HOPE Services Hawaii (HOPE) is the largest homeless service provider on the island of Hawaii where homelessness disproportionately impacts Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI): 52% of families served since HOPE received its Day 1 Families Fund award identify as NHOPI, while NHOPI make up just 10% of the island’s total population.

In 2019, when HOPE received a $2.75 million grant from the Day 1 Families Fund, they were working to help families left unhoused by a lava eruption in Pahoa in 2018. The COVID-19 pandemic which would ultimately crash the local tourism-based economy was just around the corner.

With the influx of “no-strings-attached” funding from the Day 1 Families Fund, HOPE had greater flexibility to help families experiencing homelessness adapt to and build from these times of crisis. They filled much needed operational gaps, including increasing staff to handle caseloads and purchasing vehicles so they could easily reach families in need in rural areas. HOPE also developed networks to connect people to COVID relief and CARES funds and deepened its support for families in need.

The most tangible impact of the grant has been the purchase of over 14 acres of land in Pahoa where HOPE will build housing for families. “This project helps the community heal and rebuild from the eruption, because it lets them remain in their community and support each other,” says Brandee Menino, HOPE’s chief executive officer.
The grant has been critical in helping the organization and community navigate difficult times and get on a path to stability. With the Day 1 Families Fund funding, HOPE has:

1. Scaled up their ability to provide street outreach, emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, and more services to families experiencing homelessness on the island of Hawaii.

2. Launched a master leasing program where HOPE assumes responsibility for a rental unit and then sub-leases it to a family who needs housing.

3. Grown into a one-stop-shop for those in need by partnering with mental health coordinators, social workers, nurse practitioners, local hospitals, and more.

Since 2019, family homelessness in Hawaii has continued to decrease and 90 percent of people served by HOPE remain housed at least two years later. The organization is working diligently to keep that last 10 percent in housing.

The Day 1 Families Fund grant put us on the map. It added credibility to the work we do, and helped us build visibility in our community, which was so important when COVID hit and so many families needed our help. They had heard of us and knew they could turn to us.

BRANDEE MENINO
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

FAMILY STORY

A number of challenges, from rising housing costs to unemployment, led a family of four living on Hawaii to become homeless in 2017. They were placed in shelter and eventually in permanent supportive housing. In 2019, the family had a breakthrough thanks to HOPE’s Day 1 Families Fund grant. HOPE provided them with rental assistance that helped them secure their own apartment in Hilo. With their housing issues addressed, this family was able to focus on improving other parts of their lives. The father of the family secured a full-time job, and the children, who were finally able to attend school without interruption, began to excel academically. In 2021, this family obtained a Housing Choice Voucher and moved into a three-bedroom house. Thanks to the support of HOPE and their diligence to improve their lives, the family has found stability and they continue to flourish today.