

Programs help boost homeless couples

Transitional housing through Zion Ipuka includes seminars to build self-esteem

By Deborah Manog
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Dropping the tone of his voice and wincing a bit, Mark "Braddah Moki" Nahoi remembers what life was like several years ago, living out of a Kapolei storage container and trapped in a vicious circle of alcohol, drugs and incarceration.

"I was absolutely spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically bankrupt," Nahoi said.

Estranged from most of his family at that time, Nahoi and his wife, Katherine, knew they had to make a change in their lives when their granddaughter was born.

Katherine recalled, "I was physically sick, needing to get high every day."

Choking back tears, she added, "And I promised myself that she (her granddaughter) would never know me that way."

The Nahois then turned to New Hope Leeward church, which welcomed them with open arms and told them about Pastor Curtis Tsuzaki's ambitious plan to open a transitional home in Makaha for homeless couples wanting to get back on their feet.

Upon meeting Tsuzaki for the first time in a parking lot, next to the receptacle they were sleeping in, Nahoi said he pleaded, "Please, all I like is one chance, pastor. You don't know me, I don't know you, but I'm goin' to show you that I am grateful."

Flashing a toothy smile, Nahoi credits two small Waianae-based nonprofit programs, Zion Ipuka and Bridging the Gap, with help-



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Katherine Nahoi, left, Pamela Beauford and Marie Kalani selected fashions March 6 for the Dress for Success gala to be held March 21. Stylist Tyson Joines, in back, and Jaci Agustin, mistress of ceremonies for the event, far right, assisted. The gala, honoring formerly homeless couples, will raise money for Zion Ipuka, a transitional home program.

FUNDRAISER AND RECOGNITION

The Dress for Success fundraiser will be held 5 to 9 p.m. March 21 at Ka'aha'aina Cafe at the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center.

Open to the public, the event includes special recognition for formerly homeless couples, dinner, contemporary Hawaiian music, dance, entertainment, a silent auction and free photo-taking. All proceeds from the event will benefit Zion Ipuka, a nonprofit that provides transitional housing and various services for homeless couples. For more information about the event or how to donate, go to www.facebook.com/zionipuka.

ing the couple overcome their troubled past.

Sober and drug-free for the past five years, these days Moki is a construction

laborer, and Katherine is studying to become a social worker. The couple now live in their own four-bedroom home on Oahu's west side.

The Nahois are among 10 couples that will be honored at Zion Ipuka and Bridging the Gap's first Dress for Success gala at the Ka'aha'aina Cafe in Waianae. Slated for March 21, the event will recognize the formerly homeless pairs who have completed both programs. The event also serves as a fundraiser for Zion Ipuka's housing operation.

Tsuzaki opened Zion Ipuka's six-bedroom transitional home for couples in 2010. In addition to providing shelter, the program offers help with case

management matters and finding treatment centers for drugs and mental illnesses.

"Zion Ipuka provides these things so it's easier to transition to a better life out from homelessness," Tsuzaki said. Originally from Kailua, Tsuzaki now lives in Nanakuli to be near to the Zion Ipuka ministry, which he translates as meaning "gateway to a better life."

Of 58 individuals who have resided at the home, 22 successfully recovered from drug and alcohol addictions, landed secure jobs and

moved into their own homes, Tsuzaki said.

Despite the program's successes, its future is uncertain due to dwindling funds. The lease for the transitional home expires in May, and Dress for Success aims to raise awareness and funding for the ministry.

Months after starting the home, Tsuzaki teamed up with Abe Correia, whose Bridging the Gap workshops focus on building self-esteem tied to cultural awareness and visualizing long-term success as a

Please see SUCCESS, B4



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Jaci Agustin, left, greeted Katherine Nahoi, center, and Pamela Beauford as they tried on their fashions for the upcoming Dress for Success gala fundraiser.

SUCCESS: 'Dream boards' let couples focus on goals

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means to climbing out of homelessness. While living in the transitional home, couples are required to attend Correia's classes and often return to his program as guest speakers.

"They share their stories

to the new participants," Correia said. He added, "It's a part of healing, helps them to stay connected."

Correia says he has witnessed radical changes in couples who initially come to a weekly "kuka kuka" or "talk-story" class with their heads hung in shame. While

enrolled in the Bridging the Gap workshops, which run up to 10 weeks, they learn to hold their heads high, "seeing as far as they can see towards the horizon," he said.

Correia's wife, Fran, says one of the workshops that involves researching genealogy and piecing together a family tree can serve as a significant catalyst in transforming self-esteem, particularly among Native Hawaiians.

"When they look back, they seem to get a sense of strength and identity," Fran said. "They find lineage to Kamehameha or to some high chief, and it's like, wow, all of a sudden they are somebody."

As the workshops begin wrapping up, participants are asked to cover a poster board in photos and statements that illustrate and articulate goals for the future centered around family, education, career, spirituality and health.

"Dream boards" created by the Nahois hang on a wall in their home to serve as a daily reminder of what they're working toward.

After living in the Zion Ipuka home with two other couples for almost a year and bonding during Bridging the Gap classes, Moki Nahoi said the first three couples to complete both programs became close friends and continue to keep one another in check.

Regarding the two men he befriended, James Beauford and Kazu Kalani, "They



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are my constants," Inanori said. "I try not to make any major decisions in my life — personal, church or whatever — without these two guys."

Plans are in the works to stage Dress for Success in a red-carpet atmosphere, complete with photos and entertainment. The couples receiving recognition will dress up gala style.

"It's to show the public that you wouldn't recognize this was once a homeless person who lived on the beach or in a container," Tsuzaki said.

He added, "We want to show the public that given the chance, resources and opportunity, these people can succeed."

For Katherine, picking out a glam outfit and having a stylist fuss over her hair is something new and fun. "I never went to my prom, so this is exciting," she said.

About two decades have passed since her husband, whose wardrobe staples are brightly colored construction shirts, jeans and rubber slippers, has suited up in formal duds.

Correia is encouraging the Nahois to dress for the event, in part because even just dressing for success can help touch off more success in their lives.

Pointing to the effective collaboration between Zion Ipuka and Bridging the Gap, Tsuzaki said, "Homelessness is a big issue. ... We're trying to let the people know what works. We've seen it work."

He added, "This could be a model that spreads everywhere, given the chance."