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interACTion

Spring 2007

Alternative Community Training

NEW SERVICES FOR DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

The future is brighter for five individuals involved with ACT's Community Employment program. The five are deaf or hard of hearing or have low vision or are blind. They now receive job development services from ACT.

Serving such populations is a new service from ACT, explains Trina Almond, manager of the Community Employment Program.

The five initial consumers have gone through many job development activities with some having job interviews.

For those who are deaf or hard of hearing, ACT has hired staff who know sign language. Those individuals also are knowledgeable of the deaf culture.

Brenda Miers, an employment training specialist, works closely with the deaf or hard of hearing because of her knowledge of sign language and the deaf culture.

"They really need us," she says about those with who are deaf or hard of hearing. "ACT is really set up to help these individuals. We just have to tailor it a little bit."

She says that ACT's strength is that "it's an interaction. It's a direct approach instead of theories, skills assessments and all those kind of things."

Miers, who grew up with deaf parents, says such individuals need assistance in finding employment for many reasons. Because sign language is not a written language many deaf individuals lack written-language skills. Also "they might be heavily into deaf culture or not; they might be very isolated which might be part of the reason they're having trouble finding a job." Another obstacle, she adds, is that many hearing impaired "don't consider themselves to have a disability."

For people with visual impairments, ACT staff have had the opportunity to learn what technology exists that can help individuals on the job. For example, ACT has learned software exists to help people with visual impairments work at a computer. ACT staff



CHECKING IT OUT. Linnie, left, and Brenda Miers, of ACT, communicate about the day ahead in sign language at a business. As part of her job development activities with ACT, Linnie is checking out the many job functions at a business.

has also worked on learning about mobility issues for people with visual impairments.

In addition to basic knowledge of visual and hearing disabilities, ACT staff are learning about mental health issues that sometimes accompany having a disability. Many of the consumers who are visually impaired have just recently acquired the disability.

"Acquired disabilities often lead to some mental health issues," Almond says.

"We've had a lot of sensitivity training," regarding such situations, says Almond. Staff, too, has trained to tell potential employers adaptive equipment is not going to be costly because it can be made available through an agency.

ACT wins pizza giveaway

ACT consumers and staff enjoyed the generosity of a Columbia pizzeria which held a contest for not-for-profits in its Baker's Dozen competition.

ACT was entered in the Shakespeare's Pizza contest by Jill Lafferty, wife of Don Lafferty, Director of the Community Living Program.

Enough pizza was won to hold a party for 42 people. The winnings included pizza, salads, adult libations, minor libations and a few other items. A total of 50 groups competed for the pizza with 12-plus-1 (a baker's dozen) winners selected.

STAFF LEARNS MORE ABOUT MATTERS OF THE HEART

ACT's staff members celebrated Valentine's Day learning how to better serve the individuals they support.

The staff took part in Project HEART, training specifically covering many topics normally not addressed in professional training.

Toni Cole, presenter, offered many new insights to the staff. Topics covered included:

Who owns the problem. This helps staff sort out issues that arise with their consumers and provides more independence for consumers.

Establishing boundaries. This segment helps consumers better understand boundaries in their interactions with others.

How to talk about intimacy and sexuality. This allows staff to know how to support those interested in intimate relationships.

CHERISHED STAFF RETIRES



ARDELLA CRAWFORD

recently was honored by ACT for her years of service as a main relief staff member.

HONOREE. Ardella Crawford recently was honored by ACT for her years of service as a main relief staff member.

At the staff appreciation night, Ardella was honored by ACT employees for her three years of service as a staff member at the Garden Individualized Supported Living home. In addition to her work at Garden, she worked for approximately two years at other ACT homes.

"Ardella always had a great attitude about her job," says Alanta Free, Program Supervisor in the Community Living Program. "She was fun and really cared for those ladies she was involved with." Jodie and Brandi reside at the Garden home.

"I know the ladies miss her dearly and keep in contact with her," says Free. She adds that Ardella wanted to be involved with Jodie and Brandi because they are very active in the community. Ardella wanted to be a part of their active lives including shopping, hair and many other activities. Ardella, Free adds, "stressed appearance and helped take care of the home."

At the staff appreciation night, Ardella said it was time for her to be at home and travel to see her family.

"She was always fun to talk to and be around," says Free. "We miss her dearly."

Spotlight

New supervisor for apartment program



Kathryn Gunn

Kathryn Gunn, a new Program Supervisor in the Community Living Program, wants to work herself out of a job.

She oversees a service that assists individuals living on their own in apartments. "My philosophy is to work myself out of a job—to try to get them to where they don't need us anymore."

She adds that she believes "it's possible for anyone. That would be ideal."

Gunn oversees the living arrangements for six consumers in single apartments.

"I love the change and variety that comes with working with a lot of different individuals in a lot of different situations," she says.

She enjoys working in a challenging situation which revolves around support for "individuals with their own challenges and behaviors." Since accepting her position in November, she's made friends with every consumer. "I consider myself friends with all my consumers."

Gunn worked as a main relief staff member for three years with ACT. She joined ACT during her college years to work well with her school schedule. In December, she graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a bachelor's degree in communication.

That background is put into practice everyday, she says. "Being with people that have verbal communication skills makes it fun for me because I can use my education and all the skills I've learned. I'm a talker. It makes it fun to have conversations."

The most rewarding part of her job, however, is seeing her consumers progress. "It's a rewarding job. I feel good when they're doing well."

She says the apartment services "are so great because it's what I would consider the last step to being completely independent. "That's the goal for all the participants—to achieve the highest level of independence."

The little things count for new Program Supervisor



Laura Harper

Dennis is now part of the e-mail world, the result of a little effort by Laura Harper, a Program Supervisor in the Community Living Program who joined ACT in July.

A resident at one of ACT's Individualized Supported Living homes, Dennis now zips e-mails to many friends and, most importantly, his mom.

Establishing the e-mail account for Dennis opened a whole new world for him, and made his family feel closer to him. "It just made her feel more connected," Harper says of Dennis's mom. "That was not a big thing but it made a big difference."

Harper is always keeping alert for other ways to improve the lives of her consumers. "I think it's easy to overlook things like that that wouldn't take a lot of time or energy to do but when you do them it makes a big difference for people."

Harper says the philosophy that guides her is "how would I want my family member treated? What would I want for them?"

She says her supervision of two homes "is not just a job. I'm responsible to them and for them. I think that makes a difference in the kind of care they get and what I expect from people."

Harper brings to her job a wide range of experiences. She has a Master's of Education degree and teaching certificate and has worked for the Missouri Division of Youth Services as a teacher and as a case worker and teacher at Mid-Missouri Mental Health.

Her background in the psychiatric field "helps because we have some consumers who have some type of psychological need as well as developmental disabilities. I think it's important to know how those work together and how it affects somebody."

With six years of experience in Individualized Supported Living homes also helps her be supportive to staff who serve the homes. "Sometime I think I can be more helpful to the staff to have them maybe have more patience. You know there are storms you'll have to weather and you have to make sure you let the consumers know that you're going to be there."

New job focused on consumer goals

It's Special Olympics time and Erica Corken is helping several of her consumers train.

The new Community Living Program Supervisor helps her six consumers many ways and in spring it means registering and arranging practices for Special Olympics.

Helping with Special Olympics is just one of many ways Corkin supports her consumers. A part of ACT since December, she says she's now "trying to figure out all their routines and what they like to do."

A graduate of Northwest Missouri State University, Corkin found the ACT opening on ACT's Web site. Seeing the information posted on the Internet, she "gave ACT a call and two months later I was here." Her college background is in recreational therapy with a minor in business.

She has worked with special populations before "but never like this in a supervised home." She currently supervises one home and one apartment facility. Given the variety in her job she says "is a good experience. There are different issues in different houses that's for sure."

In every case, she "really likes the people. I really enjoy them. They're just a lot of fun and I feel like they need a chance just as much as anybody else does."

Everyday Corkin works to improve the lives of her consumers, she says. "I want to help them be as independent as possible and be sure that they're able to do all the things they're wanting to do."

Goals, too, are important with her consumers. "I want to make sure all their needs are met and in every way help them reach their goals and strive for higher goals."



Erica Corken

Fun-filled summer ahead for new staff member

Summer is going to be a busy time for the six consumers Mark Pickett works with. Pickett, a new Program Supervisor in the Community Living Program, knows what guys like.

He's looking into lots of outdoor activities from going to a Cardinals' baseball game to possibly boating at the Lake of the Ozarks.

Right now Pickett is brainstorming his ideas with other ACT staff and "hopefully we'll add things over time. The sky's the limit."

A few of the other ideas include trips to Kansas City, Springfield and state parks. Pickett also would like to investigate summer camps for his consumers. In Columbia he continues to attend sporting events at the University of Missouri-Columbia as well as the city's downtown evening event known as the Twilight Festival.

"There are a lot of events we are planning to do," Pickett says. "We're just raring for summer to start."

Pickett's enthusiasm is built on eight years of work with persons with developmental disabilities. He worked in the Chicago area until moving to Columbia in order for his family to be near his parents.

"I like the overall feel of Columbia," he says. "I'm looking to continue to meet new people and see what events and activities go on."

He's driven to find new people and ideas in order to serve his six consumers. "I've built up a rapport with the gentlemen in each house. Sometimes when there's a little bit of downtime we go out into the community. We want to make sure everyone is involved and take it from there."

Pickett adds that he gets plenty of help from his coworkers in learning how to successfully support his two homes. "My coworkers are a big plus. Everyone works together. Open communication is very valuable here."

He says others in the profession spoke highly of ACT when he investigated joining the staff. "A lot of people speak highly of ACT. You know you're among good company."



Mark Pickett

ACT FORGES FOODSERVICE PROVIDER RELATIONSHIP

Stephens College students know where to go for a good omelet. They walk right up to Ruby, an ACT consumer, in the school's Stamper Commons dining facility.

Ruby is known for her excellent omelets and outgoing nature.

"It's a really good relationship," says Trina Almond, Program Manager for the Community Employment Program. Ruby benefits, as does her employer Aramark, which provides the food service to the college. Ruby, who has worked at the college since August, was the first ACT consumer to serve Aramark. And for Aramark food service manager Tim Getty, Ruby won't be the last.

One big plus to the relationship with ACT is that consumers served by the Community Employment Program often come to work well trained. "They come skilled," he says. "They come from other positions and are ready to go."

He said lengthy skills' assessments aren't necessary because of the work-readiness of ACT consumers. In Ruby's case a five minute test for cooking omelets was all it took for her to get the job.

Getty, who has worked with agencies similar to ACT in other cities around the country, says such organizations "have really helped with their workers and people that help the clients. They've helped us fill the need in many positions."

He adds that he'd like to see the relationship continue to grow. With as many as 400 students eating at the dining hall, Getty is always looking for good employees. "We'd like to have as many as we can as soon as we can," he says. With 60 part- and full-time positions, "we don't really have a limit."

The relationship with ACT, he adds, "helps both of us. It's a win-win situation."

For ACT, the relationship with Stephens College opens many possibilities, Almond says. "It's a foot in the door with Stephens College to develop relationships with people across the campus."



WIN-WIN SITUATION. Both ACT and Aramark are benefitting from the placement of the Community Employment Program's consumers with the foodservice provider. Tim Getty, food service manager for Aramark at Stephens College says employment through ACT "helps both of us. It's a win-win situation."

10 EMPLOYEES EARN DIRECT SUPPORT DESIGNATION

Ten more ACT employees are now Direct Support Professionals. That brings a total of 12 staff members who have completed 13 courses offered by the College of Direct Support.

The most recent recipients of the designation are Marsha Schafer, Nancy Jones, Sherry Mann, J.R. Robinson-Hunt, Bill Carney, Ed Ricciotti and Kirsten Collins, Abigail Kanonuhwa, Luke Abshier and Myna McGowin.

There are now 79 ACT employees taking part in the educational program and 2,070 lessons have been completed.

“We have a lot of people here that are very excited about the information,” says Michelle Saunders, Program Manager for Community Integration. The curriculum is computer based and is best-practice information for many areas of direct care.

“It’s a really good dynamic system,” says Saunders who is part of a statewide effort for the College of Direct Support. “It’s really good for the continuity of care for our consumers,” she says, and the training also helps agencies like ACT retain employees. “One of the hopes would be that training employees through this system would retain them.”

ACT provides a \$350 bonus to each employee who completes the first module of the training and an additional \$350 when the second module is completed. Employees who complete the training also receive a 25-cent per hour increase in pay.

In addition to receiving the Direct Support

RON CELEBRATES YEAR OF GROWTH WITH ACT

For more than 20 years Ron lived in institutions in Missouri. A year ago, however, he came to ACT. At ACT he’s gradually found freedom like never before.

Ron “is a success story that’s different than any other,” says Kathryn Gunn, Community Living Program Supervisor. Ron now lives in his own apartment with live-in 24/7 staff support.

“Now that he’s been here a year he’s thriving in his environment,” Gunn says. He works a late-afternoon shift every day in ACT’s Affirmative Industries Program. In the program he’s known as a hard worker who “does a really good job,” says Gunn. He also likes to help people and be friendly.

Ron has improved skills that help him relate to people in the community. “He’s able to talk to sales clerks, strangers,” says Gunn. “He’s able to enjoy the part of the community that’s not just going out and purchasing things but meeting people and being treated as an equal.”

The past year has been “an adjustment from living such a restrictive life for such a long period of time to this amount of freedom.”

And hopefully, Gunn says, Ron will experience even more freedom in the future. She



PATH TO FREEDOM. Ron has found many new freedoms since being served by the Community Living Program a year ago.

would like to see him someday “achieve alone time. He’s still supervised 24/7 and has no time to himself at home or in the community.”

Eventually, however, Gunn’s hope is that he can handle the responsibility of being alone. “When he does, then he will be extremely happy to have that time. Ron has a lot of things to do and a lot of things to overcome but he’s well on his way.”

Professional designation, those who complete the training receive a certificate from the state of Missouri. This allows the certificated training to be portable from agency to agency.

In addition to helping employees, the training may also be used to develop agency wide policies, Saunders adds. ACT’s Rights, Health and Safety committee is reviewing the college’s Safety in the Home and Community training to

see if any information could be used in an agency policy.

Currently 20 agencies throughout Missouri are part of the training program. It is a three-year program with a year and one-half completed. Saunders says input will be received from those agencies participating to help in efforts to continue to receive state funding once the pilot program is completed.

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