

# The Independent Citizen



Spring 2012

## A Hard Day's Night Pays Off

For more than 17 years Reginald Payne has worked at the ShopRite in Clark, working in the parking lot returning carts, helping shoppers load their cars and chatting with customers. Rain or shine, six days a week Reggie moves through the lot earning his paycheck.

Eight years ago Reggie decided the 48 hours he works at ShopRite each week was not enough – he wanted more money. Since then he works an additional 27 hours per week across the street at Target, performing the same job.

Six days a week at ShopRite, six nights a week at Target.

Reggie could serve as the spokesperson for National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month, which is celebrated each year in October. There are 36 million people with disabilities in the United States, more than half of whom are employed, according to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). They comprise 21 percent of the nation's labor force.

Nearly one-third of workers with a disability are employed part time, compared with about one-fifth of those with no disability, according to DOL. In addition, people with disabilities are more likely to be self-employed than those without.

People with disabilities also fill a cross section of occupations, according to research by the Institute for Community Inclusion. People with disabilities account for: 8.7 percent of workers in service occupations; 8.4 percent in production, paving and materials moving; 7.0 percent in construction, extraction and maintenance; 6.4 percent in sales and office occupations; 4.7 percent in professional and related positions; and 4.4 percent in management, business and finance operations.

Through employment people with disabilities achieve independence and also help support the community. They pay taxes, shop and contribute to the local economy, vote and volunteer in the community.

*Continued on page 2*



*Reginald Payne outside his job at ShopRite.*

## 100 Years and Counting!



*Alphonsina Bardino ready to blow out the candles at her 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebration.*

Alphonsina Bardino celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in January, along with friends, fellow CAU members and agency staff. To recognize this milestone, members of the CAU Board of Trustees presented her with a resolution after the celebration.

Alphonsina has lived independently her entire adult life and has been a member of CAU's Supervised Apartment Program since July 1979.

Born in Italy, she was brought to the United States by her parents while in diapers. During her 100 years she has sang in the choir and played the

organ, and worked for the Salvation Army and Occupational Center of Essex County. Alphonsina's husband died in World War II. She loves to dance and share stories of her childhood. In 2007, she was reunited with her long-separated brother which made her very happy. They still keep in touch and reminisce about their history.

Just recently, Alphonsina discovered a love for travel. She has been to Las Vegas and Connecticut over the past few years. She is planning to someday take a trip to Italy with her counselor.

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The businesses that employ people with disabilities benefit, as well, according to a 2010 survey of employers released by the Kessler Foundation and the National Organization on Disability (NOD). According to the report, "Most employers say that employees with disabilities have the same flexibility, absenteeism and aptitude for acquiring new skills as employees without disabilities. More importantly, one-third report that employees with disabilities have more dedication (35 percent) and less turnover (33 percent)."

"Many of our members are employed by the same company for many years," noted Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director. "They are valued employees who help make their businesses stronger."

Despite a common misperception that there are incremental costs associated with hiring people with disabilities, 62 percent of employers surveyed reported no increase in costs when hiring people with disabilities versus people without disabilities.

However, while companies more and more have adopted diversity programs, less than 30 percent of those surveyed have a program or policy in place regarding hiring people with disabilities, according to the NOD report.

Reggie takes a simpler view of employment – the paycheck.

"I budget everything – bills, rent, credit union, travel," he said. "It's very important to pay your bills."

Reggie also enjoys traveling and recently purchased a new Ford Fusion after reaching 89,000 miles on his old car. He puts money aside for retirement, as well.

"But I have a long way to go before that," he said.

Like most American workers, Reggie also thinks the government takes too much money out of his paychecks – those he earns day and night.

Reggie has plenty of company in the working world among his fellow CAU members.

John Hargrove has worked at Standard Nipple Works, Inc. in Garwood as a machine operator since 1987. Employment enabled John to become a homeowner. He took classes to learn about setting goals, saving money and credit-worthiness and then purchased a condo three years ago.

Brian Simmonelli recently celebrated 25 years working at Durex Incorporated in Union, a metal stamp and sheet fabrication business, earning a \$1,500 bonus. He is a machine operator who works 40 hours per week.

Robert Denholtz, president and CEO of Durex, said his company does not have a policy of recruiting people with disabilities but is happy to employ them if they are able to perform the required responsibilities. Durex began a relationship with the Occupational Center of Union County many years ago. Denholtz echoed the Kessler-NOD research in describing Brian.

"He's a loyal employee, he's reliable, he's here every day," he said. "We're happy to have him."

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## Board Member Profile: Martin Poltrock

### Still Teaching

Martin Poltrock is as astute a student as he is an educator. The former teacher, counselor and school administrator of 35 years spent his first year as a member of the CAU board of trustees listening and learning about the organization so he could be an effective leader in his second and current year.

"There were a lot of components of CAU I didn't know about," he said. "I was most impressed with how everything is all about the needs of the members."

Recruited to the board by his brother and fellow board member, Harold, Martin's background made him an ideal candidate for helping to fill those needs. In addition to being a teacher and principal in his career Martin was a crisis counselor and director of adult education. He continues to teach as an adjunct professor at Kean University, where he mentors senior student teachers.

"Joining the CAU board was a nice marriage because I had a background in education and we do a lot in that area," Martin said, noting he sees the results. "I've been entirely impressed by how the members buy into the concept that they're going to work hard toward independence."

The future holds hard work for the board due to the economy, Martin believes. He sees a major challenge being "investigation of new and different funding sources to take a program that's already vast and making it even larger."

In his free time, Martin is an avid golfer. His favorite song is "Mr. Sandman", and he is a big fan of the Beach Boys.





## From the Desk of the Executive Director

The first newsletter of a new year is always a good time to pause and reflect on the journey just concluded and the road that lies ahead. We look back with pleasure on our 2011 community inclusion success stories. You will find some of them featured in this issue:

- Twenty-two people with disabilities moved into their own home in four communities throughout Union County;
- People with disabilities listened to candidates seeking election in 2011 and an increased number of people we support cast their vote on election day;
- More people we support participated in regional and national self-advocacy through Jump Start, MAC Attack, and Helping Hands;
- More people with disabilities benefited from CAU's Fiscal Intermediary Services through the Personal Preference Program and other self-directed service options;
- More people previously unable to live in the community due to a lack of supports for their physical and behavioral health challenges are living in the community now because of CAU's ability to provide the level of support they need.



At CAU, we do not rest on our accomplishments; however, we use them to teach us the next steps. There are almost 2,700 people waiting in institutions to be moved to community housing. Despite even the Governor's commitment, the process is excruciatingly slow. There is also a lengthy waiting list for community services of more than 700 Union County residents with disabilities; over 7,000 across the state. These individuals and families need our support.

We count on you to take these next steps with us as members, families, friends and much needed supporters. A very insightful boy at an inclusion summer camp said:

*"The only limits we have are the limits we put on ourselves."*

Together, let's set those limits aside.

With deepest gratitude,

Sid Blanchard

## CAU Board of Trustees

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*Audrey Vasey*  
*President*

## CAU Earns Third Consecutive 3-Year CARF Accreditation

CARF, an independent, not-for-profit accrediting body, has awarded Community Access Unlimited a three-year accreditation for the third consecutive time. This is the highest accreditation possible for health and human services.

CARF's mission is to promote the quality, value, and optimal outcomes of services through a consultative accreditation process that centers on enhancing the lives of the persons served. Founded in 1966 as the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities and now known as CARF, the accrediting body establishes consumer-focused standards to help organizations measure and improve the quality of their programs and services.



An organization receiving a three-year accreditation has undergone a rigorous peer review process and has demonstrated to a team of surveyors during on-site visits that it has conformed and is committed to CARF's accreditation standards. There are over 1,200 standards an organization is measured against. CAU has proven to be a service provider that is committed to continuously improving services, encouraging feedback, and serving the community. This accreditation also demonstrates CAU's commitment to enhancing its performance, managing its risk, and distinguishing its service delivery options. Community Access strived to not only accredit their employment program (which is mandated) but ALL of their services, a feat which most provider companies do not attempt. Community Access Unlimited was commended for its multiple strengths and in its quest for ever improving quality programs and services!





## CAU's Own Millie Aurigemma a Finalist in the 2011 NJBIZ CFO of the Year Awards

Millie Aurigemma, CAU's director of accounting, was honored as one of eight finalists in the 2011 NJBIZ CFO of the year awards program in the large nonprofit category. The award celebrates financial executives who contribute to the success of their businesses or organization. Millie oversees all financial reporting and accounting activities for CAU, which has annual operating revenues of more than \$28 million.

Millie has been with CAU for 19 years, beginning as a junior accountant. She began her career as an auditor with the Navy Resale and Services Support Office before moving into the nonprofit sector, first with a group home and then an educational service district. She has developed a passion for using her accounting skills to serve those in need of support.

"Funding is limited at a nonprofit," Millie said. "We do more with less. Somehow we always manage."

Financial reporting at a nonprofit requires the same accounting principles as those practiced in the for-profit arena but also entails additional compliance requirements. Millie's task every day is balancing those requirements while allowing CAU to focus on its mission.

"I use one to serve the other," she said. "I always weigh the compliance requirements that govern a nonprofit with the needs of the members and staff. The services that Community Access provides and the way they deliver them is why I'm still here."

"Millie has long been recognized within CAU as a top CFO who knows her stuff," said Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director. "She has been lauded by numerous auditors. CAU has expanded by more than \$20 million under her watch and we could only achieve this through the efficient and thorough efforts of Millie and her team. While she did not win the NJBIZ CFO of the Year award, she is CFO of the Year every year at CAU."

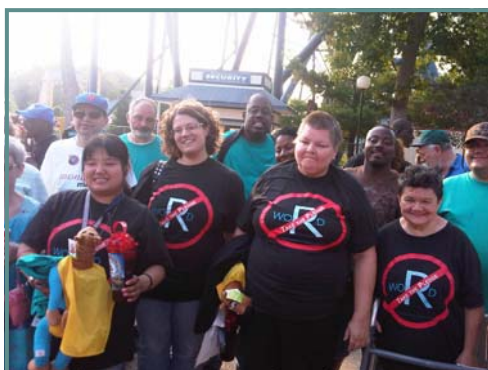
Millie is a graduate of Wagner College in Staten Island with a bachelor of science degree in accounting.



Millie Aurigemma,  
CAU Director of Accounting

## CAU Advocates Participate in Disability Awareness Day

*Saturday, September 3, 2011*



Members of the Community Access Unlimited Helping Hands Self Advocacy Group joined the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities for the First Annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day at Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson, New Jersey on Saturday, September 3, 2011. It was a beautiful day filled with fun and excitement for all. Advocates provided information about Community Access Unlimited supports and promoted the Council's R-Word campaign. Throughout the day, R-Word materials including t-shirts, buttons, and stickers were offered to park goers.

Visitors were also encouraged to sign an R-Word pledge, promising to be mindful of their speech, to remember the R-word is hurtful to those with intellectual disabilities and those who love them, and to spread the message of tolerance and understanding to others. The event was a great success, and advocates enjoyed their time promoting a good cause.

They look forward to attending this year's event being held on Saturday, September 1, 2012!



## Youth Build Their Future with Alternate Blueprints

CAU members Eric Mack and William Thomas were among the 30 graduates of the inaugural class of YouthBuild Elizabeth, which held its first commencement ceremony last fall. YouthBuild Elizabeth provides young people who either have dropped out of high school or are in the youth juvenile system with an alternate route to education and vocational training.

The program, affiliated with YouthBuild USA, allows participants to earn a general equivalency degree (GED) and certification for construction from the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER). It is an eight-month program in which students alternate weekly between classroom academic study and on-site construction training.

"The mission behind YouthBuild is construction training so young people are employable and education so they are able to attain their GED," said Krishna Garlic, chief executive officer of Brand New Day, a community development organization located in Elizabeth of which YouthBuild Elizabeth is a part.

"They can become an apprentice in a construction company or some may move on to start their own business, such as handyman, and others will go to college," Krishna said.

William intends to use his NCCER certificate to find a job in construction before one day entering the culinary field. "I'm a very good painter," he said. "I'm also good with framing. I had just dropped out of school (but) I wanted to finish my education and this gave me the opportunity."

Eric plans to go to Union County College and then a four-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree in business and computer science before pursuing a career in the music industry.

"I feel accomplished, I feel motivated and overall I feel happy," he said.

Both William and Eric said being members of Community Access Unlimited helped as they went through the YouthBuild program.

"It was definitely a push," William said. "(YouthBuild) wasn't easy at first. The push made it a little bit easier."



*Eric Mack (left) and William Thomas, were among the graduates of the inaugural YouthBuild Elizabeth program that marked its first commencement ceremony at Union County College September 1, 2011.*

## CAU Car Donation Program Helps in Transition to Community Living

Having your own vehicle is a very important part of growing up and gaining your independence. There are many young people who have lived in foster care and are making a transition to adulthood on their own without the support system at home to help them succeed. They need help in obtaining their own vehicles.

Community Access Unlimited's Vehicle Donation Program proves to make a difference in the lives of these young people. Unlike other vehicle donation programs, CAU does not take cars and sell them, receiving only a percentage of its value. Instead 100% of the donation goes to a deserving youth who has graduated from residential foster care and is moving out on their own in the community. When you donate your car to CAU, you will receive a tax benefit of being able to claim 100% of the fair market value of your donation when you file your taxes. It's a win-win for you and our agency.

By donating your car to Community Access Unlimited, youth transitioning out of CAU programs are given a chance at more opportunity. Once they receive a donated vehicle, their lives are immediately changed. They now have expanded their opportunities in employment, education, and socialization. They are able to further their lives within the community.

Roberto Chaz-Ordenez is the most recent recipient of a donated vehicle. He contributes becoming more independent from receiving this donation. He has been able to get a better job and do more for himself. He is now able to get to work, school, and the grocery store without having to rely on others to get there. He is not only thankful for all that CAU has done for him, but for the person who donated his new vehicle.

"Without CAU and the generous people who donate their cars, my peers and I would not be given the best start to living independently in the community," he said. "I'm happy to be a part of such a great organization who works hard to get us what we need to succeed."

***If you are interested in making a difference and donating your vehicle, please contact our Information and Referral Coordinator at ext. 272.***



*Roberto Chaz-Ordenez sitting in his new vehicle, donated through CAU's Vehicle Donation Program.*



## Community Access Unlimited Members Thankful to be Home

Ashley Lasanta beams as she drives her wheelchair across the large living room of her new home and breathes in the smell of a new house. She could not be more thankful for her new home.

Not long ago Ashley was living in an abusive situation after her grandparents died. After temporarily residing in CAU's transitional Emergency Capacity System, Ashley moved into her new home in Westfield last October – in time for Thanksgiving.

"This is the best Thanksgiving gift," Ashley said. "I love it here. I love the staff. I feel safe here. It's more than I expected. I didn't expect it to be this big."

Ashley's new home is one of several multi-family properties CAU opened last fall, enabling 22 people with disabilities or at-risk youth to enjoy the safety and emotional security of a home. The properties will bring the total number of properties owned and operated by CAU for use by its members to more than 200.

"Nearly 3,000 New Jersey residents live in developmental centers," said Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director. "The annual cost for each is about \$225,000, or two to three times the average cost of community living. The cost for providing community housing for CAU members runs just \$20,000 to \$80,000 annually."

The four new CAU properties include two four-bedroom homes in Scotch Plains, a six-bedroom home in Westfield and a seven-unit apartment building in Roselle comprising four four-bedroom units and three two-bedroom units. The Roselle property will be a combination of CAU housing units, market-rate rentals and commercial space on the ground floor.



Ashley LaSanta beams at the front door of her new home in Westfield, one of four new properties owned by Community Access.

"Having a home, your own bedroom, a kitchen to make your meals in, this is one of the most fundamental rights of every person," Sid said. "In the beginning of 2011 there were nearly 1,500 homeless people in Union County. There are thousands of people with disabilities living in institutions. Countless young people aging out of the child welfare system find themselves with no place to go where they can safely start their adult lives.

"That is even more tragic during the holiday season when so many of us are thankful for our good fortunes. Through these properties and others like them, we are able to make a small dent in those numbers and allow those who are less fortunate than us to be thankful, as well."

### Remember a Loved One or Special Occasion by Purchasing a Leaf on CAU's Tree of Life



You can personalize your message for years to come on the Tree of Life located at CAU's main office in Elizabeth.

Cost of a Leaf: \$50

Purchase Your Leaf Today!

...Tell Someone You're Thinking of Them...

Consider sending a Tribute Card from CAU!

Tributes Can Be Purchased For:

1 Card for \$5

3 Cards for \$10



You let us know who the tribute(s) should be sent & we will take care of the rest, or we can send you the supplies to attach your own message in each card!

For more information, please call 908.354.3040 x272.

Darcelle VanDunk is thankful to be in her new home in Scotch Plains, which she moved into in October. Prior to moving to this property she had lived in a group home, a facility serving people with disabilities, a hospital and a nursing home.

"It's nice here," Darcelle said. "It's comfortable for me. It's a nice, quiet neighborhood and nobody bothers you. It feels like we're in the country. They have deer running around outside."

Darcelle is grateful for her new home. She hopes she and the deer stay a long time.

### Community Access Unlimited is updating our mailing list!

Would you prefer to get our publications emailed to you?

~

Has your contact information changed?

~

Do you have any friends who would be interested in hearing about our supports and services?

If so, please take a few minutes to update your information on our website at:

<http://www.caunj.org/forms/subscribe.php>

For any questions, please contact:

Katie Baird, Coordinator of Marketing & Fundraising  
908.354.3040 ext. 376





## Banking on The Future

### Union County Savings Bank

**contributes to Financial Literacy, Affordable Housing and Employment for Local Youth and Adults with Disabilities**

Union County Savings Bank has donated \$10,000 to Community Access Unlimited to support the agency's financial literacy, employment and housing services. Union County Savings Bank and CAU have maintained a long relationship anchored on a bright future for youth and adults with disabilities.

"We make these donations on the basis of the role Community Access Unlimited plays in the City of Elizabeth and Union County in helping people with disabilities and at-risk youth," Donald Sims, president and CEO said. "We want to be sure they continue to reach as many as possible."

CAU Executive Director, Sidney Blanchard added, "CAU is grateful to business and community partners such as Union County Savings Bank for working together with us to see people with disabilities and at risk youth recognize their dreams of a home of their own, a job or other meaningful daily activity and financial security for the future."

Union County Savings Bank provides financial literacy education annually for CAU's members. Robert Auster, assistant vice president, conducts the trainings. Members visit the bank and learn the importance of saving and planning ahead for financial security.

A class is scheduled in March for 10-15 of CAU's youth members. The initiative stems from the bank's ongoing commitment to the community and the priority to help increase financial education and employment success for young people in Elizabeth and Union County.

Union County Savings Bank has been a member of the CAU Community Network since its inception. The CAU Community Network is a group of representatives from Union County businesses who are dedicated to helping people with disabilities, youth in New Jersey's child welfare system, and people with affordable housing needs reach their potential and be integrated into the community.



*Shawanna Hicks, a member of CAU's Youth Services program makes a deposit at the local Union County Savings Bank branch...An investment in her future!*

## CAU Members Join the Boy Scouts

While the week of February 5 celebrated Scouting Anniversary Week the spirit of scouting can be seen year-round at CAU as about 30 members take part in the Boy Scouts of America Venturing program.



*Members of CAU visit the Trailside Nature & Science Center in the Watchung Reservation as part of their participation in the Venturing crew program of the Boy Scouts of America.*

Venturing is a youth development program of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) open to both young men and women intended to

provide positive experiences to help members mature, develop skills and advance their knowledge. Each Venturing crew is a partnership between the crew members, their adult leaders and community organizations that establish the crew, such as CAU.

Recognizing the benefits of group membership and interaction, CAU worked with local BSA representatives to create a Venturing crew for its members within the developmental disabilities program.

About 30 members meet biweekly with two representatives of BSA's Venturing program and CAU program staff and behaviorists. Recently the crew adopted the name the Cougar crew.

"We are encouraging our members to take more leadership roles," said Kerin Monaco, a behaviorist at CAU involved with the program. "It gives them access to the social skills they otherwise wouldn't have access to and it entails skill-building and resource-building activities."

In addition, Venturing instills consistency and responsibility in the members. It enables them to learn what being part of a group means and that they need to be consistent in their attendance and behavior. They look forward to coming to each meeting. It's also just a lot of fun."

While the Cougars began their venturing with activities such as arts and crafts, they have since adopted more skill-building activities. They also enjoy field trips, again designed to provide learning and development opportunities within a fun setting.



*Members and staff of CAU enjoy arts and crafts during annual Scouting Day at Jockey Hollow.*

"We learn about safety in the community and all about nature," said CAU member Joyce. "And I like to hang out with the members. I was in Girl Scouts but it wasn't the same. We learn more now."



## Ira Geller Memorial Walk-a-Thon Raises Nearly \$37,000



For the second consecutive year CAU members, staff, family and friends ignored the dark clouds of both rain and a stubborn economy and proved that the desire to help others is greater than both, raising nearly \$37,000 at the 2011 Ira Geller Memorial Walk-A-Thon, a record.

"Even during a time of lingering economic strain and high unemployment we have seen the assistance and encouragement we receive from the community and our business supporters continue to increase," said Mercedes Witowsky, associate executive director.

The more than 30 sponsors of the walk included \$1,000 sponsors Dr. Baljit Sappal of Elizabeth and Woodruff Developers of Hillside, as well as a number of banks and other businesses from throughout Union County and beyond.

Kathy Wiener, owner and principal consultant of Richard Boris Management Developers and a member of the CAU board of trustees, said the annual walk is an opportunity on many levels.

"It's great exercise. It's a wonderful party," she said. "It's a great opportunity to get together and support the organization both in spirit and by raising money."

Adelaide Daskam has been a CAU member for 32 years. She sees the walk-a-thon as another step in the march toward independent living for people with disabilities.

"People with disabilities are trying to network with other people, to show them what it's like for us to live out in the community," Adelaide said. "We want people to help people with disabilities to get the word out. In an institution you don't get to do things like this."

CAU also enjoyed the support of student athletes from New Brunswick High School, who attend the event each year as part of their community service efforts under the Play It Smart program. Members of the basketball and wrestling teams helped CAU staff hand out goody bags and t-shirts.



## Save the Date!

### 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Walk-a-Thon

**Saturday, September 22, 2011**

**Rahway River Park  
Rahway, New Jersey**

***Get Out Your Walking Shoes!!  
Come Join the FUN!!***

***Ask about forming your own  
Walk team to help us reach our goal!***

**For more information, please contact:  
Katie Baird at 908-354-3040 x376**



## Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!



Hurricane Irene, flash flooding, a winter blizzard in October, that earned that month the moniker, "Snowtober 2011," CAU's members were impacted by it all. Some waited hours as roads and downed trees were slowly cleared before they could leave their storm-affected homes to shelter in areas less devastated, where they remained for the week.

Due to the generosity of the Hyde and Watson and Union Foundations, CAU members are now singing, "Let It Snow" to celebrate the organization's preparedness for future storms. The foundations contributed funding for the purchase of vital snow removal equipment.

"With over 200 units of housing in Union County, preparedness and having the right equipment to get the job done quickly is key," explained Richard Couch, Property Manager. "Members have jobs in the community they need to get to and staff they depend on," Couch said.

Whatever the rest of the winter brings, thanks to these foundations, CAU is ready.





## Youth Find Shelter and a Future

A jigsaw puzzle sits half-finished upon the table within the Union County Youth Shelter. On any given day four young people at crucial points in their adolescence try to fit the pieces of their lives into a picture that offers a brighter future.

Some are referred by the Family Crisis Intervention Unit of the Union County Youth Services Bureau. Others are ordered to the shelter by the juvenile justice system rather than being sent to the Union County Juvenile Detention Center.

Sadiel, 16, has been at the shelter for 20 days. He wants to finish high school and play football for Ohio State University while earning a degree in business.

"That's if I'm not locked up," he said.

Joseph, 17, has been at the shelter for 65 days. He hopes to finish trade school and start his own plumbing business.

"(The shelter) keeps me out of trouble," Joseph said.

The Union County Youth Shelter makes a difference in the lives of the youth who are fortunate enough to be sent there.

"Many will see they're being given a second chance," said Julia Leftwich, a director at CAU, which runs the shelter for Union County. "The counselors will try to get them to see how the decisions they made got them here and how they have to make better decisions."

While at the shelter a staff of 13 plus a teacher provide independent living skills, counseling, on-site schooling by a state-certified teacher or at the youth's home school, family counseling and, if necessary, intervention.

CAU has been running the shelter since 2006. The facility serves as transitional housing for youths aged 13-17, up to four at a time. After their stay at the shelter the youths are directed by Family Crisis or the courts into residential housing, treatment if there is a substance abuse issue, home or, if deemed necessary by the court, the Union County Juvenile Detention Center.

Detention is the avoided goal. Facilities such as this play an important role in redirecting young people away from a downward spiral, according to Tanya Johnson, CAU senior assistant executive director of youth services.

"We provide individual support that is extremely important at a critical juncture in their lives," Tanya said. "Detention is more institutionalized. We do more goal-setting, trying to get them to think about their future. Here they still have the ability to make choices and we help them see how those decisions will impact their future."



*Tanya Johnson, CAU Senior Assistant Executive Director, reviews the 2011 Shelter Annual Report with Union County Freeholder Chairman Alexander Mirabella.*

Youth facing a crisis at home are no less vulnerable and CAU is able to help these young people, as well, through both the youth shelter and the Union County Runaway Shelter, which it also operates in the same building.

"Without these facilities, most of the youth we serve in the youth shelter would be in detention and most of the homeless youth would still be homeless," Tanya said.

Darren, 16, has his entire life ahead of him. Yet not long ago

Darren was ordered by the court to enter the Union County Youth Shelter. While living at the shelter he learned ways to stay out of trouble. Today he is on a safe path forward.

"It's better to go to the shelter because it's better for you," he said. "It's safe (and) the counselors are good."



*The Union County Freeholders visited the Youth Shelter on February 23<sup>rd</sup> to see how their efforts have helped youth in Union County. The visit was an opportunity to showcase supports provided at the shelter and build awareness of the shelter's importance to those in our community.*

### 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards Night Celebration

Wednesday, April 18, 2012  
6:00 PM - 9:30 PM

L'Affaire Fine Catering,  
Mountainside

#### Tickets

\$35.<sup>00</sup> per Person  
\$300.<sup>00</sup> Table of Ten

The Awards Night Celebration is an event to recognize and honor staff, members, and community leaders who have made a valuable impact on the lives of teens and adults with special needs.

For more information, please contact:  
Katie Baird, Event Coordinator  
908.354.3040 x376 or kbaird@caunj.org



## 2011 Gala Shines Spotlight on Shining Leaders



*Dawn Apgar, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, accepts the Public Leadership Award from Sid Blanchard, CAU Executive Director (left) and Walter Kalman, Executive Director of NASW-NJ.*

CAU applauded the continuing efforts of two high-ranking state administrators who each day improve life opportunities for people with disabilities and at-risk youth at the agency's 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Gala this fall. Helping Hands Self-Advocacy Group also was recognized for its ongoing commitment to focusing on quality-of-life issues and its lobbying efforts on behalf of those with disabilities.

Dr. Alison Lozano was recipient of the Humanitarian of the Year Award, which lauds a person who has provided ongoing support and has had continued influence throughout New Jersey on behalf of people with disabilities and at-risk youth. She is the executive director for the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Dr. Dawn Apgar received the Public Leadership Award, which is awarded to a person or organization for outstanding support of and advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities and youth aging out of foster care. She is deputy commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services, overseeing the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and the Division of Disability Services (DDS).



*Helping Hands Self-Advocacy Group, recipients of the Geller Award.*

Helping Hands Self-Advocacy Group was awarded The Geller Award, which each year is presented to a person or group who have made a significant commitment to their relationship with CAU, have shown initiative and best reflect the universal concept of volunteerism.

Prominent business leaders as well as state, county and local elected officials also were in attendance and paid tribute to the accomplishments of CAU and its members.

The efforts of these honorees and others with like passion collectively further the interests of people with disabilities, according to Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director.

"We must continue to build a community that includes all people," he said.



*Alison Lozano, Executive Director of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, accepts the Humanitarian of the Year Award from Sid Blanchard and Deborah Spitalnik, Executive Director of the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities.*

## TD Charitable Foundation Grant Expands Our Reach

The TD Charitable Foundation recently provided CAU with a \$15,000 grant in support of the agency's HomeShare Program. The TD Charitable Foundation is the charitable giving arm of TD Bank, America's Most Convenient Bank.

HomeShare, administered by CAU in Union County, helps residents experiencing financial hardship and difficult housing costs stay in their homes by pairing them with people who are currently or soon-to-be homeless. This lessens the financial burden of housing for both – even staving off eviction or foreclosure – while often providing companionship, financial and personal security and mutual support.

CAU identifies potential candidates, performs interviews and background checks and provides follow-up services. CAU averages more than 1,100 calls per year relating to housing and expects to assist 40 people through 20 matches in 2012 through HomeShare, many made possible by the TD Charitable Foundation grant.

At one point in 2011 there were 1,471 homeless men, women and children counted in Union County, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, although the number at any time may be more than 4,000. Among the leading causes of homelessness are unemployment, eviction and housing costs, according to the Corporation for Supportive Housing.

"HomeShare provides an alternative to homelessness and the indignity it brings to those who are struggling due to economic constraints beyond their control," said Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director. "The program also provides relief to those who are struggling to hold on to their homes, as well as to those who are lonely. We would not be able to positively impact so many lives without the support we receive from community partners such as the TD Charitable Foundation."

"We are proud to award this grant to CAU," said Mary Jane McDonough, vice president for TD Bank. "The support and services that HomeShare provides to distressed residents of Union County are critical to helping keep them in safe, affordable homes."



*Sid Blanchard receives a check for \$15,000 from the TD Charitable Foundation in support of the agency's HomeShare Program from TD Bank representatives Rosalinda Perez (left), Mary Jane McDonough and Martin Melilli, all vice presidents at the bank.*





## Save the Date!

### 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Gala Dinner Dance

Wednesday, October 24, 2012

6:00 PM - 10:30 PM

L'Affaire Fine Catering Mountainside, New Jersey



A Night Filled with Dinner, Dancing, Awards, & Prizes!!

## Brittany Coleman...Esquire in the Making

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.*

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Brittany Coleman has justice in her heart.

"I've always been interested in law since I was a little girl," she said. "Everything it represents, protection of human rights, advocating for people. It was something I gravitated to."

Gravity and a lot of hard work have brought Brittany one step closer to that dream – one very important step. The senior at Drew University and member of CAU's Transitional Opportunities Program recently passed the Law School Admission Test, or LSAT. She has set her next goal of attending Rutgers School of Law with an eye toward practicing international law.

"I want to work for the United Nations," she said. "I want to work with the Middle East conflict. That's something that has really interested me."

Toward that end Brittany has balanced her major of psychology with a minor in political science and also studies Arabic – all on the way to maintaining a 3.2 grade point average.

Membership in CAU has helped, as Brittany was able to find the security of housing at an important time in her life, her freshman year in college. She had recently left the foster family with whom she had been living and was without permanent housing when she joined CAU. Now she lives in a Supportive Housing apartment, works and attends school.

Brittany feels very strongly that education is a wonderful launching pad for a better life, a message she hopes younger youth learn.

"Knowledge is power," she said. "If you want to change your situation or poverty or family life, education can make a difference. To waste that opportunity is setting yourself up for a life of hardship. Try to find something you're passionate about."

Brittany has. Justice.

## Seussical Jr. is coming to CAU!



Community Access Unlimited is bringing the magic of Dr. Seuss to life in his story of Horton the gentle elephant who discovers a city of tiny Whos on a speck of dust and places it on a clover. The story is filled with charismatic characters and exciting events, allowing audience members an opportunity to escape into a magical world addressing real life situations!

It seems fitting that CAU would do a musical that conveys people are people first regardless of their size; after all this is the basis of CAU's mission. Just as our mission communicates that we strive to have our members become active and important members of our society, Seussical is one of the projects we have taken on in order to facilitate our goal more pervasively. By including staff, members, and individuals from the community, Seussical is an opportunity for all to come together and have fun.

The project will play a key role in connecting the members we support to those that hold the key to their community inclusion. Participation in a project that welcomes community involvement will help all those involved build relationships and their social capital.

As we begin the process, it's abundantly clear that CAU has several budding stars among us. Both staff and members have come forward with talents even their closest friends did not know they possessed. One particular member who is reserved and quiet, took center stage belting out the show's "It's Possible". Everyone in the room heard her message. For our members, anything is possible and this is taking a step forward by involving people in the community. CAU's mission is more than words on paper. Seussical demonstrates our desire to better the lives of our members and provide our community the same opportunities.

We invite you to join us to see what all the excitement's about!

Performances will be held Friday, June 29<sup>th</sup>; Saturday, June 30<sup>th</sup>; and Sunday, July 1<sup>st</sup> at Jonathan Dayton High School in Springfield, New Jersey.

Tickets may be purchased online beginning in May.

Donations and sponsorship opportunities are available. Ads are also available in the Seussical Jr. Play Bill.

For more information, please contact:  
Katie Baird at 908-354-3040 ext. 376 or kbaird@caunj.org





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**Community Access Unlimited's Mission:** *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.*

# 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Golf Classic

**Thursday, May 10, 2012**  
**Suburban Golf Club**

**Sponsorship & Playership Opportunities Available**

**Not a golfer??**

**Join us for the Cocktail Reception & Live Auction!!**

**For More Information, Please Contact:**  
**Katie Baird**  
**Coordinator of Marketing & Fundraising**  
**908-354-3040 ext. 376**