

Michelle Chang draws from her own experience as head of Bay Area office of There With Care

by [Linda Hubbard Gulker](#) on April 1, 2013



When Michelle Chang’s now five-year-old daughter Christine was six weeks old, she was diagnosed with [retinoblastoma](#). After two years of chemo- and laser-therapy treatment at UCSF, she was cancer free. The experience of having a critically-ill child being treated in a hospital setting stuck with Michelle.

“We had families and friends who provided incredible support, but I saw that wasn’t the case with other families,” recalls Michelle. “One baby I remember in particular had no visitors. It just broke my heart, as did so many of the families’ stories. I thought at the time, ‘I’m going to volunteer and help other families.’”

A couple of years later, Michelle was thumbing through *Oprah* magazine and read about a Colorado-based organization called There With Care: “I thought ‘this is exactly what families who are going through critical illnesses need’. I tore the article out and put it on my ‘to do’ list.

“When I realized they were only in Colorado, I thought, ‘oh well, that’s that.’ But the organization just happened to be undergoing a national expansion. Sometimes the universe just puts something in your lap — and that’s what happened when I got a call asking me to head up a new There With Care Northern California office.”

Opened in January 2012, the goal of the [Menlo Park-based There With Care office](#) is to serve 100 families a year. Referrals come through hospital-based social workers. Currently, services are offered to Stanford hospital patients, but the plan is to expand up to UCSF. “We need to have a solid financial base before we can expand,” explains Michelle, who says that 95% of the organization’s donations are from individuals.

“We are unique because we are not prescriptive,” she says. “We offer safe, non-judgemental support for families in the critical phase of a medical crisis. When families get back to ‘medical normal,’ we taper off our services.”

Looking back at her own family’s medical crisis, Michelle recalls that they got through by taking it one day at a time: “Kids are incredibly resilient. Plus, the child is being taken care of by an extensive teams of doctors. But, it’s the parents who need support. We want to be there for them in whatever way they need.”

Photo by [Scott R. Kline](#)