



## **MEDIA ALERT**

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### **AbilityFirst Abilities Pageant Celebrates People with Disabilities**

Billy loves Michael Jackson – his favorite song is, “Beat It” and you can frequently see him wearing his red leather jacket around the Lawrence L. Frank Center in Pasadena. Billy is a young man who participates in the Lawrence L. Frank Center after-school program who’s creative – he loves to dance and sing. Billy also has a developmental disability. When he first came to AbilityFirst, Billy struggled with his behavior – at times he could be aggressive and refused to listen to staff members when they tried to guide him towards making better choices. That was then, this is now! After working closely with Billy on his social skills and behavior, today Billy is smiling, laughing, dancing, singing (and occasionally doing the moonwalk) around the center.

This year’s Abilities Pageant is scheduled for Saturday, February 16, 2019 and is set to showcase the children and young adults in AbilityFirst’s after-school program at the Lawrence L. Frank Center and Long Beach Center - and new to this year’s pageant, students from the AbilityFirst’s College to Career program will be joining the fun. The theme is, “Just Dance,” a favorite activity for many of the children, teenagers and young adults in AbilityFirst programs.

This year’s event also marks the sixth and final pageant, for Billy Jones, as he leaves the after-school program and begins to transfer into AbilityFirst programs for young adults, including ExploreAbility; a program designed to help participants explore their interests with a focus on person-centered planning.

*“We are excited to highlight the many talents of our participants and bring joy to the families and friends of AbilityFirst,”* said Chief Executive Officer, Lori Gangemi. *“This year’s event will be even*

*more inspiring and diverse with the addition of the students from our College to Career program and bitter sweet, as we say farewell to Billy, who for many years, has closed out the pageant with his Michael Jackson performance.”*

The pageant has been produced by the Lawrence L. Frank Center Director Michael Barkyoub for more than fifteen years and is designed to celebrate people with disabilities and the diversity of our community.

The event will highlight many AbilityFirst participants in individual and group performances that include choreographed dancing and singing. The event is aimed at bringing several dozen children and young adults with disabilities together to perform on stage in front of families, friends and local supporters while raising public awareness of AbilityFirst’s mission of *looking beyond disabilities, focusing on capabilities and expanding possibilities* for people with all abilities.

**WHO:** AbilityFirst 15<sup>th</sup> Abilities Pageant – “Just Dance” Celebrating People with Disabilities

**WHEN:** Sunday February 16, 2019 2-4PM

**WHAT:** An afternoon of live performances from participants from the Lawrence L. Frank Center, Long Beach Center and College to Career programs

**WHERE:** First Church of the Nazarene Lee Chapel, 3700 East Sierra Madre Blvd, Pasadena, CA 91107

**COST:** General Seating \$15.00/children \$10.00 and Preferred Seating \$20.00/Children \$15

**HOW:** Learn More at <https://www.abilityfirst.org/events/pageant/> Tickets are on sale at the Lawrence L. Frank Center and Long Beach Centers or can be purchased over the phone by calling 626-243-4851

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### **About AbilityFirst**

AbilityFirst provides a variety of programs that have a common mission: to help people with disabilities realize their full potential throughout their lives. As we celebrate more than 92 years of service, we are focusing our efforts on programs that are proven to have the greatest impact on a person’s success: basic life skills enhancement through our children’s and adult programs; higher education and employment readiness; and, independent living and social and recreational programming. AbilityFirst looks beyond disabilities, focuses on the capabilities of each individual and breaks through any preconceived limitations, opening up a world of possibilities. Preparation, socialization, communication, education – all leading to helping people achieve their personal best. More at [www.abilityfirst.org](http://www.abilityfirst.org)

