



Laura Heintz is referred to as the mother of the Yolo Crisis Nursery. Courtesy photo

Yolo Crisis Nursery: Village leaders built the nursery

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Getting good deeds done may take a village, but the village needs strong leaders to pave the way by laying a solid foundation and providing inspiration.

The Yolo Crisis Nursery owes its existence to the passionate village of Yolo County, one that has stepped up time and again to support the good deeds of the nursery. But it took leaders to open some eyes in the early days and get things moving in order to create this valuable community resource that has served the families of Yolo County since 2001.

Nursery founder Laura Heintz, appropriately referred to as the mother of the Yolo Crisis Nursery, was inspired by her work as a program developer at a social services agency to establish a crisis nursery in Yolo County, similar to one in Sacramento.

Encouraged by then-Yolo County Supervisor Lois Wolk, and a host of civic clubs, elected officials and other community leaders, as well as funding from the California Endowment, Heintz opened the Yolo Crisis Nursery in 2001.



Heidy Kellison. Enterprise file photo

Heidy Kellison, who established a “Friends of the Nursery” volunteer group, remembers working alongside Heintz in the early days.

“At all turns, Laura treated the nursery as if it were one of her own children,” Kellison said. “She developed all procedures making YCN above reproach operationally, and even though she wasn’t there during our 2014 crisis, YCN survived scrutiny because of the foundation she created.”

When a home on a quiet Davis residential street was chosen as the nursery’s site, Heintz was assisted by another community leader to get things going, then-Yolo County Supervisor Betsy Marchand.

“It was a huge undertaking,” Kellison said. “The two of them walked the entire neighborhood area, contacting every single resident, to ensure that the community would welcome the nursery and accommodate issues unique to having a nursery nearby.”

If Betsy Marchand’s name is familiar, that’s because it should be. She’s usually involved at some level any time something good happens in Yolo County.

As the first woman elected to the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, Marchand served in that office for 24 years. She was a gaming commissioner for Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation for more than a decade and has also served on numerous nonprofit boards such as Yolo Basin Foundation, Capay Valley Vision, the Ag Issues Center Advisory Board for the University of California and others.

Currently, Marchand chairs the Dignity Woodland Healthcare Community Board. She was recognized just last fall by Congressman John Garamendi as one of the outstanding women of the 3rd Congressional District, having “a clear commitment to the community through their leadership and dedication to public service.”



Betsy Marchand. Courtesy photo

It's no wonder that Marchand's fingerprints are all over the beginnings of the Yolo Crisis Nursery.

Of course, Kellison, as a founding member of the Friends of Yolo Crisis Nursery, is also one of the leaders from the nursery's early days. She served with the Friends for 15 years, but she stepped up even more significantly when the nursery was on the brink of closing in 2014.

The nursery's sponsoring agency lost its license to operate in Davis and announced that the nursery would be closed in a matter of weeks. While many in the community were sad to see it go, Kellison went to work to make sure it stayed.

She made the rounds to Rotary clubs, Soroptimist clubs, business groups, foundations, elected officials and anyone else who would listen to an urgent appeal for donations to keep the nursery doors open. The effort quickly raised enough cash to keep the nursery going for another year while a new host agency was recruited.

Kellison and Becky Heard, another Friends member, worked tirelessly to find that new agency, but when all efforts came up short, they decided to go it alone. The Yolo Crisis Nursery Inc., an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit, was established in December 2014.

Heard and Kellison recruited a volunteer board of directors and Heard served as the first board president in 2015. She led the very diverse group during that first challenging year to create a thriving organization that now manages the Yolo Crisis Nursery's finances, personnel structure and outreach efforts.



Becky Heard. Courtesy photo

Today the Yolo Crisis Nursery, under the leadership of the current board of directors and executive director Heather Sleuter, is on solid financial ground, delivering more services than ever to the families who live in the Yolo County village.

It would not have happened, however, were it not for the work of a small group of determined leaders who know how to get things done.

Here's your chance to follow in the footsteps of Laura Heintz, Betsy Marchand, Heidi Kellison and Becky Heard. The Yolo Crisis Nursery board of directors has three openings for new members with the opportunity to become future nursery heroes. It's a hard-working board that serves well beyond the monthly board meetings.

There are committees to join, events to attend and things to get done.

The board especially needs financial management experience, but is interested in anyone with time, talent and energy. Go to www.yolocrisisnursery.org for more information and to inquire about the opportunity.

— J.D. Denton is a former chair of the Yolo Crisis Nursery board of directors. This column is published monthly.