

# HAWAII SBDC SUCCESS STORY - KAUA'I CENTER



## Kaua'i Animal Education Center

Christy and Keola Wong had operated Wong's Traveling Zoo working with abandoned or retired animals (farm animals in particular) but had to discontinue the business due to losing a lease of land that they were using to support the animals. By their own admission, they had not really operated the business as a business; it really just grew out of serving family members and community contacts. They approached the HSBDC (John Latkiewicz, Kauai Center Director) for help with resurrecting the traveling zoo, running it as a business and expanding services using a non-profit to complement the traveling zoo.

Much of the initial work focused on teasing out the for-profit's versus the for-profit's kuleana. The non-profit would control the land, buildings and animal assets. The non-profit would handle services that are generally not for-profit activities. These might include rehabbing animals, veterinary care, housing unwanted animals, running rescue/adoption services, running pet therapy programs, and a Building Living Classrooms program. Not all of those services are on-line yet, but the vision and dedication are there.

The HSBDC worked with them to complete the non-profit paperwork and refine their business plan. From there, we worked on creating a board, identifying partners and identifying land possibilities. John has been amazed by the Wongs. "They have been persistent to say the least. They have also never shied away from the challenges or from the opportunities to stretch themselves beyond their comfort zone."

The Kaua'i Animal Education Center reopened its doors late last year and has moved to its new location at Keālia Farm. The effort has since morphed into a full-fledged operation that offers all kinds of opportunities for keiki and adults to learn about farm animals. In fact, the nonprofit is launching new programs left and right, including pet therapy workshops and "living classrooms," where families visit the farm to learn animal husbandry skills.

Christy and Keola appreciate the HSBDC. "John has been instrumental in every step of the process going above and beyond not just with the business plan writing, and filing for non-profit, he has offered support in many ways, such as coming to meetings, fundraisers, making connections in our community that built the relationships for KAEC to grow upon. We wouldn't be a success with our services without the guiding knowledge, programs and support of HSBDC!"