



ON TARGET: FROM WORK FLOOR TO NEIGHBORHOOD RETAIL

After visits to multiple businesses, Bob Erickson chose retail stocking as a job goal, and found a position at one of his favorite stores, and within walking distance of his home.

"He's pretty focused, very quick learning and a very bright young man," said job developer Allison Becker with ProAct. She offered much assistance through the Way to Work program, which helped land a job at Target in Hastings.

Erickson, who smiles continually, used a "visual resume" with multiple pages and pictures to demonstrate his skills. It displayed his warehouse work at ProAct in Eagan, being around forklifts, operating a pallet jack and safe work habits, Becker explained.

"Target saw that and their eyes lit up," she said.

Stocking at the location occurs on three weekday mornings, explains Jessica,



Bob Erickson once worked with Allison Becker on ProAct's work floor. Now, the job developer helped place and coach him in his new stocking job at Target in Hastings.

a Target logistics team leader. Erickson replenishes stationery, sporting goods and toys. "I just love the energy, personality



and bubblyness when he comes in," said Jessica. "He's like a little ray of sunshine."

Erickson is Jessica's third team member who is nonverbal, but he has a couple other ways to communicate. One is through American Sign Language (ASL), which is indicated on his nametag, but the more common tool he uses is a smartphone application called "Speak It." He can pull from a number of pre-programmed phrases, and type customized messages that are then spoken by the device.

For a ProAct interview at the See From work floor to retail, page 2

PARENT MOVEMENT PRESENTS AT PROACT



MNFAC co-chair Jim Clapper shared an update about Minnesota's service system for people with disabilities and the ongoing challenges.

With similarities to the early days of The Arc, the Minnesota Families and Advocates Coalition has grown to over 400 members, and key leaders shared their support for day programs, workforce concerns and efforts to give parents a stronger voice.

A room full of ProAct families listened to MNFAC presenters. "I love the continuum that we have ... from center-based employment, to enclaves, to supported employment services, to finding full placement," said MNFAC Co-Chair Jim Clapper. "But that is getting all changed." Planners are trying to replace the current system with three new employment programs, said Clapper, development, exploratory and supports. Clapper has an adult son with disabilities in a similar program in the northern suburbs.

See Parent group visit, page 2

Watch for the new ProAct Wish List – Suggested donations that directly benefit individuals

CONSUMER'S 'APP SMACKDOWN' SHARES HELPFUL TOOLS

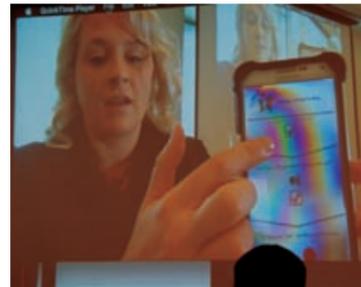
Organized by the state and a person with significant disabilities, it was perhaps the most positive "smackdown" of the year, one that focused on phone applications that can help people's lives.

The "App Smackdown" led by ProAct participant Tamir Tsogbaatar and Minnesota customized employment specialist Josh Dean offered a chance for people to show helpful smartphone apps to the Employment Innovations Group at the Dakota County offices in West St. Paul.

From creating visual resumes with video to tapping powerful tools that respond to employers quickly, to reading amounts of cash on a table and even reporting wages, numerous apps were displayed on a large screen.



"You and your staff will be able to visit my website and view all the applications being used around Minnesota. They will help people with specific things to gain meaningful



Tamir Tsogbaatar, left, welcomed the latest app ideas that can assist people with daily tasks, job searches, wage reporting and more. competitive employment and help them save quite a bit of time," said Tsogbaatar, in closing.

Best Buy offered equipment for the event.

TODAY BEST BUY, TOMORROW HELPING KIDS IN MONGOLIA

From a favorite store, to a dream job, conference presentations and a vision to help others across the world, Tamir Tsogbaatar is a young man who, with ProAct, is a rising star achieving his dreams.

The Best Buy merchandiser in Apple Valley won over managers with a passion for the products he now sells.

"His expressions and face light up when you talk about the cool things he likes to do," said General Manager Ron Szlag. "Right down to helping customers and guiding them to where they want to go. You can feel the enthusiasm."

Tsogbaatar, who uses a wheelchair, was told by his mother when he was younger that he needs to walk, so he taught himself, explains ProAct job developer Barb McGovern. Lacking medical help for his cerebral palsy in his native Mongolia, he came to Minnesota with his family at age 11.

Even bigger dreams are also in the works. Tsogbaatar's end goal is to have a business that assists young children with disabilities in Mongolia. There was no help for him there when he was little, so that's something he wants to change, McGovern said.

With a charming smile, Tsogbaatar said he feels good when helping people. "It makes me more independent and a hard worker." The merchandiser said that Best Buy is, indeed, his dream job.

Working through the company's online training and alongside coworkers, he began as a seasonal employee before becoming permanent.

Szlag said Tsogbaatar ties right in to company values: having fun while being the best, learning from challenge and change and unleashing himself



Mutual appreciation: Tsogbaatar with Best Buy GM Ron Szlag. The two repeatedly thanked each other for the working relationship.

every day. The GM also knew Tsogbaatar previously as a customer who would come in to see the latest video games.

McGovern worked with him through the intensive Way to Work pilot program, a highly-focused job placement collaboration with Minnesota Vocational Rehab Services (VRS) and Dakota County.

The GM and his employee were called on to be featured panelists at the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation spring conference in Maryland.



A video features a visit with Tamir and his manager on YouTube and Facebook.

Inside:

- Building 'Person-Centered'
- From the president
- Model in the making
- Capitol rally supports DSPs

NEW PROGRAMS AND SERVICES VP ON TAP

Kim Feller joins ProAct's management staff as the Vice President of Programs and Services.

"The background and approach Kim Feller brings fits well with our mission to improve the employment options for those we serve," said President and CEO Steven Ditschler. "Her new perspective identifies how coaching and support skills can apply to a variety of community needs."

One goal is to increase coordination of training activities and production work responsibilities to advance work readiness. Feller said increasing communication between the two areas will improve choices and opportunities for each person served at ProAct.

At RESOURCE, Inc. in Minneapolis for 25 years, she oversaw a variety of employment training activities. Feller developed extensive licensing programs for those with barriers to employment and



See Kim Feller, page 2

ProAct Golf Classic Aug. 28

Mark your calendars for the upcoming ProAct Golf Classic at Southview Country Club in West St. Paul on Monday, August 28. An early lunch is followed by 18 holes of engaging play with prizes and a gourmet meal to follow. Contact Sheena Henry at 651-289-3149, shenry@proactinc.org

From the President...

Spring brings more sunlight, and warmer temps to draw us out of our winter shell. No more worries about slipping on the ice or bitter cold, at least for several months.

You may be aware that we are in the thick of the legislative season. Several bills involve services for people with disabilities. Most importantly, we are asking for a 4 percent increase in wages for direct support professionals (DSPs). As pay has risen in other industries, DSP positions remain unfilled and turn over more quickly. We want to attract and retain quality employees to deliver services, and wages matter. Legislators need to hear that this is an important investment.

To address the need for quality staff, ProAct is working to attract those with the right skills and attitudes for the job. We are an excellent choice for people who want to make a difference in the daily lives of others.

Please join me in welcoming our new vice president of programs and services, Kim Feller, to ProAct. Her record of program innovation is impressive. She values new challenges and opportunities for both staff and the people we serve. Kim understands the importance of offering choices, and that services are not on an "on-off" switch, but are needed throughout life.

Our partnership with Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) to find community employment, the pilot Way to Work program, continues through June. One of our stars, Tamir Tsogbaatar, found a

steady job at Best Buy as a merchandiser. I'm also thrilled to announce that he was asked to participate in a panel at the national conference for the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation in Bethesda, Maryland. A ProAct video about his success has spread around the country, and even the world, to Mongolia, his native country.

You may also be aware that ProAct parents and guardians met in January to hear from the Minnesota Families and Advocates Coalition (MNFAC). Members of the statewide organization are concerned about quality care for their loved ones with disabilities. They are forming a parent advisory group to give feedback to the Department of Human Services. Please watch for more information about our next parent meeting, on June 1, in Egan.

Lastly, we have on order a fantastic day of weather for the 2017 ProAct Golf Classic on August 28. Our generous corporate and individual sponsors, and golf participants, have been so good to support our only fundraising event. It's a great day of golf, food, fun, and fellowship. We have a dinner only option for people not interested in golf. Consider joining us on Southview Country Club's championship course and thank you for all that you do to support the people we serve.



Steven Ditschler



'PERSON-CENTERED' GROWS WITH TRAINING

A renewed commitment to the "Person-Centered" model of service is launching forward with a newly certified trainer from ProAct who will teach courses.

Designated Coordinator Dennis Transue said the heart of the Person-Centered concept is to listen to and empower each person ProAct serves in a way that puts him or her at the center of their planning.

"Many of the people who come to ProAct have lived and worked in environments that focus on caregiving, but spend a minimal amount of time and effort when it comes to considering their own goals, dreams, and aspirations," Transue said.

The shift in thinking centers on three basic skill sets: everyday learning, listening/

discovery and management. "These helps us to better understand and communicate with each other," he said.

Employees will spend two full days to learn and practice the skills with each other, and then take what they've learned and add it to their daily routines.

Transue's certification as a trainer comes through a mentor-led program developed and overseen by the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the University of Minnesota, in connection with the Reform 2020 Initiatives. He is being mentored and certified through Owakihi, Inc. in West St. Paul.

Classes are scheduled for the Egan facility on April 24 and 25 and May 9 and 10. Plans are also underway to offer the training to individuals outside of ProAct who work in the field.



Dennis Transue

ANSWERING THE CALL AFTER THE CAREER

Flexible hours and low stress are a couple of the perks cited by retirees who have found a great fit at ProAct, and they gladly tell others.

"I say come out and apply. There's so much that needs to be done here and it's rewarding," said Bob Furchner, who works in maintenance at ProAct in Red Wing.

"Working with (the individuals) is enjoyable, and rewarding, it's not a stressful situation," Furchner said. He came after a long career with the U.S. Postal Service as a mail carrier.

Michael Olsen is a production worker who retired from 35 years as a sheet metal foreman. "The people here are amazing," he said. "We make sure they have the work they want ... You learn their ins and outs and they learn yours."

There's a difference here, he explained, as everyone really wants to know how you're doing. "You can give them the long story or the short one, and they'll listen to the whole thing." Olsen said the part-time position is low-stress and probably the best job he's ever had.



Michael Olsen, above and Bob Furchner, below, are two examples of great retirees who found flexible and highly rewarding jobs after their first careers.



BIRTHDAY PERKS FOR NEWER PANERA EMPLOYEE



It was balloons and pizza for all to celebrate the birthday of Cory Vinge, back left, who was hired directly by Panera in Egan in July of 2016. "I enjoy the experience, helping with customers," said Vinge. "Pretty much every single day - rush hour, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m." Vinge offers limited table service, running food and cleaning. His designated coordinator from ProAct visits twice a month. Also from ProAct is Julie Green, second row, third from right.

From work floor to retail, from page 1



store, he used it to say that he gets along well with all of his coworkers, is saving for an apartment and lives with his parents and sister.

"Some people assume that I can't hear because I am nonverbal," he said through his phone. Earlier, he had searched for work in data entry.

"Bob is skilled in a lot of ways ... if he wants something he'll go get it," said his designated coordinator, Dennis Transue. "If he wants to learn something, he'll go learn it."

Kim Feller, from page 1

invited an employer advisory group to give feedback, keeping the training both timely and relevant.

Later, the career training curriculum earned state accreditation and served over 1,000 students each year. Attention was given to mental health and chemical

health barriers. And, Feller managed the organization's accreditation process with the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

The new VP has been quick to identify new grant opportunities. One would allow ProAct to serve a wider range of ages, increase self-advocacy and add options across ProAct's programs.

Parent group visit, from page 1

MNFAC Co-Chair Julie St. Marie said there is a workforce crisis for direct support professionals (DSPs), with 9,000 open positions across the state that have resulted from low pay and high turnover.

MNFAC is also working with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to assemble a parent/advocate advisory group



MNFAC Co-chair Julie St. Marie

to communicate to DHS how systems are impacting families. "How is that rate system going to impact us if all of a sudden we don't have a place to send our children?"

MNFAC has a site on Facebook and is reachable by emailing mnfac@outlook.com.

STRETCHES AT BIG SITES BENEFIT WORKERS



"Row the boat. Uh, somebody fell out. Somebody wants to get back in, row backwards," announces Supervisor Dave Grefsrud on the ProAct work floor in Egan, who leads a growing group of individuals in stretching exercises.

In Red Wing, Dan Mason leads



Supervisors Dave Grefsrud, Egan, left in foreground, and Red Wing's Dan Mason, above in blue, lead stretches in-center.

similar effort. "It's essential, you have to stretch before you start your job," he said. Red Wing's routine was inspired by Lean manufacturing principles and Egan credits a suggestion from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).



Get to know us

proactinc.org

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Donation Opportunities

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ProAct's Four Locations

3195 Neil Amstronng Blvd., Egan, MN 55121
204 Mississippi Ave., Red Wing, MN 55066
224 S. Main St., Zumbrota, MN 55992
1202 Beaudry Blvd., Hudson, WI 54016

ProAct Board of Directors:

John Christiansen, Chuck DeNet, Brian Knapp, Paul Kramp, Mary Ellen Leary, Larry Lehman, Jim Louwagie, Teri McCloughan, Marty Stapleton, Arleen Sullivan and Jon Wilbrecht.

Panera today, modeling tomorrow? Career survey suggests path

A ProAct career survey to determine Julie Green's interests put her in the category of "Body Smart."

That group lists active occupations such as carpentry, computer repair and culinary arts. For Green, the best match was modeling, a direct fit with her love for clothes and makeup.

Noticing that models with disabilities were showing up in advertising, Green's designated coordinator, Charlotte Eastin, got permission from her mother to formulate a plan. She researched local modeling agencies and requirements for a portfolio, and enlisted ProAct staff members with skills in photography and makeup.

Green's mother purchased four outfits and a photo shoot was planned to create a portfolio. The carefully selected



Julie Green displays her new modeling outfits in these shots on a portfolio card. Photography by Stephanie Podkopacz; makeup by Stephanie Osman.

pictures with a cover letter were then sent off to an agency.

The process is just beginning, but it's hoped that the strategic moves are bringing Green one step closer to her dream job.

In the meantime, she, like some other starving artists, will keep her day job at Panera Bread until she is "discovered."

Comments welcome, alternative formats available— Upon request, this publication is available in alternate languages and formats. Comments are welcome. Contact Sheena Henry at 651-289-3149, shenry@proactinc.org.

PROACT BRIEFS:

Capitol rally tops 1,000 to push solution to DSP crisis



Individuals with disabilities, their families and direct care staff showed up en masse on March 14 at the Minnesota Capitol to support a bill that provides for a 4 percent pay increase for direct care staff.

"The one thing that's truly important is to get your legislator's support to make the funding changes ... is to hear from you, the constituents who put them in this place," said Mike Burke, president of the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation. The effort was in conjunction with the Best Life Alliance.

Voc leader named to committee advising DEED

ProAct Eagan Employment Manager Heather Deuschlaender was named to the Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee, a state level group that provides strategic advice and consultation to Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS).



"It's a huge honor to be on it and I'm thrilled to be back for a second term," she said. The group tackles major issues such as the design of job placement contracts. Information exchange, transparency, and mutual planning are key goals of the group. It also considers input from subject matter experts.

More info is available at <https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/councils/crp-advisory.jsp>

'Hudson Good Morning' to feature Life Opportunities

An April 20 "Hudson Good Morning" panel discussion before the Hudson Area Chamber of Commerce will feature presentations from ProAct and the subject is employment for people with disabilities.

"They'll be able to see what it looks like and we'll answer any questions they might have,"

said Margaret Christensen, program coordinator for ProAct Life Opportunities in Hudson, Wis. ProAct also held an educational night event in New Richmond, Wis.



Two plays on tap for April, Playhouse planning for July

ProAct's Theatre Workshop class has two upcoming presentations at the Eagan headquarters facility.

"The Little Mermaid" appears on Wednesday, April 26 at 11 a.m. and "Snow White" is showing April 28, also at 11 a.m.

Additionally, ProAct Playhouse productions has a new play in the works that will focus on people with disabilities transitioning from high school to the work force. The show is tentatively planned for an outside venue sometime in July, according to Designated Coordinator, director and instructor Matt Briggs.

'Way to Work' wraps in June, 124 applicants

The innovative "Way to Work" program with Voc Rehab Services (VRS) has placed six people from ProAct in jobs since January, and has 11 people on deck to meet with VRS in the coming weeks.

"Quite a few people are going into followup now," said ProAct Employment Manager Heather Deuschlaender, and ProAct has been more engaged with employers. The program ends June 30.

VALUING WHO PEOPLE ARE, ARTIST URGES EXPLORATION

A staff member artist who draws caricatures of people in ProAct's Eagan program took the concept much further to help establish each individual as a unique person, and their value.

Designated Coordinator Becky Ruddy leads the Creative Wellness class, with a person-centered emphasis

that discovers what's important to each individual.

A collage or portfolio is created with information about a person's family and social life, their dreams and interests, Ruddy explained. Each week's class also offers up a question, such as, "What does failure mean to you?"

Words of affirmation are discussed in a group circle, and then practiced. The



Becky Ruddy, right, with Kenwa Williams.



Sketches by Becky Ruddy

Ruddy's caricatures are part of an effort to create portfolios and collages that bring people to life with their individual personalities and traits.

concept stems from a book about "love languages." Naturally, Ruddy said her love language is visual expression.

She said part of the goal is to find out the kinds of things that ProAct staff can offer people to be well. With multiple skills and

cognitive levels, drawing the information out can be a challenge, she explains. "When I get anxious, I'm going to talk about things I like to do to get out of fears and anxiety," she said. What does a person do when he or she is depressed?

"This is my way of saying, 'You count. This is how good you look,'" she said. The drawings are a way for others to see ProAct's individuals the way Ruddy sees them, as amazing people.

FROM PROACT CREW TO CULVER'S EMPLOYEE, GREATER INDEPENDENCE

She's great with customers and coworkers, and she's flexible and punctual. This is Culver's crewmember Kelly Garrison, as described by her assistant manager.

"Whenever she has questions, she asks us, she's very eager to learn," said Tosha Curren, an assistant manager at the Eagan restaurant.

This learning is coupled with confidence. "That's one of the things Culver's saw in her," said ProAct Designated Coordinator Esmeralda Flores.

Many have seen Garrison's name on Facebook, where she's a loyal fan with a long work history at ProAct. New opportunities opened up in 2015, when a regular ProAct work crew started at the Eagan restaurant. Garrison was a substitute at first, then started going daily. Her work ethic was getting noticed, said Flores.



"I love this job ... it feels good and I like the customers at Culver's," she said. The direct hire offer came last summer, and Garrison has thrived, with regular support visits from ProAct.

Structure is provided using a checklist of work tasks, the assistant manager said. There are samples to share with guests, windows to clean and many other tasks to make the restaurant appealing. Social interaction is encouraged, and Garrison also does well with this aspect. "She loves talking to them (guests) ... and does a really good job," said Curren.

Garrison cleaned windows and opened doors with words of welcome for a weekday lunch crowd, and her hours are expanding with some Saturday night shifts.

"It's good, kind of busy on the night



A confident Kelly Garrison offers hospitality, great service and a clean environment at Culver's in Eagan.

shift on Saturday," she said. In addition to maintaining the dining room and restrooms, she is able to help with dishes as needed. She brings out food, asks customers how they're doing and takes their finished trays. And, Garrison enjoys being a part of the workplace banter.

Garrison has immersed herself in the job, Flores said, and it's what makes her the happiest. She previously worked on a crew at a hockey arena and for two other restaurants. She gets to work using bus service from Metro Mobility.



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VICE CHAIR SAYS BOARD LONGEVITY IS ASSET

Jim Louwagie, the vice chair of the ProAct Board of Directors, has offered his financial expertise to the voluntary group for nearly 20 years.

A commercial banker at Merchants Bank in Lakeville, he is well-versed in ProAct discussions about money and mission, and outside influences that sometimes bring changes to the operation.

"The question that I ask myself and try to go to every board meeting with is: 'How does this help the lives of the people we serve?'" He asks how the organization's decisions can make people's lives better, and further their growth and enjoyment as individuals.

Louwagie said the ProAct board is blessed to have so many long term members, particularly at a time when the industry's climate is changing so much.



Jim Louwagie

A changing environment with regards to center-based and community-based employment for people with disabilities is one of the major areas the board is reviewing. "We are adapting to the changing atmosphere," said Louwagie.

The vice chair credits CEO Steve Ditschler and his staff for bringing the organization forward and making it what it is today.

"The nice thing about ProAct is when you walk through the building you can just observe, you can see that the employees genuinely care for the people they are serving," Louwagie said.

A regular player who often secures a corporate sponsorship for the ProAct Golf Classic, Louwagie encourages others to come out for the event on August 28. "I'll be there hacking it up. It's a fun time, a fun event and I always look forward to it."

MAKING CANCER PATIENT STAYS MUCH BETTER

Hope Lodge in Minneapolis houses cancer patients and their caregivers without cost, and ProAct individuals help keep it clean at no charge.

"These guys are very thorough, fabulous, friendly and helpful," said Hope Lodge Assistant Manager Debbie Nelson, as the crew picked up the task sheet while checking in.

The Richard M. Schulze Family American Cancer Society facility offers 42 private guest rooms for patients and their caregivers who live at least 40 miles away.

Slipping on gloves and grabbing dusting supplies, the crew boards the elevator to shine up a computer lab, recreation room and fitness center. "Emily, will you do the door handles and light switches, please?"



Allison Chambers, at right, brings a cleaning crew each week to the facility near the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. From left are: Lorenzo Green, Rosie Scipioni, Emily Gage and Zoua Her.



asks direct support professional Allison Chambers, who leads the crew. Non-wood surfaces are sanitized with a spray and floors are vacuumed.

"It's refreshing when (the list) comes back because they accomplish so much in the short time they're here," Nelson said.

Maximizing Individual Potential for Greater Self-Sufficiency



Important Support for People with Disabilities –
Learn more about disability issues from the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation- mohrmn.org



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ProAct, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization with more than 40 years of experience.



STABLE SUPPORT FOR ELEVATOR INDUSTRY

A factory little more than a stone's throw from ProAct in Red Wing has products in 75 to 80 percent of U.S. elevators, and Marianne Dohnalek is a part of it.

The letters and numbers that appear in these stair saving movers are prepped by the now one-year employee, who uses pneumatic tools to cut them to size for assembly. There are fasteners to tend to and other tasks to perform at SCS Elevator Products.

"We have great team members," said HR Manager Meghan Simonson. "We get that done by respecting each other, trusting each other and taking pride in what we do." Bright and clean are frequent reactions she receives from people who take tours.

Dohnalek has worked with ProAct for 30 years, in clerical and document imaging jobs,



HR Manager Meghan Simonson, left, with Marianne Dohnalek, who works part-time on the production floor.

restaurant and manufacturing in Lake City. A ProAct job developer helped her find this post more than a year ago.

Simonson said Dohnalek has no problem finding others to help when a particular task is complete.

"She's really happy with what she does over there, is very independent and takes The Ride (bus) to and from work," said Designated Coordinator Joyann Johnson. A four-day schedule matched her needs, with 22 hours a week. She started on ProAct's payroll and moved over to the company payroll last fall.

SCS was started in the 1970s after a visually impaired man from Minneapolis brought his seeing eye dog to a major elevator company with the idea to place Braille plates in elevators. The company first made stencils to use on check blanks.



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