

# PROACT'S PEOPLE ACHIEVING



## Staying the course by expanding her skills, job loyalty

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Deb Robinson at a Mendota Heights McDonald's had her hours cut after long term road construction impacted the restaurant.

She considered finding another position, explains ProAct Designated Coordinator Matt Anderson, but there was a different option.

"Ultimately, we decided together to try to learn some new tasks at McDonald's in order for her to pick up other shifts," said Anderson. "Eventually, that led to her doing drive-through." Anderson makes support visits for Robinson, who works 20 to 25 hours a week.

When this writer visited, she proudly led a tour of the restaurant, complete with explanations of the different jobs she performs. "There's a little bit of everything working here," said Robinson, a veteran staffer who will celebrate three years here in September.

"You can do about anything you



make up your mind to," she said. "It will be a challenge to begin with, but as you go down the line, later, it will get a lot easier for you. You just need to keep up the good work."

A coworker from the beginning, Robin, said Robinson shows staff everything, knows what she is doing, and she loves working with her.

"Debbie is smart, courageous and catches on easily."

Robinson calls Anderson at ProAct if there's a need, and he encourages her. She finds her coworkers to be friendly, and she is, herself, quite adept at making diners feel welcome.

The crew member will often ask customers how they are doing, if they have everything they need and say she hopes they will come back to McDonald's again soon. "She takes pride (in her job)," said Anderson.

Before McDonald's, Robinson worked at more than a handful of ProAct enclaves, which are offsite work opportunities in groups. She said it was about being there, having a positive attitude, improving her speed and staying focused.

She uses her earnings to pay rent, and takes a Metro Mobility bus to and from work.

## Politics participant



ProAct's Zach Sjoblom, left, met Congressman Steny Hoyer of Maryland at a Burnsville event. His story inside . . .

## Rally at the Capitol calls for action



People with disabilities, families and provider staff rallied at the Minnesota Capitol in March to stop a 7 percent cut to disability service providers.

## Golf, support us in late August

Following decades of successful team golf events, the ProAct Golf Classic returns to Southview Country Club, an 18-hole championship course in West St. Paul, on August 27.

Sponsors and golfers have valued the course and clubhouse, and the elegant dinner. Southview has immaculate rolling fairways and mature trees. Numerous water hazards featuring fountains and magnificent landscaping

are coupled with a convenient location, extra challenges and gifts throughout the day. The golf classic is ProAct's only major fundraiser to benefit people with disabilities.

The foursome tournament offers skill contests, team prizes and group photos. Silent and live auctions, a raffle and a gourmet dinner.

Visit [proactinc.org](http://proactinc.org) and contact Sheena Henry at 651-289-3149, [shenry@proactinc.org](mailto:shenry@proactinc.org)

for sponsorship opportunities, which include golf packages. Many use the event for employee appreciation, or to connect with current or prospective clients.



## ProAct Playhouse Presents- A Midsummer Night's Dream in Lakeville June 7

They're not afraid to take on disability topics, and they do it with an edge of comedic flair that communicates a message in an entertaining fashion.

An abridged version of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the latest production of ProAct Playhouse, shows at 7:30 p.m. on June 7 at the Lakeville Area Arts Center.



"We've tailored a lot of the roles to meet each individual's needs and strengths," said classroom instructor and director Amanda Thomm. The Playhouse presentation of "Romeo and Juliet" inspired the latest choice.

Thomm said most of the play centers on love and relationships, which are relatable themes for everyone. One of the challenges is translating the antiquated language of the original play, she said.

Curious about ProAct Playhouse? Email us at [playhouse@proactinc.org](mailto:playhouse@proactinc.org)



Direct support professional Connie Straub shows tomato plants sprouting at New Options for greenhouse planting.

**New Options**  
**Plant and Flower Sales**  
 May 10 and 11, and May 16-18  
 792 Canterbury Road, #132, Shakopee

## CARF accredits for three years

A new three-year accreditation from CARF, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, was granted to ProAct after an extensive survey of four of its sites late in February.

“What really matters is- Are people’s lives better because of what ProAct does?” asked CARF Administrative Surveyor Kathy Walter. “Without a doubt, from what we’ve seen, that is what is happening. That is a noble, noble mission that you strive for every day.”

A group of three CARF surveyors shared details about 18 areas of strength they found at ProAct, as well as



recommendations.

They found ProAct to be creative, innovative, positive and proud of its work. Interviews revealed the nonprofit’s person-centered focus, advocacy, prudent financial management and efforts to seek feedback from stakeholders. Additionally, “Employers and persons served alike expressed high satisfaction with the employment services provided.”

## ProAct briefs:



### City crew expands work in Red Wing

Cleaning crews for ProAct serving the city of Red Wing for half a decade got some added responsibility with the addition of the city’s “Ignite” building to its list of structures.

“They’re cleaning daily, five days a week, and have got it down to an art,” said Site Supervisor Dave Dankers. It’s also a good savings for the city, he explains, as ProAct provides subs in case people are sick, and handles workers compensation and other expenses associated with staffing.

### Adapting work to increase participation



A bolt and nut assembly for a Wisconsin company that makes parts for lawn mowers, snowblowers and roto tillers has opened the door of opportunity to a wide range of participants on the Red Wing work floor, explains Dee Bigelbach in sales. Maintenance workers built a framework with hanging drills to ease and speed the process.

### May 8 Eagan Open House for business

The business community is invited to ProAct in Eagan for a special open house event and tour on May 8, from 9 to 9:45 a.m., 3195 Neil Armstrong Boulevard. Please RSVP by calling 651-686-0405.

### Bridging the gap, courtesy of 3M

The convenience of a group work site next door to ProAct in Red Wing came with one minor inconvenience, a dip and water obstacle between the two parking lots to cross.

3M Fall Protection built a steel grated bridge to span the gap. ProAct sends 15 to 20 participants and three to four job coaches to 3M



each day, and people from both organizations use the bridge during breaks.

## Will passion for politics lead to opportunities? That’s their hope.

Eagan Designated Coordinator Charlotte Eastin has been known to think well outside the box when it comes to work and volunteer opportunities for the individuals she serves, and participant Zach Sjoblom’s love of politics is leading to some unconventional approaches.

Sjoblom planned to attend a political event in Burnsville for Angie Craig, where Eastin met him. The gathering of nearly 100 welcomed Sjoblom, who posed for photos with Craig, and Congressman Steny Hoyer from Maryland. Craig is running for Congress.

Sjoblom has far more than a casual interest in politics. Ask him a few questions about what’s happening, and he quickly shares a few updates and opinions. He’s studied political science at the college level.



Charlotte Eastin, left, Zach Sjoblom and candidate Angie Craig.

“I just love it,” said Sjoblom. “It’s interesting, the federal government and state government.”

While interacting with him at ProAct, Eastin became determined to come up with ideas based on his passion for politics.

She explored internship opportunities with the governor’s office and a U.S. senator, created a brochure to sell Sjoblom’s political skills and interests, introduced him to community television staffers to explore options, and more. He hopes to attend some upcoming political debates.

During the last election, Eastin called multiple organizations to try to find a ride to the polling place for Sjoblom when he was in Hastings. None could help, and a staff member at his residence ended up taking him. “It should not be that hard,” he said.

Previously living in a group home there, Sjoblom moved to an apartment in West St. Paul, partly for better public transportation so he could be more politically involved. He recently got his wheelchair repaired, a process that took about two years.

### Admission Information

Eagan- Hudson-  
 Autumn Randall 651-289-3151  
 arandall@proactinc.org  
 Red Wing, Zumbrota-  
 Pamela Veith 651-327-5613  
 pveith@proactinc.org  
 New Options: Shakopee-  
 Ali Brown 952-403-7964  
 abrown@proactinc.org

### Need Employees?

Eagan- Mary McGeheran (groups)  
 651-289-3157 mmcgeheran@proactinc.org  
 Eagan, Shakopee-  
 Heather Deutschlaender  
 651-289-3163 (individuals)  
 heatherd@proactinc.org

Hudson- Traci Borchardt  
 715-245-6877 tborchardt@proactinc.org  
 Red Wing- Sam Kapala  
 651-327-5637 skapala@proactinc.org

### Production Services

Eagan- Mary McGeheran  
 651-289-3157 mmcgeheran@proactinc.org  
 Red Wing- Dee Bigelbach  
 651-327-5620 dbigelbach@proactinc.org  
 New Options: Shakopee- Rick Gregor  
 (952) 403-7968 rgregor@proactinc.org

### Donation Opportunities

Sheena Henry 651-289-3149  
 shenry@proactinc.org

### ProAct’s Five Locations

- 3195 Neil Armstrong Blvd.  
Eagan, MN 55121
- 204 Mississippi Ave.  
Red Wing, MN 55066
- New Options  
792 Canterbury Rd., #132  
Shakopee, MN 55379
- 1202 Beaudry Blvd.  
Hudson, WI 54016
- 224 S. Main St.  
Zumbrota, MN 55992

**From the President...**

Trust, but verify, a politician once said, and I can report with great satisfaction that our national accrediting organization, CARF, has done that for us with its recent survey. We received formal notification that ProAct was issued a Three-Year CARF Accreditation that will extend through April 30, 2021.

The report stated that our collective achievement is an indication of our organization's dedication and commitment to improving the lives of the persons served. Further, ProAct provides outstanding services in employment planning, employee development, organizational employment, community employment and community integration.

There were also a few minor recommendations that we will address. More importantly, there were two pages of "areas of strength" presented in the report that we are proud of as an organization. I know that many of you receiving this newsletter may have been contacted as part of the survey from February 26-28, and I thank you. The successful delivery of person-centered outcomes for the individuals we serve is dependent on more than the efforts of our staff. Family members, guardians, board members, employers, business partners, residential providers, funders, and the communities in which we operate are also important. I believe the results of this recent CARF survey were a reflection of the combined efforts of everyone involved. I thank all of you. Your relationship with ProAct is greatly appreciated.

In our current state legislative session, we are working with our primary

industry association, MOHR, to correct what will amount to a 7 percent reduction in reimbursement rates for most of our services, if we are not successful with corrective legislation this session. MOHR



is working collaboratively with other impacted groups to collectively deal with this issue. I believe most, if not all, of our local elected officials are supportive of our work, so I am hopeful we will have a positive outcome.

On January 1, ProAct took over the provision of day services for adults with disabilities in Shakopee provided through a program called "New Options." It had been operated by Scott County since 1968. A few weeks ago, we had a meeting with the county to review how things were going. I am pleased to report that those present said their expectations were met or exceeded so far. We discussed some tasks to be completed and some ideas to pursue.

Lastly, it is with sadness that I inform you that a former employee, Dale Klette, passed away in February. Besides his role leading our Information Technology function, Dale served as our first "Corporate Compliance" officer. More importantly, he was a very caring, compassionate, and positive person who added to our environment beyond his formal position. Dale joined ProAct after retiring from a long, successful career in technology. We were glad that he did. Dale is missed.

## Jacob's story: long term success in grocery work

A commitment to customer service and doing as much as he physically can have helped Jacob Carik maintain his job at Econo Foods for nearly four years in Red Wing.

"They don't look at me as someone who has a disability, but as a person," said Carik, who receives regular visits from ProAct staff members for support.

Working the hot and cold foods deli counter, he fills orders. "He knows a lot of people, our clientele who come in," said Deli and Bakery Manager Sandy Siepelmeyer.

When a visual impairment limits his ability to perform a task, Carik asks for help from another staff member.

Carik takes corrective feedback



Jacob Carik and his manager, Sandy Siepelmeyer, at Econo Foods in Red Wing.



seriously. "I did exactly what they wanted me to do . . . Sometimes, I take it almost to heart, because I want to do it well," he said.

ProAct Employment Specialist Sam Kapala said customer service involves learning not to take things

personally when people become difficult. "You make an impression and they see how you handle it," said Kapala.

Carik said he tries to treat people like family, with the utmost respect.

He was formerly a Special Olympics competitor in swimming, bowling and track events, and he works out regularly at the YMCA.

## Employees, others turn out for first blood drive

With 17 Eagan staff donors, about half of them first timers, the first Red Cross blood drive held at ProAct in recent memory tapped 21 contributors, and could have served more if medical supplies hadn't run out.

"We filled up all of the open slots," said organizer and Designated Coordinator Allie Chambers. One of the donors from outside of ProAct was Transportation Coordinator Heidi Cochran with Dakota County.

"I came because I have a partnership with ProAct," she said. "If I'm going to expect them to be at the table volunteering, then I should be volunteering as well. That's what partnerships are all about."



Dakota County Transportation Coordinator Heidi Cochran joined 17 ProAct staff in Eagan to give blood.

Designated Coordinator Becky Ruddy, a first time donor, said she always admired people who gave blood and wanted to do what she could to help people.

Those who reserved spots were entered in a drawing for a swag bag, Red Cross hat, insulated mug, emergency cool pack, gift cards and Girl Scout cookies.

## Functional loss exercises build empathy

ProAct Adult Day Services Designated Coordinator Alyssa Berg and a committee created experiences to simulate the loss of touch, sight, communication, mobility and taste that can come with a brain injury, so staff could become more aware and empathetic.

"It is important to understand things from the perspective of our participants," said Berg, "to better support them."

Simulating weakness on one side of the body, much like a stroke victim, staff were asked to button up a shirt with their non-dominant hand laden with a weight on the arm. They wore blacked-out glasses and walked down a hallway with a cane and a non-verbal participant, trying to find an open chair in a noisy room. Distorted glasses mimicked vision loss, as staff were asked to

catch a ball and walk a straight line, and a phone app simulated distorted vision caused by various diseases.

To experience the loss of touch, staff members wore heavy gloves to pick up small objects buried in a bucket of rice. They also ate cookies without flavor to simulate a loss of taste, to learn how people can lose interest in eating. Not allowed to speak, staff members used another app for text to voice communication.

"The simulations were designed for able-bodied people to get a good idea of the adjustment and retraining that are needed when some of your everyday senses are lost," said Berg.

The first-time event coincided with Brain Injury Awareness month in March. Berg said the ADS department was thrilled with its success.



Able-bodied people simulated the effects of brain injuries, Berg said.

Be sure to check out ProAct on YouTube

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### Setting the table for new trend in floor coverings



Blake Pommerening, left, and Matt Weisz use a “falcon cutter” to prepare 17- and 20-foot long garage mats for packaging in Red Wing. The 288-by-110 inch table frees up a longtime high-tech cutting table on the work floor for other jobs.

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 is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) for employment planning, employee development, organizational and community employment, and community integration.



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ProAct earned the “Meets Standards” designation from the Charities Review Council of Minnesota, which demonstrates its commitment to working effectively and efficiently with a high level of transparency and accountability to its donors and the public. ProAct, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization with more than 45 years of experience.

### Support from the county seat- United Way



United Way of Hastings Executive Director Mari E. Mellick, left, presents a \$3,000 contribution to ProAct’s Eagan Day Training and Habilitation Production Manager Jennifer Cavalier. The funds will help place Hastings individuals in jobs and provide resources for community outings.

## Music industry calls, as custodian builds stability, and his business

Chris Smith came to ProAct in 2003, and landed his first employment at a Super 8 hotel. He credits ProAct for bringing him out of his shell and helping him learn the importance of being on time.

He is now in his third year of independent work as a custodian at Lofton Label. The Inver Grove Heights company designs and prints labels and packaging.

While gaining a foothold in full-time employment, Smith also went after a curious side interest: from playing with melodies, to creating songs that attract lyrical artists in search of a melody.

He thanks his wife for forcing him one evening to stick with a melody all night long. By 5 a.m., his first song was finished. Smith’s company is “Twiss Smith Productions.”

His best source of new clients is open-mic events, such as those at the Red Sea Restaurant on Cedar and Riverside in Minneapolis. Smith brings a thumb drive of his tunes, and songwriters and poets of all types ad-lib, putting words to his melodies. He estimates that close to 30 song lyrics and two albums have used his music.

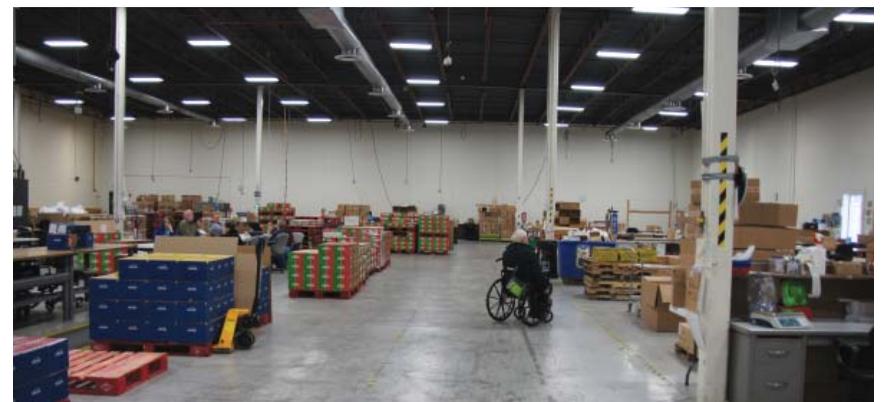
In the next four months, he has agreements for musical work to keep him busy.

Although not willing to quit his day job, he is talking to a business partner who is a producer to fine tune his skill in mixing sounds and creating “master tapes.” Samples of his music can be found on Soundcloud.com, by searching for Twiss Smith music. A favorite song writer is Ne-Yo and Nas.

He makes his home in Inver Grove Heights, with his wife Kareesha and daughter, Melody.



Chris Smith, a custodian by day and music creator and mixer by night.



Wider aisles and better organization have led to a smoother flow on the ProAct work floor in Eagan, which shared, and sold unused equipment and cleared out unneeded items. Hundreds of thousands of items are handled here each day.



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Maximizing Individual Potential for Greater Self-Sufficiency