Last November, I wrote here what one reader called a “zinger” about my frustration with an unjust rate setting methodology for services ACT and other agencies provide. It rewarded recent entries to Individualized Supported Living with higher rates.

Earlier this year, in March, I wrote again about rate rebasing and how it could meet the critical need we and other agencies like ACT have as we continue to provide services. That letter included a history of attempts to correct the problem that were rebuffed by a veto and budget withhold. We returned to the Capitol to ask legislators and others to correct this error.

The legislature heard the call for rebasing, adjusting rates in a way that levels at least some of the uneven playing field. Their rebasing legislation became law and survived the pitfalls we experienced before.

Now, new money is coming in. ACT employees and the individuals they support are benefitting.

The timing of rebasing has been critical for ACT. It has allowed us to increase wages for all staff, including Direct Service Professionals, who provide support to over 400 individuals each year.

Recruiting new employees has improved. We’re now able to compete better for staff in our area.

Data indicate, though the time period is short, that employee retention is increasing.

Rebasing has also helped us move toward compliance with the new Overtime Rule.

Overall, given our new rates, ACT has become more stable financially, less vulnerable to changes that always occur. This has allowed us to direct our energies to the development of future programs and services, rather than focusing on what felt like short-term survival tactics.

We’ve experienced a noticeable boost in morale. And we’ve seen a positive impact on the quality of services we provide to individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.

Don Lafferty, Director of Community Living, told me that had these rate rebasing funds not arrived when they did, some individuals with particularly challenging behaviors would have been considered for discharge.

Brian Tveitnes, our Director of Human Resources, reported that one employee who originally declined employment here returned and is now working as a DSP. This was made possible by the new wage and salary schedule adopted after rate rebasing.

Craig Valone, Director of the Day Program, sees his staff not coming in to pick up extra hours.

This is a good thing! We’re seeing them achieve greater work/life balance, which we expect will significantly reduce burnout.

I’m thankful for these new funds. Rate rebasing has been good. It’s not perfect, but good. We still have progress to make before we fully achieve the end goal rates that were established in Missouri for all services. (In fact, an independent analysis of Missouri’s rates is being conducted by Mercer, which will take into account the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics wage range for comparable positions, based on Missouri-specific wages.)

Let’s continue to always improve the way we support these valued individuals in our community.

The next time I write here, Thanksgiving will be behind us. We have so much to be thankful for, including this change and the positive impact rate rebasing is having on our ACT Community.

Until next month,

Mark

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Shop & Donate
#InclusionWorks

Mark Hassemer
Executive Director
JAN RETIRES AFTER 28 YEARS WITH RED LOBSTER

Jan is hanging up her apron after 28 years of making those delicious Cheddar Bay Biscuits, everyone’s favorite Red Lobster treat.

Her tenure came to a close with a retirement party at the seafood restaurant. Friends, family, and coworkers were there to celebrate.

When Jan started with Red Lobster, she was responsible for cleaning the restaurant. “One day a manager said, ‘we need help in the kitchen!’ So I jumped in,” Jan states.

From that day on she was solely in charge of making those beloved bread. In fact, she was the first person at the Columbia location that was officially trained at this position.

“And I am taking the recipe to the grave!” She exclaims.

With her free time, she hopes to travel – St. Louis, Kansas City, and Minnesota are at the top of her list. Heavily involved in Williams Syndrome Association (WSA), Jan is looking forward to attending more of these conferences and will continue to serve as an advocate for WSA. “It still hasn’t settled in!” Jan says of retirement.

Jan celebrating with cake.

A coworker congratulates Jan on her retirement.

A coworker congratulates Jan on her retirement.

Jan celebrating with cake.

one of the cakes.

Inclusion Works for Opportunity

Inclusion Works for Business

Inclusion Works for Innovation

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

#InclusionWorks

OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
dol.gov/odep

Page 2 www.actservices.org
An intense game of cornhole, a friendly UNO rivalry, and laughter filling the air…an unusual scene for employees of the Shelter Insurance Claims Department. But on Friday, October 7, this was the case.

Activities Supervisor Kristin Cummins has been working on partnering with different companies and organizations to help build community engagement and inclusion.

Across town at Shelter Insurance, a Shelter Cares committee comprised of 4 employees, helps to organize various volunteer activities throughout Columbia.

“Our office tries to coordinate some type of volunteer activity once a month,” says John Lange, Claims Supervisor with Shelter Insurance. “We take pride in being able to help the community and are always looking for ideas and activities where we can volunteer.”

Lange, Cummins’ father, started discussing volunteer options for Shelter employees at ACT.

The two decided a game day paired with a grill out was a perfect way for the two groups to get to know each other and have a blast in the same time.

That’s just what they did.

As with any social gathering, the groups mixed and mingled. People gravitated toward what interested them and friendships were formed. Everyone had a good ole time!

“It is important for businesses to help their employees engage with their community. I love that Shelter does this!” said a long-time Shelter employee.

Game day was the first. It truly was a hit!

Cummins’ goal is to develop relationships with various community members and companies to schedule something fun with them once each month. The activities provide more interaction with people outside of ACT than we typically do through our day-to-day activities.

“Our groups go out in the community every day, but it’s difficult to build relationships. There are ties to the people who work at the locations we visit frequently, but it doesn’t go much past a goods or service exchange,” Cummins says.

Cummins is working on developing opportunities like this one in the future. A sorority or fraternity will come to ACT to play carnival games at Day Program’s Halloween Party.

Partnering with local businesses and organizations through activities such as game day is a great way to connect people in the Day Program with others in the community. And it’s fun!

Thank you to the employees in the Claims Department at Shelter Insurance. It was a day many in the Day Program won’t soon forget. •
Each year, Columbia Employment Consortium recognizes three local employers for inclusive hiring.

This year’s award winners are Super 8, Gerbes on Broadway, and the University of Missouri Human Resources Department.

Philip Goldsmith, Manager of Super 8, stands out as a model employer. Philip and his management staff have that special knack for bringing out the absolute best in people.

He accommodates his employee’s schedules and needs. Once he brought a chair from home for an employee who was having difficulty standing during an entire shift. Another time, he watched the front desk so the receptionist could make a doctor appointment.

His management approach includes teaching employees how to do their duties and, more importantly, how to enjoy them.

Gerbes on Broadway in Columbia is a naturally supportive workplace, inclusive in its hiring practices, and diverse in staffing.

The store promotes a positive, customer-oriented atmosphere. Employees report tremendous satisfaction being on the Gerbes team.

Rick Bradford, Supervisor, gives lots of attention to new employee development. He showed no hesitation about hiring and training a person with a disability.

The University of Missouri Human Resources Department has demonstrated a commitment to diversifying their workforce and supporting inclusive hiring practices.

The Department has been an integral partner in the Thompson Center STRIVE program, a program created to improve employment outcomes for young adults with autism.

The support provided through STRIVE has given participants opportunities to job shadow and explore different paid positions. These experiences are extremely valuable to the participants as they choose their career paths.

These businesses have showed a dedication to their employees and the community as a whole. Thank you! Keep doing what you’re doing. •

CoMoGives FUNDS GIVE

To everyone that participated in CoMoGives, THANK YOU!!

100% of the money raised in this campaign goes to the individuals ACT serves.

In 2016, a family can now afford to buy a new kitchen appliance; Robbie could pay for crucial dental work; Abraham and his family got a family pass to Columbia Parks & Rec pools; and more!

Also in this newsletter, read about Jayden - a six-year-old boy recently diagnosed with an inoperable brain cancer. Jayden’s family of four is struggling but CoMoGives funding afforded them some relief...a brand new washer and dryer!

Now Jayden’s single mom, Karla, can take care of laundry at home instead of hauling the whole family to the laundry mat.

Keep in touch for more heartwarming stories like these brought to you by the CoMoGives. •
Jodie

Accepted into Partners in Policymaking Program

Earlier this year, Jodie, an individual supported in ACT’s Community Living (CL) program, applied for and was accepted to a leadership training program called Partners in Policymaking. Jodie was one of 19 selected. She was thrilled about the opportunity.

Partners is an intense eight-month program for families with young children who have a disability and adults with disabilities. Participants must attend eight two-day training sessions at which they hear from professionals in the field of disabilities. They are given the latest information about independent living, inclusive education, family support, technological advances for persons with severe physical disabilities, person-centered planning, and critical State and Federal issues.

They are given the latest information about independent living, inclusive education, family support, technological advances for persons with severe physical disabilities, person-centered planning, and critical State and Federal issues. Jodie went to the class eager to learn about a broad range of aspects about having a disability. A two-day stay in a Jefferson City hotel at the end of the program was an added perk!

The program’s graduation requirements included attending classes, completing monthly assignments, and finishing a major project.

Homework was designed to engage participants on a deeper level. For example, they were asked to reach out to their legislators regarding legislation they had strong views about and inquire about his or her stance on an issue. They were also asked to write about they want in life and steps they need to take to make it happen.

For the major project, participants were asked to get involved in something they are passionate about that could be tailored to meet their individual strengths and interests. This could include activities such as interning, organizing a letter-writing campaign, serving on a board, or organizing special receptions or town meetings with public officials.

They were encouraged to work on this project over the course of the program.

Jodie, who has proudly been her own guardian since she turned 18, chose to advocate for guardianship legislation. Guardianship is a legal tool that allows and empowers a person (the guardian) to make decisions for another (the ward). Being her own guardian is very important to Jodie. She makes her own decisions about her life, hopes, and dreams.

Alternatives to Guardianship says, “There is often a general assumption that just because someone has a disability, mental health diagnosis, or is aging, he or she will need a guardian. In reality, everyone is presumed competent to make choices about their own lives when they become an adult, unless a court says otherwise. With the right supports, many people with disabilities or special healthcare needs are able to remain “their own person,” making their own decisions and being in charge of their own lives. The trick is to find a balance—giving the person enough support and protection so they can live a safe and healthy life without taking away their rights and freedom to make choices and decisions for themselves.” See www.moguardianship.com.

Every aspect of Partners was meaningful to Jodie.

At graduation, she gave a heartfelt (and tearful) speech. She thanked everyone who played a role in her participation in Partners, including her roommate Brandi, CL Supervisor Brenda Wilson, Partners instructors, and Direct Support Professional (DSP) Candy.

So far, 492 parents and self-advocates have graduated from Partners. This year was Missouri’s 22nd class. It is sponsored by The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council.

Topics include:
• History of important movements such as the Disability Movement
• Inclusive and high quality education
• Federal and State legislation
• Inclusive communities
• Employment
• Guardianship
• Emergency preparedness
• Effective communication
• Positive behavior supports
• Home- and Community-based services
• Assistive technology
• Issues of sexuality
• Community organizing
• Parliamentary procedures

Partners in Policymaking Graduating Class of 2016
Over six months ago, my supervisor handed me a postcard he knew I would be interested in, and he was right. It was a save the date reminder for an upcoming workshop presented by Professor Tony Attwood.

For those of you who haven’t heard of Dr. Attwood, he is an internationally-known speaker and author. He’s written numerous scientific papers and books about Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and it’s probably safe to say I’ve read most of them.

I’ve been a big fan of his work for a very long time. I immediately saved the date on my calendar and registered.

I was particularly eager to hear his session about bullying and teasing because I worry that my son Rye, now 13 and in middle school, might be a target for bullying because he is on the autism spectrum and struggles with making friends.

I attended Dr. Attwood’s workshop in mid-October. I gained a lot of insight about a difficult topic. I wish I didn’t need to know any strategies about how to reduce bullying. The truth is I do need them, my son needs them, and I want to share what I learned from Dr. Attwood with anybody else who might need them too.

I decided the best way to share might be to walk you through my experience attending the workshop; so that is what I did.

TIP FROM TARA
90%? WHAT?

October 17, 2016

We arrived on time, early in fact, and found a space right up front. Dr. Attwood jumped right into it—Strategies to Reduce Being Bullied and Teased.

He identified bullying as “any unwanted, aggressive behavior that is repeated or has potential to be repeated, over time, among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.”

He went on to say that individuals who are bullied have lower self-esteem, lower academic achievement, higher anxiety and depression, higher levels of paranoia, are less likely to tell someone, and are less likely to ask for help.

I wasn’t surprised to hear and already assumed that the effects of bullying lowered or increased these feelings and behaviors for most kids. However, when Dr. Attwood began sharing more statistics specific to ASD and other developmental disabilities, I was shocked at what he was saying.

Wait a minute. What? Did he just say 90%?

Is my son a passive target because he is physically weaker, shy, unable to hide his anxiety at times, and/or because he has no extensive network of friends?

Dr. Attwood suggested the following strategies as a place to start if you believe your child might be a potential target for bullying:

Effects of bullying are often lasting and typically affect many subsequent relationships in a negative way.

Is my son a proactive target because he has poor social skills, is sometimes perceived as intrusive or irritating, engages in behavior that gets others in trouble (wrestling or rough play), and doesn’t recognize when to stop?

Does my son seek and need solitude? Is he Eccentric? Is he not “cool”? Does he have any friends that might be prepared to come to his defense? Is he good at characterization skills or does he have good radar?

Is there any psychological evidence like increased anxiety, school avoidance, or depression? Is he paranoid? Has he appeared to be more interested in toys that are weapons or movies and games that are more violent? Is he mimicking any new or unusual behavior?

The checklist I was answering in my head was growing and it became clear that currently my son is poor in the currency of friendship, and because of that, he has more than likely already fallen into that 90%.

The rate of bullying is four times higher for individuals with developmental disabilities.

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Dr. Attwood suggested the following strategies as a place to start if you believe your child might be a potential target for bullying:
Don’t try to lessen what is happening, being the target of bullying does not build character.

A team approach is needed. The team needs to include everyone involved. The target of the bullying, teachers, school administration, parents, other children, and the child who engages in bullying.

Understand that an established code of conduct is needed that outlines responsibilities and consequences for each person involved.

Understand that both the target and the bully need help and support.

Help the targeted individual to identify a peer that has a social conscience and an established social status. Ask for their help and develop a code of conduct that includes both encouragement for and consequences for not intervening. Be honest and seek investment in the issues that the individual is facing.

Individuals need to know how to identify others who will most likely be bystanders that are willing to intervene and are assertive. Individuals don’t need to become best of friends or even interact with bystanders willing to intervene if that is too difficult or not desired, they just need to be able to identify who a helpful bystander might be.

Develop a map of both safe and vulnerable spaces/places and teach targets to avoid vulnerable spaces and to seek spaces where bystanders willing to intervene are around.

Teach individuals that there is security in numbers and to congregate with or near like-minded peers.

Teach individuals that they must have a response. Ignoring the situation often makes it worse.

Avoid teaching individuals to lie or use humor to get out of the situation. Responses need to be true and constructive. “I don’t deserve this, stop it.”

I hope that anybody needing this information finds what I shared to be useful. Having a conversation about bullying isn’t fun, it’s hard, and talking with our kids about things they are struggling with is never easy.

I do however believe we can’t be afraid to have the tough conversations, particularly when the benefits of having them can be so great and the consequences of not having them can be so detrimental.

“You can now donate to ACT by shopping at Gerbes, Schnucks, and AmazonSmile and JustGive.org!

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

When shopping at AmazonSmile, create an account, pick ACT as your charity, and again, shop away! JustGive makes donating to charitable organizations easy. Go to their website and search Alternative Community Training to donate. You can even pick to give one time, monthly, or to put on a registry.”

“Let the shameful walls of exclusion finally come tumbling down.” — Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed by former President George H.W. Bush