

Harvest Of Love

A long-awaited home for abused and neglected children soon to become reality.

By Martha Ebersole



ANTHONY NOWAK/CLIFORD

Marlene and Chuck Powell point out where buildings will go on new Maui Farm.

Seven years ago when Chuck and Marlene Powell hosted a disadvantaged child for Thanksgiving dinner, they had no idea that single act of kindness would change their lives forever.

Since then, they have been foster parents to 30 abused and neglected children. Their goal is simple. The Powells want to provide a stable environment for children coming from crisis situations.

Six years ago, Chuck Powell took that goal one step further. He spearheaded the formation of a non-profit, tax-exempt, corporation called The Maui Farm, Inc.

Since then, the corporation has been looking for land on which to build a permanent home for abused and neglected children. Finally, it looks as if the long search for land is over. A grant application was approved by County Grants Review Committee on November 22, 1989 for the long-term lease of 8.31 acres on the old Mauna Olu College campus. Two months later on January 18, 1990 a county council committee approved the lease. If all goes well, The Maui Farm could conceivably open its doors to 24 children referred from family court and child protective services by June of this year.

In his own experience in foster-care over the years, Powell noticed that abused children really came out of their shells when they had animals to care for. Love waiting to be shared was lavished on the animals. Along with tender emotions, tending the animals brought out other attributes, namely a sense of responsibility. Many times, the chores associated with farm life were enough to offer a temporary respite from the problems that plague an abused child's life; problems like violence or drug addiction in the home. It was for those reasons that Powell concluded that a home setting on a working farm would be the therapy needed to make a difference in a child's life. Through programs, encouraging the children to achieve self-sufficiency and involvement in raising both animals and produce, the children will learn practical farming techniques as well as valuable life skills.

"Most of the kids I see and shelter are borderline detention home," Powell says. But he also indicates that with the right environment, counseling and training, a child can go forward with a constructive life and not one of "destruction and iron bars."

Others share his conviction and The Maui Farm's board of directors is composed of ten progressive-thinking individuals in the Maui community. They are: Steven Knox, President of Wailuku Agribusiness, Wayne Moniz and Ken Sakai of the Department of Education, Michael Luxton of the Department of Human Concerns, Brian Klaschka, a Marketing Specialist, Jo-Ann Ridow of Lokahi Pacific, Mai Ling Ching, Charmaine Tavares, Maui County Parks and Recreation Director, Ray Iwamoto, Honolulu attorney and Mark Gilliland of Iwado Realty.

"A lot of people don't realize," says Maureen Bond who handles public relations for the corporation, "that there are no long-term placement facilities for children in this state." Hawaii's people traditionally find foster-care and particularly long-term care, a bitter pill that is culturally hard to swallow. Until very recently, children whose parents for some reason, could not care for them were placed with relatives or family friends. This informal system, referred to as "calabash" or "hanai" is becoming impractical as society changes. Realistically, economics plays a large part in the deci-

sion to take in a child. Not only is it more expensive to provide the daily necessities, the care-givers must often work outside the home, creating additional childcare costs. If the birth family is unwilling or unable to provide support, the host family's resources can be drained by a child who may turn out to be a source of friction in his new environment.

In 1988, the Department of Human Services received 4,593 reports of child abuse and neglect in the state, of that 2,596 were confirmed. Maui had 294 confirmed during the same year and the island has experienced an increase of over 300%, both unconfirmed and confirmed, from 1982 to 1988.

In March of 1989, the Department of Human Services stated in a report, "Community resources to help families in the CPS (Child Protective Services) program are not always adequate and parents may have to face a lengthy waiting period to receive needed therapy and counseling. In addition, there are not enough foster homes available throughout the state to allow social workers to find the best match for placing the children when they have to be placed in out-of-home care."

As lifestyles change and the population rises, child abuse cases are increasing. There was a dramatic jump from 247 to 2596 in confirmed child abuse cases in the State of Hawaii from 1987 to 1988 alone.

The general plan for the much needed farm is this: Seven homes, each with four to five bedrooms would be constructed on the farm acreage. One home will be for administrative purposes and residing in each of the six remaining homes will be "parents." Only married couples will be considered for these all-important, key positions. The couples will, in essence, become "moms and dads" to the four children living with them, although they will not permit the children to address them with those titles. "It is very important that the children maintain their own family ties," Marlene Powell insists. The ages of the children will be from nine to 18 and hopefully there will be a 50-50 split between the sexes.

In addition to the six sets of house parents, two social workers will be on hand during the day as well as group psychologists and education coordinators. Executive director, Chuck Powell and wife Marlene will reside there and be available 24 hours per day. The children will be transported during the school year to the schools they were already attending before being placed at The Maui Farm. From there, Powell says, "We intend to keep them so busy, they won't have time to dwell on their problems." Marlene adds, "There has to be a healing process and we feel this will



Property site plan for improvements to Maui Farm in Makawao.

help."

Outside farming chores, homework, swimming, arts and crafts instruction and group therapy sessions will be some of the activities geared to keep the children occupied. It's a daunting challenge but the rewards may be enormous and far-reaching. Research indicates that abused children often end up to be society's problems, but when the cycle of abuse is ended early enough, there is hope.

Care at The Farm will not necessarily end at age eighteen. A trust fund for each child will be set up to allow for future education. As long as the young adult remains in community college or another form of higher education and maintains at least a "C" average, he will be allowed to live in the home until the age of twenty.

Before any of this can take place, however, start-up funds must be secured. The County's donation of a long-term lease will be a good start. So far \$275,000 in cash donations have been received; \$200,000 from the Honolulu real estate partnership of Mike Fergus and Duane Kurisu, \$20,000 from Asahi Beer-Kyosen Golf Tournament, and \$50,000 from a Japanese firm called SoKan, Inc. who bought the old Waihee Dairy site where Powell, a supervisor with Wailuku Agribusiness resides. Wailuku Ag has also donated heavy equipment and vehicles in the multi-thousands for The Farm's operation and given a cash donation of \$5,000. Transworld Consortium donated the architectural plans, valued at \$65,000, for the proposed buildings.

Although the Powells have become depressed from time to time over the

lengthy process, Chuck Powell also says that if The Farm is "put together brick by brick it will be a lot stronger." And thankfully, he says, he and his wife have been "down" at different times, relegating the task of "cheerleader" to the one who was "up."

Now that the farm is in the final stretch, an additional \$1 million is needed for the first year's operation and one-time start-up costs.

One method of fundraising The Friends Of The Farm came up with was a video directed by Wayne Moniz called "Hi'ilawe." Pua Kanahale and her dancers give a one-hour instruction on how to hula accompanied by the Waiehu Sons. The \$24 video can be purchased at Chums, Walden Books and Maui Tropical Gardens.

Once the facility is constructed, the doors will not automatically open. The Maui Farm must then apply for a license to operate as a child care institution from the State of Hawaii. The licensing procedure requires a series of inspections; building, electrical, plumbing, fire safety, sanitation and health. The license must then be renewed each year.

"We've been told that if we opened today, the Farm would be full," says Marlene Powell. The Maui Farm is likely to be a good start for abused and neglected children to begin the road to recovery in a world that seems to have abandoned them. ☐

Anyone wishing to make a tax-deductible donation or to purchase the Hi'ilawe video may write: The Maui Farm, RR1, Box 67A, Wailuku, Maui, HI 96793. Make checks payable to The Maui Farm.