

**For Immediate Release**  
**With photos, attached**



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**COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED HONORS COMMUNITY PARTNERS, MEMBERS AND STAFF**

**Elizabeth, NJ – April 19, 2012** – Community Access Unlimited (CAU) this week honored its community partners and celebrated the accomplishments of its members and staff at the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards Night Celebration, held at L’Affaire Fine Catering in Mountainside.

CAU supports people with disabilities and at-risk youth, providing programs and services that enable them to live independently and thrive within the community. The agency recognized 10 community partners who play integral roles in supporting the agency’s members and/or helping CAU achieve its mission while sharing in the agency’s values.

CAU this year honored individuals and organizations that help the agency fulfill its mission of enabling members to: integrate into and live independently within the community; enjoy the rewards of employment; achieve full educational opportunities; and live healthy lives, both physically and spiritually.

The award winners were:

- The Westlake School in Westfield – Educator of the Year for providing CAU members with a nurturing educational experience.
- Yoga instructor Donna Bacich – Community Service Award for providing yoga services to CAU members and donating time and energy to the agency.
- TD Charitable Foundation – Supported Housing Service Award for ongoing financial support in creating housing to enable members to live independently within the community.
- Reverend Dr. Larry Dixon, senior pastor at the Mount Teman Ame Church in Elizabeth – Citizen of the Year for embracing CAU members within his congregation and advocating for justice for all people.
- Jamie Roberts of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency – Youth Advocate of the Year for his commitment to and rapport with CAU youth members.
- Dr. Kate Haller of the Developmental Disabilities Center – Health Care Professional of the Year for her personal attention to CAU members.
- Savita Persaud of the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities – Distinguished Social Service Award for her partnership with CAU in helping residents of New Jersey’s closing developmental centers transition into community living.
- The Community Living Education Project – Community Education Partnership Award for enlightening people with disabilities, their families and staff of organizations serving them about their options for transitioning into community living.
- Michael Pollack – Volunteer of the Year for tutoring and mentoring CAU member Pearl Elias.
- Community Food Bank of New Jersey – Employer of the Year for providing CAU members with employment opportunities.

“Of the many people and organizations we meet and work with, some truly share the values we hold dear to us and stand out among the rest,” said Tanya Johnson, CAU’s senior assistant executive director, youth services, and the evening’s emcee. “The community partners we are recognizing tonight provide support to our members that is essential to our mission and so important to their fulfillment.”

TD Bank has been a longstanding supporter of CAU’s supportive housing programs, which parallel’s the mission of the TD Charitable Foundation. This year the foundation awarded the agency with a \$100,000 affordable housing grant through its Housing for Everyone grant competition.

“The bank is lucky to be in a position to help organizations such as Community Access, an organization that makes every dollar count,” said Martin Melilli, regional vice president at TD Bank. “Supporting organizations like Community Access is our civic duty. There’s a tremendous hole in the community and to be able to help them fill these needs is extremely rewarding for us.”

The partnership between the Community Living Education Project and CAU has taken on significant importance with the impending closure of two of New Jersey’s developmental centers and the transitioning of as many as 700 people with disabilities into community living.

The Community Living Education Project provides education to individuals, families and staff about the full range of resources available in community living for people with developmental disabilities in New Jersey. The program has been working closely with CAU to enable residents of the closing developments centers and their families to learn about CAU programs and properties.

“Community Access is committed to community living,” said Dave Wright, project director. “They not only open their doors but come out to our events. They’re very patient and understanding with the families (and) work with us to help those families understand their options. They’ve been a great partner.”

CAU also honored the accomplishments of its members at the dinner, including independent living, recreation, education and employment. The agency recognized 65 employed members marking a combined 677 years of employment service. Staff members from CAU’s various areas were honored, as well, including those marking a combined 366 years service.

The dinner was attended by several local and state office holders, including Union County Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski. She noted that CAU brings the nonprofit, government and private sectors together “to get the best for people in need.”

“As much as we would like to handle every kind of service in the county, government can’t do everything,” she said. “That’s why we work with organizations like CAU to make sure people receive the services they need.”

Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director, noted that over the last year and in the near future, CAU has opened or will open 30 new units of apartment and single-family housing, enabling more people with disabilities and young people transitioning out of the family services system to live independently within the community.

“This is part of our building the community and being part of the community,” he said.

### **About CAU**

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating its 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013, supports people with special needs in achieving real lives in the community. CAU provides support and gives a voice to adults and youth who traditionally have little support and no voice in society. CAU helps people with housing, life skills, employment, money management, socialization and civic activities. CAU also supports opportunities for advocacy through training in assertiveness, decision-making and civil rights. CAU serves more than 5,000 individuals each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908.354.3040, online at [www.caunj.org](http://www.caunj.org) or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202.

**Photo and caption below**

**[CAU Awards 2013]**



The Community Food Bank of New Jersey was recognized by Community Access Unlimited (CAU) as Employer of the Year at the agency's 2013 awards dinner. Lisa Knothe (center), the food bank's director of human resources, is congratulated by (from the left) Union County Freeholder Bruce Bergen; Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director; Freeholder Alexander Mirabella; Freeholder Mohamed Jalloh; Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski; and Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi.