

## Case Study of a Program Serving Families Who Are Homeless

# ‘Ohana Nui – Family Assessment Centers

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### Lead entities:

Hawaii Department of Human Services and Catholic Charities Hawai‘i

### Service area:

Honolulu City and County

### Setting:

Urban and suburban

### Focus population:

Families who are experiencing homelessness

### Total participants served through February 2020:

148 families at Kaka‘ako

139 families at the Villages of Ma‘ili

### Initial year of operation:

2016 (Kaka‘ako)

2019 (Villages of Ma‘ili)

## Introduction

In 2015, Hawaii Department of Human Services (DHS) leaders began discussing a service delivery framework that focused on the needs of entire families instead of individual benefits recipients, leading to the creation of the ‘Ohana Nui framework. ‘Ohana Nui, which means “extended family” in Hawaiian, seeks to stop multigenerational poverty by working across DHS divisions to address the needs of children, parents, and sometimes grandparents concurrently instead of division by division. ‘Ohana Nui supports families in the following five areas: (1) housing and shelter, (2) economic support and education, (3) food and nutrition, (4) health and wellness, and (5) social capital.

One of the first ‘Ohana Nui initiatives was the development of Family Assessment Centers (FACs). FACs are emergency shelters for families experiencing homelessness that aim to move participants to permanent housing in 90 days.<sup>1</sup> FAC staff work closely with families to help them apply for benefits, increase their income, and engage in a housing search, while also bringing other services on-site so participants can access them easily. Catholic Charities

Hawai‘i—a private charity—has a contract with DHS to run the FACs in Honolulu County: Kaka‘ako in Honolulu and the Villages of Ma‘ili (VOM) in Waianae.

**This case study includes the following sections:** [Where FACs Operate and Their Context](#); [What FACs Offer](#); [Who FACs Serve](#); [How FACs Are Staffed and Funded](#); [What Services FACs Provide](#); [How FACs Measure Program Participation and Outcomes](#); and [Accomplishments, Challenges, and Future Plans](#).

<sup>1</sup> There are five total assessment centers in the state, including the two FACs; two serving a mix of families, couples, and individuals; and one serving single men.

### About this report

This case study (OPRE report # 2021-68) is part of a series of nine comprehensive case studies that showcase innovative approaches for supporting the employment of low-income individuals and families, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients. Each case study highlights key components of implementation, including their linkages to wraparound supports, to expand the knowledge base of these programs. The programs featured in the series represent a diverse range of service strategies, geographies and community contexts, focus populations, and service environments. The case studies are sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in collaboration with the Office of Family Assistance, both within the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Where FACs operate and their context

Hawaii has historically had one of the highest homelessness rates in the country. In 2015, one year before the Kaka`ako FAC opened, Hawaii's Point in Time Count estimated 798 families were homeless across the state.<sup>2</sup> The majority of those families were on Oahu, where 556 family households were estimated to be homeless. In response to homelessness in the state, Hawaii Governor David Ige signed a Governor's Proclamation declaring the growing homeless population a statewide emergency in October 2015. The Proclamation funneled money toward homeless services and programs, including funds to support the FACs (see the [Program Funding section](#) below).

One of the main factors contributing to the high rate of homelessness in Hawaii has been that housing costs in the state continue to rise at a faster rate than minimum wage. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (2019) reports Hawaii had the highest housing wage in the country in 2019, which refers to the hourly wage a full-time worker must make to afford a rental home without being "rent burdened," defined as spending more than 30 percent of income on rent and utilities. Affordable rent for a full-time worker in Hawaii earning the \$10.10 minimum wage in 2019 would be \$525 a month. However, the average fair market rent for a one-bedroom unit was \$1,458. Even people earning above minimum wage are often unable to afford rent. The average wage of



### Economic snapshot of Honolulu City and County, Hawaii

**Total population (2018):**<sup>a</sup> 987,638

**Median household income (2018):**<sup>b</sup> \$82,906

**Percentage of people below poverty level (2018):**<sup>b</sup> 8.7%

**Unemployment rate (2019):**<sup>c</sup> 2.6%

Sources: <sup>a</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2019a); <sup>b</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2019b); <sup>c</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020a).

<sup>2</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, someone who is unsheltered resides in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, abandoned buildings, and the street. A person who is homeless and sheltered lives in an emergency shelter or some type of transitional or supportive housing for people who were previously on the streets. The Point in Time Count is a yearly one-night estimate of the sheltered and unsheltered populations across the state. Volunteers administer surveys in communities where people who are homeless stay to produce a cross-section estimate of the number of people who are homeless at a certain time.



### Housing and homelessness in Oahu, Hawaii

**Number of homeless families (2015): 556**

**Minimum wage (2019): \$10.10**

**Fair market rent for one-bedroom unit (2019): \$1,563**

**Housing wage to afford one-bedroom unit (2019): \$30.30**

Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition (2019)

renters in Hawaii in 2019 was \$16.68 an hour, and the affordable rent for someone earning this average wage was \$868 a month.

The majority of Hawaii’s homeless population (64 percent in 2015) live on Oahu where the housing wage disparity is even more extreme. On Oahu, the average fair market rent for a one-bedroom unit was \$1,563, and the housing wage required to afford a one-bedroom was \$30.06, three times higher than minimum wage (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2019).

Native Hawaiians are disproportionately represented in the state’s homeless population. Native Hawaiians accounted for about 10 percent of the state’s overall population, yet they accounted for 39 percent of the people experiencing homelessness in 2015 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2017).

At the time of the case study site visit in February 2020, Hawaii had a lower unemployment rate than the national average, at 2.7 percent compared to 3.5 percent nationally (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020b, 2020c).<sup>3</sup> However, the state has a significant population of “working poor,” referring to people who work full time and are technically above the poverty level but are still unable to pay for basic needs and necessities, including housing, child care, food, transportation, and health care. Thirty-seven percent of households in Hawaii fall in this category (Aloha United Way 2017).

Hawaii also has a higher than average proportion of multigenerational households compared to other states. In 2018, about 7.7 percent of households in Hawaii were multigenerational, compared to 3.8 percent of households nationwide (U.S. Census Bureau 2019c). Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders comprise 18 percent of those multigenerational households, the largest proportion of any racial or ethnic group.

#### Kayla’s experience

This case study follows one participant at the Kaka`ako FAC who shared her experiences with the research team. These participant experience boxes illustrate the process through her point of view. The participant’s name has been changed to protect her privacy.

## What FACs offer

The two FACs operated by Catholic Charities serve different communities on Oahu.

<sup>3</sup> Unemployment data presented here do not reflect shifts in the economy that have occurred since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. See box on page 16 for more information about changes to the economy and how the FACs responded to the pandemic.

**The Kaka`ako FAC is located near downtown Honolulu.** It opened in September 2016 in response to the Governor’s Proclamation in 2015. The FAC is located in a waterfront park that had previously been a large unauthorized homeless encampment. It is a large converted maintenance shed where participants have semi-private cubicles with walls about four feet high. The shelter space is designed to offer participants a degree of privacy while also maintaining safety protocols. There are 14 cubicles that can accommodate up to 12 families or 50 people, whichever comes first. This flexibility allows for larger families who might enter the shelter to have adequate space across multiple cubicles. To store belongings, the FAC assigns participants a locker, which are along the back wall of the FAC in a secure fenced-in area. The FAC does not have dedicated cooking facilities, but families can use rice makers and hotplates to prepare simple meals.

Inside the FAC is a communal space where children can play together. FAC staff have decorated the walls with child-friendly artwork and educational posters. FAC staff also host weekly family movie nights in the shelter. Outside, there is a blacktop area for children to play, ride bikes, and draw on the ground with chalk. There is also a small playground. The entire FAC facility—the shelter and the communal outdoor space—is enclosed by a fence.

All FAC staff work in the actual shelter space. Their “office” is an elevated platform at the front of the shelter. The platform allows them to see into the cubicles, which serves as a safety measure as well as a reminder to participants that staff are available to help them at any time.

**The VOM FAC is in Waianae, a small community about 30 miles northwest of Honolulu on the island’s Leeward coast.** It opened in March 2019, sits on 7.5 acres of land. It consists of five residential buildings with 40 two-bedroom units and 40 studios. If needed for larger families, a two-bedroom and a studio unit can be conjoined to create a three-bedroom unit. The units are situated in a large circle with open, green space in the middle. The FAC staff work in an adjacent administrative building. An on-site counselor and the child care rooms are near the entrance of the campus, and the residential buildings are further back across the green space. A local partner uses the on-site cafeteria to provide breakfast and lunch during the weekdays, and staff organize events like family movie nights. A handful of convertible rooms can be adapted for various purposes, like classrooms or spaces for community organizations to offer their services. At the time of the site visit, an organization offering free income tax preparation services for participants was set up in one of these rooms.



### Key program practices

- Shelter provided before addressing families’ other needs
- Safe temporary housing for families experiencing homelessness
- Integrated, on-site services to support families’ transition to permanent housing
- Extensive participant engagement and interaction

## Who FACs serve

The FACs serve families experiencing homelessness. There are just two criteria for FAC eligibility: (1) the family must be homeless, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and (2) someone in the family must be legally caring for a minor.

The families staying at the FACs are a mix of one- and two-parent families. Program staff reported that many adults are actively using drugs or alcohol or have recently entered recovery programs, though specific figures were not available. However, because the FAC is a low-barrier program and does not require abstinence, participants are not required to disclose if they use or what they use. Additionally, many participants enter the FAC already with jobs, but those jobs still do not pay enough to cover the bills.

The two FACs have served different populations of families experiencing homelessness:

- When the **Kaka`ako FAC** opened in September 2016, many families living in the public park right outside the FAC fence moved into the shelter. The FAC was steadily at capacity and maintained a waitlist, largely comprising families living in the park. Following Governor Ige’s 2015 Proclamation, additional providers serving the homeless population emerged in the area, and more homeless families in the immediate area sought out and received services. Now, the FAC aims to serve harder-to-reach populations, such as families who are chronically homeless or face a confluence of barriers that prevent them from obtaining and maintaining secure, stable housing. Staff estimate that roughly 75 percent of their participants are Compacts of Free Association (COFA) migrants from the Federated States of Micronesia. These families often do not speak English and they have additional documentation requirements, both of which present significant barriers to finding permanent housing.
- In addition to serving the general population of families who are homeless, **VOM** operates a program called Bridge, which serves the community’s “highest acuity” population, meaning people facing severe, chronic homelessness. These include families as well as individuals and childless couples experiencing



### Eligibility requirements for FACs

- Family is homeless as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- A family member is legally caring for a minor

### COFA migrants

The Compacts of Free Association (COFA) between the United States and the three nations of the Federated States of Micronesia allows Micronesians the right to live, work, and receive some public welfare benefits in the United States indefinitely and considers such migrants legal non-citizens. The COFA agreement was ratified in 1986 after the United States conducted nuclear tests around Micronesia, resulting in continued radioactive contamination, ecological damage, and negative health consequences for residents.

To secure housing and other benefits and services, COFA migrants must secure an I-94 form, which documents arrival and departure in the United States, but many people run into complications securing that form, such as a \$445 fee to replace a missing form.

homelessness.<sup>4</sup> FAC staff noted that the participants at VOM are mostly Native Hawaiians, which is reflective both of the town of Waianae where the FAC is located and that Native Hawaiians living in Hawaii have a higher poverty rate than non-native Hawaiians living in Hawaii (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2017).

## How FACs are staffed and funded

DHS funds multiple assessment centers across the state, some of which focus on families and others that serve other populations, such as single men. DHS reviews their budgets, and the assessment centers report regularly to DHS on their performance. Although Catholic Charities Hawai`i runs the two FACs in Honolulu City and County, the shelters largely function as standalone operations, separate from other programs the organization runs in the state.

### Program staffing

The two FACs on Oahu have a clearly outlined staffing structure, but program leadership encourages all staff to feel empowered to serve participants in whatever way they can or in whatever way a participant needs in that moment. All program staff are employed by Catholic Charities Hawai`i and include:

- **Program director:** One program director manages everyday operations at both sites and is the main point of contact among the FACs, Catholic Charities Hawai`i, and DHS.
- **Program supervisors:** Each FAC includes one program supervisor. The supervisors maintain the facilities day to day and work with FAC staff to ensure they remain compliant with their contracts.
- **Case managers:** Two case managers are at Kaka`ako and four are at VOM. Case managers conduct assessments of potential residents and work with current residents to identify services and supports that will assist in the transition to more permanent housing. Case managers at VOM have up to 15 cases on their caseloads. Case managers at Kaka`ako share responsibility for all participant cases in the shelter.
- **Housing specialists:** Each FAC has two housing specialists, one for the morning shift and one for the evening shift. Their main role is to help participants secure permanent housing. In addition to helping participants search for housing, fill out housing applications, and attend viewings, housing specialists work with landlords and realtors to advocate for participants. Housing specialists do not have caseloads; rather, they work with all participants when they are prepared to begin their housing search.



#### Training topics for FAC staff

- Housing First principles
- Trauma-informed care
- Implicit biases around mental health
- Active listening
- Emotional interviewing
- Health, wellness, and self-care
- Professional boundaries

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<sup>4</sup> The Bridge program supports people who have been assigned a housing voucher or subsidy. The FAC serves as a temporary stopover for them while they search for permanent housing with their voucher.

Many FAC staff have been working with populations experiencing homelessness for years, either at Catholic Charities Hawai'i in a different role or for another provider.

The FACs also have security guards on-site overnight. Kaka'ako has a contract with Waikiki Health, a medical and social services provider that operates a singles and couples shelter nearby, where shelter residents can work in light overnight security at the FAC to gain job experience.

The FACs are staffed 16 hours a day. The morning shift is from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., and the evening shift is from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. Staff said this staffing model is an integral part of their service delivery, as having staff on-site for extended hours means they have more availability and opportunities to serve participants. Every day during the overlapping shift change, staff review participants' cases and note any updates for evening staff. Additionally, staff said their constant presence helps them build trust and rapport with participants.

## Program funding

Both FACs are funded through Catholic Charities contracts with DHS that stemmed from special proclamations from the governor reinforcing the state's priority to address the growing homeless population. Governor Ige's Proclamation in 2015 declaring the increase in homelessness a statewide emergency channeled \$1.3 million to programs and services addressing this issue. A portion of this money was used for construction costs related to the FAC at Kaka'ako. Operating costs were supported through additional funding for homelessness appropriated by the Hawaii State Legislature in 2016. In 2018, the Legislature provided an additional \$30 million for homeless services, a portion of which was used to support VOM.

Presently, the FAC at Kaka'ako has a \$750,000 annual budget. VOM has a three-year contract with DHS with an annual budget of \$2.5 million.

## What services FACs provide

The FACs adhere to the Housing First model, which prioritizes rapid entry into shelter without programmatic pre-requisites, such as being sober. The aim is to get people into housing before addressing other challenges, such as unemployment or substance use, that may make it difficult to maintain housing. The model is premised on the understanding that shelter is a basic need to be met before people can address other challenges. The FACs can accommodate new participants when shelter space is available. After an initial intake, the FACs provide housing, wraparound, case management, and post-program services.

## Outreach and intake

The two FACs have similar processes for identifying families in need of temporary shelter and for bringing them into the shelter.

**Participants mostly are referred by other agencies serving people experiencing homelessness.** Most of these referrals come through agencies that have contracts with DHS, as these agencies can verify if people are actively homeless, a criterion for admission. The FACs might also get a bulk of referrals right before or during police sweeps of a homeless encampment. Police are not allowed to displace people from

encampments, but they can refer them to shelters with vacancies. This enforcement approach, which follows a model called “compassionate disruption,” is planned, so outreach workers from these agencies can go to encampments before a scheduled enforcement to offer FAC services and beds. Because DHS-funded shelter programs are required to provide shelter vacancy reports every morning, outreach workers have almost real-time updates on vacancies they can offer to people.

FAC staff also mentioned that some participants hear of their services by word of mouth and call the shelter directly asking if there are vacancies.



### Client intake assessment topics

**Basic needs:** Does the family currently need food or clothes?

**Legal barriers:** Does the family owe any fines or have any restraining orders?

**Housing:** Where was the family living prior to the FAC? Has it ever received a housing voucher?

**Finances:** What is the family’s gross monthly income? Does it maintain a budget? Does it have outstanding loans?

**Education:** What are the education levels of all adults and children?

**Employment:** What is the participant’s work history? Does the participant receive unemployment insurance?

**Career goals:** What would the participant like to achieve regarding work? What skills does the participant have?

**Sources of support:** To what extent does the participant receive financial, emotional, or other support from family and friends?

### Intake includes assessments of participants’ motivation and needs and development of a service plan.

Case managers conduct intakes when there are vacancies in the shelters. At the time of the site visit, the FACs had enough room to meet the demand, but when demand exceeds supply, FACs move to a waitlist system and conduct intakes chronologically. At intake, case managers focus on understanding why a participant is homeless, what their service needs are, and whether the FAC program is a good fit for them, particularly given the intense 90-day time frame. In assessing readiness for the FAC, case managers are trying to gauge if someone is willing and able to put in the work to progress through the program. For example, if someone is dealing with substance abuse, are they ready to follow the rule that does not permit using substances on the FAC property? If the program is unable to meet participants’ current needs, case managers refer them to other agencies that might be better suited to serve their present needs, such as a detox program or a longer-term shelter.

Case managers work through an intake packet with participants. In addition to capturing basic demographic information about each family member, the process includes obtaining participants’ consent for their information to be entered into the Oahu Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a program agreement, acknowledgement of receipt and understanding of program rules and regulations, participant confidentiality agreements, and permission for Catholic Charities Hawai`i to release participant information to other service agencies if needed. At

VOM, the intake process includes assigning units and providing keys. Participants at both FACs receive a new air mattress to sleep on, which they can take with them when they transition out of the FAC.



During the intake, case managers also conduct an initial case management assessment and develop a service plan with the participant:

- 1. Assessment.** The assessment comprehensively reviews participants' present basic needs, legal barriers, finances, and housing and employment histories. It asks about family dynamics, children's hobbies and interests, and support (financial, emotional, or otherwise) the family might be receiving from other family members or friends. Case managers conduct a Vulnerability Index–Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool survey. This assessment produces a score indicating a participant's level of homeless risk and acuity. FAC staff use this information when determining which additional services participants might need.
- 2. Service plan.** The plan outlines participant's goals and the steps to achieve those goals over the course of the program. All service plans have the same main goals of (1) obtaining permanent housing in 90 days; (2) developing landlord tenancy skills, like cleaning and maintaining units and understanding tenant responsibilities, by working with FAC staff and community providers; and (3) maintaining a monthly spending budget while in the program. Although these three overarching goals are the same, each participant develops their own SMART objectives, which are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely actions to take in service of accomplishing the larger goals.

### Kayla's experience

When Kayla lost her housing after relapsing, she called Catholic Charities asking for help. She had not previously heard of the FACs, but within a few weeks, there was a vacancy at the Kaka`ako FAC. She had an intake meeting and moved into the shelter with one of her children. She moved in around the winter holidays, noting the many people who volunteered at the shelter then to bring food and activities to play with the children.

## Housing and related services

As low-barrier shelters, both FACs have a small number of rules by which participants must abide. There is no curfew or requirement that participants must be sober, but adults who are going to use substances are not permitted to do so on FAC property. The FACs also implement quiet hours from 9 p.m. to 8 a.m. Both FACs intend to communicate to participants that the FAC is a welcoming place, but they do not want participants to get too comfortable. FAC staff are committed to helping participants move through the 90-day time frame and find permanent housing.

The FACs follow a core sequence of events to successfully meet the overarching goal of transitioning people into permanent housing in 90 days (Figure 1).

Figure 1. FAC service sequence



Source: Information provided to the case study team by FAC staff.



### Integrating services

The push to develop and implement `Ohana Nui was led by staff members across DHS divisions who called themselves `Ohana Nui engineers. These 22 staff members were selected to be “change agents” to improve interdivision communication and gain buy-in from colleagues about the benefits and promise of `Ohana Nui.

It was during one of these `Ohana Nui engineer meetings that the idea emerged to have a DHS navigator serving as a link to various offices. That idea eventually evolved into an eligibility worker traveling to FACs to determine benefits eligibility for participants on-site.

**Step 1: Getting “document ready.”** The first priority for FAC staff working with new participants is to ensure they have necessary and relevant documents, such as identification, birth certificates, and Social Security cards. Participants might also need homeless verification letters or government documents outlining their current benefits. Obtaining these documents is critical for the rest of the sequence, as participants need these same documents when applying for benefits, jobs, and housing.

Gathering documents can be expensive for families experiencing homelessness; a state-issued identification in Hawaii costs \$40. For participants who are unable to pay, VOM has funding to cover the cost of documents if participants complete community service hours. VOM also has vehicles to drive participants to offices to pick up documents (or, when they are ready, to attend unit showings if participants do not have access to transportation). Kaka`ako does not have funding to cover these expenses.

Additionally, if participants need documents from the federal government, it can take six to eight weeks for documents to arrive from the mainland. This time delay is

a significant barrier, especially in a 90-day program when the goal is to apply for housing by week 3 or 4.

While participants are getting document ready, they are also working with a case manager to identify supports they will need to achieve their overall goals while in the program. These supports might include physical or mental health services, substance use treatment, child care, or services for victims of domestic violence.

### Step 2: Applying for benefits and medical coverage.

FAC staff report that roughly 80 percent of families currently receive some type of public benefits or their benefits have recently stopped when they arrive. Staff indicated that a common reason for a recent lapse in families’ benefits is that they stopped receiving their mail due to homelessness. Because they were not receiving mail, they often miss letters notifying them of recertification meetings or other program requirements they must meet.

### Staff perspective

“We’re not like other agencies where we have an office and if you need help you come ask for help. We’re [sitting] up there and will ask as soon as you enter the door if you have this document and that. Are they ready for that?”

For all families, this step is to identify which benefits they may qualify for and then apply for those benefits. The sooner a family starts receiving benefits, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and medical coverage, the quicker they can stabilize, progress through their service plan, and find housing. FAC staff felt that having

benefits eligibility workers on-site quickens this process by reducing barriers participants often face in accessing these benefits, such as figuring out transportation to DHS offices and taking time off work.

Once a month, a benefits eligibility worker from the Benefit, Employment & Support Services Division of DHS—which administers SNAP, TANF, and Temporary Assistance for Other Needy Families (TAONF, which provides cash assistance for non-citizens and has the same rules as TANF)—interviews participants on-site at the FACs to determine their eligibility for benefits and educate them on requirements to remain eligible. An outreach worker from Hawaii’s Medicaid program, Med-QUEST, also travels to the FACs once a month to help participants understand their health coverage options, update addresses and other documentation, explain to participants how to use their coverage, and helps them apply if they are not already covered. When possible, FAC case managers provide eligibility workers with participants’ case information in advance so they can familiarize themselves with participants’ cases before meeting with them. Eligibility workers can verify in real-time if a participant qualifies for these benefits. Additionally, participants who work often give their paystubs to FAC staff to hold, so an eligibility worker can contact staff directly if income verification is needed. An eligibility worker can authorize SNAP benefits right away and have an Electronic Benefits Transfer card ready the next day. Participants applying for TANF typically start receiving benefits 21 days from applying, during which time they must start engaging in required work activity. Medicaid coverage through Med-QUEST begins on the first day of the following month.

Eligibility workers can offer more customized, in-depth guidance when they are on-site than they can in the office. For example, if a participant misses an interview for First to Work, Hawaii’s TANF work program, the eligibility worker can call a First to Work worker and request a rescheduled interview for the participant. Participants can also ask to speak to an eligibility or outreach worker (the same people come to the FAC every month) to ask specific questions; that personalized service is not available in a DHS office where eligibility and benefits are typically processed.

**Step 3: Finding employment.** Participants need a steady and regular income to secure housing, which for most participants will be the combination of public benefits and wages from a job. The FAC works with the Institute for Human Services’ Hele2Work program, which offers employment search assistance to homeless populations. Participants can get help with creating resumes, interviewing skills, and budgeting. Hele2Work will also pay for required uniforms or bus passes to commute if a participant is offered a job.

In addition to working with Hele2Work, FAC staff help with participants’ job searches. Participants can use staff computers to search for jobs and other job search activities. Staff help participants set up email accounts, write cover letters, and build resumes using LiveCareer, an online resume-building tool.

Program staff said that many participants are working when they enter the FACs, but they do not earn a livable wage. They reported that many participants work as ramp agents at the airport. Other commonly held jobs are in the service or caregiving industries. The wages for these positions are between minimum wage (\$10.10) and up to \$17.50, which is not enough to live on when participants exit the FAC, unless



### FACs’ connection to TANF

FACs focus on ensuring that eligible families receive public benefits, including TANF. DHS eligibility workers visit FACs monthly to review families’ eligibility and, as appropriate, enroll them in TANF as well as SNAP.

they are receiving some sort of housing subsidy. These participants are focused on finding jobs with higher pay, and although many have the skills and qualifications for higher-paying jobs, they often need assistance applying because English is not their first language.

**Step 4: Finding housing.** FAC services begin to focus on the housing search once participants have the necessary documents, are receiving benefits and have medical coverage, and have a steady and reliable income. Ideally, participants are ready to begin their housing search in the third or fourth week of the program.

In their early conversations with participants, housing specialists typically cover the following tasks or topics:

1. Developing a budget outlining what participants can afford to spend on housing.
2. Speaking with participants about their neighborhood preferences, what school districts they prefer, and the type of community they want to live in. This is in line with one of the main tenets of the Housing First model—participant choice; essentially, participants should have a say in where they live.
3. Learning from participants any special considerations regarding their housing and eligibility for specific housing subsidies. For example, people with mental disabilities experiencing chronic homelessness might qualify for specialized housing vouchers.

In almost all cases, participants need some form of rental assistance. The FACs themselves do not have funding to cover the costs of rental applications, security deposits, or first and last month's rent, all of which are typically required in the housing application process. Housing specialists will attempt to connect participants with community or government resources based on each participant's individual

#### Staff perspective

“On a small island, word of mouth gets out, and [people] know we're trying to get them housing.”

Housing specialists' involvement in the actual unit searching and application process varies by participant. Some participants conduct much of the housing search on their own and will ask housing specialists for help speaking with landlords and advocating for them after they apply. Other participants work more closely with housing specialists throughout the full process.

#### Kayla's experience

Kayla said she always had her essential documents organized, so she was ready with birth certificates and other relevant identification upon moving into the shelter. She was already receiving SNAP benefits and had health coverage through Medicaid. However, she was also able to apply for temporary disability compensation due to her relapse. Staff connected her with a local nonprofit for assistance finding a job, which she did.

In just under 90 days, Kayla moved into a transitional housing unit that FAC staff helped her find. She lives with one minor child and one adult son in a one-bedroom, one-bathroom unit. Between her and her son who also works, she said they are able to pay rent anytime soon.

circumstances. In addition, the housing specialists use the Coordinated Entry System, which facilitates and coordinates services and resources for people experiencing homelessness across the state. The Coordinated Entry System refers people to other services including permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and transitional housing options.

Although the program’s goal is to transition participants into permanent housing in 90 days, it is not a fixed deadline. If a family is approaching the 90 days but has been actively trying to secure a job, start saving, and look for housing, it can stay at the FAC longer. Staff reported that the longest a participant stayed at the Kaka`ako FAC was about one year. Often, larger families require more time to find somewhere to live. Additionally, the client-driven nature of the program means clients who do not yet feel ready for market-rate housing or independent living can choose to exit to transitional housing instead of permanent housing.

## Wraparound services

The FACs function as a resource hub for the families they serve. Central to the FACs’ model is bringing services on-site so participants can access them easily. In addition to the benefits eligibility workers mentioned previously, child care programs, mobile health clinics, and food banks, among others, provide services at the FACs. These services can help participants quickly stabilize their lives so they can transition out of the shelter. In conjunction with these partner services, the FACs intend to address each of the five areas of basic and necessary supports that `Ohana Nui aims to provide for families to position them for success: (1) housing and shelter, (2) economic support and education, (3) health and wellness, (4) food and nutrition, and (5) social capital.

Although both FACs try to address all these social determinants of health through service offerings, the service providers are often different at each site, as they generally work with organizations that are near the facilities.

**Economic support and education.** The FACs refer participants to municipal housing programs such as Rent to Work, which offers up to two years of rental subsidies for people experiencing homelessness who are working. Participants working at least 20 hours a week and do not have any legal barriers to working automatically qualify for this program. The Rent to Work program includes financial literacy classes and support with developing a budget and maintaining employment for three months, among other elements. Rent to Work brings its facilitators to the FACs to work with participants. Some of the other program offerings and requirements at the FACs, such as building a budget or finding and maintaining employment, count toward Rent to Work requirements.

With regards to education and childcare, the FAC at Kaka`ako has child care and parenting programs every Monday for families with children from birth to age 5. The program is funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant program, Parents and Children Together (PACT), for families with preschool-age children. PACT can also help families set up child care after they transition out of the shelter and into permanent housing.<sup>5</sup>

The FAC at VOM has two different child care partners offering services on-site. The Honolulu Community Action Program provides Head Start for preschool-age children. A local organization, Ka Pa`alana, brings its Homeless Family Education Program to the campus, providing educational programming to preschool-age children to prepare them for success in future schooling. This program also engages parents through life skills workshops and adult education programs, such as classes on budgeting, goal setting, GED preparation, and applying for jobs.

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<sup>5</sup> DHS has additional programs offering affordable child care for parents who work, including subsidies and afterschool programs.

Both FACs have relationships with the homeless concerns liaison from the U.S. Department of Education to secure bus passes and uniforms for school-age children living in the shelters.

**Food and nutrition.** Lanakila Pacific, a local nonprofit organization serving people with cognitive-, physical-, social- or age-related challenges, sets up in VOM's cafeteria on weekdays to provide breakfast and lunch to participants. The FAC and Lanakila Pacific have a memorandum of agreement detailing the partnership. A mobile food bank also comes to VOM once a week.

**Health and wellness.** The Kaka`ako FAC is located next to the University of Hawaii Medical School campus. The school's Homeless Outreach and Medical Education (H.O.M.E.) mobile health van drives across the street to the FAC, and volunteers provide free medical care, including vaccinations, tuberculosis testing (which is a requirement for admittance to the FAC), general care for cold or flu-like symptoms, and psychiatric services. VOM has an on-site licensed clinical social worker who serves both children and adults. The worker also conducts assessments during intake to determine whether participants need referrals for other services to address challenges such as serious mental illness. Public health nurses come to both FACs to administer some health care services and education for children, such as on how to properly wash hands and maintain personal hygiene.

**Social capital.** A community hula halau (which means "hula group") holds hula rehearsals in the VOM cafeteria. In return, it gives scholarships to VOM clients to take classes. This hula halau also holds Hawaiian activity workshops such as taro making and hula classes for participants. Most participants at VOM are Native Hawaiian, so this type of programming can help strengthen peer and family networks.

## Case management

The Housing First framework that the FACs adhere to extends into their case management services. The theory behind Housing First suggests participants' choices in housing, employment, and program services are valuable, and when participants can exercise those choices, they are more likely to remain housed. To that end, case managers and participants develop the service plans together. In the employment search, FAC staff encourage participants to find and apply for jobs they actually want to do, instead of applying for any job just to have a job.

### Kayla's experience

The participant said the staff were nothing but supportive. She said they were always interacting and constantly trying to push participants along. She said, "They just wanted to keep reminding us, 'Hey don't you need to do this?'"

frequent, high-touch interactions to support participants. Staff hold weekly "head-of-household meetings" to check in with participants on their service plans and see how they are progressing in their job and housing search. At VOM, which has private units, staff conduct weekly unit inspections. Through this

### Kayla's experience

A typical day for Kayla started with waking up and seeing her child off to school. For most of the day, she was out in the community going to support group meetings or looking for jobs. When she returned to the FAC in the evening, she would prepare dinner using a rice cooker and camping stove she kept in her locker. She and her child would eat dinner on small tables outside, wash the dishes, and then go to bed.

activity, participants can build landlord tenancy skills, and staff can document unit upkeep to share with prospective landlords as evidence of a participant’s ability to maintain a unit.

**Informal contacts throughout participants’ stay.** Staff and participants are also interacting and checking in informally throughout the day. FAC staff are on-site 16 hours a day, which maximizes the opportunity for participants to meet with program staff. If participants have a question or need help with an application, they can just find an available staff member. Similarly, if staff members need a document or have a question for a participant, they can easily locate the participant and have that conversation. At the Kaka`ako FAC, staff work in the shelter space, so they are constantly accessible to participants. Staff at VOM have a separate workspace, but they knock on participants’ doors every day to make themselves as present and available as possible. Not only does this constant availability help participants move along in their service plan, it helps build rapport between staff and participants. FAC staff emphasize the family-oriented nature of the facilities, saying they do not just ask participants for documents; they get to know them as people. Staff say building that trust with participants is critical to being successful. If participants do not trust a staff member, they are far less likely to be willing and open to working with that staff member.

**Staff perspective**

“That’s why we’re so successful, because we’re there all the time and not behind a closed door. If they need something, we’re there. And if we need something, they’re there.”

## Post-program services

After participants secure housing, they transition out of the FAC. Upon transitioning out, the FACs give participants an “exit basket,” which is a laundry basket with other housing essentials like laundry detergent, a dish rack, and towels. Participants can also take the air mattress they received upon intake.

**Length of stay.** FAC leadership reported that the average length of stay at the Kaka`ako FAC is 84 days. FAC leaders reported that 83 percent of FAC families have transitioned out of the FAC and into housing (either market-rate or transitional) since the shelter opened in September 2016. Of the 17 percent who left the FAC and did not transition into housing, some might have entered a treatment program required by another service agency, some might have been removed from the program for not following program rules, and some might have chosen to return to homelessness. FAC leadership reported that the average length of stay at VOM is 91 days. As of the site visit, leadership reported that the FAC had served 139 households since opening in March 2019 and had exited 92 households. Forty-six of those exited households transitioned into permanent housing.

**Check-ins with former participants.** FAC staff check in with participants three months and six months after they have transitioned out of the FAC. Outside of these check-ins, they tell participants to call the FAC if they need anything. FAC staff said they do get calls from past participants asking how to get help with rent or other financial obligations. If past participants call and say they are about to be evicted, FAC staff reach out to agencies providing emergency assistance to try to connect them to services. Staff also can coach these past participants through problem solving as needed. One staff member said while participants are still at the FAC, she tries to connect them with organizations that offer ongoing case management to ensure participants have a continued advocate once they transition out, because the FAC itself is unable to provide ongoing services.

### How the FACs adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic

Although the rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the county of Honolulu (66.9 cases per 100,000 residents) was far lower than the national average of 821 cases per 100,000 residents by the end of June 2020, the economic health of the county was severely affected by the pandemic<sup>a,b</sup>. The unemployment rate rose to 20.5 percent in April 2020 and dropped to 12.2 percent in June<sup>c</sup>. At the FACs, the proximity of families to one another in the housing facilities presented greater transmission risks, particularly at Kaka`ako. The FACs grappled with how to respond to the public health crisis while also addressing the immediate needs and priorities of families facing homelessness, especially in the early days of the pandemic, when information about the virus was limited and guidance on how to respond to it changed as more information became available. During this time, FAC staff had to make real-time decisions about how to serve families. To continue to provide housing aligned with the Housing First principles that guide their service approach while navigating the pandemic, the FACs did the following:

- **Prepared Kaka`ako for participants' safety.** The Kaka`ako FAC does not have individual units; families are housed in cubicles divided by short walls within a large open space. At the start of the pandemic, FAC leadership temporarily transferred all families from Kaka`ako to VOM, where they could house families in the individual units. This move allowed staff to sanitize the Kaka`ako FAC and develop new standard operating procedures for maintaining a safe environment. Some of the Kaka`ako families found permanent housing while staying at VOM, and Catholic Charities eventually transferred the remaining families back to Kaka`ako. To continue to minimize risk of transmission, the FACs reduced the number of families at Kaka`ako to 50 percent of capacity to reduce crowding.
- **Mitigated transmission risk of participants and staff.** As an emergency shelter for homeless families, the FACs' in-person service model did not change due to the pandemic. At the same time, staff had to balance public health concerns related to their own child care, transportation, living arrangements, and other jobs they held alongside their work at the FAC. FAC leadership determined there were no other feasible options to change how staff interacted with participants other than providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff, including face shields and gloves, and attempting to minimize their in-person contact. Families at Kaka`ako were required to wear masks while in the shelter, and FACs provided families with PPE as needed.
- **Recognized competing participant needs and priorities.** The pandemic added one more consideration to the existing, day-to-day survival concerns for many participants. Although participants took COVID-19 seriously, the imperative to wear a mask and social distance was sometimes less urgent than addressing more immediate needs, like finding food, accessing health care, commuting to work on public transit, or finding permanent housing.

Sources: <sup>a</sup> USAFacts (2020); <sup>b</sup> Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center (2020); <sup>c</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020b).



## How FACs measure program participation and outcomes

There has been no systematic evaluation of the FACs, but the FACs track information on the participants they serve and their outcomes. As DHS-funded shelters, the FACs must submit shelter vacancy reports every morning, providing a close to real-time update of vacant shelter beds, as well as data items such as the number of families and individuals served, referral sources, length of stay at the FAC, housing status upon entry, and housing outcomes (for example, whether families exited into market-rate or transitional housing) after 90 days. In addition to outcome measures, the FACs keep narrative case notes about participants' progress toward their goals. These notes are kept in participants' service plans. Internally, the FACs use Excel spreadsheets for managing cases and tracking clients. These spreadsheets are only accessible through the FACs' secure networks.

The FACs are connected to Oahu's HMIS and use the Coordinated Entry System<sup>6</sup>, which all shelters use to facilitate and coordinate services and the management of resources for people experiencing homelessness across the state. Part of the broader `Ohana Nui effort is to implement a new information technology system connecting all DHS departments so people can submit one application that goes to multiple benefits offices instead of submitting multiple applications that all ask for much of the same information. At the FACs, this effort, once realized, could increase public benefits access while reducing the administrative burdens associated with multiple applications for different programs.

## Accomplishments, challenges, and future plans

Since the Governor's Proclamation in 2015, service providers have led a targeted and concerted effort to address homelessness in the state. The 2019 Point in Time Count suggests those collective efforts might be working: 6,448 people were experiencing homelessness statewide, a 15.4 percent decrease from 2015. On Oahu specifically, programs serving homeless populations moved 5,307 people into permanent housing in 2019, which is a 16 percent increase from the year prior, according to data from the island's HMIS (City and County of Honolulu 2019). Through an approach that includes Housing First and integrated services, FAC leadership and DHS staff interviewed were optimistic about the ways in which the FACs have met their goal of transitioning families into permanent housing within 90 days.

Still, FAC and DHS staff indicated that there is an ongoing need for affordable housing for the families they serve and the related social services that can support family stability. For example, one of the persistent programmatic challenges for parents is finding child care. For parents whose children are not yet in school, securing child care remains the most common barrier, particularly for parents who need to be at work.

Looking forward, a priority for FAC leadership is to secure additional funding that allows for continued operation and improvements in service offerings. Added funding would support facility maintenance, increased staffing, additional financial assistance to cover costs associated with the housing search and

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<sup>6</sup> The Coordinated Entry System is a uniform process to ensure people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access to assistance. Individuals are identified, assessed, and referred to housing based on their strengths and severity of their needs. This process ensures people who need assistance the most can receive it in a timely manner.

obtaining documents, and increased compensation for FAC staff, many of whom work multiple jobs to cover their own cost of living.

DHS indicated there is an opportunity to capture and measure non-housing outcomes to better understand the various capacities in which FACs might be helping families. Further, DHS hopes to embed `Ohana Nui principles more broadly in services and programs throughout the state, integrating this full-family approach to poverty alleviation statewide.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## Methodology

The State TANF Case Studies project seeks to expand the knowledge base of programs that help low-income individuals, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients, prepare for and engage in work. The study is showcasing nine programs selected because of their different approaches to working with these individuals. Mathematica and its partner, MEF Associates, designed and conducted the study.

To select programs for case studies, the study team, in collaboration with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), first identified approaches that showed promise in providing low-income individuals with employment-related services and linking them to wraparound supports, such as child care and transportation. These approaches might increase self-sufficiency directly by helping participants find employment or indirectly by providing supports and alleviating barriers to employment. The study team identified four approaches, or domains:

1. Wraparound supports
2. Full-family transitional housing and supports
3. Employment-based interventions
4. Collective impact and collaborative community initiatives

Within each domain, the study team then identified potential programs by searching key websites, holding discussions with stakeholders, and reviewing findings and lessons from ACF and other studies. The next step was to narrow the list of programs based on initial discussions with program leaders to learn more about their programs and gauge their interest in participating. The final set of case study programs was selected for diversity, in terms of geography and focus population. Case studies of these programs illustrate the diverse practices operating around the country to assist TANF recipients and low-income individuals in finding and maintaining employment. Their selection does not connote ACF's endorsement of the practices or strategies described.

For each program selected, two or three members of the project team conducted a site visit to document its implementation. For eight programs, team members conducted two- to three-day visits to an average of two locations per program. The visit to the ninth program was conducted virtually via video conferencing due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions. Each site visit consisted of semistructured interviews with administrators of the program, leaders of their partner agencies, and the staff providing direct services. The site visit teams interviewed, on average, 15 staff per program. During in-person visits, the teams also conducted in-depth interviews with an average of three participants per program and reviewed anonymized cases of an average of two participants per program. In addition, teams observed program activities, as appropriate.

For this case study, two members of the research team conducted a two-and-a-half-day visit in February 2020 to two Hawaii Department of Human Services offices and the two FACs. The team conducted semistructured interviews with seven DHS staff, including administrators, project directors, state coordinators, and benefits eligibility workers. Two of these conversations were telephone interviews conducted after the site visit. The team conducted in-depth interviews with seven FAC staff members and two participants, one from each FAC. The team conducted a follow-up telephone call in August 2020 with a program leader to learn how the FACs responded to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

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