



Preschool teacher Oscar Lopez leads his morning reading time at the Yolo Crisis Nursery, which is licensed for daytime care of 12 children and overnight care for four. The Nursery has just finished its first full year of operating as an independent nonprofit. (Photo Credit: Jennifer Ditty)

Nursery reaches a milestone, and we're thankful

By JD Denton
President, Yolo Crisis Nursery Board of Directors
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This is a big month for the Yolo Crisis Nursery. It marks the beginning of our second full fiscal year as a local 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and while that may not sound like a big deal, it is.

A little over two years ago, this safe haven for children of families in crisis was facing a crisis of its own and was very much on the verge of closing its doors forever. In operation since 2001, the nursery was on the chopping block when its sponsoring agency, EMQ FamiliesFirst, ceased other operations in Davis and announced it could no longer support the Yolo Crisis Nursery.

The community responded, however, and funds were raised to keep the doors open another year. Then 501(c)(3) status was granted in December of 2014, a board of directors was recruited, and six months later — on June 30, 2015, the Yolo Crisis Nursery Inc. — dropped all ties with EMQ and launched its first year as a local, independent nonprofit.

One year later, here we are — the nursery is in high gear, operating at full capacity with a dedicated and experienced staff, and thanks to you, financially stable. Or at least, as financially stable as any nonprofit that depends on the generosity of the community it serves can be.

I won't try to sugarcoat the challenges that had to be overcome during the past 18 months as the nursery first crawled and then took baby steps into what it is today. The board of directors, an intensely passionate group with a variety of skill sets, dove right into the deep end and developed a business plan, a marketing plan, a human resources structure for

nursery staff and — with the help of a professional fund development director — a sustainable fundraising strategy.

As a small business owner, it was akin to opening a new business, that is, a lot of hard work, some periods of chaos, and of course, more than a few sleepless nights.

Through it all, nursery staff persevered, showing up on the front lines every day to keep families facing challenging times intact and their at-risk children in a safe, warm and loving environment. Each of us on the board drew inspiration from the staff's ability to get the job done while tuning out the uncertainty of the future.

A few weeks ago, the board of directors held a Saturday morning retreat and began hammering out a plan to take us into the next five years. We laid the foundation to stabilize the operation even more, expand services in the future and become a model crisis nursery for the state of California. It's an ambitious plan, to be sure, but we're an ambitious bunch.

And yes, you can help. Nope, this is not a pitch for a donation (though they are always welcomed and appreciated), but rather an opportunity for you to step up with something even more valuable than your money: your time, talents and passion. We have four openings on our board of directors starting in January, and you are invited to consider joining us.

The current board membership includes a marketing specialist, an entrepreneur, a retired hospital administrator, an accountant, an HR specialist, a couple of UC Davis staffers, a public relations specialist and a retailer. We're also parents and grandparents, and while that's not a requirement, maybe it explains partly why we love working together to help a bunch of kids we don't even know.

We're looking for like-minded people with some time to invest, and if you have some knowhow in real estate, construction, accounting or law, all the better. Heck, we'd even consider a butcher, a baker or a candlestick maker, as long as the commitment and passion are there. If the sound of a child's laughter makes your day, you're qualified.

There's no pay, of course, as we're all volunteers, but the payback is enormous. The privilege of supporting a hard-working, professional staff who is available 24-7-365 to be there for young families in crisis and provide a safe place for their kids is satisfying beyond measure.

Contact a board member through www.yolocrisisnursery.org, and we'll talk.

A quicker and easier way to support the nursery while hanging out with friends, sipping some wine and hearing some great music is coming up Saturday, Aug. 20. That's when the Friends of the Yolo Crisis Nursery present "Cabaret for a Cause" at Davis Community Church's Fellowship Hall, 421 D St. in downtown Davis.

Jennifer Provenza, a singer, actor and theater arts professor in Sacramento, has put together a one-woman cabaret show that she'll perform as a benefit for the nursery. Provenza has assembled a decade-by-decade musical tour of the past 100 years, with all songs by female songwriters or lyricists. The Friends group plans an elegant ambiance for the evening, with twinkling string lights, dark tablecloths and votive candles. From 7:30 to 8 p.m., guests can mingle and enjoy a glass of wine (included in the cost of admission), then sit down for the hourlong program.

Tickets are \$25; purchase them at www.yolocrisisnursery.org.

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