

Honoring Culture and Voice By Empowering the Community: How a Grassroots Community Center Became the Waipahu Safe Haven

Greg Uchishiba, Vail Matsumoto,
Stacy George, and Stephanie Furuta

Abstract

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center (further referred to as Waipahu Safe Haven) was developed using an asset-based Community Center Model approach that acknowledged its community members' needs and histories while drawing upon their individual and collective resiliency. This paper aims to outline the development of Waipahu Safe Haven and offer insights that can be valuable to others. It highlights a grassroots approach to fostering community empowerment, exemplified by creating a community center that adapts to meet the dynamic needs of the community. Key takeaways and lessons learned include respecting community relationships, leveraging the strengths of partnerships, and recognizing that members' voices and decision-making are essential. These lessons collectively enrich the understanding of individuals involved in sustained efforts to tackle pressing community issues in a culturally sensitive and inclusive matter. They also enrich the knowledge of those engaging in long-term work to address critical community needs in a culturally appropriate and inclusive way.

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center (further referred to as Waipahu Safe Haven or WSH), a community center located on the island of O'ahu, Hawai'i, primarily services Marshallese and Chuukese migrants who make up a large part of the Waipahu community. Founded on the voices and needs of its community, WSH stands as an example of innovation, providing a blueprint for other communities seeking to adopt a Community Center Model (Ottemiller & Awais, 2016; Uchishiba, 2018) and serve their diverse populations with a resilience framework lens (Fazey et al., 2007). Part of this blueprint includes developing relationships with migrant communities, sensitivity, respect, and the willingness to learn about and appreciate different cultures and backgrounds while responding to the local context of the community (Uchishiba, 2018; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

The story of WSH's development into a community center, and its struggles and successes, provides valuable insight and prompts reflection by other community organizations embarking on their own journeys toward establishing similar centers. WSH was shaped by fostering respectful and collaborative community relationships, involving the community and its members in decision-making processes, and forming partnerships with community groups. These collaborative efforts included partnerships

with key institutions like the Department of Education's (DOE) English Learner (EL) program and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's College of Education. The DOE EL program was directly tied to the center through its work with migrant students from schools in the community. Working with the center that supported the same students was a natural extension of this relationship. Meanwhile, the College of Education's engagement with the DOE and the Waipahu community schools was a natural partnership driven by mutual goals and shared dedication to serving the Waipahu community through their teacher candidates, mentors, and school-level liaisons. The convergence of these partnerships brought the authors of this piece together.

Navigating the Impact of Migration

Migration continues to be an ever-growing phenomenon, with over 110 million individuals worldwide projected to migrate by the end of 2024 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). Since 1986, Marshallese and Chuukese citizens have migrated to the United States under the Compacts of Free Association (COFA), a series of treaties between the U.S. and the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which are collectively referred to as the Freely Associated States. To compensate for the negative

impact and harm caused by nuclear testing and the military use of Micronesian islands and oceans, the COFA stipulated that the U.S. should confront the future, present, and past consequences of nuclear testing of the Freely Associated States (Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, 2020). This commitment was underscored in 1983, when the COFA was ratified by the voters of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, granting migrant (not immigrant) status, thereby allowing citizens to travel freely to the U.S. from their respective countries without visas or time limits. The COFA agreement guaranteed COFA migrants free entry and the right to live, work, and access health benefits in the U.S. As a result, many families continue to relocate to the U.S. for improved healthcare, employment, and educational opportunities (Pobutsky et al., 2009). This migration has notably impacted Hawai'i and communities like Waipahu, currently home to approximately 28,000 COFA migrants.

As migrant and immigrant populations settle into their host country, they bring a rich tapestry of cultural values, talents, skills, abilities, and networks, enriching the community during acculturation (Olcese et al., 2024). However, the language access for non-English speaking residents, or those with limited English, presents barriers to surviving and thriving in the community. According to Barbara Tom (personal communication, September 25, 2023), co-director of WSH, "Providing access to language and services was the first step towards understanding the challenges families faced within the community and a critical component in developing a successful center." Despite the challenge posed by language barriers for immigrant and migrant populations, the essence of acculturation occurs when individuals and communities maintain the original cultural identity and language while adjusting to the customs and norms of the host culture (Weinreich, 2009). Therefore, cultural and community resources can significantly facilitate the acculturation process. Community centers can serve as cultural hubs that provide their members with the tools and support they need to navigate the acculturation process. In doing so, a community center can play a pivotal role in providing educational programs and social services that help new migrants understand and navigate the norms, values, and framework of the host society.

Resilience Framework

Despite encountering cultural misunderstandings and the stress of migrating and adapting from one cultural context to another, when communities employ a strengths-based approach emphasizing group and community attributes, migrants may develop resilient coping mechanisms when confronting challenges. Establishing a successful, resilient community is a process that builds upon both individual attributes and external social and structural influences (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012; Pulvirenti & Mason, 2011). Resilience can influence the capacity for self-determination and a sense of agency within migrant communities (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012).

Fazey et al. (2007) state that to maintain resilience in social and ecological contexts, societies must be able to manage their adaptive capacity to cope with change. This is called "community capacity" (Aspen Institute, 1996). Resilience, as defined by Robinson and Carson (2015), is:

[T]he ability to respond to adversity by presenting positive adaptability to change (e.g., Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Luthar et al., 2000). It stresses the importance of the socio-cultural context in which individuals operate, echoing research on communities that directly links community development pathways to particular economic and social circumstances (e.g., Chaskin, 2008; Flora & Flora, 2008; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2008). (p. 115)

The resilience framework outlined by Fazey et al. (2007, p. 376) identifies four requirements of resilient societies:

1. The will to maintain social-ecological resilience
2. Knowledge about the impacts of current behavior and the direction of change
3. Proaction
4. The capacity to change behavior

The premise of this framework can be applied not only to societies and communities but to organizations as well. A society, community, or organization's ability to adapt to its environment, context, and unexpected events impacts its ability to survive and thrive.

Hegney et al. (2008), as cited in Kirmayer et al. (2009), discuss vital interventions and strategies for promoting resilience in Aboriginal communities.

These key interventions and strategies include validating cultural identity, language revitalization, building social capital, and building programs that give local control and voice. Considering this indigenous viewpoint is essential, as the Chuukese and Marshallese communities in Hawai'i have similarly endured prolonged periods of colonialism in their native islands and governmental oversight of their COFA treaties.

Acculturation

To foster a sense of continuity and support, WSH has created an environment that preserves individuals' ties to their culture of origin while embracing elements of the new culture. It is, therefore, important to understand that the acculturation process is shaped by numerous factors, such as an individual's readiness to adjust, the support of their community, and cultural parallels between their country of origin and the host nation. Along with adopting new cultural norms and values, acculturation involves mobilizing one's strengths, resources, persistence, and language ability to overcome inevitable challenges, all demonstrating resilience (Hormozi et al., 2018). This emphasis on resilience underscores the importance of not overlooking the collective values within migrant communities.

Consequently, acculturation is not just a process of cultural exchange; it's a process of resilience and coping with stressors associated with cultural transitions. As individuals navigate the complexities of integrating into a new culture, they accumulate experiences and skills that reinforce their ability to address future challenges. In understanding the complexities of these challenges, WSH aimed to create a community center that offered support and resources so individuals could develop resilience while undergoing acculturation.

The Community Center Model

"People working with refugee communities who have an understanding of collective values will be motivated to adopt more inclusive practices that consider the person's family, tribe-clan, significant others, ethnic community and leaders" (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012, p. 69). In line with this, the Community Center Model (Uchishiba, 2018) was created to foster resiliency, relationships, leadership, and connections to other organizations. Ottemiller and Awais (2016) concluded that community model goals should be centered around community needs

and be in collaboration with individuals within the community. The Community Center Model operates on a community-driven approach, serving as a space where families' assets are acknowledged and leveraged as valuable contributions to the community. It empowers parents and children, creating an environment that fosters "healthier families, increases self-esteem, and impacts school performance" (Uchishiba, 2018, p. 155).

Establishing the center's goals involves assessing the community's strengths and resources, focusing on objectives such as "stigma reduction, empowerment of participants, and an increased sense of social inclusion for those marginalized in the community" (Ottemiller & Awais, 2016, p. 146). This process aligns with cultivating and nurturing relationships with community members and leaders, processes that are essential for laying the foundation for building trust and ultimately diminishing community stigma (Ottemiller & Awais, 2016). As a result, connecting with families allows us to appreciate and cultivate each family's unique contributions, as families possess a wealth of knowledge that can benefit the community.

The emphasis on family engagement aligns with the role of the community center, which can serve as a hub to support the language and identities of people for whom English is not their first language. Ponzone (2015) conducted a qualitative study on Dutch migrant volunteer community organizations (MVCOs), which are similar in structure to the Community Center Model, and found that "marginalized immigrants are hesitant to use formal services, often because they lack trust or familiarity with the institutions or because the formal services do not directly meet their needs" (p. 43). Thus, grassroots organizations such as MVCOs and community centers "appear to be more effective at reaching low-income, marginalized immigrant groups that are not easily reached" (p. 43), making a Community Center Model a natural and necessary fit for Hawai'i's ethnic and cultural diversity. In these diverse communities across Hawai'i, immigrant and migrant families bring their traditions and customs, seamlessly blending them into the fabric of the local culture. Consequently, appreciating individuals' cultural knowledge and values becomes critical to establishing an authentic, supportive environment for all (Uchishiba, 2018). This was the basis under which WSH was conceptualized, innovated, and constructed to meet the needs of the Chuukese and Marshallese migrant students and their families.

Ethics and Positionality

In telling the story of WSH, the authors' positionality is deeply influenced by personal and professional experiences, molding their perspectives and interpretations. The authors intentionally set aside their perspectives when collaborating with individuals in the WSH community, recognizing the influence a Western lens could have on their cultural interpretation. The authors' intentional lens also took into account the history of Western researchers exploiting the lives, stories, and histories of those they were writing about. They aimed to share the participants' narratives according to the participants' culture, experiences, and voices. The authors' intention was to serve as a conduit for the community members to share the WSH story.

The authors also acknowledged themselves as "outsiders," which posed a risk of unintentionally misrepresenting the cultural nuances and challenges faced by the immigrant and migrant community. Additionally, the authors' close collaboration, active engagement, and relationships with the community center and the individuals of WSH may have inadvertently biased their representation of the center, or the interpretations of the people, culture, history, and context of the community center. To mitigate any potential bias and ensure that the voices of the community were not misrepresented, member checks were conducted with individuals to verify the data's accuracy and ensure credibility. Striving to highlight the voices of marginalized people and foster a more inclusive dialogue with the WSH community underscores the commitment to reflexivity and sensitivity in this approach.

Waipahu Safe Haven

Through its Community Center Model, WSH supports a large number of Marshallese and Chuukese migrants, aiming to "provide holistic programs and services with language access, and to serve as a beneficial, guiding resource to enable individuals to attain success, and empower children and families to become self-sustaining, positive contributors to the community" (Waipahu Safe Haven, n.d.). The center originated from a grassroots initiative to address a community need: providing local students in the area a safe environment to study after school, along with the essential technology to complete their homework. As time progressed, the needs of the immigrant and migrant communities became increasingly evident through the voices of their community members.

Services thus expanded to encompass broader societal issues, including language and healthcare access, as well as economic sustainability.

In addition to meeting the community's needs, WSH community center endeavors to preserve Marshallese and Chuukese cultures, making the inclusion of community voices essential to its development. The individual contributions and voices of the people involved in WSH's development were fundamental to its growth and the success of its model. Key figures in the establishment of WSH included Barbara Tom, the founder and co-director, Dr. Greg Uchishiba, the center's co-director, and the steering committee members who elevated the community's voices and brought them to the forefront. Highlighting the invaluable contributions of these individuals underscores the collaborative spirit that guided the development of WSH, and the power of the community in shaping its story.

The Birth of a Community Center

In 2012, Tom, a retired public health nurse, established WSH with a vision of establishing a safe environment for Chuukese and Marshallese children in the Waipahu community. She aimed to provide a space where students could receive assistance with homework and have access to computers, printers, and the internet. Recognizing that schools only offered computer access until 3 p.m. and the local library could not accommodate the number of students who wanted to use the technology, Tom identified issues of digital equity and accessibility. To address these challenges, she collaborated with Lorrie Kanno, the program director of Weed and Seed Hawai'i, to secure a space for WSH's activities. Weed and Seed offered a small two-bedroom apartment in a public housing building. Initially focusing on providing computer access and academic support to students, Tom also engaged adults in the community by offering a space for a women's sewing group. This informal gathering not only provided a platform for socialization and mutual learning among adults, but also enabled them to sell their products for additional income. This grassroots initiative marked the beginning of a community-driven effort to foster multilingualism, cultural preservation, and the empowerment of community voice.

Upon establishing the center, Tom enlisted Uchishiba, the English Learner District Educational Specialist (ELDES) in the Hawai'i Department of Education's (HIDOE) Leeward District, recognizing the potential for a fruitful

collaboration. Tom believed that merging their efforts and partnering with the ELDES in HIDOE would be highly beneficial in addressing language access and barriers. Uchishiba played a pivotal role in servicing schools and supporting the needs of the English-learner population in the community. Collaborating closely with the HIDOE school-home community liaisons, also known as the DOE Bilingual School Home Assistants (BSHAs), Uchishiba facilitated and supported the role of BSHAs serving as interpreters during school meetings, conducting outreach to parents, and encouraging cultural awareness among Waipahu families. This collaborative effort between Uchishiba and Tom proved instrumental in WSH's mission to foster strong connections between schools, families, and the community, many of whom benefited from WSH. Sharing similar visions and philosophies, Tom and Uchishiba believed in building the center on the strengths of its community members, their cultures, and experiences, with the goal of advocating for acculturation rather than assimilation. Together, they developed interconnected systems that accelerated the center's capacity, including recruiting AmeriCorps Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) to support and advance the center's initiatives.

The Steering Committees: Harnessing the Voices from the Community

Early in its development, the center focused on creating a system that would help support community-based leadership and sustainability, which was a unique necessity to support geographically similar but culturally disparate groups. Uchishiba encouraged Tom to create steering committees from the Marshallese and Chuukese communities to emphasize the members' voices and needs, and support their acculturation into their new environment. Thus, two steering committees were established: one representing the Marshallese community and the other the Chuukese community, to deliberate on relevant issues within their respective communities and address challenges confronting their families. Two school-home community liaisons fluent in the respective languages, who were also the BSHAs, led each steering committee. The liaisons served as vital conduits for conveying the steering committee's needs to Tom and Uchishiba. Tom recounts, "Based on what they told us and the needed resources, we

found resources to bring here [to WSH]" (personal communication, September 25, 2023). Each steering committee was comprised of 10 to 15 community members brought together through the efforts of the community liaisons. Meetings were held in the committees' home languages, and only community members were in attendance.

At first, Uchishiba and the community liaisons collaborated to determine the topics before each steering committee meeting. These topics were kept flexible and remained open to adjustments. Maintaining consistent attendance and engagement of the committees required the two community liaison leaders to adeptly navigate their roles and committee member involvement within their cultural groups. One community liaison shared:

The creation of the steering committee, which involves parents, has been helping members of the Chuukese community to address many of their problems as the newest migrants to the state of Hawai'i. This group has discussed many issues from job discrimination, medical assistance, health insurance, social services assistance, public assistance which includes financial and free social services, the language problem, housing discrimination, and many more. The fact that there is the steering committee, the group is able to meet resourceful people and able to address many of their concerns and perhaps problems. So, the steering committee has become a vehicle for members to come together and discuss their problems and solutions. This group also discusses issues such as problems at school like excessive absences and tardiness, and problems with teachers and the English language. So, in short, without the steering committee, nobody from the decision-makers will realize that there is a problem for these people. (personal communication, January 20, 2021)

The structure of the steering committee was essential in ensuring that the voices of community members were heard, valued, and addressed. The steering committee "became a vehicle to give voice to the community" (Uchishiba, 2018, p. 154), a structure incorporating key aspects of Fazey's adaptive capacity framework centered around resiliency. Specifically, it allowed its

members to maintain social-ecological resilience and be proactive.

After each committee convened, the community liaisons relayed community and committee needs to Uchishiba and Tom at separate weekly meetings. This core community center group included Uchishiba, Tom, two community liaisons, an AmeriCorps VISTA grant writer and data collector, and two AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer capacity builders. The group collaboratively discussed the steering committees' feedback, issues, possible solutions, and weekly workflow. As a result of these discussions, Uchishiba and Tom coordinated with city, state, and nonprofit organizations to support the community's needs. This multi-entity coordination is illustrated through the health access WSH provides to the community. Tom shared that "members are given access to health information and access to two legal aids who are bilingual in their [family's] home language and help them access health insurance. We also have the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) coming once a month, per requests from the individuals in the community who had difficulty navigating SNAP with the application" (personal communication, September 25, 2023).

Tom and Uchishiba listened to the community's needs through the steering committee meetings. They offered free access to resources, including opportunities for an after-school tutorial with bilingual tutors to assist parents with their child's homework. The tutorial eventually expanded into a larger partnership with three University of Hawai'i College of Education instructors and their students. This partnership between educators and WSH was mutually beneficial, especially regarding the acculturation process. Rather than educators in the community expecting students to assimilate, the partnership encouraged pre-service teachers to engage in acculturation by learning about Marshallese and Chuukese cultures and reciprocally sharing their Western culture. These shared learning experiences allowed all parties to be teachers and learners and aid their acculturation.

Over time, WSH developed and improved organizational processes to meet the ever-evolving needs of its members, demonstrating its resilience and asset-based philosophy. WSH's steering committees utilize a process in which community concerns are addressed in a socially responsive manner and take into account its members' voices. As Kirmayer et al. state, "Resilience of

the community itself involves the dynamics of the social response to challenges that threaten to damage or destroy the community" (2009, p. 66).

Both steering committees, led by their respective community liaisons, remain self-governing entities, with members actively supporting others in their community. Self-governance was not an original steering committee goal, as they focused on immediate needs and short-term planning. Over time, however, an organic shift towards self-governance occurred and empowered the committee to develop solutions involving the community's needs. Through their culture and lived experiences, self-governance emerged as a means for the community to forge connections they had long sought and allowed them to close disparities in social capital. Under the leadership of their respective community liaisons, they navigated human and institutional resources to address their communities' evolving needs. The Marshallese community liaison, Eola Lokebol, reflected on where their steering committee is today:

The steering committee offers the community a safe space where participants have a voice, can learn, and build relationships. This committee is staffed with bilingual members that are willing to provide support to programs, such as academic, medical, housing, job and legal resources for immigrants that better prepares them for social development and economic growth. They also serve as active registered members who recruit students to a learning place for students of all ages who need help outside of school hours—which includes tutors and academic materials, creating engaging and collaborative students that will succeed in the community and in their personal lives. Marshallese culture is a very close-knit community who thrives better working together. This committee empowers community members by collaborating and offering services with language access, participation in school educational projects, community outreach programs, health workshops and more. They also share their unique culture with the community by sharing their legends and stories, cultural songs and dances, food, clothing, their navigation and

handicrafting skills, while learning to adapt to the Western culture. (personal communication, January 20, 2021)

Similarly, the Chuukese community liaison, Reverend Setiro Paul, shared his insight on the impact of the steering committee on the community:

The Chuukese steering committee has become the eyes and ears for the Chuukese population residing in the Waipahu to enlighten them [the Chuukese community] on the major issues that will affect their livelihood. This committee gathers issues and concerns from members. It has also become the arm of the Chuukese community by participating in State of Hawai'i programs and activities to represent the indigenous Chuukese people. The steering committee members are, for now, becoming the foundation in Hawai'i to help preserve and pass on the Chuukese customs, traditional skills, language, and culture to Chuukese children who are born in Hawai'i and have no understanding of their cultural heritage and language at all. (personal communication, April 22, 2024)

By hearing and valuing the voices of marginalized community members, WSH recognized the inequalities that impacted them and attempted to, as Blodgett et al. promote, "better understand their experiences and to identify strategies for social change that are developed by and for group members" (2011, p. 523). Today, the steering committees remain self-governing, with members actively supporting one another and driving community initiatives forward. Applying the process of acculturation and a resilience framework into the WSH's foundation allowed its members to lead, own, and create pathways for the health and success of its community.

Lessons Learned

Reflecting on WSH's journey, several critical elements have contributed to its success. These include prioritizing language accessibility, valuing the assets of community members, fostering trusting relationships, actively involving families in decision-making processes, and maintaining strong partnerships with various community organizations. The latter three are

validated by Henderson and Mapp's (2002) nine recommendations, which include building respectful community relationships, involving community members as decision-makers, and building strong connections with community partners. Inherent in these key components are their strength-based approaches, which were understood as part of the community's capacity and resilience.

Community Members as Decision-Makers

The steering committees actively encourage community members to participate in the decision-making processes and express their opinions, which play a vital role in shaping the direction of the center and its programs. However, during the formation and operation of the Chuukese and Marshallese steering committees, an unexpected issue arose concerning fairness between the two groups. As the center expanded and membership grew, communication barriers and cultural disparities became evident between the Marshallese and Chuukese members. Initially, Chuukese and Marshallese VISTAs alternated between the two steering committees annually. However, the Chuukese steering committee members expressed their desire to work with their own Chuukese VISTA on an ongoing basis. As a result, volunteers from each cultural group were recruited to provide ongoing support tailored to the specific needs of each cultural community. This experience significantly influenced program management, resource allocation negotiations between the two groups, and the recognition of each cultural community's voices and strengths in supporting the community's overall well-being. It also underscored issues related to acculturation, as each cultural group advocated for separate steering committees and resources tailored to their needs, rather than assimilating into a single group, which could have resulted in disregarding or compromising the specific needs of one group over the other. Embracing and respecting the cultural differences of each group played a crucial role in the process of acculturating within a larger community framework while operating under a unified community center.

Building Respectful Community Relationships

An essential lesson learned was the importance of embracing diverse cultural perspectives. Initially, Tom established the women's sewing group to provide a space for sewing and fostering camaraderie. However, over the years, the members

charted their course and began creating traditional handicrafts, such as baskets, lei (garlands made of flowers), and other items from their home islands. This initiative led to the establishment of individual businesses for group members and even attracted a visit from the President of the Marshall Islands. Currently, WSH is exploring partnerships with communities in the Marshall Islands, where items will be donated from Hawai'i in exchange for indigenous handicraft materials to be utilized by WSH groups. Embracing multiple cultural perspectives enhances community capacity and resilience, bolstering the confidence and skills of both individual community members and the organization as a whole. This approach, rooted in the recognition and utilization of cultural strengths, aligns closely with the promotion of acculturation over assimilation. Highlighting diverse cultural perspectives within the broader group emphasizes the foundation of the center and the strengths-based approach upon which it was built.

Building Strong Connections with Community Partners

Establishing strong connections with community partners has been another crucial aspect of WSH's evolution. Since its inception in 2012, WSH had transformed from a modest homework spot and sewing group into a cherished community hub where individuals of all ages exchange cultural knowledge and foster healthy family dynamics. Those committed to advancing the center's mission continually innovate and devise new strategies to engage beneficiaries and cultivate partnerships that not only fulfill the center's objectives but also adapt to the changing needs of the community. By leveraging the strengths and assets of its members while encouraging resilience, WSH and its partnerships are unique to Waipahu, yet they serve as a model for the development of community centers elsewhere, emphasizing the importance of strong connections with the larger community and providing support for people in both ordinary and challenging times. The connections and partnerships forged by WSH over time contribute significantly to the resilience of the center and its members.

Conclusion

Over time, through meticulous planning and a profound commitment to their cultures, the foundation of WSH was established using the valuable assets brought by community members. Built upon that foundation, diverse programs have

been developed that are indispensable to both Chuukese and Marshallese families, as well as the Waipahu community at large. Given that these community assets directly empower individuals and foster self-determination and a sense of agency, individuals and groups have thrived under the guidance of and collaboration with WSH.

The thriving of WSH members was facilitated by the process of acculturation, which enabled the community to share and celebrate their culture while also respecting and valuing the culture of others. This cultural exchange played a significant role in the process of acculturation, alongside the overarching theme of resilience. In tandem with resilience was the practice of coping. Despite the development of WSH as a cornerstone of the community, the stressors within the community persisted, and the protective factors associated with resilience helped the community fortify itself and persevere. By employing a resiliency framework, community members were equipped to address issues such as acculturation, thereby preparing them to respond effectively to various challenges and needs.

WSH utilizes the network of services, organizations, and programs to address the diverse needs of its community. The center's success is not contingent upon size, finances, or status, but rather on the recognition of its value by community members and the collective efforts to build upon community assets. By creating opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transfer and fostering decision-making autonomy, WSH empowers individuals to cultivate pride in their identity and cultural heritage. Acculturation is embraced to honor the unique needs, strengths, and values each culture represents at the center, ensuring that the community voices are heard and respected. Members' life experiences are validated and understood through dialogues and the structured steering committee. As noted by Uchishiba (2018), "The Community Center [Model] created has the potential to serve as a model for others to empower their communities and treat its members as assets. The center provided an alternate space to carry out their language policies and practices and provided an ongoing conduit to understanding their diverse needs" (p. 155). WSH thus serves as a blueprint for community empowerment, valuing members as indispensable resources. It offered Waipahu's diverse communities a space to tap into their resilience, amplify their collective voice, and harness their assets, providing a model for other communities to follow suit.

References

- Aspen Institute. (1996). *Measuring community capacity building: A workbook in progress for rural communities*. Aspen Institute Rural Economic Policy Program, Washington D.C.
- Blodgett, A.T., Schinke, R.J., Smith, B., Peltier, D., & Pheasant, C. (2011). In indigenous words: Exploring vignettes as a narrative strategy for presenting the research voices of Aboriginal community members. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(6), 522–533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411409885>
- Chaskin, R.J. (2008). Resilience, community, and resilient communities: Conditioning contexts and collective action. *Child Care in Practice*, 14(1), 65–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13575270701733724>
- Fazey, I., Fazey, J.A., Fischer, J., Sherren, K., Warren, J., Noss, R.F., & Dovers, S.R. (2007). Adaptive capacity and learning to learn as leverage for social-ecological resilience. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 5(7), 375–380. [https://doi.org/10.1890/1540-9295\(2007\)5\[375:ACALTL\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1890/1540-9295(2007)5[375:ACALTL]2.0.CO;2)
- Flora, C.B., & Flora, J.L. (2008). *Rural communities: Legacy and change* (3rd edition). Routledge.
- Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (2020). *COFA migrants in Hawaii*. Hawaii DBEDT Research Economic Analysis Division. https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/economic/reports/COFA_Migrants_in_Hawaii_Final.pdf
- Hegney, D., Ross, H., Baker, P., Rogers-Clark, C., King, C., Buikstra, E., Watson-Luke, A., McLachlan, K., & Stallard, L. (2008). *Building resilience in rural communities: Toolkit*. The University of Queensland and University of Southern Queensland. <https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:327260>
- Henderson, A.T., & Mapp, K.L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. <https://sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>
- Hormozi, T., Miller, M.M., & Banford, A. (2018). First-generation Iranian refugees' acculturation in the United States: A focus on resilience. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 40, 276–283. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-018-9459-9>
- Hutchinson, M., & Dorsett, P. (2012). What does the literature say about resilience in refugee people? Implications for practice. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 3(2), 55–78. <https://doi.org/10.36251/josi.55>
- Kirmayer, L.J., Sehdev, M., Whitley, R., Dandeneau, S.F., & Isaac, C. (2009). Community resilience: Models, metaphors and measures. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 5(1), 62–117. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijih/article/view/28978/23910>
- Luthar, S. (2006). Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. In D. Cicchetti & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology: Risk, disorder, and adaptation* (pp. 739–795). Wiley.
- Luthar, S. & Cicchetti, D. (2000). The construct of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies. *Development and Psychopathology*, 12(4), 857–885. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579400004156>
- Luthar, S., Cicchetti, D. & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development*, 71(3), 543–562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00164>
- Masten, A.S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227>
- Olcese, M., Cardinali, P., Madera, F., Camilleri, A.P., & Migliorini, L. (2024). Migration and community resilience: A scoping review. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 98, 101924. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2023.101924>
- Ottmiller, D.D. & Awais, Y. J. (2016). A model for art therapists in community-based practice. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 33(3), 144–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2016.1199245>
- Pobutsky, A.M., Krupitsky, D., & Yamada, S. (2009). Micronesian migrant health issues in Hawaii: Part 2: An assessment of health, language, and key social determinants of health. *Californian Journal of Health Promotion*, 7(2), 32–55. <https://doi.org/10.32398/cjhp.v7i2.2013>
- Ponzoni, E. (2015). Reframing cooperation: Challenges in overcoming tensions between professional services and volunteer organizations providing parenting support in immigrant communities. *Social Service Review*, 89(1), 40–76. <https://doi.org/10.1086/680044>
- Pulvirenti, M., & Mason, G. (2011). Resilience and survival: Refugee women and violence. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 23(1), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2011.12035908>
- Robinson, G.M., & Carson, D.A. (2015). Resilient communities: Transitions, pathways and resourcefulness. *The Geographical Journal*, 182(2), 114–122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12144>

Uchishiba, G.M. (2018). *Engaged language policy and practices in a local Marshallese and Chuukese community in Hawai'i* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Ungar, M. (2008). Resilience across cultures. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 218–235. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl343>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024). *Global appeal 2024*. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/global-appeal-2024-6383>

Waipahu Safe Haven. (n.d.). *Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant and Migrant Resource Center*. <https://www.waipahusafehaven.com>

Warren, M.R., & Mapp, K.L. (2011). *A match on dry grass: Community organizing as a catalyst for school reform*. Oxford University Press.

Weinreich, P. (2009). 'Enculturation,' not 'acculturation': Conceptualising and assessing identity processes in migrant communities. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33(2), 124–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.12.006>

About the Authors

Greg Uchishiba is an English learner education specialist with the Hawai'i Department of Education. Vail Matsumoto is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Stacy George is an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Stephanie Furuta is a specialist in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.