

Neighbors Being Neighborly to Neighbors

Kokua Kalihi Valley (KKV) is a federally qualified health center that is working to foster a broad sense of health to the residence of Kalihi Valley, providing an array of comprehensive holistic health care services aimed at fostering physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well being. Kalihi Valley is home to 30,000 people living within six square miles and is the most densely concentrated population of immigrants, with 36% of it's residence residing in public housing developments (KKV Volunteer Program, 2012). KKV's target population faces significant cultural, linguistic and socio-economic barriers to accessing health care, education and employment. KKV's Roots Project is one that is vital to the Kalihi Valley community because it offers opportunities to build health through food, story sharing and connections to the land helping to bridge the gaps created by the many barriers to care, education and employment that the members of the community are faced with on a daily basis.

KKV's mission statement is to "work together 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"; fostering a community where they envision "Neighbors being neighborly to neighbors" (KKV Volunteer Program, 2012). KKV works to achieve their vision through many programs and services ranging from: medical, dental, behavioral health, maternal and child health, nutrition, case management, eligibility, transportation, smoking cessation, health education, chronic disease self-management, home visits, active living, elderly services, family strengthening, community building, advocacy, positive

youth development and cultural appreciation, environmental preservation and food production activities at Ho`oulu`Aina (KKV Services and Activities, 2012).

There is a need for such programs such as KKV to service those experiencing barriers to care with 9.6% of Hawaii's population living below the poverty level with 3.3% receiving cash public assistance income, and 7.4% receiving food stamp/SNAP benefits in the past 12 months (US Census, 2010) and 10,394 families reported living in state or federal low income public housing in the state of Hawaii (Hawaii Public Housing Annual Report, 2011). Also, access to food itself is an issue in the state of Hawaii with 183,500 people in Hawaii making up 14% of the population are receiving emergency food assistance (Feeding America, 2010). Among the households receiving assistance with children, 83% reported being food insecure and 39% reported having very low food security. 19% also reported having limited funds, leaving them to choose between being able to afford food or medicine and other medical related costs, and 13% reported having one or more household members in poor health (Feeding America, 2010). These figures paint a picture of many individuals in Hawaii experiencing poverty, affecting their access to basic needs such as housing and food. Programs like KKV's Root's programs offers these individuals opportunity to build health through food with community food production at their community nature reserve "Ho'oulu'Aina" and across the valley through cooking workshops, culinary programs at KKV's new commercial-grade community kitchen, and a range of shared meals (KKV Returning to our Roots, 2012) .

KKV reported that they are serving 1/3 of their community with 10,000 patients, that come from a wide range of immigrant ethnicities including 3% Laotian, 28% Filipino,

5% other asian, 22% Micronesian, 22% Samoan, 8% Hawaiian, and 7% other Pacific Islanders. About 64% of their patients reported living at 0-100% of poverty level, 6% living at 101-150% of poverty level, 2% living at 151-200% of poverty level, 2% living over 200% of poverty level and 25% unreported poverty level (KKV Volunteer Program, 2011). All of these factors contribute to the overwhelming amount of barriers to care, education and employment they experience that KKV is working to improve through their wide range of programs and services.

Due to the wide range of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds of the clients that KKV serves, and their approach of treating their clients as people and not just patients the organization is focussed on long term outcomes. The organization also strives for the development of an “inclusive community” where neighbors help to heal neighbors, really involving members of the community to step forward and recognize that they are part of a larger whole, connected to one another, their culture and the land they share (KKV Volunteer Program, 2011). Kat Burke the volunteer coordinator with KKV stressed the importance of exploring all facets of issues and solutions, even if it takes time to explore the web of interconnecting issues and opportunities. Kat, emphasized in the volunteer orientation that as a whole the organization is not in a rush, it is more focussed on the quality of outcomes. However, there are times when time is of the essence especially in the application process for grants and funding to support their programs which they strive to meet so that needed funds are not foregone. As an organization they realize that in order to foster the concept of broad health and inclusive community is an on-going process, and is the reasoning behind the ideology of not being in rush, but concerned with the efficacy of the process.

I had the pleasure of volunteering with KKV this semester as part of a project in my Community Nutrition class at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. My initial interest in the organization was the lactation courses they provided while promoting natural birthing initiatives to expecting mothers in the Kalihi Valley area, and have plans to continue volunteering with the organization in these areas in the future. Due, to conflicts with my work and school schedule I was unable to volunteer in these areas, but did have a wealth of other opportunities to volunteer in other areas with KKV. I had an opportunity to volunteer at the Celebrate Healthy Living community celebration at Kuhio Park Terrace (KPT) held on Saturday, September 29, 2012 where I worked in the kitchen to help prep fresh fruits and vegetables to be served during the event. KKV expected to feed 500+ people attending the event, where we served vegetarian chili, fresh cut watermelons, mangos, and bananas providing those living in KPT access to fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables. I also had the opportunity to volunteer at the 3rd Saturday event hosted up at Ho'oulu'Aina (Kalihi Valley Nature Preserve), where members of the community and volunteers gather together to participate in community gardening, reforestation, environmental education, preservation of land-based cultural knowledge, cooking and sharing food and culture to help everyone connect with one another. The particular morning I volunteered they needed help at the Kalihi valley farmers market working the EBT-SNAP benefit table they have set up offering residence an opportunity to get \$2 for every \$1 of their awarded EBT-SNAP benefit. The Kalihi valley farmers market is only operational from 10-10:45am so upon return to the nature reserve I helped in the kitchen to prepare the fresh vegetables collected in the community garden earlier that morning. Following the collection, and preparation of

vegetables in the community garden all of the volunteers are invited to sit down and enjoy the fruits of the labor. I have always been a firm believer in food and it's healing properties, and had an opportunity to experience the healing properties this food had on it's community. I am excited to continue volunteering with KKV in the future, and have plans to work on an after-school program for youth that visit the clinic getting them into the kitchen, cooking and sharing healthy wholesome foods together and am still interested in volunteering in maternal and child health programs. KKV not only makes it's clients feel part of the community, they welcome their volunteers into the community providing an opportunity to establish new relationships.

I experienced KKV's success in it's initiatives first hand, during my experience at Ho'oulu'Aina where on a rainy, windy Saturday morning over 100+ volunteers showed up to work in the nature preserve. These volunteers ranged from members of the Kalihi Valley community who have been attending the 3rd Saturday event from the very beginning and who have in a sense grown up with the program. I had the pleasure of getting to know "Uncle Ben" who said that this event was the thing he look forward to all month and would never miss one. He shared with me that he recently lost his mother, and that KKV has really been a great friend and support through this time of loss. Many of the volunteers were repeaters, and those coordinating the event said that it has gradually grown in number because volunteers end up bringing their friends and family, who then end up bringing their loved ones and that their 3rd Saturday has really grown and flourished.

KKV's programs and services include a nutrition component, through offering it's community members who live in an urban setting access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

From KKV's Root's program and its services such as the EBT-SNAP benefit program offering monetary support by providing \$2 for every \$1 awarded, helps local residents have access to locally grown fruits and vegetables sold at the open market. The cooking workshops, culinary programs, and shared meals all offer an opportunity for the community to have access to healthy wholesome foods. The medical services also offer nutrition education as part of their Self-Management Programs for those suffering from chronic conditions such as Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease, Kidney Disease and Overweight/Obesity (KKV Primary Medical Care, 2012). It could be beneficial if some of this nutrition education and knowledge are shared with the community volunteers and clients at the cooking workshops, culinary programs to help build knowledge of the health benefits associated with the healthy wholesome foods they are preparing and eating.

KKV and its services and programs are vital to Kalihi Valley community as they offer opportunities to bridge the gaps created by the barriers to care that the members of the community face on a daily basis by building health through food, making connections to the land they live on and the people they share it with. Kalihi is home to a diverse group of immigrants that experience significant cultural, linguistic and socio-economic barriers. KKV is providing an array of comprehensive holistic health care services aimed at promoting health as a whole that fosters physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well being.

References

Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services: Returning to our Roots. (2012). Retrieved November 19, 2012, from <http://www.kkv.net/index.php/roots>.

Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services: Services and Activities (2012). Retrieved November 19, 2012, from <http://www.kkv.net/index.php/services-and-activities>.

Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services: Primary Medical Care (2012). Retrieved November 19, 2012, from <http://www.kkv.net/index.php/primary-medical-care>.

Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services: Volunteer Program Brochure. (2012).

U.S. Census Bureau: State & County Quickfacts. (2012). Retrieved November 19, 2011, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/15000.html>.

Feeding America, Hunger in America 2010 National Report. Washing, DC. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc, 2010. Retrieved November 19, 2012, from http://feedingamerica.issuelab.org/resource/hunger_in_america_2010_national_report.

State of Hawaii, Hawaii Public Housing Authority. 2011 Annual Report. Retrieved November 19, 2012, from <http://www.hcdch.hawaii.gov/documents/2011%20Annual%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.