



PROOF POSITIVE

Serving Up HUGS For Keiki On Medical Journeys

By Alex Wereszczynskij, development director with Help, Understanding & Group Support (HUGS)

When Chase's mom asked him what he remembers when he was sick with cancer, she was expecting him to remember being poked with needles, spending nights in the hospital or feeling constantly sick. Instead, the 9-year-old Help, Understanding & Group Support (HUGS) child remembered visiting the HUGS House and playing in our sandbox, as well as the HUGS hospital volunteer who visited and played with him when he was hospitalized.

Today, Chase is in remission and is a healthy boy who loves sports and playing with his younger sister. Even

If we can somehow improve the quality of life for families caring for a seriously ill child, we will have done our part.

though Chase is doing well now, his family will always be a HUGS family.

This is what HUGS is all about: supporting families on their medical journey. If we can somehow improve the quality of life for families caring for a seriously ill child, we will have done our part.

HUGS is a local nonprofit that was started in 1982 by a group of volunteers from Uni-

ty Church. They recognized the stressors faced by families with a seriously ill child. HUGS provides families with programs and services at no charge, and we serve children from birth to 21 years of age who have been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Our ultimate goal is to ensure families don't have to face their journey alone.

HUGS serves more than



Cara Mukai, Help, Understanding & Group Support (HUGS) hospital coordinator, and Layla, HUGS child, at the organization's respite night.

PHOTO COURTESY JOE CASTANEDA

350 families and 1,500-plus family members annually statewide. We recognize that when a child is ill, the entire family is affected. So,

HUGS provides peer support programs for each member of the family: monthly nights for moms and dads, family events, respites and SibCamp

for siblings. For HUGS kids that have passed away, a tree is planted in their memory and a celebration of life event is held at our memorial garden at Sunset Ranch. For our more challenged families, HUGS also provides monthly food and diaper baskets and airfare assistance for HUGS kids requiring medical procedures off-island.

Our mission is to strengthen Hawai'i's families and improve their quality of life as they face the emotional and financial hardships of caring for a seriously ill child.

To learn more and see how you can support us, visit hughshawaii.org.



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