The Bluffs care facility a great partner with ACT Career Services

Job assessments lead to career opportunities

The Bluffs, a Columbia senior care facility, and ACT Career Services have a good thing going. The partnership stretches back over 10 years. The strong relationship starts with The Bluffs’ willingness to let ACT consumers try out various jobs through the assessment process. It continues with The Bluffs’ willingness to hire qualified candidates from ACT Career Services for their job openings.

Assessments give the chance for individuals who don’t have a lot of work experience to learn more about potential career options, says Jessica Boffa, Career Services Program Manager. “It’s a learning opportunity for our staff and the individual to determine their abilities and interests and any supports which might be needed to help the job seeker become a successful employee.”

The Bluffs offers Career Services job seekers chances to try their hand at duties in departments such as housekeeping, laundry, dietary, activities, and maintenance. If a job seeker is interested in other areas of employment which are available at The Bluffs, those options can be explored as well.

Assessment “is a really good process to help the potential employee develop the knowledge necessary for them to explore a successful career path,” says John Savage, Director of Employment Services.

When it comes time for The Bluffs to hire a new employee, Career Services is a resource department managers can turn to for pre-screened, qualified applicants.

“I have an opening, and I can call ACT. That’s pretty simple for me,” says Housekeeping Supervisor James Marz of the Bluffs. “That’s one of the first things I do. It’s definitely having those types of resources that make it a lot easier for us to handle business.”

One recent hire is Joel. He’s an individual with several responsibilities and the desire to help wherever help is needed. For example, after cleaning the dining room for the 132-bed facility, he’ll pitch in and help in the laundry room. He also cleans and mops the entryways.

“Joel’s doing a great job,” says Marz. “Joel likes what he does, and the staff and residents like it because there wasn’t a housekeeping person here after 3 pm. I leave when Joel arrives, and it’s nice to know I have an employee who can adjust to help out where he is needed.”

“It’s great,” says Marz. “It’s absolutely great. I applaud them. ACT is always learning ways to help their consumers meet their goals.”

Close partnership. When Housekeeping Supervisor James Marz, left, needs to fill a position at The Bluffs, he immediately calls the ACT Career Services Program to discuss qualified applicants. Here Marz is accompanied by Joel, who recently joined The Bluffs through Career Services’ job development efforts.
Amy Bussing

Amy Bussing has nearly a decade of experience working with individuals who have developmental disabilities. Joining ACT in 2003, she has been a Live-In, Main Relief and an On-Call staff. She has worked in a variety of homes, but she always driven back to North Oakland Gravel Road. “It’s a very quiet house,” says Amy. The consumers “like to come home and sit back and relax. It’s comfortable.” One of the strengths of Amy supervising the house, affectionately nicknamed, “NOG,” is the continuity of care. Amy enjoys seeing the progress made by Dolly and Veronica through the years, she knows their families, their history, and what is important to them. Initiatives that began years ago have follow through and it’s been integral in the ladies achieving successes and learning new skills every day.

Samantha Kathke

Samantha Kathke, a Kansas native, moved to Columbia in 2000 and has been a part of ACT since October 2009. Prior to her promotion as a Program Supervisor, she was working as a Main Relief. “She was impressive as a staff person—organized, detailed, personable. Her consumers enjoyed working with her and she was able to accomplish quite a bit. I really believe that the skills she was demonstrating will translate well to a supervisory position and that has definitely been the case,” says Carrie Griffith, her supervisor.

Samantha is coordinating two homes, Fieldcrest and Longwell. She works with five consumers who represent a wide variety of ages, interests and abilities. “I really like the work. I like the people I work with and the variety,” she says. “It makes it interesting.”

New beginnings for experienced staff
Community Living welcomes familiar faces in new roles

“Promoting from within means that you have hired the right people with the essential values who have learned along the way and can serve the organization in a fresh capacity,” comments Carrie Griffith, Program Manager for Community Living.

When looking to fill supervisory positions, ACT is very fortunate to have a strong pool of talent in our direct care staff who we have been able to advance into positions of increased responsibility. These four new supervisors are tried and true. They were outstanding in their previous positions and have moved on to new challenges and opportunities within ACT.
Ben Baker

Supervision isn’t new for Ben Baker, who was introduced to ACT through the Community Advantage and Day Programs. Recently he’s donning a new hat: Program Supervisor. He’s now overseeing three gentlemen at Briarwood, a home where he has served as Main Relief for the past two years. Coming into his new position with the knowledge of the consumers he’s working with, his focus has been on organizing the house and getting the mechanics of supervision down.

Ben supervises two homes – Primrose and Texas – which incorporates consumer medications, health care, home maintenance, staffing, community integration, and all the details of day-to-day living. “It’s been enjoyable so far. I’m getting to know folks and am jumping right in there. I enjoy the pace and it’s definitely appealing to make an impact in consumer lives on this level.”

While balancing the individual needs of both homes and six consumers can be complicated, the care of each individual is at the core of what drives Ben every day he comes to work. “I like the way ACT provides services to folks and is as person-centered as possible. The corporate philosophy really meshes with my personal beliefs. ACT is a comfortable place for me.”

Luke Abshier

ike other staff, Luke has worn many hats during his six-year tenure with ACT’s Community Living Program. Recently he’s donning a new hat: Program Supervisor. He’s now overseeing three gentlemen at Briarwood, a home where he has served as Main Relief for the past two years. Coming into his new position with the knowledge of the consumers he’s working with, his focus has been on organizing the house and getting the mechanics of supervision down.

Luke has brought the consumer’s personalities out in their home décor, making wall collages of consumer photos and concentrating on making their home comfortable. Luke is taking an active role in the lives of his three consumers, Seth, Chris and Kelly. Now that he has their “home base” in order, the focus is outward on community integration. They are eagerly looking forward to Special Olympics bowling and swimming competition.

Being able to draw on ideas that were garnered from his years as direct care staff has meant that he has been able to “hit the ground running.” He’s had success working with a consumer in conjunction with behavior therapy and implementing those strategies in a positive way.

“I’m working on getting things flowing. Organization is a strength of mine and we’re trying now to get things centered and on the same page,” Luke says. “I think we’re doing well.”
Joining ACT’s job-placement efforts is James Tenny-Brittian. James recently was named Assessment Coordinator for ACT Career Services. He replaces Fontella Jackmon-Jones, who was recently promoted to Program Supervisor.

James comes to ACT with three years of experience serving individuals with developmental disabilities at Woodhaven, where he got to know many ACT consumers. Transporting Woodhaven consumers to ACT, James made friends with consumers and staff alike.

According to ACT staff, he’s put in motion a dynamic personality, willingness to serve, and compassion. “He’s enthusiastic and eager to help. He has great personal skills,” says John Savage, Director of Employment Services. “His positive energy is a good blend with the others in the office.”

“He has character,” adds Jessica Boffa, Program Manager for ACT Career Services. “He values what we value—people having the opportunity to succeed.”

James learned his compassion for people as the son of two Disciples of Christ ministers. He says he spent time “helping people through church-related mission work. And if you enjoy helping people, it really makes it worth it.”

“I look forward to coming here and working with different people, businesses, and agencies,” he says. “It’s always something new. I like all aspects of it, especially the personal approach to get to know job seekers.”

He says there “are a lot of great companies out there” that are open to allowing consumer assessments. ACT Career Services has active relationships with dozens of local partners who regularly allow job seekers to explore career options and determine their strengths and interests, James explains.

“James has an excellent grasp of how to put our philosophy into practice, helping job seekers determine their skills, interests, and career goals,” says Boffa. “People who want to work getting the opportunity to work—that’s exciting.”
Survey planned to help develop program

Parent/Guardian Forum begins

On 1-18-11, after much planning, A Community Integration Program held a Parent Forum. This forum was held at the 2200 building and led by Michelle Saunders, Program Director, Michelle Bell, Program Manager and Kaylynn Ramsey, Activities Coordinator.

A power point overview of information regarding the agency and all programs within the agency was provided to family members/guardians. An explanation of ACT’s Vision and Mission was reviewed and an overview of ACT’s workforce was summarized.

Kaylynn provided information regarding volunteer sites, as well as other activities offered in the community and within the facility. Kaylynn discussed the process of including consumers in the planning of activities and the groups that have been created to address needs/wants of consumers, such as: Employment Group, Dental Hygiene, Healthy Relationships, etc.

The Forum ended with a tour for attendees through the themed program areas. Consumers who attended the forum assisted with the tours.

Michelle Saunders notes, “Our hope is to increase communication with those families and guardians who are interested in enhanced communication. We plan to survey families during annual meetings over the next year and use this feedback to improve services, such as providing speakers/training opportunities, offering times to socialize, etc.”

Easter Fun. Several ACT consumers colored their own custom Easter eggs just before the holiday. Leshon Taylor, a DSP, center, helps James, left and Agustine, right. Each consumer personalized their egg with their name then colored them in a wide range of pastel colors. In addition to the Easter egg activity, ACT had an Easter bunny on hand for all to see.
The Training and Development committee has been an active committee at ACT for the past three years. Its members have worked together to create and implement a new hire block training for all newly hired employees. Block training is a seven day period that assists employee to receive certifications in the many areas required by the state and by ACT.

Block training starts with:
- An overview of the history and mission of ACT by Executive Director, Mark Hassemer
- A tour of the facilities
- Training topics including Abuse/Neglect Prevention, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention, Medication Administration, CPR/First Aid, Missouri Quality Outcomes, Person First Language, Accessibility training, etc.

After block training is complete, the second phase of training begins. The employee is oriented to the site they will be working at by a mentor or a seasoned employee. Training with each consumer takes place and new employees need to demonstrate competence in understanding each consumer’s plan prior to being cleared to work at the site.

Michelle Saunders, Program Director, explains, “The goal is to make sure employees are trained consistently and treated the same and that supervisors have the tools to do their jobs effectively and efficiently.”

The Training and Development committee also assists with finding or creating training as requested or needed and is currently working on the following trainings: vehicle safety, diabetes, stress management and oral hygiene. The committee also offers professional development opportunities to supervisory staff on a quarterly basis.

Saunders adds, “We’re building better, more qualified employees for the people we support.”