Dear Friends of ACT,

I wrote in this Newsletter in August that ACT staff were preparing diligently for our CARF accreditation survey.

Accreditation is a big deal for ACT:

• It gives us confidence that independent third-party reviewers see evidence we’re doing the good job that we think we’re doing.
• It lets us bypass the Department of Mental Health licensure process.
• It’s a requirement for funding from Vocational Rehabilitation.
• We get great insight and consultative advice from our reviewing peers who show us what we can do differently to meet or exceed internationally recognized standards.

I promised I’d let you know the results.

I am happy to report that we received three-year accreditation once again.

Rather than try to paraphrase the results, here are some quotes directly from the surveyor’s report:

“ACT has strengths in many areas...
• Governance is strong
• Management team has solid competencies
• Staff members were observed displaying compassion, patience, and pride
• Excellent training and education program
• Strong and far-reaching strategic plan
• Health and safety is a priority
• Technologically savvy
• Outcomes process is complex, yet meaningful

One of our values as an organization is to celebrate successes.

I hope you'll take a moment today to celebrate with us this tremendous acknowledgement of the work, dedication, vision, and execution of ACT’s staff, managers, and Board of Directors.

The people we serve are being served well. They deserve it.

Until next month,

Mark

Continued on page 2
Cody Takes off From Utah for the Flight of His Life

Sometimes, it’s who you know. Your friends make something possible that you couldn’t imagine ever happening.

Imagine this. Cody, along with pilot Chris Santacroce, flew off of a mountain in Utah and glided while his friend, Tom Dresner, flew a paraglider alongside them. Once was not enough. They made three separate flights together in side-by-side formation.

Dresner is a former Community Integration (CI) Supervisor. He regularly flies his powered paraglider, taking off from his own front yard. During his five years of flying never once did he think it would impact someone’s life like it has Cody’s.

Cody, who has cerebral palsy, participates in ACT’s Community Integration (CI) program. He and Dresner became friends. That friendship continues today, even though Dresner no longer works at ACT.

The idea for the Utah flight was inspired by Cody’s reaction one evening when Cody watched Dresner take off from his yard. It was “a perfect night for flying” and the perfect night to conceive of an adventure that would come true for Cody and Tom in late-August, 2014.

“I couldn’t take him up that night because you have to run to take off,” Dresner explains. For Cody, running isn’t an option.

But the solution rested in the mountains and some different equipment. In mountainous areas, conditions are better to use other types of gliders that don’t require running or an engine and allow for easier tandem flying.

“He was absolutely ready to go,” Dresner explains when asked if Cody was at all hesitant about the experience. “I think it absolutely was the time of his life. Laughter and happiness were the constant in the entire trip,” Dresner says. The pair even got to see a trained hawk that returns to its handler on command.

Surprisingly, Dresner was reimbursed for most of the trip by a non-profit organization called Project Airtime. Members raised money to support the cause after they learned of the planned adventure.

“It was just awesome! [Cody] would go again today if he could,” said Dresner.

Thanks to Dresner and others who see beyond obstacles and make seemingly impossible dreams a reality. Cody, a man who requires assistance to stand, was given wings to fly!

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

— Helen Keller
ACT Works Sees Increased Approval for Individuals to enter into Program

It’s been a long time coming, but ACT Works is once again receiving approval for referrals into the program. AW recently welcomed Robert and William to the time-limited (two-year maximum) job preparation program.

Robert started October 1st and William, “Bill”, right after Labor Day. Both are doing well and are excited about working.

“I love having a job and making money. I want to buy a new cell phone once I have enough saved,” Robert says.

Bill echoes Robert’s enthusiasm, “I like everything about ACT Works. I like having money!”

Both are also eager to get a job in the community. Robert, who has a very outgoing personality, wants to work at WalMart. Bill, who loves the outdoors, has his sights set on landscaping.

In addition to Robert and Bill, Brittany and Patrick also recently received good news from CMRO. Brittany, who already worked in the program three hours every day, can now work six. Patrick now works three hours a day in AW. Both were allowed to transfer their time from Community Integration to AW.

Three more individuals recently received approval as well and will start job preparation in the coming months. Other individuals have had requests submitted to the regional office, and AW eagerly awaits their approval.

For now, we are thrilled to have Robert and Bill on the work floor. And we’re glad three more job-seeking individuals will soon be on board. We look forward to seeing more people working in the community because of these opportunities. ●

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

“ It means people on crutches and in a wheelchair can do anything.”
Joey Offers His Little Sister’s Hand in Marriage

There was not a dry eye in the house on August 24th as Joey gave his baby sister Erica Fahrner in marriage. Joey receives services in ACT’s Community Living and Community Integration programs.

This was an emotional time in the life of Joey’s family because his dad passed just a few years ago. Joey stepped up and took on this important task.

“It was special for Joey to be able to walk me all the way down the aisle,” Fahrner says.

Joey’s family–mom Marie, sister Nikki, and Erica–are close. Erica’s bond with Joey is so great, it inspired her to go into Occupational Therapy for her career. She was thrilled to have both her siblings be a part of her big day. Nikki was a bridesmaid.

The whole family was overwhelmed by Joey’s flawless performance.

Joey, who has epilepsy, did a great job. As soon as the doors opened for the bride’s entrance, Joey was ready with a big smile. Happily, he was able to play this important role without a single seizure.

“And he looked so handsome!” gushed Fahrner. Joey wore a suit for the occasion.

In perfect Joey style, he chimed in as the couple said their vows.

“This was very appropriate. Joey was letting everyone know he was there,” says Larry Barnette, Community Living Supervisor. Barnette has worked with Joey for 24 years.

Barnette is a modest man. He doesn’t seek credit. But he was the man behind the scenes, ensuring Joey’s trip down the aisle, and everything that led up to it, was a success. Joey’s family was well aware of his presence.

Larry, Joey, and Fahrner getting ready for the big moment.

“He was by him the whole time,” said Fahrner. “My family is grateful for Larry and everything he does for Joey.” He was even Joey’s plus one at the reception.

“It was a perfect wedding!” Fahrner exclaims. “I want a redo–I have already put my dress on again to take me back to that day!” ●
ACT Welcomes Linda & Hilary

Linda Varmette recently joined the Community Integration team! She has both BS and MS degrees in Education, as well as experience in special education and vocational education. Varmette previously worked for the State of MO-Division of Youth Services - working with at-risk youth in a residential facility.

She has spent the majority of her career overseas, teaching in Indonesia and Botswana.

She loves to travel - she has been on every continent except Antarctica.

Aside from travel and teaching, Varmette has also owned her own coffee shop (she apparently makes a mean Pumpkin Spice Latte!). Her hobbies are garage-saling and interior decorating. Her modest bucket list includes walking all the places Jesus did, zip-lining, hot air ballooning in Morocco, sky diving, and attending a Kentucky Derby.

ACT Career Services is proud to announce Hilary Mueller as a part-time career specialist. She comes to ACT with lots of managerial experience and has also volunteered for many agencies in the human services field, such as the VA and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Mueller will soon graduate from MU with a double major in Psychology and Communications and a minor in Social Justice. She will then apply for the Master's in Social Work program at Mizzou next fall.

Mueller is from Sheboygan, Wisconsin, is an avid reader, and teaches/attends classes at Muse Pole Fitness.

LuJuana, Balancing Work, School, and Parenting, Gets a Promotion

You know you're doing something right when you get a promotion within weeks of starting a new job.

That is what happened to LuJuana after working at Goodcents Deli Fresh Subs for just two weeks.

LuJuana began receiving services from ACT Career Services (ACS) in January, after being out of the workforce for an extended period.

“[The ACS employees] motivated me to get out there and search for a career,” LuJuana states.

Combine that motivation with the savvy tips ACS Career Development Manager David West gave her to use during the interview process, and she had a job just a month later as a crewmember at Goodcents.

On her first day, as West suggested, she asked her manager if there were any opportunities for advancement. He said yes, and she was promoted the following week to shift manager.

“I must have made a good impression,” quips LuJuana. “And I am still there!”

West states, “I am not surprised by LuJuana’s success. She is a person who does what she says she will do, follows through, and takes charge of her own life.”

For LuJuana, it is not just a job. She enjoys her work and the people too, her coworkers. “The environment makes me want to stick around,” LuJuana says.

LuJuana gives a lot of credit to the management team at Goodcents. Communication is a top priority. They make the staff feel comfortable approaching them with issues, which is crucial to LuJuana’s success. “I have great managers!” LuJuana states.

To say that LuJuana is satisfied with her job is an understatement. “Oh my gosh! To know that my bills are paid is a big relief. I love working.”

Besides working hard at the sandwich shop, LuJuana hopes to continue pursuing her business degree. She is also busy being the mother to a two-year old daughter.

LuJuana says, “It’s hard to balance school, a 2-year old, and a career, but I enjoy getting up and working alongside my coworkers. Once I’m on the job, I get in the groove and forget about my stresses.”
Tip from Tara: We Don’t Have to do it All

Recently, a parent who’s child receives In-Home Services from ACT emailed me to say how happy she was with the staff currently working with her son. She said in her email that the support her family has gotten has made her realize that she can be okay with “not doing it all.” She never knew how finally understanding that could benefit her family in so many ways.

As Program Manager of In-Home Services, I was thrilled to hear this and quickly passed on the compliment to the support staff working with the family. They were equally excited to receive the information.

It also reminded me how important it is for everyone to find peace in accepting that as parents, whether we are parenting a child who learns differently or not, that we all need help sometimes. We are all influenced by people around us, even when we least expect it.

I have a similar moment that has influenced me as a parent more than I thought it would, because I received the advice before I was a parent.

Paris.
Summer 2002.

An unforgettable honeymoon destination.

Scott, my husband, and I spent several amazing weeks in Europe. While in Paris we decided to take part in a “destination dinner” at the Eiffel Tower.

We headed out for the evening both thinking it could be one of the most romantic evenings of our lives. I remember thinking, what could be more romantic than a dinner date for two atop the Eiffel Tower?

We made our way to our destination and headed up the elevator to sit down to dinner, ready to embrace the romance that only Paris and the Eiffel Tower can join together.

We enjoyed a glass of wine and then a tour guide came up and informed us that we would be joined by another American who booked the same “destination”. Our beautiful fairy-tale dinner was suddenly interrupted by a middle-aged Executive from Boston named Nancy.

My husband wasn’t very happy about the recent development, but Nancy was already sitting and had ordered Hors d’oeuvres.

I decide that Nancy wasn’t so bad and we started talking. We learned that Nancy is a successful Executive in Paris on business. She travels all over the world and from time to time books “destinations” so she can feel normal and doesn’t forget how fortunate she is to see the world as a part of her job.

I tell her that Scott and I have been together for years but decided to get married because we wanted to start a family. Nancy begins to tell me how being a working mom and attempting to be a “good parent” is her biggest challenge in life. She then tells me something that had no real meaning at the time but has since become my life motto.

“You know Tara, when I first became a mother I had a lot of guilt. I worried that I was never going to be good enough. I was never going to be able to do it all. I soon realized that I was very naive to believe that I am the only teacher that my child is ever going to have. I believe that it is my responsibility to love my child and be okay and happy about the fact that other people can love and educate my child when I can’t be there. If I do that, I AM doing my job.”

I had no idea at the time how true this statement was going to be for me in my life.

When I think about our journey – where we began and where we are now – I can’t even imagine where we would be without the guidance, knowledge, and (at times unsolicited) support of others who have shaped our world as we know it.

If there is one piece of advice I can give you as a parent, particularly as a parent of a child who learns differently, it is this: don’t be closed minded or competitive. It is okay to admit that most of the time this journey is too much to handle on your own. Understand that you don’t have to be an expert. Embrace the knowledge of others and learn from it.

I wish I could find Nancy and thank her. I quote her regularly and tell myself when I am at the end of my rope that I don’t have to have all the answers. I don’t have to be an expert. It is okay to accept help from others. And most importantly, at the end of the day all I have to do is love my children and be happy that they are learning.

If I can do that, it can’t be wrong.
CoMoGives Campaign: One Month Until Kick-Off

CoMoGives is a giving guide and charitable giving campaign brought to you by the Community Foundation of Central Missouri (CFCM).

ACT would appreciate your donation to our organization during this campaign, which runs December 1st - 31st.

- You must donate online through the CoMoGives website.
- There is a $10 donation minimum
- CFCM will award 8 challenge grants to agencies that raise the most funds, have the most individual donors, youngest donors, etc.
- Donations must be made in December

ACT is very excited about being involved in this campaign and hopes for a successful turnout. Please visit the CoMoGives website to see ACT’s profile.

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

— Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed by former President George H.W. Bush

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

— Christopher Reeve
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