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interACTion

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Alternative Community Training

Persistence makes home a reality

Some things are just meant to be—like finding a new home for three ACT clients who are part of the Supported Living Program.

Jeff, Minna and Ellsworth are now living in a large, brick ranch home because of the dedication of Michelle and Buzz Bledsoe. The Bledsoes purchased the home despite the obstacle of significant upfront cash requirements.

“Sometimes something needs to be done and you’re the one,” says Michelle. “You work until you get it accomplished.”

That’s exactly what the Bledsoes did to find a home for Jeff, Minna and Ellsworth.

The Bledsoes have provided an ACT home for the past 10 years and Michelle has been a staff member for many years as well. At their East Campus home they provided living space and care for Jeff and Minna, as well as Leonard who remains with the Bledsoes. The home eventually became too small for the ACT clients and the Bledsoe family that includes two children.

To free up their own living space, the Bledsoes began to look for rental housing for Jeff and Minna. “It became apparent,” Michelle says, “we weren’t going to find anything for them. As renters we couldn’t compete.” The Columbia market’s rental rates were just too great to make an apartment a reality.

Instead, the search began for a home to purchase. “We liked this one from the very beginning,” Michelle says. The home is also a big hit with Jeff, Minna and Ellsworth.

“I love it,” says Jeff. “I like sitting on the deck.” Ellsworth likes the fact the group’s dog, Waldo, has plenty of room to run in the yard. He also likes the fact he’s only about two blocks from the convenience store that’s well-stocked with his favorites—candy bars and pop.

For the Bledsoe’s, ownership allows them to make changes in the



PERSISTENCE PAYS. Three individuals are now living in a spacious, comfortable home thanks to the hard work of Michelle and Buzz Bledsoe. The Bledsoes put in lots of time and effort to find the right home and overcome financial obstacles to provide a home that can be adapted for the clients’ special needs. Pictured with Michelle, second from right, are, from left, Jeff, Ellsworth, and Minna.

home to suit the clients’ needs. “We can change it to suit them,” says Michelle. Right now they’re improving accessibility in the bathrooms “to make it safer and better.”

“There wasn’t any downside to it,” she says of the purchase. Most of all, “they’ll have a place that suits them more and more and more.”

ACT links with Disney to recycle DVDs

ACT has teamed up with Disney and other entertainment heavyweights to help solve the problem of used movie DVDs.

ACT eventually would receive used DVDs with the latest technology—the ability to fade to black after 48 hours. Buyers would have the option to send the out-of-date DVDs to ACT for recycling.

To get the job done, ACT worked with Disney, Buena Vista Home Entertainment and Flexplay, the manufacturer of the DVDs.

“It’s a new product, new technology and

we’re right at the beginning of it,” says Jim Williams, director of the Affirmative Industry Program. “If it grows,” he adds, “it will mean more jobs.”

To encourage mailing the DVD to ACT, the message to send the DVD to ACT is printed on the front of the DVD.

The new 48-hour shelf-life technology is now being test marketed in Peoria/Bloomington, IL; Kansas City; Austin, TX; and Charlotte, S.C. A total of 1.6 million disks will be distributed to retailers in those cities.

To encourage recycling, Disney is offering a voucher for a free DVD to anyone who sends five disks to ACT. “Disney wants to encourage people to recycle,” says Williams.

The idea for the time-sensitive DVD evolved from the concern of retailers who saw thousands of returned DVDs eventually thrown away when obsolete.

The key to the program will be the DVD buyer’s effort to mail the DVD in an envelope to ACT, says Williams. “Whether they will, we’ll find out.”

New to the board of directors

Meet Kat Cunningham

Kat Cunningham is passionate about a lot in life. From University of Missouri sports to politics she puts her whole heart into everything she does.

And now she brings the same passion to ACT's Board of Directors. Recently elected to a three-year term, Cunningham hopes to provide business expertise and contacts to the boardroom table. She is the founder and president of Moresource, a Columbia-based employee-benefits and human resource firm which serves the central Midwest.

Most importantly Cunningham brings the personal desire to help the clients of ACT. Throughout her life she has been a part of the lives of individuals with disabilities.

"Inside this big gal is a big heart," she says about her many activities to help individuals.

While earning her undergraduate recreation and leisure degree at the University of Missouri-Columbia, she worked with many individuals with mental and physical disabilities. She also has a half-sister with Down's Syndrome and two of her employees have children with autism. "It's just been a part of my life," she says about her involvement with individuals with disabilities. So ACT "was just a natural fit. I was tickled when they asked."

Cunningham brings to ACT extensive experience among community organizations. Currently she is a member of the boards of directors for the Columbia United Way, Boy Scouts of America, Alzheimer's Association, Boone Hospital Foundation, Small Business Development Centers, and Entrepreneurial Support Coalition. She also is considering running for the 19th District Missouri Senate seat.

"I love networking. Networking is my thing," she says. Her many



NEW SOURCE FROM MORESOURCE. *Kat Cunningham, founder and president of Columbia-based Moresource, has many contacts that potentially could benefit ACT, she says. 'I hope that we'll be able to bring more companies to the table to help.'*

contacts with employers in the community could be a resource for ACT, she believes. "I hope that maybe with some of the contacts we have just through Moresource we'll be able to bring more companies to the table to help. Whatever ACT's need might be, if I can't help, then maybe I'll have a resource that we can contact."

She also hopes to tell many about ACT. "I like that it helps employers and the individuals out there to help individuals with disabilities mainstream. It helps them with their income and the ability to earn a livelihood. ACT is a first-class operation. It might be one of the best kept secrets in Columbia."

Nursing visits now a part of Supported Living

A little extra care is now provided to 37 ACT clients who participate in the Supported Living Program.



MONTHLY RN VISITS. *Each month Sue Braselton, RN, left, stops by the homes of 37 ACT clients to check on their health and medications. Here she provides a little extra care to Dennis.*

Each month Sue Braselton, RN, stops by to visit with each participant to check on their health and medications.

Funds have been provided by the Missouri Department of Mental Health to provide one and one-fourth hour each month of nursing oversight to each ACT Supported Living participant.

For Braselton, the regular visits allow her "to look at things a little closer from a nursing point of view." She makes sure physicians' orders are carried out, checks medications, weighs, and asks lots of questions. Her efforts, she adds, "enhance the quality of life," for each participant.

Before the RN visits began, ACT's program managers and home managers have been responsible "for making sure our participants receive appropriate and preventative medical care," Braselton says. The managers still continue in this role but now "we have an extra layer of oversight," says Don Lafferty, director of the Supported Living Program. "It's important for our clients to receive the best medical care available. This is just one more way we insure quality care."

For Braselton, visiting each participant monthly is an enjoyable experience. In addition to giving valuable care, she enjoys getting to know all the latest news from her clients. "They tell me about camp, about work, or whatever is on their mind."

She also relies on those who work in the homes to share information that might be medically important.

The relationships she has with staff and clients is strong because of her years of experience as a direct care staff. She worked as a staff member for three years before assuming the RN role.

"When I started as on-call direct care staff it was supposed to be temporary," she says. "I got hooked and here I am. We can make a difference and that's very satisfying."

CALENDAR

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

- November 27-28—Thanksgiving
- December 24-25—Christmas
- December 26—PSS Program closed
- Dec. 29-30—PSS Program closed
- Dec. 31-Jan. 1—New Years
- January 2—PSS Program closed
- January 19—Martin Luther King

NEW CLUBS BEGIN

Several new clubs have begun for participants in the Personal and Social Services Program. Recently the participants began an exercise class at ACT's facility. Also a hiking club has just begun with the first activity being a hike on Columbia's Katy Trail. In the future other hiking trails will be explored.

There also is a "New Me" club now at ACT. The club's purpose is to let ACT clients change their wardrobes, makeup, hairstyles and other aspects of personal care. The club kicked off with visits to outlet malls. They visited both Fashion Warehouse and Burlington Outlet

stores in St. Louis. They also visited the outlet mall at Lake of the Ozarks.

NEW WAREHOUSE SPACE CONSIDERED

ACT now is investigating adding about 4,000 square feet of warehouse space to its facility. The new space would help eliminate overcrowded warehouse conditions plus the renting of two additional facilities for storage.

The additional space primarily would be used for storing tapes, disks, CDs, jewel cases and other donated items.

A total of about 100 individuals with disabilities, plus staff, are located at the facility. "We're busting at the seams," says Mark Hassemer, executive director. "Just acknowledging that led us to explore this with our board."

A preliminary sketch of the expansion was provided free of charge by architect John Simon of Simon Architects.

The key now is to continue to see if ACT's recycling programs grow and also explore fi-

nancing for the expansion.

"It's exciting to think about," adds Hassemer. "But you don't want to incur long-term debt without demonstrating the means to satisfy the debt."

eBAY SALES STRONG

ACT's new venture of selling products at auction on the Internet's eBay site is going well. A mix of videotapes, jewel cases, and snap cases has brought in nearly \$20,000 in revenue from May through June. Sales were: May, \$6,800; June, \$7,300; and July, \$5,600. "It's going real good and we'll look at other auctions to expand our presence on the Web and continue to grow this new revenue stream," says Jim Williams, director of the Affirmative Industry Program.

EXCITING TRIPS FILL SUMMER MONTHS

Summer days were filled with many trips by those in the Personal and Social Services Program. Trips included a visit to the Thomas Hart Benton home in Kansas City, and also a trip to Lake of the Ozarks. An unusual museum, the Optical Science Museum in Hannibal also was explored by the group. A special treat was watching a 3-D movie. During the summer trips were also taken to the Battle of Lexington state historical site in Lexington, MO and the Lewis and Clark Museum in Hartford, IL. The season also included a visit to many historical aspects of Warrensburg, MO and a fun-filled trip to the Missouri State Fair in Sedalia.

DONATION NEWS

The following memorial gifts were made to ACT's ReachOut program. If you would like to give, send the enclosed envelope with your gift to ACT or contact Mark Hassemer, Executive Director at 573-474-9446 or e-mail mhassemer@socket.net

Memorials

- In memory of Elayne Hassemer by David & Marcia Machens; and Anna Hargis
- In memory of C. Wayne Spann by Gerald & Barbara Braznell
- In memory of John Schupp by Guy & Marian Schupp

Other Donations

Missouri State Employees Charitable Group
Mr. & Mrs. C.J. Furrer

KODAK MOMENTS

The annual spring picnic was filled with many "Kodak moments." Participants in the Day Program and Work Program filled a large pavilion at Albert Oakland Park. The day was filled with great food, a lively game of bingo, prizes, bubble blowing, and hikes in the park.

SPOTLIGHT Sue Anderson

Tell us a little about what clients you work with?

I work with six people who are independent. They live on their own in apartments and get 15 hours of support per week from staff. They're pretty challenging actually but independent. I'm hoping the program will expand.

What kind of support do the clients receive?

They receive assistance with food shopping, banking, some meal prep. They're very independent, they just need support. They haven't gotten to their full potential yet.

Did you know about ACT before becoming a program manager?

Yes. In fact I knew some of the clients in the apartment program. I knew some from the past when I was on the crisis team for the Central Missouri Regional Center.

What did you notice about the clients since seeing them years ago?

I came back and said 'Wow.' ACT did a wonderful job with these people because there were some very severe behavior problems then and now they're in their own apartment. That was nice to see. They're doing really well.

How long have you been involved with helping people with disabilities?

Twenty years. I've worked in Massachusetts, New Jersey and Missouri. I've done many things including being a direct care staff, a case manager, and supervised independent living houses. I also worked with ACT on a large project for those who were blind and deaf years ago while working with the Central Missouri Regional Center.

What motivates you?

I want to help people achieve what they want to. I want to help them go as far as they can go instead of just letting them stay where they are. It's very satisfying to give the support so they can have a quality life.

What is like to work at ACT?

I'm really impressed with the staff. They're motivated and hard working. They're in there working and giving whatever it takes to help everybody have the best life they can.

What's different about ACT?

ACT will step up and say, 'We'll give this a shot.' ACT is good at taking chances on people that other organizations would not.



FOCUSED ON SUCCESS. *New Supported Living program manager Sue Anderson wants the very best for the clients she works with. She puts to work many years of experience 'to help people achieve what they want to. I want to help them go as far as they can go.'*



WINGIN' IT. A new employment relationship took place recently when ACT client, Mario, left, began work at Buffalo Wild Wings, owned and operated by Julee Johnson, right. 'We need the employees and they need the position,' says Johnson. Mario is part of the Supported Employment Program and will receive job coaching assistance. That assistance is a big plus for the relationship Johnson says. 'I like the fact I get good support from the job coaches.' Mario plans to work 20-to-25 hours per week and will have many duties. His initial task will involve coating the wings with spicy sauce. 'I want it to be successful for both of us,' says Johnson.

Machens, Hargis honored for service

ACT recently recognized two members of the Board of Directors for their years of service.

Dave Machens, co-owner of Joe Machens Dealerships, was recognized by the Board of Directors for his six years of service to the board. Anna Hargis, director of marketing for Shelter Insurance, was recognized for serving this past year as president of the board.

At the August board meeting, three board members were elected to serve a second three-year term. Elected were Gerald Braznell of St. Louis, Rick Bartelt, vice president of QuesTec Constructors, and Nathan Williams, division chief of the Columbia Fire Department. Elected to a first three-year board term was Kat Cunningham, president of Moresource.

The following board members also were elected to board positions for the coming year: Gerald Braznell, president; Rick Bartelt, vice president; and Bob Scribner, owner, Executive Advantage, secretary/treasurer.

Mexico the focus of international effort

Mexico may soon be a new market for ACT products.

ACT has contacted the Missouri Department of Economic Development to inquire about assistance with international sales.

Bronwen Madden, an international marketing specialist with the economic development department, suggested ACT focus on one country. Since the development department has an office in Monterey, Mexico, it was suggested ACT focus on pursuing sales in Mexico.

Madden toured ACT and was encouraging about the potential of international sales. Already ACT has completed a client profile and agent/distributor search form which has been submitted to the Missouri Office of International Marketing. In turn, information about ACT and its products has been introduced to the office in Monterey.

GreenDisk products handled by ACT that could possibly be sold in Mexico are 3.5-inch floppy disks, jewel cases, and CDRWs. Floppy

disks and jewel cases could also be offered as a non-branded bulk product sold directly by ACT. Three-quarter-inch videotape and VHS one-half-inch videotape also could be sold directly.

ACT's inventory includes more than one million 3.5-inch floppy disks to be sold under the GreenDisk brand or as a non-branded bulk item. Donors also continue to ship to ACT videotapes in various formats and many other types of magnetic media.

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