



The Independent Citizen

Spring 2018

COMMUNITY ACCESS
UNLIMITED

Honoring Friends and Supporters!

Community Access Unlimited honored a wide variety of friends and supporters at our 2018 Awards Night Celebration, held earlier this month at our headquarters in Elizabeth. Recognizing that CAU cannot fulfill our mission of achieving full community integration for our members without the support of those in the wider community, each year we honor those outstanding partners who help us help our members achieve their fullest potential.

"These award recipients help CAU fulfill our mission of enabling people with disabilities and at-risk youth to live independently within the community," said Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director.

"No one human services agency can achieve full community integration alone. It takes a sustained coordinated effort. These partnerships are invaluable to us and we thank them."



Roselle Councilwoman Denise Wilkerson (left) is congratulated by (left to right) Assemblywoman Annette Quijano; Sid Blanchard, CAU Executive Director; and Elizabeth Mayor Chris Bollwage.

Visit Page 2 to learn more about this year's honorees!

"Helping you achieve independence in the community... that's

THE cau
ADVANTAGE

A Message from our Executive Director



March was National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, with the theme of "See Me For Me." That was followed in April by National Autism Awareness Month, which this year strove to move beyond simply raising awareness of Autism to encouraging friends and collaborators to become partners in movement toward acceptance and appreciation. On page 7 of this newsletter you will read about and see photos of our members with disabilities playing music side-by-side on stage with musicians without disabilities from Kean University.

It is the right of every person with disabilities to be recognized for their individual talents, abilities and contributions to society. Yet when that recognition comes about through the joint effort of those with disabilities and the wider community joining them in support, do we truly achieve an integrated society.

There are examples throughout history of people with disabilities making remarkable contributions to the community, from Helen Keller to the recently deceased Stephen Hawking. Yet every step forward a person with disabilities takes is an accomplishment that should be celebrated. Going out to dinner with family or friends, having a play date with other children for the first time, moving into your own apartment or getting a job – these all are milestones that should be applauded. The fact they often are accomplished with the help of others makes them all that much more special. That's community access unlimited.

Sidney Blanchard, Executive Director



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Nicholas Scalera**



Honoring Friends and Supporters!

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This year's community honorees were:

- Roselle Councilwoman Denise Wilkerson with the Partnership in Community Living Award. Denise really stepped up to help when a fire in our Roselle property left several members without a place to stay and few belongings.
- Mark Obler with the Individual Community Service & Partnership Award. Mark is a CAU staff member who opened his home to several of those members.



Honoring Friends and Supporters! (Continued from Page 2)

- Erich Han William Kussman, Jr., of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Springfield, a member of the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council, with the Community Integration Award.
- Zuleika Almanzar of Disability Services and Advocacy with the Outstanding Community Advocate, Developmental Disabilities Award
- Frederick Idehen of Coordinated Family Care with the Outstanding Community Advocate, Youth Services Award.
- ShopRite of Clark with the Employer of the Year Award.
- TD Bank, Financial Literacy Program, with the Organization Community Services & Partnership Program Award.

CAU also honored four employees who have gone above and beyond in their positions and six CAU members who have accomplished goals in the last year. CAU recognized over 80 members that had been employed for at least one year or more in a competitive employment setting.



Upcoming Events

- MAY -

May 1, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM
Helping Hands Self Advocacy
at the CAU Main Office

May 3, 5:00 PM—8:00 PM
Faith Into Action
at the Suburban Golf Club

May 10, 8:00 AM—5:00 PM
CAU Golf Outing
at the Suburban Golf Club

May 30, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM
Family Connections Meeting
at the Suburban Golf Club

- JUNE -

June 5, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM
Helping Hands Self Advocacy
at the CAU Main Office

June 12, 8:00 AM—4:00 PM
Union County Non-Profit
Networking Conference
At Suburban Golf Club

June 13, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM
Youth Achievement Night
at the CAU Main Office

June 29 & 30 - 7:30 PM,
The CAU Community Players
Present, Annie Jr!
at Rahway High School

- JULY -

July 1 - 2:00 PM
The CAU Community Players
Present, Annie Jr!
at Rahway High School

July 21, 10:00 AM—2:00 PM
Independent City
at the CAU Main Office

July 27, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM
CAU Prom
at the CAU Main Office

- AUGUST -

August 7, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM
Helping Hands Self Advocacy
at the CAU Main Office

August 8, 8:00 AM— 3:00 PM
Youth Conference
at the CAU Main Office

August 15, 6:00 PM— 9:00 PM
Celebration of Life
at the CAU Main Office

**For More Information on
Upcoming Events
Visit www.caunj.org**

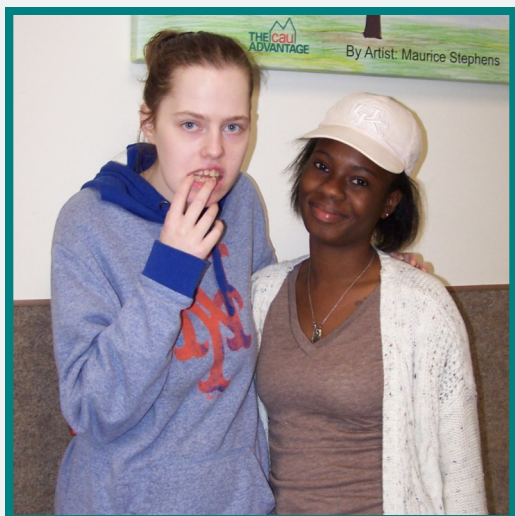
Shining During National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Two CAU members were shining examples of National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in March, which had the theme, "See Me For Me."

Sunnah Bilal Shakir for a long time was very disinterested and disengaged. However, working with CAU staff, Sunnah has blossomed and become more interactive. She attends CAU's Academy for Continuing Education, taking classes in theater, card-making and jewelry. She recently sang in a Cabaret performance and is cast as Miss Mary in CAU's annual musical, "Annie, Jr." Sunnah also is very active in her church, attending mass several times a week and singing in the choir.



Sunnah (center) poses with Jennifer Lebowitz (right), a behaviorist, and Shantena Fleming, employment specialist/job developer



"I love being a member of Community Access," she said. "Singing makes me feel happy. I also like to learn."

April Verducci came to CAU after living in a psychiatric facility. When CAU behaviorists began working with her she was non-verbal and disinterested. Now she is speaking, taking care of herself and interacting with her roommates.

"I like being a member of Community Access," April said. "If I have a problem, I call my staff. I like to come to music class. Tomorrow is karaoke," she added with a big smile.

April (left) poses with Yolanda Atkinson, a CAU behaviorist who works closely with her.



Silly with Slime!

Who knew science could create such a splat! Thank you to Tina Hansen, Director of Behavioral Services for running a Science Group at the Cranford Day Program in April. All really enjoyed making their own 'Ooblec' aka, slime, with cornstarch, water, and food coloring.

Expanding Boundaries for National Autism Awareness Month

Christopher Rodriguez sat at his dining room table pointing to images to explain what food he wanted from Schlier Langhorn, his CAU behaviorist. His mother, Rosemaria Rodriguez, watched and his Australian Shepherd sat beside him hoping for a treat. Each time Christopher, who is on the Autistic spectrum in addition to being epileptic, completed the exercise, Rosemaria beamed in delight. Last year Rosemaria quit her job to stay home with Christopher after he was abused at a day program and came away with a fractured femur.



Christopher and Rosemaria Rodriguez (center) pose with his CAU behaviorists Jennifer (left) and Schlier.

"It took me a long time to allow someone to come in but I'm glad I did," she said. "Schlier and Jennifer (Lebowitz) are great."

"When we first began working with Chris he had limited means of communicating even basic wants and needs to his mother and other family members," Jennifer said. "He would engage in aggressive behavior as a form of communicating when he wanted something and/or when he was in distress."

Christopher has learned to communicate using pictures to express his requests. He has learned to redirect himself to his room, his safe space, when he becomes agitated. Next Schlier and Jennifer will work on taking Christopher out into the community and work on his community integration skills.

"I feel like we're a team," Schlier said, which is the theme of this year's National Autism Awareness Month.

Sixteen Youth Celebrate One Year as Members

This spring 16 youth who have found a place here at CAU celebrated their new beginning when the Transitional Opportunities Program (TOP) held its annual celebration for those members marking one year in the program.

Casandra Jeffers, 20, and Tyshaun Williams-Jones, 19, are two youth who came to CAU 12 months ago. "I'm so happy here," said Casandra, who was living in an adult shelter in Newark before coming to CAU.



CAU youth members marked one year of stability and new beginning at a recent celebration

"When you're growing up in shelters, it's good to come to a program like this. The members treat you like family. You have a beautiful apartment at low cost. You have a counselor who helps you budget your time and helps you reach your goals. There's a lot of love here."

Tyshaun was living in a group home in New Brunswick before coming to CAU. Now he lives in an apartment with three roommates and works at CAU on the janitorial staff. Since becoming a CAU member he said he has defined both short-term and long-term goals.

"I'm planning on getting a car and going to college," he said. "We have a group here and they bring in someone to talk about college so my long-term goal is to go to college for clothes design."

Music to our Ears



Melody Lucas (center left) and Adam Fleissner, members of Community Access Unlimited, are flanked by Lyn Schraer-Joiner (left) of Kean University and Marguerite Modero of CAU backstage before the concert.

Collaborative Concert

In January about 25 members of CAU's Academy of Continuing Education (ACE) joined with about 20 Kean music students for a one-hour collaborative concert at the Wilkins Theater at Kean University that drew approximately 600 attendees. Kean music majors have been working with ACE students for three years, helping them learn and appreciate music and teaching them how to play instruments.

Melody Lucas and Adam Fleissner are CAU members who participated in the concert. Lucas sings and plays bass guitar while Fleissner sings.

"I like it, it's fun," Melody said. "I get to show my talents. I've been singing since I was five years old. It's therapeutic for me."

"You get to unleash your talent," Adam said. "It makes you feel good. It's nice to meet new people and other people get to learn about you."

"My students have embraced the importance of music for everyone regardless of ability," said Lyn Schraer-Joiner, Kean's music education coordinator. Added Marguerite Modero, musical director at ACE, "It's about being on a equal plane as musicians, enjoying each other's talents and proving we have the ability to excel."

The arts program was made possible in part by a HEART (History, Education, Arts Reaching Thousands) Grant from the Union County Board of Freeholders.

The Cabaret

Then in February CAU staged its first Cabaret as CAU members performed a variety of music, including Sister Sledge's "We Are Family," the music of Stevie Wonder and hip hop in two acts.



CAU Community players performing at first Cabaret

Being Heard

Our song is being heard. In March, Lyn and Marguerite were honored to present at the 2018 Research Conference of the National Association for Music Education, speaking about the joint CAU-Kean program, specifically a composition workshop in which CAU members created their own song, "Peaceful Mind," which was performed at the collaborative concert.

"We've seen how music impacts the members' lives, how working with others in a music setting can really make you feel better about yourself," Lyn said. "Their attitudes changed and how they carry themselves." Added Marguerite, "Every time I do these presentations I'm brought back to the pride I have in the members of CAU. They overcome so many obstacles and surpass my goals. If we hadn't had tried this we would never have known."

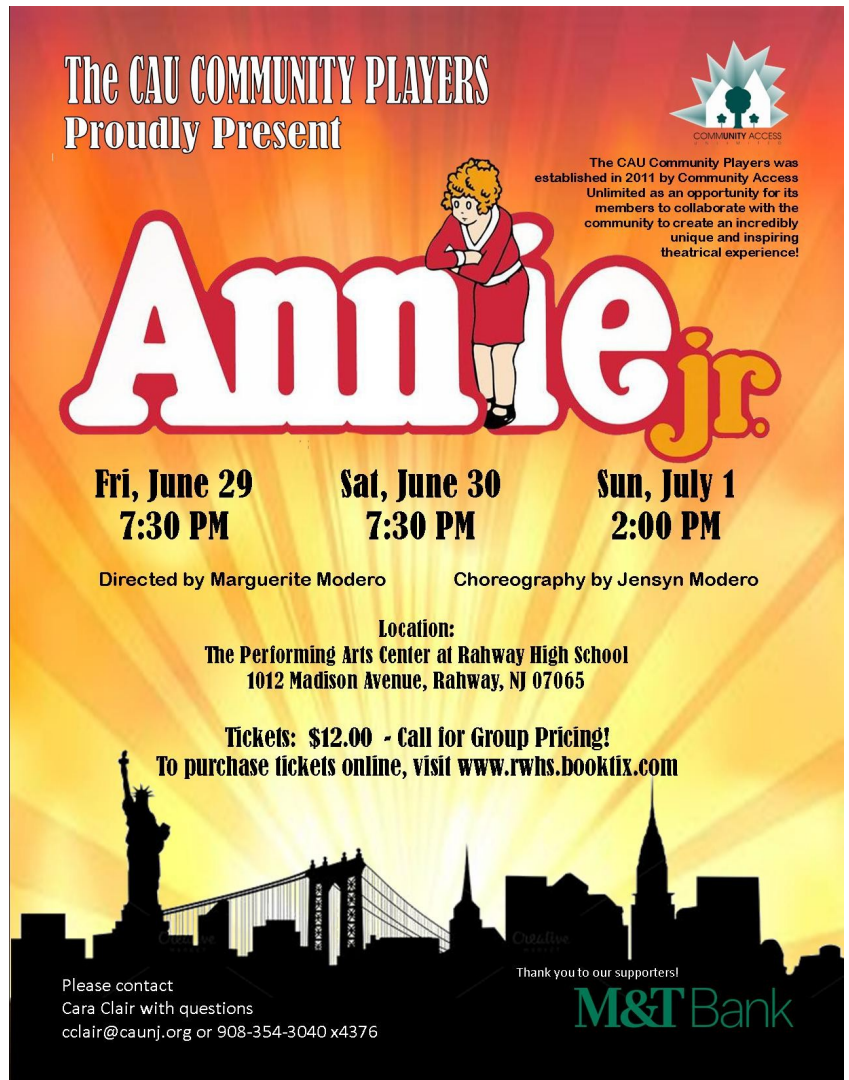
Tomorrow! Tomorrow!"...Is Coming June 29-July 1

Annie is coming...not tomorrow but soon!

The CAU Community Players will be staging "Annie, Jr." as this year's annual musical production. Performances will be held at the Rahway High School Center for Performing Arts Friday, June 29, and Saturday, June 30 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, July 1, at 2:00 p.m.

The CAU Community Players is a troupe of actors both with and without developmental disabilities. Formed in 2012, the troupe allows CAU members to engage in the pleasures of acting, singing and dancing side by side with actors from the wider community and to be judged for their talents rather than disabilities. The productions also foster cast interaction and bond-building.

"Annie, Jr." is the troupe's seventh play. The musical is based on the comic strip and is adapted from the Tony Award-winning Best Musical. With equal measures of pluck and positivity, little orphan Annie charms everyone's hearts despite a next-to-nothing start in 1930s New York City, eventually finding a new home and family in billionaire Daddy Warbucks and a lovable dog named Sandy.

A vibrant poster for the musical "Annie Jr." featuring a cartoon illustration of Annie in a red dress and white collar, standing next to the large, stylized title "Annie Jr." in white and red. The background is a warm orange and yellow gradient with silhouettes of the Statue of Liberty and the Manhattan skyline at the bottom. Text on the poster includes: "The CAU COMMUNITY PLAYERS Proudly Present", "Fri, June 29 7:30 PM", "Sat, June 30 7:30 PM", "Sun, July 1 2:00 PM", "Directed by Marguerite Modero", "Choreography by Jensyn Modero", "Location: The Performing Arts Center at Rahway High School, 1012 Madison Avenue, Rahway, NJ 07065", "Tickets: \$12.00 - Call for Group Pricing! To purchase tickets online, visit www.rwhs.booktix.com", "Please contact Cara Clair with questions cclair@caunj.org or 908-354-3040 x4376", "Thank you to our supporters! M&T Bank", and a small logo for "The CAU Community Players" in the top right corner.

"I wanted a show that was uplifting and showed that no matter how difficult life is you can still rise above your circumstances," said Marguerite Modero, Director of the Community Players. "It speaks to our mission of helping our members achieve their highest potential. It also is a good message for the audience because this is a time when people are feeling ambivalent and this will bring joy into their day."

As always, the production will field a large cast, ranging in age from 6 to 60-plus. Annie is being played by 10-year-old Meela Sashi from Elizabeth. CAU members Adam Fleissner and Scott Birnbaum will play Daddy Warbucks and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, respectively. For Scott, who uses a wheelchair, this is a dream-part come true. Joining Meela from the wider community are Gabriela Thomas playing Grace and longtime CAU Community Players member Samantha Marano as Lily.

Tickets are available at www.rwhs.booktix.com



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Community Access Unlimited's Mission: *Our mission is to provide community access through effective, systematic, comprehensive support services for people with disabilities and their families, giving them the opportunity to live independently and to lead normal and productive lives as citizens integrated into the general community. Services also include the provision of decent housing preferably income integrated and affordable to low and moderate-income people.*



Like & Share!



Save the Date!

Ira Geller Memorial Walk-a-thon

Saturday,
September 15, 2018

Event Time: 12:00 PM

Registration Opens at 11 AM!

Oak Ridge Park, Clark, NJ

FREE EVENT!

**Food - Music - Games &
Lots of Fun!!!**

Visit www.caunj.org for more information