

Achiever

Building skills, careers and independence

A look inside...

Some things never go out of style

Honest values, advocating for change, going green, reaching out to others and remembering a friend who we've lost. Some things never go out of style. Nor should they.

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The spirit of advocacy

Achieve participant opens doors -- for himself and others

We've all seen (and probably used) the large round metal buttons that electronically open doors to provide accessibility for people using wheelchairs. You press the button. The door opens. You go through. Pretty simple, right?

Gary Houdek, an Achieve participant, found out that it's not always that easy. Things like location of the button and speed of the door opening and closing can make use easier, or more difficult. In Houdek's case, things were more difficult.

At the Human Service Center in Blaine, a double set of powered doors separates the outside from the inside. Houdek noted that the second automatic door tended to close too quickly, making it difficult for wheelchair users to navigate.

Houdek communicated his issue with Achieve behavior analyst, Ralph Vossberg, who also took a look at the situation. "I observed a woman caught by a closing," Vossberg noted. "She had a difficult time getting her wheelchair untangled so she could enter. Even though there was a provision for accessibility it wasn't really adequate."

Houdek demonstrated using the doors while Vossberg watched and they noted that the internal button for the second door was positioned in an awkward location, making it difficult for wheelchair users to push and then navigate through the door.

"Gary told us he'd observed a better arrangement at the Anoka County Government Center," said Vossberg. "The button between doors was located on a post closer to the natural line of traffic so people did not need to veer over the push the button." *(Continued on back page)*



Gary Houdek is all smiles after his ideas for a changes to the automatic doors in the Human Service Center were implemented.

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DIE-FOR VALUES



By: **Richard Bro, CEO**
Achieve Services, Inc.

What issues are at your core?

What defining characteristics make Achieve unique?

At Achieve, our management staff has been going through an extensive training over the past months. The purpose of this training is to help us better understand the vision and mission of Achieve Services. It has caused us to look at our service delivery in a very different way.

We started by asking what seems to be a simple question: What kind of business are we in? I think it is difficult for some to look at Achieve as a business. After all, look at the kinds of services we provide. We serve people, not bank accounts. Our priorities include creating opportunities and work to enhance people's lives, not profit margins or stock increases.

Still, the question remains. Are we really a business? Suddenly, this simple question isn't so easy to answer.

The fact is yes, we are a business. We are affected by the economy. We are part of the community. And the factors that affect other businesses affect us as well.

When gas prices go out of control our business needs to develop strategies to counteract this, just like other businesses do. Like other businesses, we need to attract and maintain a competent and qualified workforce because we are only as good as our staff.

And, like other businesses, we have to select and maintain a certain set of core values that define us. These are values that we won't compromise, no matter what the business cost. Identifying these values was part of our training. They have become our "die-for" core – issues that we are willing to go to the mat for. They are an integral part of what makes us Achieve Services, Inc.

#1 Quality of Life

We want to make a difference in participants' lives, in order to help them become independent and fruitful and productive in their community. No com-

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promising here. This is why Achieve is in this business.

#2 Respect

Everyone wants to be treated in a respectful and dignified manner. We want our opinions to be valued. We want to be listened to. Our participants want the same.

#3 Responsibility

Achieve needs to conduct itself in an ethical manner. We need to insure that our business operates within the parameters of honesty and within the regulations of our licensure. We need to be fiscally responsible and operate in a manner that meet or exceed national standards.

#4 Safety

Our participants, as vulnerable adults, have the right to work and learn in a safe environment. As their service provider, we have a responsibility to maintain safety at all costs by monitoring all activities, employment opportunities and services to assure that they are safe.

These four core values will not be compromised and will guide our daily decision making process. Yes, Achieve is a business, a human service business. Being a business involves the bottom line. It also involves integrity and defining values that make us who we are. It is our pledge to you that these are our "die for" values.

Richard Bro, CEO
Achieve Services, Inc.

The Lost Art of letter writing


Lorrie and LaDonna

These days, “writing a letter” probably means penning just one member of the alphabet – A, B, C or even Z. When people want to communicate in writing, they type emails and send text messages, but to sit down and use a pen or pencil to write enough words to make an entire message to someone else? Unheard of. Letters – those things made up of written words, sentences and paragraphs – are a pleasant memory from the past.

Not necessarily so. Lorrie Heins, an Achieve participant, has been receiving letters from a faithful pen pal for nearly a decade. Lorrie and her pen pal, LaDonna, where paired up through an Anoka County volunteer program called Person to Person.

The program ended, but according to training assistant, Trish Plaisance, LaDonna’s letter-writing is still going strong: “LaDonna writes almost every week faithfully,” she said.

Training specialist, Ben Seeling, echoed this sentiment. “Lorrie really seems to enjoy the letters,” he said. “She picks them up and reads them right away.”

Seeling says that receiving the letters has helped to bring Lorrie out of her shell. “She can be very introverted,” he noted. “Receiving the letters has helped her communicate and become more aware of people around her.” 

Partnerships that work:

\$Sharing the wealth to \$ecure \$tability

Day training and habilitation programs like Achieve sometimes walk a delicate balance between having too much work, or not enough.

“It can be feast or famine,” said Richard Bro, Achieve CEO. “There are times when we’ve had so much work in our shop that staff had to pitch in to meet deadlines. Then there are the other times, when work isn’t available and we sit around waiting for the next job to come in. Those downtimes are the worst,” he noted.

Jim Huff, employment specialist, has been balancing the workload in Achieve’s shop for two decades. During that time, Achieve has experienced very little downtime. Still, Huff thought there had to be a better way.

And then the idea hit him: Achieve wasn’t alone in this dilemma. Other DT&H programs were dealing with downtime and work

demands as well. Huff decided to explore the idea of partnering with other programs experiencing the same work issues as Achieve.


“Achieve feels that we are not so much in competition with other programs but rather partners providing very similar services,” Huff noted. “It just made sense to reach out to other programs in the area rather than turn down work opportunities.”

Achieve has since worked out agreements with three programs: Options Inc., in Big Lake, Phoenix Alternatives in St. Paul and Mille Lacs County DAC.

“We first met with each program to make sure that deadlines and quality standards would be met,” Huff explained. “Then, when we have an overabundance of work, we send it to each of these programs – as long as that is okayed by our customer.”

Sometimes Achieve sends work out to partner programs; sometimes it’s the other way around. “This has truly been a two-way relationship,” said Huff. “Each of these programs has sent work to us.”

And the benefits have expanded beyond sharing work. “We have been able to share information on a variety of topics,” Huff said. “We have traded leads about jobs in the community. We have talked about Department of Labor standards as well as issues regarding billing, attendance tracking, job set-up and quality standards,” he said.

Building partnerships with other DT&H programs has been a tremendous success so far and has benefited everyone involved. “Sharing work between the programs better insures that we will have minimal down time and a variety of jobs for our workers,” Huff noted. “Equally important, we are able to provide excellent service to the businesses we work with. By working together, we are able to maintain quality, meet deadlines and keep our customers happy,” he said. 

Remembering AJ

AJ Breyer: January 19, 1970 - May 28, 2008

By: Tierza Langston

AJ Breyer was a wonderful young man who made Achieve a better place to be during the 15 years that he worked here. AJ was probably best known for doing the morning mail run throughout the Blaine Human Services building. From that job, just about everyone in the Human Services Center knew AJ and that gave him a sort of celebrity status, which he enjoyed. In his time here he touched the lives of so many people that it would be impossible to write down all of their stories, just due to the sheer volume of material.

AJ knew the secret of happiness. He knew how to laugh at the big things and the little things. He knew the importance of just enjoying the feeling of the sun on your face and listening to the sound of wind chimes. Sure, he could have his off days when he wasn't feeling well, but he was always willing to be cheered up. He had a terrific sense of humor and an infectious laugh

that could make anyone smile when they heard it.

AJ could choose to be incredibly stubborn at times. If he didn't want to do something, it was impossible to change his mind. He would scrunch up his face and give you his "you better back off, buddy" look, until you were forced to apologize for whatever it was you were trying to do, like feed him broccoli. He would forgive you right away of course, just so long as you didn't try to feed him any more vegetables that day, brush his teeth or mess with his hair too much.

AJ loved having someone talk to him in a nice, quiet voice. He loved it when people read to him. "Discover Magazine" was a favorite. He loved cotton candy and chocolate milk shakes from McDonald's. His favorite thing was seeing his mom, Chris DeLaria every day and having her sneak him little kisses. She works at Achieve, and AJ always enjoyed having her close.

Everyone who had the chance to know AJ will miss him sorely. We were all lucky to have him in our lives. Even though he is no longer physically with us, all the things he taught us, and the memories we have of him will remain in our hearts always.



"AJ knew the secret of happiness... His favorite thing was seeing his mom every day and having her sneak him little kisses."



Achieve gardens success without SOIL

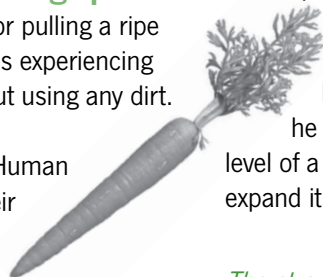
There's just something special

about munching on a carrot fresh from the garden, or pulling a ripe tomato off the vine. A group of Achieve participants is experiencing this firsthand this season, and they're doing it without using any dirt.


Because planting in the ground is prohibited at the Human Service Center in Blaine, participants have taken their gardening offsite in previous years.

But distance and traveling to the gardens was an issue.

Program manager, Jim Rooker, looked for alternatives. "I read about straw/hay bale gardens in a magazine," he said. "Basically you can plant plants in hay or straw bales and they'll grow like they were put in the ground."



Before planting, the bales must be soaked in water for 10 days, and then fertilizer is worked into the hay.

Rooker says it's been a good project so far. "It's working," he said. "The height of the bales is more conducive to the level of a wheelchair. If this project is ultimately successful, we'll expand it next year," he said. 

The straw bale garden at Achieve is growing well. Participants and staff look forward to a successful harvest, and a bigger and better garden next year.



Photo by Christine Munga

Entrepreneur in action

Earth-friendly cell phone recycling

Many of us are concerned with the health of our planet, and an important part of that is recycling. One Achieve participant is combining an entrepreneurial spirit with the idea of going green to create his own business recycling cell phones.

Dan Theiler takes discarded cell phones and turns them into cold hard cash. Plus he helps the environment by keeping the phones out of landfills.

Theiler works through a company called Pace-Butler, which evaluates the phones sent in and either refurbishes them and puts them back into use or recycles them in an environmentally-friendly way according to EPA standards.

Refurbished phones are utilized for 911 purposes in the United States, deployed nationwide and used in developing countries to improve quality of life through better communication.

Theiler has collection boxes in nine different locations throughout the Blaine and Anoka areas. According to program manager, Jim Rooker, recycling your phone is as easy as dropping it into a collection box. "People drop off their inactive phones in his boxes and we pick them up," Rooker explained. "Dan packages them and mails them off. Then he receives a check based on the condition and age of the phones sent."

The job is working well for Theiler. "It's a great job for him," commented Rooker. "It provides opportunities to meet people at the businesses where he has his collection boxes.

He can do the work on his own time schedule and he's helping the environment."

Through the North Metro Chamber, St. Cloud State College sent Theiler 150 phones. "That was a great jump start for his business," Rooker commented.

Rooker says that Theiler doesn't get money for every phone. "Some are too old, and have

to be recycled," he said. "But the most he's made from a single phone is \$5.00. They pay as much as \$50.00 for more expensive and newer phones. We're still waiting for one of those," said Rooker.


Theiler is available to post a collection box at your business. For more information, contact Achieve at 763.783.4909. 



Photo by Jim Rooker

Theiler Cell Phone Recycling Collection Box Locations

Drop off your old cell phones at one of these convenient locations, and you'll know that they will be reused or recycled in an environmentally friendly way. Plus, you will be helping Achieve participant, Dan Theiler, with his new business.


- Achieve Services, Inc – 1201 89th Ave NE, Blaine
- Anoka County Government Center – 2100 3rd Ave, Anoka
- Fast Track Products, Inc – 3575 85 Ave No., Brooklyn Park
- Frisky's Restaurant – 821 East River Road, Anoka
- North Metro Chamber of Commerce – 9380 Central Ave. NE, Blaine
- PTL Tire Service, Inc – 15300 Central Ave. NE, Ham Lake
- Spire (two locations) – 3380 Northdale Blvd NW, Coon Rapids & 8700 University Ave, Blaine
- The Touch of Sedona – 2211 Main Street South, Cambridge

The spirit of advocacy - continued

Houdek serves on Achieve's Health and Safety Committee, and brought the issue there. He wrote a letter to Property Management describing the problem and his proposed solution, including Polaroid photos of the current situation.

Being clear about the issue and the solution was important to Houdek. He knew it was key to getting the problem fixed more quickly. "People who advocate for themselves should see the problem and then mention the problem to others so they can understand the problem as if they were in our shoes," Houdek explained.

Houdek's diligence and hard work paid off. Within a couple months of writing his letter, the button between the doors was altered to a post configuration similar to his recommendation. It was a feeling of accomplishment.

His words of advice to people who find themselves in a similar situation? "Instead of being flustered, bring up things to the people who can do something about it and keep at it until you can get the results you're looking for." 

Achieve 3rd Annual

Get on Board Fundraiser is a big success



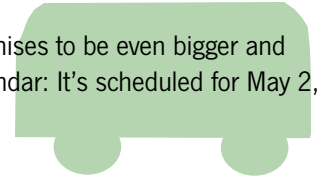
Photos by Blacktie Minnesota

Achieve's Third Annual Get on Board Fundraiser was held at Majestic Oaks in May. Nearly 300 were in attendance to enjoy tasty food, bid on auction items, laugh to comedian Scott Novotny and delight in the wonderful company of fellow Achieve supporters. Over \$15,000 was raised during the event.

The photos at left were taken during the event. At top are Heidi Nelson, Robert Nelson and Natalie Steffen. In the middle are Kathryn Timm, Ann Sheldon, Dan O'Fallon and Susan Holden. At bottom, the Bush family filled an entire table.

Corporate sponsors of the event included Abra Autobody, Print Central, Medtronic, Village Bank and Marketing by Design.

Next year's event promises to be even bigger and better. Mark your calendar: It's scheduled for May 2, 2009.



Send comments or questions to the editor: perfmn@guest.net
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