

Dear Friends of ACT,

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February Tip from Tara

Nearly two years ago in March, Medicaid Waiver definitions changed. That changed ACT, too.

Under the new definitions, ACT Works could no longer be a work destination. Now an individual can receive job preparation services for no longer than 24 months.

First, there was confusion. And upset, too. The same State agency that helped create the program now imposed restrictions. We wondered what we were going to do. Almost 60 workers in ACT Works would need to find something new.

As I've said here before, the breakthroughs came when we focused on the vision and mission of ACT. We looked at them with fresh eyes and let the words direct our actions.

Our vision and mission say all of our efforts should lead to greater community involvement. As hard as it seemed, that includes work: jobs in the community with competitive wages.

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone
I can see all obstacles in my way*

Johnny Nash wrote those lyrics to "I Can See Clearly Now," his hit song released in 1972 (the year I graduated from high school). They've been ringing in my ear this week as I've considered what has come about.

As we come to the end of the first 24-month period, like Johnny sings, we have a better focus. While much work remains to be done, we know what it is that needs to be done. We see the obstacles in our way.

We are finishing the commitments we made to others in the recycling business as we look for someone to take over the business. We are ambitiously working to find jobs for those who stayed in the program, who expressed a desire to work in the community.

*Gone are the dark clouds
that had me blind*

We've seen some wonderful successes.

When service definitions changed, one third of those working in ACT Works moved to Community Integration. Half moved to Job Prep, where they develop their skills at volunteer sites around Columbia.

Our partners at volunteer sites in the community where individuals are preparing for jobs are grateful for the work individuals are doing and the commitment they show. They give feedback to the volunteers regularly and involve them in the culture of their workplaces. Relationships are being built.

People in the community are saying their perception of the capabilities of people with disabilities is changing now that they've been able to see their skills in action.

Job Prep participants are learning about themselves, like what they like, what they don't like, what they are good at, and where they need to improve. Several are now able to see themselves in a working environment outside of ACT. Before, this was not something many saw as a possibility. Some have a renewed commitment to being their best as they pursue this goal that is so important to them. They are taking more responsibility and being accountable as they learn not only employment skills, but life skills.

Of the 29 who went on to participate in Job Prep, 8 are now in jobs they competed for in the community, 7 chose not to pursue employment, and 9 are actively seeking employment.

*It's gonna be a bright, bright, bright
Sun-shiny day*

When we started down this path, we didn't know what to expect. Now we do. I can see clearly now that it's good.

Until next month,

Mark




Mark Hassemer
Executive Director

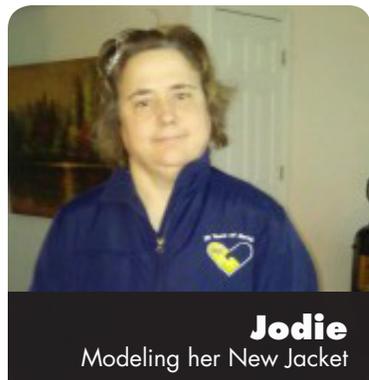
20 Years of Dedicated Service Marked by a Custom Jacket & a Fine Steak Dinner

How many people in today's economy can boast that they've worked 20 years with the same employer? How do you celebrate 20 years of solid employment? Jodie thought treating herself to a steak dinner would be a wonderful way to mark the occasion.

Jodie started working at Otscon in 1995. She works full-time assembling brake parts. She enjoys it now as much as she did back then.

Otscon has been in Columbia since 1993. The company manufactures parking brake systems and brake pedals. Its customers include major car brands like Honda, Nissan, and Toyota.

Jodie takes a lot of pride in knowing that she has contributed to the world around her, especially when it comes to safety. When she notes that a new friend is driving one of the makes that Otscon works with she will say, "good car, I might have put together your brakes!"



Jodie
Modeling her New Jacket

"I like making money!" Jodie says. "And I like to spend it"

"I have also met a lot of people working there. That's the best part of my job, working with friends," Jodie continues.

Otscon managers presented Jodie with a nice jacket that has her many years of dedicated service embroidered on the breast pocket. With the cooler weather, she has had many opportunities to wear it and she is quick to point it out, "See my jacket? They gave that to me for working there for 20 years! Isn't it beautiful?" The pride radiates from her every time she puts it on.

Work is valuable. That simple and powerful fact is not lost on Jodie. Having purpose, getting up each day and earning a paycheck does tremendous good for attitude and overall happiness.

ACT shares in Jodie's pride over her accomplishment, and wish her continued success in her career. •

"See my jacket? They gave that to me for working there for 20 years! Isn't it beautiful?"



Scott Caldwell
Co-Manager

Schnucks A Valuable Community Partner for Over 20 Years

Schnucks is known for many things – great produce, great selection of often hard-to-find ingredients, and friendly staff.

What they may not be known for is a diverse workforce, a characteristic that makes the company an extremely valuable asset to the community.

ACT Career Services (ACS) developed a relationship with Schnuck's in the 1990's. ACS helped a job seeker gain employment. Twenty-one years later, he is still a valuable employee with the company.

Scott Caldwell, Co-Manager at the Columbia location, was there when he was hired. "I left to open a store in Jefferson City and didn't come back for 14 years. Luckily, he was still here when I returned!"

The relationship between the grocery chain and ACT has been strong since.

"Schnucks is a great partner. They see the value of providing employment opportunities for the individuals we serve in the most integrated and supportive environment," says Fontella Jackmon-Jones, Manager of ACS's Community Employment Services. In the fast-paced, high demand world of retail, businesses face many challenges to remain competitive and make a profit. Schnucks has succeeded by focusing on holding on to their valuable employees. They adjust roles to ensure employees' work responsibilities and duties align with their skills while continuing to meet customers' needs.

Jackmon-Jones says, "Our partnership with Schnucks is important and vital to the services ACS provides individuals with disabilities." •



Karrie, Kimberly, Melanie, Brittany, Davin, Emily & Lindsay
 ACS employees, Food Bank employees, & Individuals supported in ACS

Volunteers Through ACT Career Services Honored by The Food Bank of Central & Northeast Missouri

The Food Bank of Central and Northeast Missouri honored several individuals that receive Job Preparation services through ACT Career Services (ACS).

Each month the Food Bank celebrates dedicated volunteers by adding them to the "Volunteer Hall of Fame" plaque. The ACS individuals recently

recognized have been working on job skills while providing volunteer services to the Food Bank.

Volunteer Programs Supervisor Melanie Lake is thrilled to have groups representing ACT there. "The Food Bank is proud to have developed such a great relationship

with ACT and fortunate to have consistent groups providing valuable volunteer services for us," Lake says.

Davin Tipton, ACS Career Specialist, has been instrumental in developing the great relationship between the two agencies. He saw that both agencies would benefit from the partnership.

The Food Bank gets a steady flow of hands, making it possible to provide food for over 104,000 people a month. The individuals ACS supports are developing as employees while doing meaningful work.

"It is exciting for us to see the individuals' skill level and self-esteem grow to a point where they are doing the work on their own," says Lake. •



James, Josh, Robert, Brandy, Mark, Robert, Jessica, Paul, Jason, Davin Karrie.
 Individuals supported in ACS

Holiday Volunteer Opportunities Abound & Fulfill



The Veteran's United choir

Volunteer options were numerous (almost unlimited) for people receiving services in ACT's Community Integration (CI) program this holiday season.

A caroling group from CI delighted listeners at Columbia Healthcare Center, Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital, and Lenoir

Woods. Caroling was a big hit for both the CI volunteers and the residents of these facilities.

"At the hospital, people started to dance they were having so much fun. Everyone loved it!" CI Activities Coordinator Kristin Cummins said.

ACT volunteers were not the only ones out caroling. The Veteran's United choir stopped by ACT to serenade the CI program in early December. The choir, fully equipped with musical instruments, had everyone singing along to Christmas classics. The Salvation Army also benefitted from CI's enthusiastic volunteers. CI participants rang those well-known bells every Monday and Friday in December.

There was even a volunteer option for the artists of CI. They created homemade holiday cards for patients at the Veterans' Hospital.

CI volunteers are no strangers to the Veteran's Hospital. Volunteers are regularly scheduled throughout the year for administrative work (once each week) and recreational therapy (twice each month).

"It is a wonderful experience for the people in CI. We are grateful to the Veteran's Hospital for the opportunity," Cummins said.

Volunteering connects people with their community and gives them fulfillment. That is certainly true for individuals in the CI program. The volunteer opportunities offered are a favorite! •

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY Black History Month

14th Valentine's Day

15th ACT facility based offices closed for President's Day

17th Random ACT's of Kindness Day

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it."

— Helen Keller

Tip from Tara

& Coping with Loss & Moving Forward



Tara and her sons.

The only thing harder than losing a loved one may be explaining that loss to your children; it can be particularly challenging explaining the death to an individual who is differently abled.

Oftentimes individuals who are differently abled are identified by others as overly emotional or even “robotic” and emotionless as compared to many of their peers.

I do not believe this is true. All people feel a variety of emotions, and the death of a family member or friend can be extremely devastating to many individuals.

There are several things that are important to remember when you are talking with someone who is differently abled about the loss of a loved one.

State the facts and remember that a lot of individuals are concrete thinkers. It is important to explain death in this way by saying, “She died. That means we won’t see them anymore.” It’s also important to give a concrete answer to why they died so that individuals do not think or fear that people just die for no reason. Explain religious beliefs, customs or traditions relating to the individual’s passing. Don’t be afraid

to explain the concept of heaven (if that is what you believe in); just use clear and concise language. Acknowledge your child’s feelings and your own. Be clear that it is acceptable to feel sad, angry, or confused. Children look to you for cues, so it’s fine to let them see you cry. Talk to them about feelings in clear terms. Give them time to process. Sometimes it may take time to fully understand what has happened. Recently our family lost someone who was very important to us, Mrs. Jan Stephens. Jan was a friend, a Coach, a mentor, a volunteer, an amazing person inside and out.

Our family has been involved in Special Olympics since our son Rye was 8 years old. Jan gave us our start. Jan founded the Mid-

Missouri Special Olympics agency years ago and organized a team of talented athletes through the years, including her son Larry who serves as a Global Ambassador and is in the Special Olympics Missouri Hall of Fame. All made possible by the ever present support of his mother.

Jan was a fighter. She had suffered from a neurological disorder and tremors since she was a child. In the last 10 years of her life, her health situation got worse, but she never stopped doing what she loved. I still recall her getting out of her motorized scooter, grabbing her walker and going over to Rye to show him what she thought he needed to do to dribble a basketball better during one of our practices.



Jan with her family carrying the unified relay torch to the World Games last summer.

Jan never saw any limits for herself or her athletes. Jan also saw all people as equal. Jan’s passion for supporting Unified Sports programs within the Special Olympic Community will be what I will always remember and admire the most about her.

She understood that an athlete and unified partner competing alongside one another, each in a meaningful and integral role, had benefits for everyone involved and the entire community.

When I had to break the news to my son Rye that Coach Jan had passed he didn’t have a lot to say at first. A few days later at bedtime he said “maybe Coach Jan just coached too much and she should of had a break.” I told him Jan never did anything she didn’t want to do and she always expected the best in every athlete. He said “yep, like Mickey and Rocky, I will miss seeing her”.

Rocky Balboa said “Life’s not much about how hard of a hit you can give... It’s about how many you can take and still keep moving forward.” I guess Rye was right Jan, you were our Mickey! Because of your legacy many individuals will keep moving forward no matter what life throws at them. Thank you for the many life lessons you taught my son and so many other athletes across the state of Missouri. •

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