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inter **ACT** ion

Spring 2004

Alternative Community Training

A process that works

Assessment the key to job success

It's the peak of the lunch hour rush at the Main Street Cafe. Waiting diners rush to a cleared table the moment it becomes available. Among all the hubbub Louise swiftly cleans the tables.

While she's working at the University of Missouri-Columbia Medical Center just briefly today, she looks like a pro. "I'm used to having to rush, rush," she says. "I'm used to food. My father worked in the airlines in food, so look where I am."

Already, Louise has logged 14 years as a McDonalds' employee and now she's trying out the Main Street Cafe position as part of her Supported Employment Program assessment. The new experience "is basically what I'm used to," she says.

The restaurant tryout is just one of several assessments Louise will experience. Employees being placed in the Supported Employment Program usually try out several different jobs.

The assessment program likely will be the key to success for Louise and dozens like her who now are part of the program. There are always three or more assessments underway at ACT.

Because of the process, ACT clients like Louise "will be able to stay in jobs longer because they make good job placement choices," says Ray Handy, director of the Supported Employment Program. Placing clients in the workplace "couldn't be done without the assessment process."

ACT emphasizes a quality assessment process because of its importance. Each process takes up to six hours. It's also a team process that requires many individuals to fully assess every job candidate.

The bottom line is to match the client's abilities and interests with the right job. For most potential clients, entering the world of work is a new experience. Most do not have a good idea of what jobs require or what their skills may be.



BEATING THE RUSH. Speed is of the utmost importance at the Main Street Café for Louise, right, and Beth, left, a current employee of the cafe. The University of Missouri Medical Center restaurant was the site of an assessment for Louise as part of Supported Employment Program placement. Beth also is part of the Supported Employment Program.

"Many base what they want on what their friends do, or TV or radio commercials," says Handy.

Because of their limited job exposure, a thorough assessment takes place for each job site. Assessment results measure:

- The individuals skills as they relate to the job
- Endurance
- Speed
- Quality of the job completed

What motivates the individual must also be considered. Because money may not always be the primary motivation for individuals, ACT looks into other intrinsic rewards such as interaction with other workers and friendships.

Even after many outcomes are measured,

more work is necessary to complete the assessment. ACT looks into many other factors for the individual such as

- Transportation to the job site
- Effects the job would have on the individual's entitlements and benefits

After all the groundwork, ACT discusses with the individual where they might like to work. With a successful match, plans are put in place for a job coach to help the individual for up to nine months.

Assessment is a lengthy process but it has been valuable over the years. "The assessment process is a very important part of supported employment," says Ute Breeding, assessment coordinator. "It's how we make good job matches."

Programs could expand to Centralia, Missouri

ACT is now researching the possibility of providing services to residents in Centralia, located about 25 miles north of Columbia.

The possibility developed after a parent of a child with disabilities contacted ACT concerning the need for assistance. The parent was unable to provide transportation to Columbia for their child to be a part of ACT's work or activity programs.

After the initial contact, a survey by Boone County Group Homes and Family Support showed seven individuals from Centralia could be served. Also, four or five other individuals would be in need of ACT's services within a year, says Jim Williams, director of the Affirmative Industry Program and the Personal and Social Services Program.

"It could be a big plus for us to grow the program and help more people," says Williams. "We would like to provide support for those people."

Many options could exist to serve the individuals. Transportation could be provided by ACT from Centralia to the Columbia facility. The Affirmative Industry Program possibly could find work from the Centralia area which would allow the individuals to work in Centralia. Another possibility could be ACT taking work to a Centralia facility for the individuals to complete.

"If there is support in the community we could rent space for activities or work," Williams says.



WELCOME! ACT welcomes Jessica, left, to the Supported Living Program. 'I love Jessie so much, I just love her,' says roommate Chris, right. In a new environment, Jessie is perfecting many new skills—from setting the table to vacuuming and beginning her laundry. She's also learning to write her name and some of the alphabet. Now with a bank account, she's also learning to sign checks

TECHNOTRASH



ACT soon may be receiving numerous electronic items collected in an office's Technotrash can. The cardboard cans are the brainchild of David Beschen, president of GreenDisk. Beschen has found over 100 businesses around the country that eventually will place the cardboard boxes in their business to collect everything from CDs and videotapes to cell phones and printer cartridges. Already, 10 Technotrash receptacles have been placed in University of Missouri-Columbia dorms. ACT's job would be to recycle the many items. Here, Robbie shows how easy it is to start the recycling process using the Technotrash can.

SATISFACTION SURVEY QUESTIONS FUNDING SOURCES

ACT recently adopted a new way to measure the effectiveness of each of its programs.

Annually a survey will be distributed to the many individuals and groups linked to ACT. The questionnaire will be part of an Outcomes Management System. It's an updated version of the organization's Performance Evaluation System which was done routinely over the past 10 years.

The new method surveys a completely new group—the organizations that provide referrals and funds to ACT.

Now all groups, from the Missouri Department of Mental Health to Vocational Rehabilitation, will be asked about their level of satisfaction with ACT. E-bay customers, who are increasingly buying ACT products, also will be questioned about their satisfaction.

Funding sources "give us another set of eyes," says Don Lafferty, the director of Supported Living Program who heads up the Outcomes Management process.

By asking funding sources about their satisfaction level with ACT, "we get a little more feedback with a different perspective."

All the survey information will be posted on ACT's Web site: www.actservices.org

Currently data from July to December is being collected and will soon be available on the Web.

Positive responses on the Web will be a strong marketing message, Lafferty says. "We hope to find out the things we're doing well and tell people."

LEGISLATORS RECOGNIZE DIRECT-CARE STAFF

The U.S. House of Representatives and Senate have given unanimous support to a resolution recognizing the work of direct-care staff. Recently the U.S. Senate passed the National Direct Support Recognition Act and the House passed The Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution, both by unanimous consent.

A total of 310,000 individuals are direct-care staff for individuals with disabilities. The resolutions recognize the dedication of the workers who make it possible for individuals with disabilities to have productive, meaningful, satisfying lives. More than 8 million Americans are assisted by direct-care individuals.

The national resolutions point out the lack of adequate compensation for staff throughout the country. The legislators identified that both the dollar amount and percentage increase in hourly wage rates for such workers is far below that of comparable job categories.

Compensation concerns also impact ACT's 140 direct-care individuals, says Don Lafferty, director of the Supported Living Program.

The staff "does a great job and yet the field traditionally does not provide the compensation they deserve." Lafferty sees the legislative recognition as "perhaps the first step in providing more funding for staff."

CALENDAR

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

May 31 —Memorial Day

July 5—Fourth of July

September 6—Labor Day

WINTER TRAVELS CONTINUE

Old Man Winter doesn't slow down travelers at ACT. In the past several months members of the Personal and Social Services Program have taken many trips. They've visited the Hallmark Visitors Center in Kansas City, the Museum of Missouri Military History in Jefferson City and the first Missouri State Capital site in St. Charles. They also visited St. Louis sites related to famous African-Americans as part of Black History Month. A fun-filled St. Patrick's Day Party was on the calendar. Everyone has looked forward to seeing pictures of Ireland taken by Jim Williams, director of the Affirmative Industry and Social and Personal Services programs.



15 YEARS OF SERVICE

Denise, right, an ACT Supported Employment client, recently celebrated 15 years of service with Boyce and Bynum Pathology Professional Services in Columbia. Denise works in the laboratory facilities cleaning the firm's all-important lab items. Denise was given an all-expense-paid weekend trip to Kansas City by her employer. ACT presented Denise a bouquet of flowers on her special day. Presenting flowers to Denise, right, is Grace Ricciotti ACT employment training specialist.

COOKING CLUB BEGINS

The Healthy Cooking Club is a new activity for members of the Personal and Social Services Program. Led by program activities director Jonnette Whitley, the club already has made banana-nut bread and cranberry-apple muffins. For all the participants, eating is the reward for their hard work.

SPOTLIGHT

Deanie McClain

Tell us a little about your job.

I'm a program manager and supervisor for the Affirmative Industry Program. As program manager I directly supervise 16 clients. As a supervisor I help manage 28 individuals in our program. I work in the second shift—from about noon to 8:30 p.m.

How long have you worked for ACT?

I started in 1992 in the Personal and Social Services Program, or Day Program. I worked there until 1999 and then took off for a year and one-half and then came back to ACT. I've been in this job for the past eight months.

What kinds of things does your crew do?

We've been recycling product from AOL in tins and DVD cases. We do unpack a lot of music CDs. We degauss videotapes and 3.5-inch floppy disks. I just oversee them and help them out and inspect their work to make sure it's good quality.

Do you like working with your team of employees?

I really do like it. It's fast paced. Everybody comes in here ready to work. If you keep that work going to them they will just work their hearts out.

What is special about this job?

So many of these guys just want a friend. They just want to be like me or you. Everyone of them has a special quality about them. I enjoy working with these guys.

What do you like to do for your employees?

I make a habit of doing a lot of praise. I think that's something all of us as individuals would like. It seems to motivate these guys. They want to do just that much more. I praise them because they do do a good job. They're very respectful of me and their co-workers. That means a lot.

What else have you seen at ACT over the years?

I've been here for so many years that I've seen some of these guys just really grow and really come a long ways. It makes you feel good. They've done it for themselves.

What can you say to summarize your job?

I love these guys; I really do. You have to love this type of work and I do. They're not only people that I serve, they're my friends. All they want is a little respect and kindness like we all want.



NEW ME CLUB HITS THE STORES

One of the newest clubs at ACT has taken two trips to find new clothes and other items for members of the Personal and Social Services Program. Expanded recently to include men, the club helps clients find new clothing and gifts. Trips before Christmas were taken to the Burlington Coat Factory in St. Louis and Bannister Mall in Kansas City.

THANKS DONORS!

A special "thank you" is extended to every individual or organization that has contributed to ACT's ReachOut program. If you would like to contribute in honor of someone's birthday or anniversary, or in memory of someone, send the enclosed envelope to ACT or contact Mark Hassemer, Executive Director at 573-474-9446 or e-mail mhassemer@socket.net

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TEAMWORK MAKES NEW HOUSE A HOME

There are four very happy people living at 800 Crestland in south-west Columbia. Chris, Kelly, Roy and Larry are four roommates at ACT's newest Supported Living Program home.

They're enjoying everything there is about the new home. Their individualized bedrooms, new furnishings and spacious backyard are all pluses for the new home. But its the staff, too, that has made the house a home in just a little more than one month.

"It was almost immediately that they all felt comfortable," says Sue Anderson, program manager. "They've really adjusted and that's thanks to the staff."

The smooth transition resulted from the hard work and teamwork of ACT staff—live-in staff member Ed Hodson, and staff members Shaun Jackson and Yvonda Barnett.

The residents had three major changes in one month's time. First, ACT assumed responsibility for three of the residents who had been served by another organization. Then Kelly, Roy and Larry moved to ACT's new residence. Finally Chris moved to the home as a new roommate.

Between December 15 and December 30 the lives of all four residents changed dramatically. All of the changes occurred between December 15 and January 15.

"These guys had gone through so many changes," says Anderson. But the transition was made smooth by ACT's staff.

The staff "got invested with the guys so fast that they wanted to be there on the holidays," Anderson says. "They did the holidays 24/7. It's definitely a team effort, everybody working together."

ACT has provided many of the furnishings for the home including new beds and bedding, tables, lamps and a computer. Much of the



NEW DIGS. There's lots of space at a new Supported Living Program home for, from left, Larry, Kelly, live-in staff member Ed Hodson, Chris, and Roy.

other furniture was provided by the home's owner.

With most of the changes complete, live-in staff member Ed Hodson hopes to see a lot of good things happen for the residents. Warmer weather will allow use of the screened-in porch and the homey neighborhood is perfect for evening walks. "All I want to see is them happy," he says. "I just want to see them have a better life."

ACT PROGRAMS SEE STRONG GROWTH

More and more people are using the services ACT provides. Over the past year two programs, in particular, have grown significantly.

The Affirmative Industry Program has grown 43 percent this past year. Today 53 individuals with disabilities are employed in the program which recycles videotapes, CD

jewel boxes, cassettes and other media. In 2002, 37 individuals were employed.

For Jim Williams, director of the program, the growth is likely to continue. "We're always looking for ways to sell more product which in turn will allow us to hire more people. Our goal is to always find ways to employ

more people."

Williams, also head of the Personal and Social Services Program, reports that the program has increased 26 percent over the past year. Today 48 individuals take part in the activities-based program. Last year, 38 individuals were part of the program.

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