

KAUA‘I’S PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY: ADDRESSING THE WICKED PROBLEM OF HOUSELESSNESS IN A SUSTAINABLE MANNER

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ABSTRACT

The shelter park responsive strategy used by the County of Kaua‘i during the pandemic to keep the houseless safe was effective. There were no significant outbreaks in the parks and no deaths from COVID-19. During the year or more that the houseless population spent in the shelter parks, the residents developed social capital and a sense of community. The houseless population in the parks was reticent and was negatively impacted when the parks were demobilized. The houseless were forced to separate and return to living in encampments in bushes around the island. The county of Kaua‘i and the Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources began regular sweeps of these encampments as the houseless are not allowed to stay on government land. There is no designated place for the houseless to stay on the island.

Houselessness is a wicked problem and is rife with complexities on Kaua‘i. The complexities challenge the county’s ability to address the houseless population’s needs effectively. The houseless population is increasingly vulnerable based on dispersion, diminishment of social networks, decreased connection to providers, and greater mental and physical health destabilization. Developing and fostering resilience in this population is within emergency management’s purview. To best meet the needs identified in this study and to navigate the complex system in which they are exacerbated, solutions will ideally come from a layered complement of federal-level and private-sector partnerships empowered under a national strategy led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. These solutions must focus on developing key elements of resilience within a houseless community structure that provides varying levels of transition, wraparound services, focused attention to health and well-being, development of life skills, and solidification of social and information networks, all framed within an operational mantra of dignity, respect, and trust.

Keywords: houselessness, homelessness, Kaua‘i, pandemic, wicked problems, vulnerability, social capital, sustainability, resilience, national strategy

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Note from the author. This research’s themes were clear and consistent, reinforcing a salient commentary on societal disrepair related to houselessness. The responsibility to present the findings with the requisite focus and gravitas is driven by what is due to the participants who shared their trust, experiences, and hope for solutions. In a 2018 FEMA PrepTalk, Vance Taylor access and functional needs advocate from the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, took the position that those affected by potential solutions should be included in the

shaping of those solutions, saying “Nothing about us, without us” (Taylor, 2018). Taylor’s position heavily influenced the solution-based nature of this work. There is a long history of solutions crafted without engaging the thoughts and opinions of those they are intended to serve. May the voice of Kaua‘i’s houseless population be heard loud and clear in this work.

INTRODUCTION

The residents of Kaua‘i view the island as their home. They are tied to the island’s culture and spirit and exist in parity (if not reverence) with the island. Hence, those without a temporary or permanent residence on Kaua‘i do not consider themselves homeless but rather houseless. As such, this study examined the state of the houseless population in Kaua‘i with a focus on the impacts on the establishment of the shelter parks (instituted as a responsive measure during the pandemic) and the demobilization of those parks. This study’s goal was to understand better the development of social capital in these parks, the houseless populations’ feelings about the closure of the parks, and their desired solutions. To understand the challenges in meeting the needs of the houseless population in Kaua‘i, one must understand the complex systems in which houselessness exists and is exacerbated on the island. Houselessness on Kaua‘i, while similar in many ways to houselessness in other jurisdictions, is also challengingly different. This study offers insights and recommendations regarding houselessness generally and as it occurs on Kaua‘i.

Houselessness is a wicked problem (Brown et al., 2009; Kelly, 2022; McConnell, 2018; Norman-Major, 2018) that intersects with the effective practice of emergency management (Brown et al., 2013; Franco, 2021). Wicked problems are most succinctly defined as social, political, or economic problems with “high levels of complexity, uncertainty, and divergence” (Head, 2008, p. 104). These problems have many interdependent factors, typically involving stakeholders with distributed ownership over the issue. They defy long-term solutions based on the sensitivity of the systems in which they emerge (Head, 2022; Rittel & Webber, 1974). The complexity of these problems requires a different problem-solving approach than simple, well-defined problems under the purview of a single decision-making entity (Head, 2022).

Emergency management professionals protect lives, livelihoods, and quality of life by creating “the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters.” (Blanchard et al., 2007). This requires extensive collaboration within and across several systems to address diverse needs. Vulnerable populations are a focal point in emergency management practice based on the population’s reduced capability and capacity to plan for, mitigate against, respond to, and recover from hazard events that impact them (McEntire, 2011; Wisner et al., 2014). The houseless population is one of these vulnerable populations (Gaillard et al., 2019; McEntire, 2011; Morris, 2020; Vickery, 2019). Focused engagement with advocates and community allies that work with the houseless population has historically been concentrated in planning and response efforts (Fogel, 2017; Gin, et al., 2016; Morris, 2020; Wexler & Smith, 2015).

The findings in this study call for a shift in how the houseless population's vulnerabilities are addressed. Emergency management that focuses on creating sustainable solutions that foster resilience must be provided the mission space to use its management framework to develop layered collaborations among key federal and private sector partners. These solutions move from episodic engagement to long-term, people-focused mitigation efforts that change the hazardscape.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative exploratory study sought to learn more about the development of social capital in the houseless population due to the county of Kaua'i's shelter park pandemic response strategy, the implications of social capital development in the houseless population as a result of that response strategy, and other implications of the strategy that could inform future response and recovery strategies with the houseless. The original understanding of the shelter park response strategy and its implications, as framed by published sources (Bodon, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d; Fujimoto, 2021a; Lyte, 2021; Read, 2021; Shinno, 2021a, 2021b), was:

1. The use of shelter parks during the pandemic was a focused emergency management strategy to protect Kaua'i's houseless population.
2. This strategy appeared to be effective in reducing the spread of the virus and severe illness in the houseless population.
3. The houseless population within the shelter parks appears to have developed a sense of community over the sheltering period.
4. This sense of community appears to have been disrupted by the closure of the shelter parks.

Social capital theory and its role in resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015) was the initial theoretical construct thought to be purposeful in this exploratory study. The theory focuses on social infrastructure that furthers resilience. In this study, the definitional framing for social capital is the power of social networks to cooperate to achieve shared goals and benefits (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). This aligns with the sense of community developed in the shelter parks.

The initial literature review, coupled with the information provided by the county of Kaua'i and media sources, framed two simple interview guides: one guide for local government representatives and houseless community advocates and allies and a second guide for adult members of the houseless population that stayed in the shelter park. These interview guides were used for semi-structured confidential interviews via Zoom, telephone, and in person. A snowball sampling approach was used until saturation was reached. However, interviews with members of the houseless population continued past saturation point as a matter of respect for their individual experiences. In total, 71 interviews were completed as follows: government representatives (7), advocates and allies (11), and members of the houseless population (53). Based on the county's 2021 Point-in-Time (PIT) count of adult shelter park residents (209), the percentage interviewed across all five parks for this study represented approximately 25% of the adult population in the shelter parks as of January 2021.

A thematic analysis was conducted within each interview grouping and across all groupings. The themes that emerged were clear and fairly consistent across all groupings. However, the thematic analysis necessitated additional research regarding complexities that participants identified as complicating factors that stymied access to services and solutions. An enhanced understanding of the complexities and their interconnection and interdependence provided an opportunity to unpack the wicked problem element of homelessness on Kaua‘i to provide more substantial recommendations.

THEMES

The themes that emerged in this study are provided in three segments in the following tables. The first segment (Table 1) shows the themes of the government representatives (7). The second segment (Table 2) shows the themes from community advocates and allies (11). The third segment (Table 3) shows the themes from members of the homeless population (53). The themes were clear and consistent within and across the groupings. A sampling of illustrative comments from study participants accompanies each theme listed. In each segment, additional comments deemed necessary to share (which did not neatly sit within a theme) are also provided. All the participants in this study provided thoughtful, articulate, detailed responses. The illustrative comments in the tables are mere snippets of these responses and are not intended to fully characterize any participant’s response or group of participants’ responses.

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 Table 1. Themes: Government Representatives

Government Representatives (n=7)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
Unified effort (6)	<p><i>“It was a whole of government effort.”</i></p> <p><i>“Decisions were made as a team.”</i></p> <p><i>“The Mayor had a strong vision and together we worked to implement that vision.”</i></p> <p><i>“Our team worked together well to accomplish our mission.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was a lot of work, but everyone pulled together.”</i></p> <p><i>“The team engaged from the beginning with a strong unified command.”</i></p>
Dedicated to trying to find solutions (6)	<p><i>“We know that what is happening now with the sweeps is not working, we are still trying to find solutions.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s sad that we can’t fix this, we keep trying. It seems so much easier than it is.”</i></p> <p><i>“Housing for the houseless community is on my vision board, I think about it every day.”</i></p> <p><i>“These are people I went to school with...I want to help but it isn’t simple, some don’t want our help.”</i></p> <p><i>“We are looking at underutilized county land and properties to see if they can be better utilized for services and temporary housing.”</i></p> <p><i>“I fight for them, I will continue to fight for them, but it’s hard to get support.”</i></p>

Government Representatives (n=7)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
Strengths of the parks (5)	<p><i>“The parks allowed for an organized shelter-in-place plan with access to health services and nonprofits that serve the population...it kept the community safe.”</i></p> <p><i>“They raised awareness to the number of houseless in the community.”</i></p> <p><i>“To me, it appeared that trust in government improved somewhat.”</i></p> <p><i>“The sites were in central locations, allowed for easy access and dissemination and made the best use of limited staff.”</i></p> <p><i>“The parks made it more feasible to help the smaller non-sanctioned camps too because there was limited staffing available.”</i></p> <p><i>“The six-month staggered demobilization enabled county representatives and nonprofits to address housing placement with those at each site.”</i></p> <p><i>“The ACLU was brought in prior to establishing the parks to avoid legal issues.”</i></p> <p><i>“The communities developed organically.”</i></p> <p><i>“Everything at the parks started good—the people were grateful.”</i></p>
Challenges of the parks (5)	<p><i>“The hope was that they would become self-governing, but there were problems with drugs, theft, domestic violence, other crime, and garbage—it was unsanitary.”</i></p> <p><i>“Public outcry to reopen the parks for resident use made keeping them open politically untenable.”</i></p> <p><i>“They needed more oversight, rules, and security.”</i></p> <p><i>“They were difficult to manage and dismantle, and the substance abuse, trash, derelict vehicles, domestic violence, and power dynamics were a problem.”</i></p> <p><i>“The parks required an enforcement presence...there were the police and park staff pushing enforcement, public health with different directives, and the public just wanted them out.”</i></p> <p><i>“There was talk of rules before the park permits were made available, but with so much going on they weren’t established exactly as we had planned, that caused problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some of the leadership structures had dysfunction—there were addiction issues—it was unsafe for the public to be around.”</i></p>

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Government Representatives (n=7)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“The Correctional Center let out half their inmates at night, those with drug and crime issues got collected into the park.”</i></p>
Housing and shelter (5)	<p><i>“Kaua ‘i has a real problem with affordable housing and that makes addressing houselessness hard.”</i></p> <p><i>“There isn’t enough housing and they have no place to go...they just keep getting swept from one place to the next, it’s really sad.”</i></p> <p><i>“We have plans to develop more affordable housing but only a small percentage of the units will be designated for the houseless.”</i></p> <p><i>“The cost of housing is so high that even people with good-paying jobs cannot afford to live here. Families are moving away, and I don’t know how we are going to keep our young people here on the island because the cost is too great.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kaua ‘i is voucher rich, but there are no rentals that are in the voucher range.”</i></p> <p><i>“The emergency shelter space is very limited—19 beds.”</i></p> <p><i>“The housing situation is an emergency.”</i></p>
Support from residents is poor (4)	<p><i>“We got a lot of pushback from residents about keeping the parks open so long, but we held our ground.”</i></p> <p><i>“Residents were afraid to go to the beaches by the park, they didn’t want their kids around the houseless with mental health and drug problems. They wanted them out.”</i></p> <p><i>“The issue of houselessness became more visible during the pandemic and I think the number of houseless surprised people. Before they were scattered, living in the bushes, and residents didn’t seem to care much. But when they were at the parks by some of our most popular beaches where residents wanted to go with their family, it became an issue.”</i></p> <p><i>“Even with temporary measures we have wanted to try it’s the whole NIMBY thing—not in my back yard.”</i></p>
Mission accomplished (4)	<p><i>“Our mission with the parks was to keep the houseless safe and we did that.”</i></p> <p><i>“The park implementation wasn’t perfect, but we accomplished what we set out to do. I would change a few things if we did it again, but I would do it again.”</i></p> <p><i>“I know they think we betrayed them by closing the parks, but we kept them safe—that was the goal.”</i></p>

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Government Representatives (n=7)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“We were advised by other counties not to open the parks to the houseless for sheltering-in-place. They said it would be difficult to end them, but we did it anyway because we wanted to keep the houseless safe and we couldn’t do that if they were all over the place.”</i></p>
Mental health and substance abuse (4)	<p><i>“The mental health and drug use problems among the houseless make addressing housing needs harder.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is no residential drug program on the island, and we do not have enough mental health and substance abuse providers to meet the need—not only of the houseless, but of the residents.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is no detox on Kaua‘i—none. It is hard to tell whether mental health or substance abuse issues came first, but they seem to be linked in the houseless individuals I have met. I mean, what do you do? Where do they get help?”</i></p> <p><i>“The outreach is lacking and inconsistent—a constant presence is needed.”</i></p>
Workforce issues (4)	<p><i>“Even when we have money to contract with mental health providers, we can’t get anyone because there aren’t enough providers on the island.”</i></p> <p><i>“The infrastructure for helping with mental health and drugs is not sufficient to provide the help needed. They have to fly to another island for residential drug treatment help...which means the houseless don’t get help.”</i></p> <p><i>“The challenge with providers is there simply is not enough of them to meet the needs...and when they have to try and find the houseless each time they move to another campsite it just makes the whole process more time-consuming. It was much easier to provide services when the parks were open.”</i></p> <p><i>‘There are hardly any human services on Kaua‘i.’</i></p>
Distrust of government (3)	<p><i>“There is a strong distrust of government.”</i></p> <p><i>“The sweeps have eroded any trust that was developed.”</i></p> <p><i>“I understand why they don’t trust us; they now have nowhere to go.”</i></p>

Government Representatives (n=7)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
Other	<p><i>“A stronger continuum of care is needed—a safety net. One thing can put you on the street.”</i></p> <p><i>“The solutions are not one size fits all—some just want restrooms, showers, platforms for tents, and protected storage for their things.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is difficult to pinpoint houseless numbers, the count could be off by as much as a hundred because they move around and can be difficult to find.”</i></p> <p><i>“Many in Kaua‘i are only steps away from being houseless.”</i></p>

Table 2. Themes: Community Advocates and Allies

Community Advocates and Allies (n=11)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
A great deal of need (11)	<p><i>“There is more need than resources and so many aren’t getting help.”</i></p> <p><i>“When we see that something is needed, we try and find a way to provide it. We have been lucky so far, but funding is always an issue.”</i></p> <p><i>“With every sweep we have people who have lost basic supplies and need to replace them, there is no getting ahead, we are always struggling to keep up—barely.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is frustrating that the county won’t do more to help the houseless who are fighting to just survive, at the very least they can stop making it worse with the sweeps.”</i></p> <p><i>“They need the security of knowing their things will still be there if they go to work, or go get groceries, or get a meal. This is basic stuff, and we can’t provide it—even worse, the government may be the one that takes it when they sweep the camp.”</i></p> <p><i>“The houseless are living on the fringe of society, hiding in bushes trying to survive and it is wreaking havoc on their health and sanity. It is shameful that we aren’t doing more.”</i></p> <p><i>“The worst thing is the suicides. I know of two pregnant houseless women who committed suicide because their baby would be taken away if they had no house to go to after birth. It is heartbreaking.”</i></p> <p><i>“We need more people who can help with the paperwork and processes—just having a program means nothing if the people</i></p>

Community Advocates and Allies (n=11)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>the program is for don't know how to jump through the hoops to get in."</i></p> <p><i>"The contrast of wealth to poverty on this island is striking...we have billionaires living without a care on hundreds of acres of land and we have people living in bushes wondering where their next meal is coming from—it just isn't right."</i></p>
Strengths of the parks (11)	<p><i>"Access was much easier, and the setting was more relaxed."</i></p> <p><i>"They worked together like a family."</i></p> <p><i>"They didn't have to worry about where they were staying, what they were going to eat, or whether their stuff was safe—it made a big difference."</i></p> <p><i>"It was a place to belong for them—it was special."</i></p> <p><i>"They had social events and shared food and other resources—it was a community atmosphere."</i></p> <p><i>"Regular services were more easily provided, which was good because staffing with the pandemic was sometimes challenging...we don't have that many people to start with."</i></p> <p><i>"At one park they started gardens and dug an imu for cooking—they were working toward being self-sustaining while living true to their culture."</i></p> <p><i>"There was so much gratitude."</i></p> <p><i>"It was easier to find people and when they weren't around others knew where they were. And they were really good about helping the elders and taking care of the sick—there were quite a few with terminal illnesses staying in the parks."</i></p> <p><i>"It was easier to contain any illnesses and provide vaccinations."</i></p> <p><i>"To me, it seemed like they were happier and more confident in themselves—they laughed more."</i></p>
Challenges of the parks (11)	<p><i>"There were still mental health and drug user issues."</i></p> <p><i>"There wasn't enough information at the beginning about why the houseless were being asked to stay in the parks. Some thought it was so they would all get COVID together and not give it to anyone else."</i></p> <p><i>"Same as a regular community, it wasn't perfect. The police had to respond to the parks on occasion."</i></p>

Community Advocates and Allies (n=11)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“There was some infighting about being in charge—I mean think about it—this was the first authority some of these people ever had.”</i></p> <p><i>“There were complaints about the damage they were causing at the parks and that really turned people off.”</i></p> <p><i>“They settled in and built a community—they didn’t want that to end. But it was never meant to be permanent location for them—they fought the closures.”</i></p> <p><i>“The garbage at the sites piled up and some areas were littered with things they shouldn’t have been littered with—needles, sanitary products, etc.—it reinforced all the stigmas people associate with the houseless.”</i></p> <p><i>“Residents were unhappy with the extended use of the parks and let the county know it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Those with substance abuse issues—alcohol and drugs—were a problem for some of the others in the houseless community and they changed outsider’s views of those at the parks.”</i></p> <p><i>“Only one elected county official visited the parks during the time they were used for sheltering.”</i></p>
Fragility of support system (9)	<p><i>“Each of us do what we can, but what if something happens to us, who will be there for them?”</i></p> <p><i>“The county isn’t doing anything except making it worse.”</i></p> <p><i>“It seems like we always paddling upstream, but we can’t give up because they need our help.”</i></p> <p><i>“They have nowhere to go, they live in the bushes and when they move, we don’t always know where to find them—then we worry.”</i></p> <p><i>“The cost of living just keeps going up and further strains the system and the people in it. Pretty soon we won’t have any mental health providers because they won’t be able to afford to live here. Tourism and the conversion of properties to vacation rentals is pricing residents out of the market -it is not sustainable.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am tired, but I know I have to keep going because they depend on me.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am the only one assigned to this site, we don’t have a lot of staff.”</i></p> <p><i>“Caregiver fatigue is an issue we are aware of and watch for, the work can wear on you.”</i></p>

Community Advocates and Allies (n=11)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
Treatment of the houseless (9)	<p><i>“I don’t judge them...I come at them with love. It isn’t my place to judge them.”</i></p> <p><i>“They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.”</i></p> <p><i>“But for the grace of God there go I. There is no shame in housing instability...I have empathy for those who are houseless.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am here to help, not to judge their choices. Sometimes it isn’t even about choices, it is just crappy circumstances or bad luck.”</i></p> <p><i>“A shower, a meal, groceries, a haircut, whatever they need—they know they can come here and be treated with respect.”</i></p> <p><i>“Our goal is to provide services that meet them where they are at and help them build the skills necessary to move out of houselessness.”</i></p> <p><i>“We nurture relationships and develop a sense of ohana (family).”</i></p> <p><i>“My heart aches for some of them, I wish I could do more.”</i></p> <p><i>“The county treats them and their things like they are trash. These are people and the things they throw away in the sweeps are all they have.”</i></p>
Housing and shelter (8)	<p><i>“A straight line can be drawn between the lack of affordable housing and tourism. Residents pay the price of the island’s pandering to tourists and the houseless suffer the most.”</i></p> <p><i>“People have waited in line for hours at the shelter and haven’t gotten in—they only have like 20 beds. They stopped trying.”</i></p> <p><i>“The county has done some things to address housing, but it hasn’t done much for the houseless. They don’t even have enough workforce units.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some don’t want a house, they just want a safe piece of land, a water-resistant building, and a place to store their belongings.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not all houseless people want an apartment and the rules and structure that come with it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Housing options, if available, aren’t always available in the areas where the provider networks and social networks are—and they don’t want to be that far away from everything they know. I don’t think that level of disruption is helpful and it probably increases the likelihood of failure in a housing placement.”</i></p>

Community Advocates and Allies (n=11)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“The paperwork requirements for housing and other such services can be intimidating to the members of the houseless community. If they can’t get help with the paperwork, they won’t apply.”</i></p> <p><i>“We should let the houseless live in clusters that create and foster community.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is not sufficient affordable housing availability in Kaua’i and there are not enough planned affordable housing projects to meet the need on the island.”</i></p>
Mental health and substance abuse (8)	<p><i>“This is an ongoing issue in the houseless community.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are not enough mental health service providers on Kaua’i. There is no detox center, no residential center, and not enough outpatient help. Substance abuse issues end up in law enforcement’s lap.”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t agree with what they are doing, but where do they get help?”</i></p> <p><i>“This is a problem that needs more resources from the county. This should be a top priority.”</i></p> <p><i>“So many end up houseless because of their mental health condition or drug use. Maybe their family can’t cope with their choices or the normal life stuff is too much for them to deal with—whatever it is, the solution is care for the original problem—houselessness is a result of those problems going untreated.”</i></p>
Other/66	<p><i>“They are not homeless because Kaua’i is their home, they are ‘displaced’ ...they are ‘houseless’. Words matter because it changes thinking...it changes the responses of others.”</i></p> <p><i>“Big money pushes out the houseless, they don’t like to see them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Other things complicate the situation, the island is overwhelmed by visitors, the infrastructure is poor, and the working and professional class are being displaced, and there is no political will to help the houseless.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is a strong undercurrent of grief in the houseless community.”</i></p> <p><i>“The houseless don’t vote because they don’t think anyone cares.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is more focus on tourists than on residents.”</i></p>

Table 3. Themes – Houseless Population

Houseless Population (n=53)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
Strengths of the parks (53)	<p><i>“Everyone shared and watched out for each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“We had a place to stay.”</i></p> <p><i>“People brought us food and came and helped us with other things, it was nice.”</i></p> <p><i>“There were social events and other gatherings like you would have in a community.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have health problems and before the pandemic I struggled every day, but in the park the people there helped me—they took care of me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Our stuff was safe, and we didn’t have to worry as much about surviving.”</i></p> <p><i>“We were family, we knew each other’s stories, we watched out for each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“We all knew what was going on—it was easier to stay informed when we were all together. That ultimately gave us more power as a group when we dealt with the county—we were all on the same page and united.”</i></p> <p><i>“People had your back.”</i></p> <p><i>“We created a self-sustaining community.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was a happy place and our worries were few.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hardly anyone got COVID and when they did, they stayed apart from others so it didn’t spread.”</i></p> <p><i>“We were all connected—it was beautiful.”</i></p> <p><i>“We set up camps that could stay up.”</i></p> <p><i>“A lot of people in the area came and brought food and supplies to the park. We felt seen.”</i></p> <p><i>“There was a lot of support for each other—I felt like people cared about what happened to me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Everyone pitched in, we all helped each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“We belonged to something bigger.”</i></p>

Houseless Population (n=53)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“I made new friends and they became like family.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was easy to keep everyone informed about what was happening.”</i></p> <p><i>“I actually felt happy most days.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was like a vacation from the everyday struggles.”</i></p> <p><i>“We were family—not perfect, sometimes dysfunctional, but family.”</i></p>
Impact of closure (39)	<p><i>“It was horrible, they separated our family.”</i></p> <p><i>“Everyone was sad when the park closed.”</i></p> <p><i>“We didn’t want to leave, we tried to fight back, but the county wanted us out.”</i></p> <p><i>“I had never experienced separation anxiety until then.”</i></p> <p><i>“We had nowhere else to go and they didn’t care.”</i></p> <p><i>“They said we could go to other parks that had not closed yet, but why would we do that? We wanted to stay where we were.”</i></p> <p><i>“I cried for weeks after they made us leave.”</i></p> <p><i>“The grief—it was like someone died—it was so hard.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was like a giant step back...back to the bushes, instead of together.”</i></p> <p><i>“I was depressed for a long time after that, still am. People need people.”</i></p> <p><i>“They didn’t care about the damage they did to us when they closed the park—they just cared about the tourists.”</i></p> <p><i>“They took away the best thing that had happened to us and then chased us out of everywhere else we tried to stay.”</i></p>
Challenges of the parks (37)	<p><i>“The biggest challenge was with those who were using, but we tried to keep them separated from the others, especially the families.”</i></p> <p><i>“There were some personality conflicts, but they were minor.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes police would just drop people off at the park because they had nowhere else to go. We would take them in, but we weren’t equipped to address some of their mental health issues.”</i></p>

Houseless Population (n=53)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“Alcohol and drugs were an issue when those using them didn’t keep to themselves.”</i></p> <p><i>“There were varying levels of cleanliness—this caused some problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“There were domestic violence and other violence incidents that needed to be addressed.”</i></p> <p><i>“One of the children stepped on a hypodermic needle left lying around—that was a problem.”</i></p> <p><i>“At the end the county was very aggressive and did a lot of things to push us out of the park—like shutting off water and electricity.”</i></p> <p><i>“Most of the challenges were minor and they got worked out by those at the park—we tried to avoid involving the police, but sometimes we did.”</i></p>
<p>“Houseless” label: sense of self, identity, disposition, current state, value (37)</p>	<p><i>“We are human beings—like everyone else...we just don’t have a house.”</i></p> <p><i>“I had nowhere else to go when I got out of jail, I didn’t even have clothes. I just had the paper clothes they release you in.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have been homeless on and off for years, I don’t mind it really if I can set up a camp and be left alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have no one—no one cares about me.”</i></p> <p><i>“I just want a better life.”</i></p> <p><i>“Everyone can tell that we are addicts by looking at our teeth.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like being free and living by the ocean, but it isn’t as easy as it used to be.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am the black sheep of my family.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am not perfect, but I’m trying. I give thanks to the Lord for what I have and for every day I am sober.”</i></p> <p><i>“I didn’t want to be houseless; I didn’t have a choice. I couldn’t pay my bills anymore.”</i></p> <p><i>“People don’t see us, well they see us, but they don’t really look at us, they look away. We don’t matter to them.”</i></p>

Houseless Population (n=53)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“Drugs became my life and that is why I am where I am now. My family is done with me, these people have become my family.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am a byproduct of the foster care system, there are a lot of us that are houseless.”</i></p> <p><i>“I want to have a job; I want to contribute; but I need a place to sleep and keep my things...I need to be able to shower regularly. How can I change anything if I can’t get beyond this?”</i></p> <p><i>“We don’t matter to the county; they don’t even treat us like we are human...we are disposable and so are our things.”</i></p> <p><i>“I try and stay clean and maintain my hygiene so I won’t offend people.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have grown children, but I can’t live with them, they don’t want me. They are tired of the drugs, and I haven’t changed.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am a good person, I don’t want anything special, just a room to call my own.”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t like myself or my life right now—I want a different life.”</i></p> <p><i>“I try and be positive and embrace the aloha spirit in everything I do, sometimes it is hard, but I keep trying. You have to have hope.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am ashamed of what my life is now.”</i></p> <p><i>“If I could only get another chance I could do better.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am doing the best I can right now in the situation I am in—my whole life is in that car.”</i></p> <p><i>“I want something better for my children.”</i></p> <p><i>“People think I am lazy or dumb—I’m not. I had a few hard breaks and they left me homeless...but I am working my way back.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am sad most of the time.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am a veteran, I served my country, and this is my life now.”</i></p> <p><i>“We are unseen. We are forced to hide to survive. What kind of life is this?”</i></p> <p><i>“I just do the best I can every day with God’s grace, that is all I can do.”</i></p>

Houseless Population (n=53)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“No one would choose this life, it is exhausting. I am so tired o/f trying to survive.”</i></p>
Sweeps (28)	<p><i>“They take everything and throw it out—clothes, papers, everything.”</i></p> <p><i>“As soon as they find out where we are, we are chased out. There is no place safe for us to go. How can we survive?”</i></p> <p><i>“They don’t just take things, they cut them up—they destroy them. It feels very personal and hateful.”</i></p> <p><i>“They say they will come at some point over a two-week period to do a sweep, but you don’t know when. You can’t sit there all day—you need to do other things—work, get food, go to appointments. If they come when you are gone, there goes everything you own.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes it is the county and sometimes it is DLNR, depending on who owns the land, but the result is the same, they clear you out.”</i></p> <p><i>“Watching them destroy our belongings with no regard to how much it cost...to them it was trash.”</i></p> <p><i>“They gave us 10 minutes to get all our stuff out before they would throw it out. We couldn’t get it all, we carried out what we could and the rest is gone.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is no concern or compassion about the age or health of those in a camp, they will sweep any camp they learn about.”</i></p> <p><i>“They slashed all the tents and trashed the place.”</i></p> <p><i>“The sweeps force us to stay in smaller groups, which makes it harder for the government to find us, but it also makes it harder for us to survive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Community supporters of the houseless are regularly providing new tarps and tents because of the sweeps—this doesn’t make sense to me—why must the government destroy everything?”</i></p> <p><i>“They say they store the stuff they take for a certain period of time before they throw it out, but I have never heard of anyone who has gotten their stuff back.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some of them are nicer than others, some feel sorry for us, that makes it a little better—it is still very depressing though.”</i></p>

Houseless Population (n=53)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“As someone who wears a bigger size of clothing it is really hard when they throw out all your clothes. I don’t want to have to wear the same thing every day.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s not like we are hanging out in plain view by the airport, we are being respectful and staying out of sight.”</i></p>
Housing and shelter (26)	<p><i>“I would just like a place where I can stay.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are so many forms to fill out to get a place and they want documents that I don’t have.”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t want to worry about where I am going to sleep, but I don’t know if I am ready to live in a HUD [Housing and Urban Development] place. My friends say there are so many rules.”</i></p> <p><i>“There is not enough space at the shelter to make it worth going all the way over there and waiting in line. You hardly ever get in.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would take any place where they would say it is okay to stay—all I need is a piece of land where I can camp.”</i></p> <p><i>“Even if you get a voucher, there are no places.”</i></p> <p><i>“It takes a lot of time and persistence to get into housing and some of us can’t even qualify.”</i></p> <p><i>“I pray every night that I will be blessed with a house soon. I just need a fresh start.”</i></p>
Mental health and substance abuse (25)	<p><i>“I would like to get help.”</i></p> <p><i>“We need a residential treatment center on the island.”</i></p> <p><i>“More services are needed and they need to come to the places where we are.”</i></p> <p><i>“Being houseless strains your mental health. If you want to really address mental health in the houseless, you need to address the houseless piece too. This life tears you down.”</i></p> <p><i>“Drug use in the houseless community is high.”</i></p> <p><i>“It isn’t just drugs, its alcohol too. Lots of people can’t get through the day without it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Dealing with addiction requires more than just will, it requires treatment. We need treatment options on the island.”</i></p>

Houseless Population (n=53)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“What do you do if you have mental health issues and you can’t get the medicine you need? You resort to other substances.”</i></p>
Solutions (22)	<p><i>“Why not give us a piece of land and let us all stay there? Isn’t that easier than doing all these sweeps that displace us over and over again?”</i></p> <p><i>“An affordable housing development dedicated solely to the houseless that engages the houseless in the planning would be nice.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give us choices, not cookie-cutter solutions. How about a campground with locked storage? Or small shelter units that can give us cover when it rains?”</i></p> <p><i>“Is it possible to have a place where we can gather as a community again? I think the community part is probably more important than whether it is a tent or a building.”</i></p> <p><i>“A property where we could grow gardens and use sustainable practices to live more in alignment with our culture.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give us Coco Palms—let us develop a cultural center and housing development where the houseless can work and live.”</i></p> <p><i>“Involve the houseless community in the discussion—ask us what we want. We don’t want to be plucked out one by one and be placed randomly all over the island with people we don’t know.”</i></p> <p><i>“Let us design a place for us—and let us use HUD vouchers for that place. We know what we need better than anybody else.”</i></p> <p><i>“Work with the people already doing so much to support the houseless—like Ho’omana—to expand services. We trust them and they know us.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you ask me, solutions will never come for some of us. The county doesn’t care about those of us with mental health issues—they just want us to go away. But okay, if there was one thing they could do it would be to make sure we can get help and the right medication that allows us to function. Then we could have a shot at living a normal life.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make housing for us a priority. We are residents of Kaua’i just like all the other constituents the county serves, we want to matter.”</i></p>
Other	<p><i>“I am not homeless; Kaua’i is my home. I am houseless.”</i></p>

Houseless Population (n=53)	
Theme (# of respondents)	Illustrative Comments
	<p><i>“No one trusts the government to address our issues.”</i></p> <p><i>“We wouldn’t survive without the help we get from community organizations and the people who support them—the county doesn’t care about us.”</i></p> <p><i>“Houselessness isn’t a personal disease; it is a societal disease.”</i></p> <p><i>“We no longer have a middle class on Kaua‘i.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am in housing now, but I wouldn’t trade my experience of being houseless. I learned a lot about myself and others.”</i></p> <p><i>“I hear about what is happening through other houseless people I know—we call it coconut wireless.”</i></p> <p><i>“We are fighting a moral and cultural battle.”</i></p> <p><i>“This is the price of paradise.”</i></p>

The tables’ themes align across groups to narrate the situation from three viewpoints. There is no dispute that houselessness in Kaua‘i is a complex issue that needs focused attention. The themes and sampling of illustrative comments featured inform and contextualize the following sections.

THE SHELTER PARKS

In March 2020, early in the initial pandemic efforts, when there was a curfew in place and only essential workers were coming and going from work, the county of Kaua‘i instituted its strategy to keep the houseless population safe. The county closed five beach parks for regular use and camping and established them as locations where the houseless could shelter-in-place during the pandemic . Each of the five shelter parks—Anini, Anahola, Lydgate, Salt Pond, and Lucy Wright—were beach-adjacent campgrounds with bathroom facilities. The selected parks were distributed around the island in areas where the houseless population was known to frequent. These parks were also very popular with island residents and tourists (albeit tourists were reduced dramatically with Kaua‘i’s strict travel restrictions and the resort bubble program during the first year of the pandemic, and beach access was limited to residents). The preliminary plan from the county was focused on issuing camping permits to control physical distance, supplying some minimal structure regarding the sites, and providing easy access for service delivery.

While there were some initial concerns about the shelter parks from some of the houseless population regarding the intent of the county (i.e., were the houseless being placed there to get sick?), ultimately, about half of Kaua‘i’s houseless population stayed at the parks. The actual

number of houseless individuals on the island is disputed. The Point in Time (PIT) count of the houseless population conducted in January 2020 was 424 -359 adults and 65 children (County of Kaua‘i, 2022b). The county believes the PIT count to be off by as much as 100 in any given year due to the difficulty of accessing every member of the houseless population. According to leaders in the houseless population, the houseless count on the island is over 700. The number of houseless at each park varied, but the January 2021 PIT count of houseless adults and children (which only captured current shelter park residents due to safety precautions during the pandemic), was 238 (County of Kaua‘i, 2022b). That count did not include six families with children (25 members of the houseless population) that had been placed in studio and one-bedroom units at a transitional facility called Kealaula shortly before the count was initiated. The distribution in each park at the time of that count can be seen in Figure 1. The number in parenthesis in Figure 1 is the number of children represented in that count.

Figure 1. Shelter Park PIT Counts, January 2021



Each park developed its own identity and organically developed a functional structure (i.e., agreed-upon rules, shared resources, norms, and emergent leaders). Each park had varying levels of success in addressing challenges that arose. Residents of the parks included native Hawaiians, long-time island residents (some who have spent many years houseless), some newly houseless, and some visitors who got stuck on the island (this phenomenon appears to have been limited to the Lydgate location, which had the closest proximity to the airport). The residents ranged from families with children to couples to single adults or groups of adults of varying ages. Many of the residents also had pets. Among the residents were some with terminal diseases, mental health challenges, substance abuse issues, and domestic violence penchants. The residents' lodging at

the shelter parks ranged from vehicles, tents, tarps, and structures built with beach wood and other supplies readily available in the area. The parks became functional communities: garden plots were started, community cooking areas were established, social events were hosted, collaborations were developed, and park residents shared their stories with each other and with the world outside the camp (via social media). Members of the houseless population that had been previously limited to a few relationships and more of a nomad existence became part of a place where they felt like they belonged, could get help with their problems, and could help others.

Law enforcement was regularly called by those at the shelter parks to address issues that presented a safety risk. The mental health and substance abuse challenges endemic in society were also evident in the parks. To a certain extent, the park residents were more compassionate and understanding about these challenges than others outside this population. However, the safety of others often triggered the solicitation of outside intervention by law enforcement.

The shelter park strategy was successful in keeping those at the parks safe. There were no clusters in any park locations, and none of the park residents died from COVID-19. In addition, those at the parks were more easily accessible for services such as meals, program support, and vaccinations. This was helpful, given that the pandemic worsened staffing limitations. Those in the parks did not have to be sought out around the island in whatever area they were living in (which could change from day-to-day), making a significant difference in the county's and other service providers' ability to serve the houseless population (both those in and outside the parks). Over time, greater trust began to develop between the houseless population and those providing consistent services at the shelter parks.

The pressure from county residents to close the shelter parks started within a few months of the parks' establishment and increased as the months went on. Residents wanted to return to the beach park areas where the shelter parks were established, but they felt uneasy based on the aggregated number of houseless at those sites, drug paraphernalia in the area, and those with mental health challenges milling about. In early 2021, after it was clear that vaccinations were becoming more readily available, the decision was made to demobilize the shelter parks on a staggered schedule. This schedule was intended to provide time for service providers to attempt to find temporary or transitional housing solutions and, in the alternative, for the houseless at closed parks to move to other shelter parks.

From the county's perspective, the shelter parks (despite some of their challenges) were an effective response strategy that would be used again. As of June 28, 2021, Kaua'i's cumulative case count in the shelter parks was 401, with only two deaths, representing a death rate 60 times lower than the national death rate (Read, 2021). The county disregarded advice from other government counterparts (pre-strategy implementation) that the development of social capital would be an issue with the shelter park strategy and could make closure difficult. The county's mission was unflinchingly focused on protecting its residents and avoiding a surge that would cripple the limited health resources on the island and jeopardize the well-being of the most vulnerable (Qureshi, 2021).

The extended tenure in the shelter parks helped the houseless population develop political capital, and they were able to bring both local and national attention to the shelter parks when faced with closure (Bodon, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d; Fujimoto, 2021a; Lyte, 2021; Read, 2021). Despite the county of Kaua‘i’s successful efforts to keep the houseless population safe, at the point of closure the county was in a worse position with the houseless population than when they started. The houseless did not want the shelter parks closed and resisted efforts to move them out (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Shelter Park Closure Dates



Emergency shelter and housing vouchers were used to help some of the houseless population displaced from the shelter parks. However, housing vouchers were often problematic and viewed as an exercise in futility by the houseless population based on the large amount of paperwork required, key documents needed (which many of the houseless population do not readily have), the lack of available units, and the differences between voucher amount and unit cost. Families with children were prioritized for placement in newly developed transitional housing (Shinno, 2021a). The county developed a plan to erect temporary shelter units in one of the park locations to meet the longer-term needs of the houseless population in that area. The area residents’ opposition was swift and significant. They shut down the temporary shelter unit plan and followed it successfully with efforts to eliminate all camping at the site.

AFTER THE SHELTER PARK CLOSURES

Most of the houseless who lived in the parks had built a sense of connection and community and were reticent to leave. Many referred to those they met in the shelter park as their family. When they were put out of the parks, they not only had no place to stay, but they were also separated from the people they had come to know, rely on, and care about during their time in the park.

This caused sadness, despair, uncertainty, and varying levels of separation anxiety based on “a loss of family” as the houseless population dispersed and went back to living scattered in bushes around the island. For those already struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues, the loss of the support structure in the park worsened their conditions. There was an increase in illness, death, and suicide in the population that the houseless attributed to the shelter park closures.

The closure of the shelter parks eroded the trust that had developed between the houseless population and the county government. The houseless felt like the stability they had developed while at the shelter parks was stripped away. Many expressed having a sense of purpose and worth during their time at the parks that they had not experienced before in their period of houselessness. Almost all of the houseless interviewed in this study expressed that they knew many people viewed them as less important than those who were not houseless. They felt defined at face value by their state of houselessness and the stigmas associated with that label. Many seem to have accepted this diminishment and reflected it in their self-image, limiting their expectations of what they deserve or can achieve (as if they are “others” and valued as less - distinguishable from those who are not houseless and who have value).

The tacit acceptance of the “other” designation has led to additional mental health and substance abuse challenges. The behavioral representation of the internalization of the “other” designation can be seen in what the houseless refers to as “staying out of sight” from tourists (and residents) on the island who see houselessness (and them) as a blight. This may be why panhandling is not a significant issue on Kaua‘i. It was noted repeatedly by those who worked with the county or as community advocates and allies that because they are on a small island, they knew many of the houseless from growing up with them or their other family members. The extent to which these connections may impact panhandling is unknown but may be part of the explanation regarding the absence of this behavior.

Those that push back on the stigmas point to sameness at the human level. A powerful piece written by Janet A. Powell (a once houseless woman now in subsidized housing on Kaua‘i) addresses her angst and frustration in this space after her son made diminishing comments about the houseless population (see this piece, “Rage”, at the end of this article). The houseless in this study came to be houseless for a wide variety of reasons, with the most common being health struggles (physical and mental) that impacted the ability to keep a job; death of a provider; family strife due to disagreements, dangerous situations, or substance abuse; lack of family (i.e., raised in the foster care system); and, being priced out of, or unable to get into, the rental market (due to income, employment, and criminal record requirements). A few came to houselessness because of the allure of living on the beach and being at one with the land. Kaua‘i residents, particularly Hawaiians, are culturally tied to the land and regularly spend time with family camping, fishing, hunting, and otherwise being engaged with nature. These ties softened the intellectual leap from house to houselessness (regarding being comfortable living on the land). However, once houseless, the reality of houselessness provided a stark contrast. As one woman noted, being houseless is considerable work, “you have to think about where you are going to get

food, where you are going to sleep, and how you are going to protect your stuff from being stolen.”

Most of the houseless were quick to own their struggles, frailties, and self-perceived character flaws that either brought them to being houseless or made their transition out of houselessness more difficult. The role of mental health, substance abuse, violence, or criminal behavior in their state of houselessness was readily acknowledged. There was also a similar level of understanding and self-awareness regarding the ways in which these challenges perpetuated their houselessness.

Kaua‘i has three shelters: an emergency shelter with 19 beds, a veteran shelter with five beds, and a YWCA domestic violence shelter with 17 beds. The emergency shelter, which is the shelter most likely to be used by the houseless, can only serve a small fraction of the houseless population in the Lihue area. There is no designated property on Kaua‘i for the houseless to stay legally.

After the shelter park closures, the houseless population set up small encampments in seemingly secluded areas around the island. Each time these encampments were discovered, signs were posted at the encampment site by the government entity in control of the land (the county or Hawaii’s Department of Land and Natural Resources) stating that a sweep would occur within a designated period—days to weeks. No certain date or time was given on these notices, which caused those at the site to experience heightened anxiety levels. Anything not removed before the sweep was collected and either thrown out or “stored” at a government location for a limited time before being disposed of (the houseless population disputed the storage assertion). The swept items often included tents, tarps, bedding, clothing, food, personal items, supplies, and essential records. Because there was no place they could legally go, many stayed at encampment sites until forced out. This made leaving the sites for food, work, healthcare, or other services challenging, as one could never be sure whether their camp and belongings would still be there when they returned. There were also concerns that camps left unattended could be subject to theft by others who came upon the site. The repeated loss of items to sweeps and theft created a continuous cycle of reacquisition of things to needed to meet basic needs. It also deepened a sense of despair among the population.

A collection of small nonprofits, churches, and volunteers are currently working to meet the unmet needs of the houseless population. These efforts are often independent of each other, but all demonstrate a similar commitment to fill the gaps they see in their areas regarding services for the houseless population. The goods and services offered include off-island substance abuse support, showers, meals and groceries, clothing, supplies, and life skill workshops. All these community efforts—which are as essential as the goods and services offered—delivered care, compassion, and a sense of community to a population that is too often marginalized.

Across all of the houseless population interviewed for this study there was a quiet desperation to be seen and heard, coupled with the faintest sense of hope that this work, in shining a light on the reality of houselessness on Kaua‘i, could change things for the positive. There was widespread concern among members of the houseless population that both the county of Kaua‘i and the state of Hawaii were unable (or unwilling) to address solutions for the houseless population on the

island. County representatives indicated that a lack of resources, political will, and other endemic issues hampered their ability to implement solutions.

UNPACKING THE WICKED PROBLEM

The thematic analysis made clear that there was a need to unpack the wicked problem aspect of houselessness on Kaua‘i to be able to offer compelling recommendations developed with a clear understanding of the complex systems that helped create, and continue to exacerbate, the problem. This is important to examine as we have been unable as a society (to date) to fully meet the challenge of houselessness. It is fair to say that houselessness on Kaua‘i, like other locations, is a disaster in and of itself that has been in the making for decades.

In examining some of the key complexities that arose from this research, the contextualization of the challenge becomes more apparent. The complexities unpacked here are the ones that clearly and consistently arose out of the data collection. These complexities include a lack of affordable housing, mental health services, limited substance abuse services, a tourism-driven economy, workforce shortages, and community services. They are covered to illustrate the kind of systems thinking and analysis required to address the wicked problem of houselessness competently. A simple illustration of the interconnection and interdependence of these complexities is provided in Figure 3. In this figure, the large encompassing circle represents houselessness as the focusing complexity and the arrows show interconnection (one-sided) and interdependence (two-sided).

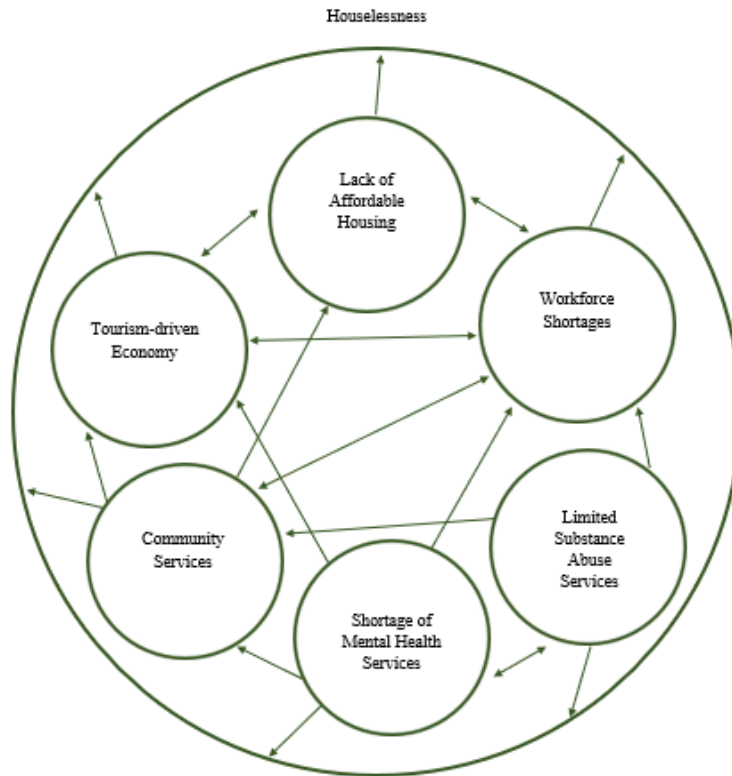
It is acknowledged that there are more complexities than are addressed herein. For example, the county-elected governance structure on the island—in which every councilmember is up for re-election every two years—increases the pressure on councilmembers to make politically expedient decisions, particularly on long-term projects that will not reach completion before the next election season. This puts more power in the mayor’s hands (a four-year position) regarding longer-term planning directives (and Kaua‘i is a strong-mayor, weaker-council model based in large part on its term construction). Alas, a lack of alignment between the mayor’s and council’s goals can result in two years of challenges that could end in the mayor and council being up for re-election simultaneously. This cycle can be highly disruptive to effective governance and the implementation of solutions to challenging or wicked problems. This type of complexity is prevalent in systems where elected governance structures are involved and should be considered (as it is here) as a foundational impediment to be circumvented (as much as practicable) within the structures of solutions.

Houselessness

The houseless population has internalized treatment as a collective “other” (Melnitser, 2007; Mik-Meyer, 2021; Vickery, 2018) and feels a need to reassert that they are human beings and worthy of compassion. The sense of having less value and acceptance in the larger population heightens the importance of being of value and being accepted within the houseless population. A sense of community and the social connection was fully realized in the shelter parks. It changed not only the worldview of members of the houseless population but also their view of

themselves. The sense of what “could be” was expanded by the shared experiences in the shelter parks.

Figure 3. Unpacking the Wicked Problem of Houselessness in Kaua‘i



While distrust of local and state governments was somewhat diminished during the period the shelter parks were open, it quickly returned when the parks were closed, and encampment sweeps were again initiated. The same distrust is also widely held for service providers who made inroads during the shelter park period but were hard-pressed to offer the same level of services after their clientele scattered across the island. Some houseless believe these service providers alert landowners and law enforcement of their locations, resulting in encampment sweeps. This has a chilling effect on members of the houseless population seeking services available to them, which exacerbates their vulnerability.

The houseless population circulates in small networks with trusted nonprofit partners that offer care, food, resources, or other services in different locations around the island. These trusted nonprofit partners often have specific individuals in their organization (termed “touchpoints” herein) that have earned the houseless population’s trust over time based on their consistent level of service, an approach that emphasizes mutual respect, and a focus on the maintenance of dignity. These systems are quite vulnerable as the touchpoints are few and far between, and the

loss of a trusted touchpoint could result in a loss of connection with the houseless population. There is very little personnel depth in many of these organizations, but even when there is depth, the fragility of the trust relationship with the houseless population requires a tremendous commitment from the touchpoint (Azambuja, 2019; Fujimoto, 2021b).

Some of the houseless have employment, but the vast majority have episodic employment based on their specific skill sets or earnings tied to selling wares to tourists. Employment is difficult as those without a vehicle must leave their property unattended to go to work. The threat of theft and encampment sweeps greatly limits the houseless population's ability to join the workforce. The primary focus of most of the houseless population is meeting daily needs such as food, shelter, and safety—none of which are guaranteed on the island.

Lack of Affordable Housing

Kaua'i is Hawai'i's fourth largest island and has an estimated 73,454 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The number of housing units was 30,332 in 2021, with 3.05 persons per household (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The housing units include owner-occupied (65.1% or approximately 19,746 units), rental, and vacation rentals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Local buyers accounted for only about 60% of all housing units sold in Kaua'i (Meierdiercks, 2022). One in eight homes on the island is used as a vacation rental (Scrimgeour, 2022b)—which equates to roughly 3,800 units. This leaves roughly 6,800 rental units.

The median value of owner-occupied housing was \$606,900 in 2020 and the median gross rent was \$1,423 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The median household income was \$107,000 in 2022 (County of Kaua'i, 2022a). The low-income limit (80%) for one person per HUD was \$63,850 as of April 25, 2022 (County of Kaua'i, 2022a). According to a county representative, HUD Section 8 Vouchers are currently outpaced by rental costs that have reached up to \$1,900 for a studio.

The current cost-of-living index in Waimea (in Kaua'i county) puts the cost of food and groceries at \$164.40 (64% above the national average), utilities at \$200.60 (100% above the national average), and housing for homeowners at \$184.20 (84% above the national average) (Best Places, 2022). The combined factors of median household income, housing cost, housing availability (and rental availability), and the overall cost of living have contributed to an affordable housing crisis on Kaua'i.

This crisis has been more challenging to deal with because there has been an increase in retirees moving to the island and a decrease in working-age families (Spindt, 2020). This has pushed both increases in housing prices and further tightened the affordable housing market. This is coupled with the exodus of many Hawaiians to the mainland to enjoy a better quality of life. For example, Las Vegas, Nevada, is often referred to as the ninth island as it is said to house the largest population of Hawaiians outside of Hawai'i (Vegas Experience, 2021). Clearly, the shortage of affordable housing coupled with the rising cost of housing has profound impacts on other areas such as the workforce shortage and the tourism-driven economy. Most pressing for the houseless population are the challenges it presents for using subsidized housing tools in a

rental market that is being pushed out of reach by wealthy buyers coupled with an abysmal lack of affordable units (and even fewer willing to accept HUD vouchers).

Shortage of Mental Health Services

The need for mental health services has increased due to the pandemic (American Psychological Association, 2021; World Health Organization, 2022). According to county representatives, community advocates and allies, and those members of the houseless population interviewed who use mental health services, there are insufficient service providers on the island to meet the needs of island residents. The state of Hawai‘i cut a number of mental health positions on Kaua‘i in 2020 (Scrimgeour, 2022a). The ability to recruit additional mental health providers (or any new members of the workforce) to the island is hampered by the ongoing lack of affordable housing (Community Coalition Kaua‘i, 2019).

The challenges of being houseless can harm mental health (Hossain, et al., 2020) and mental health issues can result in, or exacerbate, substance abuse (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2021). Mental health issues also damage the potential of members of the houseless population to reunite with housed family members. Unfortunately, the lack of mental health services becomes, by default, a law enforcement issue that is problematic (Rode, 2022). The shortage of mental health services is a key element that perpetuates houselessness on the island.

Limited Substance Abuse Services

Similar to the shortage of mental health services, there are limited substance abuse services (likewise hampered by the lack of affordable housing). In addition, there is no detox center on the island and no residential facility. According to county representatives, there are not enough substance abuse counselors or services to meet the need. Substance abuse challenges are often tied to mental health challenges, and the challenges of houselessness exacerbate both. Like mental health issues, substance abuse also damages the potential of members of the houseless population to reunite with housed family members as their substance abuse was often part of the estrangement. This, too, becomes, by default, a law enforcement issue and is likewise a critical element that perpetuates houselessness on the island.

Tourism-Driven Economy

Kaua‘i averages between 100,000–140,000 visitors each month (Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, 2022). Prior to the pandemic (in 2019), Kaua‘i’s tourist-centered economy brought in 1.3 million visitors who spent a total of \$1.9 billion on Kaua‘i (Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, 2022). Tourism supports one-third of the island’s economy and 38% of jobs (Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, 2022). Tourism is a love/hate relationship for residents and there are growing concerns about “over-tourism” and the sustainability of current visitor numbers due to inadequate infrastructure (i.e., goods, services, workers, parking, roads) (Lyte, 2022; Napier, 2021). In addition, an airport

facelift and expansion are planned for Lihue Airport to increase the number of gates available and enable more flights to come in daily (Yunker, 2022).

Continuing growth in the tourism sector, particularly juxtaposed against a year of dramatically reduced visitors in 2020, has residents begging tourists to stay home (McDonagh, 2022). Hawai‘i reached its highest visitor count of 10.4 million in 2019, followed by a 74% drop to 2.7 million visitors statewide in 2020—with the county of Kaua‘i maintaining restrictions for the longest period (Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, 2020). The pressure to reopen was palpable as the months without tourists went on and businesses started to fear business failure and closure (Parachini, 2020). Kaua‘i was able to keep its COVID case count down until travel resumed but faced dramatic upticks in cases as tourists returned to the island (Wu, 2021).

Kaua‘i’s tourism industry heavily depends on the workforce and requires affordable housing. Yet, vacation rentals on Kaua‘i, with a 1:8 ratio, stand in contrast to the statewide proportion of 1 in 24 (Scrimgeour, 2022b). “In certain areas, 1 in 2.5 homes are vacation rentals, and 53% of these rentals are owned by non-residents” (Scrimgeour, 2022b). “Property-tax data shows a net increase of 133 vacation rentals in 2022, most of which were converted from residential or homestead use, continuing a trend from the past two years” (Scrimgeour, 2022b). Tourism presents both an economic benefit and detriment to Kaua‘i’s economy with the detriment disproportionately creating pressure on those in lower socioeconomic brackets. This pressure makes the viability of sufficient affordable housing to meet workforce needs increasingly dangerous, leaving the houseless population at the bottom of an ever-growing list.

Workforce Shortages

There is a shortage of mental health and substance abuse service providers on Kaua‘i, a “major issue for the houseless population” (Healthcare Association of Hawaii, 2015). These shortages are not limited to these types of service providers. They extend across other sectors, including healthcare (Bodon, 2022), agriculture (Hawai‘i Department of Agriculture, 2020), and other industries with historically lower wages that are now forced to elevate the rate of pay to a competitive level and come up with creative solutions (Shinno, 2021c; Shinno, 2021d). The lack of affordable housing on Kaua‘i affects the ability to recruit a sufficient workforce (at a rate that the market will bear) to meet the needs of island residents.

The recruitment of trained and licensed service providers capable of filling the mental health and substance abuse service gaps require an ability to offer pay commensurate with the acquisition of suitable housing in the current market. Unfortunately, rising housing market costs, coupled with a shortage of affordable units, is outpacing the ability of public and private employers to pay a sufficient wage to allow these providers to live on the island. Without the ability to acquire an additional skilled workforce, the existing workforce is stretched thin.

Community Services

Community services such as healthcare, first responders, social workers, local government staff, utility providers, grocery providers, etc., are subject to the same workforce challenges. These

services are fundamental to island residents' daily life. Many of these services are subject to the impacts of "over-tourism."

Shortages in some service areas default to other areas that may not be ideally equipped to address the needs presented (particularly those related to the houseless population). The houseless population, more so than many other residents, tends to be more heavily dependent on some of these community services and is the least likely to have good outcomes without them. Like so many other things on Kaua'i, these services are affected by their interconnection and interdependence in an increasingly fragile system.

Using a Systems Thinking Approach

The above complexities are the ones that came up repeatedly in the data as key pain points in the crafting of solutions for the houseless population. The interconnection and interdependence between these complexities within a systems-thinking framework illustrate the level of systemwide focus the issue of houselessness requires. Every adjustment in such a dynamic system can potentially have a non-linear effect that reconfigures the current challenge or creates new challenges (Polese et al., 2021; Ratter, 2012; Wheatley, 1994). Hence, every adjustment within the system must be evaluated for its impact across the system before moving forward with the next adjustment (McNab et al., 2020). This approach requires an overarching collaborative effort with those thoroughly familiar with the known complexities and their nuances. It necessitates extensive wargaming to reach a full understanding of the system and a more informed understanding of how it will respond to adjustments (Perla & McGrady, 2019).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In late 2021 (after this study was initiated), the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published work through a rapid expert consultation about disaster vulnerability among homeless populations during COVID-19. This work reviewed "research on disaster vulnerability, homelessness, the COVID-19 pandemic, and intersecting hazards and disasters" (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021, p. ii). This strong piece made several key observations and provided strategies for meeting the population's specific needs (based on a review of the existing literature). The findings from this current study reinforce many of the observations of the aforementioned work and expand on the strategies offered with a focus on sustainable solutions that foster resilience.

Resilience, "the ability to absorb, recover from, and adapt to adverse events," is developed pre-event and is the shared responsibility of "individuals, families, communities, the private sector, faith-based organizations, nongovernment organizations, academe, and all levels of government" (Cutter et al., 2013, p. 28). This requires (in part) that "individuals, communities, and governments reverse the pattern of short-term thinking that erodes resilience and develop strategies to invest now in long-term disaster risk reduction and resilience, rather than paying more after the disaster for response and recovery costs" (Cutter et al., 2013, p. 28). Resilience at the individual/household level requires risk ownership and the requisite preparedness and

mitigation activities that go along with that ownership, but that alone provides an incomplete understanding of resilience at that level.

A synthesis of the response and recovery literature shows that in addition to the aforementioned actions, improved individual/household outcomes in response and recovery are tied to three things: social integration (social networks that can provide support), information source integration (access to information through multiple platforms), and mental and physical adaptive capacity (mentally and physically healthy people adapt better in both response and recovery) (Nojang & Jensen, 2020, p. 335). Taken together, we have a more complete sense of how individuals and households can develop resilience (i.e., the ability to absorb, recover from, and adapt to adverse events) pre-event. This allows for more focused strategies designed to create a more resilient nation.

FEMA's mitigation mission in the *National Preparedness Goal* has a number of core capabilities focused on resilience. The 32 core capabilities in five mission areas support the *National Preparedness Goal* to prepare the whole community to be "A secure and resilient nation with the capabilities required across the whole community to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from the threats and hazards that pose the greatest risk" (FEMA, 2015). The mission area of mitigation, which focuses on the reduction of "the loss of life and property by lessening the impact of future disasters" (FEMA, 2015), has become a progressively stronger and innovative tool in the emergency management arsenal in recent decades. The most salient capability to the discussion herein is the capability focused on long-term vulnerability reduction: "Build and sustain resilient systems, communities, and critical infrastructure and key resources lifelines so as to reduce their vulnerability to natural, technological, and human-caused threats and hazards by lessening the likelihood, severity, and duration of the adverse consequences" (FEMA, 2015).

Focusing on building and sustaining resilient communities "so as to reduce their vulnerability to natural, technological, and human-caused threats and hazards by lessening the likelihood, severity, and duration of the adverse consequences" (FEMA, 2015) brings us to the topic at hand. The data in this study illustrates that the houseless population in Kaua'i is vulnerable based on deficits regarding social integration, information source integration, and mental and physical adaptive capacity, and that vulnerability is exacerbated by the interconnected and interdependent complexities with possible solutions. Efforts to develop resilience for a population with the level of heightened exposure the houseless population in Kaua'i faces must be addressed pre-event as a shared responsibility.

Starting with the three-prong construct of social integration, information source integration, and mental and physical adaptive capacity, we know the deficits present themselves in these areas as follows.

Social Integration

The highest level of social integration the houseless population experienced was in the shelter parks. In that environment, they built social capital and integrated into a community structure. Since then, this level of integration has been dramatically reduced by the dispersion of the

houseless population into single or small groups to several undeveloped locations (i.e., the bushes around the island). Their ability to support and access each other has been reduced dramatically.

Information Source Integration

In the shelter parks, the homeless population was more informed as a collective (based in large part on their co-location and daily communications), and they also had regular contact with providers and community outreach volunteers. They were developing greater trust in the government. Today, their sources for information have been reduced dramatically (based in large part on dispersion and lack of regular communication), and their trust of the government has been greatly reduced. This is particularly problematic as it relates to the government's or other partners' ability to effectively communicate essential preparedness guidance, warnings, or other pre- or post-event information to this population.

Mental and Physical Adaptive Capacity

There is a great deal of research about the negative effect of houselessness on health (Duke & Searby, 2019; Fazel et al., 2014; Gentil et al., 2019; Gicas, et al., 2020; Gonzalez & Tyminski, 2020; Hossain et al., 2020; Liu & Hwang, 2021; Martens, 2001). The data in this study shows that mental health is an issue in the houseless population, and the county of Kaua'i does not have the infrastructure to meet the mental health needs on the island. The data also shows that substance abuse worsens mental and physical health issues in this population. The shelter parks did provide a structure that was more supportive for those who had mental and physical health challenges, albeit not necessarily remediation of these challenges.

These deficits indicate pre-event that the houseless population will not have a good response or recovery outcome and, therefore, will not be resilient. This warrants pre-event actions to develop and foster resilience in the houseless population. The shelter parks provided fortuitous insight regarding how capability and capacity can be developed that make the houseless population more resilient.

DISCUSSION

This study's findings show that the houseless population benefits from a supportive community of their peers that they can both contribute to and draw from. Every houseless individual interviewed for this study noted the shelter parks' value to their mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being. The shelter parks were a place to belong and in that belonging came connection. The social network piece was not surprising based on our understanding of social capital in such events (Aldrich, 2017). What was surprising was the impact the social network had on shelter park residents' self-worth and sense of capability to contribute. This went beyond connection and became a confirmation of sameness and value, feelings that have steadily been stripped away from the houseless population through the diminishment of them as an "other" by a society that too often views them as a collection of stigmas (Kamelhar, 201; Phelan et al., Reilly et al., 2022; 1997; Vitelli, 2021) and a blight (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015; Speer, 2019).

The houseless regained a sense of purpose in their role to their new community and in that role (and in that place) they recognized more clearly that they added value.

The closure of the shelter parks disrupted the communities in which the social networks developed, resulted in painful separations, and dissolved the sense of purpose and value that the community members had developed. While there remained an opportunity to still connect via social media, phone, or at community events serving the houseless population, the loss of structure and purpose fell away as those previously in the shelter parks scattered to a variety of locations on the island in an attempt to find places where they could live undetected and undisturbed. This immediately changed the ease with which service providers could provide outreach and the houseless population's willingness to make their location known. The sweeps that occurred at these sites further deteriorated trust in the government.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report (2021) in calling for mitigation efforts to reduce vulnerability for people without secure housing, noted that those “who lack regular access to secure shelter are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards of various types and scales” (p. 1). Furthermore, the report noted that “poor health is both a contributor to and a consequence of” houselessness, “existing health conditions are exacerbated by living outside” (p. 9), and members of the houseless population are more likely to be impacted by service interruptions that have an effect on their “health, safety, and general well-being” thereby intensifying “disaster vulnerability” (p. 8). The report concludes that to achieve “whole-community resilience” the root causes of houselessness, which “include social, political, and economic processes at various levels of governance that systemically disenfranchise individuals based on such characteristics as race, ethnicity, ability, gender, and socioeconomic status” (p. 17), must be addressed.

Historically, we look to extract individuals from houselessness by putting them into transitional or subsidized housing that seeks to reintegrate them into the housed communities. This presumes that the only thing the houseless individual lacks is a house. Some programs integrate wraparound services into these housing placements to increase the likelihood of successful integration and the ability to transition into permanent housing. However, it is a much rarer phenomenon to see the houseless population provided housing as a self-supported community that empowers each other.

This study supports that a key element of addressing houselessness in Kaua‘i must be the opportunity for members of the houseless community to live and develop their capability to transition into other opportunities as part a collective community. This means creating a community housing development specifically for members of the houseless population (as opposed to a few units being designated for the houseless) that requires collaboration and contribution from each community member. Such a development can offer wraparound services, focus on strengthening individual health and well-being, offer classes on skills and abilities necessary for addressing life management and challenging situations, and solidify the social and information networks both within the houseless community and as an expanding resource beyond the community. Mental health and substance abuse providers, case managers, advocates, and other service providers should be dedicated specifically to this community and be regularly

accessible. The key tenets that must frame the operations of this community come from the example set by community advocates and allies currently serving the houseless population: dignity, respect, and trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the complexity of houselessness and the importance of reducing vulnerability in this population, the overarching strategy must be managed by an agency with the requisite bandwidth, capability, and convening power to bring together a layered series of governmental and private sector partners. FEMA is that agency. FEMA is well-versed in working with partners on major initiatives that advance the readiness and resilience of the nation. The *2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan (2022)* supports FEMA's engagement in solutions focused on addressing disparities in the readiness and resilience of underserved communities and populations. The issue of houselessness is a good fit for FEMA engagement based on the potential of strong mitigation efforts to reduce vulnerability and foster resilience in a population that is difficult to adequately plan for and protect (particularly in areas facing interdependent complexities that could serve as multipliers that further exacerbate vulnerability).

It is recommended that the White House adopt a National Strategy on Houselessness that tasks FEMA with the mission space to manage a collaborative, coordinated strategy focused on the development of five model houseless community developments through a newly developed, dedicated mitigation-oriented funding lane established in partnership with the Departments of Agriculture, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, and other relevant federal agencies that have programs with service missions associated with meeting the needs of the houseless population as an independent population or as citizens. This funding lane can be utilized to establish model houseless community developments that collectively capture the variations in location, services, complexities, etc. in houselessness around the country. These sites will provide FEMA and its partner agencies the ability to deliver and measure innovative solutions that can then inform additional efforts and best practices for other locations. It will also set a baseline for return on investment on mitigation funding that is population focused instead of hazard-focused (FEMA, 2018) and prompt a dialogue on measuring the cost of resilience.

On Kaua'i, the complexities addressed herein, the governance, the fragility of the safety net, cultural considerations, and the additional challenge of being on an island (particularly given climate change considerations and supply chain failures) are all variations worth distinguishing as relevant to selecting a model houseless community development. Also, other things to address in a proposal that are specifically relevant to Kaua'i are matters such as the integration of housing for mental health and substance abuse providers in the project design (based on the lack of affordable housing), levels of options regarding transitional housing (based on feedback from the houseless population), structures to meet the relevant standards based on hazard exposure and risk, renewable energy source use, wraparound services, life skill development, a focus on fostering social and information networks, and garden and orchard integration to further community sustainability. The extent to which this approach enhances social integration,

information integration, mental and physical adaptive capacity, and ultimately, resilience can be measured and tracked in this houseless community development model.

These projects can help emergency management re-envision how it promulgates equitable outcomes and fosters resilience. It is, simply put, a game-changer for emergency management professionals and the populations they serve. This proposed national strategy, while important to informing the success of the proposed model focused on sustainable resilience for the houseless population, does not preclude local action.

One of the most critical findings of this study is the need to analyze houselessness and strategies within the framing of the complex systems in which they exist and interact. Our strategies have historically expected linear results from applying the tools at hand (e.g., housing vouchers, treatment centers, mental health services) without regard for the sensitivities in the system that are decidedly non-linear. Local jurisdictions, regions, and states should start their efforts to advance resilience in the houseless population by mapping the systems in which the houseless currently exist and are exacerbated. By unpacking the wicked problem, essential representatives tied to the complexities within the system (to include members of the houseless population) can examine the challenges in the system and provide a variety of possible strategies that can advance viable solutions. These strategies can then be war-gamed to understand the ways in which they change the dynamics within the system. Once an understanding of the system and the impacts the strategies involved in solutions will have on the system have been fully understood and addressed, other elements such as funding, potential allies and partners, and focused steps to develop sustainable resilience in the houseless population can be more successfully addressed. Of note, systems are not stagnant. They change over time. Hence, periodic remapping of the system and its dynamics are an integral part of successfully working within these complex systems.

CONCLUSION

This study examined what happened when effective emergency management practice intersected with a historically marginalized population. What was learned from the shelter park strategy in Kaua'i was bigger than an affirmation of a successful COVID-19 response: it was a window into the deficits the houseless population face in regard to resilience and the ways in which government can enhance or detract from that resilience. It also was a reminder that the things that make us resilient are also the things that anchor our general well-being.

The houseless population on Kauai was reminded of the power of connection and community during their time in the shelter parks. They saw their value to the collective and began to value themselves again. In these parks, they became more resilient.

The shelter park strategy gave emergency management an unexpected lesson on fostering key dimensions of resilience. Using a complex systems analysis approach and a collaborative, coordinated strategy, two critical advancements can be made in one fell swoop: addressing the wicked problem of houselessness and the challenge of resilience. Such an effort would have a ripple effect that positively impacts individuals, households, businesses, nonprofits, community

institutions, and government for decades to come. That is a return on investment that is hard to beat.

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Rage by Janet A. Powell (included with the permission of the author)

I have just had the most hatred filled vicious attack of rage screamed and spewed at me. I am horrified. By my own family member. I am ashamed not for how I believe, but what he said. He is of my blood? I don't know how. To be without compassion for fellow men is a lonely hateful position. We are all unique, yet we are all human. Alike but different. We all have a one-of-a-kind individual expression of life. We all come from different economical statures and places. The many faces of the one universal mind. Some of us are more fortunate in finances some in love and luck. But we all bleed the same. We are made of flesh and blood, emotions, and spirit. The same. We look different. We act different. We are different but once again the same. Human. He is more intelligent than me. She is more beautiful. We look for our place or turn on the wheel of fortune. Grey we will turn as we wait for human life to fulfill us for it is filled with limits. Limits of the mind and the flesh.

Non-acceptance from one of another's point of view is based on such ignorance and fear that they appear to be bigoted lacking any form of compassion or understanding. Why be so hateful? What are they afraid of? A segment of society? Every segment of society can be mentioned individually with care. Add a fact of homelessness to the mix and watch the fireworks fly. Or should I say bombs go off. I guess that is the segment we don't mention. The unmentionables.

There are many reasons to be homeless. None of them good. Everyone has a story. All of them different with a common thread somewhere running through it. Something to relate to with each other. A human quality or situation, bonding. Circumstances beyond their control and they are homeless. What do they do now? They are not alone. So, a community is formed. There is safety in numbers. Everyone treading ground trying not to suffocate on the dust. The numbers grow as society sickens.

Whose problem is it? Whose issue? The individual or the machine? Where do the solutions lay? Whose responsibility? There are so many levels of different people and their stories. Some are caught by economic circumstance. Some by mental or physical illness. Some by drugs. Some are old. Some are young. Some are strong and some are lazy. Who is who, is the question? And what can be done to help? Who's responsible? Apparently, no one. And the tax paying community cringes. Because they are better than the homeless because they work, have big trucks, live beyond their means. Driving the poverty ridden to even below poverty level. Homeless. What else is expected?

All people cannot exist the same. We may live in the same world but mine is different than yours. Interpretations. Some people are not equipped to live in society's free world. No, they don't know how. They weren't taught. They are ill. They are inadequate to survive. Or they are just lazy, complacent. But there is a percentage that do work. Yet what they do does not earn enough to fit society's rules. So, what are they to do? And there are those who just want out but lack the means and the know-how. This is where human compassion and intelligence should kick in not ignorance. But it doesn't. It is sickening. It is sad.

Help should be offered where it truly is needed. There are those that don't know how or have disabilities or disadvantages and can't follow through. They fall through the cracks dying while barely surviving. The ones who are sly and know how to work the system unfortunately can ruin it for the rest. How do we discern the difference without compassion? We can't. The homeless are proud, strong, community minded. They can survive. They know the importance of kindness and compassion amongst themselves. Unlike the majority of society who are ill equipped in these areas apparently. A lack of kindness and compassion runs rampant within the minds of some. Call it ignorance for lack of words.