

A Rainbow of Strength



The Independent Citizen

Spring 2020

As essential services continue through the nation's response to coronavirus, Community Access Unlimited is doing everything possible to bring structure and unity to members' days, and bring smiles to their faces.

Like the rainbow art our programs have shared on their windows to spread hope and cheer, we are reminding each other that we are all in this together!

Our direct support professionals who work with people with disabilities and youth at risk continue to provide on-site supervision and support 24 hours per day, seven days a week while following best practices for everyone's safety.

To help members make the most of this time at home, all residential program members have been invited to join in virtual learning through the Academy of Continuing education (ACE)!

From virtual gardening and yoga to programming classes that teach the user skills to make a video game, Assistant Executive Director of Support Coordination Alison Goodrich said her staff have been connecting members to some popular activities on their computers.

On the CAU Youtube page, members and families can view videos on meditation, coping skills, daily skills such as getting dressed, plus join in a virtual dance party!

Many of our programs start the day with the CAU Challenge. From art challenges such as "crazy hat day" to challenges to get active, members and staff have said the project starts the day on a fun and creative note. Our daily winners receive credit to order a deluxe to-go meal from a local restaurant, supporting small businesses all around Union County.

"It helps me not think about the virus much," said member Kimberly Rosato. "It keeps me happy. I hope we win again."

Many members are also working with staff on tackling in-home goals, including skills like cooking, bill-paying and housekeeping.

"I am cooking more to keep busy and I really like doing it. If I want to learn to cook something new I'll ask staff to look it up on the computer, something like eggplant parmesan," said longtime CAU member Terry Schwartz. "I'm hoping and praying that my roommate can go home for Mother's Day to see her mom, and that she can go to work and I can go to my program."

The agency has also quickly become a resource in the coronavirus crisis, and maintains a web page full of resources for the families they serve and professionals in social services. At caunj.org/resources/coronavirus-information/ you can find information for and by people with disabilities, social services updates related to the virus response, and a call to ask Congress to address the needs of people with disabilities during the crisis.

"Everyone's safety is our chief concern, and we thank our employees for their continued dedication during this challenging time," said Bernadette Griswold, executive director. "Seeing pictures of our members enjoying themselves during this challenge has been a highlight of my day."

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.cauj.org/support-us/.

A Message from our Executive Director



Throughout development of the COVID-19 virus situation gripping the nation, Community Access Unlimited has continued our commitment to supporting and caring for our members.

I would like to thank our friends and partners in the community for demonstrating their support for CAU through this challenging time. From donations of personal protective equipment to monetary donations from friends as far away as Europe, your support bolsters our efforts for safety and organization through this situation to deliver the best possible results for our members.

As we gather information and resources on the virus, we are sharing them with you on our website at caunj.org. There you can find links with resources for and by people with disabilities, as well as updates from DDD, the State of New Jersey and more.

CAU is in frequent communication with officials and experts to ensure we are following the timely, relevant information available to maintain the health and safety of our members and staff.

Our essential staff are screened before entering a residential program to ensure that our staff and members stay safe and healthy. This screening policy for CAU DD and TOP programs is in line with the CDC guidelines. Unfortunately, in following CDC-recommended safety measures, we cannot accept visitors to programs at this time. This temporary policy is simply aimed at reducing the possibility of spreading COVID-19 and keeping your loved ones safe.

The year 2020 starts our fifth decade and I am proud to be leading our organization in this time of both national challenge and agency expansion and success. At CAU we are unique in that we truly are a partnership between members and their families, staff and community partners. Thank you.

Bernadette Griswold
Executive Director



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Board Member Spotlight: Robert Griffin

Robert "Bob" Griffin, a partner at Griffin Alexander P.C., has been a familiar face at CAU for nearly three decades. In the early 1990s, CAU's Sid Blanchard visited Bob's law firm seeking help with a condominium matter, Bob's specialty. Bob has been a friend of the agency ever since. When he changed firms, Sid expressed his desire to continue with Bob as the agency's attorney for condominium and advocacy matters.

"I asked Sid why he would stay with me when my prior firm was larger and more politically connected. He answered, 'Because you care,'" Bob said.

Which is true. Bob truly loves CAU. After representing CAU for many years, he was asked to join the Board. He has served on the Board of Trustees since 2007.

"It's the most professionally run nonprofit I've even been associated with," he said. "Most importantly, it has a culture of caring that permeates the entire organization. Everyone who greets you is smiling and asks you how you're doing. It's really something."

Bob says he gets just as much out of supporting CAU as he puts in. "I'm one of those people who believe you should leave the world better than you find it," he said. "You can really see the benefit you bring to an organization when you meet the members and see them smiling and happy and energized. It just gives me a great feeling."



CAU Members are Heard During Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

CAU members were ready. As the calendar turned to March, Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, members of our New American Movement for People with Disabilities (NAM) self-advocacy group had an agenda of issues they are taking action on, including pending legislation in Trenton, voter registration, the census and their general rights.

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month was created to raise awareness about the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all areas of community life, as well as the barriers they still sometimes face in connecting to the communities in which they live.

NAM members were busy this March. Member Annie Sims traveled to Trenton to testify at a hearing on a proposed Senate bill to raise the wage rate of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). She spoke directly to Senate President Stephen Sweeney about her belief that the bill needs to be expanded to cover all state-funded workers supporting people with disabilities.

"I have direct care staff work with me only a few hours a week," Annie said. "But I use a lot of supports from other staff at CAU every day, such as the Facilities Department and my employment support counselor. None of these people are DSPs but if any of them left to make more money, I would not have everything I need."

Voting is another hot button for NAM members. Annie did not vote until she came to CAU at the age of 32. "My mother told me, 'This world does not have a vote for people with disabilities,'" she said. "When I came to CAU my counselor told me I have the right to vote. But I didn't know what to do so I learned. And the first time I voted it felt good."

CAU each year holds a voter registration night in March for its members to both teach them how to vote and allow them to register. We also distribute a voter guide to our members and the general population of people with disabilities.

Equally important to NAM members is participation by people with disabilities in the 2020 U.S. census. "We need to make sure everyone in New Jersey is counted," said NAM member Mark Bloom. "We are concerned that people who live in supervised settings won't be counted. Social service funding is dependent on the census."

NAM members also traveled to Washington, D.C. in March to attend the ARC of the United States' Disability Policy Seminar, an annual event that fosters relationships between people with disabilities and Capitol Hill office holders and their staffs.

Yet while Development Disabilities Awareness Month provides NAM members with another platform to advocate about these and other issues, they are year-long passions, according to member Juanna Quinn.

"We all have family, a mother and father and siblings, and know how it feels to be the disabled child," she said. "So we stand up for people with disabilities so we don't ever go back to the days when people with disabilities were shut out of society."



Juanna Quinn (left) and Annie Sims are passionate advocates for their fellow citizens.



Annie met with Senate President Stephen Sweeney in Trenton to discuss a pending bill dealing with compensation for workers who support people with disabilities.

A Year of Success in Employment Services

Expansion of the employment department took off quickly at CAU in 2019, and we are excited to offer even more supports in 2020! With an increased focus on intensive job coaching and placement services and continuing pre-employment transition services in the community, we are helping set more people up for success.

CAU has been recommended for a second year of grant funding from the NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for a Summer Youth Paid Internship program. The program was a great success last year, with 25 students enrolling. Each student interned in a community business of their choice based on their career interests. Business partners included retail, food service, customer service, and office based companies.

Each student received supports from a skills instructor to master the skills needed for each specific internship position. Twenty-two students completed the summer program, and five students were offered permanent part-time positions!

Intensive job coaching and placement has increased over the last year. CAU currently provides employment supports to over 80 adults working in a competitive, integrated worksite. We currently have partnerships with over 50 community businesses and continue to market to businesses in the science, technology, aviation, and shipping industries. This year alone, we have placed over 20 adults into the community or within CAU affiliated companies.

Business owners: Would you like to learn more about employing CAU members in a position or internship at your company? Please contact Sandra Lynch at SLynch@caunj.org!



Going Home

John Dowd is truly home. He has been a CAU member since 1992 and at age 87, legally blind, experiencing dementia and no longer able to move around on his own, John needed a new place to live that met all his current needs. CAU relocated John from another property to our new Hendricks house, a new construction, four-bedroom, fully accessible home where he can receive better personalized care.

“He’s much happier here, because he gets more one-on-one attention,” said AlexaRae Williams, Assistant Executive Director at Hendricks. “He loves interacting with staff. He is a very upbeat individual, always happy.”

Right now John shares his home with another CAU member, Malcolm Lynd, with room for two more to join them. Two to three staff members work each shift, with three shifts ensuring round-the-clock care.

Construction of Hendricks and the purchase of the property were made possible through two grants from CAU community partners. TD Bank provided a grant of \$125,000 and was joined by Valley National Bank with another \$10,000.



CAU member John Dowd relaxes in his chair at his new home, joined by one of his supporters, AlexaRae Williams.

Discover the CAU Advantage! The following vital programs and services are active and going strong. Many services are available remotely- please inquire!

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

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

Count Us In the 2020 Census!

With the U.S. Census in our virtual and physical mailboxes, CAU members and people with disabilities across New Jersey are saying **Count Me In!**

Community Access Unlimited is proud to help complete the count in 2020 by sharing a resource page with its members, staff and the wider community at www.caunj.org/census-2020/.

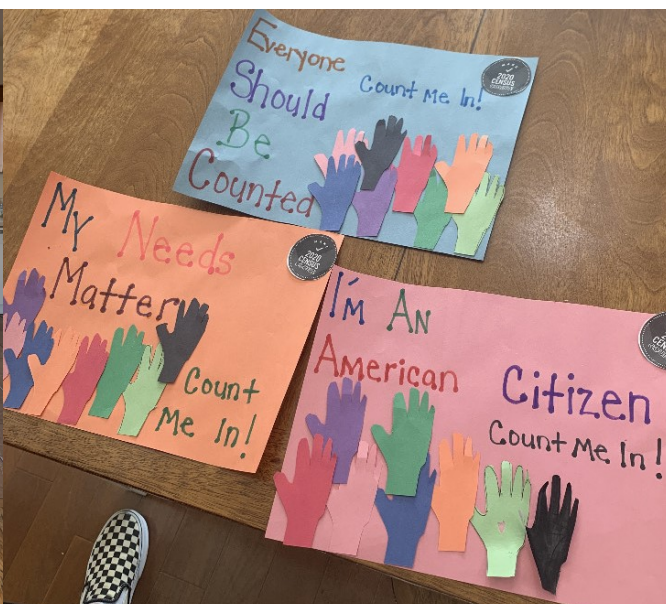
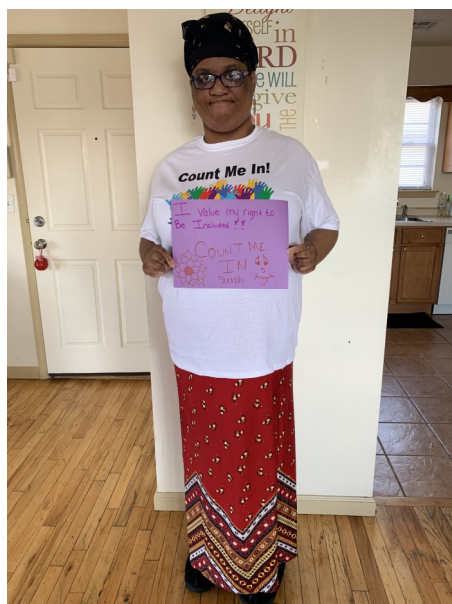
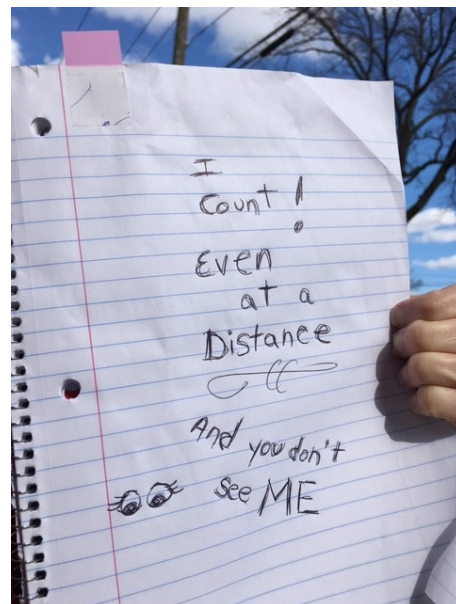
CAU launched a Census Day Challenge on April 1, with members sharing videos and photos announcing their success and excitement in completing the Census!

"My needs matter—I completed the 2020 Census!" announced member Jalisa Smith in a video.

The federal government uses Census data to allocate resources to state governments- more than \$17.5 billion dollars to New Jersey every year. People with disabilities have been identified by the Census Bureau as a hard to count population, meaning they are more vulnerable to being missed in the decennial Census. The Census helps guide funding decisions that affect the services, amenities and resources people with disabilities and their families need to enable them to participate and contribute fully in their communities. Currently, 61 million American adults live with a disability, and roughly 1 in 7 children are affected by a disability.

"We want to encourage people with disabilities to stand up and be counted and be full participating citizens," said CAU organizer Bill Webb. "It's critical for us to be doing it because New Jersey's overall count was underrepresented in 2010."

Now is the time to get involved because, otherwise, undercounted communities will miss out for the next 10 years. Join us and #FillItOut!



Home Dreams Come True for CAU Member Gary

Congratulations are due to a CAU member who now has a condo of his own! Gary Rubin now has a lifetime tenancy at his home in Elizabeth, and will have voting rights in his condo association.

The two-bedroom, two bath condo he has all to himself is a far cry from institutional living at E.R. Johnstone Training and Research Center, where he lived and worked as a young man from 1985 until the institution was shut down in 1992.

“AAMH (now CAU) would check up on me back then,” Rubin said.

In 1992, Johnstone became the first large institution shut down by the state amid controversy over whether institutional residents could survive in a community setting. Rubin became a CAU member in 1990, joining the deinstitutionalization movement and graduating from supervised apartment living to the supportive living apartment program.

A fixture at the CAU main office in Elizabeth as a security guard, Rubin has made advocacy his calling card. He was a founding member of the New American Movement for People with Disabilities, which was formed at CAU in 2012 as a movement committed to social, political, and economic transformation for the equity of all Americans. NAM travels to local and national advocacy workshops, conferences, and community events to educate the public about its mission. He also travels across the country as a board member of Self Advocates Becoming Empowered.



Rubin still recalls the bad attitudes and mistreatment he’s seen from some who work for people with disabilities and is determined to help prevent it.

“Don’t let nobody bully you or confuse you- the staff are here for you, you’re not here for them,” he said. “That’s what I try to bring out in people all the time.”

As president of Helping Hands, one of the oldest and strongest self-advocacy groups for people with disabilities in the state, Rubin shared that message on Members Renewal Day on Jan. 25.

Now that he is all moved in to his condo in Elizabeth, Rubin was thrilled to finally sign the last of the paperwork this week.

For someone who left home at the age of 16 and has moved all around North Jersey, settling down in a place of his own is a beautiful new chapter.

“I feel like I died and went to heaven,” Rubin said.

Show your support for CAU in this unprecedented time

CAU is seeking Personal Protective Equipment and donations as we continue to provide critical services for medically vulnerable populations through this health emergency. This includes face masks, gowns and gloves, and thermometers to support our continuous precautionary monitoring. With over 350 members being served in 60 residential programs and an additional 700 people in the community receiving supports, staffing levels cover 7-day services around the clock. Contact us at info@caunj.org or 908-354-3040.

Credit Card donations can be made online at caunj.org/support-us/ to help CAU protect members and staff and support them in this challenging time. We are also happy to accept donated items such as indoor and outdoor gardening kits, arts and craft kits, indoor and outdoor non-contact games, video games, karaoke equipment, cooking materials, easy “do-it-yourself” (DIY) project kits, books, lively educational materials, individually portioned/sealed healthy snack and beverage items for at-home parties and movie nights, cleaning and sanitization supplies...use your imagination!



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We can't wait to see you at our future events!
To stay up-to-date on CAU events and news, visit our website at
www.caunj.org and follow us on Facebook!

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.*

**Join us for a Discussion
with Walter Kalman—CAU
Advocate for
Families & Communities**



It's never too early to start planning!



***Bring a fellow
friend seeking
resources for their
loved ones!***

Connecting Families

*Explore tools to set your loved one up for success and have your questions answered. Free Dinner & Meeting!
Contact Maria Soares to register for our next event at 908-354-3040 x4579 or msoares@caunj.org*