



Summer, 2020

Aloha,

I am writing to express my strong support for public funding of ALEA Bridge (ALEA). Through my work with Hui Aloha, I have had the pleasure of working closely with ALEA, including its leadership and front-line staff. I believe they are unique among organizations serving homeless residents of our community. In addition to the fact that they serve a region (Central Oahu and North Shore) which has historically lacked sufficient homeless services, there are three things that set ALEA apart from other, similar organizations:

- (1) Trust and relationships with the people they serve. Unfortunately, many homeless service providers have become bureaucratic and impersonal over the years, weighed down by a lack of resources, and funder requirements and timelines that make it difficult to sustain a human touch. Ask unsheltered people for their opinion about the homeless service provider in their area, and many will give you negative reviews. Not so for ALEA Bridge. ALEA embraces the fact that helping anyone move forward in life requires building trust with them first. Indeed, ALEA Bridge has an organizational culture that focuses on trust-building, and they have earned the trust and respect of the people they serve.
- (2) Combining service and advocacy. ALEA understands that the current system of getting services and housing to homeless people needs improvement. They are willing to advocate for changes to policies and systems that do not help (and sometimes even harm) those who live on the street. This is a difficult path to walk for most service providers, because nearly all of them depend on government funding, making it risky to speak out for or against government policies or practices. But, without voices like ALEA Bridge, our systems will remain stuck in unhelpful patterns that have made it difficult to tackle homelessness on Oahu.
- (3) Willingness to pursue creative new solutions. ALEA brings fresh ideas and energy to the realm of homeless services. They were willing partners with Hui Aloha in the Bathroom Brigades program, which organized homeless people to help sanitize and care for the park bathrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are also exploring creative housing solutions, such as village-style housing built by and for people who have already have a sense of community on the street. Over the past 8 years, there has been no change in the total number of homeless people on Oahu; a decline in the number of people in shelters; and an increase in the number of people on the street. “More of the same” will not suffice. We need creative new solutions, and ALEA is one of the few organizations willing to risk and experiment.

For these reasons, I strongly encourage you to provide public funding to support ALEA Bridge’s work. I would further encourage you to make this funding as unrestricted as possible, so that ALEA can continue to work in ways that build trust, balance service and advocacy, and test creative new solutions – the very things necessary to tackle the persistent challenge of homelessness in Hawaii.

Mahalo for your consideration.

James Koshiba
Founder & President
Hui Aloha