

MO'OLELO: DEVELOPING LIFE-STORY SHARING FOR NATIVE HAWAIIAN KŪPUNA

Meet Some Team Members!



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Native Hawaiian (NH) kūpuna are not only a significant part of family structures, community well-being, and the cultural fabric; **but sharing of their memories is essential for a thriving NH culture and family.** Despite this recognition, NH kūpuna face mental health challenges, including severe depression nearly twice as high as other ethnic groups, and high life-time trauma exposure. Unresolved trauma memories may impede successful aging and **NHs have been found to have higher trauma exposure and prevalence rates of PTSD.**

Researchers have advocated for a life span approach that encourages sharing stories and an evidenced approach within gerontology – life-review (LR) – encourages personal reminiscing and has been found to contribute to “successful aging”.

Our project sought to understand if it was possible to either culturally adapt an existing LR intervention or develop a new NH version with different types of questions.



The intent of the research study (which was funded from August 2024 - July 2025) was to culturally adapt an intervention called life review for Native Hawaiian kūpuna (older adults) with major input from kūpuna participants.

- For one year, our team worked with **two groups of kūpuna consultants** to change existing life review questions (Black & Haight, 1992) in such a way that **questions and prompts would be culturally more appropriate for kūpuna to connect** with each other and others.
- The prompts and questions were developed through focus groups with kūpuna consultants with the **goal of “talking story” by kūpuna with other kūpuna.**
- It was quickly observed during the focus groups that kūpuna also **wanted ways to share aspects from their lives with those from younger generations.**



We used in-depth interviews and focus groups with NH kūpuna community members to explore the feasibility and acceptability of LR within the NH paradigm.

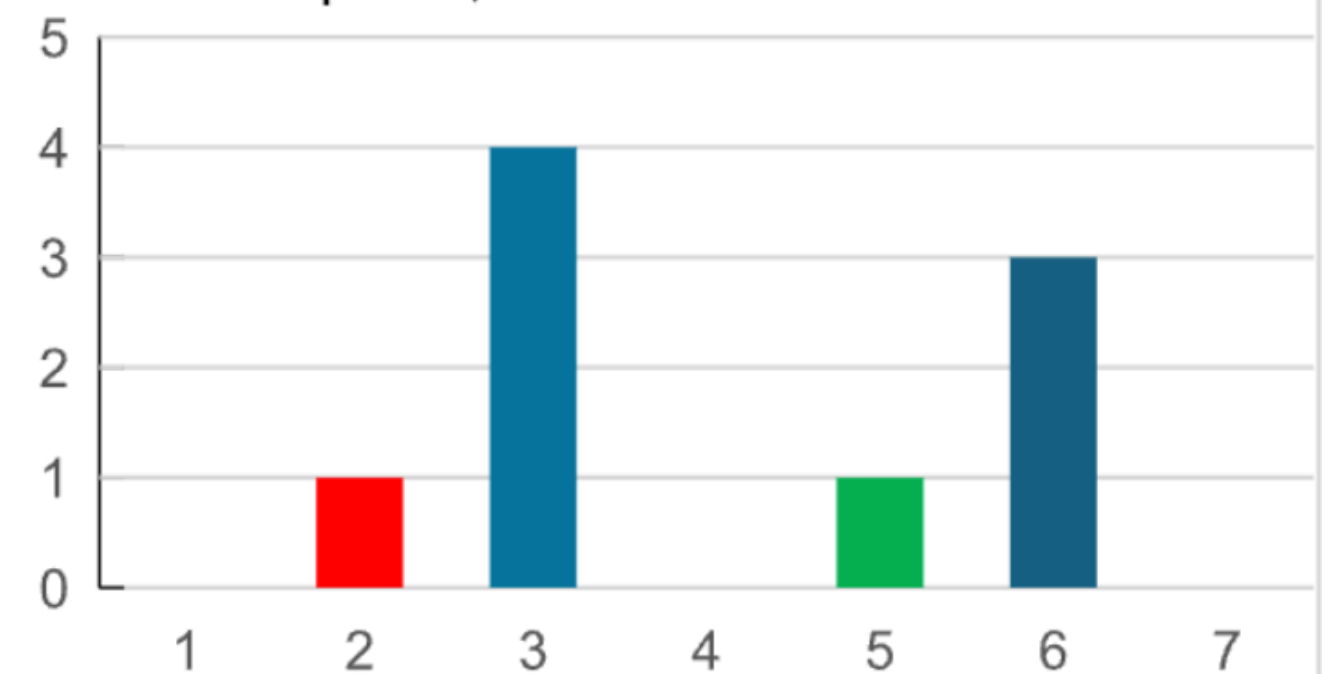
We held 6 different focus groups in two different locations on Oahu to learn from NH kūpuna what values, beliefs, and practices can be applied towards developing a facilitated NH version of LR.

We collaborated with community-based senior centers and kūpuna-centric programs (Pacific Gateway **Na Kūpuna Makamae** – Honolulu, **Kūpuna to Kamali'i group** (Catholic Charities – Waianae, **Kupuna Collective** – monthly meetings)

Table 1. Focus Group locations and genders of kupuna participants, $n=9$

Focus Group Location	Total Number	Female	Male
Waianae	6	6	0
Honolulu	3	2	1

Figure 1. Age Ranges of Kupuna Participants, $n=9$



We also wanted to learn if incorporating indigenous traditions (e.g., chant, song, dance) may contribute to developing a NH version of LR. A few lessons learned:

- New LR questions are necessary for NHs that does not query linearly from birth to present-day, but instead **relationally based questions, starting with sharing a story about their names** or asking about their family's lineage.
- Without context or warning, trauma questions should not be asked.
 - Questions could be asked with Individual meetings would be when more full life story can be shared (vs. group meetings).
 - **painful experiences should not be asked about until a strong relationship has been established.**



During the interviews, many of the kūpuna participants shared their own stories without any prompting; in doing so, we established codes and themes that were consistent with other NH studies (e.g., being connected to the 'aina, experiential teachings or observing their own kūpuna and other family members). They shared about feeling disconnected with younger generations due to other sources of information that compete with hearing from older relatives about their life experiences.

Conversations with kūpuna included not just looking through questions, but hearing about their challenges with connecting with family, sharing about losses of family knowledge, different experiences learning or witnessing Hawaiian traditions, and feelings of disconnect with younger generations.

CODES/THEMES:

Codes emerged from focus group transcripts.

Research team members discussed the codes (via consensus)

Defined the themes through merging of codes; then we all independently put the 16 codes under the proposed themes.

Sub themes - *our focus on trauma, the lack of relationships w/ younger generations is itself traumatic*

- *Cultural traditions = cultural traditions + loss of culture*
- *Prominent Life Lessons/Crossroads*
- *Learning/Cultural Lessons*
- *Connecting with other generations*
- *Aina/Land/Spirituality/Ocean/Rural upbringing*



Another goal of the project was to provide **a resource for different service providers to use in order to learn more about the people of whom they service within programs.**

After several revisions of the questions (after doing a thematic analysis of coded focus group narratives), we consulted again with kūpuna to determine how we could share these new more culturally appropriate questions with other kūpuna and their service providers. That's when the idea of using custom playing cards emerged.

What do we do with all these revised questions?



These 36 cards are designed to foster meaningful discussions within a supportive environment.

Where kūpuna or family members can bring 'em:

- Family gatherings
- On car rides (for passengers)
- To friend's houses
- To their own kūpuna groups
- To church groups

Service providers can use 'em:

- For any group meeting where reminiscing and sharing is welcome
- As a conversational activity within kūpuna programs
- With family counseling that include multiple generations
- While working with individuals at senior centers or other agencies that assist Native Hawaiian families

What is the structure of the Piko Kūpuna Kards ?

There are 36 cards total in a deck: 30 with different types of questions or prompts for sharing, 6 Wildcards - each suggesting a small activity.

Follow these simple steps to get started:

Understanding the three levels and ten different colored cards

Find the **Pink Card labeled "START WITH THIS CARD"** and begin your conversation with this card that focuses on asking someone to share about their name. And others doing the same afterwards.



The Piko Kūpuna Kards provide a portable, accessible, and affordable low-cost, no-tech option that also provides flexibility of usage in a multitude of venues, depending on the situation in which someone wishes to connect with others.



The Piko Kūpuna Kards prompts are inspired by two of the six areas within the Kūkulu Kumuhana Native Hawaiian Well-Being Framework (Liliuokalani Trust; Your paragraph text) - described within the Kūkulu Kumuhana framework - ‘Ōiwi and Pilina.

- ‘Ōiwi is described as cultural identity and native intelligence;
- **Pilina** is described as a mutually sustaining relationship.
 - We believe that these cards prompt sharing by kūpuna (and anyone else participating with the conversation), fostering pilina (connection) with prompting their stories related to native knowledge and experiences, and overall reinforcing their cultural identity.
- ‘Ōiwi and Pilina intersect with ‘ohana and community, which we hope provides a way of increasing trust and relationship; to open-up conversations.
- Our Piko Kūpuna Kards ask about perception, connection, reflection, and include activity wildcards; and different levels of personal sharing.

The overall idea for using playing cards to ask others questions or provide a prompt was loosely based upon a game called We're Not Really Strangers (WNRS; trademark), which has different categories of questions that prompt sharing between people who do not know each other. The use of playing cards as a means of distribution and acceptability was discussed and confirmed as do-able with one of the kūpuna focus groups.

*With the Piko Kūpuna Kards, **the levels of questioning or sharing depth are labelled with Hawaiian names and numbers**, allowing participants to anticipate and decide their own comfort level: ‘ekahi (Level 1, introductory), ‘elua (Level 2, more personal sharing), and ‘ekolu (Level 3, more personal and reflective sharing).*

Questions? Contact us at:

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