Office of Head Start officials Visit MEO to Offer Assistance

A team from the Office of Head Start and OHS Region 9 (which includes Hawai‘i) visited MEO last week to meet with staff and parents and to tour classrooms with the goal of offering assistance in the wake of the wildfires.

The MEO Head Start center at Princess Nahienaena Elementary School remains closed; some of the children have been relocated to other Head Start sites. It was pointed out that the Head Start site, while not open at the moment, is the only standing preschool facility in Lahaina.

The team held a Zoom call with nine parents, one from the Lahaina site, and visited MEO Head Start classrooms at UH-Maui College and Wailuku A at Ka Hale A Ke Ola Homeless Resource Center. The families, who receive preschool for their 3 and 4 year olds at no cost to them, had positive comments to share about their child's development and their success as parents in strengthening their family.
A luncheon was held at MEO on Wednesday, followed by an emotional afternoon session with staff. Office of Head Start officials emphasized that their visit was not about compliance, which is the usual reason for in-person visits, but focused on support and assistance. It was a healing and therapeutic encounter with staff expressing their thoughts and feelings.

The visiting Head Start team included Tala Hooban, OHS deputy director, and Dr. Sangeeta Parikshak, social scientist and mental health lead, from the Office of Head Start; and Cynthia Yao, regional program manager, Bernard Lagud, program specialist, and Noelle Granato, regional training and technical assistance coordinator from Region 9.



Dr. Sangeeta Parikshak, social scientist and mental health lead with the Office of Head Start, shows the MEO Head Start staff one of the hand puppets that come in the Bee Calm Back Packs being provided to MEO centers.



MEO Early Childhood Services Director Debbi Amaral hugs Dr. Sangeeta Parikshak. Bernie Lagud, Office of Head Start Region 9 program specialist, looks on.



Tala Hooban, Office of Head Start Deputy Director.



Cynthia Yao, Office of Head Start Region 9 program manager, chats with MEO Early Childhood Services Director Debbi Amaral and Chief Human Resources Officer Cliff Caesar.



A team of Office of Head Start officials visited MEO facilities and met with staff and families last week. A luncheon was held at MEO, followed by an emotional afternoon session with staff.