

# Angels on Wheels

**A Cup of Cold Water volunteers provide hope and help in the community.**

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Cindy Schumacher , **Maui Weekly**

Imagine this: No hot meals. No showers or baths for days on end. No clean clothes. Untreated staph infections. Abuse thrown at you all day. It's a life the homeless live daily.

As many as 3.5 million Americans are homeless each year. While the common impression is that the down-and-out are primarily chronic cases and therefore insignificant, the fact is that more than half of the homeless are families with children.

Many in the U.S. are now finding that anyone can become homeless. A large number of families already live a few paychecks away from what most of us consider unthinkable. The face of homelessness is changing.

## Article Photos



**Keku Akana** is a shining light in the community and “uncle” to all.

"Here on Maui, we see those in or very close to poverty because of substance abuse, economic injustice or collapse, loss of a job, bad luck, failing health, various levels of depression or despair and broken relationships," said Keku Akana, a retired deputy chief of the Maui Police Department. Akana is the founder, and now head coordinator and board president of A Cup of Cold Water (ACCW) Community Care Van.

"Many of these people have no one to lean on, no one to go to," said Akana. "Individualism is overrated. Community, faith, family and friends are the center of human hope."

The entire story of ACCW is a miracle. Currently running since October 2013, it has brought aid to our most needy citizens. Akana is a bright light helping others in the community. He continues to mentor new leadership, seek new and regular donors, welcome new volunteers and slowly expand services throughout the island.

ACCW, an outreach ministry of the Episcopal Church on Maui and Community Friends, is a nonprofit corporation organized by the Episcopal Diocese in Hawai'i. Its main goal is to deliver the essential needs of water, nutrition, hygiene, clothing and comfort to the needy--no questions asked.

ACCW helps all in need, regardless of their faith or lack thereof. The volunteers lead by example, following the parable of the Good Samaritan and Matthew's Gospel 10:42.

"We encourage the gospel, but enforce it on no one," said Akana. "It is not a requirement for our service."

"This is a community effort, and we are happy to have other churches and community partners on the island joining the ACCW team," he said. "Serving the homeless and their families via the van is an amazingly effective way to create a reliable distribution system to bring aid to our most disadvantaged citizens."

"I think the reality of how complex the homeless population is becomes so obvious when you ride with ACCW," said Rev. Cris South, deacon with Trinity-By-The-Sea Episcopal Church in Kihei.

Rev. South explained that the vast majority of the people are thankful and the volunteers have meaningful conversations with them. "The recipients are treated as friends and fellow-humans," she said.

"But," she went on, "there is the side of homelessness that involves drugs, alcohol and mental illness. We are expected to love these people equally, and it is a challenge to those of us with little experience in these areas. And yet, we do it."

"Addictions or illness do not matter when it comes to serving those in need," Rev. South continued.

"The challenge is to each of us--not to them," she said. "Talk about the opportunity to learn to love someone fully, right where they are at that moment!"

"Outreach means everything," Akana added.

Society spends billions of dollars on prevention and helping people avoid foreclosure, but far too few dollars are spent on those who have already lost everything, said Akana.

The volunteers make an immediate difference in the life of all that come to the ACCW Community Care Van.

"We create a bond with those who have given up on trusting society," Akana said.

"I have been honored to be a volunteer on a number of these runs," said Paula Baldwin of Trinity-By-The Sea.

"It is humbling, joy-filled and sobering," said Baldwin. "It produces handshakes of friendship. I stand with a child of God and watch his or her tense face relax and become shining with a smile as he or she receives water, a snack pack, toilet paper and band-aids. It is a gift to meet the people who wait for the van and be able to share basic needs."

Kit Hart from St. John's Episcopal Church in Kula describes a Sunday morning van run in Kihei.

"Our first stop at a north-end camp site found a group of gentlemen waiting for us," said Hart.

"Here's the van!" they shouted.

"Very polite appreciation was expressed for everything," Hart said. "There were smiles and easy laughter. A bond had been established here, even with different volunteers arriving each week.

"We set a leisurely pace this morning--time to talk story, time to listen to stories of Annie, a homeless wheelchair-bound woman with muscular dystrophy," Hart continued. "We witness her need for dresses she can slip on while sitting. We see a gentleman fighting a staph infection, who needs to go to the hospital as soon as possible. We hear from Fred, who shared his family history; his problems with work."

"I'm alcoholic," he said. "I know that I've lost a good job. My family has forgiven me 700 times seven. You have encouraged me. Maybe this time I will make it!"

"ACCW volunteers, along with all care providers, come up against feelings of inadequacy in the face of such need," Hart said. "Our response is to faithfully make our runs and meet as many immediate needs as we possibly can."

ACCW also helps clients locate and maintain partnership with other support organizations in the community. In fact, an information card is handed out that identifies available Maui County resources for meals, shelters, medical, dental, legal services, employment, addiction and abuse, as well as spiritual reading for anyone who requests it.

"Hopefully, there will be more approved shelters in the future, where the homeless can get help and possibly off the street," said Akana.

Until then, the ACCW team believes in addressing immediate basic needs. They are reaching out. They hope that all churches, corporations, business owners and individuals will help in any way they can.

"We need your help," Akana said. "Volunteer to become a van run leader or assistant. Help collect distribution items, prepare food or stock the van. Organize collection efforts at your church, school or business. Help us with putting on fundraisers and with financial donations."

"Volunteer. Donate. Pray."

For more information and to help or donate to this program, contact Akana or Mary Lou Mellinger at (808) 419-1637 or [acupofcoldwatermaui@gmail.com](mailto:acupofcoldwatermaui@gmail.com).

Donations are tax-deductible and can also be mailed to: A Cup of Cold Water, 2140 Main St., Wailuku HI 96793.

- See more at: <http://www.mauiweekly.com/page/content.detail/id/532363/Angels-on-Wheels.html?nav=13#sthash.8zG25ddL.dpuf>