

Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services: Our Community, Our Health

An Environmental Justice Grant Success Story

Project Overview

Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services is a non-profit corporation seeking to connect low income, Asian and Pacific Island immigrant residents in need with existing services. The “Our Community, Our Health” project was a community-wide campaign to mitigate the causes of indoor air pollution, reduce exposure to toxic cleaning chemicals, and address public health issues resulting from poor sanitation..

The Community

The community of focus for the Our Community, Our Health Project, funded under a \$25,000 [Environmental Justice Small Grant from EPA](#), was Kuhio Park Terrace Public Housing Community located on the island of Honolulu, Hawaii.

Honolulu, Hawaii is the main gateway to Hawaii and a major gateway into the United States of America. It is also the major hub for international business, military defense, and is well known as host to a variety of east-west and Pacific culture, cuisine, and traditions.

Located in Honolulu, the Kuhio Park Terrace Public Housing Community is one of four public housing developments in Kalihi Valley and the largest development in the State of Hawaii. The towers and low rises of Kuhio Park Terrace consist of two 16 story high-rise towers and low-rise units known as Kuhio Homes.

The Kuhio Park Terrace Housing Development established some 46 years ago and is home to nearly 3000 individuals. Established as transitional housing for those who could not afford the high housing prices on the Island, it has seen waves of immigrants come and go, as well as generations of families stay throughout the years. Over the past decade, a surge in immigration under the Compacts of Free Association has brought in hundreds of new residents from Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia. These families migrate from rural island villages and many have never experienced life in urban, multi-family high-rise developments like Kuhio Park Terrace. As a result, new residents often require a great deal of support in adjusting to this different living environment and knowing their rights as tenants.

During talk story sessions, residents shared that the building has had issues with cockroaches, rodents, bedbugs and other pests, and was prone to leaks, which caused outbreaks of mold. Recently the Kuhio Park Terrace housing development taken over by a private company and new policies and renovations put into place.

Project Description

In 2011, with the support of the EJ small grant, the Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services and partners addressed public health issues with the Kuhio Park Terrace public housing community. Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services and its partners conducted a community wide campaign to mitigate the causes of indoor air pollution, reduce exposure to toxic cleaning chemicals, and address public health issues resulting from poor sanitation within the Kuhio Park Terrace public housing community. Run by multilingual, multicultural staff, this project empowered the predominantly Pacific Islander community of Kuhio Park Terrace by providing residents with necessary information and tools to take ownership of their physical surroundings and thereby improve the health of the families and community.

The Results

“Our Community, Our Health” aimed at learning directly from the community living in Hawaii’s largest Public Housing Development, Kuhio Park Terrace (KPT). Key questions included: 1) Were bed bugs, cockroaches, rats, garbage, or second hand smoke problems for the community. 2) What residents currently did to deal with these environmental hazards and 3) What was the best way to disseminate information on these subjects. Based on information learned from sessions with over 80 elders in the community, a curriculum was created that included power point presentations, hands-on demonstrations, and opportunities to role-play to train 10 community volunteer health educators. After completing the training, these volunteers presented information on the dangers of bed bugs, cockroaches, second hand smoke, and prevention of hazards with over 100 families living in KPT. To help disseminate information, brochures created in Samoan, Chuukese, and simple English. A local church youth group coordinated a Healthy Living Community Celebration with live entertainment, health information booths, and healthy food for over 600 KPT residents.

Over 100 families completed evaluation forms and 100% reported they learned a lot and the majority of participants found the material and information very helpful. Some indicated it was their first time learning about the use of vinegar and baking soda as a household cleaning product. Volunteer educators were excited to share that families were very thankful and appreciative of information since, “Knowledge is Power”. Lastly, a local youth group will create five comedic educational videos on integrated pest management (IPM).



Reflection

Based on information gathered during discussions with the community elders the project staff learned that the best ways to share educational information on integrated pest management practices was through brochures, presentations, demonstrations and videos. The team created two brochures in Samoan, Chuukese, and simple English; one on the dangers of second and third hand smoke and one on bed bugs and cockroaches and safe cleaning products. The brochures distributed to over 600 KPT residents at the Living Healthy Community Celebration. During discussions with the elders the team learned that second hand smoke and tobacco use was a large concern for residents. Many complained about smelling smoke in their units from neighboring units.

Opening New Doors

“Our Health, Our Community” has several referral programs and brochures with appropriate information including contact numbers for the Quit Tobacco and Betel Nut Programs. The State of Hawaii is also passing a smoking ban in all public housing residences, so the project will support residents who are motivated to quit after the policy goes into effect.

The Medical Legal Partnership for Children (MLPC) Program provides legal counsel through individualized legal assistance and group workshops. The program provided several “Know Your Rights” workshops in coordination with the Hawaii Civil Rights commission for over 40 KPT families

and 45 pre-school parents at a local elementary school. The workshops addressed housing issues including habitability, discrimination, and disability issues. From these workshops and through regular legal clinics, MLPC attorneys provided individualized legal assistance to over 100 families. More than 25% of MLPC clients required some assistance with housing, including evictions, rent, adjustments, disability access, habitability, and other issues. In addition, attorneys assisted public housing families with other legal issues like public benefits, employment, and family law that impact health and well-being and the ability to maintain safe and stable housing.

What's Next For Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services (KKVCF) and Kuhio Park Terrace (KPT)

KKVCF plans to distribute the videos to individual families and set up a large screening at the health center or KPT.

KEY RESULTS

- Trained 10 community volunteer health educators; 5 who spoke Samoan and 5 who spoke Chuukese
- Healthy Living Community Celebration
- Reached over 600 KPT residents
- Two “talk story” sessions with over 80 community elders
- Presented information on dangers of bed bugs, cockroaches, and second hand smoke to more than 100 KPT families
- 100 families completed evaluations and reported learning a lot and all the information received was very helpful
- State of Hawaii passed a smoking ban in all public housing residences

To learn more about Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services, please visit [Kokua Kalihi Valley Family Services](#) or contact Jo Ayers, COO for Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services, at (808) 791-9400 or jayers@kkv.net