



AbilityFirst Celebrates Grand Re-Opening of Long Beach Center

Following the completion of AbilityFirst's \$6 million capital campaign, "Building Independence, Celebrating Community," the organization marked another milestone with the grand re-opening of its **Long Beach Center** on September 28. [AbilityFirst](#), a nonprofit that provides programs and services to help children and adults with disabilities reach their full potential, showcased the completed planned renovations of its building in Long Beach and expanded programs to the community.

The Long Beach Center incorporates a person-centered approach for its programs: Adult Day program, Social Recreational, Afterschool and Summer programs for 6 to 22 year olds, including Employment programs for people with developmental disabilities, and an aquatics program serving the community. Besides expanding its program, AbilityFirst is "bringing the Supported Employment and College to Career and programs to the Long Beach Center for teens and young adults, who are aging out of the afterschool program, and have an opportunity to transition to our Adult Day program and acclimate to staff," said April Stover, senior director of programs at Long Beach Center.

The renovations consisted of modernizing and enhancing the Children and Adult Program areas, including the administration office with more space to support staff and participants in the College to Career program. Participants interested in continuing their education or finding meaningful work will use the office space to participate in additional assessments to have more paths to choose from.

Nicole Mackey, associate director of College to Career, said that the program has expanded to include eight different colleges. The program emphasizes independence and personal choice in using community resources for daily living and future employment.

Sandy , whose grandson began attending AbilityFirst in 2005 when he was six years old, gave a testimonial at the ribbon-cutting event. "After meeting the staff and taking the tour, we knew we had found a perfect place for our grandson where he would be safe and treated with dignity."

Now 23 years old, Nicholas has learned many life skills and has experienced so much. "In addition to all the wonderful trips and events, AbilityFirst also gave us the respite that we needed," said "Over the last 17 years, Nicholas has grown into a fine young man thanks to the staff and efforts of AbilityFirst in Long Beach. They say it takes a village to raise a child. AbilityFirst has been our village."

Built more than 50 years ago, the Long Beach Center additional renovations included improved safety for participants and the community with a new one-way drive aisle at the rear of the building, designated space for the art activities and a place to showcase artwork, wellness

rooms with additional restrooms with a support station, and new mechanical equipment to adequately ventilate the indoor swimming pool, an integral component and vital resource to the community. A teaching demonstration kitchen was also renovated to empower independent living skills and can lead to workforce readiness.

“Under the leadership of Richard R. Frank and Gloria Deukmejian, the capital campaign committee was able to reach out to the community and friends to fund our commitment to meet the changing needs and support people with disabilities now and in the future,” said Lori Gangemi, AbilityFirst CEO.

Critical to the process was community groups like AbilityFirst’s Long Beach Guild who has been supporting the organization for almost 45 years. Caroline Hansen, president of the Long Beach Guild, served on the capital campaign and was amazed at the members’ commitments.

What has kept Hansen involved is the staff and directors. “[April] is so great to work with and the staff is wonderful,” said Hansen. “I really admire her, and she has kept everything together during the pandemic and remodeling. I see the results of the capital campaign by the renovation made to the Center and it’s just been amazing.”

“Everybody stepped up to contribute,” said Hansen, who has worked with the Long Beach Guild members year after year to ensure that the Center receives funding for programs, renovations, transportation and much more. Besides the Long Beach Guild contributing as an organization, several members, Joan Alderson, Terri Nikoletich, and Mary Alice Braly, were also recognized for their generous donations and rooms were named after them.

Other notable gifts from funders include: The Ahmanson Foundation; Alpert & Alpert Foundation; Raymond and Barbara Alpert Foundation; Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger; Mary Alice & Bob Braly; Steve & Mary Brockmeyer; Will Craig; Gail and Jim Ellis; Mr. & Mrs. Thomas D. Fenchel; Richard R. Frank; Fred & Peggy Hartley Family Foundation; Henry L. Guenther Foundation; Joanne Kim; Terri & Jerry Kohl; Ambassador W. Robert Kohorst (Ret.) & Shelley A. Allen; L and D Longo Foundation; Lawry's Restaurants, Inc.; The Long Beach Guild and its members: Gloria Deukmejian, Caroline Hansen, Deloris Mayuga, Linda Silver, Julie and Henry Taboada and Joan Alderson; The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation; Posey Family Foundation, Jack & Cherie Raidy; and The Rose Hills Foundation.

Another building in Pasadena, funded by the capital campaign, has already been completed. To learn more about AbilityFirst’s Long Beach Center located at 3770 E. Willow Street, Long Beach, CA 90815, visit abilityfirst.org.

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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 95 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. To learn more visit abilityfirst.org

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