



The Stronger Together
Hawai'i Scholarship Report 2023-2024

Stronger Together

Thanks to you ...



HAWAI'I COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



THE STRONGER TOGETHER
HAWAII'S SCHOLARSHIP REPORT
2023-2024

Introduction and History of the **Stronger Together Hawai'i Program**

When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted crucial college preparation for Hawai'i public high school seniors in the spring of 2020, the Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) took action and established the Stronger Together Hawai'i (STH) Scholarship Fund as part of our emergency community response.

▶ **THANKS TO YOU OUR GENEROUS PARTNERS** and donors and a generous lead contribution of \$1 million from First Hawaiian Bank, these unrestricted funds gave us the flexibility to respond to the needs of more than 300 students at the start of the pandemic in 2020.

The importance of our efforts became even more evident in 2021 when more than 200 students who had received Stronger Together financial support reapplied for scholarship awards. Recognizing the continued challenges posed by the pandemic, and that scholarship support alone was not achieving the persistence numbers hoped for, we were committed to support these students with their needs in their college journey. Knowing the potential strain the pandemic would

have on our college graduates and workforce, HCF decided to evolve the Stronger Together Hawai'i fund into a strategic initiative focused on postsecondary success. The initiative emphasized persistence and college completion through scholarships and grantmaking, particularly for underserved and underrepresented students.



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Summary of Stronger Together Hawai'i *Fund Activity in 2022 and 2023*

Even as the pandemic waned, the long-term community impacts it made were still being felt, especially among Hawai'i students, who had lost valuable postsecondary preparedness and support during their high school years. In 2022 and 2023, HCF enhanced our approach by combining financial support with capacity-building grantmaking for student support services.

WE PARTNERED WITH HAWAI'I P-20*

to pilot a cohort of about 40 students from the high school class of 2022 on O'ahu and Hawai'i Island. Students who were at risk of not enrolling in college were selected by their high school counselors and awarded a two-year renewable scholarship, and, through our grantmaking, were also provided mentors to help guide them through their first year of college.

With the promise of a two-year scholarship, 77 percent of the cohort enrolled in postsecondary education in the fall immediately after graduation compared to 53 percent of their peers. More notable was that 84 percent of the enrollees met at least once with a mentor their first semester, and over half met more than once, which helped support 43 percent of the first-year enrollees to their second year of college.

Through our donors' support, HCF is proud to say that, in 2023, we continued to support 144 students from the high school classes of 2020, 2021, and 2022, helping them pursue their college dreams with more than \$1 million in total HCF scholarships, as well as student support services provided by partners including P-20 and UH, with funding from HCF grants.



"I remember first applying to the HCF common application when the pandemic hit; having to navigate life after such an abrupt end to high school and facing the harsh reality of the costs that go into a higher education.

Now, this fall semester, I will be entering my senior year of college and I could not be more thankful for the opportunities that the Stronger Together Hawai'i scholarship provided for me, where I am allowed to thrive in my studies without having to focus too closely on financial burdens. After I graduate from Cal Poly Pomona next spring, I will be thinking of everyone who has helped me along this journey."

— Ryce A.

*Hawai'i P-20 is a statewide partnership led by the Executive Office on Early Learning, the Hawai'i State Department of Education, and the University of Hawai'i System that works to strengthen the education pipeline from early childhood through postsecondary education and training with data-informed decision making, advocacy, policy coordination, and shared action.

Stronger Together Hawai'i 2023

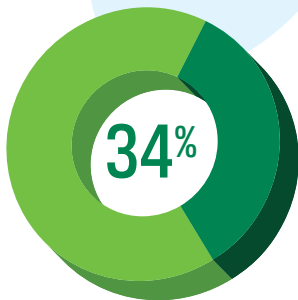
By the Numbers

Almost
\$400,000
in scholarships were awarded
from the STH program

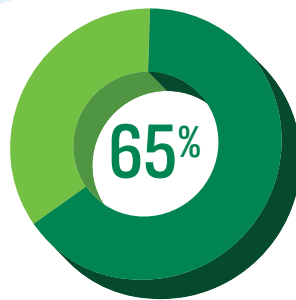
Over
\$550,000
were awarded from other
HCF scholarships



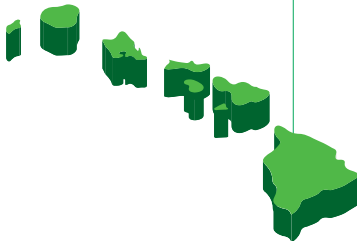
144 returning *Stronger Together Hawai'i* students
were awarded a scholarship



Percentage of
recipients who are
Neighbor Island
residents



Percentage of
recipients attending a
University of Hawai'i
system school



Percentage of 2023 recipients who are:



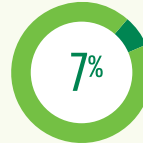
Relying on additional financial
support, in the form of loans, credit
cards, scholarships, or other forms
of institutional financial aid



First-generation
immigrants



Foster youth




Have a documented
disability



Working to support their own
education or household expenses,
or are a caregiver

Capacity Grantmaking for FAFSA Awareness and Completion Activities

In 2023, the United States Federal Department of Education implemented a new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form and process. The FAFSA form qualifies students for the federal Pell grant, a significant source of financial aid for low-income students. Postsecondary experts find that completing the FAFSA increases immediate postsecondary enrollment by 84 percent, positively impacting college completion rates.

 **WHILE THESE CHANGES** had been anticipated for over two years, the 2024-2025 FAFSA opening was delayed by over three months compared with previous years. This delay, along with the new form and process, caused confusion amongst students and families, and valuable time was lost for student support staff to assist with this new process.

In the spring of 2024, HCF created a modest funding opportunity and awarded \$29,000 in STH grants to three Hawai'i organizations to step up their FAFSA awareness and completion activities for Hawai'i

students. HCF has also already opened another funding opportunity ahead of the next year's FAFSA, set to open in fall 2024. HCF also partnered with uAspire, a national organization focused on the upward economic mobility of students, to provide FAFSA completion and financial aid webinars to our scholarship recipients and student support staff.

As the past three years have proven time and time again, the flexibility of STH's unrestricted funding allowed us to target our support where the needs were greatest.



"I have been receiving funds from Stronger Together Hawai'i since I began my academic career in 2020, three years now, and it has significantly helped me prosper in my college career.

I will be graduating in 2024, and because of the generous support from these scholarships, I will be leaving school with very little in student loans and debt, setting me up for financial success as I move through adulthood. These scholarships have also allowed me to dedicate more time and space to learning and pursuing my degree. I am eternally grateful for your extremely generous support. Going to college has genuinely taught me an incredible amount of knowledge and experience that will continue to shape my life tremendously. Thank you so much for helping me on this journey."

—Brenda F.

A Transition in the Stronger Together Program

After awarding scholarships for the 2023–24 academic year, HCF has reevaluated our approach to supporting postsecondary educational success. Drawing from lessons learned during the pandemic, we are shifting our strategic focus from emergency student-level response to systems-change and capacity-building grantmaking to increase alignment with our initiative goals of postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and success.

▶ **AS PART OF THIS EVOLUTION,** we will be spending down the remaining funds raised during the pandemic to support HCF's FAFSA grantees and their activities, and in 2025 relaunching our new strategy and fundraising effort that embodies the resilience these students have shown.

We want to thank all our donors who have so generously given to these students over the past four years and hope you will continue this journey with us when we relaunch our new postsecondary strategy.



Continue your support

If you are interested in supporting the relaunch of our postsecondary initiative strategy, please contact **Eric La'a**, philanthropic advisor in our Development and Donor Relations Team, at elaa@hcf-hawaii.org or (808) 566-5557.



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