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> [Community](#) > [Neighborhood News](#)

[Print this Page](#)

[«--back to story](#)

A special loi

Lokelani 'Ohana uses grant to grow dryland taro, tended by people with disabilities

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WAIHEE - A dryland taro field has cropped up in Waihee, cultivated by Lokelani 'Ohana and its crew of people with disabilities.

The taro field is a recent addition to the organic farm created by Lokelani 'Ohana, a program that helps educate and build bridges for youth and adults who have developmental disabilities.

The seed money for the cultivation of the 1.2 acres in Waihee came from a \$2,000 grant from the Kent Polly Smith Foundation through The Hawai'i Community Foundation late last year. The funds were used to hire a consultant, local taro farmer Bobby Pahia, clear land, install a drip-irrigation system and plant the huli.

The site was once a wetland taro field but has been fallow for more than two decades. The patch has kuleana water rights, but there is currently insufficient water for a wetland loi, or patch, said Christina Chang, vice president of the organization.

In January, the area was cleared by hand of cane grass and 20-foot-tall haole koa, and the rock walls were rebuilt by Lokelani 'Ohana farm crew leader Henry Langi. Six hundred huli of 20 indigenous varieties were planted by people with special needs, who currently weed and place compost in the field.

"There is a magical wonder in watching all . . . the huli grow into beautiful life-giving plants, and the taro grow their big beautiful heart-shaped leaves," said Chang, who has a daughter with autism.

As the program does with its other organic vegetables, the harvested taro will be sold to the community. People with disabilities help plant, tend to and harvest cotton, used in their weekly saori-weaving program led by Dana Allen; plus starfruit, guava, banana, coconut, ulu, avocado, chipote, papaya, noni, citrus, bamboo, lychee, fig, basil, cilantro, kale, chard, sage, rosemary, sweet potato, squash, pumpkin, fennel, lettuce, arugula, tomatoes, cucumber, beets, carrots and flowers.

There are about a dozen people with disabilities in the Lokelani 'Ohana farm program. The nonprofit organization is a Camphill-inspired, life-sharing home and is modeled as a small farm-based community shared by people with and without disabilities.

The organic farming supports education and vocational skill building, teaches teamwork and enhances social skills, said Chang.

For more information about Lokelani 'Ohana, call 249-0254, e-mail christina@lokelaniohana.org or see Web site www.lokelaniohana.org.

Article Photos



Lokelani 'Ohana, a farm-based program that works with people with disabilities, has restored a taro field on its farm in Waihee. Shown in the field in late March are Lokelani 'Ohana's Angelica Chang (from left), Alice Nitta, Aimee Bellard, Brian Moniz and Sean Maher.

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