

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ALLIES IN THE FIGHT FOR YOUTH

Community Access Unlimited places four among 2009 winners of NJ Alliance Awards

Elizabeth, NJ – Community Access Unlimited (CAU) has announced that two staff members, an agency co-worker at the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) and one of CAU's business partners have been named **2009 winners of the NJ Alliance Awards** by the NJ Alliance for Children, Youth and Families (NJACYF).

NJ Alliance is an advocate for public and private policies that support and protect children, youth and families, working with member agencies and other human service organizations throughout New Jersey. The NJ Alliance Awards are given to outstanding human services professionals, members and partners nominated by those agencies.

Elijah Bell and Marquis McNeil of CAU and Emily Rodriguez of DYFS were recognized for demonstrating "a level of quality in their commitment and dedication to children and youth." Enterprise Rent-A-Car, a very active CAU community business partner, was honored for "consistently supporting NJ Alliance providers or agency programs."

Bell, an educational specialist at CAU, was named Childcare Worker of the Year. He is a strong advocate for youth struggling with school attendance, performance and compliance and coworkers describe him as a "silent leader with a warm and compassionate disposition."

McNeil is a member of CAU's Transitional Opportunities Program (TOP) and was honored with the Youth Leadership of the Year award. McNeil is "a positive role model for other youth at the agency," according to Tanya Johnson, assistant executive director of youth services at CAU. He is an active advocate for youth rights and helps organize program- and community-based activities such as voter registration and food drives, Johnson said.

Rodriguez was named DYFS Caseworker of the Year. Her dedication to the youth and families she serves has been called "remarkable" by coworkers. Rodriguez is a strong advocate of a team approach where everyone involved with a youth works to meet their needs and provide them with "endless possibilities," according to Johnson.

Enterprise Rent-A-Car supports TOP by providing new members with Welcome Kits containing toiletries, t-shirts and Enterprise towels, "a soft welcome to a rather uncomfortable situation," according to Nancy Fisher, director, Union County Youth Shelter. Enterprise also donates \$1,000 to TOP each year.

"Becoming a human services professional is not just a career choice, it is a lifestyle decision," Johnson said. "Too often we become so immersed in our responsibilities that we tend to forget how much these professionals give of themselves.

"Similarly, our youth members make a positive choice when they opt to become involved with the community and contribute to their environment despite challenges that have been placed in their paths. And CAU's business partners make so much of a difference for everyone when they decide to give back to the community. It is nice when we have the opportunity such as the NJ Alliance Awards to take a breath and appreciate everything they all do."

Selection of NJ Alliance Award winners is based on criteria that include relationships with clients/members and staffs, creativity and overall performance. Member agencies and other human services organizations nominate candidates in 11 categories. Winners will be honored at the NJ Alliance annual conference April 17 in Edison.

About CAU

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2009, 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 3,500 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 07207.