Native Hawaiian elders living away from Hawai‘i for 30+ years appeared to be better off economically than their peers in Hawai‘i.

They left for adventure, for better opportunities, or with their parents or spouses.

They stayed because they built family and community on the Continent, and benefited from the lower cost of living there.

They stayed in touch with Hawai‘i and family and helped with parent care.

They participated in and spread Hawaiian culture.

Some witnessed or experienced racism on the Continent.

They planned to age-in-place on the Continent, but wanted remains or cremains returned to Hawai‘i.

Family and culture were sources of resilience.

Why study kūpuna on the continent?

Almost half (45%) of Native Hawaiians now live outside of the Hawaiian Islands, but there has been little research conducted about them.

In 2018 and 2019, the Ha Kūpuna team interviewed 18 Native Hawaiians age 60 or older who had lived away from Hawai‘i for 30 or more years.

Through a talk-story approach, we asked questions like:
• Why did you move away from Hawai‘i?
• What were your positive and negatives experiences living elsewhere?
• What was your experience with caring for your parents and in-laws?
• What are your plans for their own old age?
• What resilience factors have sustained you in your new home?

Interviews were done by phone, and kūpuna received copies of their own interviews, as well as a report of study findings.
More Details

We talked to 18 kūpuna in 13 different states.

Of the 18 kūpuna, 14 were born in Hawai‘i, one was born on the US Continent, and three migrated to the US Continent as children.

Ten returned to Hawai‘i with a job, to look for work, or to be with family. But, of those ten, eight left again.

Two brought their parents to the US Continent for care, 3 returned to Hawai‘i to provide care, and 9 visited home to provide respite to siblings.

The biggest advantages were the chance for home ownership and better jobs. But, they all missed Hawai‘i and missed the aloha spirit. Family and culture kept them strong.

Advice to others:
- Create community in your new home.
- Remember your heritage, and teach it to others.
- Live the aloha spirit.

Kūpuna Quotes

Aloha Spirit
“Hawaiians are a unique people. I mean, no matter where we go, we’re very well liked because we carry the culture. The aloha spirit carries real deep. It is the way that our parents raised us. It has to be felt, that's why.”

Home Ownership
“Housing is affordable here. I have classmates that never left Hawai‘i, and even after retiring from a government job there, they never could actually own a house.”

Racism
“When I went for Army training, I did not know whether I was black, white, or brown. I did not know which part of the bus to sit on. So, I sat in the middle, and I said I’d never go back to Alabama again. So all the locals from Hawai‘i we just stayed on base.”

Caregiving
“When you look at caregiving, you have to look at it from a cultural perspective because culturally that’s what the Hawaiians did, no matter who. The thought of putting my dad in the home never came to my mind... just take care of him, that's all.”

Maintaining Culture
“So if you leave Hawai‘i, you gotta bring your island with you. And that means, the values and culture that you grew up with, the food you need to live with, the music that you have. You bring your culture with you. So just like the Hōkūle‘a on the ocean, you got to take what you need to live on another island.

45% of Hawaiian kūpuna now live outside of Hawai‘i.

Picture credit: Ola Lau enjoys Arapaho Bay in Colorado


The goal of Hā Kūpuna : The National Resource Center for Native Hawaiian Elders is to assure the transmission of hā (breath of life; wisdom) from older to younger generations by enhancing knowledge to improve health and well-being. Hā Kūpuna is supported by grant #900I0006/01 from the Administration on Aging, US Department of Health and Human Services.