

interACTion

Alternative Community Training

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Dear Friends of ACT,

www.actservices.org



Last month I wrote here about our very strong need as people to be accepted, appreciated and acknowledged.

But when I sat down to pen some thoughts this month, the words just weren't there. Until a friend suggested I read an article by Ellen McCarthy from last week's Washington Post called "When Bill met Shelley: No disability could keep them apart." (Thank you, Kevin, for sharing this with me.)

I hope you'll read it.

I read it the very first time on the morning of Valentine's day. How appropriate, since it's a story about relationships.

Just like acceptance, appreciation and acknowledgement, we all want committed, loving relationships. Too often people with disabilities are cut off from the genuine companionship one experiences when he or she is in love.

Happily, Bill and Shelley eventually married. Bravo!

But McCarthy writes that before marriage Shelley, who had an otherwise normal life, was lonely. "When she was sick, no one rubbed her back until she fell asleep. Sometimes she had stories to tell, and there was no one to listen. Her roommates didn't stay up worrying if she was late getting home from work."

The story also points to some of the barriers, often ones we don't even recognize, that Bill and Shelley encountered as they attempted to deepen their relationship.

The researcher quoted in the story hits the nail on the head. "There is a bias in our society that is unfounded - that just because you have Asperger's syndrome or you have Down syndrome that you automatically cannot sustain a relationship," he says.

Bill and Shelley's parents, and others around them, eventually realized that their relationship was good and sustainable. "They were attentive, affectionate and deeply concerned with each other's needs," writes McCarthy.

This is an encouraging story. Shelley's mom caps it off by celebrating the fact that Shelley's "not lonely now."

But it also illustrates that we've still got a lot to learn (and remember) about love.

Until next month,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Mark".

Mark Hassemer
Executive Director, ACT

ACT Works Employees Medal in Regional Basketball Tournament

ACT Works is proud to acknowledge and congratulate five employees for their participation in the Special Olympics Central Area basketball tournament held January 5th at the MU Student Rec Complex in Columbia.

Michael S., Josh, and Michael C. each competed and received medals in the 5-on-5 team competition. Derrick and Robert competed and received medals for 3-on-3 team competition.

None of these athletes is on the same team. But they are co-workers every day at the ACT Works plastics recycling operations.

“You really have to be there to see just how thrilled the athletes are when they score, win, and advance to the next level,” said Paul Heywood, ACT Works staffer. “It’s



Michael S., Michael C., and Derrick

so great to see individuals putting themselves out there, getting out in the community and participating like this,” he said.

Teams practice once each week, typically at the New Haven Elementary school in Columbia.

They’re preparing for the February 9 District Basketball tournament in Sedalia.

Teams that win at least one game can advance to the Regional Tournament in North Kansas City (March 16) or Wentzville (March 23).

Congratulations, men. We wish you good luck as you continue to compete. ■

Columbia High School Seniors Move Out of the Classroom and STEP Into Work

The bus that transports six high school seniors to the STEP program, which just kicked off last fall, doesn’t go to a school. Rather, STEP participants arrive directly at their work site, Boone Hospital Center, every day for the entire school year.

As the program’s acronym suggests, the individuals participating in STEP are transitioning from their

educational careers to community-based employment. One of the goals of STEP is to make that transition seamless so high school seniors with developmental disabilities avoid un- or under-employment.

STEP stands for Seamless Transition through Enhanced Partnership. It’s a partnership between Columbia Public Schools, Boone County Family Resources,

Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and ACT. And let’s not forget one key partner, Boone Hospital Center. Boone Hospital Center provides the internships.

Every day STEP interns meet with their teacher to do preparation work and other training. Then it’s on to the internship experience,

continued on p. 3



Kalina



Jared



Tyler

... continued from p. 2

working in the hospital 4.5 hours each day.

ACT Career Specialist Josef Felten works with the interns on basic job skills, like how to interact with co-workers and supervisors, and on job search skills that will help them gain community-based employment after they graduate in May.

Though training is a part of the internship program, there's nothing simulated about the work they do. Each intern goes through the job application process, completes new employee orientation, displays the Boone Hospital employee name badge, and wears the right uniform for his or her job, whether that be scrubs, hairnet, latex gloves, or protective gear.

And, of course, they get their jobs

done.

The partners in the program can see once again what has long been known about working. Contributing one's efforts to a productive task, earning a living, delivering a valuable service...these are rewarding, satisfying and often life-changing.

"They're doing really well," says ACT Director of Employment Services, John Savage. "Everybody is flourishing and thriving. We're seeing interns do things they didn't think they'd be able to do a year ago."

Some who felt disengaged and out of touch with their educational prospects are energized and full of anticipation for the work they do. They're showing efficiency in their work, fully engaged, and making

excellent marks on quality checks. Others are actively and productively interacting with their co-workers. And the buy-in, engagement and enthusiasm demonstrated by the leadership at Boone Hospital are unmatched.

No one wants to count his or her chickens before they hatch; but the program partners can observe that at the half-way point of the first year of the program, the structure, format, and organization of the STEP program are working. (They're already screening candidates for the second year's class participants.)

We don't know what the future holds. But the signs are there. We believe these high school seniors will soon be working, too. ■

"A hero is an ordinary individual who finds strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles."

— Christopher Reeve

Terri Kruger, Don Lafferty & Mark Hassemer Honored for Years of Service with ACT

ACT and the people we serve have benefited over the years from the work of people–dedicated employees who have worked tirelessly to ensure that people with disabilities in our community have more opportunities.

At the year-end holiday party in December we acknowledged three members of our ACT team who have reached major milestones in their years of service at ACT: Terri Kruger, Don Lafferty, and Mark Hassemer.

Terri Kruger is a Program Manager for ACT Community Living, a position she has held since 2006. She also currently serves as the Therap administrator. For the past 20 years she’s been an energetic advocate for the individuals we serve, as well as for her fellow ACT staff.

She began working for ACT providing on-call relief in Community Living. Over the years she has served in many roles including being an employment training specialist in Career Services.

She’s been called on multiple times throughout her career to take on special assignments. Her willingness to step up and serve in these unique circumstances is highly appreciated.

Because of that willingness she’s been instrumental in laying the foundations as a manager for ACT’s personal assistant services and behavior development services, both of which have been growing and expanding.



Terri Kruger, Don Lafferty & Mark Hassemer

Thank you, Terri, for serving the ACT community with such passion and perseverance.

We also want to recognize Don Lafferty, Director of Community Living, for reaching the 20-year mark as a member of the ACT team.

Don oversees all of ACT’s residential services as well as the in-home services we provide.

“Don is a dependable and loyal person,” said Executive Director, Mark Hassemer. “I believe he has found his purpose, the thing he likes to do. He set out to provide service to others with his life. And he’s found that he can do that here.”

Two decades of serving people in this way shows tremendous commitment and a genuine love for people. We’re grateful.

Lastly, we’d like to acknowledge Executive Director Mark Hassemer for his 35 years of service.

Mark started here in 1977 when we were Woodhaven School and he was an adaptive physical education instructor. We served 144 students

back then.

In many ways, we are fortunate to observe that Mark’s history is ACT’s history. He became Executive Director in 1984. He led us in that role when we sought and got our first CARF accreditation in 1987 and changed our name to Alternative Community Training (ACT).

He led the way when we opened the doors at our new building at 2200 Burlington in 1989, and in 1990 when we started providing supported living services, the first program of its type in Missouri supported by the Medicaid Waiver.

Today ACT employs 343 people, 138 of whom are full-time. We provide supports or services to over 400 people each year.

Mark continues to lead us. He said recently that he would do this work as long as he wakes up every morning and can still say “I GET to go to work today”.

Thank you Mark for your leadership and service, and for the impact you’ve had on so many lives.

ACT Training Exceeds Missouri Department of Mental Health Requirements

During our most recent CARF accreditation review, ACT was commended highly by the administrative surveyor for the training we provide and require for staff.

By doing so, we believe CARF is acknowledging a value we hold that demands a high level of training, exceeding Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH) minimum requirements.

Our goal is to make sure ACT staff keep current on best practices that are evolving and changing in the service areas we provide. We also want to continuously improve what we do on behalf of the individuals we serve.

Our Training and Development Committee is regularly reviewing best practices and evaluating newsletters, webinars and other sources of information with an eye toward understanding the most current standards for our industry and then creating training and development opportunities that implement those standards.

The State requires our staff to be trained in CPR/First Aid, Abuse/Neglect Prevention, Positive Behavior Support, Medication Administration, and Missouri Quality Outcomes.



We go above and beyond those requirements with our new employee block training. The majority of our new staff receive eight full days of training before they begin work with the individuals we serve. (Because they do not administer medication, new Personal Assistant and Career Services staff can complete their training in five days.)

This 50-hour training schedule far

exceeds what is typically a 36-hour minimum required by DMH.

ACT also provides additional optional training in other areas such as cultural diversity, understanding autism, stress management, person-centered planning, and sign language.

Since core training requirements expire each year, employees must re-train and refresh annually.

Heading up these efforts to train and track training for staff is our Human Resources manager, Sharla Hyler. She has been with ACT for 22 years, 10 of those years as the Manager for Human Resources.

Sharla played a key role in our efforts, which began in 2006 and were implemented in 2007, to establish a more rigorous and systematic training plan for employees. That original plan was just recently revamped.

ACT staff value and appreciate their training. The staff comments about training received during the CARF review were very positive. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 8 - Medication administration refresher training at the Training Center.

March 11 - New Hire Orientation at the Training Center.

March 12 - Non-Violent Crisis Intervention at the Training Center.

March 13 - Therap/Documentation Training at the Training Center.

March 13 - Positive Behavior Support training at the Training Center.

March 14 - Abuse/Neglect Prevention training at the Training Center.

March 18-21 - Medication administration training at the Training Center.

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

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