

## **Supervisors consider funding plan for Children's Alliance**

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy From page A1 | June 10, 2015

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WOODLAND — The Yolo County Children's Alliance would maintain current programs — albeit with some painful cuts — thanks to increased funding from county, state and federal sources under a plan presented to the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

Those funds would help fill in some of the gaps left by expected cutbacks from First 5 Yolo, which is in a fiscal crisis of its own.

The Children's Alliance, which serves families throughout the county — providing child abuse prevention services, preschool for low-income children, food distribution and assistance accessing Cal-Fresh and health insurance — received \$686,000 of its \$1.4 million in program funding from First 5 Yolo in fiscal year 2014-15.

But First 5 notified the alliance last year that there would be a significant cut in funds beginning in the next fiscal year because of a significant reduction in First 5's own budget.

On the chopping block were the two family resource centers the Children's Alliance operates in West Sacramento and Clarksburg, which provide a one-stop shop for families in need of assistance, as well as the alliance's nationally recognized Step-by-Step child abuse prevention program.

But Step-by-Step, an intensive home-visiting program aimed at families at high risk for abuse and neglect, became the beneficiary of federal funding — one of just two such programs in California to receive federal funding — which will replace the \$310,000 provided by First 5 Yolo last year.

And the county will pick up a chunk of the budget for the family resource centers, providing approximately \$139,000, or about 46 percent of the centers' funding.

Those family resource centers still would face a 10 percent budget cut even with the county contribution under the spending plan outlined Tuesday. Similarly, the Children's Alliance's Community Health Initiative — which provides health insurance outreach, enrollment, retention and utilization — would see a 19-percent cut; child abuse prevention programs other than Step-by-Step would face an 8-percent cut; and Cal-Fresh enrollment would see a 17-percent cut.

Overall, the Children's Alliance would see a 7.5 percent budget reduction.

All of this awaits funding decisions by both the First 5 Yolo Commission today as well as the Board of Supervisors, which will hold its first budget hearing of the year next week.

But supervisors on Tuesday expressed support for the Children's Alliance and its programs.

"There's no disagreement on this board about the exemplary services being provided," said Supervisor Don Saylor of Davis, who praised the work done on health insurance enrollment and child abuse prevention in particular, and called the family resource centers "superb."

"This gives us a pretty comprehensive picture of where things are," Saylor said. "I'm looking forward to our budget discussion next week."

Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis, who chairs the Children's Alliance, said, "I am so impressed with everything they do across the board. People at the local level working day in and day out making things work."

That said, the writing has been on the wall for several years as far as First 5 Yolo's ability to fund Children's Alliance programs long-term.

First 5 Yolo commissioners made the decision to spend down reserves several years ago after an attempt by the governor to use those reserves to fund other programs.

The commission conducted a needs assessment which showed that Yolo County families wanted center-based programs that would provide access to everything from developmental screening for their children to parent education programs and access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

Over the past few years, Yolo County families have made good use of the family resource centers that were created in the wake of the needs assessment.

During the 2013-14 fiscal year, the West Sacramento center alone provided food distributions to 416 families; enrolled or re-enrolled more than 300 residents in health insurance and more than 130 residents in CalFresh; assisted 207 families with tax returns that brought nearly \$400,000 back into the community; offered preschool classes three times a week; and provided 1,676 resource referrals for everything from housing and child care to immigration and job assistance.

"We are the safety net services," said Katie Villegas, executive director of the Children's Alliance.

The centers, she said, reach high-risk populations in their own neighborhoods, reducing language and social barriers and providing emergency access to everything from diapers to food to housing.

But with First 5 Yolo's reserves spent down and an ongoing decline in tobacco tax revenues, the commission faced a budget reduced from \$4.1 million in 2014-15 to \$2.7 million in 2015-16, and those family resource centers were among the programs that ended up on the chopping block.

First 5 Yolo Executive Director Julie Gallelo noted Tuesday that with the commission having made the strategic decision to spend down its fund balance several years ago, "our partners were aware of the limited funding term."

Still, she said, "I'm proud of the county (for keeping) most of these programs."