Kristine Stanfill, left, and Heather Sleuter pause for a moment with the Tahtimihn Award honoring excellence in community service. Sleuter accepted the award on the Nursery’s behalf earlier this year from the Yocha Dehe Community Fund. Stanfill is director of the fund.

New mission statement helps Nursery chart its direction

By Karen Adams
Member, Yolo Crisis Nursery Board of Directors
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The Yolo Crisis Nursery survived – and even thrived – during its first full year as an independent nonprofit. Not surprisingly, that is precisely what we want for the children and families we serve. The nursery was created to prevent abuse and save vulnerable young lives, but we exist today to promote thriving as well.

Over the summer, we wrote as much into our newly adopted mission statement: *The Yolo Crisis Nursery provides early intervention services to nurture healthy and resilient children, strengthen parents, and preserve families.*

Our new vision statement points us toward a best-of-all-worlds goal: *Every child in Yolo County grows up in a safe, loving and stable family.*

We re-crafted those statements as a launching point for long-term strategic planning. Still in development, our plan will carry us through the next 10 years or so with the twin ambitions of program excellence and solid financial footing. More than likely, the plan will incorporate purchasing a new facility to replace the cramped quarters we currently lease. (For safety reasons, the nursery’s location is not publicly disclosed.)

“We don’t want to jump the gun, but with our own organizational crisis averted, we are carefully considering the financial advantages that might come with owning a facility,” said J.D. Denton, president of the Board of Directors. “It’s part of the blueprint we’re creating for the future.”

None of this would be possible without the outpouring of support we have received since our former host agency announced in March 2014 that it was ceasing its Davis operations.
In the fiscal year that ended June 30 – our inaugural since becoming independent – our income covered expenses and gave us a much-needed cushion. Some of the surplus might well become seed money for the future capital campaign, Denton says.

So we survived-thrived financially, but what about our programs?

“I feel very good about the state of our signature programs – crisis care, wrap-around services for parents, and specialized day care and preschool,” says Heather Sleuter, executive director. “Together, these programs are reaching vulnerable families. We’re providing loving care and customized support to those who need it the most.”

The numbers back her up. Demand for our services was up 31 percent over the previous year, as measured in child-care “slots,” or periods of care. In total, we provided 2,285 slots of care in 2015-16. We worked with 232 families, either helping them resolve their crises or following up after they received direct services the previous year.

There’s more. In our Family Life Skills Partnership program, we provided intensive in-home parenting education to 20 families. Referred by Child Welfare Services, the families are in the reunification process following foster placement. Based on a research-validated model, the program enables parents to keep their kids healthy and safe once they’re home.

We also provided hundreds of care packages to families in need, many of whom are not our clients. Contents may include diapers, wipes, baby formula, clothing – we tailor them to the family. Two special things about this program: We rarely turn down a request, and the contents are gathered entirely from in-kind donations from the community.

Beyond every number is a story, and how we wish confidentiality didn’t prevent us from telling them. We know, for instance, that we saved at least one child’s life. He recently celebrated his first birthday in part because his mom came to us for help during a difficult time shortly after his birth. We hope to tell the full story soon, with her permission. But the point is this:

For all the statistics we could cite about our impact, nothing demonstrates success to us more than preventing that tiny infant’s death. For that, we thank our community for the ongoing support that helps us saves young lives and promote thriving.

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Speaking of community support, we offer our utmost thanks this month to two organizations, both long-time backers.

- The Yolo County Board of Supervisors voted Sept. 13 to approve a one-time grant of $100,000 to support nursery operations in 2016-17. The grant comes from Pomona funding, which is the county’s share of a $206 billion legal settlement with tobacco companies in 1998.

  “We are thrilled to receive the continued commitment of the county,” Denton says. “We’ll continue to work hard to uphold the trust Supervisor Jim Provenza and his colleagues have placed in our programs.”
Earlier this month, the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation awarded us a grant for $120,000, to be paid in $40,000 increments over three years.

“The Yocha Dehe Community Fund is proud to partner with the Yolo Crisis Nursery,” says Matthew Lowell, Jr., Yocha Dehe Tribal Council member and Community Fund Board member. “Their programs offer important options and hope for vulnerable children and desperate parents. The Nursery not only provides temporary shelter and assistance in a crisis, when it is most needed; it also offers ongoing resources to strengthen parenting skills for the long term and to foster the safe home environments children need as they grow.”

Last spring, the Yocha Dehe Community Fund members expressed their appreciation for our work in a different fashion. At its eighth annual Partners in Philanthropy Luncheon in Brooks, the group surprised Nursery representatives with its top honor.

The Tahtimihn Award (“star” in the Tribe’s Patwin language) honors excellence in community service.

“The top award, followed by news of a three-year grant – wow,” Denton says. “We’re deeply honored for both the award and that the Yocha Dehe folks have chosen to support us at this level. We can’t thank them enough.”