Dear Friends of ACT,

As I pulled out of the ACT parking lot the week before Christmas, I saw Ruth crossing the street. So I rolled down my window to say hello. Before I could say a word, she smiled and said, “Merry Christmas.” Then she paused and said, “I mean it.”

The expression on her face was so radiant and full of joy, I had no doubt she was truly wishing the best for me, not just repeating the standard end-of-year greeting.

That’s my wish for all of you, too. Happy Holidays! May you experience peace and joy, and closeness to your dear family and friends. May you be full of thanksgiving for the goodness and generosity you’ve experienced. And may you anticipate the new year with excitement. I mean it.

These are more than words. It’s a different greeting and a different kind of wish than any other I can offer. It comes just once each year.

The winter months can be cold and dark. During this coldest and darkest part of the year it’s easy to slip in to melancholy, or even bitterness and depression, especially when our news has been so cold and dark too. Man’s inhumanity to man has literally changed the meaning of the words Paris and San Bernardino, and more.

So it really is a Holiday miracle that we can turn the worst of times in to something wonderful and inspiring by stopping our work, gathering our friends and family close, being generous to one another with gifts and food, and taking stock of everything that is wonderful.

When we take some time to focus on seeing what’s good, we can set aside differences and experience peace, joy, and light.

Here are some good things I’ve been thinking about.

We have a new stocking on the mantle, embroidered with my future son-in-law’s name. I’m thrilled to add a new member to our family. My granddaughter is two years old and enjoying this special time of year like never before, as only a child can. As usual, my tree is up and getting watered every day. We just don’t have the ornaments on yet! Even that makes me laugh.

The Voluntary Action Center has provided gifts once again to all of the people we support in Individualized Supported Living settings, many of whom have no families and no disposable income. ACT staff, Board members and families had a fabulous holiday party a few days ago. Not only did we have a blast playing Take It or Leave It, we took time to honor ACT employees who have reached some amazing service milestones: 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, and even 25.

I’m also thinking about the joy of past Christmases. Going to church with my family, sledding, ice fishing, singing carols (even in the car), and eating the special candy my mom made for us and for nearly everyone in town.

Happy Holidays, everyone! I mean it.

Until next month,

Mark

Mark Hassemer, Executive Director
Job Preparation Evolves With Volunteer Opportunities and Career Planning

ACT Career Services continues to evolve and adapt to provide the best individualized services for participants in the job preparation program. Read here for more information about the provider transformation that started this shift earlier this year.

Another major change in the program occurred earlier this year when job preparation participants moved to community volunteer sites (read more here). In 2016, the goal is to continue to increase the amount of volunteering that occurs in job preparation services. This will expand the variety of skill development opportunities available.

Job Preparation participants have been pleasantly surprised—not by the change in services—but by themselves. “They are learning a lot about themselves,” says Jessica Mahon, Director of ACS.

We believe the positive outcomes we are seeing in the beginning stages of this program transformation are reliable predictors of great things yet to come for ACS.

Job Preparation participants will soon experience another change. Again, the focus is on individualizing and tailoring services to each person referred to ACS. Now each new entrant will begin with career planning rather than immediately beginning job preparation.

Individuals receiving services will begin with a plan. Individual plans will be developed based on what each person needs to land a job that matches his or her skills, personality, and goals.

“We will look at what the individual needs so all services can be tailored to helping the individual achieve his or her career goal,” says Mahon.

ACS will continue to improve by this process of adapting its practices and approaches to ensure services are tailored to fit to each individual receiving services.

If you operate a business or know of a business that could benefit from volunteer workers, please contact ACT. Let’s explore how we might meet your needs while preparing people with disabilities for work in the community. •

Community Integration Health Class Finishes Strong with Pumpkin Pie!

Some Community Integration program participants are a bit healthier these days. The health class we told you about in October met for the last time on December first.

“The class flew by!” says Kalynn Ramsey, ACT Communication Coordinator, who led the class. “I guess we were all having fun.”

The ten-week class finished up with a focus on staying on track with health goals during the holidays. The group picked a healthy pumpkin pie recipe to bake for their final meeting.

“My goal for the class isn’t for participants to make drastic changes, but to simply start thinking about making healthier choices. Moderation is the key. Losing weight takes time,” Ramsey says.

The last class also covered physical activity and benefits of exercise.

Without a doubt, making and eating healthy foods was the best part of the class.

“I liked learning about and making healthy foods,” Dylan exclaimed.

Heath said his favorite part of the class was “learning about nutrition and making food using healthy recipes.”

Great job to those who completed the class! And good luck with your health and fitness goals in 2016! •

What do you know about Accessibility?

When you hear the word accessibility, what do you think of?

Have you thought about how one word can change the lives of a person with a disability?

Information regarding accessibility can change the dynamics of the access you have in your home and in our community. We can empower the individuals ACT serves, and other stakeholders, with the knowledge to make an informed decision about their accessibility needs.

Making an informed decision can allow everyone to live inclusive and integrated lives.

The accessibility committee at ACT reviews various barriers (such as architecture, attitudinal, financial or transportation) to identify, implement change and create an action plan that can remove barriers.

So the next time you are supporting an individual in their home or in our community, assess your surroundings. Ask this question: do I have full access in my home or community? If not, what are the barriers and how can the barriers be removed?

Resources regarding accessibility are available. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Fontella Jackson-Jones here at ACT, 573 – 474 – 9446. •
Devoted Community Living Staff Continue Their Work Throughout the Holidays

Our Community Living (CL) program is always up and running 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. New Years Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and every holiday in between are days when people need services.

Many of the people supported in this program need care around the clock, without exception. A good number don’t have family to visit. As harsh as that may sound, it’s still true.

The men and women at ACT gladly step up to be with these individuals during the holidays. Many of them wouldn’t have it any other way.

For some of ACT employees, it means missing their own family gatherings. But for most of ACT’s staff, the individuals they work with are family. So they included the people they support in their own family holiday celebrations and traditions.

“Employees in CL go out of their way to find holiday events they can attend—parades, parties, decorations, visits with Santa—everything the holiday offers,” says Brenda Wilson, CL Program Supervisor.

Program Supervisor Mark Pickett adds, “The staff ensure that everything associated with the holidays, from saving the wishbone at Thanksgiving to straightening out a tie for a New Year’s Eve party becomes a festive tradition.”

Thank you to everyone working this holiday season. Your sacrifice, while it may not be one to you, is great and does not go unnoticed. •
CoMoGives Funds are Opening Opportunity’s Door for Many

Imagine a life without swimming or putt putt golf. No tree houses or vacations.

For many with disabilities this is a reality. Camp Wonderland allows them to experience all of this and more.

Thanks to the generosity of many ACT supporters through CoMoGives, an online fundraising campaign, Chelsea and Joe were both awarded scholarships to attend Camp Wonderland!

This camp is anything but ordinary.

The summertime retreat offers campers a weeklong full of activities, many of which are not possible for people with disabilities anywhere else.

Cabins, a tree house, swimming pool, boating, and a lodge for bingo, dances, karaoke, and video games… ALL of which are accessible!

The camp also offers a nursing staff for people that have medical needs.

Chelsea utilizes a wheelchair and is medically fragile, requiring a nurse around the clock. This keeps her budget tight so she has never been able her to go on vacation, let alone Camp Wonderland.

Joe also uses a wheelchair and has never been to Camp Wonderland. He does not have access to an accessible vehicle, making travel difficult.

We are so thrilled that Chelsea and Joe got a much needed first-time accessible vacation!

Several individuals in the Community Integration program will be prepared for colder weather this winter – they all received clothing such as coats and insulated boots.

Irea, who receives services through ACT’s Personal Assistance program, will live out her dream to take dance classes.

Dennis and Tim are now able to sit at their dinner table on stable, hearty chairs thanks to CoMoGives funds.

Our CoMoGives Fund Committee is currently reviewing other scholarship applications. We will update you on the many more opportunities made possible through our participation in CoMoGives.

On behalf of everyone at ACT, thank you to everyone who participated in CoMoGives – regardless of which non-profit you chose to support.

Every non-profit involved in CoMoGives now has their own Joe and Chelsea story. As a result, our community is a better place because of the graciousness of those that gave.

The CoMoGives campaign runs December 1st through December 31st. Last year ACT raised over $13,000, the campaign as a whole raised $263,929 and involved over 50 non-profits.

We need your help to get us on the leaderboard right out of the gates!

If you can’t make it, no worries – you can give to ACT online through CoMoGives anytime in the month of December.
Why choose ACT?

We follow the hopes and dreams of each person. We listen closely to each individual served, and develop a plan that thoughtfully pursues their interests and aspirations. ACT focuses on the gifts and strengths of each person.

Why we deserve your support:

Because 100 percent of the money we raise goes to the individuals served by ACT. We carefully select critical needs that otherwise would not be funded by other sources.

What we need:

Household items and furnishings, funding to participate in camps and other activities, appropriate clothing for work or every day use, rental subsidy, dental work, house repairs, and transportation costs.

What $50 could buy:

• New household items
• A professional outfit for an interview for a first time job seeker
• Transportation to and from work

What $100 could buy:

• A CPR mannequin to help maintain certification for 350 staff
• Much needed and long overdue dental work
• An individual to afford their rent increase
• An individual to put a down payment on a much needed bed mattress or furniture
• A broken window, or other necessary house repair
• An individual to travel to a town or city or outside of Columbia for the first time.
• Entrance into a sporting event that requires and admission fee

January 2016 Tip from Tara: Bring on the New Year!

In looking forward and thinking about the New Year ahead, I realize that for the first time in a long time I am eager to embrace a new year.

To be honest, 2015 was hard. It was actually one of the most difficult years of my life; full of changes and what seemed to be many ups and downs for me, my family, and many people around me.

I am feeling ready to take on 2016 and hopeful for all of the possibilities that a new year can bring.

While thinking, reflecting, and trying to devise a plan of sorts on how best to approach the New Year, I find myself frequently jotting down quotes I find funny, inspiring or just plain honest. I’ve been making to-do lists and seeking comfort in the idea of having a “plan” for how I’m going to take on the New Year with passion and handle whatever it decides to throw at me.

I thought I would share a few of the quotes, tidbits of information and wise-words from others that I have been writing down in the notebook I keep by my side at all times. Maybe something you read here can inspire, support, and make you laugh, or get you through the day like many have done for me over the past few months.

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.” – Albert Einstein

“If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.” – Maya Angelou

“When nothing goes right…go left” – Anonymous

I encourage all of you to grab a notebook and start jotting down anything you find inspiring, funny or even absolutely ridiculous!

It really is amazing how much a few words from others can make a positive change if you take the time to read them, listen, and reflect on trying to remain positive.

Happy New Year Everybody!

Upcoming Events

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<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 18</td>
<td>ACT offices closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 26</td>
<td>ADA Legislative/Advocacy Lunch &amp; Learn, 12-1pm, City Hall Conference Rooms 1A/1B</td>
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