

CAU in the News



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Community Access Unlimited's mission is to provide community access through effective and comprehensive support services for people with disabilities and at-risk youth, giving them the opportunity to live independently and to lead normal and productive lives in the community.

DISABILITY COMMUNITY RAISES CURTAIN AT FILM FESTIVAL **Local people with disabilities help bring annual film festival to Union County**



Myrta Rosa of Community Access Unlimited speaks at the ReelAbilities: New Jersey Disabilities Film Festival at Kean University.

The documentary “**Dancing Outside the Box**” by filmmaker David Block shows how wheelchair users and able-bodied partners can bring their two worlds together on the dance floor, creating beauty in motion while proving that everyone can dance.

A local group of people with disabilities recently helped bring the message of “Dancing Outside the Box” and other like-films to a wider audience at the ReelAbilities: New Jersey Disabilities Film Festival, held in part at Kean University and sponsored in part by the New American Movement for People with Disabilities.

ReelAbilities is the largest festival in the country dedicated to promoting awareness and appreciation of the lives, stories and artistic expressions of people with different disabilities. The annual festival presents award-winning films by and about people with disabilities in multiple locations throughout the nation. Post-screening discussions and other interactive programs provide attendees with the opportunity to explore, discuss, embrace and celebrate the diversity of people with disabilities and their shared human experience with the wider community.

The New American Movement for People with Disabilities (NAMPWD) is an advocacy arm of Community Access Unlimited (CAU), the social services agency that supports people with disabilities.

ties and at-risk youth. When ReelAbilities came to New Jersey for the first time this year, NAMPWD leaders committed to supporting the event, according to Gillian Speiser, community organizer at CAU.

“The mission of ReelAbilities is consistent with that of the New American Movement, which is trying to change the perception of people with disabilities in our society,” Speiser said. “Seeing people with disabilities in different situations humanizes them.”

“The films portrayed disabilities in many different lights and ways that many people can relate to. A lot of stories you could relate to even if you don’t have a disability, things like being left out and confidence and family issues.”

The five-day event, held March 13-17 in New Jersey at multiple locations, drew more than 700 visitors to the Kean viewings, according to Millie Gonzalez, public relations specialist at the school and location organizer for the event. More than 40 CAU members and staff were among those attending and NAMPWD co-founder Myrta Rosa served as a speaker, appearing on stage with Block, producer of “Dancing Outside the Box.”

“It was really nice to have a community member who has come into her own as an advocate,” Gonzalez said. “She gave a very clear message to folks to find your support system but also the need to be motivated and to advocate and do for yourself within the support of that system.”

ReelAbilities was an ideal venue for sharing the message of helping the wider community to recognize the value of people with disabilities and embrace them for their individual worth, according to Rosa.

“It gave people the opportunity to see what people with disabilities can do,” she said. “I encourage people to see movies like these because that way they’ll feel differently about people with disabilities. When people see what we can accomplish they understand and treat us better.”

Gonzalez, who is a person with disabilities, found that message was well received as she spoke with visitors after the event, including those without disabilities.

“You cannot leave this festival without having learned something or having changed or wanting to do something,” she said.