



RICK RUTIZ photos

Ma Ka Hana Ka 'Ike student workers Pono Lecker-Tolentino (from left), Jalen Moeai, Camilo Ho and graduate teacher Russell Stoner pose above a mosaic built for a toddler and infant center in Hana. The nonprofit also built the center, which was renovated from an old elementary school classroom this month.

## Hana students create child care center from classroom

By CHRIS SUGIDONO  
Staff Writer

The Hana community plans to open its first toddler and infant center this coming school year to assist young families and provide financial security and self-sufficiency to their lives.

"It will help young families in Hana to go back to school and go back to work," said Edel Baguio-Larena, director for early childhood education and services at Maui Family Support Services. "Ultimately, it will help young families who don't have a support system."

Funded by grants from Kamehameha High Schools (\$75,000) and the Maui County Office of Economic Development (\$43,000), the center will be located in an elementary school classroom that was recently renovated by about 10 Hana High School students from the award-winning program Ma Ka Hana Ka 'Ike. The transformation included building a kitchen with countertops, remodeling a trio of doors and securing fences for an outside play area.

However, the prize of the project was a 4-by-10-foot tile mosaic to greet families every day at the center.

"They did everything," said Rick Rutiz, executive director of the program. "It was all them, all their design. They chose the fish that they were going to cut out and researched the whale breaching backwards. It was just really fun to watch the process."

Work on the classroom took about two weeks and the mosaic about another week under the supervision of Russell Stoner, a supervisor with the program. Students thought of the idea for the mosaic while staring at a pile of leftover glass tile that was used for the kitchen countertops.

"It was kind of like everyone going off at once: we could do



Ma Ka Hana Ka 'Ike student worker Zach Newton works on a mosaic for a toddler and infant center in Hana.

*"If we hired an outside contractor it would have been much more expensive for us."*

— Edel Baguio-Larena  
director, early childhood education and services  
at Maui Family Support Services

this, and we could do that," Rutiz said. "It was a fantastic thing that you have these young adults who, one, want to do something special for these keiki, and two, they can go from a vision to doing it and pulling it off and making this spectacular piece of art."

Ma Ka Hana Ka 'Ike was founded in 2000 and relies on grants and private donations. Each year, there are about 60 students from grades 9 to 12 that participate, plus graduate apprentices who return to mentor the students while continuing their own training.

While the program offers hands-on construction skills for at-risk youth in East Maui, projects such as the mosaic al-

low for more creativity and in-still care in their work, Rutiz said.

"I'm around schools and kids all the time, but it feels like creativity is not the star and sought after in our educational system," he said. "We give the kids that chance and throw it back in their laps."

A caregiver has already been hired for the center and is going through training and orientation, Baguio-Larena said. She said her agency will supervise the center until the full-time caregiver completes the required 24 months of training to gain a full license.

The agency is in the process of obtaining the supervision license and plans to open the

center when Hana School starts.

The center will be able to accommodate up to a dozen infants and toddlers and offer child development lesson plans to help prepare them for preschool, Baguio-Larena said.

"It's a great partnership with the Hana students because if we hired an outside contractor it would have been much more expensive for us," she said.

Rutiz added that while the project helps young Hana families, it also gives student workers a "position in the community."

"They're not just useless kids in the principal's office and getting into trouble," he said. "All of a sudden these kids are doing incredible work and they're getting pats on the back. It picks them up, and they feel needed and a part of their community."

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