

## 'Old medicine': Program meets isle's homeless at point of need

By MELISSA TANJI, Staff Writer

WAILUKU — A Cup of Cold Water volunteer Mark Sitts calls what the group is doing the "heart of Christianity."

"It's where the rubber meets the road," he said of the Maui Episcopal churches' program that distributes food, clothing, toiletries, cold bottled water and other basic need items to Maui's homeless and needy from a mobile van.

As he loaded the van near Good Shepherd Episcopal Church on Sunday morning, Sitts, a parishioner at the Wailuku church, said that volunteers and the needy get acquainted and become a part of one another's lives. Around 10 people showed up at the van Sunday morning to get rubber slippers, T-shirts, water, snacks and sardines, among other items.

This month, A Cup of Cold Water, a Community Care Van program celebrates its one-year anniversary. It has distributed 46,443 basic need items to 5,607 of Maui's neediest people over the past year, according to program officials, and is run by donations from island churches and without any government support.

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He called the program "nice" as he returned to the van Sunday morning to exchange a wrong-size pair of rubber slippers. He was walking barefoot and said that his other pair was worn out.

He also received a can of sardines and a T-shirt.

A woman came to the van looking for an extra T-shirt. She said the red one she was wearing was from a guy friend. Volunteer Cindy Akana, Keku Akana's wife, who handles the supplies, asked the woman if she wanted a woman's shirt.

Seconds later, Cindy Akana came out of a storage room near Good Shepherd Church

with two women's blouses.

Then Sitts asked the woman, "Are you hungry?"

"I'm always hungry," the woman replied.

"You like sardines?" Sitts asked.

"I love sardines," the woman said, noting it would give her protein.

Minutes later the woman was also given a pair of white capri pants after she asked for a new pair of bottoms.

Mellinger said volunteers are able to connect with clients who keep them updated on other members of the homeless and needy community. Clients tell the volunteers who got hurt, who got a job, who moved

away or if anyone needs help.

"We can be the love force out there," she said.

Besides gently used clothing, the program also seeks socks; bottled water; nonperishable food items that have a long shelf life such as Vienna sausage, cheese and crackers, granola bars, Rice Krispy treats; personal hygiene products including diapers, toothbrushes, toothpaste, small soaps, shampoo, toilet paper and first-aid items; and new or gently used Bibles.

For more information, contact 419-1637 or acupofcoldwatermaui@gmail.com.

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The mobile care van also logged 4,210 miles as it made stops in Central Maui on Wednesdays, in Lahaina on Saturdays and in South Maui on Sundays — to places where the island's needy congregate or may be nearby. The schedules are planned to avoid overlap with other outreach services.

"The mission of meeting people at their point of need is 'old medicine.' It's ancient elbow-grease Christianity," said Kekuhaupio ("Keku") Akana, president of the board for A Cup of Cold Water.

Akana modestly said that the program is still in its infancy and tipped his hat to others who have long been helping the needy on Maui.

"We are rookies at this," he said. "We just want to thank all the known and unknown people doing their own program."

Akana said that the program run by private donations and volunteers and receives no government help so there is "zero

burden of tax-related dollars."

He added that the Episcopal churches on Maui that launched the program — Trinity-by-the-Sea in Kihikihi, Good Shepherd in Wailuku, Holy Innocents in Lahaina and St. John's in Kula — have been joined by members of Maui's Nazarene, Congregational, Roman Catholic, New Hope, Grace Bible, Keswala churches and members of the Buddhist religion and other organizations to support the program.

"We are doing well and we are growing," said volunteer Mary Lou Mellinger. "We are getting more volunteers."

Currently there are around 35 to 40 volunteers, which include mission leaders or drivers; 25 or so rider volunteers, who distribute the products; and also a five-person supply team that stocks and checks on supplies for the van.

A three-person team goes out on the runs. While there are scheduled stops, the van may also stop if volunteers see someone in need.

Akana said that for the first month the program operated, volunteers passed out a lot of filers and walked into homeless camps to let them know the van was around.

It took the program about nine months to get the routes down to reach the most people.

Akana said officials are also looking to expand the van's services to East Maui.

It is hard to pinpoint exactly how many people the program serves on a route, as Akana called the program's client numbers "really fluid."

He said at times when veterans' payments are given out, fewer people may show up, and if the weather is bad, fewer people may show up.

The team also gives out prayers to anyone who asks for one.

On Sunday, Louis Kaiiuehu of Wailuku, who said he's been "on the streets" for five years, applauded the program that aims to help the local people, rather than having funds sent out of state.



Volunteer Mark Sitts helps load A Cup of Cold Water, a Community Care Van on Sunday near Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in Wailuku. In the van is fellow volunteer Cindy Akana and outside the van is volunteer Mary Lou Mellinger (with back to camera). The van was started by the Episcopal churches on Maui as a way to distribute supplies to the needy.