

News Release

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United Way and Contra Costa County Open Poverty-Fighting SparkPoint Center in Bay Point

County Provides \$200,000 to Establish SparkPoint East Contra Costa

BAY POINT, Calif., Oct. 31, 2011-- United Way of the Bay Area and the Contra Costa Employment and Human Services division are pleased to announce the grand opening of SparkPoint East Contra Costa in Bay Point. The Contra Costa Employment & Human Services Department has invested \$200,000 in the new center and leads its day-to-day operations at the Ambrose Community Center.

Created by United Way of the Bay Area, SparkPoint Centers are one-stop, financial-education centers that offer a full range of services to help families and individuals get out of poverty and achieve long-term financial stability. The new center in Bay Point is one of eight SparkPoints that United Way and its partners have opened in the Bay Area over the last three years.

“During this time of increasingly scarce resources, helping people achieve financial stability requires unique partnerships and focus. In establishing SparkPoint East Contra Costa, twelve county agencies and local nonprofits have banded together, offering a full range of financial services, all under one roof,” said Joe Valentine, Director of Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services. “Creating SparkPoint is a real opportunity to work together more effectively to really help families in our community.”

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While the concept of a one-stop resource center is not new, SparkPoint elevates and improves on previous one-stop models through its personal financial coaching and “bundled” services. SparkPoint brings together some of the region’s most effective programs to deliver integrated services as a single entity. Every SparkPoint client gets a coach who helps create a step-by-step plan to set and achieve personal financial goals – from getting out of debt, to going back to school, or finding a job. SparkPoint coaches encourage clients to take advantage of two or more services at a time. By combining services, SparkPoint clients reach their goals faster.

“We are excited to expand SparkPoint to East Contra Costa. The new Center strengthens United Way’s partnerships with the County and top-notch nonprofits in this region,” said Anne Wilson, CEO of United Way of the Bay Area. “By integrating our services and metrics, SparkPoint gets everyone – the County, nonprofits and residents – all moving in the same direction to more effectively tackle poverty. With one in five Bay Area families struggling to make ends meet, expanding SparkPoint is an important part of United Way’s efforts to cut poverty in half in the Bay Area by 2020.”

SparkPoint East Contra Costa provides free resources and services to help families address the following concerns:

- Foreclosure/eviction prevention
- Credit/debt management
- Employment
- First-time home buying
- Education and training programs
- Increasing savings
- Tax preparation
- Accessing public benefits/health insurance
- Connecting with free and low-cost banking products
- Business assistance

SparkPoint East Contra Costa brings together the following partners to serve clients: Bay Area Legal Aid, Brighter Beginnings, Center for Human Development, Contra Costa Employment & Human Services, Contra Costa Health Services, Community Housing Development Corporation, First 5, Opportunity Junction, Stand, Stride Center and United Way of the Bay Area. All of the partners use one system and set of metrics to track clients’ progress.

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SparkPoint East Contra Costa is funded by Bank of America, Contra Costa County, S.H. Cowell Foundation, and United Way of the Bay Area and Y&H Soda Foundation.

About SparkPoint

Created by United Way of the Bay Area, SparkPoint Centers are one-stop, financial-education centers that help individuals and families who are struggling to make ends meet. SparkPoint helps clients address immediate financial crises, get back on their feet and build financially secure futures. Each center brings together a full range of services at one convenient location, including job training, career development and financial coaching, as well as access to higher education and savings accounts. Every SparkPoint client is provided a coach, who helps create a step-by-step plan to set and achieve personal financial goals. United Way’s SparkPoint model has garnered both national and international attention, with poverty experts traveling from around the country, and as far as the Netherlands, to study it. Learn more at www.sparkpointcenters.org.

About United Way of the Bay Area

United Way of the Bay Area is a nonprofit organization that creates pathways out of poverty. Our goal is to cut Bay Area poverty in half by 2020. We focus on helping working families and individuals, ensuring they can meet all of their basic needs, while creating opportunities for them to achieve lasting financial stability. We also invest in programs that empower the next generation for success. United Way convenes partners across sectors, advocates for policy change, runs community programs and educates residents about the issues most vital to a resilient community. Founded in 1922, United Way of the Bay Area serves Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Solano Counties. For more information, visit www.uwba.org.

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