



PHOTO COURTESY OF ABILITYFIRST

**UNITED WAY PARTNER:** Saprina McAllister, an AbilityFirst-supported employee, works at an area Ralphs supermarket. The Pasadena-based nonprofit organization provides programs and services to people with physical and developmental disabilities.

# Easing grip of poverty

## United Way provides funds for regional charities

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United Way of Greater Los Angeles is focusing on bringing families out of poverty, exemplified by its new approach to giving.

United Way is distributing \$48 million to 139 nonprofit community organizations that focus on education, reducing poverty, meeting basic needs such as food and shelter and helping families with the opportunities and skills they need to become financially stable.

These priorities are part of the United Way's 10-year action plan "Creating Pathways Out of Poverty," introduced in February.

A growing number of families are living in poverty, including many who are homeless, and student dropout rates are high, said Elise Buik, president and CEO of United Way of Greater Los Angeles.

The United Way decided addressing these problems required a different approach.

"We no longer could be all things to all people," Buik said. "We need to take a long-term view. We wanted our funding to be more focused and to be tied to measurable outcomes."

### GROUPS FUNDED BY UNITED WAY

The United Way of Greater Los Angeles is distributing funds to 11 nonprofit organizations in the San Gabriel Valley. Some are new additions.

- Ability First
- Asian Youth Center
- Boys & Girls Club of West San Gabriel Valley
- Child Care Information Service
- Foothill Family Service
- Friends Outside in Los Angeles County Inc. (new)
- Hillside (new)
- Mother's Club Family Learning Center
- Our Saviour Center
- Union Station Foundation (new)
- Women at Work (new)

Source: United Way of Greater Los Angeles

A lot of funding had been based on history, but this year each organization submitted a request for proposal.

"When I took on this job, people felt that the United Way was a fortress, a closed society they could never be part of," Buik said. "It's healthy to continually evaluate where programs are aligned with our vision."

The United Way looked for a mix of great partners from the past and new programs, she said.

Among the United Way's long-standing local partners is

Mother's Club Family Learning Center in Pasadena, which will receive \$20,000 per year for three years, said Sarah Orth, development director for Mother's Club.

The grant will support the organization's adult education service for low-income parents, who will learn English and receive GED tutoring.

"Most of the parents we serve in our program don't have high school diplomas," Orth said. "We help try to get families out of the cycle of poverty. All research shows if you improve learning out-

comes in parents, you improve learning outcomes in their children."

Pasadena-based AbilityFirst will receive \$100,000 per year for three years.

The United Way's Pathways program is a great fit with what AbilityFirst does, said Lori Gangemi, president of AbilityFirst.

The nonprofit, founded in 1926, provides programs and services to people with physical and developmental disabilities.

Twenty-eight percent of people with disabilities live below the federal poverty level, and more than 50 percent of those with disabilities are unemployed, she said.

AbilityFirst's supported employment program helps people with disabilities obtain and maintain employment. The program serves 123 people, and United Way funding will move them toward their goal of helping more than 300 people in the next three years, Gangemi said.

"We're helping increase opportunities for people to become financially independent," she said.

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