Dear Friends of ACT,

Happy Birthday, ACT! I know I’m a bit premature. But when the calendar rolled around to 2015 I wasn’t the only one around here who noticed that on September 22, ACT will be 40 years old. It’s time to celebrate.

By the way, there are other landmark anniversaries occurring this year. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law 25 years ago, on July 26, 1990. Also, 40 years ago (1975), P.L. 94-142, which says all children shall have free, appropriate, public education, was enacted. It has been re-authorized over the years and is now known as IDEA.

ACT began as a private school on September 22, 1975, the same day President Gerald Ford survived a second assassination attempt, unharmed, in San Francisco.

The passage of four decades is a big deal. You may have seen the entertaining recent media accounts that show the predictions portrayed 25 years ago (1989) in Back to the Future II weren’t too far off from what we have today. Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale predicted that on October 21, 2015, the date of Marty McFly’s adventure to the future, we’d have flat screen TVs, Skype-like communications, and even a hovering skateboard, all of which exist today.

I wasn’t an ACT employee at the very beginning. But the dawning of this milestone made me stop and consider what we were doing and thinking back in the late 1970s. Here’s a recap:

Path to Nowhere. I remember working on a tactile walking path that provided a variety of sensations for people who had visual and hearing impairments. But it didn’t go anywhere! We also practiced simulations in a classroom, like crossing the street or riding the bus. Today, we’d just go out in the real world and do these things!

Group Living. Back then, it was common to gather people with disabilities together in group homes or other congregate settings. Now, our focus is on providing supports for people with disabilities so they can live with just a roommate or two, in the homes they choose, with the people they choose.

Sheltered Employment. Back then the focus was on separate, sheltered employment; finding working environments and tasks that could be carried out away from the community space. Now we have data and experience that show people with disabilities can work in the community and be held to the same production standards as people with no disclosed disabilities. Everyone simply needs the type of support specific to his or her circumstances, regardless of disability status.

Impersonal Language. It was common back then to use language that emphasized a diagnosis or medical condition over the person. “Handicapped” and “mental retardation” were labels that were common and, now we see, insensitive. Now we put people first. Personhood is emphasized over the fact that one may just happen to have a disability.

Experts Choose. Back then the experts (doctors, psychologists, and therapists) assessed each person and then together, without input from the individual we served, came up with a plan for “fixing” what was wrong or “filling the gap” for what was missing. I’m proud to say we’ve left that behind. Now we start with the person and find out what his or her dreams, goals, and preferences are. Then we act to support those goals.

We’ve come a long way, baby. (That was the

Continued on page 2
Continued from page 1

tag line from a very popular Virginia Slims cigarette ad that became famous in 1968.
It really is cause for celebration. (If you want to get deeper into this flashback thing, you could sing along with me and Kool and the Gang. www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GwjfUFyY6M Their hit Celebration came out 35 years ago in 1980.)

On a personal note, in May, my wife and I will celebrate the 35th anniversary of our marriage. We’ve experienced a fabulous life together, full of many joys (and pains, too). I did not know back in August, 1977 that I’d work for the same company for the next 38 years (and counting). Having the companionship and support of my wife and our entire family has made so much possible, for which I am truly grateful.

If I could go back and tell my 23-year old self one thing I’ve learned from these years of marriage and working at ACT I’d say: You’re going to change. Get ready to adapt, be flexible, and keep an open mind.

As we continue to be flexible, I am confident that we’ll bend in the right direction, as some of the changes listed above show we can.

Until next month,
Mark

Dental Care Always Comes First

ACT’s Community Living (CL) program has a motto, “Never cancel Dental! Dental always comes first!”

Dental care is essential to overall health. It isn’t just about having an attractive smile. Infections from poor oral hygiene can lead to major health concerns. Most of us couldn’t, wouldn’t go without it.

For those who can pay for dental care, it’s not a problem. But for the majority of individuals served in CL (whose funding comes from Medicaid/Medicare), who cannot work, and do not have family financial support, it’s an ongoing and serious problem.

ACT and other providers are responsible for ensuring that individuals receive the dental care they need. “Twice a year is the recommendation for cleanings. But we struggle to get most to a dentist once each year,” says CL Manager Carrie Griffith.

No funds are allocated for dental care by Medicaid or by the State. Finding a dentist who accepts Medicare/Medicaid locally for regular cleaning and ongoing care is a stretch. It rarely happens.

For a majority of those served in CL, dental care is not affordable and difficult to find. Sadly, they miss out on the treatment they need.

Dental services provided by the Missouri Elks Benevolent Trust (see www.elksmobiledental.org) is an option. But they remain inaccessible.

“Dental care is such high demand in this area. When Elks mobile dental units come they are inundated with people,” Griffith explains. “You have to move quickly when they come to town!”

Dental schools, like the one in Kansas City, offer procedures at reduced cost. It’s quite common now that Supervisors and Managers will drive hours from mid-Missouri to obtain care for the people served in CL.

Unfortunately, this is not a solution that fits everyone. Without routine cleaning and care they are left hurting and scrambling, desperate for care and relief.

“Individuals who can’t communicate through typical means will show us by their actions that they are in pain. Discomfort from unattended dental problems can account for behavioral issues,” says Griffith.

Some might not eat if it’s painful to do so. Others who have periodontal disease lose their teeth, another painful process.

Sedation is another concern. Some individuals cannot tolerate a dental visit. They need anesthesia for even a routine dental cleaning.

“Sedation comes with risks,” Griffith states. “Some dentists believe these risks outweigh the benefits of a cleaning.”

Unfortunately, and more often than we like, an individual’s teeth gets so bad that dentists prefer to extract them. And that leads to self-esteem issues. The cycle begins again as everyone begins the search for funds for dentures. It is just as hard to find a pair of dentures that fit properly and are affordable as it is to find dental care!

So CL has adopted a motto: “Never cancel Dental! Dental always comes first!”

Griffith states, “No matter the conflict, if someone is able to get in to see a dentist, supervisors will help each other to make sure they can take the appointment. We have canceled meetings and postponed things so that we can get individuals to the dentist.”

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”
— Helen Keller
Billy Obtains Employment at Wal-Mart

Billy has accepted a job offer at Wal-Mart after working for eleven years in ACT Works (AW).

“We are all thrilled for him!” said Program Manager, Bob Meier. “We wish him the best. We are very proud of him, and we know he will find success in whatever he does.”

Billy was offered the job a month ago following two interviews with the popular retail store. Two weeks later, Wal-Mart contacted him with a specific position and hours.

In his new role he will move pallets, stock merchandise, and assist customers to their vehicles with large purchases.

He begins before the end of January.

Billy is a versatile worker who will be missed. He had experience on the work floor disassembling media material, working with the grinder, and keeping the warehouse organized.

Congratulations, Billy! Good luck at Wal-Mart!

Employing People With Disabilities Gives OATS a New Perspective

OATS, Inc. has been offering transportation services to people since 1971. They now serve 87 Missouri counties. Recently, OATS started offering employment to people with disabilities.

“My Director came to me and asked if I had ever considered hiring people with disabilities,” says Jack Heusted, OATS Mid-Mo Regional Director.

Since that time, Heusted has hired two people with disabilities through ACT Career Services (ACS).

“OATS Transportation is a business that strives to provide assistance and support to promote an inclusive work environment,” ACS Program Manager Fontella Jackmon-Jones states. “They use proactive strategies to ensure successful employment for individuals from all walks of life.”

“Hiring these individuals has given our office a different perspective,” Heusted explains. “We don’t see these two people as having a disability any longer.”

Since hiring people with disabilities, OATS staff has gained the opportunity to become more familiar with a sector of their clientele, providing them with a new insight on what disability actually looks like.

“People with disabilities want what everyone wants,” Heusted states. “Having a job means so much to these individuals.”

Their work performance is a clear indication of this. The individuals OATS has hired show up every day, ready to work hard.

“The ACS Employment Training Specialists (ETS) offer great support,” Heusted says. “It is neat how much they get involved.”

...or don’t get involved, as Husted will tell you. He raves about the whole ETS process. The support this role offers depends entirely on the individual needs of the employee.

Professional success is almost guaranteed with the support services provided by the ETS and the inclusive work environment at OATS.

Jackmon-Jones says, “I am confident that the partnership with OATS Transportation will blossom and remain strong into the future.”
Many Friends Say Goodbye to Dear Friend Joey

ACT said goodbye to a dear friend this month. A memorial service was held in Joey’s honor that, along with many spoken remembrances, featured his favorite things—Elvis Presley, Missouri Tigers athletics, and sweet treats.

Joey began in the Community Integration program (CI) in 2008. He quickly became a friend to everyone.

He was not one to sit back and go unnoticed. He was always in on the action. More often than not, he made the action happen.

He was famous for his frequent approach with, “I need to talk to you.” It was an honor to hear those words from him. It meant you were an important person in his life.

But it also meant he had a favor to ask. Joey was very persistent and persuasive. If you said no to his request, that would not be the end of it.

“Joey was nice to everyone,” Alisa, CI participant, said during Joey’s memorial service. That became the theme of this very special time of remembering. Joey was known and liked by all. And now, he is missed.

“Joey was my best friend,” Leonard said through his tears. “We loved the Tigers.”

Executive Director Mark Hassemer shared a story about the times he took Joey to get posters from Mizzou Arena. Sometimes they would walk around Memorial Stadium. Other times they would get lucky and stumble on MU athletes. But every time they made the trip, Joey made sure grab an extra poster for Leonard.

Joey was a true, devoted fan of the Tigers. But as much as he loved the Tigers, he also loved the King of Rock n’ Roll, Elvis. If Joey wasn’t wearing black and gold, it was because he had on one of his favorite Elvis shirts.

He was loyal, he was a go-getter, and had a great sense of humor. He had one-liners that were delivered with a devious smile that said, “I got you!”

Joey’s memorial was a perfect dedication to our fun-loving friend. His niece, with whom he has lived for the last nine years, was there to share pictures and tales about her uncle. Her presence helped create the ideal setting for remembering Joey and saying goodbye.

It concluded with everyone digging into an MU decorated cake, cookies, and other yummy sweets while Elvis classics filled the room—just as Joey would want it.

Fontella-Jackmon Jones Accepts New Position in ACT Career Services

ACT is pleased to announce that Fontella-Jackmon Jones has accepted the position of Program Manager of Retention and Transition in ACT Career Services.

“Fontella brings a great deal of experience and knowledge to her new role at ACT,” says Jessica Mahon, Director of Employment Services.

Jackmon-Jones has 19 years of experience working with individuals with disabilities in many facets – community integration, community living, and employment services.

Fontella got her start at ACT as an assessor/job coach five years ago. She was then promoted to Assessment Coordinator and then, up until her latest promotion, she served as ACT Career Services Program Supervisor.

“I am pleased to continue my employment journey with ACT,” states Jackmon-Jones. “No matter the position, my main goal is assisting individuals served with achieving their career goals and to strive for a community where all individuals are fully included in order to achieve their life’s objective.”
Tip from Tara: Choose to be Present

In sticking to my promise from last month’s Tip, I took a deeper look at what I’d like to work on in my life. The first thing that stuck out to me as needing some attention is my relationships with others.

The other is figuring out how I can contribute more to ensuring that my children are a part of a community that is accepting of all people. A community that is truly inclusive.

We all lead busy lives. Everyone at times believes that they are busier than anybody else, me included. We all have commitments that make the day to day hustle to get everything we need done at the level we want it done exhausting.

We’re tired. There are a number of reasons why the daily grind is so hard. Some of us take on too much because we can’t say no or we don’t want to admit that we can’t handle all of it. Sometimes we are exhausted because we don’t prioritize very well, and sometimes it’s all of the above.

I frequently find myself saying I need to be a better parent, friend, spouse, coworker, or a more involved community member. Sure I am involved, I participate, I show up, but when taking a deeper look I’ve decided I don’t know if I’m always truly present.

Showing up and being fully engaged are two very different things. Being fully engaged and truly thinking about another person’s perspective and feelings takes time. Sometimes it takes a lot of time. And sometimes it is just easier to show up then to be fully present.

Recently I attended a leadership conference for Special Olympics Missouri. The keynote speaker was Eddie Slowikowski. He was wonderful and his message really got me to thinking about many of the relationships in my life.

Mr. Slowikowski talked about taking the time to learn other people’s story. Taking the time to learn about their struggles and successes allows us to learn more about ourselves.

Sometimes it is the struggle that brings out the best in people. If we don’t take the time to be present and understand the struggles and the successes of others, we miss out on learning.

We have all probably experienced a relationship that has gone bad with a friend, a significant other, or a co-worker. We have all most likely said to ourselves I need to be a better parent, spouse, friend, and community member.

It’s easy to say that I don’t have time to be more present; I’m too tired to be fully engaged. It’s easier to just say all relationships have ups and downs. In taking a deeper look I don’t think that is necessarily true.

Relationships shouldn’t be about ups and downs. Relationships are a choice.

Choose to be present.
Choose to be fully engaged.

I’ve decided to make this more of a priority and I hope that you all give it some thought too. Take the time to learn other people’s story and they will most likely, in turn, take the time to learn yours.

A community of people who choose to be present, who choose to be fully engaged, is the first step toward building a truly inclusive community that is accepting of all people.

Upcoming Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Black History Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 14th</td>
<td>Valentine’s Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 16th</td>
<td>ACT facility based programs closed for President’s Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 17th</td>
<td>Random Acts of Kindness Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 24th</td>
<td>Jackie Royer presents &quot;The 411 on Sect. 503&quot; 12-1p, 701 E. Broadway Columbia, MO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Happy Birthday ACT

ACT turns 40 in September this year! We are excited and already planning the festivities.

Stay connected with ACT to be a part of the celebration, see fun throwback photos, and more!

We will use the hashtag #ACTTurns40.
GET CONNECTED

Come follow us on social media:
http://www.actservices.org
ACTofCoMo
ACTofCoMo

CONTACT US

ACT
2200 Burlington
Columbia, MO 65202
1-800-359-4607
1-573-474-9446