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Dear Friends of ACT,

On the occasion of his son's 40th birthday, columnist George Will recently published another commentary on his son Jonathon's life, which is notable for many reasons, possibly the least of which is Down Syndrome, a chromosomal defect that left Jon with an intellectual deficit as well as other physical challenges.

Please read it. Will portrays his son as a man who has exceeded by far the prospects widely held in 1972 when Jon's life expectancy was pegged at 20 years.

Jon avoided a fate most common for individuals with his diagnosis at the time, institutionalization.

When I was beginning my career in the 1970's, Missouri institutionalized over two thousand individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. Today, there are probably only 500 in State institutions. And these numbers are dwindling.

To our credit, we've come a long way.

In many ways, this journey parallels those of other disenfranchised people who historically have been set aside and not allowed to participate with fairness and equality.

This journey toward belonging, inclusion and acceptance isn't over yet. We need to keep working, and stay diligent.

Will's provocative piece made me stop and take stock again of where we've been. And it inspired me, too, to re-imagine what's possible for us and the individuals we support.

Until next month,

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

Mark Hassemer
Executive Director, ACT

www.actservices.org



ACT Career Services Assists Two with Dietary Aid Jobs at the Bluffs



Stacy, and The Bluffs Food Services Director, Joyce Fenner

“I am happy about my job. I like all of the people I work with. Yes, I like my job, because it’s fun to work with everybody. I enjoy working.”

Those are the words of Stacy, who along with her co-worker, Brenda, began working last fall at The Bluffs, a not-for-profit skilled nursing facility in Columbia. Stacy continually expresses her love for her job and the people she works with.

Congratulations to these employees, both of whom now work as dietary aides.

In their new positions they work closely with The Bluffs Food Services Director, Joyce Fenner.

Ms. Fenner played a key role in making these important connections between employer and employee.

Fenner worked closely with ACT Career Services Program Supervisor Fontella Jackmon-Jones to document and describe the job responsibilities

and tasks, the working environment, the pace and level of autonomy, the skills needed, and the individual characteristics of successful employees in these jobs. This analysis is key to ACT Career Services’ success in placing employees.

ACT Career Services works with a variety of job seekers to achieve their employment goals, while assisting a broad spectrum of local employers with their recruitment and retention needs. The personalized services job seekers and employers receive through ACT Career Services pays rich rewards for businesses and employees alike.

Stacy isn’t alone in viewing her work as a success. Ms. Fenner agrees: “I am very pleased with the talent that ACT brought to The Bluffs Food Services Department. The training and support provided by ACT staff is above and beyond my expectations. We definitely have formed a long

lasting relationship with this organization.”

That long and lasting relationship is one that extends beyond the Food Services Department. The Bluffs has been a strong community partner with ACT Career Services for many years. “We’ve successfully placed several job seekers at the Bluffs in different departments over the years,” said John Savage, ACT’s Director of Employment Services. “One individual has been working at the Bluffs for more than five years.”

Meeting the recruitment needs of local employers depends on more than the understanding and guidance of ACT Career Services. The desire, commitment and preferences of the job-seeker are essential.

Brenda remarked, “I had a good experience working with ACT. But I never thought I would get back to work. I came back to the employment world and it made me stronger.”

“I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.”

— Booker T. Washington

Yearlong Journey to a New Home Succeeds for Community Living Program

Moving from one home to the next can be a stressful transition. In a college town like Columbia, there's a steady flux of students moving into and out of properties from one semester to the next. Finding the right house can be an especially daunting prospect.

Three individuals in Briarwood House, Kelly, Mike and Seth, began their journey to find their perfect house over a year ago, along with their house supervisor, Luke Abshier.

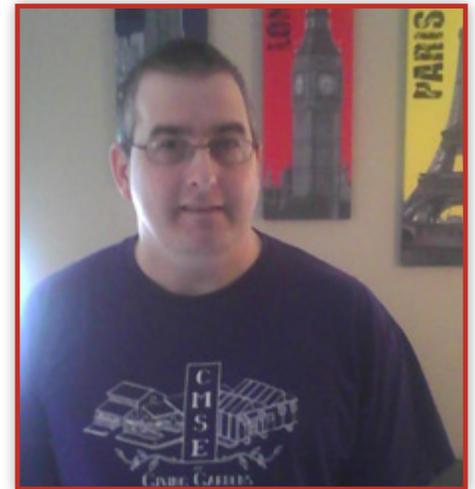
Briarwood had been a comfortable home, but after 5 years, the guys were ready to move on. They had a wish list of what they wanted in an ideal house. They were hoping for large bedrooms, a comfy main living area, a new kitchen, a nice outside area for entertaining, and a space suitable for their live-in staff, Lolita. And of course, it had to be in a safe neighborhood and be affordable.

The journey to their dream house was

not without a few twists and turns. Being part of a lease, they wanted to be good tenants, and give appropriate notice. And they just couldn't get timelines to fall into place at the beginning.

Kelly, Mike and Seth told the supervisor of the home what they were looking for, and they looked. They looked every time there was an opportunity. They just didn't find the house that met all of their needs before their current lease expired. Then they were thwarted by the big blizzard in 2011. So they decided to wait another year and try again.

It wasn't long before it was time to start the search again. "I put hundreds of miles on my car driving around Columbia, trying to find just the right home to rent. Everywhere I went, I looked for a place that could meet their needs. I contacted dozens of rental agents in the process," said Luke.



Mike

The guys did their share of searching too. Anytime they drove by a house they liked, they would bring the flyer to the office and show their program manager, Carrie Griffith.

"ACT has been fortunate to work with some great investors in the past, who were interested in purchasing a home and then renting it to the individuals we support. So we were always hopeful that someone would be looking to make that type of investment; but it wasn't happening. But the guys didn't give up, they kept looking 'til they found a rental everyone liked," said Griffith.

This February, a full year from the beginning of their search, they were able to move into their new home on Doris.

Their home was a great find. It had everything they were hoping for, and even some extras like built in bookshelves for Kelly's games and movies.



Seth and Lolita

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The landlord was very friendly and easy to work with. They negotiated an affordable rent, made a few modifications to ensure privacy for the live-in staff and even allowed everyone to move in five days early—perfect for the new eager tenants!

Even though the process was a challenging one, the results have been rewarding. Even the weather gave Kelly, Mike and Seth a break on the day of their house-warming barbecue. It rained all day, except from 3:00-5:00 pm, the exact time of the party!

After such a long journey, the newest neighbors on Doris were happy to show everyone how they settled in and added the little touches that made a house into their home. And at the end of a long search everyone was happy to finally be home.

Congratulations to all. ■

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Thank you!

Reducing Underemployment with Information, Through ACT Career Services

Work is significant. It demonstrates clearly that everyone is important. Work helps bring meaning to life. That's why much of what we do at ACT touches on work, making a positive contribution.

But here's a reality for individuals with disabilities: Fear Undermines Employment. Often, this fear is based on misunderstanding about how work impacts the benefits individuals receive.

These benefits include Medicaid, Social Security, Housing Subsidy, Medicare, and others. Some are concerned that if they work, or if they work "too much," they'll lose a benefit they rely on to help them maintain their level of independence.

While ACT's Career Services has always provided job seekers and others with information and encouragement about benefits, the ins and outs of Federal, State and local programs and regulations are complex and always changing.

The fact is, Social Security has several work incentives, special rules that assist individuals with disabilities with going to work. But the understanding and communication of those work incentives is essential to maximize an individual's opportunities.



"There's so much confusion," says Jessica McNally, Program Manager for ACT Career Services. "It seems like you can ask

five different people a question about the impact of work on benefits and get five different answers."

That's why we're excited that Jessica is just weeks away from completing the training (sponsored by the Missouri Department of Mental Health) required to become a Benefits Planning Specialist.

Along with classroom training, Jessica is completing on-line

"If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain as he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought and could be."

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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course work, and doing homework assignments. These will be followed by case studies, field work, competency based assessments and periodic continuing education (usually a monthly webinar provided by the University of Missouri Disability Policy and Studies Office).

Jessica says, "This training opportunity represents a new level of services for ACT. Not only am I gaining the important knowledge and information needed to assist individuals, I'm establishing key relationships with people in the local Social Security office."

"I'm particularly excited about what I see is a great opportunity to do pre-planning with individuals who are new to ACT. We will be able to help individuals early on see that work is advantageous—it opens a lot of doors. This new level of service, I believe, will help people choose work," said Jessica.

Jessica is on schedule to finish her field work at the end of June. ■

Community Integration's Culture Club Explores Diverse Ways of Life, Past & Present



Cooking and crafting are common threads that run through

the activities of Culture Club, a part of ACT's Community Integration Program. This group, usually with four or five individuals participating, meets all day on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Their goal is to explore and experience a diverse spectrum of cultures and cultural features. Individuals learn about historical and contemporary practices of culture groups they may be unfamiliar with.

Everyone's life is enriched and broadened when he or she gets to know others who think, live or express themselves differently.

This group maintains an active schedule. Recent activities included:

- observing Black History Month

by touring Civil War sites near the Missouri Capitol, cooking and eating soul food, and touring the Barton Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, featuring an installation on black women in art;

- inspired by the jewelry at Best of the West in Columbia, individuals selected clasps and beads from Michael's and created their own Native America-inspired necklaces and pendants;

- after a presentation from a native Iranian, individuals shopped at Global Market and then prepared middle-Eastern snacks;

- Greece is in the news so much these days, so individuals researched Greek foods and recipes, then assembled what they needed and cooked and ate Greek wraps;

- participated in a private guided tour of MU's Museum of Anthropology.

Culture Club, led by Rachel Hidborg, has been active for one year.

Activities offered are generated by the ideas and preferences communicated in monthly team meetings. The individuals ACT serves continue to demand the experiences Culture Club offers as they expand their horizons and deepen their involvement in the mid-Missouri community, and beyond. ■



UPCOMING EVENTS

May 23 - Autism Training for Staff at the Training Center.

May 23 - People 1st Language/Accessibility Training for Staff at the Training Center.

May 23 - Missouri Quality Outcomes Training for Staff at the Training Center.

May 24 - Community Integration Trip to Six Flags.

May 28 - ACT facility-based programs closed for Memorial Day Holiday.

May 29-June 1 - Special Olympics Missouri.

June 4 - Positive Behavior Support at the Training Center.

June 4 - Abuse/Neglect Prevention at the Training Center.

June 5 - Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Refresher at the Training Center.

June 6 - CPR Refresher at the Training Center.

June 6 - First Aid Refresher at the Training Center.

June 6 - CPR Challenge at the Training Center.

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