Dear Friends of ACT,

If I don’t pay close attention, I can slip into a pattern of talking about employment for persons with disabilities only in October. October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. It serves as a useful reminder to us all of just how critical jobs are for people with disabilities.

Work matters. It matters for everyone. It’s powerful. It lets people more fully experience their inherent human dignity. It reduces people’s reliance on others, while at the same time providing a unique opportunity to establish vibrant relationships with people who aren’t family. Like a rising tide, inclusive work elevates us all.

We at ACT try to tell this story wherever we go, whenever we can.

A few weeks ago, Jessica Mahon (ACT’s Director of Employment Services) and I met with a couple of Human Resources officials at the University of Missouri. We sat with Tim McIntosh, Senior Human Resources Manager, a young man in a very significant position, one who can literally influence the composition of the work force at the University. He was able to tell us the story—the one we usually carry to others. He clearly knew and was able to articulate the benefits of developing and maintaining an inclusive work force.

Tim knew the hard facts, the business case, for including people with disabilities in the workforce. It saves money. It reduces turnover, and more.

He knew that inclusion positively impacts the richness of the work environment by introducing a level of diversity that benefits people even at a place as diverse as the University of Missouri, which attracts students and faculty from all over the world.

Tim started immediately bringing up ideas of ways that the University could cooperate with ACT to find employment for the job seekers we support. But he wasn’t talking about a do-gooder pretense that only looks good in an annual social responsibility report. He was talking about the people we serve meeting real employment needs on campus.

We left that meeting with a feeling of excitement, knowing that one more employer, like others we know in the Columbia community, gets what we’ve been saying. When these folks discover themselves with an employment need, they pick up the phone and call ACT.

It is encouraging to know that, even though our job is not done, more and more are coming to an understanding of the value of inclusion. And they’re doing something about it. They’re hiring.

We’ve recognized that advocates like us aren’t always the best ones to carry the message to employers who haven’t heard about the benefits of inclusion. People in the business community are the ones best equipped to spread the message to other employers.

I’m excited that right now, as a result of funding we received for the Show Me Careers Grant, a video is in development that features business people in our community talking about the direct benefits to their companies that come from employing people with disabilities.

We’re going to premier this video at the September meeting of the Columbia Chamber of Commerce, a meeting that typically has over 400 business people in attendance. I think it will be a great start to an effort
I expect to bear fruit in Columbia and mid-Missouri.

Join me in anticipating the positive impacts of this event and in supporting local businesses as they speak out about how inclusive employment practices have benefitted them.

Until next month,
Mark

As Graduation Nears, STEP Interns Move Toward Community Employment

If you walked through Boone Hospital during the 2015 spring semester, chances are you ran into one of six hardworking STEP students.

STEP (Seamless Transition through Enhanced Partnership) is a transition service program that benefits participating students by giving them real work experience that prepares them for employment in the community.

Isaac is responsible for, among other things, making sure wheelchairs, carts, and beds are distributed appropriately throughout the hospital center. It’s a job that never ends. He takes great pride in making sure it’s done right.

Thomas, aka Dish Ninja, is hard at work on the Dish Line. He works fast and gets the job done. His coworkers have learned to appreciate his speedy contribution, because once the work is done, everyone gets to leave. Dish Ninja works so quickly, everyone on the Dish Line has become accustomed to knocking off early.

Anthony is in Central Services. His task is vital to the safety and well-being of patients. He sterilizes and seals surgical instruments, and delivers instruments and items to the Operating Room storage area.

You can find Eli cleaning just about everything…linens, the cafeteria, restrooms, and lounges.

Jay works hard cleaning bathrooms and maintaining waste receptacles. For Jay this is the perfect job – he loves to clean!

Jesse stocked clean linens and pulled soiled linens in a variety of departments while at Boone. We are please to announce that Jesse has accepted and recently started a new job in the community.

These roles may seem to be behind the scenes, but they are vital to hospital operations. The work these STEP interns do has not gone unnoticed.

One of the doctors at Boone Hospital told students she thought of them as hospital staff because of their outstanding performance, said Barb Wright, STEP Career Specialist from ACT.

But the important work they’re doing will soon come to an end. On May 12 these six students will graduate from STEP. That day will mark the completion of three very successful years for the program.

STEP is a partnership between Boone Hospital, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Boone County Family Resources (BCFR), Central Missouri Regional Office (CMRO), Columbia Public Schools (CPS), and ACT.

Wright makes sure the students are well versed in the hospital’s culture.

Bill De Lima, Boone Hospital’s Human Resources Business Partner, is being generous when he says “ACT, BCFR, CPS, CMRO, and VR do all of the heavy lifting to make this program run as smoothly as it does. Boone Hospital is proud of this program and I am personally glad to be a part of it.”

Even as this year’s program comes to an end, the partners are looking forward. STEP will continue to evolve.

Next year, interns will spend their time in many different departments. This will enable them to acquire a broader range of skills that they could bring to a future job in the community.

An additional benefit is that other departments
will be exposed to STEP interns and hopefully gain interest in participating in STEP in the future.

Next year will also bring another first—the inclusion of a student intern who uses a wheelchair. “We are excited to explore this opportunity to ensure Boone Hospital is a more inclusive workplace,” De Lima said.

As the spring semester comes to a close, students are working hard developing and practicing interviewing skills with Wright from ACT, CPS Instructor Karen Morgan, and VR Counselor Justin Lucas. They are also searching for jobs and developing their resumes.

At least one more intern will begin working in the community before graduating from their respective high schools on May 22 and 23, while others have interviews pending.

This experience on their resumes will undoubtedly make them more attractive candidates for employment. •

Individuals in ACT’s Community Integration Program Benefit from MU’s Service Learning Students

ACT’s Community Integration (CI) program is fortunate to participate a willing partner in the University of Missouri’s Service Learning program. Each semester we get to work with a group of energetic students who are eager to volunteer.

MU students in a variety of degree programs and majors are required to complete 35-50 hours of service work at a non-profit of their choice.

Activities Coordinator Kristin Cummins does not have a hard time finding things for the volunteers to do. They help with researching activities to be done in the program areas, assisting in carrying out these activities, and planning themed parties.

“The students are always willing to go where they can help out the most.” Cummins says. “The smiles on students’ faces show they are gaining rewarding experience.”

Molly Scharnhorst, a junior majoring in Health Sciences, with a minor in Leadership and Public Services, plans to work for a not-for-profit organization that involves a lot of hands on interaction.

“I have a passion for working with individuals with disabilities and helping impact their lives as much as I can,” Scharnhorst says.

She spends four hours a week at ACT as the Activities Director Assistant, assisting the Activities Coordinator. She assists helps with arts and crafts, cooking club, hosting parties, playing games, and researching new and fun activities individuals can do while they are at ACT.

Scharnhorst continues, “I’ve made some friends from working here! Each week I look forward to seeing everyone!”

Paige Hildebrant, a senior majoring in Psychology, with a minor in Human Development and Family Studies, is at ACT three hours each week.

Hildebrant assists Cummins with planning creative and fun activities in the program areas for the following week. She also works one-on-one with individuals, which she really enjoys.

“I have truly gained an appreciation for programs like CI and the staff who dedicate their time to making a positive impact on these individuals’ lives,” Hildebrant states.

She is grateful for this experience not only because she knows it will help her in the future, but because she has gained a new understanding of people with disabilities.

Cummins is thrilled about working with these wonderful women. “It’s been a great experience having students from MU come to serve. It’s gratifying to see an individual get excited when he or she sees the students. It’s a good indicator that the students are really impacting individuals in CI who receive services.” •
Changes Bring Continued Enhancement to Job Preparation Services and ACT Recycling

The ACT Recycling work floor looks much different now than it did one month ago. While it may look more appealing, the changes were not made to improve aesthetics.

ACT Recycling Business Operations Supervisor, Paul Heywood, looked at the recycling workflow and resulting production and determined a change was needed to maximize efficiencies.

Employees from ACT Recycling and Job Preparation Services volunteered to work over a weekend to reorganize the space.

Prior to the reconfiguration, everyone worked at a large table in the middle of the work floor, regardless of the task he or she was completing.

Now the large table is gone. Three new workstations are in place, each set up for a particular task. The materials needed for that task are organized around each station to maximize efficiency.

Trainees who are assigned to break down VHS tapes are now stationed at the disassembly workstation, which is located next to the VHS tape bin.

“Not only has recycling production improved as a result of these changes, we are seeing a positive impact on the overall skill development of the individuals receiving job preparation services,” says Jessica Mahon, Director of Employment Services.

Many changes are happening in ACT Career Services (ACS). They are not just rearrangements of the physical space. (See the March newsletter)

Another aspect of the program that has changed is the time in which the recycling business operates. Shifts are more streamlined to ensure ACT’s recycling business operates in a way that truly allows trainees to learn the expectations of their future employers.

Ongoing evaluation and planning are an integral part of the operation of all ACT services. These changes are occurring to further improve the services to individuals in the program as they work on reaching their personal employment goals.

Another change is the evolution of staff from the role of Production Mentor to Employment Training Specialist (ETS). Now, in addition to providing group job preparation services, ETSs also provide on-one-one training for individuals in various settings.

The skills each individual needs to master and each individual’s learning style dictate the training methods used by the ETS and the location where service is provided. All services are tailored to each individual.

All of these changes are important. We are confident they will lead to greater success and the achievement of more employment goals.

The new set up.

Another aspect of the program that has changed is the time in which services are offered. Shifts have changed to reflect typical business hours individuals will experience when employed in the community.

All of these changes are important. We are confident they will lead to greater success and the achievement of more employment goals.

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

— CHRISTOPHER REEVE
Part II of Community Living Spring Moving is Complete

Spring moving part II is over and done in Community Living (CL)! Last month four women in the CL moved into new houses. (See last month’s newsletter.) This month, four men in CL have new places to call their homes.

Patrick and Chris had a lease that was coming to an end. That opened the door to a search for something else—something better, and more spacious.

Along with a little help from TLC Moving CL Program Manager Terri Kruger, CL Supervisor Pam Adams, family, and ACT staff, Chris and Patrick moved into their beautiful new bachelor pad in March.

“I think everything about the new house is their favorite thing right now. It is such a nicer place than where they were,” says Adams.

The only drawback for the two men is the expectation that they do their own laundry. In the other house, they didn’t have a washer and dryer. That meant staff did the deed. Times have changed.

“I really like my new home,” Patrick says as he kicks back on his sofa. “It’s really nice.”

Staff seem to be happy with their new workplace as well. “I like their new home a lot. It’s easier for the guys to keep clean, because it’s more spacious,” says Direct Support Professional, Sigourney Anderson.

Change isn’t as easy for some. For Chris this is definitely the case. But now that he has settled in, the new place is home.

Blake and Casey also moved. They’re now in a wonderful new home just blocks away from where they started.

Their previous landlord wanted to put their home on the market. Blake and Casey were not interested in a long-term housing commitment, so Supervisor Lynette Austin got in contact with Realtor Andy Boyles. He gladly helped them find a great new place to call home.

“After hearing about CI, I was immediately on board. My wife and I feel extremely grateful to have found such a great program to be a part of,” Boyles says.

It was an “all-in” effort to move these guys as well. Casey and Blake worked hard, along with staff and Austin, from the beginning until every last item was unpacked.

The two were excited about moving into a new space. And they were equally thrilled to hit the stores to buy some new decorations. Now the place is their own.

But they aren’t done yet. “We have a lot of gardening to do!” Austin exclaims. She has visions of giving the new house more curb appeal. And working in the yard is something Blake and Casey enjoy.

Both houses are tucked in mature, cozy neighborhoods. Now, all four men have shaded, beautiful yards to call their own (and spruce up).

Good luck, guys. •

“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
May 2015 Tip from Tara: Dear Friend

Recently I’ve had two close friends reach out to me asking for advice because their child is waiting to have or is heading into an evaluation. Somewhere along their journey a teacher, doctor, or person in their life (including themselves) has expressed potential concerns about their child.

For many in this situation it is the beginning of a period of unknown. A period of time that is filled with worry and second-guessing.

I have often thought about how different things might have been for me when my son received his diagnosis if the person I am now could have provided the person I was then a little insight.

Here is what I would say:

Dear Friend,

Today is going to be hard. It may just prove to be one of the hardest days of your life. But you will make it through no matter what the outcome. There are a few things I would like you to remember today, tomorrow, and every day moving forward.

You are right to be here today. I know there is a part of you that wants to run screaming from the building, but don’t. If you have a concern, it is best to just find out. Living with uncertainty is exhausting. Waiting, living in denial, or doing nothing isn’t going to help anybody, including you.

A medical diagnosis indicating a disability is not the end of the world as you know it. There may be a few days ahead that feel like it is but I promise you it is not.

Parenting is hard and presents challenges no matter who you are. Receiving a diagnosis today might not make your journey any easier. It might not be what you were planning. But it is parenting just the same.

One of the most important things to remember today is to remember that you are leaving today with the exact same child that you came into the building with, no matter what the doctor tells you.

Take a deep breath, relax, and remember all of the amazing gifts and talents that are waiting to come to life within your child. Today is the first step of learning to uncover all of your child’s abilities and your own.

Sincerely,

A friend who understands and is pulling for you

ADA Celebrates 25 Years

The Americans with Disabilities ACT celebrates its 25th anniversary this year!

Area agencies have come together for this important milestone to provide informative and fun events throughout the year.

The actual anniversary is on July 25th. A fun, community event will be held in Columbia, MO. More details are soon to come in our newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ pages.

Support ACT by shopping Gerbes, Schnucks, and Amazon

You can now donate to ACT by shopping at Gerbes, Schnucks, and AmazonSmile!

For Gerbes and Schnucks, simply apply for their community/rewards program, pick ACT as your designated charity, and shop away!

For AmazonSmile, create an account, pick ACT as your charity, and again, shop away!

Happy Birthday ACT

ACT turns 40 this year! The big event will be SATURDAY, AUGUST 8TH at Tolton High School!

We are pleased to announce we will be partnering with the CoMo Derby Dames for a unique, fun, and interactive event.

We cannot wait to CELEBRATE with Columbia!

Stay connected with ACT to be a part of the celebration, see fun Throwback photos, and more! We will use the hashtag #ACTTurns40.
Bowling for Autism

The annual Bowling for Autism Tournament, benefiting Easter Seals Midwest Autism Services, was Saturday, April 25. ACT showed their support by sponsoring a lane and having three teams in the tournament.

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

— Helen Keller

Upcoming Events

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<td>May 26</td>
<td>12p – 1p</td>
<td>Website Accessibility - Section 508, at City Hall in the Community Room, RSVP now</td>
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<td>ACT 40th event with the CoMo Derby Dames at Tolton High School</td>
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