There’s an apartment waiting for countless numbers of individuals. ACT’s apartment program, through the Community Living Program, is anxious to help individuals live on their own.

The apartment program has the staff and philosophy to help a wide range of individuals live on their own. The key to the program is support for each client ranging from 10 to 30 hours per week determined by a team on an individual basis.

And contrary to what you may think, an individual does not have to have all the life skills and behaviors to live on their own. It’s necessary, however, for them to have health and safety skills, be able to self-medicate and be responsible in the community. It’s also required that they know how to use appliances and be able to get in touch with community, fire and emergency contacts.

“This program has proven with the right support that individuals even with serious behavior issues can live on their own,” says Sue Anderson, program manager.

She adds that the program has found that “having their own space and different freedoms has helped them to learn to have better behavior. To me that’s really exciting.”

The program began two-and-one-half years ago with placement of all participants at Tiger Village. Today participants can choose where they want to live. Now the seven participants live throughout Columbia.

The program involves three staff members and a program manager. Staff assist the clients in many ways such as setting up weekly medications’ planners, reordering meds, setting up doctor’s appointments, cooking, grocery shopping and keeping a checkbook.

The staff, Anderson says, “are the greatest. They’re extremely flexible and caring; they have to be because they’re responsible for seven different places.”

The program is positioned to grow, Anderson believes. “I think it’s going to grow because there are a lot of people in supported living homes that given the chance could live in their own apartment with support. I think there are lots of people who with the right support could be in less strict environments.”

Candidates for an apartment don’t need to be fully independent, she adds. “Our emphasis is on teaching so someone doesn’t have to have every skill in the world. Staff support is there to teach.”

“I’m really excited about it,” she says. “It’s great.”
Three new employees have joined the Community Living Program. The new program managers are Jill Pyeatt, Nancy Brandt and Alanta Free. Each one is responsible for two homes with each home housing two or three ACT clients.

Each new employee finds many good reasons to be a part of ACT. Each enjoys working with the clients as well as the variety in each of their jobs.

“I really like working with clients,” says Pyeatt. “It’s really cool to just spend time with them and talk with them.”

She’s a natural for her job because “I really like working with people with developmental disabilities. They’re just really great people and they’re fun to hang out with.”

A native of Fairfax, Missouri, Pyeatt has a psychology degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She hopes someday to earn her doctorate in psychology. Her experience includes working with juvenile sex offenders. She also worked at the Algoa Correctional Facility.

For Nancy Brandt, having a person with disabilities in her family motivates her to help others at ACT.

“I love caring for individuals. You have to have a heart and you have to be a caring person to be in this field—period.”

She adds that anyone could have a person with disabilities in their family.

“You could have a family member—like I do—who has disabilities.” She says her main motivation comes from her experience caring for her father who was in a nursing home for 12 years. “I know he got good care, so I want to pay society back by me taking care of others.”

One of the key goals she has for her clients is independence. “I want to foster independence,” she says.

Another aspect of her work is promoting family involvement. “I support family involvement 100 percent. She adds, “and the community needs to know they’re individuals with disabilities but they have a right to be out in the community.”

Brandt has more than 13 years experience working with individuals with disabilities. She also served three years as a program manager for a facility in Callaway County.

She adds that ACT “is a very supportive place. I enjoy the teamwork we have here. They’re very supportive. It’s almost a family atmosphere.”

For Alanta Free, ACT’s not-for-profit nature is a big reason she has become a program manager.

“She’s a natural for her job because “I really like working with nonprofit organizations. That’s my main focus.”

The native of Independence gained experience with people with disabilities many years ago. Her love of horses spurred her to work with a Jackson County therapeutic horse riding club for seven years. During that time she gained a deep desire to work with those who have disabilities.

Free is an advertising and marketing graduate from William Woods College, Fulton. She adds that her job’s variety makes work fun.

“It’s fun because you wear a lot of different hats. Sometimes you do personal care, other times you do the management kind of thing.”

ACT, “is a service organization,” she says. “It’s helping people. We make people’s lives richer and give them a better quality life.”
SPOTLIGHT

Jeremy Anderson

How long have you worked at ACT?
Two years. I started in Community Living and they stole me away to do the eBay business. They knew I knew something about computers so they gave the job to me. I've worked about one year with eBay.

What do you like about your job?
I like the fact that it deals with something that I know about. Computers are something I'm familiar with so that's nice to have skills that are being used that weren't being used before.

What else do you do in your job?
I also work with the computer server. When new employees have to be added I do that. I also install software for everyone.

What are your sales responsibilities?
I'm sales coordinator—that includes eBay and the fulfillment business for Software Blowouts. Mondays are the busiest for eBay because all the auctions end and the new ones go up. It keeps me busy.

What's surprised you about the eBay business?
I had no idea there'd be a market for used videotapes and CD jewel cases. There's a much larger market than I thought there would be. When eBay's down, Software Blowouts is up so I never have a free moment. I like it being busy.

Did you ever envision you'd be doing this work?
I did all I could to get away from computers and that's where I ended up. I guess that's my destiny. That's fine.

What do you like about ACT?
I feel like I'm part of a team instead of just being a cog in a machine. They're good at listening. They actually care. I like working here. When a manager works with you to solve problems and make sure you're happy, it's a good place to work.
Ever have a Gooberburger? Several of ACT’s clients have. The tasty concoction spreads peanut butter over a hamburger and is found at the Wagon Wheel restaurant in Sedalia.

Several members of the Community Integration Program, or Day Program, traveled to Sedalia for the tasty treat as part of recognition of George Washington Carver during Black History Month. It was just one of many activities over the past several months. Other interesting outings include:

- A trip to the Winston Churchill Memorial located on the campus of Westminster College in Fulton
- A visit to the Space Center located within the St. Louis Science Center
- A walk along the trails at the Runge Conservation Center in Jefferson City
- Sampling many new businesses in Columbia including BackYard Burgers, Hobby Lobby and the Bass Pro Shop
- Learning about Missouri history at the Governor’s Museum located in the Missouri Governor’s Mansion

Besides these trips, clients have begun a line dancing class which meets once a month. Also a Lunch and Learn activity has been started. Each month a person comes to share information about a specific topic during lunch. The most recent guest was Larry Barnett, an ACT program manager and Army reservist who recently returned from Iraq.

“The guys really like it,” Jonnette Whittler, training specialist, says about the Lunch and Learn sessions. “They have lots of questions.”

Business Profile

Healthcare Service Group, Inc.

James Mars of Healthcare Service Group, Inc. never has to run an employment ad. Instead he calls ACT.

He calls ACT because he gets well-trained, quality help—help like Barb who’s been at The Bluffs retirement home for about two months.

Barb is part of a 14-person staff managed by Mars at the retirement home. Healthcare Service Group, Inc. operates similar housekeeping services at facilities throughout the country.

For Mars, he likes ACT because ACT clients receive attentive care from a job coach when first starting a job.

“I think what’s especially good is having the job coaches that come on site for the new employee. They’re kind of cutting back now limiting the time they spend with Barb. To me it’s neat to see someone come in, have a job coach, and then seeing the employee take off on their own.”

Barb, he says, took to her job immediately. With previous housekeeping experience, she jumped right into her job. Three days a week she cleans 16 resident rooms, vacuums hallways, and cleans a dining area.

“Barb is really a great worker,” says Mars. “She’s here and she’s accountable. And she fits in great with our staff. ‘She just came in and boom she became part of our family here.’”

He adds that Barb is a hard worker who seldom takes a break. “She hardly ever takes her breaks. I have to tell her to take her breaks.”

Because of her hard work, Barb’s job security is rock solid. “I’m happy to have her work for me,” says Mars. “She’s great. I hope she’ll be here as long as she needs to be.”

InterAction is published by Alternative Community Training, Inc. as a service to the clients, families, employers, suppliers and contributors of the organization. Westwood Public Relations, Columbia, assists in production of InterAction. ACT does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex in its programs, activities, or with regard to employment. ACT is an equal opportunity employer.

Board of Directors

President
Rick Bartelt
Bob Scribner
Susan Hart
Gerald Braznell
Susanne Carter
Kat Cunningham
Gary Freeman
Rob Gaines
Larry Gross
Mike Moore
Nathan Williams
Mark Hassemer
Mark Wiehe
Westwood Public Relations