

HB20: Chelsie Evans, Hawaiian Community Assets

Once a client of the organization she now leads, Chelsie Evans has grown HCA from \$1.5 million to a \$10 million agency serving Hawai'i families.

15 HOURS AGO BY KEN WILLS



Photo Courtesy: Aaron Yoshino

Chelsie Evans grew up surrounded by community service providers and advocates before she understood the critical role they play. She was influenced by her Hawaiian grandmother who dispensed free food out of a pantry in her home, and she had a Caucasian father who as a social worker “used his white privilege to advocate for Hawaiian culture,” as she puts it.

Today she is Executive Director of Hawaiian Community Assets, Hawai'i's largest Department of Housing and Urban Development-certified housing counseling and financial education agency.

“That was a big part of how I was raised,” recalls Evans about visits to her grandmother's home on Moloka'i where she witnessed the community support. “People would come and say, ‘Auntie, do you have any food?’, and she would go to the pantry full of canned goods and give them some ... If you see some need, you've got to do something, you can't just watch it.”

For the last two decades, Evans has carried on that tradition in the nonprofit sector. “It's about the only thing I know how to do,” she says.

Coincidentally, because of hardships in her own life, Evans was once a client of the organization she now leads.

Her daughter's illness required frequent visits to a Honolulu hospital, so she and her children moved from Hawai'i island to be closer. Although she was working, it was difficult to hold a job while taking her daughter to the hospital over a period of years.

“I was trying to support three kids financially as a single mom while spending a lot of time in the hospital. Money was tight, and things were rough,” Evans recalls. With the help of HCA “I was able to do a match-savings program, which helped me save a little bit.

“So being able to have those tools during times where you don't know if there's anything else you can do is really important.”

It was a lesson she remembered as she built the organization's budget from about \$1.5 million when she started in 2021 to more than \$10 million today. “We created a financial education curriculum — it's financial education with the teachings of native Hawaiian values.”

Later this year, HCA will launch a real estate brokerage, a for-profit company that will funnel profits to the nonprofit parent while also providing specialized services to those seeking affordable housing.

“A big part of what our agents will bring to the table is an understanding of the buying process for affordable housing, or people who have been in affordable housing and want to move on to the next part of their lives, that also gets very complicated, with deed restrictions,” she says.

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