

*They plant seeds
of hope, a better life*

On The Farm

By LAUREL MURPHY, Staff Writer

MAUNAOLU — He was bounding down the path like any boy, happy after school in the wind and the trees and the dappled light of a beautiful 8-acre home Upcountry.

Here was the farm where he and his family grew corn and eggplant and sweet potatoes. Here was the personal tree he'd been given to raise. Here was the path he made himself, and the campfire where he and others sometimes came to take a "time out" whenever they got too angry.

Later, his face darkened abruptly at an upsetting thought. A wall went up. Quietly, a staff member went over to see what happened. A teen-age girl from the house next door had just walked by in tears, talking to a friend. Another roommate had been detained after school that day for hitting a fellow student.

Such is family life at The Maui Farm, a model residential program, now a year old, that provides long-term care in a home environment for youths from troubled families.

These are kids to whom the professional code words of "difficult" and "attachment-impaired" are applied. Neglected, abused teen-agers in "foster care drift," bounced from one foster home to another when they don't fit into the picture. Victims of yet another "ask for removal," most referred by Family Court, some on the way to the Koolau juvenile correctional facility on Oahu if this alternative had not been available.

Only guess what? No one's going to remove these kids from their homes at The Maui Farm, which now has two nice, modern houses capable of holding five teen-agers each and plans to start construction on three more at the first of the year under a \$662,000 county grant.

When complete, The Maui Farm will have six homes



The Maui News / EUGENE TANNER photo

Former Molokai residents Bully and Loretta Borden have taken their strong sense of ohana and skills at handling troubled youths to The Maui Farm, which provides a home-like environment for teen-agers who have been bounced from one foster home to another.

sheltering a maximum of 30 youths. There are other residential facilities in the state, but The Maui Farm is unique with its agriculture program, experiential orientation and family-style care.

Under the program, nobody has to leave until they get ready to go themselves, or come of age. As long as they follow the rules.

Really?

Are you sure?

That, of course, is a big issue these emotionally abandoned teens face, according to Program Director Donna Vida.

"They have a very difficult time bonding and trusting," she said. "They are constantly testing. 'You say you care about me? Let me show you how bad I can be. Then see if you care.'"

Unlike most residential homes for troubled youth, which are run by staff members who come and go in shifts, The Maui Farm was deliberately set up as a family, complete with surrogate parents. The program involves farming and Hawaiian culture along with group therapy and constant reinforcement of new, positive be-

havioral skills.

But the people who take the brunt of the training and the teens' tendency to act out negative behaviors are Loretta and Bully Borden, the boys' live-in foster parents.

The Bordenes are former longtime Molokai residents, parents of three, grandparents of six, who began taking in foster children 10 years ago when their own kids grew up, gaining a reputation for the skillful way they handled the problem ones.

"They're consistently very caring. They genuinely love children," said Vida. "They're not afraid to confront inappropriate behavior in a caring way. They like who they are. They have a very strong sense of ohana. Our kids trust them."

And with good reason.

One day, a boy who had been moved in and out of foster care seven times in his young life punched Bully in the face to get himself kicked out. (Violence is a ground

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for dismissal.) The reasoning being: "I may as well get myself kicked out before they kick me out." Makes sense as a strategy if that's all you've ever known.

Loretta and Bully, however, were determined not to let the boy go. They decided to keep him. Vida can't even describe the look on his face when she told him: "We're not going to give up on you. We still want you."

The Bordens grew up in the Hawaiian way, with the whole neighborhood as an ohana. "Bully's friends would be an uncle for our kids," Loretta said. "My kids' friends would call me 'Auntie.' They'd introduce Bully as 'my uncle,' not 'my friends' dad.'"

The Bordens are able to take things as they come, staying emotionally honest and caring even if it means taking some "timeouts" for themselves to deal with their reactions to what's going on.

How do they do it?

"I guess by being patient and listening to what the kids are saying," Bully said.

"It's hard to explain. When it happens, we're there, that's it," Loretta said.

She added: "We don't give advice unless they ask for it. All we can do is present them with choices about how much they are willing to learn."

It's a golden afternoon up at the farm. The boy who almost got himself kicked out is playing with a golden dog, pointing out the sights.

What's the most important thing to say about The Maui Farm?

"Taking responsibility," he said.

What have they given you?

"Love."

The Maui Farm needs live-in foster parents for new group homes for neglected, abandoned teens. To apply, call Paula Ambre, executive director of The Maui Farm, at 579-8271.

His mind is up in air creating balloons

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teers, some from as far away as Michigan and Australia, were helping his staff of 20 pack boxes and load trucks with such wonders as his grinning new "Cat in the Hat" bal-

man for a competitor. "This is like Santa's workshop and I feel like a little kid in the middle of it."

It was part of a long tradition that appears likely to continue. Bass said that despite the recent purchase of