Dear Friends of ACT,

The week of September 8th - 14th has been declared National Direct Support Professional (DSP) Recognition Week by ANCOR, a professional association of which ACT is a member. The United States Senate also joined in this designation with the passage of Senate Resolution 208.

This annual designation, which has been going on for a few years, is a time for organizations and their communities to celebrate the contributions of this unique workforce.

So, who is a DSP?

Well, I could share with you the responsibilities written in a job description, but I want to approach this a little differently.

When I think of the DSPs at ACT, I think of the unique qualities of those individuals who have chosen to work directly with an individual with a disability.

Their titles are many, including training specialist, mentor, live-in, main relief, direct care, personal assistant, and more. They share the common role of working directly with a person who has a disability.

As indicated in Senate Resolution 208, DSPs “...must build a close, trusted relationship with an individual with disabilities” as they assist them with a wide range of support. This trust is extremely important when you consider that the support is often of a very personal nature.

What are some of the qualities that make a person a good DSP?

One of the words that comes to mind is selfless. These are people who often have a tremendous ability to give of themselves to make someone else’s life better.

They are compassionate and tolerant.

They can work independently or as part of a team.

They are reliable.

In the July 2013 Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, Volume 57, Issue 7, Dodevska and Vassos looked at the qualities that were valued in residential direct care workers from the perspective of people with an intellectual disability and managers of services. They concluded that interpersonal skills must be considered when recruiting direct care workers.

Generally, I think we are talking about people who have a wide range of practical skills. They can think on their feet. They know how to get things done.

At ACT, we will be thanking our DSPs in a variety of ways. We will provide snacks and other goodies (food always works!). There will be numerous raffles throughout the week. We also want to take the time to just say thank you. Thank you for the work you do, and thank you for making a difference in someone’s life.

Until next month,

Mark Hassemer
Executive Director, ACT
The Community Integration program provides individuals with a variety of activities that emphasize communication, recreation, and community participation. One of the ways this is accomplished is by providing the individuals we serve the opportunity to volunteer and participate in other community programs. And with the warm summer weather upon us, several groups in the CI program recently visited the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture, also known as the Urban Farm, a local non-profit organization that seeks to promote the establishment, development, and maintenance of a sustainable local food system in the city of Columbia. Our groups were able to see how an ecologically sustainable farm looks and feels, as well as a few farm animals.

Other groups visited Walk-About Acres, a small farm outside of Columbia that is based on diversification and sustainability, with a large focus on honey bees. Individuals were given a tour, which included lots of different farm animals and concluded with some delicious flavored honey sticks.

“It is so beneficial for the individuals we support to have opportunities to just explore the environment and enjoy the fresh air,” says Sheila Robertson, Activities Coordinator. “We are fortunate to live in an area with so many nature choices.”

Sometimes the wonders of nature even come to us! We recently had visits from Runge Nature Center and the Raptor Rehabilitation Project, which brought live animals to our building! These visits included a presentations by their naturalists and were great fun.

These are only a few examples of groups from CI getting out and about and taking in the beauty of nature right in our own backyard. Whether it’s fishing, visits to state parks, tours of the MU museums, or participation in a garden club where we grow our very own vegetables, individuals participating in the CI program have numerous opportunities to enjoy the best of the natural community in which we all live.

participants have not only enjoyed the many parks and nature trails the area has to offer, but have also seen firsthand some of the wonderful organizations devoted to keeping the nature around us beautiful.

“Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold.”

— Helen Keller
The ACT Works program is designed to provide individuals with disabilities with the opportunity to work in a supportive environment, with the goal of eventually finding employment out in the community. A major component of the supportive environment we provide comes from our eight production specialists, production workers without disabilities who work alongside the individuals we support in our recycling program, performing all of the same tasks and duties.

Amy, Kimberly, Karla, Josh, Orreisha, Ryan, James, and Shalia range in age from 19 to 60 and come from a variety of backgrounds. While two of these individuals only work for ACT, a few are college students working part time, and for others ACT serves as a second job. Our production specialists not only provide a positive work example for the individuals we support, but they are also responsible for demonstrating the soft skills necessary for community employment.

“I enjoy making a difference in the lives of others,” says Karla Stanley, Production Specialist. “Do what you love and love what you do.” In addition, Orreisha, Kimberly, and James are also trained as Mentors and can step into that role at a moment’s notice if needed.

Participation in the ACT Works recycling program not only allows the individuals we support to earn a steady paycheck, but also provides invaluable training that is needed for community employment. Our eight production specialists help to provide this training, as well as the support and guidance needed for our individuals to eventually make the transition to community-based work.

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

— Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed by former President George H.W. Bush
The primary goal of ACT Career Services is to help job seekers achieve their career goals while simultaneously working with local businesses to meet their recruitment and retention needs. The value of this service to the community is two-fold; employees receive the satisfaction, friendships, and financial rewards that come with having a career, and local businesses benefit from having hard working, qualified employees to support their operations.

Despite the value that individuals with disabilities can bring to the workforce, they continue to face disproportionately high rates of unemployment. While the ACT Career Services team works to reverse this trend in our local community, others are attempting to tackle the problem on the national level. One such effort was launched by Delaware Governor Jack Markell, who recently served as the Chair of the National Governor's Association. In this role, Governor Markell launched his Chair initiative: A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities.

The aim of the initiative is to increase the employment of individuals with disabilities, specifically focusing on the challenges and barriers to employment. In order to accomplish this goal, the initiative realized that it must focus on appropriate training, job placement, and work-based support; the same concepts that form the basis for ACT’s Career Services program.

Perhaps the greatest value this initiative can provide is the advancement of best practices to be used by the business community when addressing this employment disparity. Throughout the past year, the initiative provided governors and policymakers with options to develop state-specific strategies to support individuals with disabilities and has just unveiled their Blueprint for Governors to be used by states that wish to implement programs to assist individuals seeking employment.

National initiatives such as these are of tremendous value for the individuals we serve, but the benefits extend even farther. The government, businesses, the general public, the individuals we serve, and their families all stand to benefit from these efforts. We must all play a role and share some of the responsibility to not only help ACT accomplish its mission locally, but to also extend our vision and values to the national level.

To read more about Governor Markell’s Chair Initiative, as well as the Blueprint for Governor’s, please visit: http://ci.nga.org/cms/home/1213/index

---

**Job Opportunities**

ACT is seeking positive and enthusiastic employees to provide assistance and instruction to individuals with disabilities.

If you are interested in a career supporting individuals with disabilities, join us and help make a difference in someone's life. You must be willing to embrace challenges and accept great rewards. We invite you to consider ACT when seeking employment and/or work experience in the human services field.

ACT is an equal opportunity employer.

Visit actservices.org/jobs to view a list of job opportunities.
Bill’s iPad provides tool for communication

Bill has participated in the Community Living program since 1994. Bill has difficulty with communication, as he is unable to speak or hear, instead interacting with his family and peers using sign as well as pen and paper. This past January, Bill’s sister, Lynn, saw an episode of 60 minutes, in which a child with autism used an iPad to communicate with her family. Lynn has always believed that her brother could communicate more so she approached Bill’s Community Living team wondering whether using an iPad for communication could also be helpful for Bill.

With the help of Angela Erby, Program Supervisor for Community Living, and Tara Shade, Behavior Consultant, Bill’s team began researching several communication apps for his new iPad. Bill received training on how to use an app called TouchChat to better communicate with others. Bill can now use his iPad to make requests, communicate how he is feeling, and to ask about his favorite thing-PAYDAY!

“We really wanted to provide the resources to open up some doors for Bill,” says Angela, who also serves as Bill’s live-in supervisor. “It has been a wonderful tool, he’s doing really well with it.”

TouchChat allows Bill to express himself more freely, using pictures to facilitate communication with his family and friends. Bill now uses his iPad to communicate with other community members at the bank, at appointments with his doctor, while ordering food at restaurants, and at work.

Angela, who has been working with Bill for the past 6 years, notes how much Bill has progressed since getting the iPad this past February. “His communication skills have improved immensely over the last few months.” Angela says, “He definitely interacts with us more effectively.”

Assisting individuals to communicate better is just one of the many ways that our Community Living team works together to support individuals in activities that make up our day to day lives. By using his iPad, Bill has enhanced his ability to communicate with others and has become more independent in the community. Bill’s voice can now be heard by everybody, not just people who know him well. Bill’s Community Living Team is eager to continue to work with him on communicating more which will allow Bill to develop new friendships and explore new activities in his community.

Upcoming Events

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month
September 8-14 - Direct Support Professional (DSP) Week

For more events, please check out actservices.org/about-us/events
GET CONNECTED
Come follow us on social media:

- http://www.actservices.org
- ACTofCoMo
- ACTofCoMo

CONTACT US
ACT
2200 Burlington
Columbia, MO 65202
1-800-359-4607
1-573-474-9446