healing, reconciliation and the alleviation of suffering in Kalihi Valley, by serving communities, families and individuals through strong relationships that honor culture and foster health and harmony”. Programs are driven by the composition of and changes in the resident population and their diverse needs, and the health center places great emphasis on making its programs and services culturally and linguistically appropriate.

One of KKV’s formal efforts addressing underlying factors in the health of its patients and the community began about 1973 when the health center organized a source of gently used clothing for job interviews, work, and school. The program eventually ended in the early 1980s as the need for it declined. KKV also took the lead in establishing Hawaii’s first hotline and shelter for abused spouses and children in 1976 and operated it for five years before transferring the shelter to a private non-profit.

Perhaps one of the earliest KKV community development activities was improving access to loans for residents. With support from a federal program, the health center founded a community-based credit union in 1978. A committee would carefully explain the loan process and repayment schedule to members, though it did not provide detailed classes in finance. Most residents paid back the loans they received. Some, however, found themselves unable to pay back their loan. The credit union voluntarily closed in 1980 before it became insolvent.

In the early 2000s KKV’s executive director led the health center in its commitment to youth development by supporting a music teacher and band program for a year when the state eliminated all elementary school music education due to budget restraints. Around the same time, KKV also began another program to better serve the fastest growing population in Hawaii: seniors. Serving a predominantly immigrant population, with more than 17 cultures and high socioeconomic need (>90 percent), KKV has learned the importance of aligning health promotion programs with the community’s cultural values. In Kalihi Valley, this means fostering healthy environments in which relationships can flourish—and there is no better example of this at KKV than its Elder Services program. The KKV Elder Center, situated in the heart of Kalihi Valley, provides a friendly neighborhood setting where 100 elders come together four days a week to talk-story, sing and dance, exercise, and participate in health education and health promotion activities with ready and easy access to health services. Program activities

contribute greatly to Kalihi Valley elders' ability to continue to be actively involved in their own care and to remain independent and age in place. But perhaps most importantly, the Elder Services programs provide these seniors with opportunities to socialize, reducing isolation and depression as they provide each other with a strong source of mutual encouragement. With leadership from the health center, these elders have also become strong advocates for the community by writing testimony, making phone calls, visiting legislators, writing letters to editors, and attending events at the Hawaii State Capitol. KKV credits the tireless efforts of these seniors for successfully getting state funding approved for at least two KKV programs.

Around 2005 KKV was inspired to establish two other SDH programs. For one of these, the health center partnered with the community to accept stewardship for 100 acres of upland forest. A description of this program follows.

### **Ho'oulu 'Aina – The Kalihi Valley Nature Preserve**

You might say “What the heck is a health center doing with a nature park?” But from the start there was tremendous support from the community for the effort. KKV was looking into various ideas, including community gardening activities at public housing projects, for how to make exercise a natural part of the daily life of patients and community members when a life-long Kalihi resident approached her doctor at KKV with the idea for a park. The resident, along with other community members, had fought for decades to protect a 100 acre parcel in Kalihi Valley from development. With the support of an initial \$200,000 Active Living by Design grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and over \$350,000 in other funds gathered over the next few years, KKV signed a 20-year lease with the State of Hawaii for the 100 acre parcel in 2005 and began with the community both physically and philosophically to re-connect the land with healthy and active living.

The plan was to use a two-pronged approach: engage community members in (a) tangible programs and projects – including developing a nature park and a bike exchange program for the community – and (b) targeted policy actions. However, as community support quickly developed for the nature preserve and bike exchange programs, staff time was soon devoted almost entirely to the tangible projects, and the decision was made to defer the pursuit of policy change as one of the primary objectives, with the understanding that tangible results would speak more loudly to policymakers. Rather than initiate or lead such an effort, KKV supported the successful passage of an amendment to the Honolulu City Charter in 2006 – a formal commitment to make Honolulu a bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly city.

With extensive help from community members, the Kalihi Valley Nature Preserve grew into a valued gathering place for community sharing and learning, caring for forest and garden. Known as Ho'oulu 'Aina, which means “to grow with the land” and “to grow the land,” these 100 acres provide invaluable opportunities for countless residents, visitors, and groups to return to a healthy connection between land

and humans. Coordinated by a 5-member site team, there are four program areas at the preserve: Hoa 'Aina (providing safe and meaningful access for the community), Mahi 'Aina (gardening and local food production), Koa 'Aina (returning acres of the preserve to a native Koa forest), and Lohe 'Aina (Archeological restoration and other culture-based activities). While each of these activities is an opportunity to burn calories, produce healthy food, and reduce the risk for diseases linked to obesity and diabetes, KKV has quickly learned that the strongest health benefit and most meaningful social determinants for the community are the connection to culture, family, history, and spirituality.

Besides hundreds of volunteers, KKV has partnered with over 30 organizations in the development of the preserve and the programs offered there, including the state government, local educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations. Some partners may be time-specific in their commitments and others have been engaged in the endeavor from inception to present. Furthermore, the project has been funded at one point or another by at least 19 different organizations from various sectors.

KKV is collaborating with the University of Hawaii using NIH funding to assess the impact of community gardening on diabetes patients. The health center is also building on the popularity of the preserve among Kalihi Valley residents to secure additional funding for a wide range of activities from organic garden education to canoe building and extensive youth engagement through a local philanthropic organization, Hau Oli Mau Loa Foundation's Hope For Kids initiative. Long-term supportive funding is sought from expanded donations, philanthropy, community organizations, and schools who have regularly been using the preserve with their own students and clientele. Ideas considered for income-generating projects include access fees, renting out meeting spaces and the repurposing of invasive species to produce biochar, furniture, or other such goods.

The second program that grew out of the Active Living by Design initiative led by KKV is a bike repair and recycling program that doubles as a youth intervention program and promotes physical exercise among all community members. A description of the program follows.

### **Kalihi Valley Instructional Bike Exchange (K-VIBE)**

A bike shop provides a way to improve community health. Around the time when KKV started to develop Ho'oulu 'Aina, there were few after-school activities available to Kalihi's youth. Childhood obesity and diabetes are prevalent in the community as are gang activity, teen pregnancy, school truancy and dropping out of school. In 2005, KKV established the K-VIBE program and bike shop to provide a fun and safe place for these youth and promote physical activity. The shop is run by a full-time program manager with the support of volunteers including a number of mechanics from local bicycle businesses. Located near schools, a large park, and neighborhood stores, the shop is accessible to youth and adults alike and attractive especially to boys from elementary and middle schools.

K-VIBE provides a place for these youth to learn, grow, and make healthy choices. To earn a bike, they and other community members join the shop's youth and peer mentoring program and learn to build and fix a bike, earning credits towards ownership of their own bicycle. The youth can learn advanced mechanical techniques, test their knowledge by assisting adults and peers, assume positions of leadership, and have the opportunity to be part of something greater than themselves. Between 2004 and 2008, nearly 2,000 bicycles were refurbished and provided to the community, 12,000 repairs were carried out for community members, and more than 2,000 people visited the shop. Other youth programs conducted under K-VIBE's auspices have included nutrition lessons and healthy snacks; violence, gang, and pregnancy prevention activities; part-time job opportunities; and a placement site for expelled and probationary youth at the nearby public middle school.

KKV partners with neighborhood businesses, public schools, volunteers, and members of the local government for a range of its K-VIBE activities, including to supply and run the bike shop; collaborate with schools to teach bike safety and healthy lifestyles; co-sponsor community rides; and have bike racks installed in the area. For example, the bike shop was successful in getting 20 bike racks installed in the community with the help of the City and County of Honolulu. Formal evaluations for the long-term impact of the program have not yet been conducted. However, the State of Hawaii has provided funding to build upon the work of this program.

K-VIBE is funded by a mix of internal funding (as it is part of KKV's Youth and Family Services program), donations, and competitive grants. The program's success, as well as its appeal to funders, is based on its ability to attract and work with large numbers of at-risk youth in the community and the mix of skill-building and health promotion activities it provides to them. K-VIBE will continue as long as the program receives relatively stable support from funders and KKV revenues.

In 2008, KKV joined Medical-Legal Partnership for Children to integrate legal assistance into the medical setting and seek to eliminate barriers to healthcare, family stability, education, and housing, including assistance with housing applications and wrongful evictions, issues of employment discrimination, and access to public benefits, child care, and child support. That year KKV also began a women's sewing project. This micro-enterprise activity works to empower low income women and girls to be independent, self-sufficient and confident. More recently, the health center is planning to add a computer and job training classroom to one of its facilities, and in 2011 KKV received a three-year grant from the Kresge Foundation's Safety-net Enhancement Initiative for its Returning to Our Roots program, which will include community food production, culinary classes in a new commercial-grade community kitchen, and a variety of activities that build community capital through food.

## How KKV Does It All

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Where does KKV get the strength and ability to go beyond the traditional role of a health care provider to addressing upstream factors in the health of Kalihi residents? The Executive Director credits the willingness of staff to say ‘Yes’ “to an awful lot”, i.e., responding to educational institutions, community groups, and patients for anything ranging from a request for completing paperwork to joining a new network. This attitude in part is also a result of an organizational history in which great flexibility and a sense of “making-do with what we had” was the norm, one example being a past executive director who was willing to meet payroll out of his own checking account at times and staff who would voluntarily decline monthly salaries.

KKV’s “infrastructure” for leveraging the SDH to improve the health of patients and the Kalihi Valley community can be described as follows:

***SDH Program Management and Staff*** – At KKV there is a coordinator for each program area, including public housing, elder services, family strengthening, youth services, the Nature Preserve, K-VIBE, and the Returning to Our Roots Project. Each coordinator is responsible for overseeing staff and managing activities. The community development coordinator is tasked with monitoring trends and happenings in the community, supporting the development of programs in keeping with KKV’s mission, determining how to finance and sustain program ideas, and working with other program coordinators to document and communicate project proposals and experiences for a variety of audiences.

Staffing matters. To run its programs, KKV places emphasis on hiring community members who speak languages of the community and are familiar with the respective cultures. To leveraging the SDH successfully, staff must have the passion, skills, experience, and a full list of contacts to get things done. Similarly, for youth programs, the K-VIBE project coordinator recommends to “have the adult staff and some of the volunteers closer in age and background to the youth that are served. They must also be youth-culture-savvy, in order to connect and build a rapport with the youth”. Simply hiring someone solely on his expertise in a given area is not enough.

***Developing SDH Programs*** – Many health center employees and volunteers come directly from the Kalihi Valley community, and KKV considers them, and the community at large, as its primary source for program ideas and a guide for their development. The underlying commitment to listening and the ability to consider a multitude of approaches to promoting community health are rooted in the original tenets of the Community Health Center movement and the vision of KKV’s founders and current leaders as articulated in its unifying mission. KKV relies on the community as the principal guide for where to concentrate its energy. For example, extensive community expression and support helped KKV arrive at a successful partnership with the state to lease the 100 acre parcel, despite numerous bureaucratic hurdles. Also based on community interest and support was KKV’s decision to defer the pursuit of policy change

as one of the primary objectives. K-VIBE, not initially designed to attract young boys, turned out to be most successful with elementary and middle school boys. Being responsive to the natural strengths and interest of a particular demographic, even when unexpected, can result in great outcomes.

Furthermore, innovation has always been supported and encouraged, and KKV has fostered thinking outside the box and a culture of self-starters and go-getters across the organization. People are always forthright with their ideas, and lunch time at the KKV main clinic provides a consistent opportunity to share stories and discuss ideas.

***SDH Program Funding and Sustainability*** – With the support of its board of directors, KKV may first pursue program ideas on its own to determine actual interest and potential impact before arranging for external funding to continue and sustain the effort. Once a program has been started, KKV seeks to sustain it regardless of funding challenges. The mindset of the board of directors and CHC leadership is essential for this approach, as it is relatively more risky than waiting for a grant opportunity to try something. However, CHCs may be one of the most financially sound institutions in their respective communities and therefore have the opportunity to jump start projects, which do not necessarily have to remain under CHC-only management and can eventually be transferred to other organizations.

KKV's efforts to leverage the SDH are generally funded through private and public grants and donations from individuals and businesses. In the past, the CHC also tried conducting annual fundraisers for additional support but discontinued the practice when it did not find this particular method to be successful. Instead, KKV actively pursues grant funding that aligns with its mission and the interests of the community. On that note, the organization has found that to successfully address the SDH, funding should be for at least three years and any evaluation should allow for at least three years of activity. Gaining an understanding of what works in these types of initiatives is a slow and arduous process, requiring a measured pace and a long term horizon. Typical one year grants are generally not suitable for anything other than short term planning.

***Partnerships and Networks*** – KKV participates in numerous networks, collaboratives, and partnerships, including the Medical-Legal Partnership for Children (a project of the University of Hawaii Law School), Association of Asian/Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO), the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) and the Hawaii Healthy Aging Partnerships (HHAP). In the past, KKV has also been central in developing a coalition of 16 services organizations that would sponsor collaborative activities that improve services for community residents. The health center is currently directing another coalition, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and developed in partnership with the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, to work on capacity-building in early childhood health within the Kalihi Valley community and connect Kalihi-based service providers, including social workers, librarians, school staff and officials, community leaders, and doctors. The impact of this effort includes the formation of sub-committees composed of community members and other stakeholders to

address issues within the community, including fire safety. Generally speaking, KKV values and is always open to partnerships but most often takes the lead in initiating and managing SDH programs. The health center is actively working to build the social capital necessary to facilitate collaborative work within the community.