

For Immediate Release
With photo, embedded and attached



For more information:

*Please contact Cara Pavia, Community Access Unlimited
908.354.3040, ext. 376 / email:cpavia@caunj.org*

**AFTER SANDY LOCAL YOUTH VENTURE INTO THE DARK
TO VOLUNTEER AT ROSELLE SOUP KITCHEN**

Members of Community Access Unlimited felt compelled to help others facing worse conditions

Elizabeth, NJ – November 9, 2012 – Traveling from darkness to devastation, three youth members of Community Access Unlimited (CAU) and their mentor volunteered to help feed those in need at the Chestnut Street Community Church in Roselle shortly after Hurricane Sandy.

Jair Bodnar, Zahir Muhammad and Felix Panique, all 15 and residents of Elizabeth, were joined by their mentor, Osner Charles, as they spent several hours at the church Thursday and Friday, November 1 and 2, serving meals to the poor, senior citizens, people with disabilities and others impacted by the storm.

All three are members of CAU's Transitional Opportunities Program. CAU serves youth within or aging out of the child welfare system and people with disabilities, providing housing and life-skills training.

The volunteering effort arose when Charles was watching news coverage of the storm's impact on local communities. He contacted Roselle Mayor Jamel Holley to ask how he and his members could help and Holley suggested the kitchen.

Charles traveled to the Elizabeth residence of Bodnar, Muhammad and Panique and presented the idea to them and other CAU members.

"We had no power but I told the guys we should help our neighbors because they were worse off than we were," Charles said.

"I was very affected by their story," Muhammad said. "I was thinking about my mom and how I would want someone to help my family in that situation, too. I helped out by serving their needs."

"They were very generous," Bodnar said. "They also were very thankful. I felt good about myself."

In addition to helping others and contributing to the local recovery efforts, the volunteering effort likely will have long-term benefits, as well, according to Charles.

"We think we are in a tough situation but we were able to help other people in their time of need," he said. "That made other CAU members want to help. They're asking when's the next volunteering opportunity. We're going to get more volunteers in the future."

They will be welcomed, according to Kathleen Majors, the church secretary.

"They were a great help. It was amazing," she said. "I told them to eat and they said, 'No, we're here to work.' One woman mentioned these young people could be anywhere and they chose to be here."

Even getting to the church was a learning experience, according to Charles.

"It's one thing to see things on the television," he said. "It's another thing to drive through the neighborhood and see the devastation that happened here. For that reason I knew it was going to be a great experience for them."

Bodnar added, "If I was in that situation, I'd want someone to help me, too."

CAU is asking for help from the public, as well. The agency went through much of its emergency supplies caring for its 3,000 Union County members during and after the storm, with 88 percent of CAU properties without power at one point. Those wishing to donate to help the agency replenish should visit www.caunj.org for a list of supplies in need and to find out how to donate.

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.

CAU Soup Kitchen Volunteers



Jair Bodnar (center) and Zahir Muhammad (right), members of Community Access Unlimited, pose with their counselor, Osner Charles, at the Chestnut Street Community Church in Roselle, where they volunteered after Hurricane Sandy to help feed those in need.