Dear Friends of ACT,

Here we are again at October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Let’s talk about work. Work is transformative. The ability to be productive and make a contribution, to be compensated fairly for your time and effort, and the freedom to express your preferences and will by spending the money you’ve earned...

These aspects of work are so bound up in a full and satisfying life, it’s a moral obligation to talk about and act to correct the problems we have with low employment rates and poverty among individuals with disabilities.

To do otherwise would be a personal failing and professional malpractice.

With 846,015 people with disabilities, Missouri ranks 11th among the States for the percentage of the population that has a disability (14.5%). (2012 American Community Survey) 454,722 of these are age 18 to 64. As a Nation, 12.3% of us has a disability.

Only 32.7% of the U.S. 18 to 64 age population with a disability is employed. In Missouri, 32.2%.

People in the same age range without disabilities are employed at a rate of 73.6% and 76.2% respectively for the U.S. and Missouri.

This discrepancy is mind-blowing. But it’s only mind-blowing if you have seen with your own eyes and are absolutely persuaded that people with disabilities can work.

Right now 140,799 people (age 18-64) in Missouri with disabilities are living in poverty. That’s a 17.8% gap, and it grew by 2% between 2011 and 2012.

What happens when people with disabilities work?

Let’s start by busting one myth: benefits aren’t always impacted.

They make a huge contribution. The case for including people with disabilities in the workplace is a business case. It pays to hire people with disabilities. Rather than being a burden, some studies show that job turnover rates and lost days are significantly lower among employees with a disclosed disability. Only rarely is productivity lower.

That’s the workplace. But what happens at home when people with disabilities work? First, they come out of isolation and into the community. They develop relationships with co-workers and new friends. They raise their standard of living. They pay taxes. They have more choices and make more choices. Often, they break out of poverty.

Recently we celebrated a very special milestone. Our friend Jan, whom we have acknowledge before (see Red Lobster Employee Celebrates 20 Years of Service), just reached her 25 year anniversary of employment with Red Lobster. A party was called for, and it happened. You can read more about the celebration in this newsletter.

Jan works 3 days each week and has rarely

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Mark Hassemer, Executive Director

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missed a shift. She is a master at her craft, the nearly mythical Cheddar Bay Biscuit. She owns a huge chunk of the institutional memory at her store. I can imagine her guiding and informing manager after manager over the decades, just like a First Sergeant bringing along a new 2nd Lieutenant.

Nearing retirement, she still loves her work. And she values the rewards, including the paycheck.

How can we have more Jans among us? How do we raise the employment rate among people with disabilities?

I have at least one good idea. Let’s start earlier. Let’s catch teens with disabilities during their final years of high school and immerse them in the work world, before they fall onto the couches in their parent’s basements, never to work again.

That’s what we’ve been doing on a very small scale with the STEP Program, a partnership with Boone County Family Resources, the Columbia Public Schools, Boone Hospital, and Vocational Rehabilitation. And it’s working. For three years in a row, we’ve seen members of each class come out into the community and get jobs.

It’s exciting. And it’s effective. Now we’re seeing it copied, to the benefit of dozens of more people with disabilities.

But it’s time to scale this up. Let’s act now to make work immersion a predictable opportunity for the majority of our community’s young people with disabilities.

You may not be able to operate a work immersion program. So what can you do? Take a look at this slideshow with 31 ideas for something you can do to make work a reality for someone with a disability.

Until next month,
Mark


NDEAM poster for 2014.


These are commanding words, words that motivate, inspire, provoke, and drive action. That is just what the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) wants.

These words are also this year’s theme for National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), an October tradition.

“We all have a role to play in—and benefit to gain from—increasing opportunities for meaningful employment for people with disabilities. This year’s theme encapsulates this in three powerful words.

It conveys that advancing disability employment is about much more than just hiring. It’s about creating a continuum of inclusion. And the first step on this continuum is expectation,” said Kathy Martinez, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy, as she announced this year’s theme.

If you read ACT’s monthly newsletter, we celebrate locally the small successes of people with disabilities and the businesses that employ them. NDEAM raises awareness about disability employment accomplishments and issues on a national level.

NDEAM dates back to 1945. Since then, ODEP has taken on the responsibility for the campaign and worked hard to expand its reach and scope.

ODEP makes spreading the word about NDEAM nearly effortless. They provide press releases, proclamations, resources, posters, and media tips that anyone can use to raise awareness.

The employment rate for people with disabilities is abysmal. But our attitudes and understanding that all people can contribute are slowly changing for the better, thanks in part to people like you.

Help ACT to celebrate and expand the reach of NDEAM. People with disabilities have so much to offer in the workplace. They should not be overlooked.

Expect Employ. Empower. ●
Jan Celebrates 25 Years at Red Lobster

Cheddar Bay Biscuits Red Lobster is famous for. When asked if she was tired of them after two and a half decades, her response, “No! They are delicious.”

For Rhonda Locke, ACT Career Services Job coach who has worked with Jan for 10 years, smelling those tempting biscuits for one day a month is the only downfall of working with Jan.

That could be because of Jan’s lovely demeanor. Jane Crow, a family friend, raves, “She has such a positive attitude and outlook on life, which I admire. I’ve never seen her have a bad day.”

And this has not gone unnoticed by the customers. Frequent diners often come to the seafood eatery to chat with Jan. “A regular once scolded a manager for not having Jan out in the dining area more.” Arlyn Storvick, Jan’s mom, joked.

This is certainly one of the perks for Jan. “I love visiting with the customers!” Jane replies when asked her favorite part of working at Red Lobster.

Her cheery persona always shines while on the job, which is not always pleasant. Jan’s office is in a hot kitchen and those biscuits don’t knead themselves.

“They are a lot of work.” Jan says about making the cheddar biscuits.

Jan has cut down to a three-day workweek and seems intrigued by retirement. “I am not sure...yet.” Jane retorts after a slight pause.

For now she is basking in her recent accomplishment and enjoying the rewards. Red Lobster gave her a diamond studded pin and a meal on the house. And, of course, being surrounded by those closest to her to celebrate.

Another thing Jan likes to brag about is being the first to receive job coaching from ACT. “I paved the way!” Jan chuckles.

We are thrilled to have been a part of her career from the beginning and are ready to commemorate Jan for many years to come.

“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
The Backbone of Team Abshier

The backbone is strong, supportive, and vital to every body. Community Living (CL) Program Supervisor Luke Abshier uses the word to illustrate what he thinks of two outstanding Direct Support Professionals (DSP) on his team.

Lolita Johnson and Stepheney Brackett both provide services to individuals in one of the homes that Abshier supervises.

“Both of these amazing ladies are the best at what they do. Sometimes their tasks are not fun. But they get it done, and they get it done well and professionally,” Abshier says.

Carrie Griffith, CL Program Manager, adds, “Many times Lolita and Stepheney have stepped up and assumed extra responsibilities to make sure the house runs smoothly and that the individuals they support have what they need for quality care.”

Johnson is a live-in staff. She lives in the individuals’ house with them. “She is my Most Valuable Player,” Abshier continues.

She works hard. She has a knack for helping the people she supports become more independent by keeping them focused and calm. She is a master at using stress-relieving techniques suited for each individual.

Johnson can often be heard repeating her mantra, “We gotta keep our selves together and have a good day.”

Johnson goes out of her way to make sure the people she supports have the tools they need to deal with each challenge they face. Her encouragement, guidance, and good nature are the keys to her success.

“Lolita’s ‘We got this’ attitude is praised and appreciated by everyone. She never fails to give her all. She’s a true role model for newer staff,” acknowledges Abshier.

She takes extra shifts when needed, mentors new staff, advocates tirelessly and effectively, and she always makes sure the job gets done.

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Stepheney

Johnson isn’t alone when it comes to keeping the individuals’ home a first rate place to live and work. She has Stepheney Brackett working alongside her to help create a positive environment for the individuals they serve.

This past spring the two worked together seamlessly to help their individuals find a house, move, and welcome a new roommate.

“She is the best part-time DSP I’ve ever had,” claims Abshier.

Brackett has the prime characteristics of a great part time staff person. She is flexible, reliable, and she handles crises without complaint or discouragement. She is always available and engaged when other DSPs have a question or need advice.

“I believe in my team!” Brackett exclaims. Brackett and Johnson work alongside several DSPs in the home they work. Due to their diligence, the entire lineup works together ensuring nothing ever falls between the cracks.

Abshier doesn’t know where he’d be without these two. “They are the LeBron and Wade of the DSPs I supervise,” he jokes.

Griffith agrees, “When Lolita says, ‘We’re here. We got this’ you feel a sense of calm. You know as a supervisor or a manager that you have an invested staff that is going to do what needs to be done to do the job right. “

Today we acknowledge and celebrate the many contributions of Lolita Johnson and Stepheney Brackett. Together or apart, they continue to support their individuals to achieve their goals and are there with them to celebrate their successes.

They are proud of their individuals, of the home they work in, and the team they work with. They never hesitate to tell you “We’re here. We got this.” And they do. ●

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

— Helen Keller
CI Takes a Trip to See Their Beloved Cardinals

Go Cardinals!

“The Cardinal’s Trip was a lot of fun!” Exclaims Kristin Cummins, Community Integration (CI) Activities Coordinator.

A Cardinal’s laden group loaded up and headed out in the morning to cheer on their favorite team.

Stopping only for lunch, these excited fans rushed into the stadium on a beautiful day for a baseball game.

The game was slow but the outcome was anything but. The Cardinals managed to score in the 9th with two outs.

“The whole stadium was cheering and fireworks went off to celebrate the win!” Cummins exclaims. “Everyone in our group was cheering and had huge smiles! The individuals loved getting to see the fireworks. It was a great way to end the game!”

To make the day even more special, everyone was able to take part in the tradition of eating ballpark fare while taking in the game. This was thanks to the family of an individual that attended the game – they graciously donated money for the trip.

21 people were able to make this trek to Busch Stadium, including three people that use wheelchairs.

“In the past, due to staffing, we’ve only been able to purchase one accessible ticket.” Cummins stated. “To be able to accommodate 3 individuals using a chair is great!”

CI Program Manager Michelle Bell assisted the individuals that used the accessible seats, along with two other staff, and said, “We had a blast watching the game and dancing to the music!”

The day was filled with cheers, ballpark snacks, and a last minute win. Suffice it to say the ride back to ACT was silent – an ode to the fun day they had.

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

— Helen Keller
Tip from Tara: Measuring Success

“Measure twice cut once”, my dad, who recently turned eighty, has told me that my whole life. Plan and prepare in a careful manner before taking action. I’ve followed these words of advice both figuratively and literally in life, most of the time.

But let’s be honest, cutting is usually way more fun! Sometimes taking a leap or a chance on something is the only way we can push ourselves and get a task completed or meet a goal.

When it comes to parenting and teaching others, I have found that it is best to do a little of both planning and leaping. Sometimes no matter how hard we try, things just don’t turn out the way we want or the way we were expecting. Sometimes things beyond our control just happen. Parenting is no different.

I certainly never planned on raising a child who thinks differently than others, but now that I am, I’m planning and leaping pretty much every day. I have a lot of parents ask me, “How do I know I’m making the right decision?” I usually answer that with, “You don’t.”

Don’t be afraid of making mistakes. Planning is important, educating ourselves about our choices is key, but setting goals high and pushing ourselves and our children is ultimately the only thing we can do to get the job done.

Failing is a part of learning. Admitting our failures to ourselves and to our children is how we all learn. It’s also how we teach our children that nobody is perfect. Nobody gets everything right the first time. Sometimes we do and sometimes we don’t. If we don’t let our children fail they will never learn how to think on their own.

About six months ago I took on the project of building my boys a clubhouse in the backyard. I didn’t really know what I was doing, I did my research. I planned. I learned the hard way that sometimes, it is literally very important to measure twice and cut once.

Both of my boys helped me with the project. We all felt successful in completing it until my son Rye informed me that it wasn’t really a clubhouse because it wasn’t in a tree. I tried to explain to Rye that it wasn’t possible to have a clubhouse in a tree because we didn’t have any trees that were strong enough to serve as the foundation.

About a month ago when a strong storm rolled through Columbia it blew over several trees in our yard. It was a lot of work cleaning up the mess but it did provide the materials to finally complete our “impossible” project.

We had to start over in many ways and we had to work hard. We never planned on being able to have a clubhouse in a tree. We thought it was impossible.

The Shade clubhouse.

As it turns out, something beyond our control happened, we did some planning, we worked hard, we took a leap, we measured twice and cut once, we even dug a couple of holes and planted dead trees; but in the end, we finally finished what we ultimately wanted... a clubhouse, in a tree, well almost.

Success feels good when it comes from taking a leap and achieving a goal. Furthermore, success feels good from starting over, trying, and doing all we can to make it right. In the end, no matter how we get there, it feels good either way.

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Upcoming Events

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ACT Needs Your Help in December

CoMoGives.com

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

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

More information will be available closer to the beginning of the campaign.

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

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