Seven get first jobs with ACT Works’ team

Seven ACT consumers joined the workforce recently for the first time in their lives.

Jonathon, Brett, Diane, Larry, Matt, Josh and Abby now are employed by ACT Works, recycling plastic and taking on other tasks.

“It's basically work related to our new granulator,” says Deanie McLain, Program Manager for ACT Works. The demand for granulated plastic “made it possible to hire these individuals.” she says. “It’s wonderful.”

She explains that none of the employees had ever worked before. Now they’re collecting a bi-weekly paycheck and they’re proud of it.

“They are so excited,” she says. “One of the ladies only worked an hour the first week and she was so excited when she got her first paycheck. She went through this whole building. She yelled out ‘I got a check’ and how much she made. She was so excited. It was a great experience for her. She had never worked in her life. Now she knows when payday is.”

The new group of seven works a total of 82 hours a week.

McLain says many of the new workers have waited many years to join ACT Works. There still is a list of 23 who want to join the ACT Works’ team. And McLain is optimistic more consumers will be added.

Currently more than a million VHS tapes need to be processed by the granulator. Plus there are many other types of plastics ready to be processed. She adds the city of Columbia does not recycle many types of plastics that ACT could pick up at the city landfill and then process. “There’s so much out there we could keep out of the landfill,” McLain says.

Already the employees have processed three truckloads of granulated plastic, each truckload weighing 40,000 pounds.

With the future bright, she hopes she “can hire more staff and then put more people on. That would be wonderful.”

Reach out this holiday season

The holiday season brings to light needs for many ACT consumers. A few no longer receive family support. Only a generous holiday spirit can provide what many of us take for granted. This year, consider contributing to ReachOut, the special giving program that will directly help ACT consumers. ReachOut was established to help ACT consumers or programs. This time of year your contributions can be designated for holiday gifts, a Christmas tree or ACT’s annual holiday party among other things.

With your contributions you’ll be Santa to many individuals. Consider making your ReachOut contribution today. Just use the enclosed envelope and designate how you’d like to see your gift used. Mail your gift to: ACT, 2200 Burlington, Columbia, MO 65202
Board member’s son a valuable part of ACT

Pat Eng is an ACT board member with experience and special insight. He comes with experience having served three years on the board of the sheltered workshop, an organization serving individuals with disabilities. And he comes with special insight because his son Matthew has been part of ACT since graduating from high school five years ago.

“If I’m going to be on a board I might as well be on a board that serves my son,” the Columbia attorney says. Matthew is part of ACT Works and the Community Integration Program.

Matthew is sociable, saying hello to everyone he meets while at ACT. He also enjoys getting his paycheck “and is now getting the concept of money,” says Eng. Because of his gregariousness, many people come up to say hello to Matthew when he’s with his father shopping on weekends. “He just knows everybody; he comes up to everybody and says hello.”

Matthew also enjoys going to court with his father greeting many lawyers during the trip to the Boone County Courthouse. “He loves that. He goes with me and other lawyers.” Eng has practiced law 35 years in Columbia. His firm, Eng and Woods has eight attorneys. Eng primarily handles criminal cases while the firm as a whole mainly does personal injury, litigation and trial work.

His involvement in the community led to knowing several ACT board members.

While he admits just beginning to learn the many facets of ACT, he hopes to make a significant contribution to the board. “I hope to be not just a warm body there,” he says. “It’s really nice to be on a board that I’m really, really interested in because it involves my family.”

“I always made it known to ACT that if they have an opening I would like to be on it because Matthew goes there,” he adds.

And being part of the board will be a pleasure for Eng because, he says, he thinks highly of the organization. “ACT is the best thing going. I’m not saying that because I’m on the board or because Matthew’s there. I think that they provide a wonderful service to the mid-Missouri area. They’re not a tax burden. They’re self-sufficient.”

In addition to Matthew, Eng and his wife, Del, have a daughter, Jennifer who is a law student at the University of Missouri-Columbia and a son, Allen, who practices law in Kansas City.

Education the goal of new program supervisor

Paul Hawkins has the heart of a teacher. As a new Program Supervisor in the Community Integration Program, Hawkins wants to help consumers and staff grow.

He’s already developed a training program to teach staff how to help consumers gain independence.

“We’re trying to get back to learning,” the Eldon native says. “A lot of day programs became babysitters for lack of a better word. It’s easy to fall into that pattern because you have many different needs. You focus on servicing those needs instead of teaching. So instead of us doing things for them they can do things for themselves.”

As a program supervisor, Hawkins comes in contact with almost every consumer in the Day Program.

“I get to see almost all the consumers every day,” he says. “It’s really interactive. It’s a joy having that interaction. I spend the bulk of my day hands on.”

He applies education and experience concerning behavior. He adds that “a lot of my skills are in behavioral intervention so I can use that. There are some folks here who need a little behavioral support so I can use those skills here.”

The most rewarding aspect of his job, however, is helping the program bring education into daily activities for the consumers.

“It’s exciting to do something in house. The expectation is to have our staff teach new skills and address behaviors. We want to give the skills and tools for consumers to handle it on their own for smaller things — skills like learning to get a drink of water. We want to help our folks think for themselves. It’s going to be very valuable.”

Hawkins comes to ACT with many years of experience working with individuals with disabilities. He has been a direct support staff member, a director of direct care staff and a director of a program similar to ACT’s Community Living Program.

His wife, Jaime, also is a direct care staff member for ACT. He and Jaime are the parents of a son, Jacob.

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And being part of the board will be a pleasure for Eng because, he says, he thinks highly of the organization. “ACT is the best thing going. I’m not saying that because I’m on the board or because Matthew’s there. I think that they provide a wonderful service to the mid-Missouri area. They’re not a tax burden. They’re self-sufficient.”

In addition to Matthew, Eng and his wife, Del, have a daughter, Jennifer who is a law student at the University of Missouri-Columbia and a son, Allen, who practices law in Kansas City.
While new to the ACT Board of Directors, Scott Maledy already has experience serving an organization much like ACT. For two years he’s been a board member for Central Missouri Contracting Enterprises, more commonly known as the Sheltered Workshop.

“I knew of ACT and their somewhat parallel services,” he says. “ACT can work well with one group while the Sheltered Workshop works well with another group. They’re both able to help individuals’ lives.”

Maledy comes to the board with knowledge he’s gained as a friend of board member Glen Earhardt. He also has met with Executive Director Mark Hassemer to gain further knowledge about ACT.

And behind his involvement is a generous spirit to help individuals with disabilities. “The idea of being able to help folks that need help that in itself is motivation. It’s not their fault that they have disabilities so if you can have someone willing to lend a hand and deal with that disability and have a more fulfilling life, I think that’s very important.”

A native of Columbia, he adds “I’ve benefited from living in Columbia so the least I can do is give some of my time back.”

Finding such time to volunteer is a skill Maledy masters. He’s also on the Central Missouri Food Bank board and is busy with his job as manager of production operations for KOMU-TV in Columbia.

His job entails overseeing and producing commercials for the station as well as producing many videos for non-for-profit organizations such as the Central Missouri Food Bank, and United Way for Columbia, Jefferson City and Fulton. Work also involves an annual video for the chancellor of the University of Missouri-Columbia and airing every Labor Day muscular dystrophy telethon.

Maledy has worked at the station for seven years and worked 14 years in video at a local camera and video equipment store. His busy lifestyle, however, does not dampen his enthusiasm for ACT.

“I think ACT’s is a good mission,” he says. “It’s a noble mission. As Central Missouri grows and expands then more people will need the services of ACT. It has the ability to grow and meet their needs. I’m happy to be a part of as it expands.”

“ACT is a great alternative to let these people feel good about themselves and enrich their lives. It’s important.”

In Memoriam

In memory of Barbara Braznell, wife of former ACT Board of Directors’ President William Braznell. ACT received a total of $5,065.00 from the following individuals:

Jayne & Arnold Kessler
Charles & Nancy Van Dyke
Eileen Braznell
Judith Kennedy
Astro Forum
Ted & Karen McCarter
Douglas & Ann Brown
Robert Huskey
James & Elizabeth Kienker
James & Constance Finger
Grace Brod
Phillip & Sandra Brown
Alan & Joan Lebon
Ralph & Brenda Hoffman
Rosemary Chapman
Arthur & Marilyn Gale
Charles & Caroline Link
Sally Ebinger
Thomas Langsdorf
Eugene M. O’Neill
Mr. & Mrs. Robert & Virginia Yale
Shara Erdel
Mr. & Mrs. Steven & Sunny Newland
Mary Ellen Braznell
Mr. & Mrs. Wallace & Elaine Stenhouse
Elizabeth Braznell
Mr. & Mrs. Donald & Eileen Morrison
Donald P. Nies
Mr. & Mrs. Hans & Maggie Wiemann
Leslie Adcock
Mr. & Mrs. Tom & Sharon Aylward
Ms. Pam Gomes
William Braznell
Mr. & Mrs. Charles & Joyce Brandt
Mr. & Mrs. Ken & Betsy Morrow, c/o Morrow Family Fund
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Morrow
D W Winsby
Mr. & Mrs. George & Gloria Wilson
Mr. & Mrs. D W. Stukkenbroeker
Mr. & Mrs. Les & Pat Rich
Mr. & Mrs. Phillip & Inge Holland
Mano F. Smith
Arthur Schartff
Mr. & Mrs. John & Susan Murphy
Mr. & Mrs. Raymond & Alyce Daws
Mr. & Mrs. Roger & Mary Lou Keech
Mr. & Mrs. Stuart & Diane Graham
Mr. & Mrs. Gregory & Nicole Morrow
Beverly Markham Hartley
Mr. & Mrs. William Cash
James A. Collins
Ms. Anne H. Mount
Mr. & Mrs. Patrick & Carol Donelan
Mr. & Mrs. Jerry & Judy Zafft
c/o Stinson Morrison Heckler LLP
Ms. Karen Kaltsh
Ms. Katie Klingler
Mr. Virginia K Morrow

Also, the Anita Remphill Trust made a final donation of $15,564.58; also Clarence & Sandy Graham made a donation to the organization.
October 6 was an important day for 92 ACT consumers. That’s the day the Community Integration Program was overhauled to increase community activities and other aspects of the program.

“Since our switch over on October 6 I have seen consumers who haven’t been out in the community regularly now out several days in a row,” says Community Integration Program Manager Michelle Saunders. “Our consumers think this is just great.”

One key change was increased interaction between consumers in the program. Before four consumers were matched to one ACT employee. While the ratio remains the same, the consumers can handpick what they want to do each day instead of doing what the group of four did together.

“We’re raising the bar,” says Saunders. “We’re moving forward in consumer choice.”

Kaylynn Ramsey, is the new Activities Coordinator, and maps out a week worth of activities one week in advance. On Friday the consumers can take the list home for input from a parent or residential provider.

Each day is split in half so consumers can choose either an outdoor activity or activity on the ACT campus.

Outdoor activities are wide and varied. In one short period consumers could go to the Katy Trail to walk along with a visit to a winery overlooking the Missouri River. They also could take a trip to the Columbia Armory, bowl or go to the movies.

On the ACT campus there now is a gross motor area for stretching, playing with balls, croquet or even bocce ball. In the summer months “slip-and-slide,” too, is offered.

“That’s a huge change.” Saunders says about the emphasis on exercise.

For consumers with vision or hearing deficiencies there is a sensory area with lots of different textures, large-size puzzles, aromas and many things to do with each consumer’s hands.

Many consumers take advantage of the new computer lab with eight computers. They check e-mail, research on the Internet and play games such as solitaire.

The revamped program also has a multi-media area with board games, more challenging puzzles, card games, flash cards, Playstation, videos, DVDs and books.

“Our expectations of our employees have changed as well, says Saunders. “And our consumers are very excited about the change. We feel that since October 6 we’ve lived up to our name – Community Integration.”

“Since our switch over on October 6 I have seen consumers who haven’t been out in the community regularly now out several days in a row.”

Michelle Saunders, Community Integration Program manager
What does a network administrator do?

My primary responsibility is to maintain all the computers here: all the work stations, three servers, maintain the Web site and operate the phone systems. We’ve got about 40 workstations.

Do you do anything with donated computer equipment?

I receive what we call techno-trash. I pull out the stuff that we can use here at ACT. I’ve really helped the IT budget by pulling the equipment out. Half of the computer equipment in the Community Integration computer lab came from techno-trash. Also, all our wireless routers came from techno-trash. Four site access points – two in each building – now allow us to have wireless Internet access in the main building and our office building across the street.

How did you know about ACT?

I worked with ACT for five years as a consultant through my former employer, Tranquility.

What do you like about ACT?

I was excited to work for an organization like ACT. My parents have always said I’m very compassionate. I thought I could continue that trend by working with people with disabilities. I want to bring technology to people that don’t have it – looking at accessibility issues. Technology can really further the field of accessibility – from magnifying text on a screen to using technology for those that can’t verbalize. And I’ve found I’m very well liked here. I love coming to work here.

What improvements have you made since you began in August?

We now have off-site computer backups. All data is stored offsite. The Community Integration computer lab is a big factor for me. I had that idea before I came but it was already in the works here so all I had to do was get on board.

Another project that we’re looking at is bringing computers in the consumers’ homes. I’m very excited about that because I’ll be bringing technology to those that don’t have it – disseminating information, as they need it. Another project is putting in place a Linux operating system, which I’ve used for six years.

Why do you like your job?

I like to be challenged. When a computer breaks that’s quite a challenge and I enjoy butting heads with the computers and making them work. When I persevere I have a sense of accomplishment.

What did you study in college?

I went to MU and studied religion and philosophy. Ironically I barely knew how to use a computer. I grew up overseas moving around from developing nation to developing nation. I didn’t have the opportunity to use computers but learned at MU. I dove right in and intentionally messed up my first computer so that I had to fix it. I also had my own computer consulting business which I ran for four years.

Any hobbies?

I’m a motorcycle aficionado and get to play more disc golf, which I didn’t get to do before. I like riding my bike and taking hikes with my wife, Anna, and kids Ellis, 8 and Jensen, 10.

ACT hires first maintenance supervisor

Matt Bowers is ACT’s first maintenance supervisor. The increasing size of ACT, with three campus buildings and many consumers’ homes, necessitated the new position.

Bowers, a native of Kansas City, has been involved with maintenance ever since attending Iowa State University. While in college he was the maintenance supervisor for a retirement community. During the summers and holidays he worked in the area of maintenance for a warehouse.

He says he plans to make a career of the work because it lets him get away from a desk. “I like the hands on work,” he says. “I don’t have to sit behind a desk all day.”

In addition to maintaining the three main ACT buildings, he’ll also help maintain more than a dozen consumer homes. Being involved with consumer homes gives him an added benefit, he says. “My favorite activity is fixing things and doing something with the consumers. I really like what they’re doing here and it’s been fun being the first one.”
Meet Matt

New consumer driven by work at ACT and home

Matt, a recent consumer to join ACT, doesn’t spend a lot of time sitting around.

He’s a big help to the Community Integration Program and has the daily task of collecting then shredding paper for recycling throughout ACT’s main building.

Matt, too, helps clean his home on Briarwood, supported by the Community Living Program. He’s helpful around the house and pitches in along with his two roommates.

“Work really feeds him,” says Jon Gilliom, Community Living Program supervisor who oversees Matt’s placement with ACT.

Matt’s ambitious nature also landed him a job with ACT Works recently. ACT’s “Day Program just loves him but they’re having to give him up now that he’s working.”

Matt officially joined up with ACT in mid-November. Before that he stayed at the Briarwood home on a trial basis. There he became acquainted with his roommates which he gets along with well.

“The family is pleased with the services Matt receives at the home,” says Gilliom. “They say he appears to be very happy there.”

One big factor in Matt’s happiness is the vast improvement his eyesight took after having cataract surgery on each eye.

“He’s had spectacular results,” Gilliom says. “Matt can read from a normal distance rather than holding the print three inches from his eyes. Now he has legal vision for driving.”

Gilliom kids that Matt “was so fascinated that he could see hair on his legs after the eye surgery. It changed his life. It just transformed his life.”

In addition to liking to work, Matt loves music, karaoke and dancing. Gilliom says ACT makes sure staff is available to take Matt to the dances he loves so much. He also participates every year in Special Olympics and Wonderland Camp.

“He’s just a tremendous kid,” says Gilliom. “We all just love him.”

New officers elected

New officers for the Board of Directors have been elected. President is Trent Stober, President, MEC Water Resources; Vice President, Joel Jeffries, M.D., physician/consultant; and Secretary/Treasurer, Cathy Atkins, Sales/Management Trainer, Awareness Management Systems.

National spotlight shines on ACT

ACT made the news several times recently. A brief article in Real Simple magazine highlighted the advantages of recycling videotapes, cassettes and floppy disks with ACT. The Real Simple article triggered coverage on ABC, both on their Web site and on Good Morning America. Locally, KOMU-TV did a full-length feature on ACT stating: “In the past three months, ACT recycled almost 3 million CDs and DVDs from all over the country. The discs are ground up and the plastic can be reused for things like automobile parts. The facility gives a second life to most every part of a DVD. If it’s in good condition, even the case can be re-used.”

48 tons of plastic received

Ever wonder how much plastic ACT recycles. For the third quarter of the year a total of 37 tons of plastic was sold for a total of $22,187. In the same period 48 tons of plastic were received. A report to the Environmental Improvement and Energy Resources Authority also states the granulator has been used almost daily throughout the quarter, even if just for a short time.

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