

Expanding Possibilities

GI ING TUESDAY

Dear AbilityFirst friends,
As I reflect on my eighteen years as CEO of AbilityFirst, I am so grateful for the opportunity to have witnessed the growth and empowerment of so many of our participants. We simply couldn't have done it without you, our generous donors.

I've seen countless individuals come to our afterschool programs as preteens and grow into independent young adults through our College to Career program, explore new talents through our PossAbility program, or gain new skills through our Supported Employment Program. All of this work mirrors the commitment we make as a community to look beyond disabilities and to focus on our participants' capabilities while expanding possibilities. I am thankful to be able to include you as part of that community.

One person I think fondly of is Maria. I met Maria more than fifteen years ago when she was part of a supported employment maintenance group, cleaning our administrative offices. I always admire the smile on her face and the joy she emanates everywhere she goes. Over the years, I have followed Maria as she has transitioned through several of our programs. Today, Maria is fulfilling her lifelong dream of becoming an artist through our PossAbility program. I recently purchased one of her pieces of art at the PossAbility Art Gala, where individuals presented and sold different forms of artwork including painting, drawing and woodwork. I am proudly displaying Maria's art in my office. It represents her so well - full of bright, happy colors that remind me every day of the new possibilities she has found.

We are so grateful that because of you, we are able to continue to bring these life changing programs to more than 1700 participants this year. As we celebrate this season of giving and thanks, please consider making a gift to AbilityFirst to help more individuals like Maria expand their possibilities in life.

With gratitude,
Lori Gangemi
CEO, AbilityFirst



*Expanding possibilities for **Winnie in Afterschool***

Winnie has blossomed from a shy, quiet 6-year-old girl to become a gregarious, karaoke-singing teenager! She is the center's "in-house cheerleader," encouraging her friends to succeed. Winnie has learned to express her opinions and needs, and tells jokes and stories with self-confidence and poise.

*Expanding possibilities for **Charles in Joan and Harry A. Mier***

With flexibility and encouragement from the Joan and Harry A. Mier Center staff, Charles gradually overcame his reluctance to get into the warm water swimming pool. Charles progressed from playing basketball standing up in the pool to learning to float and eventually, to swim. He has become an avid swimmer and helps others overcome their fear of the pool and learn to be safe in and around the water.



*Expanding possibilities for **Jesse in College to Career***

College is a lot more complicated than high school – more classes, more people, more work, more time management issues, to name just a few. Jesse, a student in the College to Career program, has found that an educational coach gives him the support and confidence he needs to deal with the challenges that come up along the way. Jesse is a Communications major at Pasadena City College.

*Expanding possibilities for **Ivan in Supported Employment***

Ivan recently obtained a new job at Superior Grocers. He has been working with a job coach in the AbilityFirst supported employment program as he completes his employer's training program and becomes familiar with the duties and routines of the position. Ivan shares, "I like it...I am happy...I like working here."

