
THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF ABILITY BUILDING COMMUNITY— WINTER 2021

REFLECTING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

by Wayne Stenberg and Crystal Heim

This year was filled with challenges as the entire nation grappled with the ongoing reality of COVID-19. Since the end of March, Ability Building Community has been continuously planning, reconfiguring, and adjusting to the ever-changing environment. The agency responded internally to the crisis and ensured that the people we serve, staff, and vendors were safe. We then leveraged internal contracts that benefited the community, having staff complete those contracts, and opened limited programming in April. These funding streams and the Paycheck Protection Program allowed the agency to continue to operate at a significantly reduced capacity.

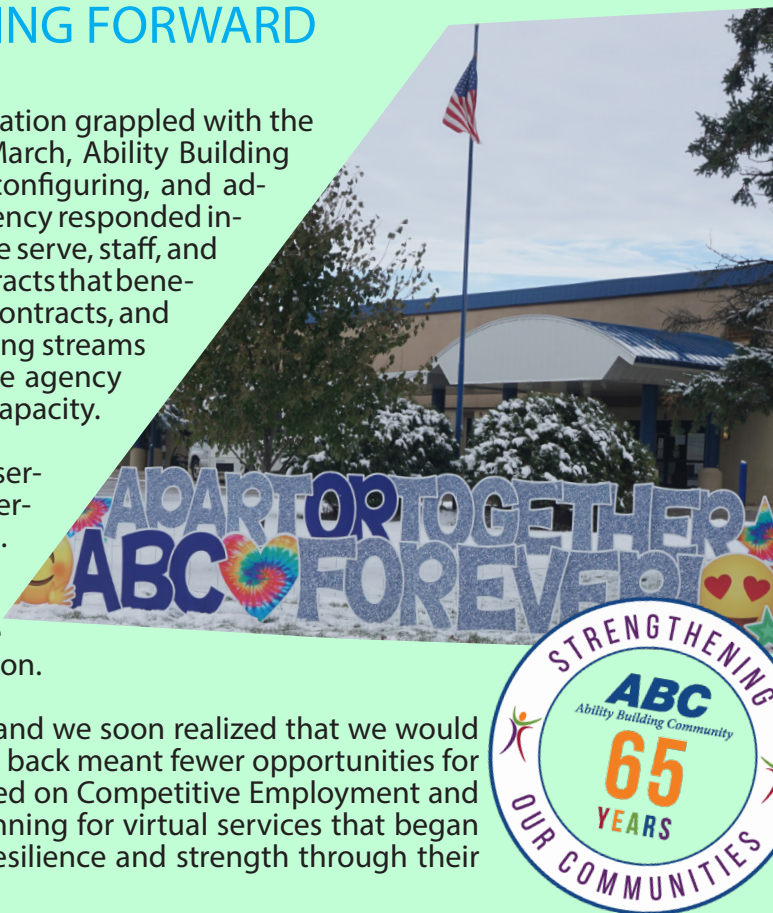
We slowly resumed community-based enclave services and on-site work in July. It looked as if operations were starting to pick back up to normal. However, in November, the new wave of the virus hit and we dialed back to the summer operations. It was hard to send the people we serve back home, but we knew it was the right decision.

Our number one focus this year has been safety, and we soon realized that we would not resume normal operations until 2021. Dialing back meant fewer opportunities for individuals to return. With this in mind, we focused on Competitive Employment and Independent Living Services. We also started planning for virtual services that began in December. Our staff continues to show their resilience and strength through their ability to adapt to the continually changing times.

The agency had a few bright spots as we were able to have our golf tournament in August and did drive through recognitions in October for our employees and the people we serve. The excitement and support shown at these events went well along with our theme – Apart or Together, ABC Forever. We also applied for Cares Act dollars that allowed us to make our workspaces more COVID-19 friendly. ABC is thankful for our community support, non-profit connections, funding partners, and continued strong business partnerships. We know that it takes a team effort to deliver quality services to the people we serve. A big shout out goes to everyone who has worked and supported us this past year.

We are already leaning into next year as we plan for our 65th anniversary in 2021. 65 years of ABC has brought evolution and change, most recently with our name change and mission. While these changes are still fresh going into the 65th year, we are confident that we are carrying out the spirit that originated with our founders. ABC will continue on the path that focuses on breaking down barriers for the individuals we serve. While we hope to have events to celebrate this incredible anniversary, we will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation. Stay tuned, as you have learned this year ABC does not back down to a challenge and we will ensure we will celebrate to the max.

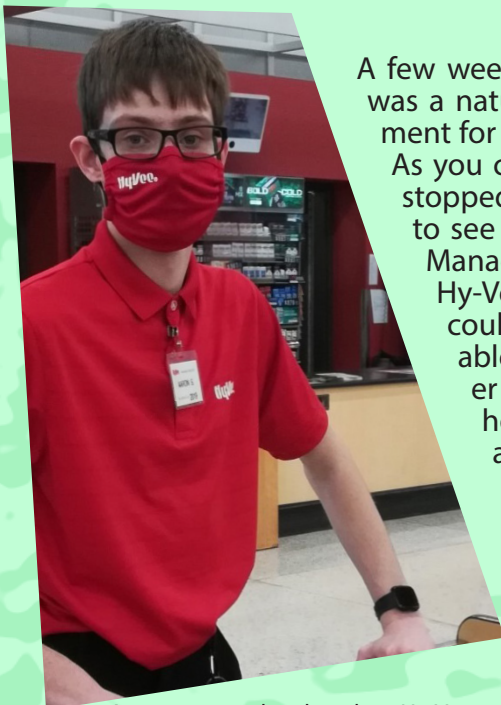
The Board and Leadership Team are confident that we will continue to move forward slowly. You will find employees working from home, in the centers, and the communities. We are anxiously awaiting the return of the people we serve and can't wait to get operations up and running to full capacity. We know ABC will continue to be a strong partner and look forward to the new year where we will continue to celebrate abilities ONE person at a time.



COURTESY DURING COVID (AARON'S STORY)

by Lynda Kuscienko

When I met Aaron two years ago, he was getting ready for graduation, excited about life, and most importantly (to him), eager to have a job! He was referred to ABC for Discovery and Customized Employment services, and I'll forever be grateful he was the first person I did placement for. Aaron had many interests including technology and a love of vehicles ranging from golf carts to fire trucks. I also found he was a warm, friendly young man, with a sense of humor, and a GREAT personality. Everything one needs to be good at Customer Service. Courtesy or stocking at Hy-Vee was on Aaron's preferred list, but the physical requirements would be too much for him, however, a Food Demonstrator wouldn't be.



Aaron prepared and ready at Hy-Vee during covid.

A few weeks later Aaron started at Hy-Vee's North store, and from day one he was a natural! It's been a year since I transferred Aaron to Supported Employment for follow along services, and things were going well.....Then Covid came. As you can imagine, that kind of service, and close customer contact quickly stopped. After months of sitting around at home, Aaron's Mom reached out to see if there was something, anything, we could do. I contacted Program Manager Jennifer Talamantes in Supported Employment, got a meeting with Hy-Vee, and with Aaron's main Job Coach Tim Wright, went to see what we could put together. Hy-Vee needed specific areas sanitized and we were able to negotiate a schedule and tasks that Aaron could do. A week later he was back at work and within a few weeks was able to increase his hours each day. Then to add a little "icing on the cake", a few months after returning Aaron was able to obtain another one of his goals, and now does a little Courtesy during his shifts! Congratulations Aaron!

Aaron's journey really highlights "Team ABC" and what can be accomplished when departments come together, working hard to ensure individuals like Aaron can fulfill their dreams.

IES INSIGHT

While 2020 brought numerous challenges and many programs had to suspend services, some more than once, IES was able to resume services early on in the year. Even though our team had to get creative trying to meet with individuals, do job training, and provide check-ins, we were able to accomplish more than we expected, and continued to find jobs for individuals throughout the year. Mixed in with new referrals were individuals we'd placed before, but like so many people, had lost their jobs and needed help again. Because of the pandemic, some employers have unique new positions to fill which created some great opportunities for placement, while others can't allow things like job tryouts or evaluations, making those services difficult at times. It's stories like Aaron's that keep us going with a "can-do" attitude, and like our tagline says, we're "Celebrating Abilities one person at a time".

Wishing all of you the best in the new year!

-Keisha, Lynda, Mia, and Jennifer



Aaron demoing his Customer Service smile pre-covid.

TRIBUTES AND MEMORIALS

Lucille "Lucy" Wilkes

Lucy was involved with ABC for 26 years. Lucy began working at Woodland in June of 1994 where she worked on packaging for Mayo, other general production work, and in retail at Twice is Nice. Before she passed she was involved in our rec program at ABC Works-Caledonia and ABC Works-La Crescent. Lucy was a joy to be around, and brought smiles and happiness to everyone she came in contact with. She will be deeply missed, but remembered for her big smile, her outgoing personality, and her genuine kindness and love for all people.



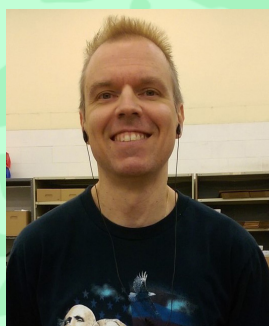
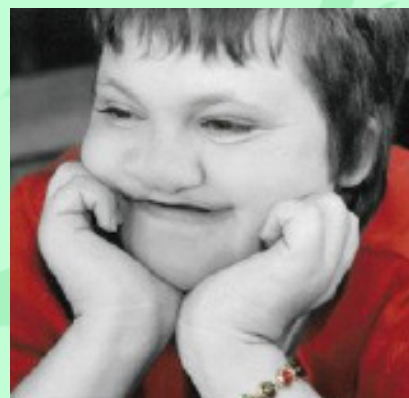
Ricky Tomfohrde

Ricky worked through ABC for 16 years and was one of the kindest souls with a radiant smile for everyone who crossed his path. Ricky took extreme pride in his work and was always willing to lend a helping hand. He will be greatly missed by everyone who were privileged enough to know him.

Latanja "Tonnie" Novak

Latanja "Tonnie" Novak, 34, of LaCrescent, MN, and formerly of Caledonia, died peacefully, surrounded by her family, Friday, May 29, 2020 at her home, ABLE Lancer House in LaCrescent, MN.

Tonnie was born August 19, 1985 and was a graduate of Caledonia High School. She started work at ABC in 2007 and was employed at Good Times Bar before moving to LaCrescent. Tonnie enjoyed working on our Health Direct production and also loved music, drawing, card games, music, animals, spending time with her friends at ABLE/ABC, and more music! She was a ray of sunshine and will be dearly missed by her family and friends.



Mark Ekstrom

Mark started working with ABC in 1989 and participated in several programs over the years. For many years, Mark was known as the friendly ABC custodian, where he knew everybody and everybody knew him. After retiring from the custodial field, Mark spent time working in Center-Based Employment as well as participating in some rec/leisure activities. Mark will always be remembered for his huge smile, great sense of humor and witty personality. Anyone who had the pleasure of knowing Mark will never forget the kind person he was.

Chris Alan Bundy

On September 29, 2020 ABC lost a longtime friend and co-worker. Chris was born on November 16, 1953 and spent 32 years as an ABC employee. Chris worked on various in-house tasks and at one time independently chained thousands of cloth loppers that were used in our rug production. Chris was full of life and quick with a smile and laugh to his friends. He was also known as a "Tough guy" and always willing to use his wrestling skills his brothers taught him. Chris was a part of our ABC family and together or apart he will always be in our heart!!!



TRIBUTES AND MEMORIALS CONTINUED...



Wendy Frisch

Wendy passed away on Sunday June 21st, 2020. Wendy was a long time job coach at ABC. Anyone that worked with Wendy saw how much passion she had for ABC and the individuals that she worked. Wendy formed bonds with each individual and exemplified the person-first philosophy that we strive to achieve at ABC. Wendy will be missed greatly.

Sulada Khamsavang

Sulada was a gentle, soft spoken person and enjoyed to joke around with his friends while working. Sulada's wit, kind soul, and humor will be missed by everyone who knew him here at ABC.



WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER

TRACY SCHRAMM



Tracy Schramm with her mobility assistance dog Gidget.

Tracy is a manager in the IBM i Global Support Center. Prior to her current role, she was a Resolution Manager in the Power Systems Project Office handling complaints from clients. While at IBM, she has had temporary assignments in development and an international assignment at IBM Mainz in Germany. Tracy holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish from Southwest Minnesota State University. In addition, she holds a Masters of Information Systems and Management from the University of Phoenix.

Tracy is very passionate about serving the community, and ensuring that people with disabilities live the life that they wish to live. Tracy is very active with the People with Diverse Abilities group within IBM. She is also a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Transit, a member of the Diversity Council Advisory Board. In addition, she and her mobility assistance dog, Gidget, are active volunteers at Assisi Heights and Can Do Canines.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY Effective Date: 06/01/2019

ABC is an equal opportunity, affirmative action, and veteran-friendly employer. ABC provides employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, gender, pregnancy, citizenship, national origin, age, disability, military service, veteran status, genetic information, union membership, creed, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, status with regards to public assistance, membership in a local human rights commission, use of lawful consumable products or any other status protected by law.

ABC will not request or require a genetic test or collect or use any protected genetic information from any employee or applicant in connection with employment-related decisions.

This policy applies to all terms and conditions of employment, including recruiting, hiring, compensation, selection, job assignment, promotion, discipline, termination, layoff, recall, transfer, access to benefits, leaves of absences, and training. If you have a question or concern about any type of discrimination in the workplace, you are encouraged to bring these issues to the attention of your immediate supervisor or the Director of HR & Safety. You can raise concerns and make reports without fear of reprisal. Anyone found to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY Effective Date: 06/01/2019

ABC strongly supports the principles of equal employment opportunity and affirmative action in all of our employment policies and practices. We administer our employment policies and practices without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, familial status, membership or activity in a local human rights commission, or status with regard to public assistance, or any other status protected by law.

ABC's policy is to comply with the letter and spirit of applicable federal, state, and local laws concerning non-discrimination and equal opportunity employment. We pledge to make a determined and sustained effort to prevent and eliminate any discrimination within the organization, in part by implementing the affirmative action measures described in our Affirmative Action Plan, as well as those outlined below. In the case of individuals with disabilities, this commitment includes the provision of any reasonable accommodations that may be necessary to enable an individual to perform the essential functions of a position or to be considered for hire into a position.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

SUPPORT AND ENFORCEMENT. ABC takes Affirmative Action to ensure that all employment practices are free from discrimination. Such employment practices include, but are not limited to, the following: recruiting, hiring, compensation, selection, job assignment, promotion, discipline, termination, layoff, recall, transfer, access to benefits, leaves of absences, and training.

Each member of management, from the Executive Director to all first-line supervisors, must give our Affirmative Action Plan and the commitments of this policy full support through inspirational leadership and personal example. In addition, it is the duty of every employee to create a job environment that is conducive to our nondiscrimination and affirmative action policies. Overall responsibility for the coordination, direction, and enforcement of our EEO and affirmative action policies, programs, and efforts has been assigned to the Director of HR & Safety. ABC evaluates the performance of management and supervisory personnel on the basis of their involvement in achieving these Affirmative Action objectives as well as other established criteria. Anyone, including subcontractors, who does not comply with the Equal Employment Opportunity Policies and Procedures as set forth in this policy and/or our Affirmative Action Plan will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of the relationship.

ABC fully supports the incorporation of non-discrimination and Affirmative Action language into our contracts, and we will commit the necessary time and resources to achieve the goals of Equal Opportunity Employment and Affirmative Action.

RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES. When filling any position within our organization, ABC seeks out and considers all qualified minority, female, veteran, and disabled applicants. All schools, colleges, employment offices, and other recruiting sources are advised of this policy and are urged to refer qualified minority, female, veteran, and disabled applicants. All job advertisements will state that ABC is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer, and will include placement with resources targeted at minorities, females, veterans, and individuals with disabilities to help ensure that such groups are aware of available employment opportunities. When the need for skilled applicants arises and we decide to recruit at schools and educational institutions, schools having large enrollments of minorities, females, veterans, and individuals with disabilities will be included in the recruiting plan.

PLACEMENT AND PROMOTION PROCEDURES. Placement, promotion, and transfer activities at all levels will be monitored to ensure that full consideration has been given to all qualified minority, female, veteran, and disabled employees.

TRAINING. On-the-job training programs, as well as other training and educational programs that ABC offers, will be regularly reviewed to ensure that minorities, females, veterans, and individuals with disabilities are given equal opportunity to participate. Appropriate steps will be taken to encourage minority, female, veteran, and disabled employees to participate in available training and educational programs.

LAYOFF, TERMINATION, DOWNGRADING, AND RECALLS. Layoffs, terminations, and recalls from layoffs will be made without regard to any employee's protected category status.

PAY TRANSPARENCY NONDISCRIMINATION. ABC will not discharge or in any other manner discriminate against employees or applicants because they have inquired about, discussed, or disclosed their own pay or the pay of another employee or applicant. However, those who have access to the compensation information of other employees or applicants as part of their essential job functions cannot disclose the pay of other employees or applicants to individuals who do not otherwise have access to compensation information, unless the disclosure is (a) in response to a formal complaint or charge, (b) in furtherance of an investigation, proceeding, hearing, or action, including an investigation conducted by us, or (c) consistent with our legal duty to furnish information. 41 CFR 60-1.35(c).



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KEEPING OUR COMMUNITY CLEAN

by Kristen Lynne

Did you know that every year Rochester Parks and Forestry Division collects approximately 600 tons of trash from our parks and city buildings? 600 tons is approximately the weight of 240 adult elephants! That is lot of lot of litter to pick up throughout our community. In the fall of 2020, Rochester City Parks was awarded a grant through the CARES Act to contract with organizations like ABC to assist with litter collection at Rochester City Parks. ABC was awarded 3,000 work hours to take place over the course of 8 weeks. Through this opportunity, ABC was able to offer a new work opportunity to 25 individuals served. This work opportunity was a breath of fresh air for some, as they got to enjoy the outdoors and get out of the house for a little bit.

Fae worked at the city parks 3 days per week this fall. Fae shared, "I like working at the parks. I get to clean the park and spend time with my friends outside. I would do this job again". ABC is grateful for our partnership with Rochester City Parks and happy we are able to help keep our community clean. The next time that you are at a city park, be part of the solution, not the pollution!



Fae helping keep our parks beautiful one bucket at a time.