

WAIKIKI'S TOURISM INDUSTRY PLANS TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS



Industry leaders in the tourism sector donate hundreds of thousands of dollars to put an end to Waikiki's homeless problem. The initiative aims to get hundreds of homeless off the streets in a year's time.

To jumpstart the program, the Hawaii Lodging & Tourism Association (HLTA) is donating \$100,000 to the Institute of Human Services (IHS) for this year. Another \$100,000 will be donated to the institute next year.

George Szigeti, the President and CEO of HLTA, said that the complaint number one of the visitors who don't want to come back are the homeless people.

He also said that the IHS came up with an action plan to solve the homeless problem in Waikiki. Szigeti added that his group was very pleased about the institute's plan and they readily gave their support.

Executive Director Connie Mitchell of the IHS said that the cooperation with the tourism sector is one of a kind. The plan involves sending a team to Waikiki four times a week to bring the homeless from Waikiki to IHS to allow people to easily access the offered services. There is also a plan to build a resource center in Waikiki especially for the homeless.

Mitchell said that many people are not aware of IHS services. Through this program, Mitchell believes that more people will know that help is available to those who are in need.

There are about 500 people who live on the streets in Waikiki. Three hundred individuals are expected to be put into shelters. Some of these people will be sent back to their home state during the first year of the program's implementation.

The plan also seeks to help 120 homeless individuals from the mainland to return to their homes. These individuals will have to pay 50% of the cost of the plane ticket. The IHS, however, will help those who cannot afford the airfare. The institute will assist the homeless to find money to buy tickets.

To keep the program going, the IHS must raise another \$400,000 yearly from other donors.

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