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*For more information: Please contact Joanne Oppelt, Community Access Unlimited
80 West Grand St. Elizabeth, NJ 07202
908.354.3040, ext. 378
email: joppelt@caunj.org*

**THANKSGIVING COMES EVERYDAY FOR MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS AT
COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED**

Elizabeth, NJ – Americans will spare a few moments this Thursday to take stock of their lives and give thanks for that which they have – a home or job, family and friends, their health. For some it will be a passing moment before passing the turkey and gravy. For others there also may be an annual trip to the local food pantry to volunteer time before returning home to a Thanksgiving dinner.

Yet there are some who may be most thankful and feel this way everyday, even though they may seem like the least fortunate or the caregivers and volunteers with the greatest burden to carry. They are the members of **Community Access Unlimited (CAU)** and the agency employees and volunteers who give their time to them.

Lenore Trower likes to go to lunch, catch a movie, shop and talk about guys. She is not stopped by being blind and requiring a wheelchair to get around. At 58, Trower is determined to enjoy life regardless of the challenges it has laid in her path. She also is thankful to have a friend who sometimes helps her navigate that path.

Eileen Barry visits Trower four times each week as part of CAU's Community Support Program. When not dining together or shopping, they also attend events in Trower's building – she likes to show off her visitor – or visit the ocean and listen to the waves.

"She's really a nice lady," says Barry, a CAU employee. "I really have a nice time with her."

"I'm going to see my big sister today – it's her birthday," Trower said recently. "Without Eileen, I could not go, and I've never forgotten my sister's birthday. Eileen helps me do the things that I used to do by myself. I wouldn't have a quality of life if I couldn't feel a sense of independence."

Avery Jenkins once thought of becoming a chef or psychologist. A visit to the hospital, where he received caring attention from the nursing staff, finally cured Jenkins' career itch. Today he is enrolled in the nursing program at Union County College, a highly selective program that accepts only 175 students each term.

Jenkins' personal path was once equally undefined. Living in a group home, he felt he was not learning and achieving before entering CAU's Supportive Housing Program.

"It was a period to grow my own way, to help me grow toward adulthood," Jenkins says.

Maturity has taken hold. Jenkins' CAU advisor recently found him home on a Friday night studying. Jenkins plans to further his education after earning a degree in nursing, perhaps becoming a physician's assistant.

He also is thankful for his experience at Community Access Unlimited. "If I was doing this by myself, I'd have to work 40 hours a week and go to school part-time," he says.

Every Tuesday morning, Barbara Kloss visits Steve Agolia, a CAU member with disabilities, and teaches him about using the computer. Kloss is a retiree from ExxonMobil and serves as a volunteer in CAU's Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

Kloss' contact with Agolia extends well beyond her Tuesday morning visits, however. He likes to receive email yet has few people who might send it. So Kloss watches her own emails from friends and family for those that include photos and forwards these to Agolia.

Kloss has been active in RSVP since 2007, and has been a community volunteer since retiring in 1994. While serving as a grammar school reader, she learned to be patient with children who were hesitant to participate, knowing they would eventually join in. Kloss brings that patience to her visits with Agolia.

"If his eyes are closed, he tells me, 'I'm not sleeping, I'm listening,'" she says with a laugh. "The key is patience. I got to know him and how to work with him. I feel like home here – you build a relationship."

Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director, has seen countless relationships like these during the near 30 years since founding the organization in 1979. He says he remains as moved as ever by the appreciation members and volunteers show for the quality of life CAU provides that members might not otherwise have.

"I see the waste of taxpayer money in Washington and the state's monstrous deficit, knowing that translates into fewer dollars for the people we serve, and I feel frustrated," Blanchard said. "Then I see how thankful our members are each day for what we do for them, and what they do for each other. I see our volunteers giving so much time and affection when I know there might be easier ways to give back to the community."

"These people – our members, our staff and our volunteers – they truly understand the meaning of Thanksgiving. We can all learn from them."

About CAU

Community Access Unlimited (CAU) 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. Access Unlimited who works with member and Steve Agolia.