

## Caring for Hawaii's Kupuna

Hawaii's elderly are genuinely special. Embedded in them are the stories of years past, sights seen, people met. Nothing can replace their gentle smiles, vivid enthusiasm, and eagerness to greet us. Sadly, Hawaii seems to have neglected the needs of our kupuna nowadays as costs for care homes, care givers and medical care have dramatically increased.

My great-grandparents are my closest relatives living on the island. I treasure their wise advice and unconditional love. This is why I feel overcome with fear each time I witness them being unable to care for themselves. At 93 and 97 years old, they have surpassed the age of independently caring for themselves and can no longer perform daily tasks. While my family assists them during the week and each weekend, work and school prevent us from seeing them every day. As my great-grandpa was recently diagnosed with metastasized prostate cancer, hiring a caregiver is a probable solution. Unfortunately, a salary of approximately \$23,000 per year: is insufficient to pay for round-the-clock care, which is immensely costly. Care homes provide quality nursing and assurance for the elderly. Still, a majority of these establishments now utilize waiting lists that require preliminary registrations. Certain ones shockingly begin before retirement! It is also necessary to take our kupuna preferences into account when selecting long-term care options. For example, my great-grandparents would detest leaving the contentment of their beloved home, which they designed and constructed themselves. Not expecting to live as long as they have, they retired at 50 and have spent practically half of their lives living without a steady income.

If nothing is done for Hawaii's kupuna 50 years from now, as future retirees, we will suffer unpleasant consequences. Inevitably, our soles will fill our elder's shoes as the same issues

will loom in our future - only the dilemma will not disappear, it will instead flourish as Hawaii's cost of living increases over time. We can preserve Hawaii's generations only by devoting ourselves to creating a superior kupuna care system.

An obvious solution to this complex issue would be adding the costs of elderly care to retirees medical insurance for a minimal fee. This way, those who require extensive care could receive it affordably and those are not in need currently would merely pay a minute cost. Additionally, it would be plausible to establish a state-funded inpatient residential and outpatient nursing system. Unavoidably, the facility would require constant resources from taxpayers, which could deter support for the idea. Essentially, a continuous effort made by the community will fabricate a reliable elderly care organization that will appeal to all of Hawaii's demographics. Ideally, the center's location would be in Honolulu, where a majority of the population is condensed. Here, elders would have the option to reside unlimitedly or utilize outpatient care whereby qualified caregivers would be assigned to various clients. Certainly, this plan requires a massive amount of planning and dedication; however, with motivated people collaborating, we will be able to improve the lives of Hawaii's kupuna.

When Clarence T.C. Ching established the cultural plaza in Chinatown, he worked tirelessly so that the new center would benefit a total of five cultural groups. Similar to creating a kupuna care program, Ching had to start from scratch, as Chinatown had recently suffered a fire. It took Ching nearly three years to complete the structure in 1973. If our community can have the same desire, passion and dedication that Ching had while building the cultural plaza, we can surely accomplish all of our goals.

The glowing spark of opportunity is within our palms and acting now will benefit society in the future. If we, as residents of Hawaii, want to have reliable care for the elderly now, and for us in the future, acting immediately is essential. With innovative ideas, dedication and unbreakable passion, our dreams can fabricate before our eyes. Helping our kupuna now will positively affect Hawaii, especially its older residents.