



Counselor and childcare worker Connie Cordero has been with the Yolo Crisis Nursery since it opened in 2001.
Photo credit: Kelly Barr

Saving Families, One Child at a Time

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By Cherise Henry
Special to the Enterprise

Karen Adams, Yolo Crisis Nursery board member and interim coordinator of marketing and communications, tells a story about a woman named Michelle. Michelle was about to give birth to her second child and having recently fled her abusive husband, brought her 4-year-old son to Yolo Crisis Nursery for 24-hour care during her hospitalization. She later returned to the hospital to treat severe complications from her labor and delivery, at which time the nursery took in both of her children to provide respite care, and helped to find Michelle a job and housing. Once employed, her new wages didn't cover childcare for two children, so she qualified for on-going care in the nursery's specialized infant program and preschool.

Today, Michelle and her young family are thriving, thanks in large part to the nursery – a nonprofit organization that provides a safe, temporary home for children during times of extreme family crisis.

The nursery offers a cozy three-bedroom home in Davis that can accommodate four children, up to age 5, overnight and 12 during the day. Trained support staff, with smiles and hugs on-the-ready, are onsite 24/7 for children and families in need.

Adams says what makes the nursery unique in California is that it holds three licenses: crisis and respite care, infant day care (ages 0-2) and preschool (ages 3-5). The nursery can therefore care for children of families in immediate crisis, and continue to provide ongoing high-quality childcare with emphasis on helping to mitigate any trauma the child may have suffered. “With the three licenses and integrated programs, the nursery not only keeps kids safe and families together, it promotes resiliency and readiness to learn,” Adams says.

According to recent statistics of UC Berkeley’s California Child Welfare Indicators Project, children from birth to age 5 made up more than 46 percent of all substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in Yolo County from 2008 to 2014 – exceeding the state’s percentages each year (except 2013 when it matched), which ranged from 43 to 46 percent.

Executive Director Heather Sleuter, who has worked with the nursery for 10 years, says that while these rates are still too high, the number of substantiated child abuse and neglect cases in this age group dropped in Yolo County during this time period by over 25 percent. She believes the nursery is an effective solution to continuing this downward trend.

“In short, the Yolo Crisis Nursery is a proven program that saves families and saves lives,” says Sleuter.

During fiscal year 2015-16, children at the nursery received care 2,285 times, up 31 percent from the previous year, which Adams says indicates that both the need is there and that the Nursery’s outreach brought more families to their doorstep. “That’s great, because we want to be able to serve every family that needs help,” Adams says. Ninety-eight percent of families served were low-income and Medi-Cal eligible, with the majority coming from Woodland (43 percent), West Sacramento (32 percent) and Davis (10 percent).

For local families – like Michelle and her children – in crisis situations, the safe home and services provided by Yolo Crisis Nursery are nothing short of life-changing, and lifesaving. “With solid support from our community,” Adams says, “we’ll hopefully move ever closer to our vision that every child in Yolo County grows up in a safe, stable and loving family.”