You don’t know it but you’re just a phone call away from some of the best workers in the Mid-Missouri area.

Through ACT’s Career Services, dozens of top-notch employees are working in area businesses.

Businesses benefit when they hire through ACT because of the many services ACT provides for the employee and employer. At no cost to the employer, ACT provides:

- Candidate pre-screening
- An expanded pool of qualified candidates
- On-the-job training
- Education and training of potential employees
- Retention services

“We work very closely with the employer to meet their business needs,” says Jessica Boffa, Program Manager of ACT Career Services.

“We are not a traditional employment service like many people think of,” she says. “We are not a temp agency; we help employers find qualified candidates for permanent positions. Our services save the employer a lot of their own time and money.”

Despite these services, many businesses are reluctant to employ an individual with a disability because they fear they will have to spend a great deal of money to make accommodations for the individual.

A national survey by a division of the U.S. Department of Labor found nearly half of all employers interviewed reported that the accommodations they implemented cost nothing. Similarly, 45 percent experienced a one-time cost; the median cost was $500.

In return, the employer got a productive employee. A study by DuPont found that 90 percent of employees with disabilities rated average or better in job performance compared to 95 percent for employees without disabilities.

Boffa reminds that studies indicate that individuals with disabilities have higher company loyalty and are inclined to stay in jobs longer, reducing high turnover costs.

Studies also indicate that consumers prefer to give their business to companies which hire individuals with disabilities.

Ninety-two percent of respondents in a 2006 Gallup Poll indicated these companies as more favorable to companies which do not hire individuals with disabilities.

Another question asked for perceptions of the benefits of employing people with disabilities. A total of 87 percent of the respondents said they prefer to give their business to a company employing an individual or individuals with disabilities.

Employees with disabilities “are a tremendous resource,” Boffa says. “They’re a resource for the employer and our community.”

If you’d like to learn more about ACT’s Career Services

call: 573-474-9446 or 800-359-4607
E-mail: ACTcareerservices@gmail.com

Services to employers are free
Tap into quality employees through Career Services

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6 Russians visit ACT to learn about recycling program

Sixteen offensive linemen of the University of Missouri-Columbia football team got acquainted with ACT consumers and staff recently. One group of the players listens to Community Integration Program Director Michelle Saunders while another player gives an autograph to an ACT consumer along with many signing their names. The group will return to ACT in mid-April to help clean the outside areas, play football with consumers and take part in Wii games.
Focus on work drives new director

Focus is a word that drives everything John Savage does at ACT. Now the Director of Employment Services, Savage found employees at ACT matched his passion for work.

Checking out ACT on its Web site confirmed his impression of ACT as an individual-driven organization. “What attracted me to ACT was their philosophy. The Web site shared with him “the focus ACT has on people they’re serving - basically that there is a job for everybody who wants one.”

“We find the job that meets the consumer’s needs, instead of saying ‘we have a job, now you must meet the requirements.’” His, and ACT’s, approach is ‘you want a job, now let’s help you find a job that best matches your abilities and interests.’ I really like that attitude. I really like that focus. I was very impressed by that.”

That philosophy is encouraged by the many state agencies ACT works which is a change from the Illinois agencies he worked with before joining ACT in December.

“Coming from Illinois, it’s a positive change in the service system. Missouri is far ahead of Illinois in what were doing. People have opportunities here they wouldn’t be able to have in Illinois.”

At ACT, Savage directs two large operations – the recycling program known as ACT Works plus the Career Services Program that places consumers in jobs for local businesses.

Savage came well prepared for his new job. He has worked for 17 years in organizations serving individuals with disabilities. Working primarily with people in residential homes he has been everything from a direct service professional to an administrator. For the past five years he was the primary staff trainer for a large agency in central Illinois with homes as far south as the Metro East area and up to the suburbs of Chicago.

He adds he’s glad he’s made the move. “There’s a lot of positive thinking here. One goal is to meet high standards in the recycling operation. We need to make sure that as an agency we put out a quality product. Just because we have employees with disabilities doesn’t mean we can slide. And our consumers are perfectly capable of putting out that quality.”

“The Career Services Program is really doing a great job. There are a lot of things to be gained by a business hiring a person through Career Services.”

“The focus always is the quality work the people who work here produce. We want to make sure they’re happy and make sure they have a good, safe, enjoyable place where they’re making a decent wage doing a decent job. Fundamentally our goal is to get people with disabilities jobs.”

Family atmosphere begins with staff

It’s a family thing at ACT. There are many staff people either related to each other or to an ACT consumer. A total of 25 employees are related either to another ACT employee or ACT consumer. That’s a total of 15 percent of ACT’s 169 employees.

Sharla Hyler, Human Resource Manager, says staff often join ACT because they have a family member receiving support from ACT. Having the knowledge and experience of caring for an individual with disabilities is a tremendous benefit as an ACT employee, she says.

“You know the importance of caring and what it takes – what is required to take care of that individual.” She adds that such an employee “brings that into their job already knowing about caring.”

Employees with loved ones as consumers “have included that member in their life functions. When they come into our agency as employees, they don’t know any different. They know to include consumers served in everything that goes on.”

For the 25 employees related to another staff member or consumer, “it becomes second nature for them to come and work here,” Hyler says. “It’s natural for family members to want to get involved.”

Because it’s a family affair in many cases, consumers benefit in many ways, Hyler says.

Often someone will join the ACT staff after a wife or husband joins the staff. “You are pulled in and drawn in and get to know everyone anyway.” The spouse “wants to enhance the consumers’ lives as much as possible as an employee.”

“Our staff ends up being for our consumers that extended family some of them don’t have.”

Missouri ahead of Illinois

John Savage says ACT’s emphasis on work for many consumers drew him to his new position. Here he watches Chad pack a large box with cassette tapes.

New Director of Employment Services

John Savage says ACT’s emphasis on work for many consumers drew him to his new position. Here he watches Chad pack a large box with cassette tapes.

The focus always is the quality work the people who work here produce. We want to make sure they’re happy and make sure they have a good, safe, enjoyable place where they’re making a decent wage doing a decent job. Fundamentally our goal is to get people with disabilities jobs.

John Savage, Director of Employment Services

Staff member with a family member who is an ACT consumer:
- Brittany Payne and sister Lindsey;
- Nancy Schaefer and mother Marsha; Marsha’s other daughter, Misty Mings also works in ACT’s Community Integration Program.
- Lisa Roper, aunt of Clarence, and Myron Thomas also related to Clarence

Employees who also work with a family member at ACT:
- Barb Absher; mother of Luke; Jessica Kennedy, niece of Barb
- Gloria Landers, Felicia Baines and Liz Koyego
- Carrie Griffith, daughter of Susan Braselton and Scott Braselton, brother Jill and husband Bruce Ziebarth
- Alanta Free and husband Rhodi Schnetzer
- Monica Ganaway and sister Vivian Spears
- Tina Hill and daughter Ashley Kee
- Sharla Hyler and mother Myna McGowin
- Debbie Muro and sister Autumn Hanes
- Janesetta Jackson and Angel Lawson, cousins
Here’s a lot to be said about life experience. And Jill Wacker has the managerial and social service experience to work now as a Program Supervisor in the Community Living Program.

Wacker, a native of St. Charles, worked in the corporate world briefly after college, but knew she wanted to work with people. So she spent the next 15 years as the director of a small non-profit in Fayette that works with persons with developmental disabilities.

“I was doing that and feeling real good about it,” she says. But the option came to stay at home with her growing family and work as a bookkeeper for her husband’s sub sandwich shops.

Today she’s closely involved with three consumers and staff as their Program Supervisor. “I’m kind of starting again in social services,” she says. “Now that I’m here it’s kind of like putting on an old pair of shoes. It’s very comfortable and it feels like I made the right choice.”

What she likes about the job is that it has two facets – people and the management of records and paper.

“You know, paper is so clean and so finished. I like that. When you work with people you may never really have closure. You do your best to help people, but as lives go on you may never really know what happened with that person and did that work out. There’s a lot of open-endedness when you work with people.”

Wacker brings to the job the insight of someone who is a parent of a child with a disability. One of her three sons has a mild form of autism, often called Asberger’s syndrome. She says that experience helps her see how other parents of developmentally disabled individuals may act a certain way.

“It really gives you a new perspective on the family’s point of view. It’s harder to do all those things you know are right to do. So, I think it really helps me have a better perspective with the family members. Their perspective is just different. And their emotional level is different.”

In addition to her personal experiences, she hopes to draw on years of management of employees. For the near future she hopes to have more homes to manage and eventually “work into something along quality or training.” She said she’d like to see continuity always take place when staff changes are made.

Her first impressions of ACT are positive with extensive training being a strong plus. Staff, too, are a plus, she says. “Here you see a lot of professionalism.”

Wacker and her husband Kirk have three sons – twins Shane and Jarritt who are in seventh grade and Colt, 16, and a sophomore at Hickman High School.
Consumers select own activities

Freedom of choice the goal of new program

A trip to Central Dairy for ice cream is just a fingertip away. ACT recently launched Community Advantage, a program that blends technology with freedom to choose for older consumers.

The program is overseen by Doug Edgar, Community Integration Program Supervisor. He was instrumental in developing an easy-to-use Web site that allows consumers to pick what they’d like to do throughout the week. Currently there are two activities a day, Monday through Friday. As more consumers sign up, activity options will expand.

With a target of older consumers, the activities involve “smaller, more calm groups,” Doug says. He aims for activities that “might not have the hustle and bustle that comes with some of our younger consumers.”

The program is driven by the Web site which lists activities at least one week in advance. Each consumer is assigned a name and a password. They then choose their own activities for the next week.

Edgar says the staff wants consumers to have complete freedom of choice when it comes to activities.

“We don’t want to assign any activities to them at all. They do that on their own on the Internet from their home.”

He adds that they might say “hey, we’re going to the library on Tuesday I’d like to do that. With a couple clicks of the mouse, they’re signed up.”

Generally there is a morning and an afternoon activity. Consumers can pick one or both if they’d like.

So far “we’ve had a lot of success and the participants are excited about it because they have a lot more say in their daily schedule,” he says.

Another advantage is that ACT can use the Web site to plan staffing needs for the week as well. “It’s a win-win situation,” says Doug.

Rest assured there is plenty of mental stimulation and variety for the consumers. Doug said he purposely seeks out and schedules activities that are meaningful and meet the needs of older consumers.

Activities include social activities such as morning coffee, bingo, and ice cream; cultural activities such as plays and museum visits; physical activities such as a walk in the mall and bowling, and intellectual activities such as going to the library or playing games. Eventually Doug hopes to have intergenerational activities such as visits to a day care facility or a high school.

Activities are color-coded on the Web site by type of activity to make choosing easier.

“We’re trying to develop a wide variety so it’s not just bowling or walking,” he says. The new program can also “allow the home staff to steer a consumer to a particular area of need.”

Doug Edgar, Community Integration Program Supervisor

Yes we can.

That was the theme of the second Black History Celebration at ACT. The event included singing by Mary Warren, Training Specialist for Community Integration, and a message by Demetrice Bell, main relief in Community Living and past at St. John White Chapel Baptist Church. Other participants included a reading by Darren Calvin and a special performance by Daniel Anderson. Of course, food was a big part of the celebration with many dishes brought in by ACT employees. The event was coordinated by several ACT staff.
Day shift will get up-to-date information

Online system increases continuity of care

Many of ACT’s consumers soon will receive an improved continuity of care thanks to a real-time software program known as Therap.

The program really is very simple. It allows staff to tap into the Therap site to continuously and instantly post information about consumers, policies and many other things. Also posted can be goals for each individual consumer and their progress throughout the month. Specific forms required by the State of Missouri can also be on the consumer’s information pages.

The information is all secure with a consumer’s information only available to their family or ACT staff member. The staff member will only have access to their specific group of consumers.

“It’s the best thing that’s come along,” says Michelle Saunders, Program Director of the Community Integration Program.

She explains Therap is very open to new ideas from users. “If you have an idea of doing something better or if you have a form you’ve utilized that you want to continue, they can work it in their system.”

Online documentation through Therap will decrease time spent in written documentation and increase quality time spent engaged with consumers.

If you are interested in visiting the Therap site to learn more, go to: www.therapservices.net.

Army experiences benefit program supervisor

Even military service can help an individual assist consumers in the Community Living Program. That’s what Karen Berry has found out after 12 years and staff sergeant status in the U.S. Army.

“Military background has helped me to focus when chaos is all around. She adds that “parenting helped, too.”

Berry recently joined ACT as a Community Living Program Supervisor. In that role she manages two homes with a total of three consumers each. Her homes are on Crown Point and Phyllis.

During orientation Berry “began to blend my relationship with the clients and let them get to know me and just observe and talk about things. Now the next step is we’re going to have a staff meeting – we’ll explore how do we enhance this – our service and make you feel supported at the same time.”

Berry says she’s putting in the positive atmosphere she felt the minute she applied for her job.

“When I came here it was such a positive experience. I haven’t met anyone I haven’t been impressed with. We’re all working together and that’s important to me. I want to be part of that.”

She adds that she developed a positive attitude at an early age. Her father worked in occupational therapy which “he brought into my mind as a child that everybody isn’t as blessed as you are so don’t take things for granted.” She also gained life lessons from her mother who worked with small children in social work.

Her work includes 12 years in the U.S. Army where she dismantled bombs, worked in intelligence and computers.

She likes a lot of variety in her career, she adds. “I like to know something almost every day. That’s the really cool part. I don’t get bored easily but I want to keep going and keep figuring things out. Like the people I’m around. They all give positive energy and that makes me feel better about everything.”

Karen Berry, Community Living Program Supervisor.

Karen Berry says the organization is “currently working on medication administration to complete documentation online. They’re also working on an incident reporting form that is standardized statewide. They’re constantly developing and looking at the big picture.”

One of the most valuable uses will be passing along information from evening and night to the daytime staff, Saunders says. The daytime staff might find out their consumer “really struggled” the night before. The daytime direct care could be equipped to provide the consumer extra support when they first meet in the morning as well as throughout the day.

“This is another example of continuity of care and will enhance the communication,” says Saunders. “Just being able to look through and see what happened is helpful.”

Families, who will have the identification to login also will benefit by knowing how their son or daughter is doing.

In addition to specific information about their son or daughter the site will contain Frequently Asked Questions and other vital information. Also “many of the key players who work for Therap have blogs and they give a great deal of support to set it up and support it.”

ACT will use many computers in the Community Integration Program as well as 10 laptops, one each at Community Living Program homes using the system.

With 90 consumers in the Community Integration Program, Therap will play a large role in communication, says Saunders. “I think we’ll be better prepared to understand and deal with situations,” she says. And I also think it will benefit all the sites throughout ACT.”

“Therap will enhance the service delivery system within Community Integration. Because we’re delivering services so consumer centered now, that’s very challenging at times when someone changes their mind or they’re not in the same group. We want to support that choice – what they want to do.”

Karen Berry, Community Living Program Supervisor.
ACT Works is helping a Russian organization improve its own recycling operations.

Two representatives from Salvation Center, located in Asbest, Russia visited ACT twice to see how the plastic granulator process works.

The contact was made through Bob and Doris Scribner who are consultants to Salvation Center. Bob is a past board member and president of ACT and is president and consultant with his firm, Executive Advantage. The Scribners live in Columbia but have made frequent trips to Russia to assist the Salvation Center. Representing the center during two visits to ACT were Evgeny Melnikov and Konstantin Lyubanov. “Their main goal is increasing the capacity of the recycling operation,” Doris says.

Founded 10 years ago, the center helps rehabilitate individuals with drug or alcohol addictions and also works with individuals with AIDS or HIV. The program includes a nine-month rehabilitation period and then a three-month period known as an adaptation period. Salvation Center doesn’t charge for services, room, board or living expenses.

“I believe ACT’s involvement will play a crucial role in saving and supporting clients,” she says. She adds that ACT’s Executive Director Mark Hassemer and other ACT employees “value Salvation Center’s work and encourage visitors from Salvation Center because it takes a lot of small steps to change society’s mentality.”

In addition to earning income for the center, the recycling program provides employment that generally is difficult to get in Russia for ex-addicts. “This is where the plastics recycling program is important,” says Doris. “Most of these young men and women are restricted in their ability to find a job or a place to stay,” she says. Because it’s difficult for an ex-addict to get a job, “the plastics recycling program plays an essential role in helping young people get on their feet.”

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ACT employees value Salvation Center’s work and encourage visitors from Salvation Center because it takes a lot of small steps to change society’s mentality.

Doris Scribner, Salvation Center consultant