

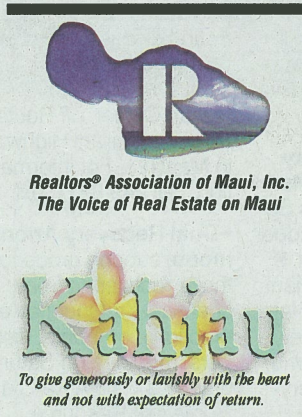
You are invited to make Christmas happen

By JOSEPH W. BEAN

When the situation at home becomes too painful, and a woman has no reasonable alternative but escape, there is Women Helping Women. Let's get to the most important facts first: If you are in trouble right now, call the 24-hour domestic violence hotline at 579-9581. Is your situation not yet urgent? At least look at WHW online, www.whwmaui.net; or e-mail info@whwmaui.net; or call the administrative office, 242-6600; or the West Maui Center, 661-7111.

P. Denise La Costa, Principal Broker at Prudential Locations Maui, volunteers on the West Maui Domestic Violence Task force for the organization's West Maui Advocacy Center (WMAC). "My support for this organization gets stronger as the needs become increasingly critical," she said. "I volunteer for committees and various fundraising events. Carol Brown of RE/Max Premier Properties also works as an advocate and Ruth McKay of Maui Inc. also volunteers with the WMAC."

Volunteers are vital. Staff is essential, too. Val Ching-



Johnson said, "After leaving my previous job of 20 years, I decided to do something more meaningful. I wanted to do something for the community. I called Women Helping Women to volunteer, which resulted in employment at the shelter. It was any eye opener for me to see the suffering and the needs of women and children. After 3 years of shelter work, I transferred to the Administrative Office where I serve women in 'Transition.' In other words, I'm serving women committed to leaving their abusive partner, committed to making changes in their lives, and striving to reach self-sufficiency."

Ching-Johnson said, "The Transitions program includes funding for transitional housing, but we do not own or operate a transitional home." She explained that women are typically in Transitions one to two years, and she is commonly working with about 40 women and 60 children at any given time.

The Transitions program provides services to homeless women and children who are survivors of domestic violence. "We assist participants in achieving self-sufficiency as they move into long-term, residential stability," Ching-Johnson said. "In addition to advocacy and case management, we provide funding for security deposits and rental assistance. We also provide other support services that include funding for childcare, education and health. If our agency cannot provide what the participant needs, we refer them to the agency that does."

The situation of WHW clients is terrible, even terrifying — every day. Now, imagine a mother who finds herself in trouble, in need, and in the WHW program at Christmas. "Most of the women and families that we are working



Women Helping Women has a consignment store — Re-Vive — to help raise funds. Here, from left, are volunteers Kawai Kana, Janie Omura and Malia Ashlock, with WHW Executive Director Stacey Moniz, and volunteer P. Denise La Costa.

with are struggling financially," said Ching-Johnson. "Many are working for low wages, attending college, or receiving public benefits. So, receiving gifts during the holidays is a blessing."

WHW staff needs help with the gifts. They will suggest gifts for the children by age and gender — art, sports, games, puzzles, dolls, special interests... , and they make a list of what they think the women would like, usually clothing, sheets, towels, gift certificates, and such. The

gifts need to be delivered by December 9 to give WHW staff and volunteers time to match the gifts to the women and children. Delivery is to WHW Administrative Office, 1935 Main Street #202, Wailuku.

"We welcome surprises!" Ching-Johnson said, but lists and discussions are useful.

Ching-Johnson added, "We do not have a celebration with the participants of the Transitions Program. We call the Moms to pick up the gifts when they're ready. We wrap

the Moms' gifts, but not the children's. The Moms like to know what is given to the children. Gift cards are a great idea. These let each woman choose what they need or want. Cards from Wal-Mart, Macy's, Foodland, Safeway, Ross, K-Mart, even gas cards are all welcome! You can bring them to our office. If someone wants to donate cash, we'll take cash or checks (payable to Women Helping Women). We will put money into gift cards.

In past years, people have also volunteered to "Adopt a WHW Family." Maybe that is something you can do.

"We select the neediest families," Ching-Johnson said, "which is usually larger families or the ones that are really struggling financially. We ask the Mom to submit a wish list for each child and herself, and we give that list to the donor. If anyone wants to adopt a family, they should just call me at 242-0775, Ext. 26."

La Costa and the volunteers will do all they can, year round. The staff will too. Whatever is special for Christmas, needs your help.