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Imua Family Services Announces Plans for Imua Discovery Garden

Maui's premiere early childhood development agency revealed their intent to purchase the Yokouchi Estate to create a community space for outdoor, nature based learning for our island keiki.

Imua's dream for the community-based Discovery Garden is to inspire children while they learn and grow, and to equip parents and teachers with a safe naturalistic environment where learners of all abilities can develop at their own pace. Our "Nature Play Spaces" will encompass a second Imua Inclusion Preschool site, an open-air outdoor classroom, family picnic areas and gardens where children can connect, play and learn outdoors. Mud tables, interactive walls, activity panels and sensory gardens will be designed so keiki with disabilities can play alongside their able-bodied friends and siblings. These unique grounds will promote acceptance and compassion – both important values for children to embrace. Located in central Maui, the property is accessible to the community and is ideally located for the planned clinical residence, which will help therapists, technicians and other professionals expedite their relocation to Maui and quickly provide their services to the community.

The Yokouchi Family Estate was home to Pundy Yokouchi, a prominent Maui luminary who, along with the Yokouchi 'ohana, has left a decades-long legacy of giving back to the community. Designed by Charles William Dickey, one of Hawaii's most prominent 20th century architects, the estate boasts beautiful grounds and traditional architecture. Executive Director Dean Wong was overcome with gratitude when the family first presented this opportunity, remarking "It is fitting that the legacy of this property would continue to serve the community and touch the lives of children, which are huge priorities for all the members of the Yokouchi family." Therefore this new expansion of Imua Family Services will be formerly named Imua Discovery Garden, presented by The Yokouchi Family.

Access to the neighboring Maui Historical Society directly from Imua Discovery Garden will allow guests of either organization to benefit from a wide range of cultural and learning experiences. In addition to partnership with the Maui Historical Society, Imua Family Services will look to partner with groups and organizations on such priorities as sustainable planting, farm-to-child learning, environmental stewardship, non-violent communication, arts & culture, as well as health & well-being.

The inspiration for Imua Discovery Garden came during a 2017 strategic planning session, where Imua's staff and board were dared to dream big and envision how the agency could grow to become the optimal environment for children and families here on Maui. Those dreams were developed into a five-year plan aimed at transforming the agency by improving accessibility, expanding services, and providing

a more fluid experience for families interfacing with their programs. Included in the plans was the goal of acquiring a campus that could provide the community with improved services and more accessibility, along with educational and recreational activities focused on inclusivity. The vision was one of a campus that would help increase functional, social and emotional skills for those who access services, all while offering a more naturalistic learning environment attuned to Imua's model of inclusion. From this planning, the concept of Imua Discovery Garden was born.

The commitment and dedication of the Yokouchi 'ohana, and Imua Family Services is a clear signal that the start of this dream, founded in a vision for the children and families of Maui, is well on its way to success.

Imua Family Services began serving children and families on Maui back in 1947. With its dedication to building healthier families and communities, it has since grown to become a premier provider of programs focused on childhood development and family strengthening. The agency's current Executive Director, Dean Wong, has said, "It is our vision and responsibility to steer this ship (Imua Family) towards our centennial and to mark a new era of what Imua Family Services is, and can be, for our Maui community." Currently, Imua Family Services utilizes an Early Childhood Development Center in Kahului that the agency built in 2015. The facility is home to a unique inclusion model preschool (Imua Inclusion Preschool), specialized therapy rooms, a variety of meeting spaces, and the agency's main offices. Imua also maintains office space on both Molokai and Lāna'i.