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interACTion

Spring 2006

Alternative Community Training

ACT workforce available for new projects

ACT has just the right answer for businesses needing a little extra help. ACT's Affirmative Industry Program has 70 individuals available to provide a number of services for all types of business

ACT can provide a wide range of services including: production, assembly, sorting, collating, stuffing, sub-assembling, labeling, packaging, marking, box assembly and hand assembly. In addition to these services ACT has

“We’ll provide a quality service. The work we do will be as good or better than the people that do it in their facilities.”—Jim Williams

“The most important thing is to create jobs and opportunities,” says Jim Williams, Director of Operations and Community Employment. “Now we need more income to support the number of people we have currently. We’re open to anything and everything.”

extensive experience in order fulfillment and shipping services.

“We’re always looking for opportunities for people that are starting to sell products on the Internet or from their homes and need the operational support that we can provide.”

For larger organizations, “we can offer a workforce to increase their productivity without increasing their employee costs. We can package things and do things for them and they won’t have to add employees during their peak demand.”

“We’ll provide a quality service,” he adds. “The work we do will be as good or better than the people that do it in their facilities.”

If you, or someone you know, is interested in using the services of ACT, please contact Jim Williams at 573-474-9446 or jimact@socket.net.

Working with ACT can provide many benefits including:

- Improved manufacturing outcomes
- Reduced costs
- Increased production without adding new staff

Most of all, you can take advantage of a workforce “that is willing to take on tasks that will impact your company in positive ways and reach your manufacturing goals,” says Williams.



READY TO WORK. Louise, and many other ACT consumers, are ready to take on new work projects. Workers in the Affirmative Industries Program are able to provide a wide range of services—from sorting and stuffing to packaging and assembling.

PROGRAM CHANGE BOOSTS HIGHER QUALITY CARE

ACT’s reputation for quality care just jumped a notch.

Today there is improved supervision and management of Community Living homes. It’s all because program supervisors now oversee two homes rather than three or more.

“It should overall improve the services we provide, says Don Lafferty, Director of the Community Living Program. “Now our program supervisors will have more time to talk to family members and guardians, consumers and staff.

In nearly all cases each home has three Community Living consumers. “With two

homes supervised by each supervisor, Community Living consumers benefit in many ways,” says Carrie Griffith, a Community Living Program Manager.

“Supervising two homes, instead of three, allows us to focus on each home individually, to spend more time in the home with staff and consumers- instead of going from each house crisis to another. She adds that “quality of care has always been of primary importance at ACT and this new arrangement allows supervisors

to achieve the next level of quality.”

The change also will help the work life of program supervisors. “Typically the 24/7 nature of their jobs reduced tenure to two or less years,” Lafferty explains. “This should just allow our supervisors to do a great job without giving up their personal lives to do it.”

“Having two homes also promotes a healthier work/life balance for the supervisors, which helps them to respond to consumer needs and staff issues with a fresh perspective,” says Griffith.

NEW EMPLOYEE FOCUSES ON JOBS

Amanda Harms is seeing another facet of ACT. She recently left her job with the Community Living Program to become a Job Development Coordinator with the Community Employment Program.

The biggest change has been the increased number and variety of ACT consumers she assists.

“One of the main differences is that in Community Employment you’re constantly working with somebody different. I get to work with a larger variety of people. I also get to work with people with a wider range of disabilities which is pretty interesting.”

Everyday she puts to use her Columbia College psychology degree. “That challenge—that mental stimulation—that’s where it’s at for me.”

As a Job Development Coordinator, Harms

provides or oversees many services that ultimately lead to a job.

Community Employment provides job development services such as skills’ assessment, developing a resume, working on skills such as interview preparation, going through the job search and interviews, trying the job out and working with employers. About 25 individuals now are part of the job-seeking process.

The consumers, she believes, are often overlooked by the community. “I really do enjoy helping people with disabilities. They’re a population that is under-appreciated. Helping people have an opportunity to meet their goals and reach their dreams, that’s been one of the most rewarding things that I’ve been a part of.”

“Everybody needs to work,” she says. “We want to help them feel that sense of



FOCUSED ON WORK. Helping ACT consumers find employment is Amanda Harms.

productivity and being tied in with the community. There’s value in working and everybody has to experience that.”

ACT JOINS SUPPORT STAFF TRAINING COLLEGE

A computer-based training program is now available to all ACT staff and management.

The College of Direct Support offers up-to-date training for Direct Support Professionals, or DSPs, and management. A total of 26 ACT employees and one ACT consumer have signed up for the training in the first month it was offered.

Michelle Saunders, Program Manager for Community Integration, serves as ACT’s administrator for the training program. She explains that the program is built upon the curriculum of the National College of Direct Support which is based at the University of Minnesota. The curriculum is being used in 10 states.

Each state can add its specific information to the curriculum as can each agency like ACT.

“I think one of the great things is you can add the state-specific and the agency-specific information,” says Saunders. “You can link it right in to the content.”

Consumers, or their guardians, also can link up to the curriculum and suggest topics that their direct care staff could study. Eventually “family members and consumers would pretty much state what training they wanted their staff to participate in,” she says.

The thorough curriculum has dozens of relevant topics. A few topics include:

- Introduction to developmental disabilities
- Maltreatment of adults and children
- Safety in the home and in the community

The curriculum provides training from some of the best practitioners in the field. It also

provides ACT comprehensive training that can be difficult to find. Because the training is offered by computer, information can be updated easily, Saunders adds.

“It makes a lot of sense for us. As information changes all you do is go into the system and update it.” The curriculum, which also includes videos and testimonials, “is user friendly,” Saunders says.

There are several ways consumer’s family members can also be a part of the program. You can contact Saunders if you’d like to be a part of a program. You also can learn more about the program by logging on to the national program Web site: www.collegeofdirectsupport.com.

ACT SUPPORT HELPS LAUNCH NEW BUSINESS

ACT is helping Gene Gruender carry on a family tradition. Gruender has launched Gruender III Construction, following the footsteps of his father, grandfather and several uncles.

The new company might have never been created if it weren’t for a few services provided by ACT.

Two years ago Gruender was disabled because of a work-related accident. A vertebrae was crushed requiring two surgeries and many months of recovery. Once healed, Gruender turned to ACT for help. The Community Employment Program evaluated Gruender’s abilities learning he could not do bending, twisting and other physical tasks. ACT also linked the young contractor to a state program that provided funds for ladders, tools, promotion and other startup costs.

“I couldn’t have afforded all the tools, the

insurance and all that without going through this with ACT’s assistance and the state giving me a grant to get started,” he says.

As a result, Gruender does exactly what he wants to do. “I have 17 years of experience in everything. I’ve done residential, commercial, remodeling commercial, remodeling residential. We’ve been remodeling houses since I was five or six years old.”

His family name is well-known in Columbia which has already helped him line up many jobs for the future.

In five years he hopes to have a full-blown construction firm up and running. He knows that because of a degenerative disc disease he may not be doing all the construction himself so he expects to have a crew of his own. “Hopefully in five years I’ll be driving around telling people what to do,” he says.



SUCCESS STORY. Gene Gruender has launched his construction business after assistance from ACT’s Community Employment program.

“It’ll all work out,” he adds. “I love it. I thought I would be laid up and on Social Security, not very productive. Now I’m out back doing what I like to do. I can’t ask for anything more than that.”

Everyone working at the University of Missouri-Columbia's Brady Commons' food court knows Jimmy enjoys his job. The ACT Community Employment consumer gives high-fives to coworkers and managers as they pass by.

"Jimmy always gives everyone high fives," says Kara Pennington, Campus Dining assistant manager. The high-fives are "kind of like his signature," she adds. "He's got to give you high-fives. We know he's happy and enjoying his job."

Jimmy, along with Angie and Harry, are ACT consumers who have found success at the food court.

Many factors influence their success, one of the most important being the attitude of the Campus Dining staff.

"If there's anything to do to help ACT, I want to do it," says Pennington. "It doesn't take much at all. It's no problem," to employ individuals placed by ACT.

The employees "are very friendly and they're hardworking," she says. "All you have to do is show them the ropes and they go from that. They're very good to work with. They're also good with the customers."

In addition to hiring individuals, Campus Dining allows ACT to do job assessments at the Brady Commons' food court. Usually they work in the seating area or in the back doing dishes. "We just get them started on it and let them go with their job coach who comes with them," Pennington explains. "It's usually cleaning up tables, trash and dishes. Every once in awhile we do a cash assessment—learning the



MU EMPLOYMENT. Kara Pennington, University of Missouri-Columbia Campus Dining assistant manager, enjoys having three ACT consumers on staff at her MU food court.

register."

The relationship between Campus Dining and ACT has been rock-solid for many years. Angie and Jimmy have worked at the food court for more than five years and Harry recently began working there.

Pennington hopes to always have three to four ACT-placed individuals at the food court. "They always come in happy and say hello to everybody," says Pennington. "I hope that we can keep the relationship and always have ACT consumers employed here."

NEWSbriefs

MILLION POUND MILESTONE

In less than one year, ACT consumers have processed 1 million pounds of plastic for recycling. The milestone was reached March 28. Seventy ACT consumers have been taking VHS tapes out of their packaging, cleaning them and sorting the items for shipment to China. The tapes were donated by FunIMATION. The firm sent ACT 3 million items—about 20 semitrailer loads or more than 400 pallets of tapes.

ACT TESTS BUTTON MARKET

Yes, even used buttons now are valuable. And ACT is investigating to see if recycling buttons can be profitable. ACT is working in cooperation with Remains, Inc., a St. Louis vintage and recycled clothing firm. The plan is for Remains to supply the buttons and ACT sort, package and sell the items. One 55-gallon drum of buttons has been received from Remains, Inc. Now ACT consumers are sorting the buttons by color, style and shape. "There's zillions of buttons out there—plastic buttons, metal buttons, wooden buttons, large buttons, small buttons," says Jim Williams, Director of Operations and Community Employment. "We'll have to see if we can generate some interest and make some packaging. If we could break into the crafts business and sell a mixed bag of buttons it might be an opportunity." Prices for packaged buttons range from \$2.50 to \$8 a quarter pound, he says.

NEW OFFICE SPACE TO OPEN IN MAY

ACT has recently leased 3,200 square feet of office space located across the street from the main office. The new space will house the Community Living and Community Employment programs. A total of 16-to-18 employees will be officed in the new space.

"It's really exciting," says Mark Hassemer, Executive Director. "We've needed to do something, and how often does space become available in your neighborhood? The offices will be very helpful." Currently small offices are shared by several employees. In addition to employee offices, the new facility will have conference space to meet with consumers, families, case managers, counselors and others. The vacated space will be used by Human Resources and other activities. The new facility is expected to be opened in early May.

FOUR EARN MASTER'S DEGREES

Four ACT staff members recently earned master's degrees. The recipients are: Amanda Blumhorst, Director of Financial Operations, who earned an MBA from William Woods University; Sharla Hyler, Human Resources Coordinator, who received an MBA with human resource emphasis from William Woods University; Carrie Griffith, Program Manager, Community Living Program, received an MBA with human resource emphasis from William Woods University; and Bret Glass, Program Supervi-

sor, Community Employment Program, received a Master's of Education degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Missouri-Columbia

RECENT DONORS

The following individuals made donations to ACT in December and January: James Besleme, Donald and Selma Burnett, Cyril and Marie Furrer, Larry and Anna Gross, Steve Lee Planning and Design, David and Marcia Machens, John Pascucci, Peggy Payne, and Ray Rutherford.

SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

Although Ruth Ann is new to an ISL home, having moved into the home in late October, she is not new to ACT. For the past year she received 10 hours of support from a personal assistant while living in her own apartment.

Before moving to the new home, Ruth Ann met her two roommates, Minna and Chris. She also received a full tour of the home. "It was a smooth move," says Carrie Griffith, Program Manager for the Community Living Program. "She said she liked the house and the neighborhood."

The biggest request by Ruth Ann was to receive transportation to visit her boyfriend of many years. "We've arranged that," says Griffith.

In addition to good transportation, Ruth Ann will also get help with her prescriptions, doctor visits and other activities.

Exploring Missouri



NEGRO LEAGUE MUSEUM A HIGHLIGHT

Winter didn't slow down members of the Community Integration Program. The consumers traveled the state to learn firsthand about many different things.

One of this winter's highlights was a trip to the Negro League Baseball Museum in Kansas City.

In January the destination was the historic portion of Rocheport. Also, there was a visit to the Reptile Museum at the University of Missouri-Columbia. This winter the group traveled to Mexico, Missouri to visit a renowned horse facility. Traveling south, the group went to Jefferson City to the Elizabeth Rosier Gallery to see the art of Essex Garner. Planned travels include a trip to the St. Louis Science Center to see the Titanic exhibit, a visit to the Truman house and museum in Independence and a trip to the Jefferson Landing Museum in Jefferson City.

In addition to the many trips, consumers are busy doing volunteer labeling for the Alzheimers Association.



A trip to New Florence, Missouri, top, took Susan and Michael to a giant rocking chair at the Boonslick Lodge. Above, ACT travelers cluster around a large statue at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City and top left, Roy serves as the Christmas party bingo caller.

NEW, IMPROVED WEB SITE PLANNED

Changes are on the way for ACT's Web site.

"The site will be changed to update information more quickly," explains Jeremy Anderson, Sales Coordinator who is planning changes for the Web site.

The firm which designed the original site offers updates as a free service. "Changes, however, take a long time," Anderson says, "preventing fresh information from making it to the Web site."

One of the biggest improvements will be the ability to change prices or items for sale instantly. Currently it takes several weeks to implement a change through the hosting service.

"I think it will be more efficient," says Anderson. "If you want something done right do it yourself. It just makes more sense."

He adds that "by hosting the site here we can update it as we get some new products and adjust the prices more often to meet demand. In the long run it makes more sense to do it."

Bringing the Web site in house also would help facilitate job assessments conducted by the Community Employment Program. Occasionally potential consumers have an interest in Web design, Anderson explains. And by managing the Web site in-house more individuals could use the site to assess their design and programming skills.

Another benefit would be online job applications. Applications now are available on line, however, a hard copy must be printed, completed and then mailed to ACT.

Other future improvements include:

- an alternate site made for individuals with visual disabilities, and
- digitized video that explains ACT services.

"These are all simple things," Anderson says. "If we have it, we might as well use it."

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