



The Independent Citizen

Spring 2019

COMMUNITY ACCESS
UNLIMITED
State-wide Service Provider

A Changing of the Guard

In January, CAU's founder, Sidney Blanchard, announced he was stepping down as Executive Director, the position he held for 40 years, and passing the reins to Bernadette Griswold, who served as Associate Executive Director. Fortunately for CAU and our members, Sid is not riding off into the sunset, but returning to his organizing roots as Associate Executive Director of Community Relations.

40 Years of Service

In the 40 years since Sid put down his state social work career to launch CAU, he has secured his place as a founding father of the movement to achieve civil rights for individuals with developmental disabilities. Now, with a multi-million dollar enterprise that has inspired decades of tangible social progress, Sid is returning to his grassroots origins.

Sid's 70th birthday and Type 2 diabetes diagnosis were the impetus for the shift to Associate Executive Director of Community Relations.

"I don't feel like having my fingers and toes cut off," Sid joked. "I would rather hand my position off to someone who will uphold the values and responsibilities I've built. The transition has been years in the making."

Sid, whose activism stretches back to the anti-war movement of the 1960s, has stood at the helm of the cause for disability

rights since its genesis, affecting change on a state and national level. Armed with a \$90,000 grant to remove individuals from state institutions in 1979, his Volkswagen Beetle served as the command post for his mission. From these modest roots, CAU is now one of the largest human services agencies in New Jersey, boasting an operating budget of more than \$60 million, \$50 million-plus in assets and more than 1,000 employees. Across New Jersey, more than 5,000 individuals and their families benefit from the supports CAU provides.

"I get fired up inside and depend upon my sense of humor to see me through. Action is what counts. Talk is cheap," Sid told the Star-Ledger in 1994, when he was declared Jerseyan of the Week.

That fire has yielded a considerable record of advocacy, innovation and entrepreneurship within the nonprofit and human services landscapes over the years. Realizing early on the dangers of relying on a sole funding source, Sid has fought the byproducts of capitalism with capitalism to ensure the agency's survival.

Today, guided by the same activist, community-oriented principles, CAU supports all who are disenfranchised, including youth within the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, seniors and veterans, people with affordable hous-

" Helping you achieve independence in the community... that's

THEcau
ADVANTAGE

A Message from our Executive Director



I am honored to speak to you as the new Executive Director of Community Access Unlimited, an organization where I have worked for 15 years and which I love dearly. Forty years ago, Sid Blanchard founded CAU out of the trunk of his Volkswagen Beetle. What began as an effort to move a few people with disabilities from institutional living into the community to empower them to become integrated members of the community has grown into a powerhouse of societal change that improves the lives of thousands every day.

Perhaps what is so remarkable about what Sid achieved was not only his passion for improvement of the lives of people with disabilities and later at-risk youth, but also his ability to marry that passion for social service with a visionary approach to operating a nonprofit using a business mentality.

Sid structured CAU to be a stable and self-sustaining agency that would not rely on public funding and would grow off its own success. Today we are a \$60 million agency with more than \$50 million in assets, 1,000-plus employees and more than 5,000 members throughout the state.

Sid was an extraordinary mentor and teacher, and he ensured that I learned every facet of this model of passion and support combined with operational acumen during my tenure here. I am fully prepared to take the reins and lead this remarkable organization for our members, their families and our staff. Sid launched our journey and guided us through the initial rough waters of a changing landscape in New Jersey for service providers supporting people with disabilities. He saw that those agencies that resisted would perish and took all the necessary steps to position CAU for continued success. It is with the deepest appreciation I look forward to continuing our mission.



Bernadette Griswold
Executive Director



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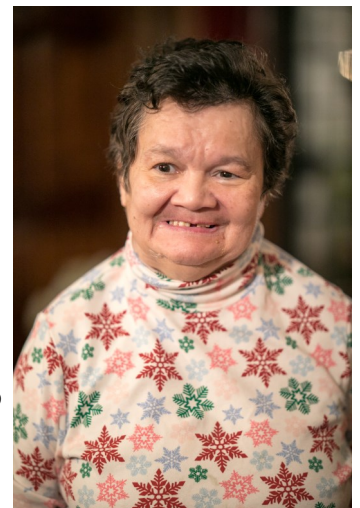
**Walter Kalman, Martin Poltrock
& Nicholas Scalera**

Board Member Spotlight: Myrta Rosa

Myrta has been a CAU member for nine years and a member of the Board of Trustees for five. Her journey to us began when her parents passed away and she opted to move to the Woodbridge Developmental Center for 11 years. Her first experience with CAU was visiting our Helping Hands self-advocacy group and developing a passion for advocating for herself and others with disabilities, even starting a self-advocacy group at Woodbridge.

When Myrta felt it was time to go back into the community she selected CAU and has never looked back. She remains an active advocate for people with disabilities, speaking at a national conference a few years ago, and sees her position on the Board as a pulpit for this passion.

"I love helping people who cannot begin to help themselves and want to live where they want to live and have their voice heard," she said.



ing needs, and youth with disabilities. As for Sid, he is not so much slowing down as he is investing time in his oldest and strongest passion: hitting the pavement and organizing within the community.

"I'm looking forward to working more closely with our members and their families, getting on the ground in Trenton to advocate for our people," Sid said. "CAU has always been so much more than a social services organization to me — it's a movement to empower and liberate anyone who has ever been told they can't."



Destined to Lead

Bernadette has been with CAU since joining the agency as Independent Living Skills Coordinator in 2003. In that position, she developed and implemented independent living skills curricula for adults and at-risk adolescents. She also created and conducted staff and member trainings, as well as facilitating anger management groups at the Union County Jail.

As CAU grew, so did Bernadette's responsibilities. In 2006, she was promoted to Assistant Executive Director, in which position she maintained all contractual obligations, including outcomes, reporting, licensing and program inspections. She ensured the health and safety of members through rigorous program, inspections and records review. She successfully achieved targeted levels of service and secured opportunities for development and growth.

In 2008, Bernadette became Managing Assistant Executive Director, a position that allowed her to continue growing as an administrator. She administered all aspects of CAU programs supporting people with developmental disabilities, oversaw staff development and training and continued to maintain compliance with agency policies and contractual obligations. She also oversaw all agency quality assurance functions, including CAU's expanding nursing and behavioral staff. In addition, she was responsible for analyzing budgets and ensuring fiscal policy compliance. During this time, CAU

residential programs grew from 13 to 50.

Bernadette became CAU's Associate Executive Director in 2015. While in this position she adhered to national best practices to administer 1,100 full- and part-time employees and managed an operating budget of more than \$33 million. She developed and implemented short- and long-range plans and continued to oversee the expansion of programs, including writing grants, developing new programs and implementing a host of agency fundraising activities. She developed and operationalized CAU's statewide Support Coordination program and continued developing and maintaining close working relationships with members, families, legislative leaders and community organizations.

"Every step of my career development here at Community Access Unlimited prepared me to take the reins as executive director," Bernadette said. "I developed a passion for supporting our members and providing them with the opportunity to live independently and lead normal and productive lives as citizens integrated into the community. I also developed the administrative skills and knowledge of the human services sector that will enable me to continue the great work of our founder, Sidney Blanchard. Sid served as a great mentor and teacher and I will forever be grateful to him."

Harold Poltrock, Esq., president of CAU's board of trustees, said he is confident Griswold will be successful as she continues growing the agency and leading its fight for its members.

"I've known Bernadette for 15 years and I am more impressed with her each year," he said. "She is the driving force and orchestrator for our best programs. She ensures we get the most out of every dollar and opportunity for the well-being of CAU's members."

Griswold is a graduate of East Carolina University with dual bachelor of art degrees in human environmental science/family and community services and elementary education and is working toward her master's degree in leadership and public administration at Centenary University.

She is a member of and active participant in many human services organizations, including: New Jersey state representative for the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR); Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities (ABCD); ABCD, co-founder Support Coordination Alliance; American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; New Jersey Chapter; and National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities Department of Human Development and Family Sciences.

Upcoming Events

- MARCH -

March 5, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Helping Hands Self Advocacy at the CAU Main Office

March 7 - 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM

CAU Community Networking Breakfast
Suburban Golf Club, Union NJ

March 21, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

CAU Cabaret at the CAU Main Office

March 27, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

MAC-TOP Staff Appreciation Night, CAU Main Office

March 30, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Family Connections Meeting at Suburban Golf Club

- APRIL -

April 3, 5:00 PM—7:00 PM

Faith Into Action, Hosted by the UCICC
at Suburban Golf Club

April 4, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM

CAU 40th Anniversary Celebration
Embassy Suites by Hilton, Berkeley Heights, NJ

April 12, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Couple's Night, Suburban Golf Club

April 17, 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Transitional Opportunities Program Open House
CAU Main Office

- MAY -

May 9, 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM

CAU Golf Classic at Suburban Golf Club

May 21, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Helping Hands Self Advocacy at the CAU Main Office

- JUNE -

June 4, 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Union County Nonprofit Networking Conference
at Suburban Golf Club

June 7, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

CAU Prom, CAU Main Office

June 11, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Youth Achievement Night, CAU Main Office

June 19, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Family Connections Meeting, Suburban Golf Club

June 28, 7:30 PM - June 29, 7:30 PM - June 30, 2 PM

CAU Community Players produce Hairspray Jr.
Rahway High School Performing Arts Center



Celebrating 40 Years of Excellence

Join us for an evening dedicated to our founder, Sidney Blanchard, whose revolutionary vision in 1979 and leadership over the last 40 years has made an incredible difference in the lives of so many.



Thurs. April 4, 2019

Embassy Suites by Hilton,
Berkeley Heights, NJ

Tickets & Sponsorship
Opportunities are available!
www.cauturns40.eventbrite.com

For More Information contact:
Cara Clair at cclair@caunj.org
or 908-354-3040 x4376

CAU Musicians Join Kean University to Make Beautiful Music



The stage at the Wilkins Theater at Kean University was ablaze earlier this year with the energy and Day-Glo tee-shirts of CAU members and Kean University music majors at the group's fourth annual collaborative concert.

The two-hour concert, entitled "Inspire, Believe, Uplift," featured 25 singers, including 10 musicians from CAU's Academy of Continuing Education (ACE) and 30 Kean music majors, joined by choirs from local middle schools — all connected by the international language of music.

"I wanted my CAU students to have a concert experience," explained Marguerite Modero, ACE Musical Director, about the genesis of the collaborative concerts. "I wanted them to have the joy of a true, sophisticated concert."

Marguerite reached out to Kean's Music Education Coordinator, Lyn Schraer-Joiner, who embraced the idea of collaboration. These yearly performances have been a true partnership that has enriched the lives of everyone involved.

"I enjoy the experience each year," said Melody Lucas, a CAU member and a third-year performer. She plays acoustic bass and sang solo for "Rewrite the Stars." CAU member Dipen Trivedi, a second-year performer and a pianist, said the show is an amazing experience that allows CAU members to learn and perform musical material.

Marguerite is delighted every year to see the show's progress and how rewarding it is for the musicians and audience alike. "After four years, the level of musicianship has risen so much that we are able to create a program that has much more musical diversity and difficulty," she said. "It is so exciting to see them be able to succeed at this, to look at their faces and to see them glow."

For the Kean music majors who have been working with ACE students for the last four years, the experience has enhanced their own abilities as future teachers, Lyn added. "Having this experience gives them an appreciation of music for all people regardless of their ability," she said. "It helps the students develop different musical strategies. It also takes away the fear of the challenge."

The concert experience also helps to dispel the myths about people with disabilities. "The benefit has been fostering relationships with people who may never have the opportunity to meet each other," Marguerite said. "Hopefully, this makes the world a better place because of everything we created."

The program was made possible in part by a HEART (History, Education, Arts Reaching Thousands) Grant from the Union County Board of Freeholders.



(Top) Millie Gonzalez, Ms. Wheelchair NJ 2019, emceed the collaborative concert, which she praised as a "wonderfully integrated musical experience."

(Bottom) Melody Lukas (second from left) and Dipen Trivedi (right) are joined by Lyn Schraer-Joiner (left), Kean University Music Education Coordinator, and Marguerite Modero, Musical Director at CAU's Academy of Continuing Education.

Love was in the Air

Cupid's arrow knows no bounds, striking connections between people of all races, religions, abilities and sexual orientations. Here at CAU, many of our members feel Cupid's arrow and enjoy celebrating their love on Valentine's Day.

Amanda and Wesley Strond are members with disabilities who married in 2004 and have been celebrating Valentine's Day ever since.

"We were supposed to get married in 2003, but I chickened out," said Wesley, who quickly realized his mistake. "We got married the next year at Holy Grand Church."

Amanda and Wesley enjoy going to movies and church events and recently celebrated her birthday with staff. They also attend CAU's annual Couples Night each year. While they look forward to Valentine's Day each year, they said they don't need a holiday to remind them of their love. According to Amanda, every day is Valentine's Day.

"I've got my Valentine right here," Wesley added, hugging his wife.

Romantic relationships are very healthy for people with disabilities, according to Jeremy Lefever, a Behaviorist at CAU.

"People with disabilities are just like any other group," he said. "They want respect, fair treatment, acceptance and, most of all, love. The general public has misplaced perceptions about love and relationships and how they impact the disability community. Adults with disabilities are able to and want to be in mutually romantic relationships and some eventually want to get married and have children. It is important that we afford them every opportunity to find love and romance."

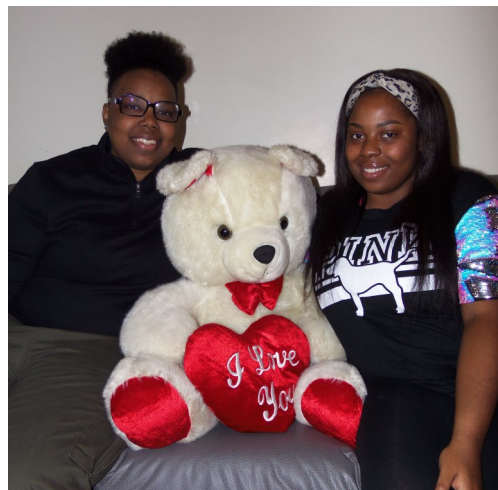
Two of CAU's youth members met at the agency and fell in love. Shameese Burnett and Cassandra Jeffers met at a CAU church outing and felt the magic right away. Shameese surprised Cassandra on their first date with a trip to Denny's and then again on their first Valentine's Day.

"She decorated my apartment and cooked me dinner," Cassandra said. "We had a dinner date."

Shameese added that she also baked a heart-shaped cake. This was the couple's second Valentine's Day and Shameese planned to exceed the high bar she set last year. "It's a surprise," she said, smiling.



(Above) Amanda & Wesley Strond reminisce about their relationship. (Below) Shameesh Burnett (left) and Cassandra Jeffers (right) celebrate Valentines Day together for the second time.



You Can't Stop the Beat!

Join us for Hairspray Jr.!



Friday June 28
7:30 PM

Saturday June 29
7:30 PM

Sunday July 1
2:00 PM



The Performing Arts Center at Rahway High School
1012 Madison Avenue, Rahway, NJ 07065

Visit www.caunj.org for more information

Member's Spotlight: Gary Rubin

Gary came to CAU in 1992 after 11 years of institutional living, first at a facility for youth in Pennsylvania, then at a developmental center in New Jersey, where he was abused by both staff and fellow residents and forced to sleep without a door. When Gary moved into a CAU-owned apartment, it was the first time he had his own room since he was 15.

"I actually kissed the floor in my bedroom," he said. "That's how good it felt."

Today Gary enjoys a spacious two-bedroom unit with room for his office. He is one of CAU's leaders in advocacy for people with disabilities and works hard advancing the causes and raising the voices of his fellow members.

"I love helping people who cannot begin to help themselves and want to live where they want to live and have their voice heard," he said.



TOP Members look to Help the Homeless

Several CAU youth members hit the streets of Union County at 3 a.m. on Jan. 23 to participate in the annual Point-in-Time (PIT) count, a national effort to gather information on the homeless at one moment throughout the United States. The aim is to help identify and change racial and ethnic bias in systems and services. PIT is mandated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and relies on local Continuums of Care like CAU to carry out the count.

Three youth members from CAU's Transitional Opportunities Program (TOP) and seven CAU staff members joined the countywide effort this year, locating homeless individuals, collecting information and escorting them to the Division of Social Services with the assistance of the Union County Sheriff's Department.

For TOP member Barshay Stinson, his annual PIT experience is meaningful in part because of his own past. When he was younger, his family lived for five years with no heat or lights and was eventually evicted from their home.

"It means a lot to me because I'm doing something good for the community and it's really important to get these people off the streets and into safe shelters," he said. "It really hurts to see a lot of people going through what they're going through, but the best thing we can do is try to support them and get them the most help we can."



Left to right, Union County Sheriff's Officer Lloyd Thomas and TOP members Shaquin Ingram and Barshay Stinson said they feel rewarded knowing they're doing something good for the community.



CAU's Transitional Opportunities Program members and staff searched the streets of Union County during the wee hours of the morning to find individuals in need of social services as part of a nationwide endeavor to capture data on homelessness in local communities.

The CAU members and staff worked with Union County Sheriff's Officer Lloyd Thomas during the morning hours they conducted the count. "It's nice to see where the homeless people are and to see the services that can be offered to them, and to work with (the CAU representatives)," he said. "It's good we're all together."

This year the CAU team helped find about 30 unsheltered homeless people and direct them to shelters, according to Karen Dinsmore, Assistant Director of the Union County Department of Human Services. Dinsmore said she sees the issue of homelessness increasing in the county.

"We definitely see it growing because of the high cost of housing in Union County," she said.

The county greatly appreciates the assistance of the social services agencies such as CAU who help with the annual PIT count, Karen said. "We couldn't do what we do without the help of community-based organizations," she said.



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Community Access Unlimited's Mission: *Our mission is to provide community access through effective, systematic, comprehensive support services for people with disabilities and their families, giving them the opportunity to live independently and to lead normal and productive lives as citizens integrated into the general community. Services also include the provision of decent housing preferably income integrated and affordable to low and moderate-income people.*



Join **Community Access Unlimited** for

Annual Golf Outing!

Suburban Golf Club

1730 Morris Avenue
Union, NJ 07083

Thursday, May 9, 2019

8:00 AM Registration & Breakfast
3:00 PM Cocktail Reception

Thank you to the following sponsors:



Join us for fun on the links while supporting a great cause!
Single Golfers - \$375 Foursome - \$1400

Show your support by sponsoring the event at levels ranging from \$400-\$10,000!



To reserve your spot, contact Cara Clair at 908-354-3040 x4376 or visit
2019caugolfclassic.eventbrite.com