

Testimony
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Director of Business and Community Development

The Big Island Substance Abuse Council has been responding to those who are reaching out for help from addiction and alcoholism for many years. This is evident by the forty (40) years of service this non-profit organization has been operating here on the Island of Hawaii. Drugs are not a new phenomenon to the island, but much has changed in recent years. What is a phenomenon is the incredible impact that the drug methamphetamine known as "Ice" has created. Few Big Island residents can state that they have not been touched in one way or another by this terrible drug. Addiction, violence, and crime now recognize "Ice" as the motive or reason behind the action.

At the Big Island Substance Abuse Council the impact began in the mid 1990's, as the number of consumers presenting themselves with "Ice" as their "drug of choice" began a steady increase. In the year 2000, "Ice" became the most common addiction being treated at our programs. Today, the number of individuals in Big Island Substance Abuse Council programs who will report addiction or abuse of methamphetamine is overwhelming. All ages, all cultures, all income levels, no one is ignored by this addiction.

There are many opinions as to why this trend has occurred. These opinions are as diverse as the people who occupy this beautiful island, and the speculation will undoubtedly continue. The Big Island Substance Abuse Council has moved beyond the question why and is now looking to the solution. Local, State and Federal Government Departments began efforts to reach out to the people of Hawaii County and take a lead in developing the strategy and solution to the problem. Partnerships and collaborative efforts have begun a new trend related to "Ice" that is "Healing Our Island". A combination of law enforcement, prevention and treatment efforts has resulted in a comprehensive approach to turn the tide. Details related to the Big Island Substance Abuse Council's role in these efforts include the development and implementation of many new programs and opportunities for those impacted by "Ice" addiction. The primary objective is to increase capacity of programs while reducing barriers to accessing services.

Providing services to children and adolescents is one of the primary objectives. The Big Island Substance Abuse Council is now in all of Hawaii County's Public High Schools. A full time substance abuse counselor is available in the familiar environment of the school and can be accessed in confidence. Adolescents who present evidence of substance use can also be referred directly. The behaviors and patterns that lead to substance abuse are addressed where and when it is appropriate, not after it has progressed to addiction.

For the adolescents who have progressed past early intervention, the Big Island Substance Abuse Council is a partner in developing and implementing a comprehensive Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Program. This experiential program is designed on the Big Island, by Big Island Professionals, for Big Island kids.

These adolescent programs are provided in addition to the Outpatient Treatment services established by Big Island Substance Abuse Council in Kona, Waimea and Hilo many years ago. These programs work directly with Judiciary and family referrals for adolescents appropriate for an outpatient level of care such as, The Big Island Juvenile Drug Court. Treatment services are provided to this target population while the Drug Court monitors progress and provides accountability through incentives and sanctions for the participant. This program has demonstrated

excellent outcomes throughout the mainland and expectations are high as the Big Island Drug Court is implemented in Hawaii County.

Families have experienced a significant amount of turmoil and damage due to “Ice” as demonstrated through increased domestic violence, child abuse, and homelessness. The Big Island Substance Abuse Council responded to this community need through the development of Therapeutic Living Programs. These homes accommodate target populations in a homelike setting with the reinforcement of full time staffing. Programs for new mothers and their infant children and the home for single fathers and their kids are examples of how the Therapeutic Living Programs reach out to meet the specific needs of the families.

With twenty-four (24) programs throughout the Island of Hawaii, the Big Island Substance Abuse Council continues to provide effective and efficient services to those in need. Regardless of age, cultural identity or income level our programs are developed to provide immediate access and to reduce barriers to appropriate treatment and prevention services.

The Big Island Substance Abuse Council is honored to be a part of the solution in the efforts of “Healing Our Island”. The responses to community needs and development of solutions to the “Ice” epidemic were possible only through a collaborative and strategic effort of everyone involved. Support from our government officials such as Senator Daniel Inouye, Governor Linda Lingle, and County of Hawaii Mayor Harry Kim provided leadership and inspiration to stand firm in the battle for freedom from this drug.

While much progress has been made, and the efforts have been rewarded with success there remains tremendous need. Support for the individuals, families, and communities throughout the Island of Hawaii will be necessary as the work continues. Many rural areas hit hard by economic turmoil and the devastation of “Ice” still have little or no services for their residents. Longer durations of treatment have been proven effective for methamphetamine addiction, but treatment episodes continue to be limited in length. Specific target populations such as those with co-occurring disorders struggle to find appropriate care. The island of Hawaii continues to need the support of our Federal agencies to maintain the course and develop all of the resources necessary to overcome this epidemic. Please continue providing the funding opportunities and support that have allowed the progress to occur and will continue to support the efforts towards “Healing Our Island”.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Director of Business and Community Development