



**SACRAMENTO
CHILDREN'S HOME**



SACRAMENTO CHILDREN'S HOME CRISIS NURSERY

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT



Submitted to:
Sacramento Children's Home
2750 Sutterville Road
Sacramento, CA 95820



Submitted by:
LPC Consulting Associates, Inc.
2015 J Street, Suite 205
Sacramento, CA 95811



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sacramento Crisis Nursery has been operating since 1996, when the Sacramento Children’s Home (SCH) opened the first residential site in South Land Park. In 2002 SCH opened a second site in North Sacramento County, expanding the accessibility for families countywide. The Crisis Nurseries have provided both emergency day care and overnight care for children whose parents were at risk for neglect or abuse. Originally the funding for the crisis nursery was provided by a “start up” grant from Blue Cross of California (currently the California Endowment) to respond to the community need for a safe and caring place for children. For over 13 years the Crisis Nursery has provided emergency care for children while evolving to meet the needs of the community. The Sacramento Crisis Nursery’s mission is *“to prevent child abuse and neglect by providing support to families at times of crisis through residential respite care for children from birth through age five.”* Families with a broad range of need for emergency child care may self-refer and use the nursery services voluntarily as they address needs for them and their families. These may include homelessness, domestic violence, medical or mental health issues, substance abuse treatment, employment search, and/or other times when children need a safe place to stay while parents seek stability as caretakers.

Due to shifts in funding resources, the North Sacramento site is the only one that remains operational. Though the need for and interest in having a second site to serve families in South Sacramento County has not waned, the resources have not continued to support two sites. SCH is conducting a needs assessment in order to determine whether to pursue funding to re-open the south area site, and has taken this opportunity to examine other issues related to sustaining two sites. The issues relate to the following questions:

1. What is the need for Crisis Nursery 24-hour and day respite services?
2. What is the perceived need to provide Crisis Nursery services in closer proximity to families in South Sacramento County?
3. What motivates families to use the services provided at the Nursery?
4. What are the barriers to using the services of the Nursery?
5. What changes might be considered to increase utilization of the services offered by the Nursery?

The needs assessment study included a combination of focus group discussions and interviews with a variety of stakeholders and parents of small children, many of whom represent the families targeted by the Crisis Nursery. Altogether the needs assessment findings are based on responses from an estimated 76 stakeholders and providers of services for families at risk for abuse or neglect, and an estimated 57 parents who are being served by these providers. The needs assessment was based on open-ended

questions only; a structured questionnaire will be developed from this experience, to facilitate future surveys and community level inquiries for the Crisis Nursery.

Highlights of Findings from the Needs Assessment

In general, both stakeholders and parents recognize and appreciate the purpose of the Crisis Nursery and Day Respite services. Many know something about these services, though it appears there continues to be a need to educate the general public and to keep the services “in front of” providers who serve families with young children, to compete with the information that vies for their attention.

Among the needs identified were:

- Services more accessible to families in South Sacramento County (either South County or central city), without preference for a specific location;
- Expanded outreach and promotion, including tours or open houses for parents and families to see what the Nursery offers and meet the staff;
- Creation of promotional materials that reach families with information that clarifies the purpose and services provided; include testimonials from families who have used the services, Q&A related to misconceptions, and suggested scenarios for service utilization;
- Changes to name or branding, to eliminate or downplay “crisis” and emphasize spontaneity of need and immediacy of service response;
- Emphasis on how the Crisis Nursery and Day Respite services demonstrate good parenting, and would be regarded as positive, preventive actions by CPS; and
- Clarification of relationship (or not) between Crisis Nursery and CPS, including how Nursery interfaces with CPS (e.g., like any provider who is a mandated reporter).

Despite more than a decade of Crisis Nursery services in Sacramento, ongoing outreach, education, and promotion are critical if the families who need these services are likely to seek them. This history also presents an opportunity to share personal stories and testimonials from families who have used the Crisis Nursery’s residential and Day Respite services and to expand the providers to whom the Nursery markets its services. The full report from this needs assessment study provides numerous ideas and suggestions for everything from branding to outreach targets, in support of expanding the use of the Crisis Nursery services and making them more accessible by the families most in need, and the children most at risk for abuse or neglect.

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Established in 1996, The Sacramento Crisis Nursery is a program of the Sacramento Children's Home serving the families of Sacramento County. The mission of the Nursery is "to prevent child abuse and neglect by providing support to families at times of crisis through residential respite care for children from birth through age five." To fulfill this mission, the Crisis Nursery operates a residential facility in North Sacramento, offering overnight care and day respite services to children zero through five years old.

The first Sacramento Crisis Nursery was planned and developed by the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Sacramento, Inc., the Junior League of Sacramento, and the Sacramento Children's Home. Concerned about the lack of child abuse prevention programs available for families with infants and young children who needed a safe place to go, the founders at these three agencies established the Nursery to respond to this community need. To attain nonprofit 501(c)3 status for the Nursery, the founders partnered with the Sacramento Children's Home (SCH), as SCH had over 140 years of experience serving children and was considered a stable agency in the community. With grants from Blue Cross of California (currently The California Endowment), the Junior League of Sacramento, and the Sierra Health Foundation, as well as the creation of the Sacramento Crisis Nursery Fund from the Thomas P. Raley Foundation, the first Crisis Nursery opened its doors in the Sacramento neighborhood of South Land Park in 1996. For almost 10 years, the South area site provided overnight care for up to 10 children zero through six years old.

Then in 2002, the Sacramento Children's Home constructed and opened the second Crisis Nursery to serve the north area of Sacramento County. Similar to the South Area location, this second site was nestled in a quiet residential neighborhood in the city of Sacramento. This Crisis Nursery remains in operation, offering day and overnight care.

Since its inception, funding for the Crisis Nursery has come from various sources. In 1996 the Thomas P. Raley Foundation provided \$500,000 for the Crisis Nursery Fund to serve as an endowment for the future sustainability of the program. Then in 2001, First 5 Sacramento awarded a three-year grant to renovate, start up and operate a second crisis nursery in the north area of Sacramento. In 2004, a second three-year grant from First 5 Sacramento was awarded to expand beds for families dealing with substance abuse issues; and in 2007, a third three-year grant from First 5 Sacramento funded the new "emergency day respite" program which includes parenting classes, transportation and preschool curriculum for children. In addition, the Crisis Nursery fundraising auxiliary group, called the Friends of the Crisis Nursery, is a volunteer group dedicated to sustaining the Crisis Nursery and its services and garners funding and resources for the operation of the program. At the time of the report, the Nursery had a newsletter distribution of approximately 5,000 donors.

In 2007, due to insufficient operating revenue, the South Area Nursery was forced to close. Although the SCH continues to maintain ownership of the property in the South area, it is no longer used to provide services. At the time of this report, SCH and the

Friends of the Crisis Nursery were exploring options and seeking support to reopen the South Land Park location.

In late 2008, The Sacramento Children’s Home contracted with LPC Consulting Associates to conduct a needs assessment for the purpose of gathering input from the community to inform next steps in terms of enhancing and expanding the Crisis Nursery in Sacramento County. Staff conducted parent and stakeholder focus groups and interviews to determine the community’s feelings about the Crisis Nursery, and to gauge needs to support families throughout Sacramento County. The findings from these open-ended inquiries are the subject of this summary report.

Description of Services

Currently, the Crisis Nursery has one location in the North Sacramento area which provides both overnight and day respite childcare for families in need of a place to leave their children. The day respite services are available daily from 7:00am to 7:00pm, with a capacity of up to 20 children (8 infants and 12 preschool age children). There is no limit to the number of days that families can utilize the day respite services. The overnight care component of the program accommodates up to 14 children, who can stay up to 30 days. While at the Nursery, all children receive the same educational curriculum administered by English-speaking or Spanish-speaking daycare teachers, whether they are there for day respite or for overnight care. Table 1 below illustrates the utilization patterns of the North Area Nursery.

Table 1 — North Area Crisis Nursery Utilization (FY 2008/09 YTD)

	Emergency Day Respite	24-Hour Overnight Care
Average Children Per Month	66	49
Average Days Per Child Per Month	1.2	5.4
<i>Average Monthly Capacity</i>	56%	142%

The Crisis Nursery is licensed as a “450 Daycare Center” and currently has three state licenses that make it possible for them to provide the services they do: (1) a “daycare preschool license” for 12 children; (2) an “infant daycare license” for eight infants; and (3) a “crisis nursery license” for 14 children.

In addition to childcare services, the Nursery provides case management support to all parents who bring their children for either overnight or day respite care. On site, the Nursery hosts an ongoing, weekly parenting class called “Making Parenting a Pleasure”, which is open to all parents. To assist parents in getting to the Nursery, two vans with one full-time employee offer 24-hour transportation to families going to and from the Nursery.

While the Nursery provides care to children ages zero to six, a Nursery staff member reports that there is a “huge need” for services for children over the age of six. Although a separate license is required to care for children ages six through 18, at times the Nursery obtains a waiver to keep siblings together at the Nursery when one is older. However, says a staff member, this is a rare occurrence. An idea staff are considering to address this issue is to expand the North Area Nursery’s capacity to include services for older children, by building another residence hall adjacent to the current facility.

At the time of this report, the Crisis Nursery was the only agency offering free respite and overnight childcare to families in the County of Sacramento. Although Birth & Beyond Community Response Program sites (Birth & Beyond) offer “parent time outs”, they are for a limited length of time and require the parent to be on site. And while St. Patrick’s Home offered day respite, it requires one to “call first and pay for the services.”

According to a staff member, the Crisis Nursery is a program that “offers a continuum of care for families” that need a place to leave their children from time to time. The services the Crisis Nursery provides are unique to the community and address a specific need in Sacramento County.

“This is the only program that addresses the needs of this particular age group of children, which is free care for children and families in emergency situations.”

~Friends of the Crisis Nursery

SECTION 2 METHODOLOGY

Between October and December 2008, LPC staff and Sacramento Children’s Home staff conducted a total of 14 focus groups and four interviews to gather input from parents and stakeholders in the community about the Crisis Nursery. The data collection activities included administering questions to the following groups:

- Stakeholders – Staff conducted seven focus groups and one interview with approximately 76 community stakeholders. The participating groups included: Birth & Beyond Community Response Program staff from North Sacramento, La Familia, and Valley Hi sites; Birth & Beyond Team Leaders, Family Resource Center (FRC) Coordinators, and Intervention Specialists; Child Protective Services (CPS) Supervisors; Friends of the Crisis Nursery; and a Crisis Nursery staff member.
- Parents – Staff conducted seven focus groups and three interviews with a total of 57 parents from the community. Participants included: CPS Parent Leaders; “Making Parenting a Pleasure” class participants (at the Crisis Nursery); Phoenix Park residents; Strategies for Change clients; Crisis Nursery consumers; and Birth & Beyond clients from La Familia, North Sacramento, and Valley Hi sites. Out of the 57 parent participants, nine were Spanish-speaking.

Each focus group and interview consisted of a set of specific open-ended questions for stakeholders and for parents (Attachment A). Questions varied based on the audience, but in general, the facilitators asked questions in order to gain insight on the following topics:

- What do parents and providers know about the Crisis Nursery; what do they say about Crisis Nursery services?
- What keeps families from utilizing the Crisis Nursery?
- How can the Crisis Nursery make their services more available in terms of location, transportation, outreach, and name of service?
- How can the Crisis Nursery effectively market their services to parents and providers?

Staff from LPC facilitated and recorded notes for 11 focus groups and one interview, while Sacramento Children’s Home staff facilitated and recorded notes for three focus groups and three interviews. Data collectors submitted all raw qualitative data to LPC for analysis. LPC staff conducted content analysis to summarize responses, identify patterns in responses, and reveal themes from the focus group and interview data.

Sections 3 and 4 of this report discuss responses from the focus groups and interviews conducted for the Crisis Nursery needs assessment. Section 3 presents a summary of responses from stakeholders, while Section 4 presents a summary of parent input. Section 5 draws conclusions from the full range of gathered responses, and offers recommendations to enhance utilization of the Crisis Nursery in Sacramento County.

SECTION 3 COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER RESPONSES

This section presents findings from stakeholder focus group and interview responses. The discussion of the findings includes: knowledge of the Crisis Nursery; how staff learn of the services; agency referral processes; what others say about the Nursery; barriers to utilization; and location and marketing suggestions.

3.1 Knowledge of Crisis Nursery and its Services

Stakeholders generally had accurate knowledge about the basics of the Crisis Nursery. In the focus groups, individuals reported the Nursery was a place that offered free and confidential services to families in crisis, where parents could take their children for both day respite care and overnight care. Although some respondents knew that the Nursery served children from birth to five years old, others were unsure of the client age limit and unclear about the number of days and the number of times families can utilize the day respite and overnight services.

Those who had toured the Crisis Nursery described the facility as “beautiful”, “clean”, “inviting” and imparting a “homey atmosphere.” Some Birth & Beyond staff commented that the Nursery has a “great yard,” providing a space for play care and structured activities. They felt the Nursery was parent-friendly and that the staff was supportive to their clients. One CPS Supervisor reported, “We know that it is a safe place for children to go.” However, some respondents mentioned that the North area site is somewhat imposing and the neighborhood is not diverse.

All focus group participants were aware that the Crisis Nursery did not involve CPS or police interventions. Stakeholders were generally knowledgeable about the different situations in which families could utilize the Crisis Nursery’s services, aware that the Nursery was not just for relieving families in “crisis” situations, but also a resource for parents who had to attend a job interview, go to a medical appointment, or attend a court hearing. However, only some respondents acknowledged that the Nursery requires parent participation, indicating that the parents must make daily telephone calls and visit their child(ren) in care every other day if possible.

While respondents mentioned that the Crisis Nursery also offers transportation services, most were unsure about the details and types of transportation provided. The Birth & Beyond staff at one site were completely unaware of the transportation services provided by the Nursery, and others were unsure of the geographic restrictions of the transportation. Although the Nursery is helpful with transportation, according to several stakeholders, it might not always be available the exact moment there is a crisis.

Overall, the Birth & Beyond staff and CPS Supervisors did not mention the educational services provided by the Nursery. Only a few FRC Coordinators knew of the preschool curriculum offered to children, while several staff at the North Sacramento Birth & Beyond site were aware that the Nursery provides “Making Parenting a Pleasure” classes for parents.

3.2 How Staff Learn of the Services

Birth & Beyond staff generally learned about the Crisis Nursery and its services from touring the facility and from information about the intake process during the tour. For instance, at one Birth & Beyond site it was reported that every individual who is hired takes a tour of the Nursery. Information about the services is shared between Home Visitors, Team Leaders, and other FRC staff at Birth & Beyond sites through word-of-mouth. Staff also reported that they learn about the Crisis Nursery from parents who use or have used the Nursery in the past, from training they receive, and from written materials such as brochures. One staff member reported that she heard information about the Crisis Nursery on a television news broadcast.

Child Protective Services (CPS) Supervisors also learned about the Nursery through on-site visits. They reported attending a unit meeting at the Crisis Nursery and taking tours of the facility. In addition, Nursery staff have made presentations to CPS staff about the services they provide. Staff who have worked for CPS a longer time, know about the Crisis Nursery because it was, at one time, where social workers took infants when they had to be removed from the home at night. Supervisors reported that other methods of learning about the Crisis Nursery's services were during CPS induction training and through information shared by supervisors at CPS.

3.3 Agency Referral Process

As indicated in the focus group responses, Birth & Beyond staff are proactive in educating parents about the Crisis Nursery and its services. Staff reported they often talk to parents about the Nursery as a resource before the family is in a crisis situation. Sometimes Home Visitors and the Intervention Specialists ask families if they have "a plan" for alternative sources of childcare support. Many staff members suggest that the families tour the nursery themselves before making the decision to use it. At two Birth & Beyond sites in South Sacramento, staff provided transportation to parents so they could view the Nursery, although it is "challenging to do on a regular basis because the site is so far away," said a staff member.

"I make a referral to everyone; everyone should know about it. We talk about it in parenting classes and when we sign people up. It's more about educating people and being proactive."

—Staff Member, Valley Hi Birth & Beyond

If a family has urgent issues, staff will make an immediate referral then as well. They refer families who are homeless, who have a high stress level, who have mental health issues, who are looking for work, or who are pregnant and may go into labor. One Intervention Specialist specifically referred a mother who had post-partum depression and who feared she might hurt her baby.

Although all Birth & Beyond staff members can make referrals, the most common method is for the Intervention Specialist to handle the referral process. Sometimes a Home Visitor or the Team Leader will go to the Intervention Specialist in order for them

to refer the family. Generally, referrals are made by assuring the family first that “this doesn’t mean you are in trouble...” The Intervention Specialist provides the family with information about the Nursery, and may say something like “CPS would think it is great that you are taking this type of precaution” to prevent potential abuse or neglect. One Birth & Beyond site reported that although the staff member makes a referral by providing the phone number and name of a staff member, the family is responsible for calling the Crisis Nursery themselves. Staff then document the referral and occasionally follow up with the family to see if they utilized the service. On rare occasions, staff accompany the family to the Nursery.

At another Birth & Beyond site, staff inform all families of the Crisis Nursery, in a general overview of the services linked to the Family Resource Center (FRC). They “single out” the Crisis Nursery as a “special resource” and explain that they are sharing the information in advance in the event that parents might find it useful in the future, because “crises are not planned.” Staff define the word “crisis” and discuss different crisis situations, but also acknowledge that families do not have to be in crisis to use the Nursery, “maybe the parent just needs a break, and that is okay too.”

Similarly, CPS Supervisors reported that they like to educate the family before a family really needs to use the Crisis Nursery services. They inform the parent about when they can use the Nursery and why it may help them. Also like Birth & Beyond, CPS staff do not call the Nursery for the parent. However, they can be there to support them while they make the phone call and have helped them get to the site to fill out the paperwork. Typically, social workers will refer a parent if they have an appointment scheduled or if they must attend a court hearing. They also talk to expectant mothers about the Crisis Nursery in the case that the baby is due and they have no alternate childcare support.

For CPS cases, social workers develop a safety plan for the family and in the plan, the Crisis Nursery is often listed as a community resource for the family. “We like to leave them with a support plan that gives them resources in the community before and after a crisis,” says a CPS supervisor.

3.4 What Others Say About the Crisis Nursery

During the community stakeholder focus groups, participants discussed what they have heard others say about the Crisis Nursery and the services it provides. Stakeholders responded based on what they know parents have said and what other service providers have said about the Nursery.

3.4.1 Families

Birth & Beyond FRC Coordinators say the uninformed and under-informed members of the community are generally fearful of the program. The most common fear is CPS becoming involved as a result of a parent using the Nursery. However, families who have utilized the program are generally very happy with the experience and are repeat clients. Focus group respondents commented that parents felt the Nursery gave them a

break and time to “get their head together.” Parents also felt the Nursery allowed them to address their crisis and be more resourceful. Stakeholders reported that many families they know who used the day respite care “loved it” and are repeat clients, these families have mentioned that the Crisis Nursery even ended up being an advocate for them. The following are additional examples from stakeholders of what parents have told them about their experiences using the Crisis Nursery:

A single parent, who was able to drop off her child at the Crisis Nursery while she concentrated on making and keeping job interview appointments reported: “I found a job because of the Nursery.”

A parent who said she was “on the edge” and “desperate for time away,” told a Birth & Beyond Home Visitor: “You saved my life [with the referral to the Nursery].”

A mom, who CPS referred to the Nursery, reported that she received nonjudgmental treatment and even though she was referred by CPS, “was able to keep her dignity.”

One mother commented that the volunteers who work at the nursery are “angels.”

An Intervention Specialist at Birth & Beyond referred “a highly stressed mom with mental health issues and a lack of support” to the Crisis Nursery. Afterwards, the mother told the Intervention Specialist, “if it hadn’t been for the Nursery, she does not know what she’d have done” since she was able to leave her child there for a day or so at a time when she needed it.

Although families who utilized the Nursery services had an overall positive experience, according to stakeholders, there were also parents who shared they felt scrutinized by the process and were given unsolicited or unwelcomed parenting advice. Other families mentioned the paperwork and intake process was extensive and took a very long time. However, apparently parents also felt the lengthy process was justified and made them feel more secure about leaving their children. Stakeholders have also heard families complain that the North Area location is difficult to get to and is not in a central location, and that the South Area Nursery is very much missed by the community.

According to stakeholders, parents feel more comfortable utilizing the services after taking a tour of the Nursery. In general, families who have not seen or utilized the Crisis Nursery are fearful of it, while those who have used its services are satisfied with the experience and have or would use the services again. Once parents are at the site and able to look around, “they really seem to like it.” Some families have reported that the Nursery is “comfortable” and “homey,” and according to some stakeholders, the tour is “enormously helpful” because families will often “sign up” once they have visited the Nursery. Parents say they are relieved to know there is a safe place to leave their kids when the parent is sick or otherwise incapacitated.

“I think seeing it gives them a peace of mind. They know their kids are safe and they can do what they need to do and not worry.”

~Birth & Beyond Staff Member

Birth & Beyond staff find that the parents most likely to utilize the Nursery are those who are new to the area, without support, with little to no income, who have no money for child care at the moment of need, for court dates, or to work off bench warrants with jail time.

3.4.2 Service Providers

Focus group responses indicate that while most service providers know about the Nursery, there are still staff who are not aware it exists or have misinformation about the agency. Even a small number of Birth & Beyond staff who participated in the focus groups did not know about the Crisis Nursery. Similar to the confusion some community members have, stakeholders reported that sometimes other providers confuse the Children’s Receiving Home and Sacramento Children’s Home, especially since the two sites are in close proximity.

“I don’t think a lot of them know about it. When I mention it, a lot of people are surprised, or they aren’t sure what they do there.”

~Birth & Beyond Staff Member

3.5 What Keeps Families from Utilizing Services

Stakeholders reported that travel distance, lack of knowledge and understanding of the services, stigma associated with the Nursery, and several restrictive requirements are the reasons more families do not utilize the Crisis Nursery’s services.

3.5.1 Travel Distance

Focus groups respondents agreed that the North Area Nursery site is too far away for a great number of the County’s families. Their concern lay in that the Nursery is not close enough to a public transportation line and the distance from parts of the county might make families uncomfortable about traveling so far. Respondents indicated that distance was especially a barrier for those living in South Sacramento neighborhoods, indicating South Sacramento is a “world away” from Pasadena Avenue in Sacramento, where the Nursery is located.

“Imagine taking a bus all the way from South Sac[ramento] and then walking three or more blocks from the bus drop off. That’s not easy to do with a child.”

~CPS Supervisor

The staff at a Birth & Beyond site in South Sacramento were especially affected by the closure of the South Land Park location. They reported that they “lost a valuable resource” because the North area site is “too far to travel for most families.” According

to staff, their families do not have transportation and therefore cannot get to the Nursery quickly in cases of emergency. “It’s a wonderful option,” shared one staff member, “It is really sad to have lost the South area site; it was a better option for our families.”

As mentioned, the distance contributes to transportation barriers for families. Some stakeholders acknowledged that transportation may not always be immediately available in times of crisis or insufficiently accessible for daily parental visits to the Nursery. Others reported that families do not want to utilize the Nursery transportation because “they don’t want the driver to know where their child lives.” The travel distance makes the visiting requirement a challenge to fulfill for many families and, as a result, could potentially keep families from utilizing the Nursery.

“What if the parent wants to visit every day? How are they going to get there?”

~ CPS Supervisor

“If they want to use the Nursery, they have to sit down, look up the number, call ahead, and wait until the van arrives. It is not as convenient as it might seem.”

~Stakeholder

Ideally, stakeholders would like the Crisis Nursery to use multiple white shuttle vans or vehicles that will not draw attention, such as a regular four-door car. Stakeholders agreed that the vehicles should not have any distinguishing features or logos to ensure confidentiality and the privacy of the clients. Along with this, respondents suggested employing one full-time driver or two part-time drivers as well as on-call drivers so that 24-hour transportation can be effectively offered. Others suggested disseminating bus passes for parents’ daily visits to the Nursery.

3.5.2 Lack of Knowledge or Understanding of Services

While almost all stakeholders agreed that the distance from home is an issue of inadequate access for the families who live in other parts of the county, they also acknowledged that a major barrier to utilization is families’ lack of knowledge and understanding of the services offered by the Crisis Nursery. Respondents indicated the “word is not out” about the Crisis Nursery, and what people do know about the program is often incorrect.

The most prominent misconception is that the Nursery is affiliated with Child Protective Services (CPS) in some way. Parents fear that if they utilize the Nursery’s services, CPS will open an investigation or take their children away, or perhaps there will be police involvement. Others mentioned there is confusion in the community between the Sacramento Children’s Home and the Children’s Receiving Home, which is for children removed from parental custody and is closely linked to CPS. Stakeholders reported that many parents are hard to convince otherwise, especially families with prior CPS history. One staff member recalled an instance when a mom needed the Nursery

because her husband was jailed and she had to handle a job and the children all alone. It was hard for her to keep going to work, but she was afraid to send her children to the Nursery. For families with any CPS involvement, it is hard to think otherwise.

“They think the workers at the Nursery might report them to CPS.”

~Birth & Beyond Staff Member

Respondents mentioned that there is also a more general lack of understanding among parents about what services the Crisis Nursery provides. Some are completely unaware of some or all of the services offered. Families may believe there is a cost associated, or they believe the intake process will take too long and are discouraged from using the Nursery. One respondent mentioned that some people perceive the Nursery as place for sick children, while others think the day respite care is “too good to be true.” Furthermore, “when parents hear the word ‘crisis’ sometimes they don’t think they are in crisis, and therefore they don’t need the Nursery,” said a stakeholder. The fact that parents may not feel their situation qualifies as a crisis or an emergency could prevent them from utilizing the services.

“The majority of our parents need to hear about the Nursery, to better understand what it is and how to use it.”

~Stakeholder

Stakeholders reported that it is important to encourage parents to tour the Nursery so they can experience the atmosphere and talk with the staff. By educating the parents about the Nursery in this way, it can mitigate many of the barriers to utilization due to misconceptions or lack of understanding. According to several focus group participants, tours can help parents realize that CPS interprets Nursery utilization as “a positive and responsible way to reduce the risk for abuse or neglect.”

3.5.3 Community Stigma

The stigma surrounding the word “crisis” and the label of “being in crisis” was another barrier identified by stakeholders. They reported that families have a negative association with the concept of “crisis” and therefore with the Crisis Nursery. Because the Nursery provides services where the parents actually leave the children, there is a stigma attached to the parent not being able to care for their children. They think, “If I cannot handle my children, then maybe I’m not a good mother.” The underlying element of shame relates to the parents’ perceived incapacity to handle their problems on their own. “They think that if they have to get help,” reported a Birth & Beyond Staff Member, “they are not being good parents.”

“Families don’t want to be in ‘crisis’. There is shame to that name.”

~CPS Supervisor

Not only do parents not want to be perceived as “bad parents” but they are also fearful of leaving their children anywhere. “Having your child that far away from you is nerve wracking for many of the parents,” reported one stakeholder, and many parents would

not leave their children anywhere at all. Some parents even believe the Crisis Nursery will not take sufficient care of their children and think, “My kid is not going there!”

3.5.4 Restrictive Requirements

In addition to the afore-mentioned barriers to utilization, stakeholders perceived several Nursery requirements and restrictions as deterrents for families. One restriction is the zero to five age limitation. Some families have multiple children that may not all be under six years old. In cases such as these, parents do not want to separate their children, as that would be an added trauma for them.

“If a family has older children, it is difficult to leave the younger children at the Nursery and then take the older ones elsewhere.”

~Stakeholder

“It is hard to break up siblings. It is traumatic to the older kids and the younger kids to be split up.”

~Stakeholder

To address this restriction, stakeholders suggested that the Crisis Nursery extend the age parameters or provide the parents with resources for other childcare options. Specifically, CPS Supervisors reported that the age range should be changed to 10 years and under, while others thought it should remain under six years, but with allowances for siblings 10 years old and under.

The visitation requirement was also perceived as a barrier to utilization because of the difficulty families might have fulfilling the necessary visits. If they are truly going through a serious crisis, parents could be “put off” by the required daily visitation.

The language barrier was another reason some families might not to utilize the Nursery, said stakeholders. “Though the childcare workers [at the Nursery] may speak Spanish,” according to one respondent, “if the case managers don’t, then communication with the parents is limited.” Stakeholders suggested that the Nursery improve the language capacity not only in regards to Spanish-speaking families, but also to Hmong, Russian, and Southeast Asian families.

Lastly, several stakeholders mentioned the challenge associated with the Crisis Nursery’s intake process. According to them, intake is a challenge because it takes too long and “parents don’t have time.” CPS Supervisors suggested that the Nursery pre-register families in order to decrease the amount of time spent on intake paperwork and procedures.

3.6 Location Suggestions

In general, stakeholders believe the Crisis Nursery should be located within a neighborhood, in a “homey” setting that was easily accessible. The Nursery should look like a house and must blend in to the surroundings. One stakeholder mentioned

modeling it after the Dunlap Birth & Beyond Family Resource Center on 4th Avenue. While respondents felt the North Area site is in a nice, safe, quiet, and pleasant location, stakeholders discussed a range of additional options.

As far as physical location, respondents agreed that services would be more utilized if the Nursery was in an area easy accessible to families most in need or at risk for neglect or abuse. This was a priority over the type of neighborhood in which it would be located. For instance, one respondent suggested siting the Nursery close to families that need it the most, such as in the area of the County that has the highest child abuse and neglect referrals. Others mentioned that it should be located in a diverse neighborhood and families generally tend to feel most comfortable in areas that are more similar to those in which they live.

Specifically, many respondents suggested that the Nursery be located in downtown or midtown Sacramento, an area that is central and easily accessible by bus and other public transportation lines. It was important to stakeholders that the location is near the light rail and the bus. Oak Park was another possible location mentioned by several respondents, being both in a central location and in an area of high need.

A large number of focus group respondents, especially those representing agencies located in South Sacramento, recommended that the Crisis Nursery open a location in the South area. According to stakeholders there, it is “badly needed” and the North area is just too far a distance for their families to travel. Birth & Beyond staff in the South feel that the need for Crisis Nursery services is greater in the South area of the County.

“We need the nurseries to be accessible to more areas, more regions of the County. We would like to have one in Natomas, and we need a larger facility in the South Area.”

~Friend of the Crisis Nursery

Others were in favor of using the former South Land Park location for the Crisis Nursery. Proponents of this idea reported that it “is in a nice area and makes the parents feel comfortable,” the site blends in to the neighborhood, and the bus stop is right there. However, it was also mentioned that the facility is “not all that large.”

Co-locating the Nursery with another community agency or organization was an item of contention during the focus group discussions. Some stakeholders agreed that co-location would benefit the Nursery, while others believed that co-location is not necessary and might actually detract from the Nursery’s reputation and service delivery. Some respondents thought connecting the Crisis Nursery to a Birth & Beyond Family Resource Center is a good idea because there is already positive name recognition and reputation in the community, and it would “automatically take away the stigma” of using the Nursery. Other stakeholders suggested that the Nursery be located near to, but not co-located with, a Birth & Beyond Family Resource Center. “That way, if a family from the FRC is in need of Nursery services, it would be easy to walk them over and convince them it is convenient and beneficial,” said one Birth & Beyond Staff Member.

Other stakeholders acknowledged that it would be good for the Nursery to be around several community service providers, not only a Birth & Beyond FRC. “I think it should be inside a community center,” reported one respondent, with other services such as teen parenting classes, after-school programs for older children, Planned Parenthood, and a UC Davis health clinic. “It would be a one-stop shop for every service.” Even so, stakeholders reminded each other that it is crucial to be located with or next to agencies that have a positive reputation in the community. If not, it could prove to be a barrier to utilization.

“If it be co-located it is important that it is somewhere people respect. If they don’t like the other program, they won’t come to the Nursery either.”

~CPS Supervisor

Although some stakeholders thought that the Nursery could be located at the Community Center in Phoenix Park, others responded that locating it in or next to a public housing area would not work well because people may not realize the Nursery is for non-residents, and the residents could end up being the only ones utilizing the services. In addition, the Nursery would become associated with Phoenix Park in the public’s mind, which may come with its own “stigma attached” to it.

Other suggested locations were near the UC Davis Medical Center and near Shriner’s Hospital, so that parents could drop their children off on the way to medical appointments. Friends of the Crisis Nursery considered a “mobile approach” to providing respite services so that the Nursery could be flexible in moving staff to where the greatest need is.

3.7 Marketing Suggestions

The stakeholder’s marketing suggestions for the Crisis Nursery fell into three categories related to: marketing materials, messaging, and marketing methods. Focus group and interview participants also suggested alternate names for Nursery services as a marketing tactic. Lastly, stakeholders reported which community agencies and organizations to target for outreach efforts and as possible referral sources.

3.7.1 Marketing Materials

Stakeholders suggested a range of marketing materials that the Crisis Nursery could use to spread the word in the community about their services. They mentioned that because parents often receive “too much paper”, the Crisis Nursery could instead use: radio and television Public Service Announcements, billboards, refrigerator magnets, DVDs, door hangers, and interior bus posters to disseminate information about the Nursery. CPS Supervisors noted that their most popular marketing item is a refrigerator magnet picture frame, because it is easy for families to use and provides a constant visual reminder of the services. At events, “everyone takes one,” said a Supervisor, “and they are almost always gone.” A Nursery staff member mentioned that it would be especially helpful to have a video to show to families and providers, presenting testimonials from families who have used the services.

Stakeholders also suggested enhancing the traditional paper-based informational materials currently used by the Crisis Nursery. The brochure should explain various ways and reasons that families can use the Nursery. For example, within the brochure there might be a list of potential needs in a checklist form: “Do you ever feel like...?” or “Have you ever found yourself needing to...?” By providing real-life situations that parents may be able to relate to, they may be more prone to see the Nursery as a place that can meet their own family’s needs. Respondents also recommended changing the brochures to have “less words and more pictures.” One stakeholder specifically suggested that there be pictures of the inside and outside of the Nursery facility. While others acknowledged there should be various types of brochures tailored and individualized for different audiences and published in different languages.

Lastly, one respondent suggested creating a “new baby packet” given to all new mothers with information about the Crisis Nursery and other service providers in the community. The packet could be used by multiple providers as a collaborative effort in educating families.

3.7.2 Messaging

Messaging suggestions centered on addressing misconceptions associated with how the public interprets overnight and respite services for children. This included changing the name of the Crisis Nursery, and branding it as a friendly, safe place. To stakeholders it also meant referring to day respite as “emergency childcare” and including a comprehensive description of the services in the informational materials. Furthermore, marketing messages should contribute to removing the stigma that needing and receiving help with caring for your children is a negative thing, noted respondents. Instead, make utilizing the Nursery in times of need a social norm and express that it can be a fun place for children to spend time.

“Make using the nursery a strength. If you use the nursery, then you are a good parent.”

~Stakeholder

“The Nursery needs to use a counter message that bringing your children to these services will in fact keep your children out of CPS or foster care, that the services actually keep families together.”

~Crisis Nursery Staff Member

For television and video messages, stakeholders suggest incorporating testimonials from families who have used the Nursery, sharing encouraging comments about how and why the Nursery helped their family and them personally.

“Families need to see the results of using the nursery to help them relate it to how it might be helpful to them. Personal stories will resonate with families.”

~Stakeholder

Other marketing message recommendations were to: (1) clearly differentiate between the Sacramento Children's Home and the Sacramento Children's Receiving Home; (2) associate the Nursery with Birth & Beyond to tap into the Birth & Beyond "brand" as an already-established trusted resource for families; (3) increase marketing around the parenting classes offered at the Nursery; and (4) emphasize that the Nursery is "free" in the marketing materials.

3.7.3 Marketing Methods

Marketing methods suggested by stakeholders included advertisements on radio and television, outreach at community events, hosting open house tours of the Nursery, and utilizing parent clients as speakers. Many stakeholders reported it would be beneficial for the Crisis Nursery to advertise their services on radio stations and television stations, such as Channel 13.

Stakeholders also agreed that the Crisis Nursery should host "big scale, fun events" that families can attend to take a tour, get their questions answered, and celebrate the services offered. For instance, one stakeholder suggested that all the Birth & Beyond sites could attend the on-site event. By associating the Nursery with fun activities, families will perceive it in a positive way and may help eliminate the "fear factor" some families have with the Crisis Nursery. Not only should these "open house" events be offered to parents and families, but also to potential referral sources. Some of the open houses could be geared toward specific agencies for them to bring their families on a tour.

In addition to hosting on-site events, focus group respondents recommending conducting outreach at community events, such as First 5 events and health fairs. Stakeholders even suggested making presentations at targeted organizations such as in Birth & Beyond's parenting classes. More one-on-one outreach was also suggested, such as a Nursery staff member going with and Birth & Beyond staff member on home visits to clients.

Stakeholders acknowledged that many times the best marketing method is "word of mouth" and showing that other families use it. By creating "parent leaders" of either current or former clients, the Crisis Nursery could have families share their stories of success with the Nursery. These parent leaders could also make presentations at various agencies and organizations and even provide their testimonies to the media.

3.7.4 Name Change

Stakeholders reported that the word "crisis" is a deterrent to families because it either scares people away or causes them to think their situation is not emergent enough to warrant services. However, it was also noted that if the name of the service does not reflect its purpose, ineligible families may try to use the services and be turned away. Focus group facilitators asked stakeholders about different names for the Crisis Nursery that would make it sound more appealing to families and the general public. Specific suggestions for alternate names for the Crisis Nursery included:

“Wee Care Nursery”
“Extended Arm Nursery”
“Safe Heaven”
“Respite Nursery”
“Comfort Nursery”
“Comfort Rooms”
“Kids Cuddle Zone”
“Sacramento Children’s Home Nursery”
“The 24-hour Nursery”
“Maloof Nursery” (or other sponsored name)

For the day respite services, the name also poses an issue because not everyone in the community understands the meaning of the word “respite.” An alternative name is “emergency care,” and yet some situations in which parents could use the Nursery may not be emergencies. Focus group participants were also asked what to call the “day respite” component of the Crisis Nursery. Suggestions for alternate names included:

“Haven daycare”
“Parent day help”
“Parent assistance”
“Time out assistance”
“Parent day break”
“Emergency day camp”
“Urgent child care”

3.7.5 Targeted Outreach

Stakeholders agreed that the Crisis Nursery needs targeted outreach to educate the community and get the word out about its services. They acknowledged that many different agencies, organizations, and professions could be potential referral sources for the communities they work with. In general, respondents suggested outreach to healthcare, education, faith-based, and criminal justice sectors. Specifically, they named the following entities:

Maternity wards;
Alcohol and Drug Treatment Providers (i.e. Strategies for Change);
Daycares;
Kinder care;
The Network Café at the Sacramento Food Bank;
Teen Mother Programs;
Teen Homeless Programs;
Planned Parenthood;

WIC;
Preschools;
Elementary, middle, and high schools;
Hospitals (UC Davis, Mercy San Juan);
Courthouses (specifically Family Court);
Birth & Beyond Family Resource Centers;
Dentists;
“Front line” healthcare providers (i.e. General Physicians, OB-GYNs, Public Health Nurses);
Clinics;
School districts;
Churches and Religious Leaders;
Trauma Centers;
Parents with mental health issues (i.e. post-partum depression);
Mental health service providers; and
Law enforcement.

Stakeholders acknowledged that outreach to these groups needs to occur on an ongoing, continuous basis. “Some audiences need to hear about these services over and over again, to keep the Nursery and Day Respite services in their mind when they need to make a referral.”

SECTION 4 PARENT RESPONSES

This section presents interview and focus group responses from parents in the community and parent consumers of the Nursery services. The discussion of the findings includes: parents' knowledge of the Crisis Nursery ; childcare options in a crisis situation; reasons to utilize the Nursery; barriers to utilization; and location and marketing suggestions.

4.1 *Knowledge of Crisis Nursery and its Services*

A majority of parents from the community did not know about the Crisis Nursery prior to their participation in the focus group. Of the parents who had heard of the Nursery, their knowledge of the services was limited. Some acknowledged, "It is a place for children aged zero to six, for when families are in crisis," but few parents mentioned that the Nursery has overnight services and respite services, and that parents must "return to visit every day." One parent stated the Nursery was located on Auburn Boulevard, indicating confusion between the Crisis Nursery and the Children's Receiving Home. Generally, those who knew the correct information about the Nursery, reported the services it provides are "great."

"The day services are great for childcare if you need to find a job, go to school, or just take care of business."

~Parent

Other parents spoke about the Crisis Nursery in relation to CPS. One respondent believed that the Nursery was "a place that CPS puts kids when they do not have a foster home for a kid." Another reported that her sister used the Nursery and they "referred the child to CPS because he had a bruise on him from rough-housing" and one parent mentioned a friend who took her child to the Nursery and was subsequently reported to CPS. Yet another focus group participant reported that the Nursery has a "bad reputation" since the death of twins. According to the parent, CPS was involved with the family, the Nursery returned the children to the parents, and the children died.

From the focus group responses, it was apparent that parents perceived a strong connection between the Crisis Nursery and CPS. This indicates a need for effective community education about the Nursery, its partners, and its services.

Of the parents who had learned of the Crisis Nursery and its services, several reported they heard about the Nursery from a County social worker or from a nurse during a hospital stay. Others found out about the services through a Birth & Beyond staff member, from Francis House, from a Family Partner at Stanford Home, from their alcohol and drug recovery home, from a case worker at Sacramento Area Emergency Housing shelter, and from a friend who had used the Nursery.

4.2 *Childcare Options in a Crisis Situation*

Almost all parents who had trusted family or friends nearby agreed that they would leave their children with them in a crisis situation. However, this childcare option was not feasible for all parents. Some reported that they have no family or friends close by and some noted that although they did have family and friends, they “are not always willing to help” and “have their own problems to deal with.”

“I live with my mom and sister, both of whom have fulltime jobs. They cannot take care of my son during the day when they are both working, so I have limited access to forms of support from my family.”

~Crisis Nursery Parent Client

The parents who reported they had no family or close friends nearby, and thus had no support system for childcare in case of emergency or crisis, are perhaps the families most in need of a childcare option such as the Crisis Nursery. A “Making Parenting a Pleasure” class participant, acknowledged, “There are certain situations or time periods when you need this kind of help [from the Crisis Nursery], when your children need to be with other children instead of adults.” While leaving children with family or friends was their first choice, parents acknowledged that that choice was not always available at all times.

If family and friends were unavailable in crisis situation, most parents agreed they would be willing to use free, quality childcare such as that provided by the Nursery, “as long as it was safe.” They would “need to make sure it was not a bad choice.” Respondents expressed that they would need to know it was a secure facility and had employees who truly enjoyed caring for children. Other influencing factors for parents were that the facility: be close to their home, be clean, have space available when needed, have a fast intake process, and provide transportation. The intake process was especially a concern for Spanish-speaking parents, who suggested that the forms be short and that there be an option to register in advance.

However, a few parents would not be willing to use the Nursery at all. For both those who would and would not consider using it, their main concern was potential CPS involvement. One mother thought that even if they did not take her baby away, they would open a case file. “That’s scary, and I won’t go there until I know,” she reported. Some had heard of friends whose children were taken away, which made it hard for them to trust the Crisis Nursery.

Several parents acknowledged that they would feel wary about leaving their kids at the Crisis Nursery, and even if they did, it would be hard to leave their children for more than a few hours at a time.

“I’m uncomfortable leaving my children anywhere overnight. I just don’t feel comfortable with my kids being away from me.”

~Parent

4.3 Reasons to Utilize the Nursery

During the focus groups and interviews, parents discussed situations in which they would utilize the Crisis Nursery or tell a friend to utilize the services. Reasons parents had for why families should utilize the Nursery varied greatly. Respondents indicated that parents might utilize the services in numerous situations with differing levels of severity, such as:

- during substance abuse treatment;
- during hospital stays or for medical reasons;
- during stressful situations;
- to look for a job;
- to attend a job interview;
- to run errands;
- to go to court;
- to attend school;
- to clean the house;
- when utilities in the house are interrupted due to nonpayment;
- when a parent is overwhelmed, frustrated, mad, or depressed;
- when a parent has mental health problems;
- when a parent needs to take time for themselves; or
- when a parent has no other childcare support available and needs a safe place for their children.

A parent consumer of the Crisis Nursery's services reported that she used the Nursery during a "breakdown" when she needed to take care of herself and went to a mental health treatment center. "I wanted to be a good parent," she reported, "I wanted my children to be safe and cared for." Other parent consumers of the Crisis Nursery also reported positive experiences. "It was really, really great and I did not have to worry about anything," offered one, while another shared that the staff were "very helpful and welcoming."

"This is a great service to help anyone who is just trying to get back on their feet."

~Parent

Some parents would tell their friends about the Nursery only if they asked for help or "had a lot on their plate", while others would tell their friends in advance, "just so that they knew it was there." Another parent added, "I tell everyone about it." One respondent noted that she knew a mom who considered giving her children up for adoption in order to relieve her extreme stress. This parent brought her children to the Nursery, and "it turned out really good" since after having a break, she decided not to give up her children to adoption.

“It helps you in a time of need. It is good to use when you have nowhere else to turn.”

~Parent

4.4 What Keeps Families from Utilizing the Services

Parents reported that barriers to families utilizing the Crisis Nursery’s services include: (1) fear of CPS involvement; (2) lack of knowledge about the Nursery and its services; (3) restrictive requirements; and (4) transportation challenges. The apprehension about possible CPS involvement was the most common reason parents felt that families do not utilize the Crisis Nursery.

4.4.1 Fear of CPS Involvement

As mentioned, the greatest barrier to service utilization according to parents is the fear of being reported to the CPS as a result of using the Crisis Nursery. Parents reported, “The word on the street is you might risk a call to CPS if you take your kids to the Crisis Nursery.” A number of parents have heard from individuals and support groups that if you leave your children at the Crisis Nursery, CPS will take them away. Many parents in the community do not trust the Nursery, said one respondent, “a lot of services for low income people are seen as CPS traps.” Parents see that this has a “ripple effect” in the community because it causes more families to believe that the Nursery works with CPS, while forgetting that staff at most all social service agencies are mandated CPS reporters.

“They may judge you if they see any bruise or mark on your child and they may think you are abusing him and will take the child away.”

~Parent

“If you’ve ever had CPS in your life, you are afraid to take them to the Nursery for fear of being referred to CPS again.”

~Parent

In addition, respondents acknowledged that if a parent has a warrant out for their arrest or is not a legal resident of the United States, it could also deter them from using the Crisis Nursery. For families who are not legal residents, they may be concerned about deportation or being denied service, and parents with warrants may be fearful that going to the Nursery would lead to their incarceration.

4.4.2 Lack of Knowledge

Another reason parents do not utilize the Crisis Nursery is a lack of knowledge about its existence and its services. From the focus group responses, it is apparent that the purpose of the Nursery is not clear to the general community. According to parents, families do not know it is a nonprofit agency, they do not know about all the services provided, and they do not know the services are free.

“If I’d have known about the day respite before, I’d have been using these services to meet my needs then.”

~Parent

Parents expressed concern over the environment their children would be in at the Crisis Nursery, due to lack of knowledge about the facility. As one parent shared, “I don’t even know who works there. Will they really be able to take care of my kids the whole time I am away?” Another agreed that she did not believe the staff at the Nursery could take care of her children as well as she could. Parents worry about leaving their children, and a lack of detailed knowledge about a childcare facility makes it even less probable they will utilize that service. As discussed in the following section, parents suggest that the Crisis Nursery market their services with the assurance that it is a safe place for children and is not connected to CPS.

“Are they safe there? I would be scared to leave my kids. Tours of the facility would help comfort me, but I would still wonder if they really understood why I was leaving. Would they think I was a bad person?”

~Parent

4.4.3 Restrictive Requirements

A number of parents mentioned the cumbersome paperwork involved in leaving a child at the Crisis Nursery. Focus group respondents complained that the heavy paperwork and requirement to produce vaccination records was too time-consuming. One parent even mentioned that at intake “sometimes they check every inch of the child, assuming you neglect them.” Several parents suggested pre-registration as an alternative to the process. This way, if a family happens to encounter a crisis situation, it is easier for them to leave their children at the Nursery without spending a great deal of time there. Spanish-speaking participants specifically requested that the paperwork be “easy” to complete and available in different languages, with bilingual personnel to help as needed.

“When you are in crisis, the paperwork required to leave your child at the Nursery is too cumbersome. The process just seems like too much when you need immediate help; you just don’t have time to sit there to do the paperwork or await the physical. It would be great if they could get some of this done before the crisis, like pre-registration before you bring your kids to the Nursery.”

~Parent

The Crisis Nursery’s age limit was also a problematic restriction according to parents. They noted that many times, families have children older than six years old, who they need to find childcare for as well. Generally, parents do not want to separate their children between two locations and two childcare providers. One parent recommended extending the age limit at the Crisis Nursery to accommodate children up to 12 years old.

“No parent is going to want to split their kids up and it is hard to find one place, let alone two places, to drop your kids off.”

~Parent

4.4.4 Transportation Barriers

Transportation remains an issue for parents, according to the focus group responses. Whether using public transportation or using the transportation provided by the Nursery, getting to the site is “too much trouble” for parents. Respondents reported that if a family does not live close to the North area Crisis Nursery, it is a “huge challenge” to use the buses or other modes of public transportation to get to the site. One parent noted that the Nursery does provide transportation and “if they can cater to you then that’s enough.” However, she wonders, “can they get you there whenever you need?” As an alternative, parents suggested offering public transportation vouchers to families making visits to the Nursery.

“If the Nursery is not convenient, it is really hard or impossible for parents to see their child every day.”

~Parent

Parents also suggested that the Nursery ensure the van does not have “Crisis Nursery” visible anywhere on the exterior. One respondent noted that if it were the case, “all my neighbors would be talking.” Parents reported they do not want others judging them for using the Crisis Nursery services. A regular, unmarked car would be best for transporting parents from their home to the Nursery, said focus group respondents.

“I don’t want people to know I’m in a crisis. I don’t want people to think badly about me for taking them there.”

~Parent

“When they hear crisis, they think, ‘Wow, not for me!’ No one wants to admit they are in a crisis.”

~Parent

4.5 Location Suggestions

Many parents felt the need for a Crisis Nursery is greater in the South Sacramento County than in the North area of the County. Parents felt that either South Sacramento or Downtown Sacramento would be a good place to site a Nursery. They liked the idea of the South Land Park location because it is in a nice, safe neighborhood and “close to many things.” Several respondents also mentioned Oak Park as a possible site, but two parents expressed concern that the location was not in a nice area and had “drive through killings.”

Parents especially liked the idea of a downtown location because it is central for everyone, and “there are already a lot of homeless families and low income families that could use this service there,” according to one parent. “Downtown seems to be the one

place you can get in Sacramento from anywhere.” However, one parent felt that downtown is “too scary.” And another said, “you don’t want a location that has homeless people sleeping outside the door.” An alternative would be siting it in the Arden area, which, a parent reported, is still accessible to everyone.

“You really need a Nursery that is in the South area or even in the middle area of the County. More families in the South area need these services than in the North area.”

~Parent

Some parents supported the idea of collocation with a Birth & Beyond Family Resource Center, especially Spanish-speaking parents. They mentioned that Birth & Beyond is a place with which they already feel comfortable because they know the personnel and trust them, that the location is secure, and the employees take good care of their children. Another parent mentioned that co-location with Birth & Beyond would connect the two programs “so that everyone that knew about one would know about the other.” Some parents suggested co-locating the Nursery with agencies that mothers frequent, such as Planned Parenthood or WIC. However, one parent thought that co-location with another organization would compromise families’ privacy.

In regards to the current location of the Crisis Nursery, parents’ proximity to the North Area determined their contentedness with this location. While those far away felt the North area site is confusing to get to and is not “practical” because of the distance, others felt the North location is sufficient because it is close to their home.

The focus group consensus was that the Nursery be in a safe place that is central to everyone and is relatively easy to access. However, parents also requested that the facility be hidden to a degree, so that parents can “sneak in” without others being aware they are taking their children there.

“People care and feel valued when it is in a calmer and a safe place.”

~Parent Consumer

4.6 Marketing Suggestions

Parents offered many suggestions related to effective marketing activities that the Crisis Nursery could undertake to better educate the public and enhance utilization of their services by families in the community. The recommendations addressed multiple levels of marketing, including: materials, messages, name of service, marketing methods, and targeted outreach.

4.6.1 Materials and Messages

Parents felt it would be effective to update the Nursery’s marketing materials to include new items and a new look. In terms of the agency brochure, respondents suggested making it “flashier.” One parent felt the current colors are drab and the Crisis Nursery should “dress it up with more color.” Others thought the look of the brochure should be

tailored to the audience to whom it is disseminated, and printed in different languages to reach all ethnic populations in the community.

“Change the look of the brochure so it does not look so bureaucratic. It looks okay for agencies, but not for marketing to parents.”

~Parent

Focus group participants also recommended updating the content of the brochure. They advised including definitions the words “respite”, “crisis”, and “emergency” and to include more information about the day respite services. Since these words have different meaning to different people, real-life examples may help caretakers see the relevance of the Crisis Nursery to their situation, reported parents.

Respondents also suggested the brochure include quotes or testimonials from parents who have used the Nursery services “successfully and repeatedly.” According to one parent, “The best marketing tool is to get testimonials from parents who have used the Nursery,” and to use word-of-mouth to spread the information. One parent suggested including a “Frequently Asked Questions” section to address common questions or misconceptions about the Nursery. It was important to parents that the marketing materials “indicate that taking your child to the Nursery is not a bad reflection of them as a parent.”

“Parents need to know it is okay to say, ‘I need help.’”

~Parent

In their marketing materials, parents advised that the Nursery clearly indicate there is no affiliation with CPS. They also reported that the materials should explain, in detail, the cases in which the Nursery will make a report to CPS and other procedures related to CPS involvement. Parents say it would be beneficial to mention the services are confidential and list the qualifications of Nursery staff. These are all things that are “important to know” for parents.

“It is important that families know that the Nursery is on their side.”

~Parent Consumer

4.6.2 Name of Service

Parents agreed that the Crisis Nursery should not use the word “crisis” in its name. As one parent acknowledged “It sounds like an admission of failure as a parent, when you already feel bad enough about yourself for taking your kid to the Nursery.” Another reported that the Nursery’s current name is “scary” to her. Parents also acknowledged that it does not reflect the purpose of the program. Families do not have to be in a crisis situation in order to utilize the services.

“You don’t have to be in crisis to use it, so why call it Crisis Nursery?”

~Parent

Instead, parents suggested a name that sounds more “warm and inviting” and incorporates words such as “safe”, “comfort”, or “caring”. Ideas for new names included:

“Plan B Nursery”

“Urgent Care Nursery”

“Emergency Nursery”

“Ninos Felices” (Happy Children)

“Ninos al Rescate” (Children to be Safe)

“The Way Station”

In regards to naming the “day respite” services the Nursery provides, parents suggested that they be called something different to enhance the community’s understanding of what the service entails. Although some knew what the word “respite” meant, a number of parents participating in the focus group were not familiar with the meaning of the word. Suggestions for alternate names included “playcare” (the term used at Birth & Beyond sites) and simply “daycare.” However, parents acknowledged that a more general term such as “daycare” might result in too many people attempting to use the services. Other recommendations were “emergency daycare” or “emergency childcare.” According to focus group responses, the name “crisis” has a negative charge that “emergency” does not have for parents.

4.6.3 Marketing Methods

Parents proposed using television and radio commercials in Spanish and English to advertise and market the Crisis Nursery’s services. They recommended posting print ads in newspapers and in the “El Chaleco” and “Penny Saver” magazines. Other suggestions included advertising: on billboards, on the internet, in church bulletins and newsletters, in local partner magazines, or by creating and disseminating an informational DVD.

Focus group respondents acknowledged the importance of seeing the Crisis Nursery in-person as an effective marketing tool to increase utilization. One parent shared, “I took a tour to check it out first. That helps a lot for some people.” Parents suggested hosting an open house or a “Family Fun Night” at the Nursery, complete with a craft or bake sale and a raffle or giveaway. An introduction to and an opportunity to know the personnel at the Nursery was something that parents reported would make them feel more comfortable using the services. The Spanish-speaking respondents especially felt that it would be effective to educate parents about the Nursery in terms of its location, personnel, requirements, and cleanliness. They proposed that visiting the site in advance would be one way to accomplish this. Another way would be to host a parent class or workshop about the Crisis Nursery and its services.

In addition, Spanish-speaking parents expressed a desire for education on the appropriate age when a child can be left home alone and the appropriate age when a child can perform childcare for their siblings. Some parents had heard about cases

where CPS became involved after a parent left their child alone, and were curious about the consequences of leaving a child home alone when they are under the appropriate age. Parents requested parenting classes to learn this information so that they may become better caregivers. Classes such as these could also be used as a way to market the Nursery to parents in the community.

4.6.4 Targeted Outreach

Parents advised the Crisis Nursery to conduct outreach to a variety of community agencies, organizations, and individuals in order to educate about their services. Focus group participants recommended making presentations and distributing marketing materials (such as ads, brochures and flyers) to the following entities:

Schools and teachers;
Doctors offices;
WIC;
Head Start;
DHA;
OB-GYN offices;
Employment departments;
Alcohol and Drug Treatment Providers (i.e. Strategies for Change);
Alcohol and Drug Recovery homes;
Alcohol and Drug Treatment Alumni Groups;
Alcohol and Drug Services;
Public Health Nursing;
Counseling Centers;
CalWORKS parent classes;
First 5;
Welfare to Work Programs;
Daycare Services;
Mother-Baby Program at the Sacramento Food Bank;
CPS Social Workers (specifically reunification workers);
Police Departments;
Hospital emergency rooms and waiting rooms;
Urgent care clinics;
Community centers;
Play groups;
Parent classes;
Pregnant women and new mom support groups;
The Department of Public Health;
Community colleges;

Learning centers;
Health fairs;
Child Action, Inc.;
Planned Parenthood;
Stanford Home;
Wraparound Programs;
Transitional housing; and
Homeless shelters.

Other locations to distribute marketing material included at grocery stores, laundromats, apartment complexes and on the interior of both Regional Transit buses and the light rail. Parents also suggested placing information in “school backpack inserts” that schools give out at the beginning of the school year. Parents who have children in Kindergarten and First Grade may be eligible to use the Nursery, and others may have younger children. Another respondent suggested disseminating information via the Shaken Baby Syndrome Task Force and with other materials given to mothers at the hospital after they deliver a baby.

In addition, focus group respondents recommended marketing to specific target populations most in need of Crisis Nursery services, such as parents who are in drug or alcohol treatment and parents who use public assistance or who live in low-income housing. Others suggested marketing the Nursery and day respite services to foster parents participating in a Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting with CPS. Sometimes, for instance, it is difficult for a foster parent to attend the meeting because they have no childcare available on short notice. One parent reported that in San Diego County, they have a program called “The Way Station” specifically for foster parents. It is a facility where foster parents can drop off a child for up to 30 days in order for someone to care for their child when they cannot. The Way Station serves children up to age eight, and is an “awesome” program, according to the parent.

SECTION 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The stakeholder and parent focus group and interview responses provided a vast amount of information, ideas, and suggestions in regards to the Crisis Nursery and its services. The input gathered for this study indicates that while both parents and stakeholders believe the Crisis Nursery provides services that benefit the families in Sacramento County, there are barriers to utilization that should be addressed in various ways.

The major barriers to utilization of the Nursery’s services, according to both parents and stakeholders, included:

1. Fear of CPS Involvement;
2. Lack of Knowledge and Understanding of the Crisis Nursery services;
3. Travel Distance and Transportation;
4. Community Stigma; and
5. Restrictive Requirements (age limit, visitation, and intake process).

Although respondents identified barriers to utilization, parent and stakeholders also provided feedback for ways the Crisis Nursery can address these barriers. Specific recommendations for how the Nursery can enhance its services and increase utilization included:

1. Create an option and a process for pre-registration so families can bypass much of the paperwork when they need to utilize services.
2. Extend the age limit of the Nursery to include older children up to 10 years older, or allow for older siblings to participate in the program.
3. Provide transportation with unmarked shuttle vans or regular sedan vehicles as to ensure confidentiality and protect clients’ privacy.
4. Expand Nursery language capacity to include Spanish, Hmong, Russian, and South Asian-speaking staff.
5. Establish a second Crisis Nursery located in a South Sacramento or downtown Sacramento neighborhood.
6. Change the name of the Nursery and the name of the “day respite” services.

Lastly, parents and stakeholders recommended that the Crisis Nursery perform a range of marketing activities to educate parents, providers, and the public about their services. Recommendations specific to this topic were as follows:

1. Encourage families to see the Nursery in-person by hosting tours, open houses, “family fun nights”, and parent education classes.
2. Use a range of marketing materials, not only paper-based materials, to disseminate in the community.

3. Include parent consumer testimonials in the marketing materials, such as a video.
4. Update the style and content of the Nursery brochure. Develop multiple versions for different audiences and ethnicities.
5. Clearly differentiate between the Sacramento Children's Home and the Sacramento Receiving Home.
6. Conduct ongoing outreach to targeted agencies, organizations, target populations, and individuals specified in the report.
7. Debunk the misconception that the Crisis Nursery is affiliated with CPS and explicitly explain the mandated CPS reporting procedures.

This input from the community via parents and stakeholders is vital to creating a Crisis Nursery that meets the needs of all families in Sacramento County who require its services. The finding from this report can be used as a tool to either modify or add to the current services provided and the momentum began by this study can propel the Nursery forward in accomplishing its mission.

ATTACHMENT A