A recent survey of students across the UH System found that “56% experienced at least one form of basic needs insecurity, including 39% who experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days, 40% who experienced housing insecurity in the previous year, and 8% who experienced homelessness in the previous year.” Indeed, the evidence that many students have difficulty meeting their basic needs is widespread. In this quarter’s Kūkulu Kaiāulu Hōʻike Hapahā Makahiki (Quarterly Impact Report) Winter 2024, Lindsey Millerd, President of the Associated Students of University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu (ASUHWO) gives voice to the needs of students. We know that if basic needs are not met, students will not be able to stay in school and graduate. Dr. Loea Akiona, chair of UH West O‘ahu’s Kōmike Kumu Ola Basic Needs Committee provides an overview of the work we are doing to meet our students’ needs.

Currently, UH West O‘ahu provides students with mental health services, campus transportation, clothing through the Campus Closet, and free menstrual products through the Ma‘i Movement. In the fall of 2023, Kōmike Kumu Ola joined UH Mānoa’s Student Life program in a pilot partnership with Aloha Harvest to recover unused food products that are distributed through our new Food Vault program. Read the story of Alex, one of our many grateful students. In truth, we know that there is more we need to do.

There are many ways you can support UH West O‘ahu’s Kōmike Kumu Ola Basic Needs Committee efforts! We hope that this issue of our quarterly report inspires you to think of how you might support the basic needs of our UH West O‘ahu students. Please help us to ensure our students fulfill their dreams. They are our future professionals and leaders!

E mālama pono!

Maenette K.P. Ah Nee-Benham
Chancellor, UH West O‘ahu
Increasing food access contributes to sense of community

On the first day of the spring 2024 semester at UH West O'ahu, a student named Alex stopped by a booth and fulfilled two important objectives.

Alex, who picked up bread and fresh produce at the Food Vault Hawai‘i West booth, said: “UH West O‘ahu is always trying to build community, especially coming out of COVID and all of the insecurities that we faced as a community, and families, and individuals during that time. I feel like this serves as a way to build community, and sends a larger message of how UH West O‘ahu is trying to support students.”

UH West O‘ahu offers free, fresh produce via the Food Vault Hawai‘i West program. A total of 328 pre-packaged sets were given away over nine distribution days spanning from October to December 2023. The service continues in the spring 2024 semester.

UH West O‘ahu is participating in the pilot program with UH Mānoa Student Life & Development’s Food Vault Hawai‘i program. Food Vault Hawai‘i has a partnership with Aloha Harvest, the largest food rescue and redistribution organization in Hawai‘i, to recover unsold produce and bread from designated sites. UH West O‘ahu’s designated site is the Hawai‘i Farm Bureau’s Millani Farmers’ Market.

“As part of this program, we commit to recovering whatever the farmers’ market vendors would like to donate,” said Dr. Jan Javinar, specialist faculty in student affairs at UH West O‘ahu. “On Monday mornings, a team volunteers to pre-bag the goods, working to ensure that there’s an equitable mix of items in each bag, given that Sunday’s recovery.”

The distribution is on select Mondays and Tuesdays throughout the semester at the Nāulu Center. A total of 1,190 pounds of food — or 132 pounds per week — were distributed to students over the nine distribution days in the fall.

Organizers estimate an average of 36 students per distribution day. The pre-bagged goods — which included items such as kale, papaya, and various breads — are valued at about $12 to $15 each. Typically the sets are distributed within one hour. Students are not required to show proof of need; they only need to provide a student ID or UH username to receive the food. The message it sends to students is that: “You are inherently part of the community and you deserve to be fed. That is part of the underlying message,” Alex added.