



## Camp gives comfort

An annual event started for kids now has entire families attending to learn from their grief as they share their sorrows

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A camp being held this weekend at Queen Liliuokalani Children's Center in Hauula goes beyond having fun.

"The purpose for me is to create safe space for people to look at what is in their heart and bring it forth," said the Rev. Clarence Liu. "That is really the journey of grief."

Liu is chaplain for Hospice Hawaii, holding its 10th annual family bereavement camp tomorrow through Sunday.

About 40 children and family members who experienced the loss of a loved one in the past few years are attending the camp with about 35 staff members from the children's center and Hospice Hawaii.

The bereavement camp began just for children and was expanded about three years ago to help the entire family, said Kenneth Zeri, Hospice Hawaii president.

"One of the major dynamics we find is there is a lot of protecting of the other that goes on in our families," he said. "Kids do not want to cause

any suffering to their parents ... and parents vice versa. They've got to be strong. ... The protection mechanism keeps them from expressing their grief."

At camp, Zeri said, "We look at that and explore ways of sharing it where they can become closer. It's an amazing camp, a tremendous thing."

Each year the camp has a theme reflecting cultural understanding. This year it's Malama Ohana, or "caring for the family," which is reflected in all the crafts and games, Zeri said.

When families arrive, they put pictures of the person they lost on a table and refer to those in telling stories about favorite times together.

Liu said one of the first major exercises for the family is to do poi-pounding. They learn how the taro plant is symbolic of the family, he said.

"What I hear most about camp," he said, "is when they're with others who have experienced losses, tremendous camaraderie, solidarity and love emerges. For the first time they are in a situation where other people understand what it's like. There is no need to be quiet about it."

Healing happens once people stop pushing back their grief and they "come to grip with their pain," Liu said.

A memorial service will be held Saturday night with everyone gathered around a campfire and singing songs, he said.

Some children who attend the camp return as volunteers when they grow older, he said.

"It's really a powerful thing to see these kids coming back and assuming leadership. It's very inspiring for us."