

New York woman, son given airfare to return home

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State House members conducted a hearing yesterday to discuss solutions for homelessness in Honolulu. Testifying were Tiara Reed, with her son, Ronald Collado, 2, who will fly back to their home in New York next week, and Tisha Woytenko of Help the Hawaii Homeless, one of the groups helping them get there.

A homeless woman and her 2-year-old son stranded in the islands for a month will fly home to New York next week with funds raised through a partnership of local churches, businesses and nonprofits.

The homecoming will be the summer's third, an effort that has been funded entirely with the private money after the state Legislature shot down a pilot program earlier this year.

The early successes has some lawmakers saying the one-way tickets should be included in government plans to reduce Hawaii's homeless population.

"I'm really excited for them," said Rep. Rida Cabanilla (D, Waipahu-Ewa), chairwoman of the House Housing Committee. "I think the return home program is wonderful in decreasing the number of homeless people."

The House committees on housing and human services held a briefing on the matter yesterday.

New York native Tiara Reed and her son were stranded on Oahu three weeks ago after plans for their return trip fell through. The two were to stay in the islands for two weeks to meet Reed's estranged mother, who promised to pay for their return airfare. When Reed and her mother got into an argument, however, she and her son were left on the streets without a way home.

"I was one of those people that looked down on the homeless," Reed said. "I didn't expect for this to happen."

After ending up at the Institute for Human Services, Reed asked her fiance in Amityville, N.Y., to help her find a way home. Reed and her fiance called a number of different shelters and support organizations before being referred to Help the Hawaii Homeless, a nonprofit that has spearheaded all return efforts this summer.

"We contacted everyone who could help, but everybody turned us down," Reed said. "I think that his program is great. It's getting me home."

Through Help the Hawaii Homeless, the family also received funding from religious organizations Word of Life and Pacific Revival Center, and from Quality Air Conditioning.

"There's been a momentum of sponsorship," said Help

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the Hawaii Homeless Executive Director Tisha Woytenko. "I hope that we are able to work together more."

Woytenko said while the program has been effective at helping a few of Honolulu's homeless, the one-way tickets are not the only answer and cannot be applied to everyone. Help the Hawaii Homeless has a list of 12 candidates under review. The homeless candidates must go through an exhaustive verification process.

"We'd hate for people to think that we are exporting homeless people," Woytenko said.

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