



Mental Health Through Connection

**Impact Report Update
Summer 2025**

Table of Contents

Overview.....	1-2
Mission, Vision, and Values	1
Organizational History and Experience.....	1
Opportunity & Need.....	1-2
Current Programs and Projects.....	3-14
Nature & Art as Therapy.....	3-10
The Impact.....	10
Facilitators and Volunteers.....	11
Connecting Community to Support.....	12
Cross-sector Collaboration.....	12
Community Partner Survey.....	13
Community Partner Feedback.....	13-14
What's Next for Nature & Art as Therapy: Transportation.....	14
Programs & Projects in Development Supportive Housing.....	14-16
Leadership.....	17

Overview

Our Mission, Vision, and Values

Root & Rise Hawai'i is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides accessible, therapeutic mental health support and services to under-served populations in Hawai'i, including adults with Serious Persistent Mental Illness¹ (SPMI). Our programs foster a sense of creativity, competency, and resilience; cultivate connection to place, community, and self; and facilitate community integration and cohesion.

Root & Rise believes that mental health is achieved through connection to self, community, and 'āina (land). Our vision is to create safe spaces and equitable opportunities for all to grow and thrive in unison.

Core Values: Accessibility, Safety, Growth & Adaptability, Freedom & Empowerment, and Aloha 'āina.

Organizational History and Experience

Root & Rise Hawai'i has engaged over 1000 individuals since September 2021 and was established as a 501(c)(3) in May 2023. Operations are carried out by skilled community members and dedicated volunteers, guided by co-founders Aliza Gebin and Mona Trenae-Maynard and a strong board of directors with expertise in mental health, community engagement, and business management. Root & Rise Hawai'i is currently working to build organizational capacity and increase program offerings to include workforce development and supportive, transitional housing for adults with SPMI in Hawai'i.

Opportunity & Need

Root & Rise Hawai'i emerged from an understanding of community strengths, interests, needs, and opportunities for mental health wellness on our islands. In the state of Hawai'i:

- [82%](#) of adults have experienced a mental health condition in the past six months;
- [21.47%](#) of all adults have AMI (Any Mental Illness); and
- Only [32%](#) of people experiencing mental health challenges receive some form of support.

¹Serious Persistent Mental Illness (SPMI): diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that causes serious functional impairment that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities. SPMI includes disorders such as bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, schizophrenia, and schizoaffective disorder.

Limited access to adequate mental health services persists due to barriers of cost, transportation, provider shortages, stigma, and cultural competency gaps. These barriers impact social determinants of health, including social inclusion, housing, employment, and access to healthy food, which hinder the ability of our communities at-large to function and thrive.

Community-generated solutions to mental health issues, include:

- Earlier intervention and prevention
- Cultural competency
- Work to reduce stigma
- Conversation about life skills training and coping skills

Current Programs and Projects

Nature & Art as Therapy

Nature & Art as Therapy, our flagship program, offers free, community-based mental health support through workshops that combine nature- and art-based activities focused on mindfulness and social connection to improve mental health wellness. The program primarily benefits adults facing mental health challenges on the west of Hawai'i Island.

A few special 2024/2025 Nature & Art as Therapy workshops:

- **PositiviTEA** – Integrated the creation of personalized herbal tea blends with positive affirmations to nourish both body and mind.

What our participants liked: *"GIVE THEM FUNDING!!! We need more wholesome activities like this.." "I love tea, nuff said..." "Calming."*



- Sunprints and Botanical Dye Pillowcases – Brought us into deeper connection with the 'āina, reminding us of the beauty found in natural materials and unexpected outcomes.



- Free to Be Me Celebration – July 4 – Our first and second annual celebration featured mask-making and a shared community barbecue by the beach. Done in conjunction with Mental Health Kōkua, several new participants were introduced to Root & Rise Hawai'i through this community event at a local beach park.



What participants liked:

"Got to meet interesting people and have a great day!" "Community." "The food."

"This is so great for me to get out and socialize. So grateful."



"Freedom to experiment! Imagination!"



- Collective Art Practices – Included collaborative collage projects (like crafting a bird's wings) and the creation of large-scale acrylic artwork celebrating shared expression.

- Henna & Chai Tea Ceremony – Invited intention-setting in a peaceful environment with traditional henna art and shared cups of warm chai.

What our participants liked: *"One of the best we have had yet!" "Peaceful. Gave me a good peaceful feeling!" "Everything."*



- Sound Bath & Breathwork – Used vibrational healing and intentional breathing to promote deep relaxation, emotional release, and inner balance.

What our participants liked: *"It was comforting." "Soothing." "Gave me a centered balanced body."*

- Creative Crisis Safety Plans – Combined peer support with collage-making to help participants develop grounding tools and personalized safety plans.

What our participants liked: *"Nice to get out of the house helps with my anxiety" "Learn about how to talk to someone better."*

- 'Āina Restoration Activities – Involved trail-making, garden weeding, and cleanups to care for and give back to the land.



What participants liked about this workshop:
"Community involvement." "Working out in nature." "Working with my hands." "Cleaning up." "Physical therapy. I love the people."



"I loved being in the forest and working together as a group to accomplish something amazing!"

"It was a humbling and amazing experience to come together as a group like we did to serve the way we did! The walking trail looks amazing and I pray it brings peace and is soothing for all who step foot on it."

"That I was able to help with the service project."



- Equine Therapy – Offered healing interactions with horses that allow for participants to process anxiety, trauma-related disorders or PTSD in a non-verbal way.

Our participants' feedback underscores this evidence:

"Not too much information to try to remember. I have difficulty with that. This, I can remember."

"Freedom." "Relaxing."

"You could go at your own pace."

"Good vibes."

- Shell Art - Working with natural elements like shells, collected here on our beaches, by embedding them in a natural clay allowed participants to focus on arranging their shells in meaningful ways while also allowing them freedom to create without focusing on dexterity or becoming frustrated.



What our participants liked:

"It was something new."

"Enjoyed watching people make things." "Everything."

"It's fun and nice to be creative."

"Interesting making shell imprinting..."

- Flower Gardens & Bouquet Making at Nanea Gardens in Nā'ālehu - We picked flowers, made bouquets and shared in making and eating lunch together.

What our participants liked:

*"Working with the flowers." "Beautiful area and the flowers were gorgeous!"
"Freedom to express myself!"*



"Symptom management and crafts like making lunches and doing flowers."



HIGHLIGHT: Camping up Mauka

In August 2024, we brought a group of Root & Risers with SPMI to a private cabin on the mountainside above Kealahou for an overnight trip. We explored the 'āina, gathered our findings to make beautiful bouquets, played games, and feasted on ono (delicious), locally sourced food.

Over a campfire, we wrote down things we were ready to let go of, along with our wishes and desires for the future, then offered them to the fire—sending them out into the universe with purpose. And, no campfire would be complete without the joy of s'mores.



This experience truly embodied what Root & Rise Hawai'i is all about. Mahalo to our co-founders Mona Trena-Maynard and Aliza Gebin, as well as [Mental Health Kōkua \(MHK\)](#), Amanda, [Kaya's Cafe](#) and [Kainaliu Fresh](#) for making this experience unforgettable.

This overnight trip was a living expression of our core values: creating a sense of belonging, deepening our connection to place and each other, and making space for joy—even in the midst of life's challenges. Everyone contributed to preparing food, and each person found their own moments of peace while feeling supported by the warmth and presence of community.



Nature & Art as Therapy is built upon principles of trauma-informed care, including empowerment, choice, collaboration, safety, and trustworthiness. Developed to engage and maximize community-based assets, the program invites local experts, artists, and practitioners to serve as workshop facilitators, and draws upon existing social networks and local services to engage volunteers and program partners. Nature & Art as Therapy honors the values and lifestyle of our island's culture, which recognizes connection to 'āina, service, and community as vital components of well-being. The program is currently funded by Hawai'i Community Foundation and County of Hawai'i Waiwai Grants-in-Aid.



The Impact

- **Nature & Art as Therapy has engaged over 1190 individuals since 2021**, and a total of 229 participants since January 2025 alone – on target to surpass last year's participation.
- **Improved Mental Health:** 97% of participants report improved mental health from a single workshop.
- **Returning Participants:** 48% of participants have attended more than one workshop.
- **Partner social service organizations:** Mental Health Kōkua, CARE Hawai'i, Steadfast Housing Development Corporation, Kona Paradise Club, Department of Health - Adult Mental Health Division, Hope Services, and Humanity Hale.
- **Increased support for community members suffering with mental health issues:** 69% of participants report they are living with mental health challenges or diagnoses.
- **Increased support for low-income community members:** 90% report low-income based on HUD's 2023 income limit for a single-person household.
- **Consistent workshops provide stability:** An average of 4 workshops are facilitated a month – open to the public and hosted in partnership with social service agencies specifically for their clients.

Facilitators and Volunteers

In this last year, Root & Rise Hawai'i has engaged over 20 facilitators and volunteers to guide, teach, lead and support our participants. 18 of these facilitators were leading a workshop with Root & Rise Hawai'i for the first time.

Facilitators and Workshops:

- Keli'ikanoe Mahi of Hiki Ola and Kumus Lloyd Kumulā'au Sing & May Haunani Balino-Sing: Ulana 'Ie'ie weaving workshops
- Kerry Green of Moonsun Art Gallery: Community Art Project at Charity Walk
- Madalyn Freedman: Creature Companions
- Karey White: Weaving
- Angaea Cuna of GaeaBound and Donkey Mill Art Center: Papermaking
- Nicolle Villari: Watercolor
- Courtney Meiselman: Ceramic Ornament Painting
- Molly Murphy and Darcy Yogi of Plant Pono: Holiday Ornament Making with locally grown trees
- Maka Gallinger: Ukulele and singing
- Sara LePouttre of Earth Petal Herbals: Botanical Dye Pillowcases
- Feliciana Gebin: Cooking Pancit
- Anita Bhakta of Hennasphere LLC: New Moon Henna Circle
- Emily Radisich: Group past life regression and guided meditation
- Jennifer Lindsay of Paradise Hawai'i Ranch: Equine Therapy
- Priscilla Basque of Wannabee Pono: 'Āina Service Project
- Pam Neil of Aloha Breathwork: Sound bath and breathwork
- Kay Burlingame: Nanea Flower Gardens
- doTerra: 'Āina Service Project
- Mona Trenae: Activities geared toward mental health wellness
- Aliza Gebin: 'Āina-based and social/emotional workshops
- Keala Hill: Art teacher

We would like to give a shout out to, Robin Dearman, who has been consistently volunteering for over a year! We appreciate you, Robin - for all that you do with joy, enthusiasm and caring in your heart. Mahalo nui loa ~ Root & Rise Hawai'i.



"With each encounter, I am learning empathy. I am understanding how each person is dealing with their circumstances. This understanding is making me a better person." – Robin Dearman, volunteer

Connecting Community to Support

Moreover, the program strengthens the local economy by fostering long-term resilience within the mental health sector. By providing a space for participants, the broader community, and social service partners—such as Mental Health Kōkua, CARE Hawai‘i, and Steadfast Housing—to connect, network, and share resources, we build a supportive ecosystem that promotes social integration and access to vital services. For example, a family member of someone facing mental health challenges might attend a workshop and be introduced to Mental Health Kōkua, which provides transitional housing support for adults with SPMI. Through this connection, they learn how to navigate the resources available to support their loved ones. Additionally, a mental health counselor may learn a basic art practice from the facilitators, which they can incorporate into their direct service outside of the workshop to better support clients with SPMI. This inclusive, community-driven approach not only addresses individual needs but also contributes to the overall quality of life for Hawai‘i’s residents.

Sharing meals and doing activities out in the community has created safe spaces even for those who are not current participants. On more than one occasion the Root & Rise Hawai‘i Team has engaged people in need of either social connection or more specialized services; for example, guiding some from self-elected houselessness to willingly accepting help. By offering our services out in the community there is the opportunity for the community to join us.

Cross-sector Collaboration

Additionally, by introducing community-based facilitators from diverse sectors—such as the arts and ‘āina-based industries—to innovative mental health approaches, the program strengthens Hawai‘i’s social fabric and reduces stigma. These facilitators, many of whom may not have previously encountered the health and wellness field, are trained to integrate holistic methods into their own work through their experience as a Nature & Art as Therapy facilitator. For example, a musician or artist may discover that their professional skills can be used to support healing and mental health, gaining tools to address a broad range of mental health needs within their profession. This cross-sector collaboration not only promotes professional growth but also expands the pool of facilitators able to support mental health in new and impactful ways. Initiatives like Nature & Art as Therapy re-envision traditional mental health care and introduce practices like social prescribing, offering alternative treatment options that enrich Hawai‘i’s approach to mental health.

Community Partner Survey

This year, we conducted our very first Community Partner Survey to gather feedback from past, present, and potential organizational and business partners, workshop facilitators, and volunteers. The goal was to better understand perceptions of our work and how our community would like to be involved. We received nearly 40 responses, with 51% indicating interest in increasing their support or partnership with Root & Rise Hawai'i. We gained valuable, detailed insights ranging from the types of workshops practitioners would like to offer, to how organizations would like to refer clients to our program, along with ideas for fund development, outreach opportunities, and reflections on how our mission touches people in meaningful ways.

Community Partner Feedback:

"Reflecting back on the last few months, I am honored to say that a strong highlight was collaborating with Root and Rise. As a ceramic artist, I am often alone in my studio. But on this day in December 2024, I had an opportunity to lead an ornament painting workshop in Amy Greenwell's lush gardens. As the participants gathered, those who arrived early jumped to help set up. After my demonstration, I gave each participant supplies. Ceramic ornament balls and special paints littered the tables as creativity bounced. Everyone had ideas, from including their initials or a word, to layering colors. Peoples' focus was strong and everyone was eager to share their creations. The workshop came to an end, not when all had finished their paintings, but rather when our bellies were full with ono grinds. The workshop was one day for the participants, but the ornaments had one final step before they were ready to adorn the tree. The participants parted from their hard work. The ornaments headed to the kiln, which would enhance their paintings with a glassy shine. As the final pieces came out of the kiln, and the metal tops were attached, I could only dream about everyone's reaction as the ornaments were returned. There was so much enthusiasm on that day, as we came together. I will not forget Root and Rise and the Ornament Day we had together." – Courtney Meiselman, facilitator, Ceramicist

"Throughout the event, we were continually met with gratitude. Every participant was so genuinely lovely that you would not know the hardships they have and continue to overcome. They remind us that we need to be grateful for a delicious meal, the opportunity to help, the assistance when we need it, and the ability to share our stories through art and community. It is the simple things that make our world go round, and we are so fortunate to be able to partner with Root & Rise Hawai'i who make this all possible."-- Darcy Yogi, facilitator, Plant Pono

"The experience was transformative, both for BIISC staff and hopefully for the participants. It was an opportunity for us to connect with under-resourced residents and share the importance of protecting Hawaii's biodiversity. For the participants, the hands-on activities and discussions fostered a deeper understanding of how their choices—such as selecting locally grown trees—can make a tangible difference. The SPMiles, laughter, and pride they expressed during the tree-decorating activity showed how much they valued the experience" – Molly Murphy, facilitator, Plant Pono

"Working with the Root & Rise Hawai'i community members in a teacher-to-student capacity was something new for me. It was very rewarding to see the joy they took in making their creations in their unique ways. Some with intense focus on their single piece the entire time to others creating more than one piece with equal enjoyment. It was wonderful to share what nature has provided with a group that shows sincere appreciation and enthusiasm, as evidenced in their finished pieces." -- Christopher Hill, Shell Art Class Co-Facilitator

What's Next for Nature & Art as Therapy: Transportation

For the upcoming year, we were awarded our largest grant to date – \$50,000 from County of Hawai'i Waiwai Grants-in-Aid. This grant will help us increase capacity and reach of the program by increasing funding for transportation. While we have relied on volunteers and travel stipends, many volunteers do not have the larger vehicles necessary to accommodate groups or the time to cover long distances, particularly to rural areas. To address this, we will contract transportation services to ensure reliable and efficient travel for participants. At the same time, we will continue to strengthen relationships with our volunteers, empowering them to focus on hands-on support during workshops and contributing to other key aspects of program development, such as fundraising. Additionally, the funding will help us continue to serve nutritious lunches and snacks (locally sourced when possible) for Nature & Art as Therapy workshops.

Programs & Projects in Development: Supportive Housing

Root & Rise is working to build organizational capacity and expand program offerings. Our goal is to expand to provide an array of mental health support, housing, training, and opportunity to those most impacted by mental health challenges and limited access to resources.

The vision includes:

- Supportive housing: Affordable housing with coordinated support services for adults with SPMI.
- Workforce development: Work opportunities and supportive training for adults with SPMI in supportive environments.
- Life skills development: Hands-on training for meal preparation, budgeting, personal hygiene, communication, navigating community resources, and more;
- Health and wellness opportunities: Accessible and holistic classes and services such as yoga, smoking cessation, acupuncture, and nutrition.
- Psychoeducation: Information and support for those with SPMI, their 'ohana, and the greater community to better understand and cope with mental health challenges.
- Peer mentorship: Supportive services where individuals who have navigated their own mental health journey offer counsel and solidarity to those facing similar experiences.
- Warm line: A free phone line that offers support and linkages to resources for those struggling and need someone to talk to.

Throughout the next year, our current focuses of growth is Root & Rise Supportive Housing.

Root & Rise Supportive Housing: A Path to Stability & Hope

The Root & Rise Supportive Housing program is a person-centered transitional housing with mental health support and therapeutic services. It will address the critical need for transitional housing and support services for adults experiencing SPMI in Hawai'i. This innovative program will provide affordable housing combined with coordinated wrap-around services, helping individuals gain stability, improve their quality of life, and integrate or reintegrate into the community.

The Need

- Almost [half of all unhoused individuals](#)² on Hawai'i Island are living with SPMI.
- Only [138 transitional housing program beds](#) exist across neighbor islands of Hawai'i, Maui, and Kauai for adults with SPMI.
- For a chronically houseless person living in Hawai'i, treatment in the ER, substance abuse programs, and other healthcare settings costs about [\\$8,162 a month – 76% higher](#) than that of an unhoused person in a sheltered environment.

² [Transitional housing program](#): temporary housing with supportive services to individuals experiencing homelessness with the goal of interim stability and support to successfully move to and maintain permanent housing.

Barriers to stable housing for people with SPMI include social stigma, financial insecurity, legal challenges, and medical conditions. With mental health symptoms exacerbated by the experience of houselessness, the use of costly systems like emergency rooms and prisons increases; families, communities, and the environment are strained; and individuals with mental illness continue to suffer, many in isolation.

Our Solution

To provide an intermediate step between houselessness and independent living, Root & Rise is working to create affordable housing coupled with coordinated support services to help adults with SPMI to gain stability, improve their quality of life, and integrate/re-integrate into the community.

Through daily residential supervision and individualized case management grounded in our core values, Root & Rise Hawai'i supportive housing will:

- Create opportunities for residents to meet basic needs (food, shelter, and safety);
- Prioritize the strengths, needs, and goals of each resident;
- Promote life-skill development, including personal hygiene, symptom management, gardening, food prep, financial literacy, and communication with providers;
- Link residents to therapeutic resources, including Root & Rise's Nature & Art as Therapy, and other community-based supports and social services; and,
- Support residents' transition to more independent living by helping to secure and maintain housing after discharge.

Root & Rise supportive housing will be accessible to adults with SPMI who are experiencing or are at-risk of houselessness. Residents will pay a subsidized rent of 30% of their income and will face no limitations on duration of residency, with the expectation that they work toward stability and greater independence.

Timeline

We are currently exploring potential housing sites and working to strengthen our organizational capabilities through program-building and administration support. Within the next three years, our projected goal is to raise an initial \$1.7 million to purchase the housing site and launch the program. While we work to develop a capital campaign for the housing site acquisition, our aim is to build and nurture relationships with our community, partners, and supporters to bring this vision to life.

Co-founders

Aliza Gebin, Chair of Board & Co-Founder

Art and 'Āina Educator, Project Coordinator – Independent Contractor

Mona Trena-Maynard, Co-Founder

Case Manager, Department of Health - Adults Mental Health Division

Mental Health Therapist, Care Hawai'i

Leadership

Melody Khodabandeh, Secretary, Director

Owner & Gallerist, MoonSun Art Gallery

Margaret Lim, Treasurer, Director

Special Education Educator (Retired), Department of Education

Olani Lilly, Director

Executive Director, ChangeMakers Community Economic Development Corp.
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