Meet Benny and Jimmy, HyVee employees
Career Services establishes rewarding partnership

If you walk into Columbia’s Conley Road HyVee supermarket you might just see two of the store’s most enthusiastic employees. “Benny and Jimmy, two employees assisted by ACT’s Career Services, are model employees,” says Human Resources Manager Ann Carlson. “They are phenomenal,” she says. “We look at those two as part of the family. And for a store with the corporate slogan, “Where there’s a smile down every aisle,” Benny and Jimmy are exceptional employees.

Jimmy, who is a dishwasher 24 hours a week, “gets customer compliments all the time. He wants to be here. He walks down the hall giving everybody high-fives,” says Carlson. Carlson adds that “we don’t look at them as people with challenges. We look at them as great employees.”

While Jimmy started out bussing tables in the store’s restaurant, he eventually found a better fit as a dishwasher. He had spent 18 years as a dishwasher at a local restaurant and the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Finding the proper fit for Jimmy “is something we would do for anybody,” says Carlson. “There was nothing special or out of the ordinary that we did. We just looked for where he would be the most successful and have the most fun. It was an easy move.”

HyVee’s accommodating attitude made the job placements easy, adds Geoff Lanham, an ACT Career Service’s Job Developer. “You have to build on those strengths and HyVee has certainly done that.

The supermarket, with about 80,000 square feet, capitalized on the hard-working nature of Benny. Benny works five, five-hour shifts, Monday through Friday, as a custodian. “Benny knew what he was doing when he walked in the door,” says Carlson.

When she told him, “Welcome to the family,” he looked at her and asked, “I've got a job? I've got a job? I've got to call my mom.”

She says Benny, “was thrilled beyond compare when he got this opportunity.”

Jimmy, too, was excited when he got his job in April. He high-fived everybody, Carlson says, and yelled “I've got the job. I'm a dishwasher.”

As part of ACT’s services, newly placed employees receive job coaching assistance. For Benny his work involves many aspects of cleaning. He power washes, and cleans bathrooms, windows and window ledges. He also is given a special project each week. Benny, however, goes beyond the call of duty. “He sees what needs to be done and he just takes charge and does it,” says Carlson.

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The good employee fit is also one HyVee and ACT hope to repeat. Carlson says that as more positions open this fall, “I’ll definitely let ACT know.

She says ACT provides “outstanding support and is available whenever I need. The support has been fantastic. I couldn’t ask for a better partnership.”

Part of the team. Benny, second from left, and Jimmy, third from left, are now part of the HyVee family. They landed their jobs through the work of Ann Carlson, left, HyVee Human Resources Manager, and Geoff Lanham, right. Job Developer at ACT.
Meet Matt

He volunteers twice a week
Your enthusiastic Meals On Wheels volunteer

Matt, an ACT Day Program consumer, gets lots of hugs and handshakes. That’s because he delivers Meals On Wheels twice a week. Matt makes friends everywhere he goes and the Meals On Wheels project is no exception. While waiting for the lunches at the Harry S Truman Memorial Veterans Hospital, he shakes hands with more than a half dozen volunteers also awaiting their deliveries. The minute he makes contact, out goes his hand for a welcoming handshake.

“He loves to socialize with people,” says Kalynn Ramsey, Activities Coordinator. “He loves to get out in the community. He loves to get the meals because there are lots of people there. And then of course he socializes with the people he’s dropping meals off to.”

Matt is quick to say, “I like doing Meals On Wheels.” And his favorite part, he says, “is delivering hot meals.” Making the deliveries, along with Matt, are several other ACT consumers and Nancy Beatty, Direct Support Professional.

Beatty says the volunteers are tired when they finish deliveries near noon. “They’re tired and they feel fulfilled because they did something wonderful. They helped someone else.”

Matt, in particular, shows his enthusiasm for Meals On Wheels by being the only ACT consumer to make deliveries twice a week.

“He really enjoys it—going up and knocking on the door and handing them their meals means a lot to him. They like to give. We all do. Instead of receiving all the time they like giving back,” she says.

“They’re doing a good thing. They’re helping someone.”

Matt, an ACT Day Program participant, takes off quickly, upper left, to deliver Meals On Wheels. Left, a delighted recipient receives a meal from Matt. Lower right, Matt, who has never met a stranger, talks with other Meals On Wheels volunteers while waiting for the meals to deliver.

Kalynn Ramsey, Activities Coordinator

Meals on Wheels mission.
“I don’t know that there is anything challenging—if you love to do it. Who I am makes a difference.”

That is Nancy Beatty’s approach to her role as a Direct Support Professional and as a person. Meet Nancy, a Direct Support Professional (DSP) for 14 years at Alternative Community Training Inc. (ACT) in Columbia, MO. For the past three years she has been a DSP in ACT’s Community Integration Day Program and helps support 100 people at a ratio of four a day. And ACT counts itself as a proud member of ANCOR, the American Network of Community Options and Resources.

The spirit and soul are significant characteristics of an effective and talented DSP and that’s why Nancy is featured in this month’s College of Direct Support’s “The DSP Chronicles.”

Here is how she describes her approach to work—and to life. “I have a philosophy that guides me daily and it is this saying: ‘Who I am makes a difference.’ That’s true for me and it’s true for all of the people I support and for everyone as well. It’s really important in all of the things we do.”

When you ask Nancy to describe the most enjoyable part of her work, her spirit and soul shine brightly again. “I love being here with my friends, the people I support. I like to see them complete their goals and share that success with them. It fills my day. I don’t think it is a challenge to support people.”

When you ask Nancy to describe the most enjoyable part of her work, her spirit and soul shine brightly yet again.

“Those I support, of course! You would be surprised how many hugs I get every morning. I enjoy working for ACT. I enjoy the people we support, my coworkers, my bosses,” Nancy says. “I look forward to coming to work every day to visit and to make a difference. That is why I love this job and working here at ACT.”

What got her interested in being a DSP in the first place? Her answer: “When I came to work at ACT, I needed a job and thought that this was just a place to stop off for a while. I started to see that I enjoyed coming to work and the people I support are my friends. That is why I can’t leave here!”

Before coming to ACT she was a factory worker and a housekeeper at a hospital. Her years at ACT began in 1996 as a production worker, working alongside individuals with disabilities, taking labels off tapes and sorting floppy discs. Nancy was then promoted to Team Leader for employees and a Training Specialist for persons supported. She continued in that role for about eight years.

Then she was offered another position within the warehouse where she would pull products, packing products and mailing them to various locations. Nancy was in this position for about a year and then this position ended. Nancy returned to the Team Leader position until she accepted a position in ACT’s Community Integration program.

Michelle Saunders, the Program Director for the Day Program, says that Nancy spends her days taking care of consumer needs, integrating the persons she supports into the community, doing volunteer work and other fun activities that are meaningful and productive.

Nancy says her growth as a DSP has blossomed in the last 15 or so months. “We changed how we deliver services, so each consumer chooses their activities of choice on a daily basis. This means that the people I support each day changes,” she explained.

“This is exciting and makes each day a new experience. I also think the College of Direct Support (CDS) has helped me look at a different perspective of how I do my job. I tell all new employees at ACT to go through the CDS courses because they have helped me so much in my position.” She says that the CDS courses taught her one major thing. “I have really learned how to be a much more effective advocate for the people I support and for our employees. The CDS opened my eyes and helped me grow as a DSP and I’m so glad I took them.”

Saunders adds that “Nancy was good before the CDS courses, but it seemed to tie it all together in her head when she went through the CDS.”

Nancy is the anchor of our Community Integration program. She gets things going each morning and greets consumers and family members. Many consumers ask to be in her group because they like her and appreciate her caregiver qualities. She is a great DSP.

Michelle Saunders, ACT Program Director, Community Integration
Focus is direct employer contact
Job placement effort earns Vocational Rehabilitation award

Jessica Boffa, manager of ACT’s Career Services, is the 2010 Service Provider of the Year as selected by the Missouri Rehabilitation Association (MRA).

The mission of the Missouri Rehabilitation Association is to “promote an environment in the state of Missouri which gives persons with disabilities a fair opportunity to achieve quality of life.” Service agencies, educational institutions, training programs, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) professionals are some of the members of MRA.

ACT Career Services works to achieve the mission of MRA by supporting job seekers with disabilities with finding employment, while also assisting local businesses with meeting their recruitment and hiring needs.

Boffa, who has worked for ACT for two years, has been instrumental in making many changes in how clients find jobs. Rather than traditional methods of job hunting, ACT also devotes more time to meeting with local businesses and learning about their personnel needs. This allows ACT to match the job seeker’s skills with the potential employer.

“Making those direct employer contacts has really benefited our clients,” says Kelly Cook, M.Ed. and lead Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. Boffa was nominated by Cook for the statewide award. “I feel we have a great partnership with Jessica and ACT and Voc Rehab here in Columbia,” she adds. Boffa, “is very innovative and has an open mind to considering new services for our clients. Our relationship is just really good.”

While the Service Provider of the Year highlights Boffa, she explains that the award is for her entire staff. With six full-time and seven part-time staff members, Career Services works with about 100 individuals.

“I think Jessica and Career Services really put the time and effort into developing something that our clients are really interested in and have the abilities to do,” says Cook.

“A big thank you goes out to those people that helped us,” adds Boffa. “We all realize we’re here to achieve a common goal and it doesn’t matter who’s supporting who– we’re all here to assist the individuals with disabilities with achieving a higher quality of life in finding employment.”

The move towards a more proactive approach during the past year is a result of Boffa’s “vision and effort,” adds John Savage, director of Employment Services which oversees ACT’s Career Services. “It starts with a vision and it starts with effort, so Jessica is very deserving of the award. It’s been a collaboration, but she got it all going.”

With positive results now being experienced by Career Services, Boffa adds there always is more to be done. She promises to continue refining the process and measuring results.

She also intends to continue to work with the Columbia community to increase the number of individuals with disabilities who get jobs. “The big challenge is to have the whole community employ individuals with disabilities and help them be successful in the workforce,” she says. “There are lots of skills, lots of talents, lots of contributions that can be made. I think the challenge is for our entire community to make improvements and work toward a more diverse workforce.”

Remembering Jan.

ACT consumers took a few moments recently to remember a consumer who passed away this year. Pink balloons were launched on the day of Jan’s birthday, July 27.

I feel we have a great partnership with Jessica and ACT and Voc Rehab here in Columbia. Boffa, is very innovative and has an open mind to considering new services for our clients. Our relationship is just really good.

Kelly Cook, M.Ed. and lead Vocational Rehabilitation counselor
The world is a whole lot bigger for seven Day Program consumers. They’re learning first-hand about work.

Led by Training Specialist Tammy Hartegan they spend a portion of two days a week talking about the world of business and work. They also spend a couple hours a week visiting a wide variety of businesses and institutions.

Known as the Employment Group, the wishes and interests of each member drive the effort.

“I just feed off what they’re talking about,” says Hartegan. “I made a decision to listen to what they say. I’m letting them guide me.”

Interests already have led the group to a Michael’s store and a childcare facility. That facility soon will allow Martha, a group member, to volunteer. And it’s the hope of Hartegan that Martha can see the many jobs at the daycare center and eventually be employed there.

To see a large number of jobs, the group visited the University of Missouri-Columbia Hospital.

While landing a paid or volunteer job is an eventual goal, there are no time constraints to get one. The purpose now is to explore the many jobs available, plus learn valuable job-seeking skills such as developing references and filling out applications, both paper and online. The group’s meetings also help reinforce proper business behavior. And in every instance, personal interests and hobbies are explored.

Taking the group to businesses and institutions opens the group members’ eyes to the many jobs available. “I’m finding a lot of excitement,” says Hartegan. “It’s opening doors for them and letting them see what is really all out there.”

“Twas pretty confident that if they could see what is out there, I could spark an interest,” she adds. “Fast food was what they were locked into in the beginning. Now they’re finding out that they could take their interests and find employment.”

Hartegan says the effort was triggered by a career planning guide, provided by the Missouri Planning Council. The employment group read three of twelve chapters in an employment guide by MPC. Ideas from the first three chapters were all the group needed to get started.

The group also does much more than visit organizations. They hold discussions about appropriate job behaviors and other topics. They read the local newspaper to find jobs and learn what businesses are doing in the community. And they fill out online job applications.

After a business visit, Hartegan says, “They request an application only if they’re definitely interested. They’re not just getting an application from everywhere.”

“While the Employment Group is enjoyed by the group members, they also like the regular activities of the Day Program,” Hartegan says.

But opening the group to new opportunities remains the goal. For some individuals “we don’t just want this Day Program forever. Some are very young and need to learn what they like. This shouldn’t be the final. It should be the starting point.”
Everybody here is proud of her
Special Olympics star wins three gold medals

There’s an athletic all-star at ACT. It’s
Jodie, a participant in the Community
Living Program.

Jodie, this summer, won three gold
medals in the Special Olympics national
bowling competition.

She won gold medals for single, double
and team competition.

“Everybody here is really proud of me,”
says Jodie who began bowling 30 years ago
when she was eight years old.

She competed for the gold during a
week in Lincoln, NE. She got to Lincoln
after raising funds on her Web site. She
also practiced every Sunday for months to
sharpen her skills.

“It was really surprising to make it to
nationals,” she says. Her coach nominated
her to go to a sports camp and with that
experience she was prepared for national
competition.

For sure, she’ll keep on bowling and
try to top her best score of 210. With
her determination and skill it’s bound to
happen.

Good memories were shared
School honors ACT consumer at graduation

June 4 was a special day for Ricky, an
ACT consumer. It was graduation day.
On that day Ricky concluded three
years of education at Bearfield School, part
of the Columbia Public Schools.

The day was special for many reasons –
one being Ricky was the only graduate of
the school that day.

The school invited all students and
teachers to attend. Ricky “was in front of
the whole school,” says Ricky’s Program
Supervisor Mark Pickett. “Everyone was
there.”

He adds that many teachers and staff
made a few comments about Ricky and his
years at Bearfield.

“They had a lot of good memories of
Rick,” he says.

Now Ricky’s planning to add new
memories as a participant in ACT’s Day
Program. Eventually his goal is to join ACT
Works as an employee.

“Whatever you put your mind to, you’ll
have the opportunity,” encourages Pickett.
“You’ve got a lot of friends and family
members that are proud that you graduated
and now are moving on” Pickett adds.