Dear Friends of ACT,

Patience? Baloney!

The other day in block training for new employees at ACT I recalled that years ago people routinely expressed to me how much patience I must have in this line of work. Progress, it was thought, is often slow, and we must be able to recognize and celebrate the smaller achievements made by individuals.

Some of that makes sense, but as I’ve thought about it over the years, I find myself believing that just the opposite is true.

How so?

Well, people with disabilities have been the patient ones. They have endured all of the time we’ve taken to better understand that they just want many of the same things in life as you and me.

We developed continuums of service that had people experiencing day services, followed by pre-vocational services, followed by vocational services, followed by community employment services. Sprinkle in a little behavior development service, along with some personal assistant service, add some other well-intentioned service, and, well, you get the idea.

Are you kidding me? People never worked their way through the continuum of services. It took too long!!!

Instead, let’s recognize that we have an array of services to offer individuals. A menu, if you will. Programs and services that can be individually chosen and tailored to meet the unique interests and dreams of each person. This is a person-centered approach and central to best practices in our field today.

I discussed these ideas recently with a colleague, and he suggested that we should also be diplomatic in this approach. That is, we all have different values and should not impose ours on anyone. I agree.

But “times a wastin’” folks. Let’s get after it.

Patience? I don’t think so.

Until next month,

Mark Hassemer
Executive Director, ACT
Brandy H. mixes it up

The purpose of the ACT Works program is to provide job training and guidance to individuals with disabilities, while simultaneously providing employment and a steady paycheck. Individuals in the Works program perform a variety of tasks in the operation of our recycling program and are paid based on the tasks that they perform.

And for the ACT Works supervisors, no individual has a more complicated pay sheet than Brandy H. Brandy is an individual in the program employed as a production worker in our warehouse on the evening shift. One of the best things about Brandy, and the reason her pay sheet is so complex, is that she is always willing and able to perform all sorts of different tasks.

“No matter what the task pays,” says Sara Sims, Brandy’s production mentor, “when I have a task needing to be completed, Brandy always helps out.” This includes the clean up every night, where Brandy is always a huge help with the sweeping and mopping of the work floor.

Although some tasks pay more than others, Brandy enjoys having variety in her job and doesn’t mind performing the lower paying tasks. “It switches it up a bit,” Brandy says. “If I had to do the same thing every day I’d get bored of it.”

Despite doing so many tasks, Brandy does have a favorite; she loves working on the grinder best of all, especially when grinding polycarbonate, the plastic used in CDs and DVDs. Her dedication and work ethic is but one example of the success of the ACT Works program and underscores Brandy’s potential to eventually work out in the community.

Featured Business: Ruby Tuesday

The goal of ACT Career Services is to help job seekers achieve their employment goals while working with a large array of local employers to help them with their recruitment needs.

Ruby Tuesday, a corporate restaurant with over 700 locations around the world, is one local business that works with our Career Services team to employ individuals with disabilities. Nicole Manes, the General Manager of Ruby Tuesday at 3310 Vandiver Drive in Columbia, describes her particular location as “our very own happy spot.”

“We have a great staff and a great crew,” Nicole says. “Everybody gets along with no drama, the way we like to keep it.”

Among this great staff and crew is Daylene D., an individual employed through ACT’s Career Services program.

“Daylene is working out very well,” Nicole says. “I’ve found her to be a very nice lady.”

An important goal of the career services program is that both job seekers and employers reap mutual benefits from the relationship. For Daylene and Ruby Tuesday, this goal seems to have been met.

Continued on page 3
“Daylene doesn’t require too much from us,” Nicole says. “We’ve accommodated her needs while still getting ours met and it’s been very cohesive. We try to place her in the areas she knows best, and she follows directions and gets along with the other staff members well.”

So well, in fact, that Nicole would gladly work with the ACT Career Services team again. “This has worked out well,” she says, “and if the opportunity arose to hire someone else, I’d gladly give that person a chance.”

Ruby Tuesday’s participation with our Career Services team underscores their commitment to the local communities where they reside. As an organization, Ruby Tuesday has a history of corporate citizenship and takes pride in supporting charitable organizations through programs such as the “Ruby Tuesday Community GiveBack Program”.

The GiveBack Program offers a charitable donation to local organizations that host a dining event at any of their 700 plus participating locations. Their contribution is based on 20% of the net sales from guests that bring in a GiveBack flyer for the organization’s specific event. Since the fundraising takes place at a local Ruby Tuesday restaurant, the money that is raised will benefit the communities in which we live, work, and play.

You can read more about the GiveBack program at http://www.rubytuesday.com/giving-back

Ricky, Pat, and Chris host dance off

The Community Living Program provides support to individuals who have chosen to live in the community. We assist each individual to reach their highest level of independence by providing guidance in activities that we encounter on a daily basis, as well as the freedom to choose the activities to pursue in the household. For Ricky, Chris, and Patrick, three individuals served by our Community Living program, it was their goal to have more friends and people visit them in their home.

As an incentive to help expand social relationships, the Community Living staff helped Ricky, Chris, and Patrick to accomplish their goal by hosting several events in their home, including a Christmas caroling party, a sugar cookie party, an Oreo party, and a barbecue. While these events were a lot of fun, most were centered around food, and Ricky, Chris, and Patrick did not want to be associated with just food. Luckily, the inspiration for a different kind of party was not far off.

“One of the individuals, Ricky, loves to dance and loves music,” says Roni Martin, supervisor for Community Living. “I ran across a YouTube video that was a sort of dance off with the Fresh Prince rap. I shared the video with the guys and Ricky became excited and challenged two different staff to ‘out dance’ him.”

This soon turned into the entire house dancing and the idea for their next party was born: a Dance Off!

The guys immediately kicked into

Continued on page 4
high gear with the planning, with Ricky making a set list of music, Patrick practicing the Macarena, and even Chris enjoyed laughing at everyone’s attempts to get him to dance. The guys invited the other ACT houses as well as friends and family to the event. Almost every night for the next two weeks, Ricky would go to the garage to practice and listen to the music for the dance off. “I’m the DJ,” Ricky said. “I’m going to do my thing.”

To prep for the event, Ricky decided that he would play host. He started icing down water for guests early in the evening, and all the guys made sure they looked their best, with Patrick even wearing a tie. Ricky waited by the door and was very happy to greet the guests. Although a couple houses called to say they couldn’t make it, Ricky simply replied “That’s okay, we can dance anyway.”

The night was a big hit, with mostly dance music and 80s classic rock playing, and lots of Billy Joel. When the guests left for the evening, Ricky was ever the gracious host and shook everyone’s hands and thanked them for attending. When asked if he was proud of himself, Ricky smiled widely and replied “Yes.”

The guys were very proud of their dance off event, and are already brainstorming future ideas.

---

**Special Olympics brings friends together**

The Community Integration (CI) Program offers activities that provide opportunities for community participation, socialization, recreation, volunteering, and enhancing communication and independent living skills. Individuals supported through CI often receive information and make connections to other community programs that they enjoy participating in. This summer, several of the individuals that we serve competed in the Special Olympics through the Columbia Parks and Recreation department.

For many individuals, participating in the Special Olympics is a fulfilling activity that provides not only a great deal of fun and exercise, but also teaches discipline, teamwork, and the spirit of friendly competition. For most, the experience is not all about the medals and glory, but the time spent having fun with friends.

“I like the Special Olympics. I won medals and got to see my friends.” – Jim N.

“The Special Olympics is fun and I get to hang out with my friends!” – Josh C.

“I ran so fast! It was fun!” – Jessica R.

For these three individuals, the fun and camaraderie does not begin or end with the summer Special Olympics. All three were still talking about the spring track meet and are currently getting ready for bowling.

The goal of the Community Integration Program is to facilitate community involvement through person centered planning and promoting individual choices. The ability to choose to participate in the Special Olympics and other sports and recreation activities allows the individuals we serve to be participating members of their community and is vital to accomplishing our mission.
Personal Assistant Program sees growth

Individuals and their families come to ACT seeking the same overall goal: independence. The challenge in accomplishing this goal is that every individual and every family has a different path to get there, each with their own unique needs and requests for services. ACT helps individuals and families meet those needs by providing services tailored to their specific goals, including, but not limited to, community integration, exercise, recreation, social skills, life skills, volunteering, learning to use the city bus, or assistance with personal care needs.

One relatively unknown service provided by ACT is the Personal Assistant Program, which has undergone enormous expansion and growth over the past couple of years. In early 2011, the PA Program was small, comprised of just a few individuals receiving a few hours of service per week. But a dramatic rise in individuals served came with a dramatic need for qualified staff to provide services, leading to the decision to expand and grow the PA program in November 2011.

Since then, the program has grown immensely. In November 2011, PA services provided 100 hours of services to 5 individuals. In June 2013, 79 part-time staff provided over 1700 hours of support to over 70 individuals, and the program is still growing. In fact, ACT continues to seek and hire qualified staff for individuals waiting for services.

Personal Assistant Services requires a specific kind of staff; someone who is compassionate, responsible, can work with individuals and their families, willing to travel all over Columbia and beyond, work odd hours, and embrace the fundamental idea and mission of the program: helping individuals and their families achieve or maintain independence.

“The employees are wonderful, the individuals are happy, and the services are successful and innovative,” says Kathryn Gunn, Program Supervisor for PA Services. “This is what I’ve wanted to achieve as a part of this program from the beginning.”

Personal Assistant Services is pushing the boundaries of who is receiving services and helping to create a more inclusive community. ACT is excited to continue to expand the PA services, which serves children as young as 4 to adults in their 50’s, and everyone in between.

“We are excited about the growth of our program,” says Tara Shade, Program Manager for In-Home Services. “Kathryn and all of our front-line staff work very hard and we are eager to continue to grow the program, provide additional services, and increase independence for all individuals.”

Upcoming Events

August 7-9 - APSE-MO Employment Summit, Columbia, MO

For more events, please check out actservices.org/about-us/events