



## COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED MEMBERS THANKFUL FOR ALL THEY RECEIVE AT AGENCY

**Elizabeth, NJ – November 26, 2013** – Oprah Winfrey said, “Be thankful for what you have. You’ll end up having more.” This time each year, the members of Community Access Unlimited (CAU) take stock of what they are thankful for even as the agency works to make sure they have more.

CAU provides support programs and services to people with disabilities and youth served under the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to enable them to live independently in the community, in areas including housing, vocational and life-skills training, education, advocacy and recreation.

Andrew Barry, a person with a developmental disability, became a member of CAU in 2011 after growing up in Raritan with his family. Andrew wanted greater independence and he and his family chose CAU to enable Andrew to have a place of his own within an environment that includes trained care. Today Barry lives in a home in Scotch Plains with several other members.

“I’m thankful for Community Access because they help me,” he said. “They teach me how to cook and clean my room. I play video games with another member. We go places with staff, buffets and sometimes out to breakfast.”

Barry is able to return home every weekend to visit his family, a CAU staff member dropping him off each Friday evening with his grandmother. He has been looking forward to going home for Thanksgiving.

“I’m thankful for my family because they help me a lot,” Andrew said. “I’m also thankful to be a member of Community Access because I like living here and what they do for me.”

Almenta Foster has been a member of CAU since March 15. After being separated from her siblings and leaving her mother’s home at 16 under DCF direction, Foster lived with an aunt for several years before heading out on her own. A DCF case worker suggested Foster look into CAU’s Transitional Opportunities Program, which provides young people aged 13-21 with support services, including housing, education and vocational and life skills training.

“I am so grateful for CAU,” Foster said. “It’s beneficial to have help as you step forward into the real world. I thought I was ready but you have so many things thrown at you. CAU teaches you how to find different resources, like help you with your bills and with your food, and they teach you life skills.

“And they encourage you. There’s always someone positive in your ear saying, ‘You can do this.’ They encouraged me to get my license, which I didn’t think I could get. Someone is always going to be there. CAU teaches you to be independent while helping you at the same time.”

Foster’s membership at CAU also allowed her to help others when she and several other members flew to Oklahoma this summer to help with the recovery efforts following the hurricane that hit Moore, Oklahoma, last May.

“That was a wonderful experience, not only because I traveled but because I was helping others who really needed help,” she said. “I was donating my time to people who didn’t know a disaster was going to come. It teaches you to appreciate what you have.”

“For nearly 35 years Community Access has been providing people with disabilities and at-risk youth with support services and programs that enable them to live fulfilling lives independently within the community,” said Sidney Blanchard, CAU executive director. “We enable people with disabilities to live out in the community, in apartments and houses instead of institutions. We enable families to see their loved ones cared for and nurtured by trained staff. We enable young people exiting the child services system, unsure of where to turn, to live on their own and develop life skills and vocations.

“Unlike other human services agencies, we offer our members a continuum of care, from housing and recreation to life skills and employment training and advocacy, a model they and their families cannot find

elsewhere. That is the CAU Advantage and I am thankful we are able to provide that advantage to over 4,300 people with disabilities and young people throughout New Jersey.”

### **About CAU**

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating its 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 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.