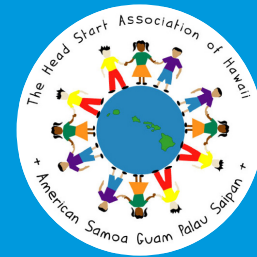


2023 HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START FACT SHEET

Program Resilience in Responding to COVID-19's Impact on Children, Families and Staff (2020-2022)



Hawaii Head Start/ Early Head Start

Head Start (HS)/Early Head Start (EHS) is a federally-funded program for income-eligible families with children from birth to five years of age, first established in 1965 as a social justice initiative under the Johnson Administration's "War on Poverty" Program. Designed as a comprehensive child development and family strengthening and support program, HS and EHS prioritizes children who are experiencing homelessness, are IDEA-eligible (have special needs), are English Language Learners, are in the foster care system, or whose families are SNAP beneficiaries. HS has been serving preschool children and families in Hawaii for over 55 years, and EHS has been serving pregnant women, infants and toddlers and their families for over 25 years, to ensure the health, well-being and school readiness of children for success in school and in life. Together, HS and EHS programs serve approximately 3,000 children and their families annually across six entities statewide.

Effects of the Pandemic

COVID-19's impact on Hawaii's families was undeniable. According to a July 2020 Bank of Hawaii Foundation Report, 51% of families with at least one child under the age of 18 saw their combined household income decline due to working fewer hours, being furloughed, reductions in pay, or not being able to work due to the lack of child care. Families' emotional well-being was also impacted with the economic uncertainty created by COVID-19, resulting in high levels of anxiety and stress, even among those who had not lost their source of income. **For HS and EHS families, whose household incomes fall at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty level - even with one or both parents working - these concerns were exacerbated. HS and EHS programs became essential safety nets for families in providing vital health, nutrition, childcare, housing and mental health/wellness services and supports.**



Continuous Programming In-spite of COVID-19

The implementation of stay-at-home orders issued by Governors in 2020 to combat the spread of the coronavirus resulted in the unprecedented closures of HS and EHS classrooms and home-visiting programs across the country, including here in Hawaii. An exception in Hawaii was classrooms involved in an Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership between Parents And Children Together and Kama'aina Kids, which remained open to provide child care for essential workers who were partnership families. The federal Office of Head Start (OHS), recognizing the need for flexibility to carefully plan for the eventual reopening of programs, while adhering to state and local guidance, awarded supplemental federal dollars to local HS and EHS grant recipients with which to respond to and recover from COVID. These funds (*CARES, CRRSA and ARPA

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Continuous Programming In-spite of COVID-19

dollars) allowed programs to adapt their usual processes and procedures to continue to provide comprehensive services to children and families, to partner with community agencies to leverage resources, and to support the mental health and wellness of their employees in order to meet the challenges in their professional as well as their personal lives.

- Screenings and developmental assessments were conducted virtually, to the extent possible, with telehealth and/or phone calls with families to assess if they had concerns for their children.
- As doctors' and dentists' offices began to open up again, families were reminded to make and keep appointments, with assurances that offices were safe for visits.
- Although early intervention and special education services were limited during the pandemic, HS/EHS staff worked diligently with their Departments of Health and Education partners to complete referrals for children for whom they had developmental and/or other concerns.
- Educational packets were mailed or dropped off at homes to families, with staff support in using the materials provided through virtual sessions or by phone.
- Staff linked families to "grab and go" meal opportunities through DOE sites and dropped off non-perishable foods and produce from food banks and other vendors.
- Diapers, formula, and health/hygiene products were delivered to support families' needs.
- Staff checked in with families minimally on a weekly basis to ensure that needs were being identified and families connected to services, even if virtually.
- Case management and networking supports were seen as especially critical to families at this time, many of whom were isolated and needed the ongoing social contact that staff provided them.
- Staff conducted weekly home visits virtually at first, then outside of the family home, and then began in-home visits while masking and practicing social distancing.

- Group socializations for EHS families were confined to outdoor venues and limited in size to ensure health and safety protocols could be managed effectively.



- Classrooms opened up in Spring 2021, with reduced numbers of children per day, and on alternating schedules.
- Staff followed the Hawaii Department of Health and CDC's health and safety guidelines regarding sanitation, temperature and well-child checks upon arrival, physical distancing, masking, and more frequent handwashing and outdoor activities during the program day.

Comprehensive services resumed in-person in 2022, including screenings and follow-up referrals as needed, developmental assessments to inform curriculum planning, family goal-setting activities, parent committee meetings, and staff/family conferences. Active recruitment of families resumed prior to school year 2022-2023, when the OHS announced its Full Enrollment Initiative and resumption of pre-pandemic practices for tracking and monitoring enrollment. To extend HS/EHS services to more families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beneficiaries became eligible for HS/EHS services as of April 2022. Additionally, programs navigated staffing challenges exacerbated by the pandemic by prioritizing strategies to address staff mental health, including enhanced staff wellness programs, increasing professional learning opportunities, and contracting more hours with mental health consultants to provide needed supports and resources to staff.



*Note: Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020; Coronavirus Relief and Response Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA); American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

Program Highlights



COVID relief funds were awarded to local HS and EHS grant recipients over the past 3 years for individual program recovery, response and renewal efforts to mitigate the pandemic toll on their children, families, staff and communities. The following are a sampling of how COVID funds were used.

KEY:

HCAP = Honolulu Community Action Program, Inc.

PACT = Parents And Children Together

MEO = Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc.

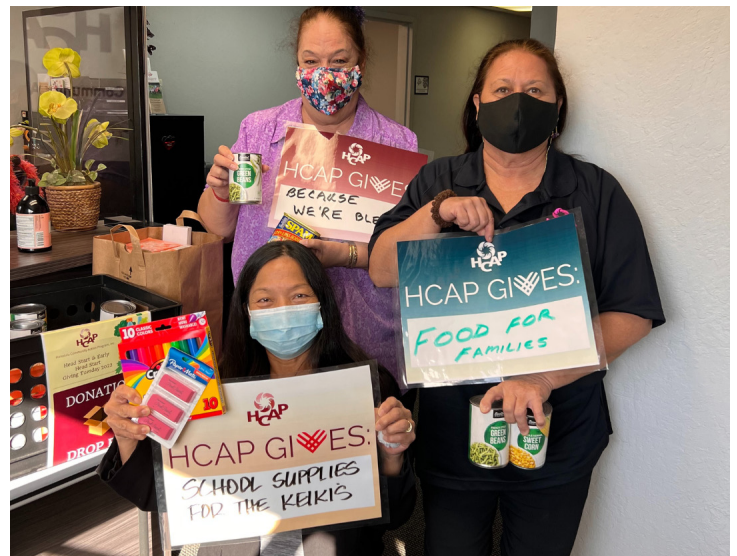
MFSS = Maui Family Support Services, Inc.

CFS = Child and Family Service

FSH = Family Support Hawaii

Providing for Basic Needs

- **MFSS:** provided bags of food, activities and resources to families at the Stand for Children Rally, hosted annually by MFSS.
- **FSH:** provided food boxes with fresh produce and canned goods to families on a bi-weekly basis, along with information about food distribution events and sites in their respective communities. Provided diapers/wipes and formula to families on a bi-weekly basis.
- **PACT:** partnered with various food vendors and community sites to distribute weekly meals at designated pick up areas in the community or delivered the meals to family homes.



Technology Support

- **HCAP:** purchased laptops and cell phones for all teaching and family support staff; purchased tablets (with internet data) for children to use for remote learning in their homes.
- **PACT:** purchased laptops for teachers, home visitors and family advocates; provided cell phone and internet subsidy (reimbursement) for staff when working remotely.

Quality Improvement

- **MFSS:** hired a part-time nurse to assist with COVID concerns families were having.
- **MEO:** provided eight additional school days in SY 21-22 to mitigate learning opportunities lost earlier for children.
- **HCAP:** extended the school years in 2020 and 2021 to keep children and families engaged in learning opportunities and to provide ongoing staff support.
- **PACT:** Hired temporary preschool and infant/toddler aides to assist with COVID-related duties (deep cleaning, additional child supervision, staff coverage); provided summer programming
- **CFS:** hired an additional staff as a “floating” teacher to use as needed; refurbished classroom curriculum materials.
- **FSH:** prepared and provided bi-weekly learning packets to families; checked in weekly to discuss the activities and how to extend learning opportunities using other materials found in the home; provided additional developmental support as needed.



Program Highlights



Recruitment and Retention

- **HCAP:** extended the school year through the summer to keep staff employed, as well as to extend learning for children; provided incentive bonuses to existing staff, as well as signing bonuses to recruit new staff; conducted a recruitment media campaign for staff and for children.
- **HCAP:** provided incentive bonuses to existing staff, as well as signing bonuses to recruit new staff; conducted a recruitment media campaign for staff and for children.
- **PACT:** conducted a family recruitment marketing campaign at three malls; posted recruitment signs on Oahu city buses on specific routes; conducted a social media campaign to recruit families; provided staff retention bonuses for staff who worked throughout the pandemic in 2021 and 2022.

Staff Wellness

- **MFSS:** distributed “mindfulness” packages (materials and handouts to support mental health, along with personalized notes) on a bi-weekly basis to staff; provided opportunities for self-care events within the community, including field trips and team-building activities.
- **MEO:** provided monthly staff wellness days, including opportunities to work on special projects of choice, engaging in off-site activities as a team, or to take the day off. A team of management staff attended UCLA’s “Institute on Organizational Staff Wellness” to bring innovative strategies back to the agency for implementation.
- **PACT:** purchased fitness and wellness equipment and supplies to promote self-care; distributed agency swag to staff; provided quarterly wellness and team-building days that included community volunteering, environmental clean-up and food-related activities.



Facilities

- **MEO:** installed open-air play structures with lower profiles to provide for better safety and supervision of children, along with new playground surfaces, at 6 preschool classroom sites.
- **HCAP:** replaced entire air conditioning system at the Head Start office, as well as installed UV lighting and air filtration devices.
- **FSH:** transformed a carport into a covered playground area and created a garden space for children to learn about gardening and to enjoy taking home produce grown.
- **PACT:** repaired and renovated classrooms and office spaces by painting, installing new flooring, fencing, cabinetry, playground shades, air conditioning units, and addressing plumbing and safety issues.
- **CFS:** installed new playground structures at two preschool sites; added outdoor sinks; addressed outdoor repair needs; installed air purifiers and hand-sanitizing machines.



This fact sheet was developed in collaboration between the Head Start Association of Hawaii and the Head Start State Collaboration Office (June 2023).