Veronica finds success at new job
New partnership forms between MU Hospital and ACT Career Services

Staff at the University of Missouri Health System are glad they learned about ACT Career Services. Because of a contact suggested by an ACT board member, the major hospital complex found Veronica. She’s a dedicated employee of Environmental Services. She works an overnight shift five days a week. And from all indications it looks like she’ll be a part of the medical center for years to come.

“Whenever I interviewed her I was really impressed with her longevity in positions,” recalls J.T. Garrett, a Human Resources recruiter. Previously Veronica worked at Columbia Mall for six years in a housekeeping job.

“It demonstrated she understood what it means to be committed to hard work.” Moreover, Veronica “was engaging and she really showed the qualities we look for in any position – that value jobseekers put on themselves for the job they are doing. They take pride in ownership of what they produce. She exemplified that and it was the thing that impressed me the most.”

Jessica Boffa, Program Manager of ACT’s Career Services Program, adds that the young, but solid relationship with the medical center has played a role in placing Veronica, who began work in July.

“It hasn’t been that long since we met with Human Resource personnel,” Boffa says, “but the partnership that has quickly formed is already leading to many successes.” Not only has the hospital hired a successful employee through ACT Career Services, but both agencies recognize the value of the collaboration.

The recruiters at the hospital have “really assisted our job seekers with learning more about their positions, what it takes to be a successful employee, and what they look for in applicants,” says Boffa. It is anticipated that this will continue to assist job seekers with learning more about the job search process and with obtaining employment.

Garrett, the hospital recruiter, worked hard with Career Services’ job developers to find a quality employee. He wanted a person committed to excellence. He found that in Veronica. “It doesn’t matter what position you hold,” he says. Everybody “contributes to the patient experience. Our housekeeping staff has a very influential responsibility and that is the aesthetics of the hospital.”

He adds that for Veronica and all employees “there really is an additional responsibility—that sense of teamwork and knowing we’re all there for the same goal – and that is for the patient.”

For Veronica the job has been a very good experience. “I like it,” she says. “I like meeting people and working with my co-workers.” She adds that the emergency room area she works in “is just continuously going. It’s a new challenge.”

But challenge and job variety is what she enjoys. “I am working on a goal of saving up for a car,” she says, “and going to driver’s class.” Then she’ll be able to get herself to her 11 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. daily shift. “I’m also working on getting my own place.”

Veronica’s prospects look good. Her Environmental Services supervisor, Bill Lane, says, “She’s working with a group and has really fit in.” Two co-workers, in particular, “have put her under their wings. She’s doing very well and everybody likes her.” Working primarily in the emergency room, “she makes a real contribution on the job.”

She also makes a contribution to the goal of diversity at the medical facility, says Peter Callan, Director of Talent Acquisition and Development.

“Overall as an organization our goal and my goal is to increase the diversity in our workforce and diversity comes in all shapes, sizes, people with different backgrounds and abilities. I think it’s the right thing to do. Diversity mirrors our patients.”
Youth comprise largest group
Behavior Therapy Program meeting growing need of youth

While ACT’s Behavior Therapy Program started out small not long ago, it’s grown immensely in less than four years.

“We’ve really grown and it’s very exciting,” says Tara Shade, ACT’s senior behavior therapist.

Today she and therapist Katie Adams, provide close to 800 15-minute units of support a month to approximately 25 consumers. When behavior therapy began in July 2007, 16 units were provided.

“It’s a big change,” adds Shade. “There’s a big need in Columbia for services.” That’s echoed by Terri Kruger, Program Manager of Community Living and Behavior Therapy. “There’s definitely a need out there and the funding sources see that the services we provide are well worth it. It’s helped a lot of consumers.”

Shade adds that when she began, most consumers were adults. Today about 75 percent of those served are children under 18 years old. Those consumers primarily reside in their natural homes, she says. Funding for the service comes from Boone County Family Resources or the Department of Mental Health.

“We help a lot of young kids and young adults in managing and assisting with behavioral issues that they have. Our goal is to make them more successful in their lives.”

“The service has grown exponentially because of the area’s need,” explains Kruger. “It also has been successful because of the unique skills of Shade and Adams,” Kruger says. The two are unique in the field because of their experience working with individuals with developmental disabilities.

“One important thing about our program is both therapists have worked with people with disabilities,” says Kruger. “You can hire any behavior therapist but it takes a certain kind of therapist to work with individuals who have developmental disabilities and mental and emotional challenges.” The ACT therapists have worked direct care. She adds, “They’ve worked in the thick of it and worked directly with challenging behaviors prior to being behavior therapists. They do very well.”

With the growth also has come diversity of consumers, Shade says. “We’re serving a diverse group of people. “I like that. Every day is different.”

Thanks to the Behavior Therapy Program, Jennifer is living a more stable, successful life.

Jennifer has worked with Behavior Therapist Tara Shade for nearly two years. As a result, Shade sees for her “a typical life of someone her age. It’s down the road but we’re slowly working on it.”

The progress started after Shade wrote “a very intensive positive behavior support plan. The plan helps her learn how to live in the community.”

Today Jennifer lives in a Community Living Program apartment with two full-time ACT staff.

Some measures of her success include working as a volunteer in ACT Works and reconnecting with several family members. “She’s been able to re-stabilize her life in the community over the past two years,” says Shade. “She’s been able to do it because we’ve taken it slow and we’ve worked on each skill a little bit at a time. She’s really been successful.”

For the future, Shade hopes to see Jennifer employed in ACT Works, plus “continue to build relationships in the community and go out and do things she likes to do.” Already, Jennifer has joined a Special Olympics bowling team “which is a huge feat for her,” says Shade. “It’s awesome.”
Partnership for Hope funds now available
New funding available for individuals with disabilities

On October 1, hundreds of Missouri families received good news regarding their care of individuals with developmental disabilities.

That’s when a new funding source, initially known as the Prevention Waiver, but now called The Partnership for Hope, was made available to 470 consumers and their families across Missouri. Boone County was allotted 80 of the available slots, says Executive Director Mark Hassemer.

The Partnership for Hope has the goal of providing community-based services to 470 persons with developmental disabilities in a timely manner, avoiding or delaying the need to put their family member in residential care programs or institutions.

“This is an innovative partnership between county boards and the state to allow families to keep their loved one with a disability at home, while still providing them the support they need to thrive in their communities,” Governor Nixon stated in a news conference in St. Louis in September.

The program will provide up to $12,000 in services per year to recipients. ACT’s Behavior Therapy Program already has received requests for services from five individuals. Several additional individuals have inquired about participation in the Community Family Advantage Program. Boone County Family Resources (the county Senate Bill 40 Board) will determine which individuals may participate.

Initially for the state of Missouri, $8.2 million is available for the program with approximately $1.5 million coming from local boards, $1.5 million match in state funds, and $5.2 million in federal spending. Those funds will be available on a continuing basis for future years beyond the first year. The amount available is continual for services in each county and will depend on the financial commitment given by the county’s board.

For ACT, “there is the potential for significant growth in the future,” says Michelle Saunders, Program Manager for Community Integration and Community Advantage.

“It’s so meaningful because it allows local communities to react to needs before the crisis stage,” says Hassemer. “It’s very positive for Missouri’s citizens. ACT will definitely be involved with the new effort.”

Focus is on identifying needs
ACT launches effort to receive grants

ACT now is taking aim at a new source of funds—grants.

“It’s definitely been on our radar for several years,” says Michelle Saunders, Program Director of the Community Integration Program. She and Jessica Boffa, Career Services Program Manager, are heading up the effort to eventually receive grant money for use throughout ACT. Saunders and Boffa have launched a survey for all ACT programs and services to identify specific needs.

“We’re looking for ways that we can continue to improve the services and supplement what we’re doing,” Boffa says. She adds that “as an agency we provide excellent support and services – not only with the consumers that we work with but the community.”

Mark Hassemer, Executive Director, adds that identifying needs is the key to success. “There are many needs across all programs,” he says. “We’re taking time to look at what those needs are. We’ll prioritize them and determine which are capital and which may be addressed operationally.”

“With so many needs, Boffa says “additional funds will help ACT remain a cutting edge provider. We’re looking at places we can enhance things that we’re already doing,” explains Saunders.

ACT currently is working with several University of Missouri-Columbia students who are researching possible grants.

“ACT does wonderful things,” Boffa adds. “What other things are there that we can do to make a difference?”

Consider giving to ReachOut
Tax-deductible donations meet many needs

It takes a lot to meet the needs of ACT’s many consumers. While public funds meet most day-to-day needs, other needs arise. That’s why ACT established ReachOut several years ago. This special fund accepts tax-deductible contributions from ACT’s many families and friends.

This year, ReachOut received a significant donation from the estate of the late Jerry Braznell, an ACT board member and parent of Bill, an ACT consumer. “We’re grateful for such a generous donation,” says Executive Director Mark Hassemer, “and we want to continue to build on that so that we can address some needs that we have. There are many needs across all programs,” has Hassemer. “ReachOut makes a big difference.”

If you’d like to donate to ReachOut just use the enclosed envelope in this newsletter or contact Mark Hassemer at 573-474-9446 for more information.

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Donations
The following individuals contributed donations to ACT during the past several months.

In Memoriam
In memory of Carol Jeannie Miller
and honor of Bryan Norwood
Norma. Watson
In honor of Bryan Norwood
Peggy Douglas & family.
Peggy Rose

General donations
Robert Conway
Frances Davies
Clarence & Sandra Graham
Leroy & Judith Heman
Peggy Payne
United Access

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She brings communication skills to the job

Meet Michelle Davidson-Bell

Michelle Davidson-Bell has many skilled ways to communicate with ACT consumers. With a talent for learning languages, she’s learned sign language, assistive devices, picture communication techniques and many other methods.

“I really like to assist people with all of their communication needs,” says the new Community Integration Program Manager. “It fascinates me.”

Davidson-Bell learned a lot about communication while working at TouchPoint Services, an autism organization that helps individuals with autism formerly known as the Judevine Center.

Davidson-Bell brings 22 years of extensive experience working with those who have developmental disabilities. Her career includes work as a main relief for ACT. Most recently she worked for TouchPoint.

She plans to put her years of experience working with individuals with disabilities immediately to work at ACT. She’ll have many managerial duties overseeing more than 110 consumers as well as several Program Supervisors in the Community Integration Program.

What has driven her in a wide variety of positions is her desire to help people. “I really like making a difference in someone’s life,” she says. “I enjoy assisting them to reach all of their capacities.”

And there’s no doubt that Davidson-Bell will be “hands-on” in her new position. She says she “likes the direct interaction with the consumers. I like to see them every day and visit and catch up.”

In addition, she hopes to make slight improvements in the program such as putting in place some communication systems and scheduling techniques including visual schedules “to help consumers transition more easily from activity to activity and have a less stressful day.”

Along with her busy job, Davidson-Bell is active with her daughter Mariah and her grandchild. Davidson-Bell’s husband, Demetrius Bell is a main relief staff member with ACT and also pastors a church in Montgomery City.

“We’re busy people,” Davidson-Bell says.

I really like to assist people with all of their communication needs. I enjoy assisting them to reach all of their capacities.

Michelle Davidson-Bell, ACT Community Integration Program Manager

ACT has a well-designed way to address any complaints a consumer might have. Complaints, however, seldom arise because every effort is made to know consumers’ needs.

“We want to make sure our consumers are safe, happy and healthy,” says Terri Kruger, Program Manager of Community Living and Behavior Therapy programs. “We want to know their needs so our consumers are happy and get the supports that they need or want.”

She says ACT is “constantly asking the consumers what they like, what they don’t like, what would they like to see changed, what do they like to do.”

Should a complaint come up, ACT reviews reports monthly. The Human Rights committee also looks over consumer input every quarter. “We review those reports to make sure that nobody’s rights were violated or there wasn’t something out of the ordinary involved in that situation.” She adds that no grievance has yet come through the Human Rights review process.

She adds: “Our first and foremost goal here at ACT is our consumers’ rights. We take it very seriously.”

Likes, dislikes constantly addressed

Grievance process available to all consumers

Communications link.

Michelle Davidson-Bell has a knack for language and is using that talent in her new role as a Community Integration Program Manager. Here she’s with Community Integration consumers, from left, Jessica, Mila, Perry and Gary.
ACT consumers took part in the fall recognition of 150 dedicated employees who have earned the Direct Support Professional designation. Many of the consumers designed and inked yellow flags that hung in front of ACT’s main building. Many thanks and several lunches honored DSPs throughout the week. John Savage, right, Director of Employment Services, gives a high five to Courtney, left, and Bret, center.

New state waiver may spur growth
Community Advantage Program poised for growth

ACT’s unique Community Advantage Program is poised for growth. Now two years old, the program has much in place to serve more consumers.

The program is designed for retirement-aged consumers that want to take part in community-based activities. Participants take part in a wide range of activities from serving at the Central Missouri Food Bank to visiting at coffee shops.

“I know there are more folks in the community that could benefit from Community Advantage services,” says Ben Baker, Program Supervisor for Community Advantage and Community Integration. He expects more consumers in the near future “because there aren’t many programs for aging individuals with developmental disabilities.”

With 10 current participants, the program adheres to its goal of providing activities that are quieter than largroupe Community Integration activities. “The slow growth has allowed us to do the program right,” says Michelle Saunders Program Director of Community Advantage and Community Integration. “The small census provides a calmer atmosphere.”

Saunders and Baker each point to the fact that Missouri’s new Prevention Waiver has the potential of bringing in new Consumer Advantage participants. The program already has received several referrals for the program. The new waiver provides support for individuals before a possible critical situation occurs such as an aging caregiver or a challenging behavior of the consumer.

To be prepared for such an influx, Baker expects to add a third staff member to give participants more options for activities. Currently the two staff members provide care five days a week.

The program also expects to keep up with growth by continuing to use its computer sign-up system. Participants can plan out their week of activities from their home and then have a staff member pick them up at their home.

“Getting people out and engaged in a variety of activities is really important to slow the declines both mentally and physically in persons supported,” says Baker. “Community Advantage is an avenue to do that.”

“I know there are more folks in the community that could benefit from Community Advantage services because there aren’t many programs for aging individuals with developmental disabilities.”

Ben Baker, Program Supervisor for Community Advantage and Community Integration
Fontella Jackmon-Jones takes on new role
Career Services professional ready for new challenges

Fontella Jackmon-Jones was recently promoted to Program Supervisor with ACT Career Services. As such, she will be helping manage the growing job placement service.

“I have a whole lot of new duties that I’m really getting used to,” she says. Jackmon-Jones’ primary responsibility will be to oversee the job coaches who help new employees learn their job duties at local businesses. She will also help train her replacement as the Assessment Coordinator.

For the past two years, Jackmon-Jones helped coordinate two to four on-the-job tryouts for each job seeker. In addition, she worked with local high school students. “I will miss that direct contact,” she admits.

She is really good at meeting challenges. She has that natural drive and focus to look at the challenge to make things better. She will have a lot of responsibility and we’re very confident and excited about her taking on this new position. She’s a great staff member.

John Savage, Director of Employment Services

Fontella has proved to be a solid problem-solver, says John Savage, Director of Employment Services. “She is really good at meeting challenges. She has that natural drive and focus to look at the challenge to make things better.” He adds, “she will have a lot of responsibility and we’re very confident and excited about her taking on this new position. She’s a great staff member.”

Although Jackmon-Jones will have a significant change in duties, she says she is “doing exactly what I need to do.” With more than 10 years of experience, she says she gets “real satisfaction working with individuals with developmental disabilities. I love what I do.”

In addition to her years of work in the field, she earned a degree in biology and minor in chemistry from Columbia College. Jackmon-Jones and her husband, Mark, are the parents of daughter Nidjha and son, NiDainian.