Dear Friends of ACT,

Jimmy was my best pal growing up in small-town northern Wisconsin. He lived across the street with his mom, dad, three sisters, and a cocker spaniel named Thumper.

Some of my earliest memories growing up include Jimmy. We ran and played all over the neighborhood. They were fun and happy days.

When we were in second grade at St. Paul’s, Jimmy went to the hospital for surgery. I didn't understand what was going on, but I knew he had trouble seeing because he would always hold his book real close to his face when reading.

Jimmy came home with his hair shaved off and a long scar that started behind his ear and curved across the top to the front of his head. I can still see that scar clearly in my mind’s eye today.

After he came home from the hospital, I went to his house every afternoon during the school year to read to him. When school work was done, we played, inside and outside. I learned to lead him around safely. I led him down the aisle at church for our First Communion.

That summer we walked to Lake Como with our sisters for swimming lessons.

Since St. Paul’s didn’t have the staff or resources Jimmy needed, he went to the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Janesville, Wisconsin. I knew his sight was getting worse because in his letters to me the words were all over the place. They didn’t follow a straight line.

Soon his dad was transferred. Jimmy and the whole family moved to Memphis. Happily, they came to visit us at times.

Jimmy gradually lost all of his sight. The letters I received from him were written in Braille. His mother wrote out the words under the Braille letters.

I still have the first letter he sent me, on July 1, 1966. He said he'd just bought a new baritone ukulele and hoped to learn how to play it.

I still have a coin purse Jimmy made for me. It’s round and flat, with a zipper. It looks like a baseball. And I have school pictures of Jimmy, too.

When I was in the seventh grade, I was running outside to recess when my brother called me over. It was May, 1967. He told me Jimmy died.

I was a pall bearer for my best friend, Jimmy. The funeral was in our home town and was called a Mass of the Angels, a special service for young children. My understanding was that it’s a celebration of the soul’s direct line to heaven for baptized children.

After all these years, I still think of Jimmy. But I’m not leading him around. Jimmy helps lead me now. He helps me keep things in perspective.

Until next month,

Mark
Support ACT Through CoMoGives

Go to CoMoGives.com during these final days of December and select ACT for your charitable organization (you will pay through PayPal, but you do not have to have a PayPal account to donate).

100% of the donations made to ACT through the CoMoGives website will go to ACT. We can also receive additional funds through Challenge Grants (similar to fund matching).

You can follow our progress:
- Website - actservices.org
- Facebook - facebook.com/ACTofCoMo
- Twitter - @ACTofCoMo

Thank you for your support of ACT and our mission.

Derrick Gets a Job at Wendy’s

The ACT Works (AW) program is pleased to announce that Derrick was recently offered employment and is now working at the new Wendy’s on Nifong in Columbia, Missouri!

After working with Vocational Rehabilitation and Job Point, agencies similar to ACT Career Services, he accepted a Crew Member position at the fast food restaurant.

A Crew Member is responsible for keeping the restaurant clean, presentable, and prepared for customers.

Derrick worked in AW for 3 years and was a stellar employee. “He quite often had the highest production rate,” says Bob Meier, AW Program Manager.

Derrick worked on the work floor disassembling media materials and in the warehouse on the tape puncher. “He did every task well!” Meier continues.

Accepting the new job is bittersweet for Derrick. “I will miss everyone, but am excited about the future of my career,” Derrick stated.

Derrick has now been working at Wendy’s for over a month. We wish him all the best.

Community Living Receives 14 New Cars

Thanks to a State-level budget makeover, ACT’s Community Living (CL) program acquired 14 new 2014 Toyota Camrys at the beginning of December. These vehicles are used to transport individuals to work, on errands, and to everyday outings.

Now that each residential house has its own car, staff no longer need to use their personal vehicles.

“This is a great hiring tool,” says Don Lafferty, Director of Community Living. “If a potential employee does not have a vehicle, it does not take the candidate out of the running.”

Before the new cars arrived, staff had to use their own cars or check out cars from other programs. This was a real logistical hassle that sometimes left individuals without transportation when cars weren’t available. Staff will still rely on borrowing other programs’...
Lafferty hands much of the credit to Amanda Blumhorst, Director of Financial Operations. “Amanda deserves recognition. She put a lot of hard work into this.”

It was a great team effort. And every minute was time well spent.

Community Living Supervisor Lynette Austin jests, “Everybody in our house was excited to get our nice, new, shiny Camry. We talked about how clean and pretty it looked, then discussed in great detail how it should stay that way!”

The new cars will open more doors, and roadways, for individuals in CL, giving them even better access to their community.

Dan is Advancing in his Tech Support Career at Socket

Dan enjoying his favorite past time.

Dan started working at Socket in Columbia, Missouri in March. He began as a Tier One Tech Support staff. Now he’s training to move up to Tier Two Tech Support. He’ll be promoted to that new position in just a few weeks.

As a Tier One Tech Support staff he takes calls from residential customers regarding internet and phone issues. His main responsibility is helping customers by troubleshooting and then solving their tech issues. The solutions he provides may be as simple as helping customers get their devices plugged in and turned on. But often the solution is a complex one.

At the Tier Two Tech Support level Dan will be supervising and assisting Tier One Tech Support staff to ensure customers get the best service. He will also be communicating and coordinating with telephone companies and dispatching technicians to customer’s homes to work on problems that can be solved over the phone.

Dan has been working with computers in some capacity for over 30 years. He received his AA degree in software four years ago.

Socket, a telephone and internet service provider, is a perfect fit for Dan. “My job is great!” Dan exclaims.

Dan began working with David West in ACT Career Services (ACS) last June. He is pleased with his experience in the program.

“ACS did exactly what I needed them to do…keep me focused on getting a job. ACS staff assured me that if I was persistent in my job hunt it would lead to success.”

Now that Dan is nearing his one-year anniversary with Socket his motivation has not diminished at all, especially after he purchased a new car, thanks to the steady income. “The car is a good visual to remind me why working is so important. I earned that car because I worked hard.”

Great job, Dan! Keep up the good work! More promotions, more pay, and more rewards will surely come.

“Let the shameful walls of exclusion finally come tumbling down.”

— Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed by former President George H.W. Bush
Employees Retire from ACT Works and Join Community Integration Program

Over the last few months, 22 employees have retired from ACT Works (AW). They now participate in the Community Integration (CI) day program. NOTE: more than 22 may have left AW (for employment, CMSE, etc), 22 is how many came over to CI.

Facing and embracing retirement can be nerve-racking. It’s unchartered territory. That trepidation is certainly not lost on these retirees. They’ve left behind years of productive employment and the hard-earned paychecks that go with them.

Bobby worked in AW for 15 years. He is glad to be retired and he’s enjoying time out in his community. “I like going to Wal-Mart, the mall…just getting out and about.”

Becky is now enjoying her time in the CI program after 16 years of working in AW. “I like making new friends!” Becky exclaims. “I was sad to retire, but glad I have the opportunity to attend CI.”

In last month’s newsletter, Executive Director Mark Hassemer wrote about the Medicaid decision that came out earlier this year (http://www.actservices.org/?p=6610).

“The new rule’s intent is to ensure that individuals receiving services through Medicaid’s Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) programs have full access to benefits of community living and are able to receive services in the most integrated settings,” Hassemer stated.

In order to maintain funding through HCBS, AW needed a makeover. Job Preparation Services was developed to coincide with the recycling services provided by AW. Job Preparation is defined in the Developmental Disabilities Waiver Manual as “services that provide training and work experiences intended to teach an individual the skills necessary to succeed in paid community employment.”

During transition meetings, six individuals who were splitting their time between AW and CI decided to focus solely on their employment goals. They chose to stop participating in day program activities. Four of the six found employment shortly afterward.

Many individuals decided retirement was best for them, due to the new format of services. They switched over to CI.

Kristin Cummins, CI Activities Coordinator, says, “The individuals who are new to the program enjoy being on the go and bragging to their previous co-workers that they are now retired.”

Congratulations to those entering these new phases of life…starting new careers, changing careers, or embracing retirement.

Upcoming Events

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 19th</td>
<td>ACT offices closed for Martin Luther King Jr., day</td>
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<td>January 27th</td>
<td>Lunch ‘n Learn: Developing Quality, Affordable, Universally Designed Housing for All, Community Room City Hall</td>
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“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”
— Helen Keller
Tip from Tara: A Deeper Look

Happy New Year!

Webster defines a New Year’s resolution as a secular tradition, in which a person makes a promise to do an act of self-improvement or something slightly nice, such as opening doors for people beginning New Year’s Day.

It’s a fresh start.

Every year, many of us come up with goals, things that we want to change about ourselves or our lives. Typically it is about making a commitment. Something we see as attainable and want so desperately, but the chaos of our lives prevents us from reaching our goal.

It is the time of year that if we are willing, we can look deep into our personalities that make up who we are, and for a moment, we might be more willing than ever to identify what it is that we don’t always like about ourselves.

I have come up with resolutions for years. I am fairly confident if I look back at my Amazon purchase history on New Year’s Eve or Day it could prove to be the time of year when I spend the most money on books. Self-help. How To. Dieting. Parenting.

Purchases made with the intention that knowledge gained might translate to a level of insight superseding the norm of previous years.

This year I’m not doing that. This year I have decided to dig a little deeper. I am looking at what I have gained from the perspective of others throughout the year. The tough conversations, the moments when I have felt the most uncomfortable. And I’m going to spend my New Year holiday reflecting, rather than reading the advice of an expert, because if you really think about it the only expert about me, is me.

I encourage the rest of you to do the same. I hope to follow up in the coming months and to possibly write about what I have learned.

I’m not really sure who said it first, but I frequently read that “No one is in charge of your happiness but you.” I look forward to this deeper dig and yours too.

I appreciate all of you who have reached out to me this year with ideas about topics that you want me to discuss, and those of you who have shared stories about your family that you have identified with after reading my tips. I love hearing from you, and if any of you who haven’t reached out but want to, please contact me at tshade@actservices.org. I look forward to hearing from you.

Happy New Year! ●

“It means people on crutches and in a wheelchair can do anything.”

— Hannah McFadden at the dedication of a statue showing President Franklin Roosevelt in the wheelchair he designed for himself
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