

interACTION



Alternative Community Training

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Dear Friends of ACT,

March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

It was first declared by President Ronald Reagan on February 26th, 1987. Over a quarter of a century has passed since this proclamation, in which the President stated:

"Americans are becoming increasingly aware that such disabilities need not keep individuals from realizing their full potential in school, at work or at home, as members of their families and of their communities."

And of their communities.

When I welcome new staff to ACT, one of the things I mention is that it has not been hard to get people with disabilities into their communities. We do that every day. We take people on outings, enjoy recreational activities, place them in jobs, and help them live in neighborhoods throughout our community. The challenge is seeing that they become participating members of their communities. It might be a subtle distinction, but I think an important one.

A person can live in his or her community and never really be part of it. We all have friends, neighbors, and various support groups. We join clubs, teams, churches and numerous other groups that put us in contact with others.

What are we doing to help individuals with disabilities become part of their communities?

Well-intentioned community providers (like ACT) develop programs and services to support individuals with disabilities. We hire staff to get people into the community. I wonder though, are the individuals we support becoming part of their community? Don't get me wrong, I think our staff does an amazing job. They work hard, and for not a lot of pay. But we need to provide the individuals we support opportunities to interact with people not paid to be with them.

I'd also like to say something about using respectful language. You know, the people-first language that we've been promoting for a while... a person with a disability, a person who uses a wheelchair, a person with a cognitive or intellectual disability (instead of using the "R" word).

Speaking of the "R" word, the Missouri Association of County Developmental Disabilities Services celebrates disability awareness month every year by issuing posters and bookmarks with a good, positive message for us to share with others. This year the poster talked about using respectful language, by stating "Clean up your language." It shows a hand erasing the "R" word off a chalkboard.

This Association is comprised of professionals in our field for whom I have great respect. They are leaders who provide and promote cutting edge services to individuals with developmental disabilities.

The message printed on their poster and bookmark this year is clear and good. What is questionable is that you can read the "R" word very clearly on this blackboard. I learned at home that this poster may not be right for every setting.

My wife is the principal of an elementary school in Columbia. When approached by the Assistant Superintendent prior to this school year about taking the class of students with very significant disabilities, some with serious medical issues, she said of course, we're a public school so why wouldn't I take all students? She gets it.

When I asked her how many posters she wanted this year, she looked at it, and then said, "None." She told me that her kids don't use that word and she didn't want them to learn it, especially at school. I got the same reaction from my staff at ACT.

Disability awareness month. Sometimes what's important is not only what we say; it's what we don't say.

Until next month,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark".

Mark Hassemer
Executive Director, ACT

www.actservices.org



Mike C. a Big Help in the Warehouse

Here at ACT, we believe that it is important to provide all individuals with the same kinds of opportunities that any one of us would expect to experience, which includes living and working in a community where we belong. The ACT Works Recycling Program is one way in which individuals with disabilities can have the opportunity to work, and where they can also gain valuable skills and training that can translate to other aspects of their lives.

The ACT recycling program focuses on obsolete electronic media, such as VHS tapes, DVDs, CDs, and their cases. As advances in technology render these media formats obsolete, the need for their disposal provides a remarkable employment opportunity for people eager to work.

Mike C. is one individual who has thrived as a worker in our recycling program. When a box of VHS tapes arrives at our facility, individuals like Mike must inventory the

donation and then set to work degaussing, disassembling, and grinding the videotapes into little plastic pieces, which is then sold to manufacturers for use in new products.

For Mike, he seems to have found his niche working in the



Mike C. in the warehouse

warehouse where he is especially fond of disassembly and grinding. Bob Meier, Mike's supervisor, says that he is especially skilled at running the grinder and the tape disassembly machine, which

punches out the unusable screws from the videotapes. But more than that, Mike seems to always go above and beyond what is asked of him; he always leaves his work environment clean, orderly, and neat, and often takes it upon himself to mop the warehouse without being asked. "You can basically turn him loose and he works without supervision", Bob says.

Mike, with his strong work ethic and skillful execution of his job, is but one example of the successes accomplished through the ACT Recycling Program. The ultimate goal of ACT Works is to help individuals like Mike become integrated into the community, gainfully employed, and to receive a regular paycheck. The skills and experience acquired through the recycling program will no doubt open up many more opportunities for the individuals we serve to find their own niche within their community. ■

“Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold.”

— *Helen Keller*

Introducing Our New Career Development Manager, David West!



ACT is excited and proud to introduce our new Manager of Career Development: David West!

As the new Manager of Career Development, part of David's job is to meet with businesses to identify their recruiting needs, coordinate planning conferences with Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, and oversee the caseload of the Career Specialists as they seek to match the job candidates we represent with local businesses.

David says that the best parts of his job are "the looks of happiness when the individuals we support get job offers, when they are able to keep their job and feel successful,

and when the businesses we've helped call and ask 'Do you have any more good people we can hire?'" David adds, "I get to provide a service where everybody wins."

Providing service is nothing new to David, who comes to us with a very unique background.

David helped create an organization called International Health Partners in Tanzania, where he oversaw a team who managed to build leprosy and TB wards, an ICU and ER, administrative buildings, a windmill to bring up water from the river, and even a farm on the hospital land to be more self-sustaining. David continues to be involved as a member of the organization's board of directors.

David says that ACT's vision of

a community where everyone belongs, is included, participates, and is accepted aligns very well with his own beliefs. As the new Career Development Manager, David joins a dedicated team of people devoted to providing the individuals we support the opportunity to realize their career goals.

Making a positive difference in peoples' lives and trying to leave things a little better than how he found them are what keeps David going every day. "I don't have to go to work, I get to go to work," David says. "Each day brings a new set of challenges as unique as each business, or each person, we work with." ■

Mataio Makes Strides in Our BDS Program



One of the many services that ACT provides to individuals in our community is Behavioral Development

Services (BDS). This program emphasizes Positive Behavior Support to assist individuals and families to increase positive interactions and relationships with

others while decreasing negative interactions. In this capacity, ACT has served both adults and children as young as 4 years old.

One individual who has made tremendous progress in our BDS program is Mataio, a 6 year old boy from Columbia, who can best be described as very active, energetic, and absolutely full of life.

He likes to play video games and

board games with his brother and sister, and especially loves being outside, where he can play basketball with his neighbors.

For many individuals like Mataio, the secret to leading a fulfilling life and becoming a participating member of the community is to learn how to cope with many of the stresses, pressures, and dangers of

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day to day living that many of us take for granted. The BDS program helps individuals to meet these challenges by working on developing better social skills, understanding emotions, coping with feelings of anxiety or anger, and safety awareness skills.

Once a need for BDS services is identified, our Behavior Consultants meet with families for an initial observation in their home, focusing on how a family interacts with each other and defining what behaviors can be improved and which can be cultivated.

Goals are then established and strategies are implemented to accomplish these goals.

Nicole Thomason, a member of our BDS team who has been working with Mataio since July of last year, says that he has made



tremendous progress in the short time that she has been seeing him. Just like any active, outdoors loving 6 year old, safety awareness has been an important part of Mataio's skill development. Nicole assists Mataio's family by teaching and developing these skills through the use of various visual supports so that he better understands how to be safe at the store with his mom, while riding in a car or bus, or when crossing the street. In addition, Nicole developed a visual schedule for the family that helps to provide Mataio with

more structure at home, which encourages positive behaviors such as completing homework, helping with dinner, and caring for pets.

Of course, strong family support is crucial to ensure an individual's success, and we work closely with Mataio's family to implement positive strategies and steps to develop appropriate replacement behaviors and increase positive interactions and skills. Since starting to work with Mataio and his family last year, Nicole says Mataio has made a lot of progress. He now approaches potentially stressful situations with less anxiety and less anger, and Mataio has learned to better communicate with his family.

Mataio's progress is but one example of the successes of the BDS program. By fostering positive interactions and relationships with others and working with families to learn proactive strategies to better support challenging behaviors, the BDS program helps individuals to become part of an inclusive community where they can belong, participate, and be accepted. ■

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

— Christopher Reeve

Fun Activities Plentiful in Community Integration Program

The ACT Community Integration Program provides activities that emphasize communication, recreation, self-help, personal hygiene, and community participation. The program helps the individuals we serve to get out into their community and to engage in meaningful, life enhancing activities.

Thanks to the Community Integration team, there are always a variety of fun activities going on in the program. Sheila Robertson, our new Activities Director, has kept very busy making contacts within the community to set up some of these ongoing activities and programs at area attractions. These have included regular adapted story time at various community libraries, weekly manicures at a salon, and physical sports activities at the YMCA and Armory Building. This month, the massive piles of snow outside led to an in-house

activity that included bringing the snow indoors to explore. The month of March also brought St. Patrick's Day parties to celebrate the luck of the Irish, plenty of painting and gluing in arts & crafts, and even a scavenger hunt for treasure.



...and a Mardi Gras Party!

Some groups also went to see the live TRYPS performance of Beauty and the Beast, take a tour of the KOMU TV station, and to have pizza at a local restaurant.

Sheila has also been building relationships with local senior

citizen venues, which should open the door for some new fun activities very soon.

While everyone has been keeping busy and enjoying these indoor activities, the official start of spring has everyone eager to get outside. "We are looking forward to warmer weather, to be outdoors more," Sheila says.

The Community Integration team works very hard to keep all of these fun activities going to ensure that the individuals we serve have the opportunity to have fun, meaningful, life enhancing experiences by becoming a participating member of the community.

"I believe ALL individuals need to have meaning in their lives and I am so excited to help provide those opportunities for them," Sheila says. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

April is Autism Awareness Month!

April 2 - World Autism Awareness Day

April 13 - Ella's Hope Walk/Run

April 27 - Bowling for Autism

April 9 - Disability Rights Legislative Day

April 19-20 - Thompson Center Autism Intervention Conference

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

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 <http://www.actservices.org>

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