

# MidWeek

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## The Voice Of The Victims

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By Alfred Herrera



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President Children's Alliance of Hawaii

Since I started working with the Children's Alliance of Hawaii four years ago, it has been a little awkward for me to tell people what I do for a living.

When I am at social gatherings or working in the community, the typical icebreaker question almost always arises, "So, what is it you do for work?" Most people are unfamiliar with the nature of my business, so I often give them a complete answer: "I work for a nonprofit organization called the Children's Alliance of Hawaii, which helps children that have been sexually abused."

This often results in a stunned look and some discomfort from my new acquaintance. It is an uncomfortable feeling, and the look seems to convey the question, "Did he just say what I think he did?"

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My staff and I work tirelessly to carry out the mission of the Children's Alliance of Hawaii to provide care and support for sexually abused children, offering hope for the future. We do this because we know that child sex assaults are a "problem" in our state. This is made evident in the growing amount of headlines appearing in Hawaii's media and the fact that between 600 and 1,200 children each year are interviewed by The Children's Justice Center of Hawaii for allegations of child sexual assault or molestation. This number breaks down to two or three children every day. This is not a problem. It is a crisis.



Photo courtesy Children's Alliance of Hawaii

Children's Alliance of Hawaii president Alfred Herrera, clinical director Caroline Thomas, director of development Kim Bartenstein and enhancements coordinator and administrative assistant Cristine Reeves

It is time to stop waiting for someone else to step up. We are "it." We are the voice of the victims. It's time we come together and unite to take a shared ownership of this social problem. This is the reason the Children's Alliance of Hawaii is launching a public awareness campaign this month called "Million Stars of Hope." The intent is to educate each and every resident in the state that child sex abuse is a significant problem in our community. Together, we can denounce it, fight for justice for our victims and ensure that these programs and services continue in the future.

Child sexual abuse is a difficult challenge for the community. It is exponentially worse for the victims whose lives are damaged and who must undertake a very difficult path to recovery.

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Please join the heroes in our community who are helping with "Million Stars of Hope." I invite you to learn more on our website, <http://www.cahawaii.org>. Together we can make a difference.

On a final note about the times I do get those looks of disbelief when initially meeting someone for the first time, most times people are able to recover from it. Once the shock subsides, people begin to accept that I am a nice guy. Heartbreakingly, at least one person, male or female, almost always comes to me to tell me how much they

appreciate the work I do and they let me know that they were sexually abused as a child.

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