

## Advocates for disabled are thankful

Donna Yee • Poughkeepsie Journal • January 3, 2010

Abilities First, a nonprofit organization based in Poughkeepsie with programs and services across Dutchess County, lends more than a helping hand each day. The organization, founded in 1962, serves more than 2,200 individuals and families with mental and physical disabilities in Dutchess, as well as neighboring counties.

Comprehensive services include preschool, early intervention, day programs, residential services, a medical rehabilitation clinic, integrated employment services, at-home residential habilitation and social work and service coordination.

Serena Marrero, director of development, said the first stop for families is social work and service coordination where it's determined services are needed.

Unfortunately, many are limited-income families.

Resources tend to be depleted when disabilities exist in a family and some parents may not be able to work since they must stay at home to care for others, Marrero said.

This year, Abilities First, with assistance from Holiday Helping Hand, was able to give about 220 families a little boost for the holidays by providing Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner.

Holiday Helping Hand, now in its 27th year, is a seasonal fundraising campaign run by the United Way of Dutchess County and supported by the Poughkeepsie Journal.

Funds received through Holiday Helping Hand were also used to buy items such as pajamas and gift cards.

Louise Natoli, assistant director of the social work department, said these items and the dinners probably wouldn't be possible without Holiday Helping Hand.

"Donations were very generous this year and it was really, really helpful because this year, more than ever, people were in need," Marrero said.

As of Dec. 31, \$36,020.81 has been raised through community contributions.

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