



COMMUNITY ACCESS
UNLIMITED
State-wide Service Provider

The Independent Citizen

Celebrating 40 Years of Supporting Our Members

Community Access Unlimited (CAU) marked 40 years of supporting people with developmental disabilities and at-risk youth with a celebration on May 7 at our headquarters attended by members, staff and many of our valued community partners.

Our anniversary also marked a senior management leadership transition for CAU. Bernadette Griswold, previously Associate Executive Director, stepped into the role of CAU's Executive Director. Our founder, Sid Blanchard, is staying on as Associate Executive Director under Bernadette.

Sid began operating the agency in 1979 from his Volkswagen Beetle with a \$90,000 grant to move 20 individuals from state institutions into the community. Today, CAU has an operating budget of more than \$70 million, \$95 million-plus in assets and more than 1,000 employees as we strive to integrate people with disabilities and at-risk youth into the general community through comprehensive supports. Statewide, more than 5,000 individuals and their families benefit from the services we provide.

"I am excited to lead CAU forward as we continue to work

to improve the lives of the people we serve," Bernadette said.

During our 40 years, CAU has been recognized for innovation, both operationally and in how we support our members. Self-advocacy is one of our sacred rallying cries, with members campaigning for themselves and others. In addition, because social interaction is so essential to community integration, an important part of our mission is holding a number of social events each year that allow our members to celebrate and socialize, such as Couples Night, Prom and our annual musical production.

"You can have no community unless everyone is included in the community, regardless of their abilities," Sid said.

Finally, as housing is a keystone of our foundation, we own more than 250 housing units throughout Union County, including mixed-use properties that allow members to live side-by-side with people without disabilities.

"CAU has always been so much more than a social services organization to me – it's a movement to empower and liberate anyone who has ever been told they can't," Sid said.

A Message from our Executive Director



It was an exciting spring and summer at CAU. In the spring we celebrated our 40th Anniversary with a celebration at Embassy Suites in Berkeley Heights attended by members, staff and community partners. That was fitting, as it is only through partnership that we are able to fulfill our mission of supporting those who need our help to live fully independent lives.

As you read through the pages of this issue of *Independent Citizen* you will see the variety of supports CAU provides and the varied achievements of our members. This summer we had another splendid production by the CAU Community Players as they staged "Hairspray, Jr.," which drew hundreds over its three performances. The quality of these productions never stops amazing me and each year the excellence of acting and singing becomes even more impressive.

Our annual Prom once again showed how our members with disabilities will never be denied the same pleasures as people without disabilities. While many of them never attended Prom as a teenager because they were not welcomed, they are able to

celebrate this event year after year with us thanks to our self-advocacy group, Helping Hands, who hosts the dinner dance each year.

The accomplishments of many of our youth members were celebrated at Youth Achievement Night. This evening allows us to recognize those members who made great strides during the year and serves as motivation for other youth members hoping to receive this recognition from their peers in the future.

In addition, thank you to all our community partners who attended our annual Golf Outing. You helped us raise important funding that helps us sustain and grow the programs and services we provide our members and the benefit this provides to our entire community.

On another note, this summer we were selected to be part of a new statewide initiative in partnership with the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and began placing and supporting high school students with disabilities in Union and Essex counties into paid summer internships, supported by skilled CAU staff. We are thrilled to be expanding services to young people that will help them transition to independence in their adult lives through employment opportunities.

Please be sure to mark your calendars for our 2019 Gala. It is being held Thursday, Oct. 24, at the Embassy Suites in Berkeley Heights.

Bernadette Griswold, Executive Director



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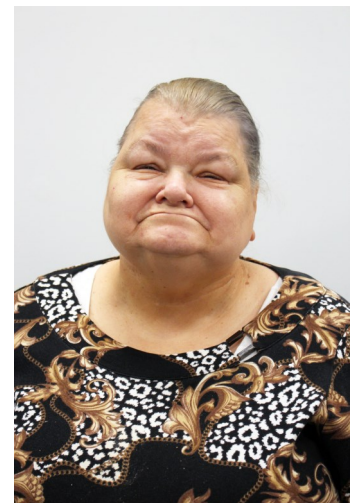
**Walter Kalman, Martin Poltrock
& Nicholas Scalera**

Board Member Spotlight: Adelaide Daskam

Adelaide Daskam was one of CAU's first members, joining the fledgling agency in 1979, and she has been an integral part of our development ever since. As a board member for the last 20 years, Adelaide takes her role very seriously, working with other board members to constantly improve CAU through new ideas, such as for housing for people with disabilities.

Of course, Adelaide thinks CAU is a pretty special place where people with disabilities learn how to live independently, including budgeting, caring for themselves and having fun, such as through travel. "CAU is like family, like a mother and father," she said. "And all the members are like sisters and brothers. And without family, we would be lost. CAU is the best agency for people with disabilities."

Adelaide works at CAU in the office and attends Day Program. On her own time she likes to shop with friends, travel, visit with her boyfriend and spend quiet time alone.



Fore! Annual Golf Outing Raises Money...and Spirits

Dozens of CAU's community partners gathered at Suburban Golf Club in May to help raise tens of thousands of dollars to support our members and programs. A record 102 golfers attended.

"At Community Access Unlimited we could not fulfill our mission of empowering our members to live rewarding and fully integrated lives in the community without our business community partners," said Bernadette Griswold, CAU's Executive Director. "As we grow and support more people, we are so grateful the number of our business partners grows, as well. We can't thank them enough."

The event sponsor was Valley National Bank, a long-time financial supporter of CAU.

"Strengthening our communities resonates at the heart of everything we do at Valley," said Mwaura Muroki, Valley National Commercial Banking Officer. "That's why we're proud to support CAU in their mission to empower all people with disabilities to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives in an integrated community."

Innovative Benefit Planning, the reception sponsor, provides benefits support for CAU and our more than 1,000 employees. Mark Sulpizio, the firm's co-Founder, also has a loved one who is a CAU member.

"What CAU does hits home for us," he said. "We have an adopted sister-in-law who lives in a Community Access group home. We've been very involved with her care and we've seen first-hand the type of support Community Access provides."

Other key sponsors of the event included reception sponsor Bramnick Law and cocktail sponsor Superior Office Solutions.



Event supporters (left to right) Wayne Kenny, Harold Poltrock (CAU Board President), Tim Donohue, and Marty Poltrock (Honorary Board Member).



Some of our event supporters enjoying a game of golf.



Joining CAU executive director Bernadette Griswold (center) are event supporters (left to right) Mark Sulpizio of Innovative Benefit Planning, Harold Poltrock (CAU Board President), Mwaura Muroki (Innovative Benefit Planning), and Mary Ann Betz, Chris Forno and Robert Leung of Valley National Bank.



CAU staff members (left to right) Stephanie Pasternak, Monique Lewis-Hawkins, Carolee Marano, and Marshall Christie.

Very Special "Hairspray, Jr." and Cabaret Thrill Hundreds

Hundreds of theatergoers were moved by a very special production of "Hairspray, Jr." performed this summer by the CAU Community Players, a troupe of actors both with and without developmental disabilities. The troupe staged three productions of the popular musical at the Rahway High School Center for Performing Arts in June.

Each year the CAU Community Players select a play that is representative of CAU's advocacy message of inclusion, acceptance and believing in oneself, as well as everyone's worth regardless of ability. They also select a play that allows for a large cast, as no one is turned away from performing.

This year's production, "Hairspray, Jr.," was based on the 1988 film and later Broadway hit. The story revolves around self-proclaimed "pleasantly plump" teenager Tracy Turnblad as she pursues stardom as a dancer on a local TV show and fights racial segregation, body shaming and discrimination against special education students.

Kim Barry, 32, has been a member of CAU for five years and has performed in the annual production each year. "I really love it," she said. "I was nervous the very first time I was on stage but now I'm really just excited." Kim said performing has also given her more confidence.

Taylor LaFalce, 20, a senior at Rahway high who is deaf, was a community member joining the CAU Community Players for the first time. "I like meeting new people," she said. "And this is better than being in my high school play. When I was a freshman they told me I couldn't be in the play because I was deaf."

Faith Greene, 18, is a member of CAU's Transitional Opportunities Program for at-risk youth who decided she wanted to try acting and joined the CAU Community Players for the first time this year. "I wanted to meet new people, try something new and broaden my horizon," she said.

Earlier in the spring, many of the same performers from "Hairspray, Jr." were joined by students from CAU's Academy of Continuing Education to stage a Cabaret. Member John Drescher sang Frank Sinatra's "My Way." Members Terrell Ross sang the Beatles song "Twist and Shout" and Michelle Rosenkrans sang "I Win" by Carrie Underwood. ACE student Ernie Small sang and played the drums.

Naturally, the group opened with "Cabaret," made famous by Liza Minnelli, and closed with Queen's "We are the Champions."



The cast of "Hairspray, Jr." performing on stage.



"Hairspray, Jr." performers (left to right) Taylor LaFalce, Kim Barry and Faith Greene pose with their Director, Marguerite Modero.



Performers with disabilities in the 2019 CAU Cabaret included (left to right) Terrell Ross, Michelle Rosenkrans, Ernie Small and John "Old Blue Eyes" Drescher.



CAU Community Players performing in the 2019 Cabaret.

Celebrating Youth Achievement

Finding stability is both a goal and challenge for youth living in the child welfare system. For 33 CAU members, that objective became reality this summer as they celebrated a year of progress within our Transitional Opportunities Program.

Shania Meyers, who left home at 15, has been at CAU for 18 months, coming to us from a group home. She now lives in a CAU apartment with two roommates, works in our accounting department and is thinking about going back to college.

"I learn so much here," she said. "You learn social skills. You learn how to pay bills. I didn't think I would learn as much as I have. I even graduated the Leadership Program, which is life-changing."

Tairah Mandes has been at CAU for six months and is looking forward to next year's one-year celebration. Before coming to CAU, she was in an Intensive Residential Treatment Services program for youth with emotional and behavioral health challenges.

"I came here and knew this was the place I wanted to be," she said. "They have a lot of opportunities other programs don't have. I have a job and I'm really getting on my feet. The staff here is really supportive and cares about you. It's where I was meant to be."



Tairah Mandes (left) and Shania Meyers pose at the One Year Celebration of the Transitional Opportunities Program.

Annual Gala Dinner Dance

October 24, 2019

6:00 PM—10:00 PM

Newark International Airport Marriott
1 Hotel Road, Newark, NJ 07114

*Please help us
congratulate
this year's honorees*



Elaine E. Katz
Kessler Foundation
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Year



Steve Hehl
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Arthur "Skip" Winter
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Ira Geller Award

To RSVP or Reserve an Ad
or Sponsorship visit
<https://2019galadinnerdance.eventbrite.com>

Or contact Mercedes Pagan 908-354-
3040 x 4376 or mpagan@caunj.org

Members Dance the Night Away

During the high school prom season, one stands out each year – CAU's. Dozens of members attended our Annual Prom dinner dance in June and danced the night away.

"People with disabilities often do not have the opportunity to go to a prom when they are younger because they either attend an alternative school that does not hold the event or they are not invited to their traditional school prom," said Rolando Zorilla, CAU's Managing Assistant Executive Director. "So a number of years ago our member self-advocacy group, Helping Hands, decided to hold their own prom and have it each year to ensure that every member who missed prom when they were younger would have the chance to celebrate their own evening again and again."

This year's prom was Steven Agolia's fourth and he said he looks forward to the evening every year. "I wanted to come tonight to mingle and see some old friends," he said. "Socialization is important, being with people who care about you and meeting new people."

Randy Mercado and Mary Jane French have been dating for years and were one of the many couples who took to the dance floor. "I like the food and I like to dance," Randy said. French looked stunning in her lilac dress with sequins. "I'm enjoying being dressed up and I'm looking forward to dancing," she said. "It's also a great opportunity to see old friends."

"I think it's great we do this for the members," said Juana Quinn, an officer of Helping Hands who never had a prom when she was in high school. "That's the sad thing about being disabled. Most of the members never had a chance to go to prom because people think it's not important to us. But it is."



Juana Quinn is an officer in Helping Hands, Community Access Unlimited's member self-advocacy program that sponsors the annual event.



Randy Mercado and Mary Jane French danced and caught up with old friends.



Steven Agolia (right) caught up with friend Michael Brooks at Community Access Unlimited's annual prom dinner dance held last Friday evening.

Member Spotlight: Ernie Small – Special Olympian

Ernie Small is very focused on fitness and he harnesses that power to take part in the Special Olympics each year. He competes in basketball, soccer, bowling and track and field, where he particularly excels. Ernie will proudly show you his many medals if asked, but it is the thrill of the competition that he likes best.

“When you compete you get nervous at first,” he said. “But when you go ahead and start running and keep going facing straight ahead, you thank God you can do it.”



Ernie Small showing his Special Olympics medals.

There is an added benefit to Ernie’s on-field activities, as well. “I have trouble focusing and competing helps me stay focused,” he said.

Of course, winning is great, as well. “It feels so wonderful,” he said. “You just feel so happy. You jump for joy. You feel like, ‘Yes, I did it.’ It gives me a sense of accomplishment for my peers, my friends and my family members who have watched me grow.”

Upcoming Events

- SEPTEMBER -

Sept. 24, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Union County Day of Prayer
Presbyterian Church of Westfield

- OCTOBER -

Oct. 1, 6:00 PM—8PM

Helping Hands Meeting
CAU Main Office

Oct. 3, 8:00 AM—10AM

CAU Community Networking Breakfast
Suburban Golf Club, Union NJ

Oct. 17, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Family Connections Meeting
Suburban Golf Club, Union

Oct. 23, 8:00 AM—3:00 PM

Union County Adolescent
Networking Conference
CAU Main Office

Oct. 24 6:00 PM - 10:00 PM

Gala Dinner Celebration
Newark International Airport Marriott

- NOVEMBER -

Nov. 12, 6:00 PM—8PM

Helping Hands Meeting
CAU Main Office

Nov. 16, 10:00 AM—2PM

Who Wants to be Independent?
CAU Main Office

**For more information on upcoming events,
Visit our website at www.caunj.org**



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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.*

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

*Hosted by Membership Services at Community Access
Unlimited*

Thursday, October 17, 2019

5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Door Prize

Suburban Golf Club 1730 Morris Ave, Union, NJ

RSVP to this Free Dinner & Meeting— Contact Maria Soares at 908-354-3040 x4579 or msoares@caunj.org