

Groceries donated to IHS help families enjoy holiday

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By Dan Nakaso

Bruce Hironaka and his family are counting on a box of groceries from the state's largest emergency homeless shelter to put a Thanksgiving meal on the table this year, but the Institute for Human Services needs more food and volunteers by Saturday to serve the many families in the same situation.

"Thanksgiving should be good since we're getting help from IHS with food," said Hironaka, 45, who works part time for a temporary staffing agency. "Right now we're low on budget and just trying to survive for the holidays."

HOW TO HELP

To donate food or volunteer to box or deliver food on Saturday, call Kate Record of the Institute for Human Services at 447-2811.

IHS created its "Give Thanks" program four years ago to help an estimated 100 former clients such as Hironaka have a happy Thanksgiving meal.

At the request of its clients, IHS moved the food program to Saturday from Thanksgiving day this year. The agency needs more nonperishable food and an additional 10 to 15 volunteers to pack and deliver the food to clients, spokeswoman Kate Record said.

Nonperishable food can be donated through Saturday. Fresh produce only will be accepted on Saturday, Record said.

While some of the 100 people who will receive food on Saturday used to be homeless, many such as Hironaka stayed off of the streets because IHS gave him \$1,500 to help with his first month's rent and a deposit on a two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment in McCully.

Hironaka's mother, Elsie Kawakami, sleeps in one bedroom, and his nephew Lincoln Tokita sleeps in the other. Hironaka sleeps on the couch in the living room.

"Right now my mom's on Social Security and I'm on SSI (Supplemental Security Income)," Hironaka said. "We didn't have enough money for rent and the deposit."

But getting an apartment isn't a guarantee against becoming homeless -- or a guarantee of a Thanksgiving dinner, Record said.

"Oftentimes paying rent for these folks means that their food pantry starts to run dry towards the end of the month," Record said. "This program provides the families and individuals with a box or two of food proportionate to the size of their household and ensures that their pantries will be stocked for a little while longer."

IHS offers its Give Thanks program in addition to an annual Thanksgiving meal that former clients are served at IHS courtesy of the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Record said.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Natasha Andrews, 28, helped box Thanksgiving food last year and hopes to do it again this year.

Andrews also has worked at the IHS family shelter, sorting donated clothes and helping to serve meals.

Asked why she volunteers, Andrews seemed surprised by the question.

"I just want to help people," Andrews finally said. "If I was in that situation, I would want that kind of help. There are just so many homeless here, so many families and kids that don't have food or clothes. I just need to help out."

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