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For more information:

Please contact Cara Pavia, Community Access Unlimited
80 West Grand St. Elizabeth, NJ 07202
908.354.3040, ext. 376 / email:cpavia@caunj.org

COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED MEMBERS APPLAUD ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Annual celebrations recognize those who have achieved success and inspired fellow members

Elizabeth, NJ – June 23, 2012 – Believing that even the simplest accomplishment should be celebrated when it is achieved from a more difficult starting point, the members and staff of Community Access Unlimited (CAU) recently honored the award winners at the agency's Performance Recognition Night for those members with disabilities and Youth Achievement Night for CAU's at-risk youth.

CAU Provides support programs and services to people with disabilities and at-risk youth to enable them to live independently in the community, including housing, vocational and life-skills training, education, advocacy and recreation.

The agency's Performance Recognition Night recognized 11 members with disabilities who made progress toward goals and performed in ways that strengthened their ability to live independently.

Dante Chrystal, a CAU member with disabilities since 2008, was recognized for his remarkable determination in both setting and achieving goals. Chrystal told his counselor he wanted to find a job, get his license and buy a car. After one day he was working at UPS, saving his wages for driving lessons. On May 26 he passed his driver's test to earn his license and began a new job at a staffing firm.

"I have a great staff behind me, great support from my counselor," Chrystal said. "I have great thoughts. I only keep the positive and let the negative go. Whenever I get down I count my blessings. I may not have everything but I have more than others. If you believe and work hard, your dreams will come true."

Chrystal's third dream came true the night of the awards events when CAU executive director Sid Blanchard told him the agency was giving him a car in recognition of his hard work.

Annie Johnson developed new dreams this year. A member with disabilities since 2009 who was described as a wonderful person to be around, Johnson was recognized for her accomplishments in hair dressing, basketball and dancing. Johnson is playing the role of Mrs. Mayor in CAU's upcoming production of "Seussical Jr." and the experience has opened to her a new door of dreams and goals, she said.

"I love the dancing and interaction," Johnson said. "I never was part of anything before. Now I know I can be a dancer. I can be an actor. I can be a singer, too. I want to do more and bigger parts."

Brittany Coleman was one of the Valedictorian Award winners at CAU Youth Achievement Night, which honored 33 youth members. She recently graduated from Drew University with honors. While Coleman has applied for law school and may return to that path later, for now she plans to focus on entering graduate school and earning a master's degree in social work, she said. She wants to work for the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services.

"I was in foster care and I want to give back," said Coleman, who has been a CAU member for three years. "I want to inspire them and tell them they can do anything they want to do regardless of their circumstances."

Yawina Cirene has only been at CAU for six months yet was one of the recipients of the Most Likely to Achieve Award. The 18-year-old junior at Abraham Clark High School in Roselle maintains a 3.6 grade point average, recently began a part-time job, opened checking and savings accounts, participates in CAU's leadership program and is a youth mentor in school. She was described as a role model for other members.

"I will be a CEO at a major corporation one day, bigger than Apple," Cirene said. "I want to own my own large corporation. I could just start now with a lemonade stand and it would be the best lemonade in the world and it would grow into a large corporation."

Rather than taking the lemonade path, however, Cirene plans to go to college after high school to earn a business degree. She already is eyeing Rutgers, Seton Hall, Rider and William Paterson universities.

"I want to complement our 2012 recipients for the great job they have done in 2011," Blanchard said. "They are a great example to all of us of how we need to set goals and achieve them."

About CAU

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating its 33rd anniversary in 2012, 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 had 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 4,500 individuals each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908.354.3040, online at www.caunj.org or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202.

Photo – [CAU Awards]



Dante Chrystal, a member of Community Access Unlimited with disabilities, accepts his award at CAU's Performance Recognition Night. Chrystal found a job, saved for driving lessons and passed his driver's test to earn a license. He was also rewarded with a car from the agency.