



A Letter from Our Director

2016-03-03

Teaching Gratitude and Creating Productive Citizens

During my time at IHS, I've noticed that some individuals' willingness to work has been dampened by an economic environment that no longer seems to reward effort, largely due to the staggering housing costs we face in Hawaii. If one can't achieve a secure and comfortable home no matter how hard one works, it's not surprising that people give up. This is part of the context in which we are trying to end homelessness. Beyond policies and funding, we must inspire every resident of our State young or old, new or longtime local to be productive citizens.

For those who are unable to do for themselves, we need to care enough to reach out and assist. We can't expect people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps if they don't have any or are so confused that they are putting their boots on their hands. In the first case, a path to employment can help them buy bootstraps. In the second case, we can connect them to treatment where they can re-establish their mental and physical competence, and then find work in recovery.

Here in Hawaii, we strive to practice aloha: civility and kindness that deepens relationships between us. Sadly, some folks have yet to learn aloha and come seeking resources with demanding and entitled attitudes. To them, we kindly set expectations that they volunteer if they can't pay the program fee and, at the same time, help them access employment. Expecting respectful behavior helps them become better community citizens. If we don't teach respect, we reinforce behaviors that then reinforce entitlement and helplessness.

Finally, with respect, we teach gratitude. We don't need any thanks for what we do, but teaching appreciation for what one has been given helps mitigate anger over what one lacks. Let me once again share my gratitude for you. You remind me that it is possible to transform lives despite the current lack of affordable housing, controversial debates, and economic chasm between those who have and those who do not.

Connie Mitchell

Executive Director