



CELEBRATING UNITY

The Independent Citizen

We have much to look forward to this fall season as CAU continues to adapt to meet our members' needs through the current health situation. You can give us a call or join our email list for updates about our virtual services, virtual events and more!

We invite you to join us for our first **Ira Geller Virtual Walkathon**, which will be **Sept. 12 from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m.** Although we can't gather in person this year for a post-walk barbeque, we are excited for an afternoon full of fun and representation of CAU in communities around New Jersey! Choose a park or walk in your neighborhood and show us you participated by tagging us on Facebook or Instagram.

It's easy to register and start fundraising online for the Walkathon. Scan the QR code on the back of this Independent Citizen to sign up, or check out the event listing on our website!

The annual Walkathon was renamed in memory of Ira Geller, a CAU member who worked tirelessly to raise funds for the agency and its support and services for people with disabilities, and who was known for his commitment to people with special needs.

Fall 2020



"There is still a cause that we serve and raise funds for, especially at this time when all our events have been cancelled due to COVID-19," said Saranya Thana, director of fundraising. "Something as small as ten dollars can go a long way, so whatever anyone is able to give, please share that you donated online and with others."

Members have been spreading the word to let everyone know the Walk will be virtual this year, said member Gary Rubin.

"Even though it's virtual, it's important that people participate because it benefits what the agency does for us - it's a fundraiser that helps us as individuals, so the more fundraising the better," Rubin said.

Sponsorship opportunities are available for businesses and organizations. To become a sponsor or to learn more about these opportunities, contact Saranya Thana at SThana@caunj.org.

A Message from our Executive Director



At CAU we are continuing to find solutions for our members while maintaining our commitment to their safety and wellbeing.

We are excited to be rolling out more virtual services, which you will learn more about in this issue. Our staff and members have been working hard to make these virtual services work for them, and we are happy to see these services being delivered effectively at home. Our Assistive Technology (AT) training and support services help us to ensure that members get their greatest benefit out of emerging technology-based programming.

You should know that we are taking safety seriously with enforced screening of all essential staff before they start their shift, in addition to cleaning and social distancing protocols at programs and all office locations.

Some of our services, including Day Habilitation and Recreation, remain temporarily closed due to state safety regulations around reduced building capacity limits and social distancing. Call us or sign up for the newsletter on our website to learn about the latest virtual services and groups being offered. You can also join us online for weekly interfaith and advocacy meetings.

I hope you will join us Sept. 12 as we walk in our communities around New Jersey for the Ira Geller Virtual Walkathon. Your walk will spread awareness of the essential work CAU does. Representing CAU in your community is all the more critical during this time, and we thank you in advance for your support.

Bernadette Griswold
Executive Director



CAU Board of Trustees

President

Harold J. Poltrock, Esq.

**Secretary/Treasurer -
President Elect**

Dr. Karen Ensle, R.D.

**Tendai Ndoro, PhD
Secretary/Treasurer—Elect**

Kevin Aspell

Adelaide Daskam

Robert C. Griffin, Esq.

Bernadette Griswold

Shawanna Hicks

Marc Levy

Maxine Neuhauser, Esq.

Myrta Rosa

Audrey Vasey

Kathy Wiener

Honorary Members

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

Board Member Spotlight: Dr. Tendai Ndoro

Dr. Tendai Ndoro has been a board member for over 10 years and brings valuable expertise in public administration and business, as well as her experience with special education as a parent of a child on the autism spectrum. Ndoro is Regional Director for the New Jersey Small Business Development Center at Rutgers University/Rutgers Business School (RBS) in Newark, where she enjoys sharing resources and information about entrepreneurship and small business. She earned her PhD in Public Administration from Rutgers University.

“I support the mission of independent living, as well as the focus on housing and other supports, everything that has to do with people with disabilities living full and independent lives in the community,” Ndoro said.

Ndoro had been involved as a member of a special education executive committee for her son’s school district, where she was passionate about confronting harassment and bullying.

“I have been there as a parent and I wanted to support all the values CAU had,” she said.



CAU Members Rally For Local Restaurants

New Jersey eateries are suffering mammoth losses in income while restricted to outdoor dining and selling take-out orders. Celebrity chef Tom Colicchio predicted up to 75 percent of the nation's restaurants might never again reopen their doors.

Locally, six CAU members are giving their time to help local restaurants stay afloat as part of a national movement called Rally for Restaurants™, an effort to promote local eateries and encourage the public to order take-out food and buy gift cards while spreading the word about their favorite restaurants through social media.

This spring the Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce, which is coordinating the local Rally for Restaurants effort, issued a chamber-wide request for volunteers to make calls to area restaurants encouraging them to enroll in the Rally for Restaurants program. Sandra Lynch, CAU's assistant executive director of employment services, thought employed agency members who were not able to work due to the state shutdown were the perfect candidates. CAU also opted to pay them to make the calls.

"They love it," Lynch said. "It takes their mind off the complacency and boredom of being home all the time. Their immune systems are compromised so they never leave their home. This gives them a chance to talk to people while also working on their phone skills and efficacy. They continue to work with their job coach and it gives them the chance to help the community."

After brief training, the six CAU members jumped right in making calls to area restaurants, according to Lynch. The intent is to educate the eateries about the Rally for Restaurants movement and encourage them to enroll in the program and then send out emails and social media messages to their contact lists asking for their support.

CAU member Gabby Aragona is enjoying making the calls. She said she was nervous at first but when the first three restaurants she called signed up, she started to feel really good.

"I felt really proud of myself that I was able to help them," she said. "If I ever needed help, I would want someone to help me. When I first started it was a bit of a test. I had to look at it as, 'Now you're a telemarketer.'"

While all volunteers are given a script by the Gateway Chamber, Aragona prefers to use her own words.

"I tell them, 'Due to the pandemic we know you're struggling and we can put you in this directory that makes it easier for people to find you and keep your business open,'" she said. "It's a no-brainer."

CAU member Megan Modero tries to make a few calls every day.

"I try to work at it," she said. "I also like helping the restaurants. People want to go out for dinner and have their family time. So by helping these restaurants to stay open I'm also helping the community."

Collectively the CAU members have made more than 150 calls to restaurants encouraging them to enroll in the program, according to Lynch.

Eric Nowoslawski, director of special projects at the Gateway who is coordinating the chamber's Rally for Restaurants effort, is thrilled by the response of the CAU members.

"They've gone above and beyond," he said. "The Community Access Unlimited members alone accounted for nearly a third of our 500 calls made. They've been enthusiastic and shown real initiative. We can't thank them enough."

The restaurant &grain, in Garwood, has joined Rally for Restaurants thanks to CAU members.



Virtual Services Bring Enrichment Home

With nonessential face-to-face meetings largely on hold due to COVID-19, services for people with developmental disabilities are evolving with virtual options to help people meet their goals and find enrichment in a challenging time.

Day habilitation and vocational and recreational services are among the programs that were forced to close due to the pandemic in March, leaving providers to develop new solutions.

Jessica Gaeta, 22, is a CAU member who made the switch to virtual services this spring. She is enjoying a busy schedule studying music and theater, self-help, math, history, and visual and digital art with the Academy of Continuing Education.

“It was hard to get used to at first but it’s really good for me right now,” Jessica said. “I love to be doing art a lot and I like studying it too.”

Jessica had a busy schedule before quarantine that included attending ACE, working part time, and dance classes several times a week. Unfortunately, her summer schedule of participating in Special Olympics New Jersey for swimming, golf and basketball was cancelled due to the pandemic.

“It’s been great that she’s had ACE to participate in,” said Jessica’s mother, Eileen. “It’s been wonderful for Jesse, she looks forward to it. It’s definitely been in our favor during this pandemic.”

CAU is currently accepting registrations for virtual Day Habilitation, the Academy of Continuing Education (ACE), and Vocational services on the virtual services portal. Members can choose from a wide selection of groups such as Life Skills, World Cultures, Culinary Arts, and Health and Safety in the Workplace, depending on what services suit their needs.

“It’s important to us to make sure members are still achieving their goals even when we can’t see each other in person,” said Bernadette Griswold, executive director of CAU. “We want to offer every benefit possible to members through virtual service options.”

“The teachers do a good job of making it exciting,” Jessica added, explaining that she enjoyed learning painting techniques in her class and using them to perfect her own sunset painting.

Virtual groups involve much more than video sessions and completing assignments online. Virtual field trips are one exciting possibility that can bring subjects such as American history and science to life.

CAU virtual services are subject to change. Visit the CAU website and sign up for email list to stay up to date.

Visit
caumembersportal.org
 to explore virtual
 services!

CAU member Jessica Gaeta joins a Zoom meeting. ACE, Day Habilitation and Vocational services are available remotely.



Learn more about CAU services – ask us what is available virtually!

Support Coordination - Accepting new members and working remotely. Let’s work together to create the perfect Individualized Support Plan for your family!

Day Habilitation-Join us for virtual sessions to learn life skills and subjects such as Reading and Health and Wellness

The Academy of Continuing Education - remote learning. Choose courses in math, reading, media, science, art, self help and history! ACE is our answer to post-graduate learning for adults with developmental disabilities.

Behavioral Management - Virtual and socially distanced. Our approach works to increase positive behaviors and create lasting outcomes. We can complete behavioral assessments and develop and implement structured behavioral modification plans.

Residential Services - Accepting referrals for review. Our residential staff receives advanced training to support complex medical and behavioral needs.

Employment Services- Our team can help you reach your full potential with career planning, prevocational training and supported employment!

Support Services- Let us build a support services plan that meets your personalized needs. Read more about our services on our website.

Assistive Technology- Whether you or your loved one needs assistance communicating, navigating their environment, or overcoming other challenges, our AT supports can help individuals and families achieve a better quality of life.

caunj.org
info@caunj.org
908-354-3040

Musicians Band Together for CAU

From folk-country singer Jesse Lynn Madera and alternative pop singer Sara Ontaneda to handpan artist Dan Mulqueen, a diverse selection of music from six artists was showcased on the CAU Facebook page from July 6 through July 11 in a virtual concert to benefit CAU.

Thank you to everyone in the community who tuned in and donated to help support CAU members and staff through COVID-19!

Madera, who lives in Nashville, said she was happy to donate her talent for the benefit concert and hoped listeners found her music hopeful.

“I really love to perform live and I’m not sure how it translates over the internet, but I really enjoy connecting with people and I hope my music brings some hope to people and some strength when they’re confronting big emotions,” she said. “I like to write about things that are kind of difficult.”

New York City-based jazz guitarist Juan Mungia said he was eager to share his music with new people online.

“I hope people can enjoy the music and forget the whole situation of the world for a while,” he said. “For me that’s the whole idea of being an artist is to be able to give people an outlet to have a good time. For me I just like to see people happy.”

New York City-based Sara Ontaneda sings in both English and Spanish with a fusion of pop influences. She said she hopes her music brought listeners peace during these difficult times.

“I’m more than happy to share my music for a great cause,” Ontaneda said. “I believe that everyone should have equal opportunities to live their best life. I really like what CAU stands for and I believe in the work they do.”

BANDING TOGETHER
FACEBOOK LIVE EVENT
A VIRTUAL BENEFIT CONCERT FOR COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED

MONDAY JULY 6- @7:00PM CHRISSIE LIMOS	TUESDAY JULY 7- @7:00PM JUAN MUNGUIA
WEDNESDAY JULY 8- @7:00PM SARA ONTANEDA	THURSDAY JULY 9- @7:00PM DAN MULQUEEN
FRIDAY JULY 10- @7:00PM JESSE LYNN MADERA	SATURDAY JULY 11- @7:00PM ANIL SALEM

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS:

As vital services for people with disabilities and youth at risk continue during this unprecedented time, CAU is working to meet growing and changing needs. Make a donation to CAU and learn more at: www.caunj.org/support-us/.

COVID-19 Creates a Crisis for Runaway and Homeless Youth in NJ

The COVID-19 pandemic is straining resources for programs serving runaway and homeless youth that were already in short supply prior to the crisis. The primary causes of homelessness among youth are family conflict or severe economic hardship, making these programs more critical than ever to ensure young people who need aid do not slip through the cracks.

Youth programs at Community Access Unlimited transform lives and are comprehensive to meet individual needs. From emergency housing to semi-independent and supported housing, CAU ensures that members have a safe home as well as training and education to prepare them for a stable, self-reliant adulthood. Services also include crisis intervention, counseling, recreation services, and leadership and advocacy opportunities.

Natalie Flores, 18, is one Community Access Unlimited Transitional Opportunities Program member who is celebrating her accomplishments this year. A 2020 graduate of Essex Valley School, Flores is class president and salutatorian, and was excited to deliver her speech in an in-person graduation ceremony in July.



CAU member Natalie Flores is celebrating her achievements and will start college this year.

“Coming from a challenging environment and not having a typical support system was a struggle,” Flores told her classmates. “To start high school and fail all your classes and then to graduate with a 3.6 GPA and be a member of the National Honor Society and be salutatorian is a tremendous accomplishment because I myself had doubts about my own success.”

Flores will attend Union County College in the fall and plans to major in education to pursue her goals of teaching math to children in a juvenile correctional facility.

“I’ve been there and I want to make a change, I want to help another kid out,” Flores said. “I want to set up my own program where I try to get kids off the streets and put them in their books. I want to help them focus in school and be ready.”

“[My staff] have seen my growth and how difficult it was,” she added. “They kept trying to lead me in the right direction. They were guiding me in telling me what the real world is out there. They also taught me about credit and budgeting.”

Homeless youth face particular risks during this time. An average of 25 percent of youth accessing runaway and homeless youth programs have a chronic or pre-existing health condition like diabetes, asthma or HIV, according to a recent survey of programs coordinated by the Coalition for Homeless Youth. Youth living on the streets are also at high risk for victimization and assault, mental illness, substance misuse, juvenile justice system involvement, and human trafficking, all of which increases the likelihood of perpetuated homelessness in adult life.

CAU youth programs include the Transitional Opportunities Program (TOP) which provides comprehensive residential services to youth ages 13 to 21, as well as the Union County Youth Shelter and federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Basic Center Program and federal Transitional Living Programs. These programs provide safe shelter and supportive services that address the experiences and needs of these youth to mitigate their risks and put them on a better life outcomes trajectory.

Eligible youth can become a Community Access Unlimited TOP member by referral through the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency, Children’s System of Care, referral by local schools, community organizations or local agencies, faith-based organizations, hospitals and medical offices, self-referral, or by anyone encountering a youth seeking shelter or assistance.



Become a Designated Safe Place for Youth

Safe Place is a national youth outreach and prevention program for young people in need of immediate help and safety. As a collaborative community prevention initiative, Safe Place designates businesses and organizations as Safe Place locations, making help readily available to youth in communities across the country. Safe Place locations include: libraries, YMCAs, fire stations, public buses, various businesses, banks and social service facilities. **Contact CAU at info@caunj.org to ask about becoming a Safe Place.**

Recognizing 30 Years of the ADA

The civil rights movement for people with disabilities reached a landmark on July 26, 1990 with the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. On its 30th anniversary, people with disabilities are celebrating hard-earned victories and are speaking up about the work still to be done and recognizing the historic law intended to prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life.

Gary Rubin became a member of Community Access Unlimited in 1990, then known as the Association for the Advancement of the Mentally Handicapped- Union. Rubin experienced chaotic living arrangements and mistreatment living in state-run institutions in the 1980s, and quickly became involved in the Helping Hands advocacy organization, one of the oldest and strongest advocacy groups for people with disabilities in the state, when he joined CAU and began living in a residential program. He became president of Helping Hands and was a founder of the New American Movement for People with Disabilities (NAMPD).

“Before the ADA, you were no one if you had different abilities,” Rubin said. “I was one of the people who made sure it went through, and afterward we talked to people. You don’t want a law to come out and people to take advantage of it. They need to comply.” Today, Rubin lives on his own, works and remains an engaged disability civil rights activist.

According to Belinda Malave, another CAU member and advocate, the ADA has become frustrating, because the law is not taken seriously by everyone and too often, little is done to ensure compliance and accountability.

“We have work to do – we have a long way to go as far as the Americans with Disabilities Act,” Malave said. She cited difficulties accessing buildings in her wheelchair and discrimination she has experienced in the workplace as a telemarketer. “There are lots of places still not accessible or discriminating 30 years later. There is no reason for any new building not to be accessible because of the ADA.” Malave has been a longtime, vocal and highly active self-advocate and a strong advocate on behalf of people with disabilities at the system level.

Societal attitudes about people with disabilities began changing in the 1960s with the deinstitutionalization movement. As the rights of people with disabilities were slowly recognized and advanced, thousands of state centers housing people with disabilities and people with mental illness, with support from organizations like Community Access Unlimited, were transitioned to become included, participating members and residents in communities. The ADA was modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin – and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Signed into law by President George H.W. Bush, the ADA expanded disability rights beyond federally funded spaces with the intention that people with disabilities could no longer be denied access to jobs, school, transportation, or to public places.

At the signing of the ADA, President Bush gave an impassioned directive, now famously part of the legacy of the ADA: “Let the shameful walls of exclusion finally come tumbling down.”

Helping Hands, founded at CAU in 1984, and the NAMPD, founded in 2012, continue to advocate for the needs of people with disabilities in the United States and empower them to advocate for themselves.

“We want to talk to the governor on Zoom about job opportunities and what’s happening with this virus,” Rubin said. “With the virus going on things are really changing. And it’s people like us who are affected by it.”

Malave has been communicating with people with disabilities by phone to make sure their needs are met while quarantined, she said. Rubin said he is concerned about COVID-19 policies restricting the independence of people with disabilities.

“The ADA has a way to go and we need to do a little bit better,” Rubin said. “We need to do something so we can prevent just being seen but not heard from...I don’t want to feel like that in the 21st century.”

Belinda Malave, left, and Gary Rubin, right, are longtime advocates on disability issues and CAU members.





COMMUNITY ACCESS
UNLIMITED

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

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 225
Elizabeth, NJ

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.*

Scan the QR code
to join us for our
Virtual Walkathon
on Sept. 12!
To stay up-to-date
on CAU events
and news, visit
our website at
www.caunj.org
and follow us on
Facebook!



Vacations, wine baskets
and more will be
auctioned off to support
CAU in our Virtual
Auction in October! Stay
tuned on our website
for more information.



ANNUAL IRA GELLER VIRTUAL WALKATHON



1. REGISTER
Scan the QR code at the
bottom to register!



2. DOWNLOAD NIKE RUN CLUB
Once registered and downloaded make sure
to add CAU as a friend by adding
info@caunj.org



3. WALK
Finally, enjoy a great walk in your
community with your family!

INFORMATION

GRAB YOUR SHIRT
Raise \$100.00 and earn a free walkathon shirt or purchase for \$10.00

POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA
Don't forget to snap pictures of your progress! Tag us & use #CAUWALK2020

STAY SAFE
Remember to practice social distancing and take health precautions during your walk



SEPTEMBER 12, 2020
12:00 - 2:00 PM



SCAN TO REGISTER

For more info
✉ STHANA@CAUNJ.ORG



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

