

INTERACTION

Alternative Community Training

"An inclusive community where everyone belongs, participates, and is valued."



**NANCY
BEATTY
SAYS
FAREWELL
AFTER
25 YEARS!**

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CoMo Gives Update | Crystal's Call to Action | New HR Manager



Dear ACT Advocates,

Here's a curious thought: lately, I can't seem to ignore the word *help*.

When I first interviewed for the Executive Director position, they asked me, "What one area did I need to improve upon?" I answered, "Asking for help." I've never liked asking for help. I struggled to find it in myself to do it. But there comes a time when you push aside your pride. For me, that time is now.

I need your help, ACT advocate!

What is an *ACT advocate*? An ACT advocate is any person who wants to support people with disabilities living in the community, whether they receive services from ACT or not. They believe in inclusivity, independence, and equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

I'm talking about Rate Standardization and the ongoing DSP Crisis.

You may recall our November 2015 newsletter that called out Missouri's rate system injustices for historical DD providers. ACT, the first Missouri service provider of Individualized Support Living (ISL), is now the lowest reimbursed DD provider in the state. Most ACT-supported individuals have rates below 30% of the highest rate awarded to new individuals that enter residential services.

They refer to these low rates as "floor rates."

Sadly, the high rate new individuals receive is far from being fully funded as these calculated rates came before the state's new minimum wage laws. With a new rate study scheduled, we already know the evidence will reveal that individuals stuck with "floor rates" will further sink to "basement rates."

Since preparing this issue, the governor has increased his initial Rate Standardization recommendation from \$9.9M to \$49M. This recommendation is a considerable feat! Thank you, Governor Parsons! But it comes five years too late. The state budget still requires another \$40M on top of the recommended \$49M to give our DSPs a livable wage successfully.

ACT advocates, this is a **call to action!** We need your help in advocating for better rates. With better rates, we can recruit and retain DSPs. That's what this is all about. Despite our advocacy efforts over the past ten years to legislators, we've barely made a dent in this rate catastrophe.

On our website, we've added valuable resources that expound on Rate Standardization and the DSP Crisis. I ask you to review these materials, specifically Steve Lee's impactful testimony.

Steve is a parent to one of ACT's long-instituted individuals and also serves on the Board. His 2016 testimony led to the first significant funding increase in over a decade.

ACT advocate, I ask for your help in making your voice heard. Contact your local legislator(s). Call. Email. Text. Let them know enough is enough now. Reach out to your friends and family, local newspapers, and TV stations, and ask them to become ACT advocates. Historical providers such as ACT need better rates! Individuals who receive services depend upon the support and care of Direct Support Professionals daily.

2020 was a year of change and challenge—a time when we could not have been further apart from one another but closer together.

The New Year is here, and the season of growth and renewal upon us. I ask you now, for 2021, let's continue coming together and help those who need our voice.

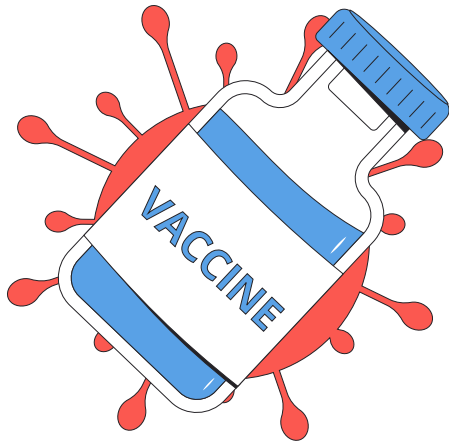
Thank you for your continual support of ACT!

Best wishes,




Don Lafferty
Executive Director

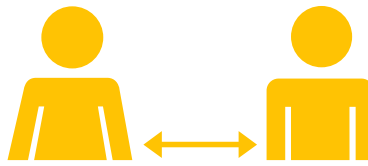
COVID-19 Vaccines Underway for Employees and Individuals



Since January, over 54 employees have received the Pfizer two-dose COVID-19 vaccine. ACT's HR Director, Lisa Otto, assisted employees in the process. She registered them through Compass Health and the Boone County Health Department, while other employees were self-registered.

In February, Columbia's Kilgore's Medical Pharmacy held a Vaccine Clinic and administered the vaccine to ACT's supported individuals. To date, over 50 individuals have received the vaccination.

Upon vaccination, ACT reiterates to staff to follow COVID-19 guidelines regularly, wearing masks, social distancing, and washing hands frequently. ACT continues to educate staff about the importance of getting vaccinated.

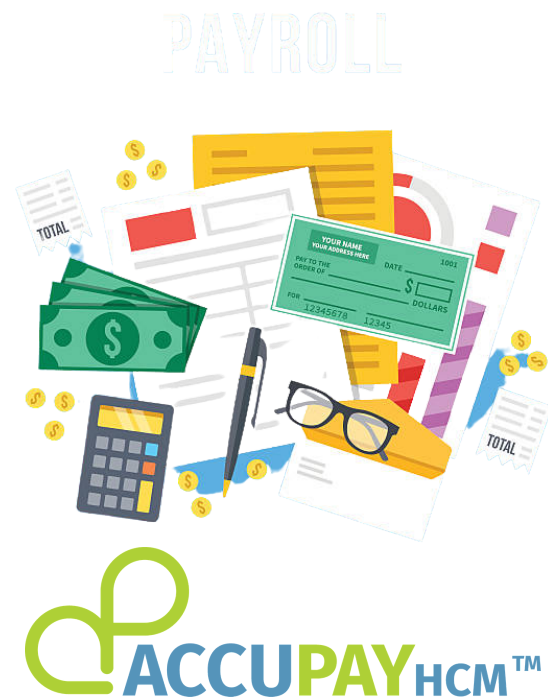


ACT Has a New Payroll Provider

Effective on March 20, ACT's new payroll and human resources provider AccuPay launches!

AccuPay offers innovative and up-to-date services and solutions. With ACT's growth, the need to fulfill staff demands, reports, and benefits more effectively require a new provider transition. AccuPay will ensure ACT has the top-notch ability to onboard, facilitate, and engage its employees. ACT is excited about this new transition.

ACT thanks Columbia EDP for their years of partnership and steadfastness through the years!



Community Living Welcomes Mackenzie

Welcome, 17-year old Mackenzie, to ACT! She receives services through the Community Living Program.

Before ACT, Mackenzie transitioned from Great Circle – a behavioral health organization that provides support and care to children and families. She joins two other roommates at the program's home, both of whom immensely enjoyed meeting with her when she first toured ACT.

Mackenzie attends Battle High School. She's enthusiastic about making new friends and experiencing new activities and adventures! Already, she's taken advantage of her activity money—funds donated through CoMoGives – and busying herself with room décor, clothing, and an enjoyable meal out with her roommates.

ACT is happy to have you, Mackenzie!



Mackenzie stands in front of her new ACT home.

Crystal's "Call to Action"

Amazing Superb Donor. Crystal wears these words proudly on her American Red Cross shirt. For the first time in over 20 years, Crystal donated blood to the American Red Cross. Her success, though, was not without obstacles.

On September 22nd, 2020, Crystal ventured to the Columbia Mall with her direct support care staff to participate in the public blood drive held inside. Once there, she waited her turn. But it never came. The blood drive staff told Crystal that because she was in a wheelchair, she could not participate. The onsite supervisor stated, "He could make accommodations," but he refused to do so. Crystal knew this was a call for action!

After persistent calls to the state following the incident, including one to Governor Parsons, Crystal received good news. A nurse from the St. Louis Red Cross contacted the Columbia Red Cross and explained Crystal's situation.

On October 20th, following a month-long of advocating and persistence, Crystal finally donated her blood. She plans to continue giving blood to her baby brother's memory as he wanted to be an organ donor but was unable to.

When asked what advice she has for others like her dealing with discrimination and injustice,

she said, "Continue to be persistent! Advocating is key." Crystal hopes her success story will encourage people with disabilities to take action when necessary and if possible.

Crystal also has hopes that one day ACT will hold a blood drive. If so, you better believe she'll be the first in line!

"Advocating is key."





CARF Awards ACT another Three-Year Accreditation

Once again, ACT has received the maximum accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). This achievement marks ACT's twelfth time receiving accreditation since the first time in 1987.

The CARF survey, initially scheduled for May, was postponed delayed significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

In the months that followed, ACT staff did a phenomenal job with preparing for the survey. For the first time in ACT history, the CARF survey took place virtually. Not only did ACT staff have to learn Microsoft Teams—a different collaboration system, but virtual tours had to be scheduled and coordinated, ACT records redacted, and all other survey preparation activities conducted. ACT Directors and Assistant Program Directors also practiced phone tours of their areas (Day Services, CL Houses, and Worksites) and familiarized themselves with the digital process.

Typically, a team of expert practitioners selected by CARF performs an internal on-site examination review of the programs and business practices. But because of the COVID-19 pandemic and safety restrictions, CARF conducted most survey activities through Microsoft Teams, while completing virtual tours through FaceTime.

The breadth and depth of the review by CARF remained unchanged by the different survey methods utilized. Although the virtual survey was a different and challenging experience, ACT's management team felt confident in the quality of its services.

Based on the survey results, CARF then prepares a written report on the provider's strengths and areas for improvement. If the provider successfully demonstrates its conformance to standards, they receive accreditation. According to CARF's website, the international organization has rigorous standards that other organizations applying for accreditation must meet.

"Thank you to everyone and their amazing work in preparing for the CARF survey," says Don Lafferty, Executive Director of ACT. "And not only for the survey but for your hard work and commitment to the quality services you provide every day to the individuals receiving services!"

In CARF's final report, they commended ACT on its "ongoing commitment to consistent efforts to improve the quality of its services, and pursuit of excellence."

Each received CARF accreditation is a massive accomplishment for ACT. "Once this pandemic is over, we will all come together and have a wonderful celebration," says Don.



ACT Bids Nancy Beatty a "Happy Retirement"

After 24 years of service with ACT, Day Services Activities Coordinator Nancy Beatty retires. "There comes a time that you know it's time to move on. Now is my time."

During her tenure, Nancy held various positions. She began her journey with ACT as a production worker for ACT's former VHS recycling program. What she believed to be a temporary job soon became a permanent home and newfound career choice. Each day with ACT had Nancy coming back for more. "The more that I worked at ACT, the more I learned about the company's purpose. I made their vision and mission mine, too."

Nancy eventually joined Day Services as a Direct Support Professional (DSP). She then became a Mentor for Day Services, followed by Activities Assistant and finally Activities Coordinator.



Vicki Schulte, the Assistant Program Director of Day Services, says Nancy couldn't walk into the room without energizing the individuals about planned activities. Her enthusiasm is contagious, and her "compassion for the individuals showed through her actions."

Carrie Griffith, the Director of Day Services, remembers Nancy as the first person to welcome her to Day Services. She told her, "There's a lot of good here, a lot of good people. You are going to make it even better. I'm so glad you're here!" Carrie adds that Nancy has a way of making everyone feel welcomed and included.

Congratulations on your retirement, Nancy Beatty! ACT wishes you all the best on your next adventure.



Read "A Message from Nancy Beatty" on page 6.

A Message from: Nancy Beatty



When I started here at ACT, I started as a Production Worker taking labels off VHS tapes. I didn't think I would be here long because I had just returned back from North Carolina and just needed a job then. Months went by, and I made so many friends. I told myself that I would look for another job, but I came to ACT each day and loved it. I started doing other jobs in the warehouse, team leader over the part of the work floor. I became a Mail Processor for mailing out software products out of the warehouse.

But more importantly, I was working with my friends whom I enjoyed serving. The more I worked at ACT, the more I learned about its purpose and made its vision and mission mine.

Years flew by, and my love for the people and ACT grew stronger. I loved the family environment and how ACT stood for "People First." I eventually moved to the Day Program, now Day Services. I started as a DSP. I did the College of Direct Support, and something clicked! I had even more understanding of my job. I was eager to tell all the new people about what I had learned. Soon after, I was proud to be picked for the DSP of the Month for ANCOR. About a year later, I became a Mentor and then an Activities Assistant before becoming the Activities Coordinator this year.

I love what I do because I get to see laughter, and I plan and do activities with people I care about. The PEOPLE we serve are why I'm here. This is why I've stayed so long. I will miss my friends; I will miss the smiles and the hugs.

There comes a time, though, that you know it's time to move on. Now is my time. I'm retiring and moving back home, but ACT will always be my second home. I have family here. The advice I'd like to leave to the new staff is to take time and listen to the individual and get to know what they like. Treat people as you want to be treated and always show respect. Remember to be supportive not only on good days but also on not-so-good days because that's when people really need your understanding. Staff always needs to remember the saying, "Who I am can make a difference."

I hope that ACT never changes the "People First" motto. I also hope that the family environment stays. I believe the closeness of everyone makes a better work environment. Looking at the future of ACT, I think all the changes that I see starting now will be remarkable! I believe there will be so much more on the way.

-Nancy



Trinity's **STEP** towards Success

Eighteen-year-old Trinity Ratliff is one busy teenager: a senior at Hickman High School, a peer group leader at her internship site, and an employee at the Columbia Mall. With a full schedule in hand, Trinity is on the road to success!

Trinity began her journey with ACT in its After School Youth Program (ASYP) for community involvement. She then interviewed for STEP (Seamless Transition through Enhanced Partnership). The program's design provides young people with real-world experience, ultimately preparing them for future employment.

Trinity's accomplishments surpassed expectations, and soon she became a leader in the program.

Her continual drive for conquest knows no boundaries. Since then, she has become a peer group leader for her internship site at the Columbia Mall. And soon, Trinity will prepare for her job search services to seek employment following her high school graduation!

People cannot help but want to be around Trinity. Her raw charisma and model behavior has encouraged others to follow in her footsteps and the right direction.

When asked about her future goals, Trinity said she hopes to one day work for a daycare. ACT wishes Trinity all the best on her path to continued success!



Meet John Savage, ACT's New *HR Manager*

Welcome, John Savage, ACT's new Human Resources Manager! John has been a part of the ACT family for 12.5 years. Over the years, he has worn several hats and accomplished many things. John's primary role has been as a Training Specialist, even though he handles various HR issues.

John will continue to train new hires, but his new position will include other HR responsibilities. John will manage HR's new interview process to help improve Retention and Recruitment. He is currently working on a newly instated interview process alongside ACT's HR Coordinator, Alyx Curl.

John brings over 25 years of leadership skills and knowledge of management and HR-related issues. He also has five years of direct support care experience. We are excited and confident in John's abilities. Congratulations, John!



The Face Independence

For over 45 years, independence has steered ACT and paved the way for individuals with disabilities to work and thrive autonomously in their community. And for Rachel Schlossman, she knows what it means to be independent!

Rachel receives service through ACT's Community & Family Services – Independent Skill Development program. She has been living in her own apartment for the past few years and has been successful with natural supports. However, when the COVID-19 outbreak hit early last year, things changed.

Rachel struggled to keep up with her cleaning routine without the help of her family. So, Rachel's team requested the Independent Skill Development Services' assistance to help Rachel regain her cleaning and organizing skills.

Kathryn Gunn, the Program Supervisor for Community & Family Services, began working with Rachel at the end of last year. Together, they developed a cleaning routine with easy-to-use supplies and methods tailored to Rachel's needs.

Rachel's independence hit a new high, and when she talks about how great her apartment looks, she gleams with success.

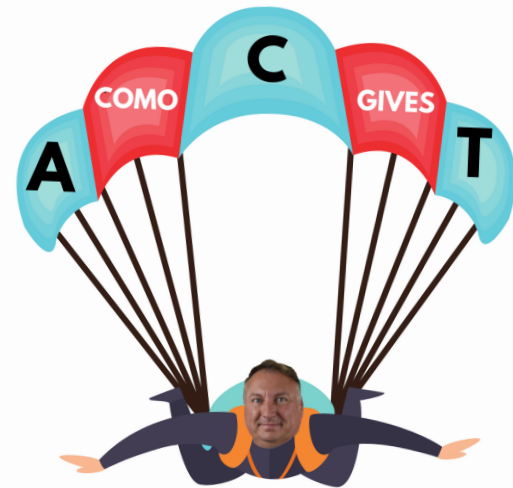
CoMoGives Funds Exceed Goal

WE DID IT!! ACT raised **\$15,425** through the CoMoGives 2020 campaign – meeting and exceeding our goal! The support of our donors and the community has moved us deeply. Every generous donation received will have a significant impact on the individuals we support.

ACT looks forward to sharing with you the experiences you (the donor) made possible! THANK YOU again! We could not have reached our goal without you.

But wait, there's more! During the CMG campaign, ACT's Executive Director, Don Lafferty, participated in a most daring Peer-2-Peer challenge. His challenge, "The Sky's the Limit," was created to encourage donations to ACT. As part of his Peer-2-Peer challenge, if ACT could eclipse 2019's received gifts, Don would skydive for the first time.

Stay tuned for updates on Don Lafferty's upcoming skydive challenge!



 CoMoGives.com



Donate to ACT

Did you know that there are other ways you can donate to ACT? You can support ACT by shopping at AmazonSmile, Gerbes, and Schnucks! You can also make donations through ACT's website at actservices.org.

Create an account on AmazonSmile.com, select Alternative Community Training as your charity, and then shop! AmazonSmile will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to ACT.

At Gerbes and Schnucks, apply for their community/rewards program online, select Alternative Community Training as your chosen charity, and shop!



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