



**Child & Family
SERVICE**

Private, nonprofit since 1899

Na Kānaka People

A community newsletter published by Child and Family Service ■ Winter 2006

Ohana of the Year - Together at last

By Mike Leidemann
Advertiser Staff Writer

Johnnie Quinores remembers the day her son Kaylen put everything in perspective, as only an 8-year-old can.

"It's good to have you back, Mom," he said.

Not just back in the house, but back from years of hard living. Back from more than a decade of drug and alcohol abuse and crime. Back from the long, downward spiral that ripped her family apart. Back from the homeless encampment in Mokule'ia, where authorities first took her children into protective custody.

"I went to h-e-H," she says. "I had to really hit bottom before I could start to bounce back."

The story of how Quinores and Albert Braine hit rock bottom, got straight with the help of publicly available services, but still struggle with the day-to-day joys and trials of family life is one worth celebrating, officials say. And that's just what will happen next week when the Child & Family Service organization honors them as the 'Ohana of the Year at a luncheon in Waikiki.

The annual award honors families who have shown great progress on the issues they face with help from the agency.

"They've worked so hard just to get to this point," said Kathy Fetters, who met the couple through the organization's Healthy Start program and nominated them for the family honor.

"They really deserve to have something good happening to them now."

Today, Quinores, Braine and four children live in a brightly lit, well-furnished, two-bedroom Waipahu apartment that is filled with the sounds of kids playing. They've been drug- and alcohol-free for 18 months, and they candidly tell the story of their family's decline and rebirth.

They met in a Pearl City bar 8 1/2 years ago and found out quickly that they had something in common: "We both liked to get high," Braine said. Before the night was over, that's what they were doing at a friend's house.



From left, 2-year-old Triston Quinores, dad Albert Braine, 8-year-old Kaylen Baker, 1-year-old Victory Braine, mom Johnnie Quinores, 10-year-old Koa Akina-Quinores, and 12-year-old Kaysha are Child & Family Service's 'Ohana of the Year.

Photo courtesy of Strictly Photography.

Their problems didn't start there, though.

Quinores, 38, had been drinking heavily since she was a teenager in Waikiki and admits that the partying often affected the way she took care of three children from a previous relationship. Braine, 37, grew up in a tough part of Waimanalo and had been using drugs since his early 20s. Both say they have childhood memories of domestic violence, substance abuse and being abused in their own homes.

Their life together seemed to alternate between the high times and the low ones, marked by constant bickering and fighting. "The police knew us in every part of the Island," Braine said.

They don't expect everyone to understand how drugs can grip you so much that you simply end up neglecting your own children. They don't always understand it themselves.

"You know what you're doing isn't right, but you just can't stop," Quinores said. "You think it can't get worse, but it still does."

They tried to get help, they said, but it wasn't easy to deal with a system when you don't have a phone, much less a permanent address. So the downward spiral continued.

How bad could it get?

- One day child welfare services officials took Quinores' children — Kaylen, 8; Koa, 10; and Kaysha, 12 — into custody. She and Braine kept using.
- One day Quinores found herself pregnant and making ham and cheese sandwiches in the back of a stolen car just before the police arrived.

See "Ohana of the Year - Together at Last" on Page 3

This article first appeared in the Honolulu Advertiser. It is reprinted here with the Honolulu Advertiser's permission and our thanks for the newspaper's interest in and support of Child and Family Service.