



December 31, 2008

People who made a Difference

Aloha House **mental health crisis response workers**

By ILIMA LOOMIS, Staff Writer



Aloha House mental health crisis response workers are available to respond to any appeal for help within 45 minutes. The team includes (front row, from left) Gay McDonald, Dr. Vince Nubla and Tina Boteilho; (second row): Jessica Brazil, Christina Andersson and Lydia Hockridge; (third row): Patty Means-Ellis, Janna Eastman and Marlene Nagata; (fourth row): Van Delos Santos, Nicole Edwards, Gayle Lani and Michael Zarate. Photo by Amanda Cowan

You might call them paramedics for the soul.

Anytime, anywhere, Crisis Mobile Outreach workers will respond to anyone who's in an emotional or mental crisis and calls for help. And they'll be there within 45 minutes.

"It saves lives," said Jud Cunningham, executive director of Aloha House, which holds the contract to provide the state-funded service on Maui, Molokai and Lanai. "It helps stabilize people and get them to a safe place, so they can get the help they need."

Crisis workers never know what their next call will be. It could be to the campsite of a homeless man with schizophrenia who's stopped taking his medication and is

trying to hurt himself. Or it could be the home of a single mother who's feeling overwhelmed and doesn't know how she can go on.

Anyone who needs help can call the state Department of Health ACCESS line at (800) 753-6879.

Cunningham said the crisis workers have to be both highly skilled and extremely compassionate. For people on the front lines, the job can be emotionally draining, and workers don't get rich - they do it because they want to help people, he said.

"These are our community heroes and angels who do this work."