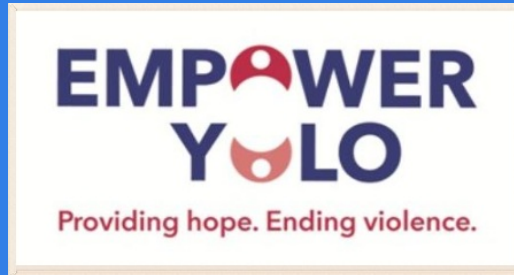


Empower Yolo is opening its doors in 2016 not just bigger but as a better agency!



Empower Yolo and Yolo Center for Families Merged January 1, 2016



Empower Yolo and Yolo Center for Families become one to better serve Yolo County

Yolo County - Empower Yolo and Yolo Center for Families have legally merged to become one agency under the name **Empower Yolo, effective January 1, 2016**. The two nonprofit organizations that provide essential services for individuals and families have determined that their complementary organizations could better serve their clients and the needs of the families they serve through this organizational alignment.

Collaborative services started with Empower Yolo's teen education program working with the Center for Families' ASSETS program. From there the agencies saw how many of the programs naturally complimented each other, and they were serving the same families. "It became evident to both sides that a combination of skills and services would benefit each other," said former Executive Director for Yolo Center for Families, Bob Ekstrom.

Empower Yolo is still dedicated to helping survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and child abuse - providing emergency confidential shelter, legal assistance and counseling. Yolo Center for Families is still dedicated to helping families stay healthy,

stable and self sufficient - providing services such early child development screenings, health insurance, after school programs, homeless prevention assistance, and an income tax assistance program. The merging of these two agencies helps provide more comprehensive services to all our clients.

Both agencies went through a long process to make sure a merger was a good fit including moving both agencies in together at the Walnut Street offices in Woodland in January 2015. They also used a consultant last spring, held weekly meetings and combined board meetings. It was a long process to legally merge over the past 6 months, but the merger has proven to the boards and staff of both agencies to be beneficial. The agencies have been able to save on rent, utilities and administrative fees to name a few, and are able to put those resources towards their mission of helping families in Yolo County. "Moving the two agencies in together was a demonstration of how powerful we could be; the staff saw what we could really do," Ekstrom said.

The board and staff of both agencies had concerns about the challenge of maintaining identities, not losing respective missions and the work each agency does. They are working through different agency cultures where Empower Yolo is more private and secure, and Yolo Center for families is more open with lots of activity. However, this change has been positive for clients who feel part of a community and a longer-term relationship is developing with clients. "The core parts of our missions are the same. We had to trust each other and then the staff started to trust in what we were doing," Ekstrom said. The new agency rewrote its mission statement, which represents the combined agencies.

Empower Yolo's Mission and Purpose:

New Mission Statement-

Empower Yolo's mission is to promote safe, healthy, and resilient communities.

Empower Yolo's purpose is to provide-

- (a) Twenty-four hour crisis intervention, emergency shelter, confidential counseling, training, legal assistance, and other services for individuals and families persons affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking, and child abuse;
- (b) Resource centers for community services to improve the health, social, educational and economic outcomes of Yolo County residents; and
- (c) Community outreach and educational programs about available resources to promote health, stability, and self-sufficiency for individuals and families.

All services are to be provided in a manner that appreciates, enhances, and utilizes the strengths of Empower Yolo's clients and honors their cultural practices and traditions.

"The new agency is not about just about being bigger, it's about being better," said Executive Director, Lynnette Irlmeier. "It's about better serving our clients with the services both Empower Yolo and Center for Families has to offer." Irlmeier describes how much easier the merger has made it on clients receiving services. "Center for Family case managers come to the shelter to help clients sign up for benefits. In the past it took clients 45 days to receive benefits and now it takes 5 days. This time turnaround is amazing for clients," Irlmeier said.

- Empower Yolo's Services -

Services: Maintaining our mission and providing services to clients and families seamlessly during this transition is important to both agencies. Yolo Center for Families will still maintain its identity, but is now a program of Empower Yolo. Yolo Center for Families will continue to operate its programs out of Davis, Woodland and Knights Landing locations.

Empower Yolo's combined services will include:

- 24/7 Crisis Hotline
- Residential Services (including emergency confidential shelter and rapid re housing)
- Legal Advocacy (including restraining order clinics)
- Counseling (including individual, family, child, empowerment program, and support groups)
- Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Response Teams
- Prevention, Education and Outreach (including presentations, community fairs/tabling, and professional trainings throughout Yolo County, and Teen Education presentations and groups in local high schools)
- Family Resource Centers (in Davis, Woodland and Knights Landing)
- Youth Services (including early screening; Safe School and Health Students Program; children's health insurance enrollment and ASSETS after school program)
- Health Education (including health insurance enrollment program, peer health educators, and Knights Landing Medical Clinic)
- Homeless Prevention & Rapid Re-housing Program
- Economic Self Sufficiency (including financial literacy classes, and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program)

All services are free and confidential. See a list of service locations [here](#).

Empower Yolo's New Board of Directors

Leadership: Lynnette Irlmeier is the Executive Director of Empower Yolo and Center for Families programs. Bob Ekstrom formally retired last summer. "The board is confident in Lynnette's ability to run both agencies now and in the long term," said Empower Yolo's New Board Chair, Catherine Farman. The boards of both agencies were combined and new executive officer positions were voted in to create the new board. "I like the leadership team for both sides. I can depend on them; they think creatively; it's a great combination of boards," Irlmeier said.

Empower Yolo Board:

Executive Board -

Catherine Farman, Board Chair (Board member, Empower Yolo since 2014)

Karen Leaf, Vice Chair (Board member, Center for Families since 2013)

Julie Vogt, Co-Secretary (Board member, Center for Families since 2003)

Susan Gelter, Co-Secretary (Board member, Empower Yolo since 2012)

Joseph D'Angina, Treasurer (Board member, Center for Families since 2013)

Board Members-

Karen Naliboff (Board member, Center for Families since 2012; Past Board President 2015)

Holly Burkett, Ph.D. (Board member, Empower Yolo since 2014)

Marsha Toy Engstrom (Board member, Empower Yolo since 2014)

Sheryl Patterson (Board member, Center for Families since 2014)

Leilani Kupo, Ph.D. (Board member, Empower Yolo since 2015)

Dr. James I. Grieshop (Board member, Center for Families)

Empower Yolo would like to thank Anne Marie Flynn, Past Board President for Empower Yolo 2013-2015. Anne Marie was instrumental in the name change for Empower Yolo, expanding the teen programs, and demonstrated strong leadership efforts during the recent merger.

Empower Yolo thanks her for her dedication, generosity and service to the community. We wish her well in her new endeavors!

Looking Forward in 2016

As Empower Yolo settles in as a new agency we are excited about this positive change moving forward in 2016. The culture of the agency is that "Empower Yolo is a place to be welcomed and safe. It's about being safe and a part of the community," said former Board President of Yolo Center for Families, Karen Naliboff. Our new mission speaks to what we were and what we will be. "Sexual assault and domestic violence is something that happened to you, but it's not who you are; it doesn't define you," Irlmeier said. Empower Yolo is about helping people improve their lives and not getting stuck in the past; it's about moving forward and developing a place in the community. The new agency, and all that it has to offer, can help us achieve our mission of promoting "safe, healthy and resilient communities."

We welcome you to join us at our **"Honor Our Sponsors" event on Thursday, February 25th** at Seasons Restaurant in Davis to find out more about our new agency.

To learn more about the merger read the full press release in The Davis Enterprise, "Empower Yolo, Center for Families merge into one agency," January 3, 2016, [here](#).

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