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inter **ACT** ion

Summer 2002

Alternative Community Training

Apartment program celebrates independence

July 4 took on special meaning this year for several ACT participants. July 4 was their personal independence day. The participants had just begun to live on their own in their own apartments.

Five ACT participants now are living on their own with some staff support. Four live at Tiger Village, a large apartment complex complete with swimming pool. A fifth individual now resides at Holiday House, another Columbia apartment complex.

"It's great to see how excited everybody is," says Rebecca Beard, program manager who helped launch the new apartment program. "It's something the participants were really wanting and now we're able to provide it."

Over the past several years ACT clients told her they would like to have their own apartment, she says.

"This is a goal they have been working towards and they've shown they can live more independently."

As part of the program, the individuals are responsible for furnishing their apartment and cooking their own meals as well as making sure their rent and utilities are paid.

Safety is the primary criteria to allow a client to live in their apartment, she says. "We look to see if they're safe by themselves. That's number one. Can they use the stove safely? If someone comes to the door what are they going to do? Those kinds of safety issues are what matter most."

With the program just beginning, about 22 to 25 hours of staff support will be available for each client. One staff person will rent an apartment in the complex for easy access by the clients. Other support staff will set up appointments with participants to help go over bills, budget or assist with grocery shopping.



HOME SWEET HOME. A Tiger Village apartment is now the home of Josh as part of ACT's new apartment program.

Eventually Beard expects the amount of support to be reduced to about 10 hours per week for each client. The focus at that time will be providing assistance for budgeting, she says.

The Tiger Village complex is within easy walking distance of retailers including Wal-Mart and K-Mart. A little further jaunt will take you to the Columbia Mall and many of the clients' favorite grocery store, Hy-Vee.

As new or existing participants meet safety-related and other program requirements, more apartments may be located by ACT.

"I have no doubt that this program will be successful," says Beard. "Hopefully this will lead to others achieving their goal of living independently."

ReachOut update

The following memorials, honorariums and general donations have been received through the ReachOut contributions program.

HONORARIUMS

- Mr. and Mrs John Schupp in honor of their son, John
- Claudius and Sally Miller in honor of Gerald and Barbara Braznell's 50th Wedding Anniversary
- Marjorie Graham in honor of Bill Braznell's birthday and the 50th Wedding Anniversary of Gerald and Barbara Braznell

Gerald and Judy Zafft in honor of Gerald and Barbara Braznell's 50th Wedding Anniversary

MEMORIALS

In memory of Dick Braznell the following persons contributed:

- Gerald and Barbara Braznell
- John and Eileen Braznell
- John and Mary Ellen Braznell
- Maxine Morrow
- James and Mary Anne Mendel
- Brad and Shelly Neudecker
- Gerald and Judy Zafft
- Lucius Morse

- James and Terri Monroe
- James and Constance Finger
- Jack and Diana Davison
- Lynn Hedrick
- Shirley Spence
- Wayne and Carol Spann
- Rose Fischer in memory of Connie Woodward

Gerald and Barbara Braznell in memory of Susan Heimburger

GENERAL DONATIONS

- Missouri State Employees Charitable Campaign
- John and Jacqueline Pascucci

a personal story Meet Uncle Billy

The following is an essay the granddaughter of board member Jerry Braznell wrote as part of her application to Princeton University in October 1997. Recently Lindsay Hedrick graduated from Princeton. Her Uncle Billy is Bill Braznell a member of the ACT family since ACT was founded more than 25 years ago.

By Lindsay Hedrick

On Easter, you'll find him peering into storm drains looking for those gaudy plastic eggs filled with quarters and grotesque marshmallow rabbits. He checks all the pockets of his birthday pants for dollar bills. He inhales Cocoa Puffs like oxygen and drinks orange soda through a straw. He draws pictures of me and my family on his calendar to mark the days he knows he will see us. This is not my younger cousin or nephew, he is my 37 year old Uncle Billy.

Billy was born mentally handicapped. He suffers from severe autism and is completely deaf. From these conditions stem a plethora of neurological disorders, some of which can be tamed by medication. He essentially cannot communicate except for rudimentary sign language that he has learned through years of instruction. Billy is incapable of independent living and has required constant professional supervision his entire life.

I often wonder why this happened to Billy. Why was he born with this condition that prohibits him from controlling his mind and body? Why must he live in a state that ignorant people laugh and joke about? This man should be in the prime of his life—enjoying a wife, raising of children, and developing a successful

career. Instead, he is held captive by a brain that doesn't allow him to learn and prosper in the world around him.

Looking at Billy's childlike tendencies and his undeveloped intelligence, it is easy to conclude that he is oblivious to the world around him. According to society's standards, it is indisputable that Billy is simple minded. After all, his IQ has been tested at the second grade level. But through the years, I have noticed that some of Billy's behaviors indicate that there is more going on inside his head than we might assume. For example, several years ago my family realized that Billy sorts the money in his wallet according to serial number. In addition, he is extremely habitual. He is always aware of the time, the date, and what is supposed to be happening.

As a child, I rarely ever questioned Uncle Billy's condition. That was simply the way he was, and he was not going to change. But now as I mature and begin to test my own abilities in life, I am starting to wonder if Uncle Billy does not have more capability and understanding than we believe. Autism is truly one of the great mysteries of modern medicine. This puzzle is an incessant plague in the lives of me and my family. I would like to end the wondering because each time I watch my



Bill Braznell dances with his mother, Barbara, during the 50th anniversary celebration of his mother and father, ACT board member Gerald Braznell.

uncle blow out his birthday candles, I know another year has passed, and the questions still remain unanswered. Sometimes, I almost feel that the sheepish grin he occasionally dons is in mockery of all of us surrounding him. Perhaps we are the ones who truly don't understand.

ACT receives three-year accreditation

ACT has received a three-year accreditation from the Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission, also known as CARF.

The CARF accreditation sets the standard in the nation for organizations such as ACT. ACT has earned the accreditation every three-year period since 1987.

"It's an accomplishment that reflects well on all our staff," says executive director Mark Hassemmer. "It is a very special designation that reassures our clients and families that we provide the highest level of service and care."

Preparing for the intensive accreditation review also reflects on the dedication of the staff, Hassemmer says. "We appreciate all of the staff for working tirelessly for the review. It was a collective effort and one that shows the highest level of professionalism among our staff."

Brian Boon, president of CARF, says ACT "should take pride in achieving this high level

of accreditation. This achievement is an indication of your organization's dedication and commitment to improving the quality of lives of the people receiving services."

In CARF's final report to ACT many areas of strength were highlighted. A few areas reported to ACT include:

DEDICATED STAFF. The staff members are highly qualified, have many years of collective experience, and display dedication to the mission of the organization, which has resulted in considerable stability for the provision of quality service.

SATISFACTION. Persons receiving services, funding/regulatory agencies, and businesses express a high degree of satisfaction with services.

STABILITY. ACT appears to be appropriately structured and successfully administered to meet the needs of the persons receiving services. The organization has a history of



financial stability and solvency.

JOB ACCESS. The organization has developed many avenues for persons receiving services to access a wide variety of community jobs that are well matched with individual interests and abilities.

TRANSITION TO WORK. ACT has made concerted and successful efforts to assist and support a large number of persons with significant disabilities to make the transition from day personal and social services into paid employment.

CALENDAR

ACT's offices and facility-based programs will be closed for the following holidays:

September 2 — Labor Day

September 20 — Retreat

November 28, 29 — Thansgiving

December 24, 25 — Christmas

December 31 - January 1 — New Year

GETTING OUT

Participants in ACT's Day Program are now out in the community almost 50 percent of the time, reports Don Lafferty, director of the program.

Adding a new employee to the day program has allowed more trips to be taken, he explains. Before staff was increased, participants were in the community about 20 percent of the time.

ACT also has leased another van to take participants to many activities—from Meals on Wheels to traveling throughout the state.

MARKETING PUSH CONTINUES

ACT's Affirmative Industry Program continued its efforts to bring new business to the Columbia facility.

Recently 350,000 CD jewel cases were acquired for ACT participants to repackage in 10 packs, says Don Lafferty, program director. Act also is investigating the use of recycled products to be used in the manufacturing of other storage cases for CDs. The program also continued its effort to get new customers. In an effort to find new videocassette and computer diskette customers, a 2,300-piece mailing was made to every school in Missouri. There also was a mailing of 900 sales pieces to all school districts in Illinois.

VIDEOCASSETTE TAPE SALES STRONG

Recent months witnessed strong sales of videocassette tapes. ACT's largest customer purchased 24 pallets of VHS tape. A pallet holds about 4,000 tapes.

Another large customer purchased four pallets of tapes, all Betacam or three-quarter-inch tapes.

Recently a new customer has placed an order for five pallets of long-length tapes. In addition to strong videocassette sales, the month of April saw strong sales of computer diskettes. A total of 215,000 diskettes were sold in April which is one of the best months in several years.

Q. How did you get acquainted with ACT?

A. Through my stepdaughter Nancy who works here at ACT.

Q. What kind of work have you done here?

A. For a year-and-one-half I worked in the production area as a production specialist and production training specialist. For nine months I worked somewhere else but I missed this place so I came back. I now work in the Day Program as a training specialist and two hours a day in the production area.

Q. What drew you back to ACT?

A. I missed this place. I really like it. Everyone here is very ethical. It's very well organized. The managers are very good and the employees work well together.

Q. In working with your clients, what's the most satisfying part of your job?

A. It's fun when I find out a little more about what they do and I'm surprised at what they can do. I just love the hugs and the smiles. I get a lot of them.

Q. What else can you say about ACT?

A. It's a great place.



It takes teamwork to start a career

It takes teamwork to launch a career for ACT clients. Through the efforts of many, one particular ACT client began her dream job this summer.

Amanda, a Rock Bridge High School senior, began her work at a Columbia Blockbuster store as a result of a great deal of teamwork, explains Ray Handy, supported employment director.

Amanda always wanted to work at a video store and now it's a reality for her. "I think this will be a permanent job for her," says Rhonda McMillen, Amanda's mother. "It's helped her esteem-wise; she is more independent and is making decisions on her own. She's very happy with her job." At the store Amanda restocks shelves, shrink-wraps tapes and now is beginning to work at the register.

To land her job, many factors fell into place. One important aspect was a new assessment offered by the Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Known as Comprehensive Transitional Assessments, the test is available for students in their high school junior year—one year earlier than the typical Supported Employment Assessment. The process also offers more community-based trials than before to help place an individual in a job.

Completing assessments prior to an individual's senior year, "has been extremely beneficial because they're able to gain employment prior to graduating," says Handy.

Also helping Amanda were Blockbuster managers Bryan Pepper and Henry Mormon who accommodated Amanda in many ways on the job. The Columbia Public School District also was key to landing the job while initial training is being funded by Vocational Rehabilitation. And ACT played a role by



IN THE MOVIES. Amanda is now "in the movies" three times a week as an employee of a Columbia Blockbuster. Here she waits on a customer along with store manager Henry Mormon.

facilitating assessments, job development and providing a job coach for Amanda.

"It's a win-win situation for all entities and for Amanda," says Handy. "Most of all Amanda got the job she really desired."

"We're very appreciative of ACT," says Rhonda McMillen. "Amanda's interests and preferences have been at the forefront. ACT has a sincere interest in seeing a person lead an independent life."

In the future Handy hopes to involve the new assessment tests and possibly the Columbia Public Schools in helping plan careers for ACT clients. By working closely with the school district to begin assessments in the junior year, many individuals could be placed in a part-time job before graduation.

"It gives us a head start on career planning prior to graduation," says Handy.

The new Comprehensive Transitional Assessments give ACT "an early start on assessing individuals and getting into the job development process," he adds. The new assessments and teamwork "are going to help parents and students be ready for employment."

ON THE GO

Participants in ACT's Day Program continue to travel near and far this summer. Two highlights for the ACT City Travelers include an Amtrak journey to St. Louis and a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game.

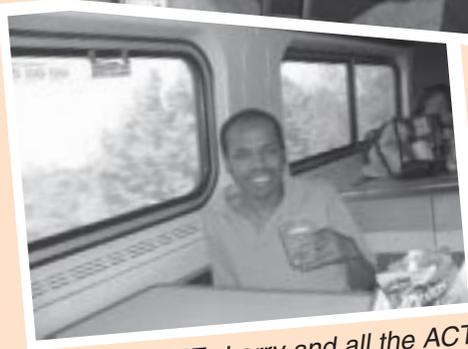
The ball game was on June 20, the same day as a memorial was held at Busch Stadium in honor of broadcaster Jack Buck.

Other highlights during May and June include visits to: Graham Cave State Park, Kansas City's Steamship Arabia Museum, the Kansas City Art Museum, Grants Farm, the St. Louis Science Center and the Missouri Governor's Garden.

Summer days were also filled with visits to Columbia's Access Arts, delivering hot meals as part of Meals on Wheels, fishing at Little Dixie Lake, bowling, attending the Blind Boone Jazz Fest, movie-going and hearing from entertainers such as the OakJammers and the Goldenaires.



SIGHTSEERS. Jenny, left center, Joyce and John take in the scenery from their St. Louis-bound Amtrak train.



BREAK TIME. Larry and all the ACT riders enjoyed the relaxation aboard the Amtrak train to St. Louis.



AMONG THE CROWD. A crowded Busch Stadium delighted Dennis and other ACT participants who took in a Cardinals game in June.

ACT now on line

Information about ACT is just a click away. With its new web site, individuals soon will be able to learn about the services and products of ACT.

The site can be found at: <http://actservices.org> The site was developed over the last several months by IDPgroup of Columbia.

Now you can click on the site and learn more about client services such as:

- Personal and social services
- Affirmative Industry Program
- Supported Employment
- Supported Living

Making the site personal are numerous pictures of ACT clients and employees. Case studies about ACT clients also are included.

The business side of ACT is a major part of the web site with on-line ordering of recycled video tapes, floppy disks and CD jewel cases. Information also is provided concerning Green Disk's Certified Destruction of Intellectual Property program.

Site visitors can learn how to donate materials such as video tapes and computer disks to ACT. For those seeking employment, the site also lists job openings.

<http://actservices.org>

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