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ADVOCATE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HONORED FOR HIS ACTIVITIES

Gary Rubin of Community Access Unlimited recognized by New Jersey Self Advocacy Project

Elizabeth, NJ – April 19, 2012 – The soft spoken approach does not work in Trenton. Maybe that is why Gary Rubin soars.

Rubin is a person with developmental disabilities who advocates for the rights of people with disabilities at every turn, whether sitting before a microphone at a legislative hearing or during a private conversation in the hallway with a state senator or assemblyman or woman. Never shy, Rubin has helped make a difference for people with disabilities through his advocacy, according to those who see his impact.

Recently Rubin was formally recognized for those efforts when he was named the 2012 winner of the Jane Miller Award for advocacy by the New Jersey Self Advocacy Project, an arm of The Arc of New Jersey. Rubin was honored at the organization's Spring into Action Self Advocacy Luncheon April 14.

The New Jersey Self Advocacy Project provides statewide support for New Jersey's self-advocates with intellectual and related disabilities to help them make a change on both personal and social levels. The Jane Miller Memorial Leadership Award is given to a self-advocate who demonstrates leadership skills.

Rubin, a member of Community Access Unlimited (CAU), has been recognized as a leader for many years, according to Sean Holmes, a director of services at the agency. CAU supports people with disabilities and at-risk youth, providing services to help them live independently within the community, including housing, life-skills training and advocacy support.

Rubin is a founding member of CAU's Jump Start program, which works to educate social service professionals about how to deal with clients more effectively, according to Holmes. He also is active in the agency's Helping Hands member advocacy program and trains fellow members and others with disabilities how to advocate for their rights and speak to groups about the rights and needs of people with disabilities.

First and foremost, however, Rubin is an advocate, Holmes said.

"Gary develops a lot of relationships with people who make a difference," he said. "In turn, that gives us a lot of political capital in advocacy. They don't want to talk to us. They want to talk to the people we're serving."

Rubin considers Senators Steve Sweeney, Loretta Weinberg and Richard Codey among those with whom he has established a solid relationship. He believes they, other legislators and all the groups he speaks to listen to what he says.

"I'm very heartfelt with them," Rubin said. "I don't sugar-coat it. I grew up with an intellectual disability and abuse all around me. I can tell people about living with intellectual disabilities because I lived it."

Rubin and fellow advocates last month held a disabilities awareness event at the statehouse to mark March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

"They did a superb job meeting and greeting the legislators, staying on point and answering their questions with perfection," Dennis Donatelli, director of the New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project, said in an email praising them. "They were excellent representatives for all people with disabilities throughout New Jersey. I believe they made a huge impression on all the legislators that they spoke with."

Rubin views his fellow CAU members and other people with developmental disabilities as his audience, as well. "My job is to let people know there are choices out there and there are people who will give you a helping hand so no one is alone," he said.

Nevertheless, Rubin was shocked to receive the Jane Miller Award for advocacy. "I always thought of myself as an average Joe," he said.

Others do not.

"People know him. That means he's making a difference," Holmes said. "When you have a member who can improve things you have a jewel."

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 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 or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202.