



The Independent Citizen

Spring 2017

COMMUNITY ACCESS
UNLIMITED

The Year of Art at CAU

Check Out the Upcoming Events at CAU!

CAU Awards Night Celebration
April 6, 2017
More information— Page 3

**Performance by the New Jersey
Symphony Orchestra with
Opening Act, CAU Rocks Band**
May 11, 2017

**CAU Golf Classic at
Suburban Golf Club**
May 15, 2017

**Concert by the
Celebration of Cranford Singers
with Opening Act,
the CAU Community Players**
May 16, 2017

The year 2017 will be the Year of Art here at Community Access Unlimited as our staff and members collaborate with each other and members of the wider community to bring music and theater to the stage.

The Year of Art started with "Don't Stop Believing," a collaborative concert staged at Kean University's Wilkins Theater with CAU members being joined on stage by music students from Kean. Under the guidance of Dr. Lyn Schraer-Joiner, Kean's music education coordinator, Kean students and CAU members have been collaborating to bring the experience of music to CAU members for more than a year. Last year they staged a joint formal concert, joined by the Roselle School District Choir. This year's performance was more relaxed, with the newly formed CAU Rock Band, a selection of CAU members joined by the Kean students, and choirs from the Roselle Park, Rahway and Elizabeth middle schools.

The combined group performed contemporary selections such as "Don't Stop Believing," "Living on a Prayer" and "When I Grow Up," songs that carry a message of believing in yourself and everyone being able to succeed, according to Marguerite Modero, CAU's music director.

The concert also featured performance of a song that was written as a poem by CAU members Dianna Sims, Juana Quinn and Darin Anderson called "By Choice," with music composed by Professor Georgiann Toole at Shepherd University in West Virginia, who was inspired by the poem. CAU soloists at this year's performance were Melody Lucas, Megan Modero and Tina Witowsky.

"We're trying to involve our members with the college students and students in the wider community to get them acquainted with one another so the students can become familiar with people with disabilities and CAU members can get the college experience they may aspire to but until now have been shut out from," Marguerite said.

Future year of Art events here at CAU will include a performance by the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, a performance by the Celebration of Cranford Singers and, of course, the production of "Aladdin, Jr." by the CAU Community Players. Watch for details about these and other events.

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

THE CAU
ADVANTAGE



A Message from our Executive Director

For some time now I have been talking about how New Jersey is moving to a fee-for-service model for the supports provided to people with disabilities through the state Division of Developmental Disabilities. That transition is now official.

While some people with disabilities and their families have been wary of this change – afraid they will lose support or benefits and concerned that too much administration will fall on them – our members here in Union County and

those we serve throughout New Jersey should be secure in knowing Community Access Unlimited is both ready and financially sound enough to flourish in this new environment.

The change requires service providers serving people with disabilities to make significant investment in technology and infrastructure. We already have. Because the fee-for-service model eliminates direct payment for basic needs, such as rent, food and clothing, there may be gaps in funding where some nonprofits have not properly prepared. We will be there to fill those gaps.

In this new landscape, CAU is ideally positioned and equipped to meet the needs of both our existing members and new members who are not fully supported by other service providers. Our members will not notice any changes in their day-to-day supports but will enjoy greater options when selecting the services to which they are entitled. And we will be there to help them and their families make those selections.

We are looking forward to mastering this landscape together!

Sidney Blanchard
Executive Director



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April 6, 2017 A Night Among the Stars CAU Awards Night Celebration

Cocktail Hour
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm
Includes Hors d'oeuvres and Open Bar

Awards Ceremony
7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Awards Reception
9:00 pm to 10:00 pm

Join us for an hour of Desserts and celebration with the Awardees

Join us for a "Star Studded" Event

Where we recognize and honor people in the community who have had a large impact on the lives of people with disabilities and at-risk youth.

Cocktail Hour Tickets: \$60.00
(Includes Entire Event)

Awards Ceremony Tickets: \$35.00
Arrive at 7:00pm
(Includes Dessert Reception)

RSVP by April 1st

To purchase a ticket or support the event, contact Alyssa Mistretta at 908-354-3040 x4205 or at amistretta@caunj.org





Board Member Profile: Marc Levy

Marc has been a member of the CAU Board of Trustees for about one year. He was recruited by friend and board president Harold Poltrock and brings to the board decades of experience in benefits and finance.

After growing up in Long Island and attending the University of Arizona, Marc began his career working for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, or MetLife, where he worked in business and estate planning consulting. In the late 1990s he took the experience he gained at MetLife and founded MBL Benefits Consulting, which supports businesses through consulting on health care benefits, voluntary benefits, benefits technology, retirement and executive planning, property and casualty insurance and wellness programs.

"Harold and I talked about the board needing someone with my background in finance and benefits and I decided to join," Marc said. "I'm still getting my feet wet, figuring out how I can bring value."

Marc has been impressed with CAU so far. "The organization is phenomenal," he said. "It's great to be involved with an organization with people who have such a passion and want to get things done. It's a lovely environment to be part of."

Changing Lives for the Better

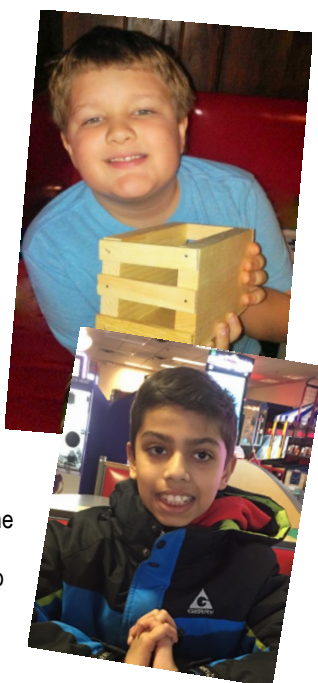
Daniel Jack (DJ) is an 8-year-old with regressive autism. Early in life he met all his milestones – he had an extensive vocabulary and enjoyed playing. Then one day he stopped talking and playing and shut down. While DJ's mother, Sarah, wanted him to receive treatment, his father refused and even became abusive. Sarah left with DJ and was referred to CAU by Perform Care, a behavioral health managed care company. Schlier Langhorn began working with him last July.

"Since Schlier has been working with him he is speaking in sentences and can sit still for a dentist," Sarah said. "The change is amazing. She calls it generalizing his behavior so he can apply what she does with him when she's not here. It's entirely because of the work she does with him that he can do the things he does now. We can take him to a restaurant and events and not be afraid he's going to have a melt-down. It's been such a change."

Aiden is 10 and was diagnosed with ASD and ADHD. He was unable to learn in school and began self-biting and grabbing to get attention. He also had a reflux issue due to eating too quickly. Aiden's parents, Julie and Aneil, were referred to CAU by Perform Care and several behavior technicians began working with him in October, beginning with a diet plan to address the reflux.

"He really wanted to interact with other kids and didn't know how to go about it," Julie said. "And the self-biting and grabbing are out of frustration and distress. They (CAU behavior technicians) said let's try video modeling. Now Aiden's behavior has improved dramatically. He thinks about it. I feel positively our son will be able to interact with other children appropriately."

Julie and Aneil both noted how knowledgeable and flexible is their CAU team. "There is great continuity between the three of them," Aneil said. "And they work with us and incorporate our ideas. They know we know Aiden best and they listen."



(Top) Daniel Jack (DJ) enjoys participating in community events and has even auditioned for the CAU Production of Aladdin Jr.! (Bottom) Aiden recently attended a sensory friendly day at Chuck-E-Cheese with the assistance of the CAU team.

Meet Joanne Oppelt Back to Move Forward

Joanne Oppelt has returned to Community Access Unlimited as assistant executive director, business development.



Joanne was development director at CAU for nine years before leaving in 2011 to take the helm at crisis hotline Caring Contact. In her first term with CAU Joanne raised more than \$11 million through government, foundation, corporate and individual fundraising, greatly expanded the agency's marketing and public relations efforts and introduced our annual report.

In Joanne's new position, she and her team are responsible for all marketing, grant writing and banking relationships, while also assisting with corporate contributions. Joanne's goals is for her team to raise \$5 million per year to allow CAU to continue growing and maintain sustainability – "To provide resources to allow people with disabilities and at-risk youth to achieve independence within the community," she said. Joanne returned to CAU because Sid Blanchard, our executive director, offered her "dream job."

"I love my job," she said. "It's wonderful to be back with people I know. It's such a team environment. The relationships I had with members and staff picked up right where they left off. The feeling is wonderful."

Investing in a Collective Future



Carmen D. Rivera (left), assistant vice president and branch manager in Investors Bank's Elizabeth branch, presents Joanne Oppelt, CAU's assistant executive director-business development, with a \$5,000 contribution toward employment services.

Reflecting the strength and effectiveness of our programs and services, CAU regularly receives grants from the business community, funds that help the agency operate and expand, thus providing support to even more people with disabilities and at-risk youth.

Most recently, CAU received a \$5,000 grant from Investors Foundation to be used for employment services to increase vocational and employment skills and opportunities for people with disabilities and at-risk youth. CAU has about 70 members who are gainfully employed in a variety of sectors, from retail to hospitality and food services to automotive repair, and offers employment services to both members and employers.

Investors Foundation supports nonprofit organizations that enrich the diverse communities served by Investors Bank. "We're a community bank so we are supportive of the communities we serve," said Carmen D. Rivera, assistant vice president and branch manager in Investors' Elizabeth branch. "And Community Access Unlimited does a lot of great things for Elizabeth, Union County and the state."

"Support like this is essential to our mission of enabling people with disabilities to live fulfilling lives fully integrated into the community," said Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director. "Employment is an important component of community living, providing a sense of self-worth, camaraderie and financial rewards that allow our members to be taxpayers, consumers and contributing members of the community."

Car Donation Program Drives Success

Jonathan Kindle has come a long way. Now he can drive to his next destination. Jonathan is the latest recipient of a car donated to CAU through our Car Donation Program. Unlike most other car donation programs, where the organization simply sells the donated car for a fraction of its value, CAU's program delivers real value to both the agency and its members.

After receiving a donated car, CAU repairs the vehicle and gives it to a member who has reached certain accomplishments, including programmatic goals and obtaining a driver's license. CAU pays the insurance and maintenance costs for six months but the ownership of the vehicle is transferred to the member at no cost to them. It's their car.

Jonathan came to CAU from a very restrictive group home at the age of 16 in 2012. He entered CAU's Supervised Transitional Living Program, then progressed to Semi-Independent living and then to Supported Housing. He was named Youth Member of the Year in 2015 and a Colleen Fraser Award scholarship recipient. Today Jonathan works for CAU as an Employment Support Counselor helping members with disabilities with their job tasks. He received his donated car in February.

"This will help me get to places I need to go without walking," Jonathan said. "My commute will be easier. And I want to travel and this will make it easier to do that."

Car donors help more than the person receiving the car – they also help young people in their careers. In January 2017, Community Access Unlimited forged a partnership with Union County Vo-Tech High School. The school has a vehicle repair curriculum for students to learn skills that are transferable to future employment. As part of the collaboration, students perform repair jobs as teaching tools in the classroom. CAU covers the cost of materials. Donors are able to claim the deduction, teachers have hands on teaching materials, students get to learn real-life skills – a win, win, win for all!

Says, Peter Capodice, Union County superintendent "We are extremely proud of our partnership with Community Access Unlimited and how it pertains to our automotive students. Our students through this partnership have the opportunity to give back to their community by making repairs to automobiles that Community Access Unlimited makes available to residents in need of transportation."

CAU car donors are able to claim 100 percent of the vehicle's fair market value. CAU will accept cars of any age and mileage as long as needed repairs are less than \$1,500.



To donate your car, contact
Alyssa Mistretta at 908-354-3040
x4205 or amistretta@caunj.org

Bringing Financial Stability to People with Disabilities

Managing their benefits and finances can be an overwhelming task for people with disabilities and their families. To help, CAU is designated by the Social Security Administration as a Organizational Representative Payee, both for members and people receiving daily support from other social service agencies throughout the state.

As such, CAU receives the Social Security Disability Funds or Supplemental Security Income paid to these individuals directly from the federal government, then manages those funds for them, paying bills and depositing the remainder into their bank account for personal needs. We also issue them a customized reloadable credit card with zero liability and 100 percent fraud protection that can offer ATM access or be designated for transactions only.

"We design a comprehensive financial budget for each individual, working with them throughout the year," said Mildred Batista, Representative Payee Accounting Coordinator. "They or their guardian is always involved and has 100 percent say in all decisions."

Equally important is the role CAU plays in both protecting and enhancing the benefits to which each individual is entitled. "We evaluate each person's financial statements on a monthly basis and if we see they qualify for additional support, we apply for that on their behalf," Mildred said. "If they somehow lose a benefit we work with the county, state or federal government to restore it."



Today CAU supports 300 CAU members as their Representative Payee and 200 additional people throughout the state, generally either people with disabilities being supported by other agencies who are not authorized to serve as a representative payee or members of Home First Financial services, a homeless prevention social services agency run by CAU.

Belinda Malave is a CAU member who enjoys the peace of mind and financial security of having CAU serve as her representative payee.

"They pay the bills, manage my money and make sure I have enough to make it through the month," she said. "If I have any issues or concerns I know who to call and know they will handle it. And for people who have a greater disability than me, it's a very good thing. They might not have anyone to advocate for them and CAU will. They're a safety net."

Aladdin, Jr. Coming to CAU

The CAU Community Players will be staging "Aladdin Jr." in June of 2017. The CAU Community Players is a troupe of individuals with developmental disabilities and actors and actresses from the broader community which allows CAU members to engage in the pleasures of acting, singing and dancing with people from the wider community and to be judged for their talents rather than disabilities.

Each year the CAU Community Players select a play that is representative of the agency's message of inclusion, acceptance and believing in oneself, as well as everyone's worth regardless of disability. Based on the Disney movie, which itself was based on the folk tale of the same name, "Aladdin Jr." is the story of a street urchin, a princess and a genie all overcoming their respective obstacles to escape the traps of their lives and achieve their fullest potential and happiness.

Be on the look out for more information about the upcoming event!

The CAU Community Players Proudly Present



FOR MORE INFORMATION
 Contact **Jonathan Jones** at
 (908) 354-3040 x 4969 or
 at jjones@caunj.org.

Check out our website for more info:
www.caunj.org




Funding has been made possible in part by the NJ State Council on the Arts, Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, through a grant administered by the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs

Make a Difference in the Life of a Youth

CAU accepts donation of the following items (in new or like-new condition) for the Hope Chest Program:

- **Kitchen Essentials** (Plates, Silverware, Glassware, Knives, Pots & Pans, Cooking Utensils, Kitchen Towels)
- **Bath & Shower Essentials** (Assorted Toiletry Items, Towels, Bath Mats, Shower Curtain, Toothbrushes, Toothpaste)
- **Bedroom Essentials** (Bedding (single, 2 sets), Pillows, Curtains, Alarm Clock)
- **Miscellaneous Essentials** (Luggage, Laundry Basket, Microwave, Iron, Ironing Board, Toaster Oven, Trash Can)

For more information or to make a donation, please contact: Alyssa Mistretta, Fundraising Coordinator at 908-354-3040 x4205 or at amistretta@caunj.org



Annual Gala Honors Three Community Partners

Community Access Unlimited celebrated community inclusion when it honored three local community supporters at its Annual Gala this fall. The gala is an opportunity for CAU to say thank you to its community partners who help us fulfill our mission.

Ziad Andrew Shehady, business administrator of Springfield, was honored with the Humanitarian of the Year Award. Ziad worked with former Gov. Jim McGreevy at the Jersey City Employment and Training Program, which includes the agency's prisoner re-entry program, and is involved with several community efforts, including the American Legion Jersey Boys State, Educate the Block, Root to Rise, Inc. and SoupKitchen411.com.



(from left to right) Harold Poltrock, President of CAU Board of Trustees; Frank Guzzo, director of UC-DHS; Lisa D. Taylor, Esq., partner at Inglesino, Webster, Wyciskala & Taylor; Ziad Andrew Shehady, business administrator of Springfield, and Sidney Blanchard, CAU executive director.

Frank Guzzo, director of the Union County Department of Human Services, received the Public Leadership Award. Under Frank's leadership the department has been recognized for many achievements, including the National Association of Counties 2009 Achievement Award for the county's Code Blue Emergency Shelter Initiative; the 2009 Public Service Award from the Garden State Employment & Training Association; and the opening of a state-of-the-art 76-bed Juvenile Detention Center.

Lisa Taylor, Esq., was honored with the Ira Geller Award, named for a long-time member of CAU who embodied the spirit of volunteerism. Lisa is a partner with the law firm Inglesino, Webster, Wyciskala & Taylor, which for the past two years has donated \$10,000 to CAU. She works with health care clients to enable them to provide care to those in need and is active in the Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities, of which CAU is a member.

"Our award winners are important to both CAU and the wider community and we owe them a debt of gratitude," said Harold Poltrock, president of CAU's board of trustees.

Also at the gala was the annual presentation of The Colleen Fraser Award certificates and three \$500 scholarships to CAU members who will utilize the funding to further their efforts in advocacy for people with disabilities and at-risk youth.



(Top Left) Senior AED of Disability Services, Paul LaMaine poses with AED of Disabilities Services, Aisha Arroyo, and Colleen Fraser Scholarship winner Belinda Malave. (Top Right) Youth from the TOP Program, Carlito Lopez & Andreyah Reid, are joined by Wesley Strond, a member in the Plainfield Program as they receive recognition for their advocacy efforts. (Bottom Left) Executive Director, Sidney Blanchard congratulates Colleen Fraser Scholarship winner, Adelaide Daskam with Paul LaMaine (Bottom Right) TOP Coordinator, Howard Wingard, provided remarks for Colleen Fraser award winner Barshay Stinson at the event



Attendees were tearing up the dance floor at the Annual Gala Dinner Dance! Join us November 2, 2017 and dance the night away!

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	
Gold Sponsor \$2,000.00 - 1 table of 10, full page ad, and recognition on the CAU website	Inside Front Cover.....\$750
Silver Sponsor \$1,500.00 - 6 guest tickets, full page ad, and recognition on the CAU website	Inside Back Cover.....\$750
Bronze Sponsor \$1,000.00 - 4 guest tickets, full page ad, and recognition on the CAU website	Center Spread.....\$675
	Full Page Ad.....\$350
	Half Page Ad.....\$175
	Quarter Page Ad.....\$100
	Family Message.....\$50

For ticket or ad information contact, Alyssa Mistretta, 908.354.3040 x4205 or amistretta@caunj.org



Great Strides for Great Causes

Under blue skies last September, more than 550 walkers celebrated community and diversity at Community Access Unlimited's 15th Annual Ira Geller Memorial Walk-a-Thon at Oak Ridge Park. The event raised more than \$60,000 to help support CAU programs and services. In addition to the actual walk, CAU members, families, staff and community partners enjoyed games and Italian ices as the aroma of the barbecue floated in the air, accompanied by a continuous flow of popular songs.

The Walk-a-Thon celebrates all that CAU strives to be: support for those in need and a symbol to the community at large about the abilities that everyone has to participate and contribute.

The Walk-a-Thon is bolstered each year by CAU's community partners, businesses and organizations that support the agency and without whom CAU could not fulfill its mission. Those supporting the walk this year included Woodruff Developers, American Business Communication Services, Borden Perlman Salisbury & Kelly, Innovative Benefit Planning, the Spire Group and many other generous sponsors.

Save the Date!

September 16, 2017, 11 AM
Oak Ridge Park—Clark, NJ

Help us reach our \$60,000 fundraising goal!

<https://www.crowdrise.com/2017-ira-geller-memorial-walk-a-thon/fundraiser/communityaccessunlimited>

Welcome Home, Everyone

Community Access Unlimited last November held a ribbon-cutting ceremony and grand opening of its new cutting-edge headquarters in Elizabeth. The new building is cutting-edge both in its amenities and because CAU intends for it to be used by both the agency and the wider community while also serving as a symbol of advocacy and community integration.

"In keeping with our mission of community integration, we built this building not only to house Community Access Unlimited but also to serve the wider community," said Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director. "This stage will be home to theater productions and the arts. These meeting and training facilities will be used by community groups and local businesses. We're looking forward to integrating the community into this building as a way of building a greater community."



CAU Executive Director, Sidney Blanchard, is joined by the Mayor of Elizabeth, CAU Board Members, and members of local, county, and state legislature at the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the new 80 West Grand St. in Elizabeth.

The building is a 60,000-square-foot, five-story, totally accessible facility. It features a 450-seat auditorium with state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment and a streaming mezzanine. The auditorium will be used by CAU for events and also will be made available to the community and perhaps will serve as home for a future Union County Community Theater.

There are three floors of modern office space, with CAU administrative staff occupying the third, fourth and fifth floors and a portion of the third floor being made available to local businesses to rent. The building also offers dividable conference and training facilities, also with state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities, available to businesses and community groups for rent.

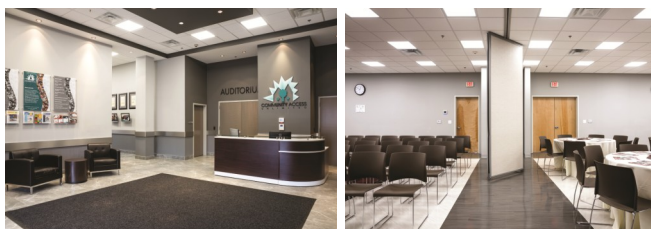
In addition, the new building is equipped with three generators so in case of an emergency it can serve as a safety zone and community center for residents of Elizabeth. The general contractor for the project was Woodruff Developers and the architect for the building was James R. Guerra, AIA of James Guerra Architects.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony in front of the new building featured Sid, CAU associate executive director Bernadette Griswold, CAU Board Members, and local dignitaries who have long supported the agency and helped pave the way for the new facility, including Elizabeth Mayor Chris Bollwage, Union County Freeholders Sergio Granados and Vernell Wright and state Assemblyman Jamel Holley. The ceremonies also included presentation of a \$10,000 grant to CAU from Valley National Bank, long-time supporters of the agency.

"We are proud to support Community Access Unlimited in their mission to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to live independently and lead productive lives within our communities," remarked Mwaura Muroki, vice president Valley National Bank.



The CAU Main Office in Elizabeth features a welcoming lobby area (bottom left), a 450-person theatre that can be set up for receptions or seminars, and training space that can accommodate 50-100 person events.



Space is available for rent! If interested, contact Cara Pavia, Director of Marketing At 908-354-3040 x4376 or cpavia@caunj.org.

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U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 225
Elizabeth, NJ

80 West Grand Street
Elizabeth, NJ 07202
Phone: 908-354-3040 TTY/TTD: 908-354-4629
Fax: 908-354-2665 www.caunj.org

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.*



MAY 15th 2017

COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED
ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

Suburban Golf Club
| 1073 Morris Avenue |
Union, NJ 07083

For sponsorship opportunities & playership information contact Alyssa Mistretta
amistretta@caunj.org - 908.354.3040 x4205

