Mission
To provide community access through effective and comprehensive services to people with developmental disabilities, youth aging out of foster care and people with affordable housing needs, giving them the opportunity to live independently and to lead normal and productive lives as citizens integrated into the community.

Vision
We strive for our members to:
• Achieve economic self-sufficiency while being as productive as commensurate with their abilities
• Achieve independent living within the community according to their abilities, resources and needs
• Achieve a functional level of money management
• Achieve a satisfying social life
• Achieve a healthy lifestyle
• Achieve personal growth
• Achieve equal rights and self-determination

Values & Beliefs
We believe all our members have a right to:
• Community integration
• Holistic interactions as valued human beings
• Equal treatment as citizens
• Equal value as members of a social action movement
• Choice and self-determination
• Real lives in real homes

Message from the Board President and Executive Director
Community Access Unlimited serves approximately 6,000 members per year throughout New Jersey, including adults with disabilities and youth served under the Department of Children and Families. Members’ disabilities range from slight to severe physical impairments, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, emotional and mental health issues, intellectual disabilities, neurological disorders and sensory impairments. Youth members include those aging out of the youth welfare system and those requiring emergency housing, including teenage runaways. CAU provides supports and gives a voice to adults and youth who traditionally have had little support and no voice in society. We help people with housing, life skills training, vocational skills and with housing, health maintenance, money management, socialization, education, crisis intervention, civic activities and community integration. CAU also supports opportunities for advocacy through training in assertiveness, decision-making and civil rights. The breadth of our services as well as our advocacy and recreation programs are unique. We provide more all-encompassing residential and support services than any other organization of our kind.

On a personal level, CAU allows people with disabilities to live normal, productive and meaningful lives as citizens integrated into the community. People have affordable and accessible housing. They receive education and learn new skills. With better independent living skills, they are able to exercise more control over their lives and be more engaged in daily living activities. Their lives have meaning through work or social relationships. Their self-esteem rises and they grow as human beings.

Yet it is not only our members who benefit from our efforts. On a financial level, communities realize revenue from income taxes and sales taxes as our members work and shop. The community also benefits as people break down the walls of discrimination and better realize the significant contributions to community life people with disabilities can make. We become a more inclusive and cohesive society. There can be no whole community without inclusion of all.

We are quite proud that since 2006, CARF (Commission of Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities), an independent, not-for-profit accrediting body, has awarded Community Access continuous three-year accreditations, the highest accreditation possible. Three-year CARF accreditation is bestowed upon programs that demonstrate that the persons served benefit from the services provided. An organization receiving a three-year accreditation has undergone a rigorous peer review process and has demonstrated to a team of surveyors during onsite visits that it has conformed and is committed to CARF’s accreditation conditions and standards. There are more than 1,200 standards against which an organization is measured. Further, Community Access was commended in its quest for quality programs and services.

Harold Poltrock
President – Board of Trustees

Sid Blanchard
Executive Director
Luigi Gianni never worked before coming to CAU nine years ago. This spring he was recognized as Employee of the Year at CAU’s Annual Awards Dinner. “It felt great,” he said. “I was a little nervous making my speech.”

Luigi had been thinking about finding a job when he came to CAU and his counselor helped him secure a position working in CAU’s cleaning crew. He has been working for four years and enjoys it very much. “I was a little nervous when I first started,” he said. “Then I got the hang of it. I like working hard. It gives me something meaningful to do and I like working with other people. And I like making money.”

Before coming to CAU Luigi lived in a boarding house where he was not happy. Today he lives in a CAU property with roommates. “Thank God I have somewhere to live, have a roof over my head,” he said with a smile.

Employment

With work comes pleasure – the rewards for effort, a sense of self-worth, the camaraderie of coworkers. People want to feel productive. They also want financial independence. To help our members find meaningful employment, CAU offers post-high school education, pre-vocational training, vocational assessment, career planning, supported employment, job coaching and long-term follow-along supports. Programs are approved by the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Sectors where our members have sought job experience or found employment include clerical, hospitality, retail, manufacturing, facilities management, food services, shipping and receiving and warehouse distribution. Our employer partners include ShopRite, Marshalls, Walmart, Dollar Tree, Retro Fitness, Sam’s Club, Target, Swan Motel, White Castle and Trinitas Regional Medical Center. CAU also employs approximately 85 of our members, who comprise 8 percent of our employee population.

We also provide certified home health aide training to the general public. The goal of this program is to provide people with an industry-approved certification that will give graduates occupational skills that will provide them with a living wage. CAU’s Home Health Aide Training Program is certified by the New Jersey Board of Nursing and is on the New Jersey Department of Labor’s Eligible Training Provider List.

People want to feel productive.
Eddie Matthews has been a member of CAU since 1979, when he came to us from the Johnstone Training and Research Center for people with intellectual disabilities. “I was one of the original members,” he said. “I’m very grateful to CAU for bringing me to Elizabeth to live on my own. I’ve had a lot of ups and downs but I’m doing very well.”

Eddie has lived in several CAU properties during his time with us and today lives in a townhouse with his wife of 24 years, Elaine, also a CAU member, and their cat, Nemo. “It’s good to have your own place because you can do your own thing,” he said. “You have to make sure you go to work and pay your bills but I like having my own place because at least we know we can come and go as we please. No one is going to bother you.”

Yet Eddie and Elaine also know CAU is always there to help them.

Housing

Home is security. Home is where we can always return and feel safe. Home is a source of strength and pride—“this is my home.” To integrate people with disabilities into the community, CAU uses a scattered-site approach—people with disabilities living in single-family homes within a wider neighborhood or occupying a few apartments within an apartment building or mixed-use property, in each case having neighbors without disabilities. This stands at odds with group homes or stand-alone neighborhood developments dedicated to people with disabilities. Our members live in apartments, condominiums, townhouses, single-family homes and multi-family homes in urban, suburban and small-town settings. Housing locations are close to downtown areas and public transportation.

CAU owns 231 units of housing in Union County, 90 of which are accessible to people with physical disabilities. We offer emergency housing as well as long-term rentals. Our property management team modifies existing homes based on individual member needs, including wheelchair ramps, lowered kitchen cabinets and counters, bathroom handrails, roll-in showers and tilted mirrors. Specialized fire alarms and doorbells are installed for those with hearing impairments. Additional programs include mobile street outreach, a youth shelter, emergency placement for people with developmental disabilities, transitional housing, supported housing and community rental assistance.

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Leonard Roth enjoys a full life. Despite being limited to a wheelchair, he goes to a day program each morning – “I do shredding,” he said. “I go into the sensory room” – a room with a variety of textures, lighting, and Legos and puzzles intended to promote cognitive development. Staff also takes Leonard to community events, church on Sunday, Barnes & Noble and CAU barbecues. “I like to be outside,” he said.

Despite his disabilities – he cannot tolerate solid food, among other issues – Leonard is able to live such a full daily life due to the care he receives from his dedicated CAU staff. Five nurses care for him 24-hours a day, feeding him, giving him his medications and performing health assessments in between doctor’s appointments. “I like my nurses,” said Leonard, pictured here with Detra Griffin-Gilliam, a Licensed Practical Nurse and one of the five nurses caring for him. “They help me make sure I take my vitamins. They make me feel safe and secure.”

We are equipped to meet these challenges. CAU employs 15 nurses who provide medical injections, care for wounds, assess non-urgent medical situations, ensure necessary medical follow-up, monitor dietary compliance, audit medical files and run medical topic trainings. Our clinical staff also includes 15 behaviorists, two of whom are board-certified and one who is a doctor of psychology. Behaviorists conduct behavioral assessments, develop and implement treatment plans, facilitate groups for members as needed and provide staff training on effective behavioral supports. CAU also employs a brain injury specialist, providing neuro-psychological services, including cognitive rehabilitation. At CAU we also have embraced recent advancements in available assistive technology. Two of our staff are certified Assistive Technology Professionals.

Through our Home Health Services program, Certified Home Health Aides support senior citizens in their homes, including providing care management, behavior management, dementia and Alzheimer’s care and transitioning care, in addition to performing personal assistance and household errands.

CAU has welcomed New Jersey’s move to community living versus institutional living for people with disabilities yet this new landscape creates challenges many human services agencies are not equipped to handle. People moving out of developmental centers can have acute, ongoing medical and behavioral needs. The youth we work with exhibit behaviors related to the trauma they have experienced. Meanwhile, members who have been with us for years are aging in place, needing a higher level of care.

Leonard Roth

We are equipped to meet these challenges.
Tahira Williams has gone from dealing with behavioral issues to becoming a social butterfly while at CAU. She has developed and maintains friendships with other members and is involved in many recreational activities at CAU that allow her to make new friends. She also has become involved with groups outside CAU, such as her church, where she meets and interacts with even more people. Tahira even began hosting a new baking club.

Wanting to work, Tahira started a new job at Creative Cuts, a hair salon in Newark, with the help of a staff member who also works there part-time. She works one day per week cleaning cutting stations and gathering towels and very much looks forward to her shift each week.

Tahira wows everyone with her bubbly personality and pleasure in making other people smile. Staff and family have noticed she has developed a will to never give up. She has spread her wings.

Social Life

We are social creatures. People are born with a natural desire to have relationships with others. In addition, people need to get away from their daily grind and relax. CAU offers our members a wide array of recreational and interactive opportunities to fully enrich their social lives. Members enjoy evening outings such as dinner at local restaurants, day trips such as a visit to New York City and overnight vacations, including cruises to the Caribbean. People express themselves artistically through activities themed to their creative nature, including art classes, acting workshops and music clubs. In addition, members can attend our annual Prom, Singles Night or Couples Night.

For people looking for a place to worship and develop relationships with people of similar belief systems, the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council hosts an annual “speed dating” event, where people can explore a large variety of faith traditions and be welcomed into a faith community.

No matter how introverted or extroverted are our members, most find a perfect balance of social relationships at CAU.

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Mark Bloom does not worry about finances. He receives Supplemental Security Income from the government and a regular paycheck from CAU, where he works in the cafeteria. Yet Mark does not worry about taking care of his money because CAU does that for him, serving as Mark’s Representative Payee – receiving his SSI, depositing it into his bank account, paying his bills and giving him money for recreation via a prepaid debit card.

“They help me out with my SSI and my rent,” Mark said. “If I need help and I can’t do it myself, I know it’s being taken care of and I know Samir (Abdul, Senior Accountant) will be there for me. But I also get money on my card, so I’m independent.”

Mark has been a member of CAU since 1999. Before joining us he lived with his parents, who continued to manage his finances until CAU took over.

“They’re getting up there in age so it’s better for me and better for them that CAU does it for us,” Mark said.

Money Management

Control over one’s finances brings greater choice and independence. The first step in that quest is understanding money and money management through financial literacy. At CAU our members learn financial concepts in both one-on-one and group settings. Members learn about managing their money through everyday activities such as shopping, recreational opportunities and social pursuits, guided by staff. Professionals from our banking partners provide group financial literacy training. Staff also take advantage of our partnerships with financial institutions designed specifically to meet their needs.

To enhance the capacity of nonprofits in the fee-for-service environment, CAU offers back-office and billing management services to other community service providers. Provider agencies can combine their electronic health records with a billing management platform, keeping both their mission and bottom line intact.

For people who need help managing their Social Security benefits, a CAU Representative Payee ensures protection of benefits, sets up and manages bank accounts and pays bills. Individuals needing services receive regular financial reports and a reloadable debit card for personal purchases. CAU is designated by the Social Security Administration as an Organizational Representative Payee. We serve people and organizations throughout New Jersey and Manhattan.
Anand Subramaniam is a person with autism who has difficulty expressing himself but is able to do so through art. He attends Arts Unbound, a nonprofit in Orange that teaches art and promotes the creations of people with disabilities and senior citizens.

This spring CAU asked Arts Unbound to lend us several pieces of artwork to decorate the walls of our new headquarters. Three of Anand’s pieces were selected – unbeknownst to CAU that a member’s art was among those chosen.

CAU supports Anand through our Community Support Program. His counselors visit and take him out into the community, such as for walks in parks and to sporting events. Among the places Anand loves to visit is Arts Unbound.

“When he comes here he has a huge smile on his face because he’s able to do what he wants,” said Esmeralda Vazquez, Anand’s teacher at Arts Unbound. “In this world it’s difficult when you can’t express yourself and here he can. Art is a way of giving him a voice to tell his stories.”

CAU strives to provide our members with a wide variety of benefits of membership – the CAU Advantage. Navigating the system to secure the right services for someone with disabilities is fraught with confusion and frustration. Through our CAU Family Mentor program our Family Mentor, Rebekah, uses her own experience as parent of a child with disabilities to provide families with invaluable guidance. She also hosts quarterly group Family Connections meetings.

Uniquely, the CAU Community Players theater troupe is a collaboration of members with disabilities and actors from the wider community that allows our members to perform side-by-side with performers without disabilities in an annual production staged in a community setting.

The New American Movement for People with Disabilities (NAM) is a social movement committed to changing the social, political and economic structure of American society so that all people can live with pride as equals regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, religion, income or disability status. Focusing on issues that relate to advocacy, public policy, social movement and community organizing efforts, NAM promotes leadership development, support and participation.

All people can live with pride as equals.
Asia Lee lived in a foster home before coming to CAU four years ago. After arriving she first lived in our Group Home as she became acclimated to being a member of our Transitional Opportunities Program (TOP). She then moved into our Supervised Transitional Living Program, then Semi-Independent Living and now lives with a roommate in a CAU apartment in our Supported Housing program.

Asia has grown quite a lot during her time at CAU. She is Vice President of our Member Action Committee and MAC Attack, the committee’s outreach entity that provides comprehensive workshops to both youth in care and professionals who work within the youth services field, through which she has traveled throughout the country to make presentations. “It was basically me stepping out of my comfort zone, doing something I normally wouldn’t do,” Asia said. “Now I want to push other members to advocate for themselves.”

Asia attends Union County College and wants to become a social worker. She recently received TOP’s Perseverance Award.

Life changed for Eric Wicker, his mother, Andrea Parker, and their family when Rose Kuprianov came into their lives four years ago. Rose is Eric’s Support Coordinator for the support he receives from CAU through our Support Coordination program. She works with the family to ensure Eric maximizes the benefits he receives from the support resources available to him in the community.

“She’s extremely helpful,” Andrea said. “It doesn’t matter what I ask her. If she doesn’t know the answer, she gets back to us. She makes suggestions for him – like a job coach or services in the area. She is a real blessing because trying to get around the system is a nightmare and she’s very knowledgeable.”

The continuity of having Rose as Support Coordinator for four years is a blessing, as well, according to Andrea. “You hear about other families having to change coordinators or agencies,” she said. “We’ve been very fortunate. We haven’t had to do that.”

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Union County Savings Bank has been supporting CAU from the days when our executive director, Sid Blanchard, operated the agency out of his Volkswagen Beetle. According to Donald Sims, the bank’s president for 35 years, the mission of Union County Savings Bank is to “Support the local communities we serve, Elizabeth and all of Union County, providing residents and businesses with the support to fulfill their banking needs. We also are a strong supporter of community groups, local charities and civic organizations that work to fulfill the housing and financial needs to the community.”

The Union County Savings Bank Foundation makes an annual donation to CAU and the bank has provided favorable financing for several CAU housing projects over the years. Bank personnel also have taught financial literacy classes to CAU members.

“We’ve been a good friend and loyal supporter of CAU because we feel strongly about their mission and what they accomplish,” Donald said.

Community Partnerships

We believe that community access for all requires the partnerships of every segment of society. We rely on the extensive network of community partnerships we have developed and maintain, including financial institutions, businesses and employers, health care providers, cultural organizations, faith-based communities and other social services providers. Our banking partner provides us with the financial support to build housing while they and our other business partners support our events that raise funds for our programs and services. Other community partners work hand-in-hand with us to ensure our members receive the continuum of care they deserve. The CAU Community Network is a collaboration between CAU and the business community meeting twice annually to foster relationships and inform business professionals about philanthropic opportunities that benefit them and their community.

The Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council comprises more than 40 congregations of all faiths to promote inclusion of people with disabilities into their communities. The council hosts an annual speed dating event to allow our members to explore a variety of faiths and the Annual Union County Day of Prayer. CAU provides administrative support to the council while the council provides supportive faith communities to our members.

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The talented staff members who work at CAU enjoy benefits far beyond a paycheck. CAU is a leader as a social movement, committed to equality and the integration of all people into society at large, regardless of their disability or socioeconomic background. Our workplace is diverse, reflecting the diversity around us.

Eight percent of CAU’s own workforce of 1,100 employees consists of people with disabilities, who also are our members. CAU provides full-time employment with excellent opportunities for advancement – more than 40 percent of our supervisory personnel have been promoted into their positions – as well as part-time positions that offer flexibility. All our offices are ADA-compliant and handicapped accessible. We provide employees with excellent benefits, including commonly called Cadillac health care and retirement benefits, as well as tuition assistance. If you are looking for an employer that will offer you fulfilling work, competitive pay and an attractive benefits package and comprehensive training, an organization that is financially stable and will welcome you into their family, look to CAU as your next workplace.

Supporting Other Agencies

The Union County Nonprofit Consortium is a group of executive directors of social service providers from throughout Union County who meet monthly to discuss and increase organizational and community capacity in the human services sector in the county. The consortium also hosts an annual Doing Good Better conference designed to educate nonprofit professionals about resources available to them and encourage networking that results in greater collaboration. The Union County Nonprofit Consortium includes founding members Community Access Unlimited, Prevention Links, Alman Group, LLC, Family and Children’s Services, the County of Union, Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless, Families And Communities Together (FACT), YMCA Union County, Community Coordinated Childcare of Union County; Legal Services of New Jersey; UCPC Behavioral Healthcare; Urban League of Union County, and YMCA Plainfield.

The Union County Youth Services Network is a collaboration of governmental and community youth services agencies dedicated to coordinating and developing a seamless network of the foster care youth in Union County. The network meets regularly and holds an annual conference attracting about 200 people that also enables networking to foster greater collaboration among participants.

Training

People need and want to grow and develop over time. Toward that end, CAU offers a multitude of training for members, staff and the community. Our training for members includes independent living skills, employment skills, budgeting and money management. We offer group financial literacy classes in coordination with banking professionals.

Staff training includes all training required by state licensing agencies covering professionals who want to work with people with disabilities or youth. Staff working with our youth members also are trained in trauma informed care. Inservices for staff includes First Aid, CPR and Home Health Aide certification. Staff members can attain higher levels of expertise or other industry-recognized credentials through tuition reimbursement of continuing education costs.

We offer the public certifications in First Aid, CPR and Certified Home Health Aide training, valuable credentials to health care employers. We offer community training for those working with youth on topics pertaining to their experiences with abuse, recovery and the foster care system. Our training for people with disabilities focuses on how they can best interact with and gain support from the community. Our members also train professionals working with people with disabilities and youth, presenting at several local, regional and national conferences each year to share their perspectives.

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