

CAU in the News



September 2012

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.

COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED CONTINUES WALKING TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Annual Walk-A-Thon raises \$33,000 to support people with disabilities and at-risk youth

Members, staff, family and friends of **Community Access Unlimited (CAU)** once again made great strides toward delivering a brighter future to people with disabilities and at-risk youth at the 14th



Community Access Unlimited members Dianna Sims (standing) and Danielle DeCurtis

Annual Ira Geller Memorial Walk-A-Thon, held Saturday, Sept. 22, at Rahway River Park.

The event drew more than 450 walkers and raised \$33,000 for CAU programs and services, which provide housing and life-skills training to members, enabling people with disabilities to live independently within the community and young people within and aging out of the child services system to build a rewarding future.

Joyce Cargle, a member of CAU with developmental disabilities, has benefited from those programs and services for 18 years. She lives independently in an apartment with a roommate.

"We learn how to be independent and live on our own," she said. "We learn how to do budgeting and go shopping. We learn how to get a job. They let be an integrated part of the community and meet a lot of new people. This summer we attended Disabilities Awareness Day in Great Adventure."

Major sponsors of the walk included Dr. Baljit Sappal of Elizabeth; Woodruff Developers of Hillside; Innovative Benefit Planning of Cinnaminson; James R. Guerra P.A. Architectures of Elizabeth; H&J Security Systems of Avenel; and Union Avenue Pharmacy of Bound Brook.

CAU also enjoyed the support of student athletes and cheerleaders from New Brunswick High School, who attend the event each year as part of their community service efforts under the Play It Smart program. Play It Smart is a national program designed to help student-athletes take responsibility for their futures through lessons learned on the playing field, in the classroom and in service to others. The student athletes helped set up the balloon arc that served as the start and finish for the walk, handed out goody bags and sold t-shirts and wrist bands.

Tre'jon Wilson, a junior basketball player at the school, attended the walk for the third time. "It's a life changer, giving back to the community," he said. "I learned that everybody should be treated the same, disability or not. Everybody is equal."

Keisha Smithford, a freshman cheerleader, attended the event for the first time. "It's a really good and interesting experience, to see all people of life and learn how to help," she said. "It's a really good feeling. I also learned helping people can be an everyday thing."

Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director, noted that rain clouds blanketed the Walk-A-Thon the last two years but that sunshine bathed this year's walkers. Blanchard also sees

a brighter tomorrow for both his members and people with disabilities throughout New Jersey because the state has committed to closing two developmental centers and creating a more conducive system for allowing all residents to live within the community.

CAU has doubled the number of members the agency serves to 4,500 and its staff to 830 in the last two years and is fully prepared to continue that growth as more people transition from institutions to community living, according to Blanchard.

"People with disabilities have the right to a full life within the community and to integrate with people without disabilities and enjoy a piece of the American pie," he said. While New Jersey has the third highest level of institutional living in the United States even as 11 states operate no institutions, Blanchard believes the state is finally turning the corner.

"We have faith New Jersey can be equal to the other states without institutions and share the belief that people can live equally and integrated in the community," he said.



Members, staff and supports of Community Access Unlimited begin the 14th Annual Ira Geller Memorial Walk-A-Thon to raise money for programs that support people with disabilities and at-risk youth.