ABC improves the quality of life in Southeastern Minnesota by providing rehabilitation and employment services for persons with disabilities and other special needs.

Kate at work at Kwik Trip — one of many Supported Employment success stories.
Message from the President & Director

The year passed marked an extraordinary milestone for Ability Building Center: 60 years of service to persons with disabilities and special needs. From humble beginnings with 12 participants in 1956 to more than 800 in 2016, Ability Building Center has provided comprehensive person-centered services that have made an unmistakable impact on our community for the past six decades.

In celebrating the achievements of these 60 years, we honored the legacy of our ABC founders — those who blazed a new path by breaking down barriers for those with disabilities and special needs. We’re happy to report that this “founder spirit” is alive and well at ABC today.

2016 was a year marked by seismic change, with key leadership changes at ABC, new federal and state initiatives aimed at revolutionizing person-centered planning and shifts in our sources of funding, to name just a few. This backdrop of change is our new reality, presenting ABC with a new set of challenges and opportunities. As our founders did 60 years ago, we will blaze a new path, overcome barriers, and chart the course for the future. Carrying forward our founders’ spirit we become stronger and more resolute in fulfilling the mission of ABC.

Recent initiatives at the state and federal level, such as the Olmstead Plan and WIOA (the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act), have placed a greater emphasis on competitive, integrated employment. While we are enthusiastic about the potential outcomes of WIOA and the Olmstead Plan, it is critical that proper supports and services be developed and appropriately funded at the state level to ensure that individuals with disabilities are provided the opportunity to choose work, and settings they desire. Reflecting these trends, Ability Building Center today provides roughly 2/3 of our services to individuals in a community setting.

As you read through the Program Update, you will find information about the breadth of services Ability Building Center offers, including vocational, residential, independent living, and life enrichment services. However, the real story is the people who are finding employment and life enrichment activities which reflect their choice, developing self-worth, and becoming integrated members of their communities.

None of this would be possible without our ABC Board and staff. The outstanding reputation ABC enjoys in the communities we serve is a direct result of the commitment and dedication each of you exhibits on a daily basis. Thank you! Our special thanks to those Board Members that will be completing their tenures of service to ABC: Mary Alcott, Steve Kann and Kathie Rogich. Your leadership has built a solid foundation for ABC’s work in the years ahead.

To our parents and guardians, thank you for entrusting us with your loved ones. We are committed to providing the support and services each participant needs to succeed at home, at work, and in the community.

To our Benefactors, community of supporters, and volunteers, you are making a difference by investing in the lives of our participants and staff. Without your support we would not be able to fulfill our mission. With the new challenges facing agencies such as ours, your continued financial support is appreciated and needed now more than ever. Thank you!
Development Highlights

- Ability Building Center received donations of over $14,000 from the Rochester Community Block Grant for automatic door openers in 2 of our program areas, and a lift table in our Ability Options program area.
- The annual Houston County fundraiser collected over $31,000 from donations, sponsorships, auction and raffle in August.
- The annual ABC golf tournament in June raised over $62,000 in revenue from golf sponsors, golf registrations, donations and a raffle.
- Memorial gifts and gifts of recognition in excess of $7,000 were received in the names of friends and loved ones.
- Donations allowed for the purchase of a new card entry access system and camera system with software to monitor around the building and the parking areas to insure the safety and security of all our employees.
- Donations were received for the commercial water heater for our Small Change Commercial Laundry Service at our La Crescent location.
- Charter Media again provided opportunities for Ability Building Center to air $64,720 in television spots throughout the year promoting our 60th Anniversary and the recruitment of new employees. KTTC donated $40,626 in television air time to promote ABC’s 60th Anniversary and our “On the Tee” golf tournament.
- Over $5,000 in contributions and a shredder was given to ABC in honor of our 60th Anniversary.
- Additional contributions to ABC over the year of over $394,953 were received in a variety of ways to assist ABC in providing rehabilitation and employment services for persons with disabilities and other special needs.

2016
Financial Statement

(audited revenue)

Revenue:
- Trade Sales & Community Contracts: $3,669,824
- Program Service Fees: $8,571,584
- Contributions: $563,981
- United Way Allocations: $93,205
- Investment Income: $101,017
- Total Revenue: $12,999,611

Program Services Expenditures:
- Vocational Development: $88,200
- Center Based Employment: $3,798,241
- Ability Enterprises: $2,894,402
- Abilities Unlimited: $427,566
- ABC Works: $2,717,289
- Community Based Employment: $1,969,595
- Total Program Services: $11,895,293

Supporting Services:
- Management and General: $1,132,894
- Development: $225,521
- Total Supporting Services: $1,358,415

Total Expenses: $13,253,708

Change in Net Assets: -$254,097
In anticipating what the future might look like for persons with disabilities and other barriers to employment, the staff at ABC spent much of 2016 developing a new vision for our programs and services.

The new Discovery Program is one outcome of this process. Discovery is a highly individualized experience that engages participants in career exploration in a personal 1:1 manner. Information about an individual’s interests, strengths, environments or activities where they are at their best, supports that are effective for them, and present levels of performance, is gathered through a series of activities, interviews and observations. This information and picture of who the individual is guides the selection or creation of community-based jobs. The program offers an alternative strategy to more traditional form of vocational evaluation.

Overall economic trends will continue to affect employment opportunities. While the overall number of job openings in the greater Rochester area has increased in recent years, opportunities for persons with disabilities have often not kept pace. Traditional work opportunities such as cleaning and laundry service remain, but many are looking for something integrated, new, and innovative.

Recruitment and retention of direct care staff reached crisis proportions in 2016, adversely impacting ABC’s ability to develop opportunities for persons with barriers to employment.

In 2016 Ability Building Center provided services to 813 people, with participants in work programs being paid $2.6 million in total wages. The Supported Employment program represents the largest group of individuals served by ABC, followed by Center-Based Employment and Ability Enterprises, our day training and habilitation program. Persons with intellectual disabilities and mental health concerns continued to comprise the largest portion of those served.

Stakeholder satisfaction again ranked high with the services provided by Ability Building Center achieving a 96% stakeholder satisfaction rating. Services were ranked high in meeting a person’s individual goals and expected outcomes. Ongoing surveys and recommendations from advisory committees are in large part responsible for our success providing the individualized services people desire.

In 2016, some of Ability Building Center’s programs were surveyed by CARF (the Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities), an independent, nonprofit accreditor of health and human services. CARF-accredited service providers have applied CARF’s comprehensive set of standards for quality to their business and service delivery practices.

CARF-accredited organizations have demonstrated conformance to proven standards for business practices and are committed to continuous quality improvement. Each provider’s commitment to excellence is periodically evaluated on site and reconfirmed annually. Once again, we are proud to say we have achieved a three-year accreditation; the highest accreditation an organization can receive!

Ability Enterprises was at capacity for much of the year as the ability to recruit staff hindered program growth. In 2016 the program experienced its first 245D licensing review by the Department of Human Services. While there were a few improvement suggestions, the inspection could be considered a success; especially since the program had historically been under a different licensing process for many years and the 245D standard is fairly new.

The Community Based School to Work program served 39 students in 2016, with most of those from [Image]
the Rochester School District. This is a reduction in the 48 served in 2015. We believe some of this is a reflection of the impact of WIOA and that transition-aged students must first pass through the vocational rehabilitation services process. It can be anticipated when students are referred to ABC in the future they will be much further along in their school careers.

The Abilities Unlimited (AU) program maintained a work crew comprised of 10 of the program’s 34 participants during 2016. Of these, three worked in the CBE program with minimal staff supports. They worked on memory recall, setting up their own work stations and time management. Two participants were in dual programming with our Discovery program. AU successfully placed one individual in community employment requiring only limited supports. Abilities Unlimited again participated in the Art and Ability project through SEMCIL, with 22 participants involved in the project. The final projects were on display at Mayo Clinic and were included in a published booklet.

Referrals have been significantly down for the end-year of 2016 in the Houston County Competitive Employment program. Woodland Industries had three referrals from Vocational Rehabilitation Services and all have been successfully placed in their desired job; working the hours they desired. One participant is earning minimum wage and is successfully employed at a grocery store stocking shelves and unloading trucks, while another participant working part-time at a pharmacy at minimum wage doing cashier and stocking. The third person was placed at a hotel earning $10/hour in the laundry room. The Supported Employment program at Woodland Industries served 33 people, 14 of whom were paid directly by the employer.

As ABC concludes its 60th year we have set a course for a bright future. With the support of our many stakeholders, we look forward to continuing to assist people in choosing and achieving their own personal measure of success.
Supported Employment Spotlight: Kate

One of 178 stories of people on the path to work and life success, with a little help from ABC.

“Try a cup of Karuba Gold, it’s *really, really* good,” Kate Breen suggested as she offered samples to shoppers at the Kwik Trip store in Caledonia. Many among the growing crowd of customers gathered around her sample table were sold after just a few sips. Kate then directed interested patrons to the location of this particular blend and reminded them that the flavor was on special every Monday.

This is only a fraction of what Kate accomplishes in a typical day on the job as barista. From the moment she arrives at work and puts on an apron, she is busy making sure the coffee bar is fully stocked, prepping sandwiches for the lunch ahead, and a multitude of other tasks.

“Kate brings an incredible level of enthusiasm to everything she does,” explains Helen Olson, Kate’s coordinator at Woodland Industries.

Few would ever guess the challenges Kate has overcome, and continues to overcome, with the help of Woodland’s Supported Employment program.

A native Minnesotan from a large family, Kate was diagnosed at an early age with ADD, ADHD and mild intellectual disability. Before coming to ABC in 1998 she had problems staying focused on everyday tasks. Just being able to hold down a job in the community seemed like a dream too far.

“I don’t know what I would have done without ABC,” Kate says. “I hate to think - I might have been homeless, or in prison, even. My work and supervisors provide the structure I need to succeed every day.”

Shortly after arriving at ABC Kate was hired by Kwik Trip, one of ABC’s partner employers. It was a match made in heaven — she has been there ever since.

“Kate is such an important part of our team,” says Amy Dobrunze, Kwik Trip’s Assistant Store Leader. “Her positive attitude is an inspiration for us all.”

Life outside of the confines of her structured work environment can still be challenging for Kate.

This hasn’t stopped her from obtaining a Culinary Specialist certificate from Western Wisconsin Technical College and moving into an ABLE home — once unimaginable accomplishments she credits to the focus she learned from her time at ABC.

When she’s not working at Kwik Trip, Kate volunteers for a number of area charities, including La Crescent Animal Rescue, and participates in local walks to fight breast cancer. She also puts her culinary degree to work as a volunteer cook for her church.

“When I started out I thought the ABC staff was too tough,” Kate recalled. I now see why. I never could have done the things I have without their help,” she added.

“I don’t know what I would have done without ABC. I hate to think - I might have been homeless, or in prison, even. My work and supervisors provide the structure I need to succeed every day.”
Working for Kwik Trip remains at the top of her list of priorities for the future. Kate is particularly looking forward to her upcoming anniversary with the company — a milestone Kwik Trip rewards with generous additional paid leave. She intends to use this for a well-deserved vacation, “to somewhere warm.”

About Supported Employment

Kate is part of ABC’s Supported Employment (SE) program, a CARF-accredited initiative designed to assist people in finding and successfully maintaining work outside of Ability Building Center in cooperation with community businesses. Many participants are on the path to independent placement — either ABC-paid or employer-paid work — working in groups or on crews while developing essential skills.

Clients may work in roles as diverse as locker room attendants at a local athletic club, members of a mobile custodial crew assigned to a local school district, document scanners or electronics testers.

Crew members build skills as they get support and structure from their coaches, other members of the crew, and employees at the businesses they visit.

Team members are paid by ABC, but supervised and naturally supported by the staff of the business partner.

The support a participant gets from his or her ABC Job Coach and fellow crew members can be the key to achieving the highest level of independence and success. Some participants may already have the necessary work and social skills, but still benefit from monthly “check-ins” and semi-annual team meetings.

As with all of ABC’s programs, Supported Employment is staffed by professionals dedicated to a person-centered, team-based approach to ensure continued success. Each client’s team may include family, guardians, a social worker, medical or mental health providers, residential staff, an ABC Job Coach and Program Coordinator, and most importantly, the clients themselves.

About Woodland Industries

Supported Employment programs are available through each of ABC’s four locations in Southeastern Minnesota. Kate’s coordinator is based at Woodland Industries in Caledonia, Minnesota. Woodland is a CARF-accredited extended employment program for a person with a disability or disabilities that limits his or her work opportunities.

Woodland Industry participants may be working toward job-readiness in the community or they may simply be adding to their existing skills. Woodland offers a variety of supportive work settings, individualized program planning, work behavior development and skills building.
Thank You!
2016 Benefactors & Contributors

The Benefactors’ Circle was established in 1994 to honor key leaders in the ABC mission. Contributors who give cumulative gifts of $1,000 or more are recognized at five different levels. Listed below are our new Benefactors and those who have achieved a new level of giving in 2016.

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Minnesota Energy Resources
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Names in bold are benefactors.

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Board of Directors

Ability Building Center’s success over the years is due in large part to the leadership of its board members.

Clockwise from left: Roger Dearth, Jeff Smigielski, Mary Alcott, Kreg Kauffman, Becca Stiles-Nogosek, President Patty Simcox, Steve Kann. Left inset: Dick Kerndt; right inset: Kathie Rogich.

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