

Rural setting provided at Maui facility

By Joan Conrow
Advertiser Staff Writer

PAIA, Maui — It's taken eight years, but Maui County's first long-term residential facility for children from troubled families is finally a reality.

Tucked among the eucalyptus trees in the rural, rolling hills between Paia and Makawao, Maui Farm is now accepting youths who have been shuffled around in foster care and desperately need a permanent place to call home.

The facility, at 100 Ike Dr., will host an open house from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dec. 11.

"It has been a long time coming, but it's here, and that's the good news," said Paula Ambre, executive director of Maui Farm.

The project initially was conceived by Charles and Marlene Powell, who saw their own foster children thrive when living at the couple's former home at the old Wahee Dairy site.

By learning to take care of living things, the Powells reasoned, children learn responsibility, lose their self-pity and start thinking of ways to improve their own lives.

That's the philosophy at Maui Farm, where children and young adults aged 10 to 21 will care for plants and animals on the eight acres of land that surround their homes. Three dogs and a goat already live there, and a horse, pigs, calf and chickens await pens.

"I think this will be a very nurturing and healthy environment for kids to grow up in," said Donna Vida, program director of the facility.

Six homes are ultimately planned for the site, and the first two were recently completed. Furniture, kitchenware and electronics equipment donated by Maui residents and businesses fill the five-bedroom, three-bath homes.

"The community has really come through," said Ambre, noting that money and professional services also have been

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given to the project, which was built on land leased for \$1 a year from Maui County.

Vida said other folks have volunteered to provide social, cultural and recreational activities for the children who will live at the Farm.

"These kids are all of our responsibility, we feel," Ambre said.

Up to 10 children will live in the first two homes, along with the full-time foster parents, Eric and Roxanne Mitchell and Joseph "Bully" and Loretta Borden. The Bordens, who moved over from Molokai, have lots of experience dealing with difficult youngsters, Ambre said.

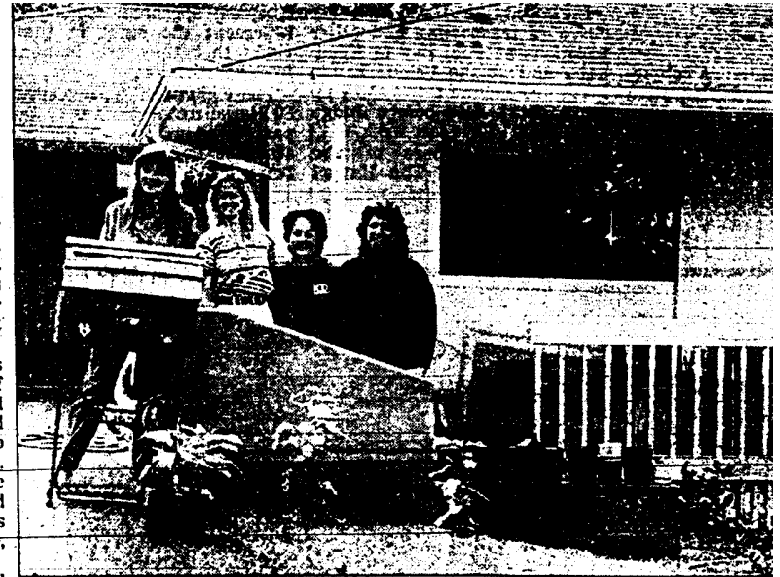
A 14-year-old boy is the first resident, and Ambre said three or four should be living at the Farm by the end of the year. Most of the children to be placed there have been neglected and abused. Some are chronic runaways, others have had run-ins with the law.

"They've suffered a lot of trauma in their short lives and they need time to heal," Vida said. "Many have been through a series of foster placements. Abandonment issues are very deep, the trust level is very low."

For these youths, it's easier to join a family as part of a group, she said. Ambre said it also is important for the kids to know they will have a "consistent, stable place to live" at Maui Farm.

Besides caring for animals and learning to live as part of a family, the children and young adults will be instructed in various skills designed to help them become independent. Counseling sessions will be held around a campfire, and Vida has plans for a ceramics kiln, sweat lodge, ropes course, and gardens of native plants.

"We want this to be a special place that will make a difference for kids in the years to come," Ambre said.



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From left, Maui Farm executive director Paula Ambre, foster parents Roxanne Mitchell and Loretta Borden, and program director Donna Vida show off their new Upcountry

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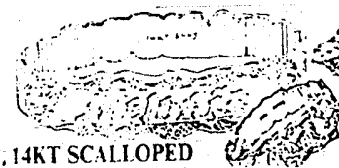
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