

Kaiser workers volunteer at school gardens | West Hawaii Today, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

<http://westhawaii.com/sections/news/local-news/kaiser-workers-volunteer-school-gardens.html>

January 24, 2013

By Erin Miller

West Hawaii Today

emiller@westhawaii.com

Kaiser Permanente employees and their families pitched in at three sites around Hawaii Island as part of the national day of volunteering Monday.

In West Hawaii, Kaiser crews helped with school gardens at Konawaena High School and Waimea Middle School, Associate Medical Director for the Neighbor Islands Dr. Daryl Kurozawa said. About 50 people came to Konawaena, where volunteers cleared an area to expand the garden, as well as helped with existing plant beds.

Kaiser partners with the Hawaii Island School Garden Network for the volunteer day, which was established in 2005 to coincide with Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Kurozawa said the school gardens programs are a good fit for Kaiser, because the gardens teach students about healthy lifestyles, nutrition and sustainable agriculture practices.

“This annual volunteer effort by our physicians and staff reflects Kaiser Permanente’s longstanding commitment to service and healthy communities,” Kurozawa said in a written statement. “For more than 50 years, Kaiser Permanente has had a rich history of service that is at the heart of our mission to improve the lives of our members and the communities we serve.”

The school gardens project also ties in with Kaiser’s focus on preventing childhood obesity, Kurozawa added.

Hawaii Island School Gardens Network Director Nancy Redfeather described the gardens as hands-on laboratories, in which teachers can incorporate lessons not just agriculture, but also science, technology, engineering and math.

“We welcome public contributions to our school garden program in the form of funding, shared resources, and volunteer time,” she said in a prepared statement. “Our program, schools, and keiki are grateful to Kaiser Permanente, its physicians, and staff members for continuing to partner with us through this annual day of service, and help us address the health of our community.”

Kaiser employees also volunteered Monday at the University of Hawaii-Hilo’s Pacific Aquaculture & Coastal Resources Center, doing cleanup work at the Center’s site at Keaukaha.

“Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service provides everyone with a chance to start the year off right by making an impact in their community while honoring Dr. King and his legacy of service,” Dr. Margaret Hu, Kaiser Permanente’s Hilo Clinic chief said. “Research shows that volunteering and giving back to your community can also improve physical and mental health. So, volunteering has the added benefit of helping yourself while you’re helping others.”

On Oahu, volunteers did work with fishponds and other areas on the island’s windward side, Kurozawa said. About 900 Kaiser doctors and staff members participated in the event across the state, Kaiser officials said.

