



The Independent Citizen

Fall 2017

COMMUNITY ACCESS
UNLIMITED

SAVE THE DATE!
Gala Dinner Dance
NOVEMBER 2, 2017
Marriott Newark Airport Hotel
(see page 8 for more information)

Congratulations to our 2017 Awardees!

Honoring Those Who Help Our Members

This year Community Access Unlimited will be honoring Union County Freeholder Betty Jane Kowalski and Kevin Casey from the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities at our annual Gala, to be held this year on November 2 at the Marriot Newark Airport Hotel.

Bette Jane Kowalski has been a lifelong advocate for parks, libraries, public transportation and community service here in Union County over her 14 years as a member of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders. As Freeholder Chairwoman in 2007, she promoted initiatives for shared county-local services to reduce costs and increase efficiency and continues to work to ensure high quality, cost-effective services for county residents. Bette Jane worked to bring direct service to New York for Raritan Valley riders during off-peak hours. She supported funding for children's projects at public libraries and for community gardens. She helped address the issue of Rahway River flood control. Bette Jane serves as the Freeholder liaison to the Human Services Advisory Council, which coordinates the services of the county and various agencies and organizations to seniors, children and those in need. And as a member of the Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund, she worked to add many acres of land to the Union County Parks system.

Kevin Casey is the Executive Director of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD). Hailing from Bloomington, Illinois, Kevin came to the NJCDD in March 2015 to lead the daily work of the council in its mission to advocate for individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in New Jersey. *Continued on page 2*



Union County Freeholder
Bette Jane Kowalski



Mr. Kevin Casey
NJCDD



A Message from our Executive Director

At Community Access Unlimited we serve approximately 6,000 members throughout New Jersey, including adults with various physical and intellectual disabilities and youth served under the Department of Children and Families. We provide support and give a voice to adults and youth who traditionally have had little support and no voice in society.

We help our members with housing, life skills training, vocational skills and employment, health maintenance, money management, socialization, education, crisis

intervention, civic activities, community integration and advocacy. CAU provides more all-encompassing residential and support services than any other organization of our kind.

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.

In turn, our support of our members benefits the wider community, as well. Communities realize revenue from income taxes and sales taxes as our members work and shop. Business gain loyal, dependable and hard-working employees. More importantly, the community benefits as people break down the walls of discrimination and better realize the significant contributions to community life people with disabilities make. We become a more inclusive and cohesive society. There can be no whole community without inclusion of all.

Sidney Blanchard
Executive Director



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& Nicholas Scalera**

Cont. From Page 1 Honoring Those Who Help Our Members

Before joining the NJCDD, Kevin spent 11 years leading the Illinois and Pennsylvania state divisions that oversee services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Previously, he led nonprofit organizations that provide services for people with developmental disabilities, including serving for 15 years as the director of Pennsylvania Protection & Advocacy, Inc. Kevin began his career teaching and providing direct service for teens with both mental illness and intellectual disabilities. He is a graduate of Illinois State University with a bachelor of science degree in social sciences and a master's degree in special education.

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Luigi Gianni Finds the Rewards of Work

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.



Upcoming Events

- OCTOBER -

Oct. 5 6:00 PM—7:30 PM
Helping Hands Self Advocacy
at the CAU Main Office

Oct 11, 5:30 PM—9:00 PM
Family Connections Meeting
at the Suburban Golf Club

Oct 24, 7:00 PM—8:00 PM
UCICC Hosts the
5th Annual Day of Prayer
The Parish Community of St.
Helen's, Westfield, NJ

Oct. 25, 8:00 AM—3:00 PM
UCYN Hosts the 4th Annual
Union County Youth
Networking Conference
at the CAU Main Office

- NOVEMBER -

Nov. 2 , 6:00 PM—10:00 PM
CAU Gala Dinner Dance
Newark Liberty International
Airport Marriott

Nov. 14, 5:30 PM—8:00 PM
10 Years + Event
at the CAU Main Office

Nov. 16, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM
Holiday Express
at the CAU Main Office
Tickets must be purchase in advance

Nov. 18, 10:00 AM—2:00 PM
Who Wants to be Independent?
at the CAU Main Office

*The CAU Main Office will be
closed November 23 & 24 in
observance of the holiday!*

- DECEMBER -

Dec. 5, 6:00 PM—7:30 PM
Helping Hands Self Advocacy
at the CAU Main Office

*The CAU Main Office
will be closed December 22 &
December 25, as well as
December 29 and January 1
in observance of the holiday!*

- JANUARY -

Jan 9 6:00 PM—7:30 PM
Helping Hands Self Advocacy
at the CAU Main Office

Jan 5, 7:30 PM—9:30 PM
The ACE Collaborative Concert
at Kean University

Jan 16, 6:00 PM-8:00 PM
Jan 18, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM
Jan 20, 10:00 AM—3:00 PM
Auditions for the
2018 Theatre Production
at the CAU Main Office

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

Making Their Voice Heard

Members of the New American Movement for People With Disabilities (NAM) recently attended the Union County Department of Human Services Public Hearing for the Paratransit System and member Marcella Truppa testified. NAM is a movement committed to changing the social, political and economic structure of society so that all people can live with pride as equals regardless of class, race, sex, gender, orientation, religion, income or disability status.

"We attend hearings on subjects that impact people with disabilities and align with the things we stand for, such as transportation, housing and services," said Michael Williams, Community Organizer at CAU. "We prepare testimony and enable our members to have their voices heard."

Yet on this occasion, none of those NAM members attending planned to speak. That was until Marcella was moved to share her experiences having difficulty traveling using the county's paratransit system, with drivers not showing patience when picking them up from work and being rude to her and threatening to leave her.

"I felt much better telling them about what was happening to me," said Marcella. "I feel like this might be happening to other people, too. This was important to me and I'm glad I spoke up."

After Marcella testified, Karen Dinsmore, acting Director of the Union County Department of Human Services, asked for more input.

"They took great interest in what Marcella had to say," Michael said. "I guess our work is paying off because she was very comfortable testifying. Our members are advocates and this hearing was a testimony to their growth."



Marcella Truppa testifies at the Union County Department of Human Services Public Hearing for the Paratransit System as acting Human Services Director Karen Dinsmore listens. Marcella was joined by other members of the New American Movement for People With Disabilities.

Making Strides for Our Members

More than 450 CAU members, staff, friends and community supporters gathered this September for the 16th Annual Ira Geller Walk-a-Thon, which raises money to support our members and the programs that serve them. The walkers gathered at Oak Ridge Park in Clark for a delicious barbecue, games and plenty of lively music. This year's walk raised more than \$55,000 and CAU is especially thankful for the support of Spire Group, PC; American Business Communications Services, Inc; Woodruff Developers; Borden Perlman Salisbury & Kelly; Inglesino, Webster, Wyciskala & Taylor, LLC; and Santander. According to Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director, the Walk-a-Thon celebrates all that CAU strives to be – support for those needing help and the wider community coming together in celebration.



October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

October is national Disability Employment Awareness Month, an area in which CAU and many of its members shine. CAU operates an Employment and Day Habilitation Services Department committed to assisting those members who wish to work, comprising pre-placement services that include training in interviewing skills, work dress and on-the-job behavior; serving as the liaison between the member and employer; on-the-job coaching; and follow-up to ensure both the member and the employer are happy.

"We are there for every aspect of the process, giving them everything they need to get a job, coaching them while they're learning on the job and providing tools to help them be successful," said Fredia McKinnie, Assistant Executive Director of the department. "We're always serving as the advocate for both the member and the employer."

More than 50 CAU members are employed at businesses, in areas including retail, maintenance, clerical, culinary, security and animal care. Businesses employing CAU members include ShopRite, Sam's Club, Target, Marshall's, the Swan Motel, the Irvington Board of Education, the Humane Society and CAU itself (8 percent of CAU's 1,200 employees are people with disabilities).

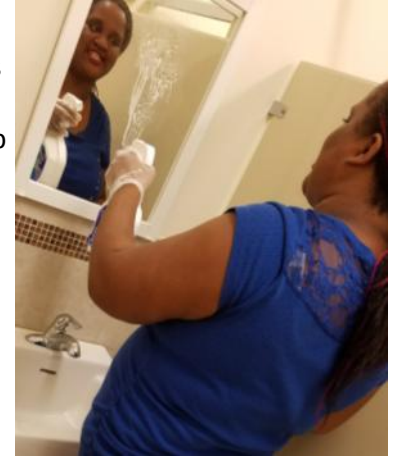
Sharon Mohry has been employed at ShopRite for more than 20 years, working six hours a day one or two days a week. While she started in maintenance, today she fills orders that come in online for either pick-up or delivery. Sharon loves her job.

"I like the people," she said. "My supervisor, Laura, is very good to me. I like what I do and I really like getting paid. You work hard for your money."

Laura says Sharon is an excellent employee. "She's the best," she said. "She does everything we ask and more. She's always here and always pleasant."

There are substantial benefits to businesses who employ people with disabilities. Workers with disabilities have a higher retention rate than those without – some CAU members have been working for the same employer for decades. They are very reliable – they have extremely high attendance and are committed to performing their tasks well. Workers with disabilities have a significantly higher performance record in the area of safety than their counterparts without disabilities.

In addition, employing people with disabilities increases a company's diversity, which has been documented to benefit businesses in such areas as enhanced customer service and improved return on investment and sales. And businesses employing people with disabilities may qualify for certain tax breaks.

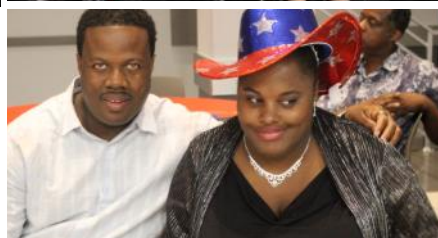


Many CAU members are employed: (Below) CAU Member Maurice Stephens works as a security guard in Roselle. (Above) Sunnah Bilal-Shakir works on the CAU Cleaning Crew. 8% of CAU's employee base are members that CAU also provides supports to.



(Caption) Sharon Mohry (left) poses with Laura Augustine, ShopRite From Home Manager, in front of the Clark ShopRite.

The Never-Ending Prom



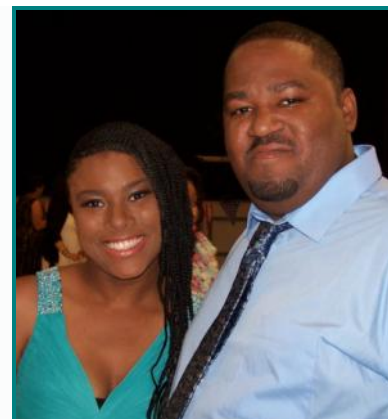
This years prom welcomed more then 90 people to the celebration!

Prom is a magical time for so many young people, a night filled with gowns and tuxedos, limousine rides to elegant catering halls, fine food and romantic dancing. They are nights treasured for a lifetime. Yet many people with disabilities do not have those memories because they never went to prom, either because they attended an alternative education program or simply because no one ever asked them and they did not feel welcomed.

CAU members are able to create memories of attending prom and even make new ones year after year. This summer more than 90 members and their guests dressed to the nines and attended the 12th Annual CAU Community Prom. They enjoyed good food, music from a DJ, dancing and prom pictures. "We started this years ago and decided to have the Prom every year so no member would ever feel left out," said Gary Rubin, an officer in CAU's Helping Hands self-advocacy group, which sponsors the dance each year.

Maurice Stephens, a CAU member, and Shalnika Jackson, a former member, attended the prom together. Shalnika left CAU several years ago and she and Maurice recently ran into each other in the community, reconnecting just in time for the Prom. "I like the music, the fun and I like to dance," Shalnika said as she pulled Maurice out onto the dance floor. "It's nice to see people dressed up," Maurice added. "I was supposed to DJ but I wanted to spend time with Shalnika."

The CAU Prom is open to all members of the community, not simply CAU members. "Our mission at CAU is to enable our members to live fully integrated lives within the community," said Rolando Zorrilla, Assistant Executive Director of Developmental Disabilities Support Services. "That is why we welcome everyone to this event."



(Left) Shalnika Jackson and Maurice Stephens (right) on Prom night!

Testing Their Independence

Life is not always easy and often requires tough choices. While young people living within the child welfare system do not yet face these decisions, they will when they are adults living on their own. To help prepare them, CAU each year holds an event called Independent City, where CAU youth members and youth from the wider community aged 13-31 learn how to live on their own.

"It's like a reality game that teaches youth about life, things they need to know to be independent," said Michele Mobley, Director of Youth Services at CAU. At the event this year, CAU's auditorium was filled with tables representing different entities, such as utilities, food stores, apartments and assistance agencies. Each attendee was assigned an identification – some had children, others did not – and a salary and were instructed by staff on how to best spend their money. "They go around to look for food or utilities such as



We were fortunate to be joined by members of the local community who volunteered their time to support at-risk youth!

CAU Youth Members Learn They are the Future

More than 200 youth living within the child welfare system and wider community were told recently they are the future. That was the message of the keynote speaker at CAU's 2017 Annual Youth Conference, which brings together at-risk youth from throughout New Jersey, as well as dozens of human services professionals from more than 20 programs supporting them.

"It's about bringing together youth from throughout the state and helping them learn about life skills while giving them the chance to have fun in a learning environment," said Howard Wingard, Supported Housing Coordinator at CAU. "It's a great opportunity for all the different programs to come together."

This year's keynote was Lana Whitehead, founder and owner of Sharpened Mindz Certified Coaching, a mentor and social worker and a former player for the Miami Sol of the WNBA. "You are the future," she told the youth. "You are the trail-blazers and you have to take a stance. It's scary now with all this hatred and people being judged not for who they are.

It's not the way you were raised. You have no time for intolerance." Whitehead talked about how her passion for basketball initially drove her but how education became so important for her success. "Education is paramount today," she said. "You need to find someone who can touch you and push you. They are your extended family. And you have to build yourself as a leader."

Barshay Stinson and Asia Lee are two CAU youth members who attend the conference every year and served on the planning committee this year. "I love being a member of CAU," said Barshay, who came to CAU in 2014 after living in a foster home. "The best thing is you make new friends. It feels good to be around people with the same background who are not afraid to talk about it. We're like family." Asia, who came to CAU in 2013 after living in foster care, said, "The conference brings people together and we see what we're learning is not just talk. The energy confirms it's always getting better."



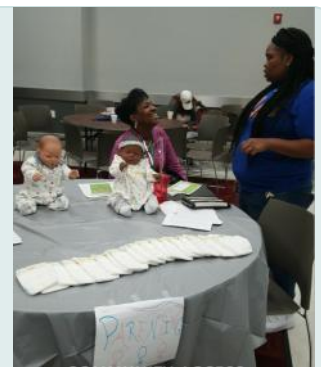
(Left to right) Barshay Stinson, CAU youth member; Lana Whitehead, founder and owner of Sharpened Mindz Certified Coaching; Asia Lee, CAU youth member

PSE&G," Michelle said. "They try to get Social Security or other kinds of assistance. They decide, 'Okay, I only make this amount and I need to make some decisions.'" Helping to complete the "city" were professionals such as physicians and lawyers, members of the armed services and representatives from colleges explaining financial aid. This year more than 70 youth attended, including Nicole Jenkins and Zania Brown.



Nicole, 19, has been a CAU member for less than a year. She came to us from Volunteers of America, a supervised independent living program and now lives in a CAU property. "It was fun," she said of her Independent City experience. "They had a lot going on. It was like a refresher for me because I'd been through something similar." Nicole must have learned a lot their first time because she said she had no problem making her money last and purchasing all the goods and services she needed.

Zania, 18, has been with CAU since January. She came to us after living with a friend and now resides in a CAU apartment with a roommate. "It was a good experience to learn how to budget and other things," she said about going through Independent City. "I got everything I needed and still had extra money left. It helped prepare me."



Conference attendees experienced parenthood during the event

Youth enjoyed learning about budgeting throughout the event using pretend money to 'pay' for every day needs

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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.*



Annual **Gala** Dinner Dance

Venue

Newark International Airport Marriott
1 Hotel Road, Newark, NJ 07114
Thursday, **November 2, 2017**

Evening Begins at 6:00pm

Join us for dancing, food, a
silent auction & celebrations!

CAU Members & Staff - \$85.00

Additional Guests - \$135.00

Formal Attire Requested

Sponsorship Levels & Ad Sizes

Sapphire Sponsor \$10,000 - 1 table of 10, full page ad, verbal recognition at event and in pre-event materials (if before deadline), mention in press coverage, recognition on CAU website and at event

Platinum Sponsor \$5,000 - 1 table of 10, full page ad, verbal recognition at event, mention in press coverage, recognition on CAU website

Gold Sponsor \$2,500 - 1 table of 10, full page ad, recognition on the CAU website

Silver Sponsor \$1500 - 5 guest tickets, full page ad, recognition on the CAU website

Bronze Sponsor \$1000 - 4 guest tickets, half page ad, recognition on the CAU website

Inside Front Cover.....\$750

Inside Back Cover..... **SOLD**

Center Spread.....\$675

Full Page Ad.....\$350

Half Page Ad.....\$175

Quarter Page Ad.....\$100

Family Message.....\$50

For ticket or ad information contact, Cara Pavia, 908.354.3040 x4376 or cpavia@caunj.org