Dear Friends of ACT,

ACT and our partners in Columbia’s Show-Me Careers effort premiered a video clip on September 3rd at the Columbia Chamber of Commerce meeting. Over 400 business leaders were there.

The video is the initial outreach piece developed under a grant from University of Missouri-KC’s Institute for Human Development designed to carry the message to businesses in the Columbia area about the benefits of employing people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD).

We think it rolled out just in time to maximize the impact of our annual October observation of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

You can’t be around ACT without knowing how much we value and emphasize employment.

To those we support - and to everyone, really - work is a source of dignity, pride, a feeling of accomplishment, and, of course, the resources needed to live one’s life more fully and with freedom of choice.

So this effort to encourage local businesses to become more inclusive is an important one.

When you watch the video, you’ll see it also includes good words from business leaders about the value of considering and creating a more diverse workforce. The fact that this message is carried by business to business is important.

Community providers like ACT will always promote the hiring of individuals with disabilities. But when the business community recognizes the value of a more inclusive workplace, and tells others about it, the credibility and impact of the message are enhanced.

That’s why the core partners in Columbia’s Show-Me Careers effort decided from the beginning to invite Moresource, Inc. to become a partner. Moresource, which assists companies with insurance, HR, payroll, bookkeeping, and similar functions, is led by the dynamic Kat Cunningham. (She is a former ACT board member and president.)

Moresource has since been an enthusiastic and valuable partner.

In addition to developing the video, Columbia’s Show-Me Careers team-consisting of ACT, Boone County Family Resources, Central Missouri Regional Office, Columbia Public Schools, People First, Services for Independent Living, Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation, Moresource, and others-has established the Columbia Employment Consortium and launched a new web site using the grant funds.

The Consortium will continue to meet and develop strategies designed to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

The website at www.abilitiesforbusiness.com is free for everyone to use. Businesses can post job opportunities and Boone County candidates who are ready to work can add their names and resumes to the mix for consideration. They already have.

As the end of the grant period nears, the fruits of this effort are just now gaining wider awareness. It seems like everything’s heating up just as the grant winds down.

But you can help keep the momentum going. Watch the video. And ask others to watch it, too.
We want people to get the message. But what we really want is people with disabilities working in the community.

You can find the video at this URL: goo.gl/4jEjbh

or on our youtube channel: Alternative Community Training

Until next month,
Mark

Two Great Resources for Businesses Seeking Diversity Unveiled

As October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) approaches, two new websites are available to local businesses (and job seekers). Mark mentioned one in his letter to readers.

The websites www.abilitiesforbusiness.com and www.ADAintheWorkplace.org are up and running.

The Abilities for Business website matches candidates with businesses. It was created as a result of discussions between the Columbia business community and people who know the value of hiring persons with disabilities, most of whom are associated with agencies similar to ACT.

Together, they agreed there was a need to continue to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

“The goal is to maintain a place where businesses can find qualified candidates and hire from a more diverse candidate pool,” Director of ACT Career Services (ACS) Jessica Mahon explains.

The ADA in the Workplace website was developed by the Columbia Employment Consortium, a collaboration of local organizations who are all committed to supporting the employment and independence of people with disabilities.

The Columbia Employment Consortium identified the need for a single place where businesses can find the information they need about diversity in the workplace.

There are several area agencies in Columbia providing employment services for people with disabilities and recruitment assistance to local businesses. A tremendous amount of information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is also available, as is other information on hiring individuals with disabilities. All of this existing information has not been centralized, until now.

A one-stop shop for all of this information benefits employers and makes it easier for them to take steps to make their businesses more inclusive.

Through the website, the Consortium provides businesses resources, information, and supports, including access to trainings and on-site consultations, with a focus on recruiting and retaining qualified employees with disabilities.

Business owners and managers who understand the facts and the business case for inclusion hire people with disabilities and are predictably happy about the advantages and the return on investment.

AE’S’hionne at 24: Enjoying Sports, His Job and Friends

Everyone that knows AE’S’hionne will tell you he has grown into a wonderful, young man...Even AE’S’hionne.

At the young age of 16, AE’S’hionne moved into an ACT supported home. Now he is 24. And these 8 years have made all the difference.

In this time, he has found a job, is very involved in both competitive softball and basketball leagues, and has made several friends.

You might say he is living the normal life of a man in his early 20’s.

“He has learned so much about himself,” says LaKayla Prince, Direct Support Professional (DSP) that works with AE’S’hionne. “He knows how to cope with his emotions now.”

His level of independence is also increasing a great deal – in the past year he has traveled without the support of staff or supervisors, and with his team, twice for out-of-town sporting events.

These trips with his teams are nothing AE’S’hionne takes for granted. In fact, they mean a great deal to him.

“I earned this independence by showing respect, participating in practices, and being on time,” says AE’S’hionne. “I enjoy going to these games with my teammates. I’ve never been able to do anything like this...I get to do new things and meet lots of new people.”
His first trip was to Fort Leonard Wood with his basketball team. Him and his teammates got to sleep in barracks and received tours of historic tanks used during war.

The last weekend of September he will travel with his softball team for their last tournament of the season. Then he rolls right into basketball season.

“We were undefeated last year!” AE’S’ionne exclaims of his basketball team.

His job, and the money that comes with it, has also given AE’S’ionne something to be proud of. In the evenings he is cleaning the offices of Boone County Family Resources and loving it!

“I like it and I make good money.” AE’S’ionne says with a big smile. “And I’ve been making friends there!”

The best part of having a steady cash flow is spending it. Currently, he has his eyes (and bank account) set on a Play Station 3.

His success is in part due to the dedicated people around him. Prince, along with DSP Cliff Collins, Community Living (CL) Supervisor Larry Barnette, and CL Manager Terri Kruger, AE’S’ionne has matured by leaps and bounds.

They have all learned so much about each other through the years he grew from a teen to an adult. A bond was formed.

“Cliff takes AE’S’ionne to clean the house car. AE’S’ionne loves it! It’s a guy thing,” Prince says.

Collins states, “In the two, two and a half years I have worked with AE’S’ionne, he has come a long way. He is now like a second son to my girlfriend and me.”

Good luck in your upcoming softball game and basketball season, AE’S’ionne. We will be cheering you on!

Hy-Vee’s Tony Deaver Guides Employees to Job Success

The Hy-Vee West Broadway Kitchen Manager, Tony Deaver, is no stranger to employing people with disabilities.

He began working for Hy-Vee in Des Moines 26 years ago. They had a strong working relationship with an agency there like ACT. And they had great success hiring people with disabilities.

When Hy-Vee #1 on West Broadway opened in 2001, Deaver began working with ACT’s Community Employment Services (CES) and hiring individuals receiving services.

“I see [working with CES] as a great opportunity to get people out in the workforce,” Deaver says.

One of his employees, Jessica Fulton, has done so well at Hy-Vee she no longer needs support from CES.

Some of Jessica’s success must be credited to Deaver.

His management approach is specifically tailored to the needs and unique abilities of each individual employee. Like a coach developing his team, he identifies the best qualities in each person and builds from there.

CES Manager Fontella Jackmon-Jones says Deaver is amazing. “He is an awesome employer! A natural support for Jessica.”

He accepted the recommendations offered by CES and he played key role in developing the strategy for maximizing Jessica’s contribution as an employee.

“Since day one he has been willing to support and provide additional training to individuals whenever they were needed,” Jackmon-Jones continues.

CES and the people who receive services are fortunate to have partners like Tony Deaver and Hy-Vee in the community.
Community Integration Pairs Up with Nature Abounds, Steps out into Nature, and Adds Another Volunteer Opportunity

Nature and volunteer lovers in ACT’s Community Integration (CI) program are thrilled about a new activity offered each week.

Through Nature Abounds’ Watch the Wild program, individuals in CI can enjoy the outdoors while helping scientists learn about various ecosystems across the United States.

Nature Abounds, a national 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, began in 2008. Through its two successful programs IceWatch USA and Watch the Wild, it urges people to unplug from their fast-paced lives, wake up to the natural world, pay attention to environmental issues, and RISE to the occasion:

Raise awareness through education, action, and inspiration.
Inform about environmental issues.
Strengthen the voice of action.
Engage all ages in creating healthier communities and a healthy planet where people and wildlife can co-exist peacefully.

Activities Coordinator Kristin Cummins stumbled on Watch the Wild while looking for a new volunteer opportunity to add to the day program activity choices. She wanted something that CI could do without overlapping with the volunteer work done by ACT’s Job Preparation participants.

“CI has a large number of individuals who have volunteering goals and enjoy helping others. So I looked for a volunteering activity that everyone could participate in, answered an interest area often suggested by individuals, and could be done during CI program hours,” Cummins said.

Watch the Wild was a great fit. And so far, it’s a hit!

For consistency, the Nature Abounds program asks participants to choose an area to observe and stick with it. The data paint a picture for scientists so they can learn more about that particular location. CI participants selected Eagle Bluffs Conservation Area, southwest of Columbia.

Before heading out, the group receives an activity bag that includes a binder and binoculars. The binder contains directions to Eagle Bluffs, descriptions of what they are looking for, data recording sheets, and an explanation about how the information will be used.

Groups are encouraged to look around the environment and list any plants and animals they see. They also listen for sounds such as birds, animals, or vehicles. And they record weather conditions at their location. The date, time, and temperature are also logged.

Direct Support Professional Paula Marshall says, “It is very peaceful. We listen to insects and search for birds – we saw a crane once. That was cool!”

Each group fills out an observation form that prompts them to look, listen, and describe their surroundings. The form is submitted to Cummins and she enters the observations into Nature Abounds’ website.

Over time, the observer groups (and scientists) can look back at previous observations and see if anything about the environment changes over time.

The CI volunteers initially found that identifying and naming the various animals and plants was difficult. There are so many different species. So Cummins added an animal and plant guide to the observation binder.

Now the groups provide more accurate descriptions of their observations and the educational benefits are even greater.

To learn more about Nature Abounds and its programs, visit natureabounds.org •

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

— Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed by former President George H. W. Bush
STEP’s Fourth Year Kicks-Off

The fourth year for the STEP program has begun at Boone Hospital Center. The 2015-2016 year interns are an even mix of males and females – three of each.

In year’s past, men have dominated in numbers. This is only second time a class has had any females.

For the first time in the program’s history, there is an intern that utilizes a wheelchair. The hospital is excited about this opportunity and is working on making all necessary accommodations.

“This year’s group is a well-spoken, outgoing bunch and have done lots of fun things so far, like surgery on bananas,” Barb Wright, Career Specialist, says of the students.

They also participated in mock interviews with members of the local business community. Restaurant owners, a lawyer, and teachers from Columbia Public Schools offered their time and professional expertise.

There are also two new staff members for the program. Nathan Mudrick, STEP Instructional Support, and Jaclyn Bowles, STEP Instructor.

The interns have now completed the real interview process and learned their positions within the hospital. On September 29th they will start Boone Beginnings, an orientation with their perspective departments, and September 30th is the big day – first day on the job!

“I’m ready to start work!” says one STEP intern.

Until then, they will spend their days in the transition center classroom on the 6th floor of Boone working on team building, skills such as telephone communication, and soft skills (listening, taking feedback, and following directions).

After winter break they will begin looking for employment in the community. The graduation ceremony takes place in May.

“I can’t wait to get a real job and get paid!” exclaims another STEP intern about starting the program.

Good luck, interns! •

CoMoGives Funds are Opening Opportunity’s Door for Many

Imagine a life without swimming or putt putt golf. No tree houses or vacations.

For many with disabilities this is a reality. Camp Wonderland allows them to experience all of this and more.

Thanks to the generosity of many ACT supporters through CoMoGives, an online fundraising campaign, Chelsea and Joe were both awarded scholarships to attend Camp Wonderland!

This camp is anything but ordinary.

The summertime retreat offers campers a weeklong full of activities, many of which are not possible for people with disabilities anywhere else.

Cabins, a tree house, swimming pool, boating, and a lodge for bingo, dances, karaoke, and video games... ALL of which are accessible!

The camp also offers a nursing staff for people that have medical needs.

Chelsea utilizes a wheelchair and is medically fragile, requiring a nurse around the clock. This keeps her budget tight so she has never been able her to go on vacation, let alone Camp Wonderland.

Joe also uses a wheelchair and has never been to Camp Wonderland. He does not have access to an accessible vehicle, making travel difficult.

We are so thrilled that Chelsea and Joe got a much needed first-time accessible vacation!

Several more individuals that receive services at ACT
recently benefitted from the funds raised through the CoMoGives Campaign.

Two individuals supported in the Community Living program were able to buy some needed furniture. Bill purchased a lift chair that will enable him to get in and out of his recliner. Daniel bought a patio table for his beautiful backyard.

Several individuals in the Community Integration program will be prepared for colder weather this winter – they all received clothing such as coats and insulated boots.

A girl that receives services through ACT’s Personal Assistance program will live out her dream to take dance classes.

Our CoMoGives Fund Committee is currently reviewing other scholarship applications. We will update you on the many more opportunities made possible through our participation in CoMoGives.

On behalf of everyone at ACT, thank you to everyone who participated in CoMoGives – regardless of which non-profit you chose to support.

Every non-profit involved in CoMoGives now has their own Joe and Chelsea story. As a result, our community is a better place because of the graciousness of those that gave.

The CoMoGives campaign runs December 1st through December 31st. Last year ACT raised over $13,000, the campaign as a whole raised $263,929 and involved over 50 non-profits.

ACT is already gearing up for another successful December in 2015!

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

— Helen Keller

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40 Years and Still Rollin’

Our 40 Years and Still Rollin’ event was a huge success!

Thank you to all who attended, volunteered and celebrated in spirit from afar.

And to our sponsors:

Joe Machen’s Toyota, Flat Branch, Missouri Cotton Exchange, Caledon Virtual, Columbia EDP, LaBrunerie Financial, The Insurance Group, Williams Keepers, Moresource, MasterTech, Veteran’s United Home Loans, 100 Percent Wine, Columbia Speed Academy, Dents Unlimited, Law Offices KKB, HyVee, Schnucks, Olive Branch Imports, & G Wright Way Services.

The CoMo Derby Dames put on quite a show for us at Tolton High School! Thank you ladies (and men)!! •

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.

A fun, community event will be held in Columbia, MO on Sunday, July 26th at Orr Street Studios starting at 11:00am.

More details are soon to come in our newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ pages.

If you value inclusion and equal rights, join us in commemorating the ADA. •

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! •
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