



# The Independent Citizen

## Winter 2018

COMMUNITY ACCESS  
UNLIMITED

### ***Congratulations to Our 2017 Gala Awardees!***

This fall Community Access Unlimited honored Union County Freeholder Betty Jane Kowalski and Kevin Casey, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD) at our annual Gala, held at the Marriot Newark Airport Hotel.

Freeholder Kowalski has been a longtime supporter of CAU. She has been an ardent advocate for parks, libraries, public transportation and community service in Union County during 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.

"It's such a privilege to be here at Community Access' annual gala," Bette Jane said. "I'm proud to be honored but really I accept on behalf of all the county, particularly our human services staff. Along with my fellow freeholders, we are proud to work with such a premiere agency. Community Access has the staff and know how to get people on their feet and allow them to do what they need to do with dignity."

*(continued on page 2)*



*Union County Freeholder Betty Jane Kowalski is congratulated by Freeholder Chairman Bruce Bergen (left) and Sid Blanchard, CAU Executive Director*



*Kevin Casey (center left), NJCDD Executive Director is congratulated by (left to right) Sid Blanchard, Myrta Rosa, NJCDD Vice Chair and Rebekah Novemsky, CAU family mentor.*

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

**THE CAU**  
**ADVANTAGE**

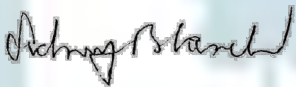


## *A Message from our Executive Director*

As New Jersey continues its transition to a fee-for-service model for people with disabilities, CAU is in an ideal position to serve a growing number of people and continue our mission of people with disabilities achieving independence. The fee-for-service model has required service providers to change the way they operate, including investment in infrastructure and IT systems to support continuation of services. Many other nonprofits have fallen behind on these adjustments, impacting their ability to perform. CAU, however, was well prepared and we are flourishing in this new environment – which means those we serve are flourishing too.

The key for our success is our business model of sustainability. CAU started in 1979 with a \$90,000 grant to move 20 people out of developmental centers and into the community. Today we have a \$67 million operating budget, support more than 6,000 people and own more than 230 units of housing throughout Union County. By building on appreciable assets as well as net income, we generate additional revenue we then re-invest in programs. This brings sustainability that serves as the engine of our growth. This financial stability has allowed us to continue hiring – we now employ more than 1,100 people – and to invest in the infrastructure and IT systems needed to effectively operate in this new landscape.

Yet we can't do everything we achieve alone. While our financial strength means we do not need to rely on government funding, we do rely on our community partners, including businesses that support us; other human service agencies with which we partner to ensure a continuum of care for our and their members; and government agencies and leaders. I'm looking forward to 2018 being another great year here at CAU.



Sidney Blanchard, Executive Director



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**Walter Kalman, Martin Poltrock  
& Nicholas Scalera**

Kevin Casey leads NJCDD in its mission to advocate for individuals with developmental disabilities in New Jersey. Prior to joining the council he spent 11 years leading the Illinois and Pennsylvania state divisions that oversee services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Previously he served as the director of Pennsylvania Protection & Advocacy, Inc. *(Continued from page 1)*

"It's wonderful (to be honored)," Casey said. "To make sure people with disabilities have an opportunity for a full life in the community, that's driven me since I was young and still does. We enjoy working with CAU and look forward to working with them for years into the future."

The gala drew more than 600, including CAU members and staff, government officials, professionals in the human services sector and business and community supporters.

CAU also presented the annual Colleen Fraser Award certificates and \$1,000 scholarships to two members of the agency who will utilize the funding to further their efforts in advocacy for people with disabilities and at-risk youth, Asia Lee and Carol Petties.

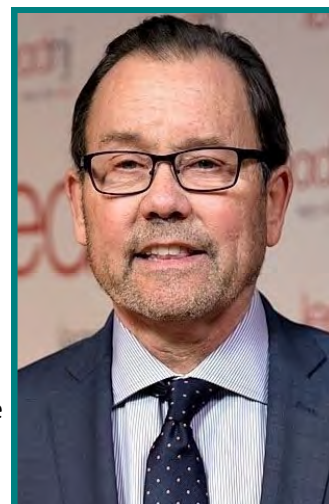


## Board Member Profile: Kevin Aspell

Kevin Aspell has philanthropy in his blood. After graduating Manhattan College with a bachelor of arts in Social Work, Kevin worked in the human services sector in New York City. After being recruited as a sales leader by tech giant Cisco, he received the Chairman's Award for Community Service for his leadership of community-based employee volunteer programs and also led an Inclusion & Diversity Program at the company.

So naturally, when Kevin was introduced to CAU in 2003 by board member Maxine Neuhauser, he signed on.

"It's all about the culture at CAU," he said. "We see our members as members of the communities where they live. There's an expectation they work, they pay taxes, they vote. I've always believed you own your own destiny and that culture is what CAU is all about. I want there to be a sense of self-determination."



After leaving Cisco, Kevin went full throttle into community service. He formed OPUS Consulting, LLC, an inclusion and diversity consulting practice focused on improved business performance through effective employee engagement, collaboration and onboarding programs, with a focus on veterans. He then joined Hopeworks N' Camden, a youth development organization.

Kevin retired from work in early 2017 but not from supporting the community and those most vulnerable within it. In addition to CAU's board he also sits on the board of Hugs for Brady Foundation, which is focused on supporting children and families battling pediatric cancer; is spokesperson for the NJ Sharing Network; is a graduate of the prestigious LeadNJ program; and remains active in a number of other organizations.

"Part of my family culture was we always tried to help," he said. "Retirement for me just gives me the ability to volunteer with organizations I want to support." CAU is fortunate to be among those.

### Upcoming Events

#### - FEBRUARY -

**Feb. 6, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM**  
Helping Hands Self Advocacy  
at the CAU Main Office

**Feb. 8, 5:30 PM—7:00 PM**  
TOP One - Year Celebration  
at the CAU Main Office

**Feb. 15, 5:30 PM—7:00 PM**  
CAU Cabaret  
at the CAU Main Office

#### - MARCH -

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

**March 7, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM**  
TOP One - Year Celebration  
at the CAU Main Office

**March 15, 8:00 —10:00 AM**  
CAU Community  
Networking Breakfast  
at the Suburban Golf Club

**March 15, 7:00 PM—9:00 PM**  
CAU Laser Show Fundraiser  
at the CAU Main Office

**March 24, 5:00 PM—8:00 PM**  
Family Connections  
at the Suburban Golf Club

#### - APRIL -

**April 3, 6:00 PM—8:00 PM**  
Helping Hands Self Advocacy  
at the CAU Main Office

**April 12, 6:00 PM—10:00 PM**  
CAU Awards Night  
at the CAU Main Office

**April 18, 10:00 AM—3:00 PM**  
TOP Open House  
at the CAU Main Office

#### - MAY -

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

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

**For More Information on Upcoming Events**  
Visit our website at [www.caunj.org](http://www.caunj.org)



## **Provident Bank Foundation Provides CAU With \$25,000 Major Grant**

The Provident Bank Foundation has provided CAU with a \$25,000 Major Grant we will use to purchase a new, handicap-accessible van as part of our Mobile Street Outreach program, which helps us reach and connect with runaway and homeless youth in Union County.

The Union County Runaway and Homeless Youth Shelter provides runaway and homeless youth with shelter, food and support such as life-skills training and employment assistance. The shelter can accommodate up to five youth at a time and provided support for 13 runaway and homeless youth between Oct. 1, 2016, and Sept. 30, 2017.

Through its Mobile Outreach Program, CAU reaches out to youth living on the street in an attempt to move them into the shelter and begin the process of

*Jane Kurek (center left), Executive Director of The Provident Bank Foundation, presents a \$25,000 grant to CAU Executive Director Sid Blanchard (center right). Looking on are (left to right) Christian Pfefferle, Vice President Relationship Manager, Provident Bank, Joanne Oppelt, Assistant Executive Director Business Development, CAU; Tanya Johnson, Senior Assistant Executive Director Youth Services, CAU; and Michael Petrucci, Vice President Market Manager, Provident Bank.*

support. The largest homeless population in the United States is youth between the ages of 12 and 18 and one in seven youth will experience homelessness. More than 24 percent of Union County's population of approximately 555,000 is below the age of 18, making CAU's Mobile Outreach Program vital.

Provident Bank Foundation's Major Grants fund projects and/or programs that address one or more of its funding priority areas – Community Enrichment, Education and Health, Youth and Families. Major Grants provide between \$5,000 and \$25,000 in funding and support organizations that have identified an immediate need in the community and the individuals they serve.

## **Valley National Bank Foundation Provides CAU \$10,000 for Housing**

Valley National Bank Foundation awarded CAU with a \$10,000 grant to be used for housing costs for 30 members, including rent and utilities. As New Jersey transitions from an annual contract payment model for the services provided to people with disabilities and their families to a fee-for-services model, many expect a gap in funding for housing.

CAU, with our established track record in housing, has been positioning itself to fill that gap and the grant from Valley National will help us do that. Under the new fee-for-service model people with disabilities and their families are given greater choice in selecting the service providers they use and those service providers then are reimbursed by Medicaid. However, the funding for housing and related costs has been shifted to the Housing and Mortgage Finance Administration.



*The grant from Valley National will help members pay for rent and utilities*



## 2017 Walk-a-Thon Makes Great Strides

The supporters of Community Access Unlimited helped us raise more than \$55,000 at our 2017 Ira Geller Memorial Walk-a-Thon, held in September at Oak Ridge Park in Clark. More than 450 people participated, including members, staff, family and community supporters.

"Our annual Walk-a-Thon is a truly community-integrated event," said Sid Blanchard, CAU Executive Director. "The community and our members join together to raise money for the programs that support our members in their efforts to live independently within the community."

Major financial supporters of the event included:

*American Business Communications Services, Inc*

*Borden Perlman Salisbury & Kelly*

*Inglesino, Webster, Wyciskala, & Taylor, LLC*

*Santander*

*Spire Group, PC*

*Woodruff Developers, LLC*



Many experts in the state's human services sector worry funding for housing will lag, leaving many vulnerable.

"CAU has been a trailblazer in establishing housing for people with disabilities every since and today are expanding our current mission of creating mixed-use housing that allows our members with disabilities to live side-by-side with members of the wider community without disabilities. We are able to do this with the support of partners such as Valley National," said Sid Blanchard, CAU executive director.

"Valley National Bank is proud to continue supporting CAU's mission and participate in our shared goal of increasing access to affordable housing," said Mary Ann Beltz, Vice President, Territory Sales Manager. "Valley strives to make our communities better by contributing our time, talent and financial resources. Helping communities grow and prosper is the heart of Valley's corporate citizenship philosophy."



*CAU is creating mixed-use properties like this one where our members with disabilities can live side-by-side with members of the wider community without disabilities.*

## Story of Personal Comeback Keys Annual Youth Services Networking Conference

The attendees of the Fifth Annual Union County Youth Services Networking Conference, held last fall at CAU's headquarters, heard a very special story of personal comeback. The conference drew more than 175 child services professionals from more than 50 government agencies and nonprofits from throughout Union County.

Keynote speaker Marion Simmons told the audience how she spent 19 years in foster care, experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse at every stop before coming to CAU at age 16. After becoming a member of CAU, Marion earned a bachelor's degree in human services and sociology; worked for the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency; and recently started HOTE (Holding Onto Exceptional People), LLC to help other at-risk youth succeed in life as she has. Marion told the audience she believes everyone in life deserves the opportunity to turn a setback into a comeback.



*Members of the Union County Youth Services Steering Committee gather before the Fifth Annual Union County Youth Services Networking Conference.*

"Before I came to CAU I was lashing out but they didn't give up on me," she said. "They told me, 'We'll let you cry and be mad, but you're still going to work on your goals, getting your driver's license, getting a job, graduating.' I thrived here. CAU truly is the key that opens the door."

Attendees of the conference also heard presentations by leading professionals in New Jersey's child services field and participated in roundtable discussions on a variety of topics impacting the youth they support. The conference is sponsored by the Union County Youth Services Steering Committee, 16 leaders from the county's nonprofit and government sectors working in youth services.

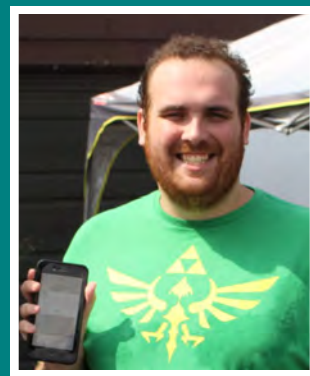
## Member Tyler O'Neill Creates CAU YouTube Video

Tyler O'Neill, a CAU member on the autism spectrum, has become a film-maker. Tyler attends CAU's Academy of Continuing Education (ACE) twice a week and takes Media Production among his classes. This fall Tyler put those film-making skills to good use when he created a video featuring him, his mother, Kim, and Joanne Oppelt, CAU's Assistant Executive Director of Business Development. In the video, Tyler and Kim talk about what CAU has meant for them and Joanne talks about how CAU has been and will continue being successful in fulfilling its mission.

"Being a member of CAU means being you and being supportive of others no matter how different your opinions might be," Tyler says in the video. "Who knows how far we can go in the future." Tyler has blossomed during this four years attending ACE, according to Kim. That, in turn, has improved Kim's life, she says in the video.

"Community Access Unlimited has had a huge impact on me as a parent," she says. "When Tyler graduated from school we were both very anxious about what his adult life would be like. CAU has connected him socially with the community. Through the encouragement of all the wonderful staff and his CAU peers he has gained so much confidence in himself. Now I have confidence that with CAU's help his adult life is going to be awesome."

To view the video, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhaozQ4bWdw>.



*(Above) Tyler at this year's Walk-a-thon. (Below) Tyler (2nd from right) is joined by members of the ACE Program*





## Hundreds Gather for Fourth Annual Union County Day of Prayer

At a time when the country is being torn apart by hate rhetoric and fear of those unlike oneself, more than 650 members from Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist communities came together in October in a show of unity at the Fourth Annual Union County Day of Prayer in Westfield.

"It is great to be together with leaders of other faiths," said Rev. Michael Saporito, pastor of The Parish Community of St. Helen, which hosted the event. "This is such a year of turmoil for people in the country. It is great to bring different people of faiths together, and what faith doesn't want love, peace and unity and want to treat other people with the dignity they deserve?"

The annual Union County Day of Prayer, whose theme this year was Unifying Our Community Through Prayer, is hosted each year by the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council, comprising more than 40 interfaith congregations and community-based nonprofits, including founding member CAU. The evening featured prayers, songs and meditations from religious leaders of various faiths from throughout Union County.

"Martin Luther King once said that the most segregated time in this country is 11 a.m. on Sunday when everyone goes to their segregated church," said Sid Blanchard, CAU's executive director. "People with disabilities can't go because they are excluded, they are unwelcome. By bringing the community together and meeting each other, we are seeing that all people have value. People with disabilities and young people who have been abused and neglected will be welcomed in the faith community of their choice."

Unity and togetherness was the theme that carried through the evening.

The Venerable Klint Kevalin of the Dhammakaya Meditation Center in Fanwood described the event as "Something that the world really needs. It is something that we as a community need to show, that peace can happen. We come from different faiths joining together to bring light to the world."

That light has never been more needed than now. Rev. Dr. L.L. DuBreuil, pastor of Faith United Church of Christ in Union, said, "We are living in a time of suspicion and ignorance. It is important that we get to know each other, pray together and shine the light."

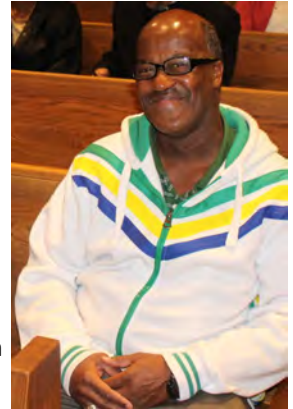
Imam Khalil Abdul Aziz of Plainfield's Mosque Masjidullah, agreed, saying, "Here in 2017, I think we haven't made the effort to get to know each other. We live next to synagogues, churches and mosques, but we don't really know each other. Interfaith efforts are very productive in bridging that gap."

Cantor Matt Axelrod of Congregation Beth Israel in Scotch Plains spoke of the advantage of building that bridge, saying, "Anything that brings us together and shows us what we have in common makes us a stronger community."

*Speakers & Clergy from the 2017 Day of Prayer*



*CAU members enjoy the Day of Prayer*



*Young members of the Muslim Community Center of Union County performed at the event*





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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.*



## "How Megan's Law Affects Juveniles in New Jersey" Now Available

A new booklet, "How Megan's Law Affects Juveniles in New Jersey," is now available for affected youth as well as professionals who support them. The booklet provides a broad range of information about the law and its impacts on juveniles in an easy-to-understand question-and-answer format. The booklet is intended to provide guidance and direction to youth who were convicted of a sex offense when they were younger than 18 years old. It also serves as a resource for child services professionals who serve or interact with them, such as: child welfare workers, child advocates, law guardians, public defenders, attorneys in Megan's Law Units of

county prosecutors' offices, educators and guidance counselors, family court judges and staff, mentors of youth, law enforcement officers and others.

Questions range from basic to more complex, such as what is Megan's Law and what does it require and how a Megan's Law offender can ask the Court to terminate registration requirements. The booklet was written by Nick Scalera, president of Scalera Consulting Services and a past Director of the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services who now works with public and private agencies that serve at-risk youth and/or vulnerable adults. Nick is also the Chairman of the Union County Youth Networking Committee.

"I wrote the pamphlet to provide affected youths with a clear, easy-to-understand explanation of Megan's Law's complex provisions and to offer them reliable advice on how and when to request that their records be expunged," Scalera said. "In addition, I felt the booklet would offer guidance to the professionals who serve or interact with Megan's Law offenders."

There is no charge for the booklet. To obtain a copy, contact Nick at [nick@scalera.com](mailto:nick@scalera.com) or call him at **201.532.5851**.