Ability Built Computers Celebrates Five Years at ABC!

This November marks the five year anniversary of the Ability Built Computers program at ABC. During that time more than 5,000 computers have been distributed to individuals, families and organizations throughout Southeastern Minnesota facing barriers to technology access. The program has also given more than 50 individuals with disabilities or special needs the opportunity to learn a new trade.

Ability Built Computers, in partnership with community government and private sector organizations throughout Southeastern Minnesota, strives to provide high-quality, cost-effective technology solutions, provide modern job opportunities to people with disabilities, and refurbish and reuse as much computer hardware as possible and recycle the remainder responsibly.

“ABC is very proud to facilitate the unique partnership that makes this program possible,” said Steve Hill, ABC Executive Director. “It’s a win for the community on so many levels – training and employing ABC participants, providing individuals and groups with technology they may not otherwise have access to, and by keeping nasty electronic waste out of our landfills and watershed,” Hill added.

In fall 2010 the CompuShare program run by the United Way of Olmsted County outgrew its facilities and was transferred to ABC, becoming Ability Built Computers. The program distributes an average of 100 computers each month and the number continues to grow steadily.

Ability Built obtains computers and electronics equipment through donations from government, organizations, businesses and individuals. These computers are cleaned, repaired or reassembled into machines suitable for general use, such as Internet browsing, email or word processing. As a Microsoft Registered Refurbisher, Ability Built Computers feature genuine Microsoft operating systems. The finished systems are then sold at low cost to eligible individuals, non-profit organizations and schools.

Individuals are eligible for the program if they either 1) have a disability; 2) receive some form of public assistance; or 3) have a gross household income less than 280 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. The latter figure is based on the number of persons in the household. For example, in 2015 a family of four earning $67,900 annually would be eligible to purchase computers through the program.

All certified non-profit organizations and educational institutions whose primary purpose is not the promotion of a specific religion or political viewpoint are eligible to purchase through the program.

Ability Built Computers will put any computer equipment you no longer use or are replacing to good use in the community and/or recycle it responsibly at no cost to you. Contact Ability Built Computers at 507-535-7119 or abilitybuilt@abcinc.org if your business has surplus equipment they can make available.

The program also has a number of volunteer opportunities available. Those interested in volunteer opportunities are invited to contact ABC’s Volunteer Coordinator, Wes Brandenburger (wesb@abcinc.org), for more information.

Written by Lance Laack, Ability Built Computers Manager
Ability Building Center Launches Discovery Program

Think back to when you were a child and you were asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Do you remember how you answered that question? More importantly, do you remember how it made you feel to talk about your dream job and envision yourself one day achieving it? As a child the world is an endless ocean of possibilities. You have a lifetime ahead of you to explore, learn, and find out what happiness means. As we age, our interests grow, change, and evolve. How often do we step back and ask ourselves, “What makes me happy?” At Ability Building Center (ABC) we want every person to have the opportunity to explore their interests and learn about different opportunities. We support that all individuals have different dreams and we believe that exploration can be a rewarding and empowering experience.

ABC recently started a new program called “Discovery”. Discovery is a new approach to job development that recognizes that the individual should play an active role in the job exploration process. The more an individual is involved in the process, the more likely they are to find a job that is rewarding and meaningful for them. The individual is asked to share their interests, what types of jobs interest them, and what careers they have always wanted to learn more about. Once we have determined what the individual’s interests and skills are, we set up informational interviews at multiple employers throughout the community. An informational interview is an opportunity to ask employers questions about the types of jobs that they offer, the skills that are needed, and if any accommodations can be made. This process allows the employer the opportunity to get to know the individual and form a connection with them. Our hope is that this connection will lead to an employment opportunity. Chelsea (pictured) recently went through the Discovery process.

When Chelsea started Discovery, she worked at the People’s Food Co-op & Olive Garden. Chelsea indicated that she loved her jobs but was interested in finding a third job that she could go to in the afternoons. Chelsea has always been interested in working with children or animals so we explored these types of careers. During the process, we discovered that an after school program in Pine Island was interested in hiring Chelsea as an after school assistant. Chelsea accepted a school-aged childcare position. Discovery helped Chelsea explore her interests and achieve her dream of working with children. Congratulations Chelsea!

Written by Kristen Lynne, Discovery Coordinator

Chelsea reading to students at Cool School.

Chelsea proudly representing the Panthers.
Rochester Banquet
October 13, 2015

Congratulations to Peoples Food Co-op for receiving this year’s Employer of the Year award. We have been working with Peoples since July 2013, 7 days a week providing food packaging and dishwashing in both the deli and kitchen. This opportunity provides employment for 22 to 26 ABC participants.

Pictured is Doug Schommer Business Developer from ABC, Peoples Food Co-op CEO and General Manager Lizzy Haywood, Carla Meyer, Maura Henn, Jessi Stewart, and Beth Werven.

Mayo Medical Labs Packaging and the Specimen Kit Orders area provided a little over 25,000 hours of work for 127 ABC participants annually. This work varied from the simple task of placing a sticker on a bag to the complexity of a T628 Kit Quantiferon. ABC builds 46 kits and mailers for them. Thank you for all you do for the community by providing this work for Ability Building Center. Pictured are Julia Ramsey, Production Coordinator at ABC, Connie Ohnstad from Mayo Medical Labs Packaging, and Dan Smith, Production Director at ABC.

Houston County Banquet
October 29, 2015

Presenting John Buege with the ABC Works Employee of the Year award is Cathy McCabe, Job Developer for ABC Works.

Diane Workman is the recipient of the Woodland Industries Outstanding Worker award – presented by Helen Olson, Worksite Coordinator. Not pictured, but also receiving this award are Todd Goetzinger, Dylan Clauson, and Liz Moldenhauer.

From left to right: Jennifer Traff, Tim Brunson, & Janice Nelson receive their award for 35 years of faithful service at ABC Works! Presenting this award was Judy Johnson, Houston County Program Director.

Pictured is Lori Thillen, right, Manager of Quillin’s grocery in Caledonia, accepting the Employer of the Year award from Helen Olson.

Tina Ritiker, right, of Healthdirect, accepts the ABC Works Employer of the Year award.
Hittin’ the Sand in Houston County (2015)

Many hands were hard at work throughout the Spring/Summer of 2015 to encourage businesses, sponsors, boaters, bikers, and car cruisers to participate in our 5th annual Hittin’ the Sand fundraiser in Houston County. This event gave local supporters a good reason to get out and enjoy a day filled with sunshine, friends, and community!

Once again, over 100 businesses sponsored our event, with several offering to advertise on their billboards. Cars began their cruise at Elsie’s in Caledonia, while boaters launched from Lawrence Lake Marina. All came together in the evening at Wildcat Landing in Brownsville, where generous donations from local people/businesses were auctioned off. The day wrapped up with brats and beans at the campground. Nearly $30,000 was raised, making this a huge success! Heartfelt thanks for all the generosity from our friends throughout Houston County who continue to support us in our efforts to bring quality services to people in Southeastern Minnesota.

Written by Sheila Heberlein, Program Coordinator

Contributions Needed for Parking Lot

ABC recently purchased the empty lot west of their building at 62 N 3rd Street in LaCrescent. This area will be developed into a much needed parking lot! Currently there is only one sided street parking available a block away on Sycamore Street. This does not adequately accommodate the 25-30 staff vehicles that require parking spaces on a daily basis.

The proposed cost for this project is $24,260.00. This includes removing the existing surface, applying a crushed aggregate base cover and then a 3” asphalt surface. The end result will be a 100’x64’ parking area.

Please contact Judy Johnson at 507-895-7161 for more information.
Congratulations
Lowry and WOW Award Winners!

We are proud to announce that Diane Workman is our 4th quarter Wow award winner! Diane is a very friendly worker who does general production jobs as well as works in the Twice is Nice store. Diane always has a smile on her face and gets along with her staff, co-workers, and Twice as Nice customers. Diane has excellent attendance and is always up for new jobs. Diane’s positive attitude is contagious. We are lucky to have her on our Woodland team. Congratulations Diane and thank you for all your hard work!

Lita Oyarzabal is a key worker and a positive role model in the Sewing Department at ABC. No matter what her personal circumstance, Lita comes to work with a smile on her face (people call her Miss Sunshine) and she helps everyone she works with feel better. She has an excellent work attitude and a very strong work ethic. Despite her physical limitations and cognitive deficits related to a stroke, Lita approaches everything with a willingness to try and do her very best. She is an amazing lady who has overcome many adversities in her life and very deserving to be recognized for the hard work she does for ABC.

Board News-Meet Becca Stiles-Nogosek

Becca Stiles-Nogosek is the Membership Events Coordinator at the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce. Previous to her work at the Chamber, Becca was a facilitator with the Diversity Council and worked at The Rochester Civic Theatre. Becca was also a Special Education Paraprofessional with the Rochester Public Schools for several years. As a former employee of ABC, Becca is honored to serve a great organization and its participants in a different way. Becca has a great passion for the Rochester community and serving and advocating for all its community members.

Say “hello” to Jeff Smigielski

Jeff is a neuropsychologist on staff at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where he has worked since 1988. Before coming to Rochester, he worked at the Clinical Science Center at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Since the mid 1970’s, Jeff’s career has focused on working with people who have disabilities. He has had a particular interest in working with people who have acquired brain disorders, including traumatic brain injury. Jeff has served on the board of a number of nonprofit organizations, and just completed 2 consecutive 3-year terms on the boards of Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance and Minnesota Stroke Association. Jeff and his wife Terry have been married for 40 years. They are the proud parents of six children, and have been blessed with 11 grandchildren (so far).

Thanks Margaret for your Service to ABC!

Margaret began working with people with disabilities in 1977. She started her career at ABC in 1982. She grew up on a dairy farm in Zumbrota, and has lived and worked in the region most of her adult life. She is currently the Director of Human Resources at ABC, but has worn many hats during her time. Margaret is a member of the Society for Human Resource Managers (SHRM) and active in charities and philanthropy in the Rochester community. As a result of Margaret’s work on behalf of people with disabilities, Margaret’s husband Pete changed careers and became a social worker, as did both of the Coleman daughters. Margaret’s daughters and their husbands live in Hudson, Wisconsin, with her five grandchildren ranging in age from two to ten. Future plans are to move closer to them, watching them grow and enjoying their activities. Margaret feels her time at ABC hasn’t really been a “job” but a wonderful opportunity to get to know and interact with all the staff, participants, and friends of a fantastic organization.

Margaret enjoying her family and retirement!
Thanks to Our Generous Benefactors

On November 18, 2015 Ability Building Center (ABC) hosted breakfast in our cafeteria to thank our Benefactors. The Benefactor’s Circle was established in 1994 to honor and recognize key leaders who gave cumulative gifts of $1,000 or more.

Currently there are 500 Benefactors.
The 5 levels of giving include:

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To date we have raised $370,000 to support our programs and services at ABC. If you would like to view the video of our Benefactors event here is the link: http://www.abcinc.org/news/videos.

If you would like more information on becoming a Benefactor or you would like to know how close you are to the next giving level contact Laurie Kellagher at 507-535-7105.

Pat Smieja shares her story and journey after having an aneurism in 1994. She has been working at ABC for 21 years now. Without her work at ABC she would be home feeling unproductive. She has a plaque hanging in her room that says, “Be patient, God isn’t finished with me yet.”