



BLOOMING FORWARD

The Independent Citizen

Spring 2021



We're excited to start the summer off right at CAU, and that includes celebrating expanding our services available to the community and our reopened Day Program in Cranford.

Day Program reopened on May 3 at 50% capacity to welcome members back, as well as new members to the program. The closure of in-person day programs has been a major struggle for many in our community, and we are thrilled to see everyone again, connect with you, and continue the best in programming and recreational activities! You can learn more about our program and what we are doing to protect the safety of our members and staff on our website at caunj.org.

Also returning this year is the summer paid internship program for students with disabilities in Union and Essex counties. Local businesses get a boost introducing interns to their company at no cost to them; interns are paid through a grant from the NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. CAU will support interns working 15-20 hours a week with check-ins from a skills instructor every shift. We are seeking business partners for this program, contact us to learn more.

Employment services have also expanded to include cost assistance for employment-related expenses for eligible Union County adults and dislocated workers. Unemployed individuals in need of assistance with costs

such as housing, food, child care, and transportation may contact us to inquire about this program partnership with American Job Center.

CAU is also working with American Job Center to offer even more comprehensive youth employment services, such as job training, financial assistance and career planning.

Recreation events are also back and have included movie nights out, virtual cooking classes and yoga classes. Thank you to all of our partners and members who have made these events fun and memorable, whether they are in person or in front of our computers!

We invite you to join us for the virtual Ira Geller Walkathon running the week of June 21-June 26. As always, your participation will make it another successful year. Check out the back cover for registration details. Please join us in person on June 26 if you are local to Warinanco Park and wish to join us for the 5K run or walk!

Check out the back cover to register for the Annual Ira Geller Walkathon!

A Message from our Executive Director



It has been an exciting spring as our state begins to emerge from a year like no other and shed some pandemic restrictions that have been challenging for our members and community.

We have been working hard to offer even more comprehensive services to you, and we invite you to contact us to ask how CAU can help you or your family member meet your goals, whether they be finding the right residential program, searching for a job or developing independent living skills.

Our day program is now reopened at 50% capacity. We are thrilled to see your faces again and see our members reconnect with friends and enjoy in-person programming. Virtual services are open at the

Academy of Continuing Education

I want to thank all of our staff, members and families who have coordinated with CAU for COVID-19 vaccines for all residential members who wish to receive it. Hundreds of members and staff have been vaccinated so far. These vaccinations make a difference to protect all of us and stop the spread of the virus where we live, work and play.

I also want to congratulate everyone who is graduating this year! Students have persevered through remote learning challenges and should be very proud of their accomplishments.

Lastly, I invite you to join the virtual Ira Geller Walkathon June 21-26. Get outside to walk, run, or roll in your favorite place, and share our fundraiser and your photos with us online. This tradition brings everyone together each year and makes a difference to support great services in our community.

Bernadette Griswold
Executive Director



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Board Member Spotlight: Marc Levy

Marc Levy joined the CAU board of trustees four years ago with a desire to give back to the community through CAU's mission.

Levy has assisted in reviewing financial projects as a board member, utilizing 25 years of business experience in human resources consulting with his company, MBL Benefits Consulting. He has reviewed areas of employee engagement, retirement benefits, and insurance options to support the financial health of the agency and employees.

"I wanted to put some time in and hopefully add value," Levy said. "It's exciting to have been part of this with someone who was a patriarch of the organization, and now someone with Bernadette's skillset continuing to grow and take CAU in a tremendous direction."



Teachers and Students at Community Access Unlimited Strive for Success During Autism Acceptance Month

Michael Adamowsky says he didn't plan it, but he has found his purpose in life through teaching.

After completing his master's degree in accounting and starting a career at CAU, Adamowsky found that the accounting position didn't suit him. He didn't like sitting at a computer all day. He decided to become more directly involved in the mission of CAU.

Now, Adamowsky is an educational specialist at the CAU Day Program, where he leads groups in a variety of subjects and gets members involved in different activities. He also assists at the Academy of Continuing Education, CAU's answer to post-graduation learning for adults with developmental disabilities.

As a person on the autism spectrum, Adamowsky said he is able to relate to his students with disabilities in a unique way.

"I want to be a role model for them," Adamowsky said. "I want to be someone they can look up to."

This April, The Autism Society of America is made a shift to celebrating Autism Acceptance Month, previously known as Autism Awareness Month. The campaign is designed to celebrate differences and increase awareness of the signs, symptoms, and realities of autism.

Adamowsky said he wants to give members all the support they could need or want to succeed in their Day Program groups. He also wants people to know that having a diagnosis does not mean a person can't excel in their studies and be successful.

"I received 'normal' schooling through life; because of my autism I just had a little help along the way," Adamowsky said. He was named hardest-working student in his class, was inducted into multiple honor societies, and went on to achieve his master's degree.

Adamowsky has brought the same passionate energy to his online learning groups as he did in person at Day Program.

"That's basically the cornerstone of this whole thing," he said. "I feel like the teacher has to be just as involved and enthusiastic as the members are, because if the teacher isn't able to teach, how will the students be able to learn?"

"He's a great example to our members and members who are striving to work," said Onekia Grier, managing assistant executive director of Day Habilitation and Educational Services. "He does such a great job with teaching, there is a waiting list for members to get in his groups."

Continued

Michael Adamowsky is an educational specialist at CAU.



Autism Acceptance Month Continued...

Adamowsky was working in April to carefully plan syllabi for groups like math and science, poetry writing, and financial literacy for in-person Day Program services that returned May 3 under state guidelines.

“I see what’s on the inside and what they’re capable of doing,” Adamowsky continued. “A lot of the members have told me that’s why they love me, because I’m able to see past their disability and they haven’t had interactions with other people that are the same.”

CAU members with autism can benefit from a variety of supports, from Day Program to behavioral support to employment training, depending on their needs and goals.

Kyzier Davis is a new CAU member who is excited to graduate from high school in June.

“I have support from my staff, social workers and teachers,” Davis said.

Davis said he is not sure what he wants to do after he graduates, but he is focused on coping and life skills with the help of CAU behaviorists and his residential program staff. Exercise has been one of the most beneficial ways to help regulate his emotions.

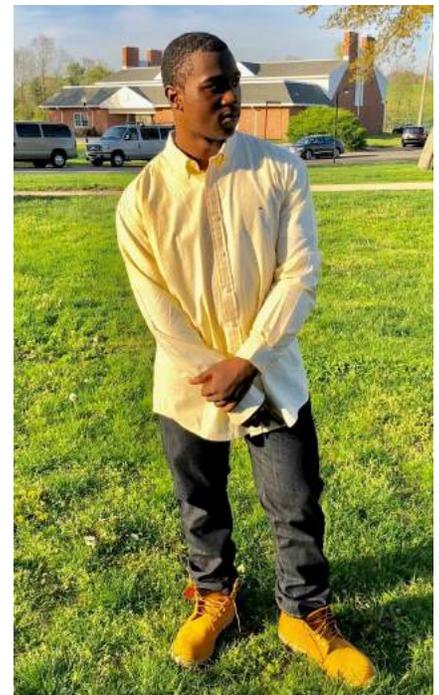
“Even if I have good days and bad days, I do pushups every day,” Davis said. “I feel relief and calm from exercise.”

Davis, 21, said he is concentrating on managing his behavior in public by expressing himself at home. That includes drawing and writing down his feelings in a journal. One goal he has is to one day see himself on TV.

“I’ve had a lot of good days so far...I had a great March,” Davis said of his time with CAU.

Adamowsky said he hopes that people with autism never limit themselves in life.

“I really hope that [people with autism] are not afraid to be themselves,” he said. “There is a purpose in life for everyone; no matter what kind of person you are there’s a pot of gold waiting for you at the end of the rainbow if you’re just willing to find it.”



Kyzier Davis is a student and new member at CAU.

Musicians Band Together with CAU

From pop to blues and rap to jazz, there was something for everyone at CAU's second Banding Together virtual concert fundraiser from March 22-27.

The concert series featured musical performances at 7 p.m. nightly on the CAU Facebook page. All proceeds will support CAU programs for people with disabilities and youth at risk.

Jefferson musician Jeiris Cook kicked off the six-night concert with his signature blend of blues, R&B and folk.

"I'm stoked to participate this time around," said Cook. "I hope, number one, that CAU finds the support that they're looking for. I hope that people leave with a greater sense of what CAU does, and I hope they leave feeling better than when they came because I believe music is therapy. Sometimes the right lyric will resonate with someone...I think music can connect with people in a way that is powerful."

CAU would like to thank all the musicians who contributed their time and talent: jazz violinist Richmond Punch, rapper Kosha Dillz, indie soul pop band Apollo Sonders, R&B/soul singer Chrissie Limos, pop/R&B singer Natalie Imani, and special guests, guitarist Bruce Kulick, Fred Michael Beam and Sunshine 2.0.

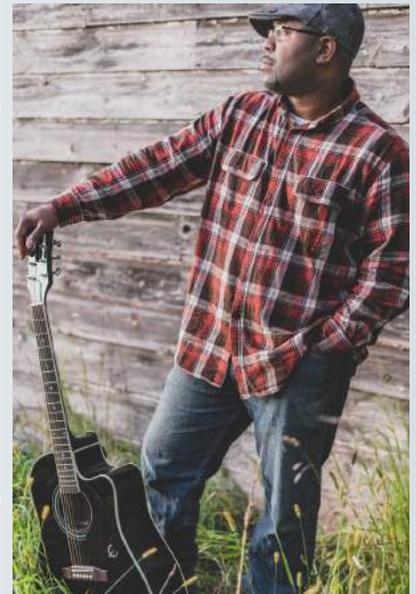
Banding Together donations will help CAU offset significant pandemic-related expenses such as personal protective equipment for members and staff, and supplies for creative at-home activities for members. The pandemic has greatly affected the operations of the agency, which has grown to offer virtual services, including virtual learning and employment services.

"Any opportunity for us to perform and give back to a community in need is a win-win," said Nick Geremia, bassist in the four-piece Apollo Sonders. The Jersey City-based group draws inspiration from Amy Winehouse and Lake Street Dive, and was named one of the "Bands you Need to Hear in 2020" by NJ.com.

Apollo Sonders had been performing two to three times a month before the pandemic "ground everything to a halt," Geremia said. The band is feeling hopeful about being able to perform again this summer or fall.

"Opportunities as a band have been few and far between for the past year," Geremia said. "This event let us keep our chops up as a band while supporting Community Access."

Learn more about supporting the agency and become a monthly donor at www.caunj.org/support-us/.



Jeiris Cook, top, and Apollo Sonders, bottom, performed in the Banding Together fundraiser to benefit CAU.

CAU Works with Amazon to Support Jobs for People with Disabilities

CAU is working with Amazon to help people with disabilities in New Jersey begin new careers working for the retailer.

Amazon has made a commitment to “building and supporting an inclusive workforce,” which may include supported employment such as job coaching, accommodations such as an ASL interpreter or different interview format, and accessibility accommodations, according to their website.

Several CAU members completed trainings in December and started working at an Amazon sortation center this winter.

“It’s an integrated work environment,” said Sandra Lynch, assistant executive director of employment at CAU. “We’re working with Amazon to make sure the members are successful at their jobs.”

Member Robert Cappello had been working at a fast food restaurant but was furloughed in 2020 due to COVID-19. With the help of his job coach, Robert completed the application process at Amazon and was hired. He said he is excited to be working in the community again and has been busy learning how to scan boxes and load pallets at the sortation center.

“I’m really happy,” Cappello said. “My coworkers treat me well even though I haven’t worked there that long. I really didn’t have any money before to pay my phone bill, but now I pay it and my rent and cable bills.”

Referred to the CAU Employment Department by DVRS of Union County, Wilford Edwards struggled with employment since becoming physically disabled ten years ago. He now has his first job since being disabled and says that he is glad to be starting a new venture to support himself. He also hopes to find a new wheelchair-accessible apartment, further his education and receive a trade certificate.

“One of my main goals is to get a place for myself where I can have more living convenience- that is what I am really working for,” he said.

Edwards’s job coach visits him at work and checks that he can perform his duties without problems.

“Once I’m in a position working and I understand what I’m doing, I don’t need a lot of supervision and I don’t make the same mistakes all the time,” Edwards said.

Positions members have found at Amazon have room for upward growth, Lynch said, such as shift supervision roles or opportunity to become a trainer.

CAU is excited to continue working with Amazon to help more individuals with disabilities find job opportunities and grow in their careers. CAU offers comprehensive career planning, prevocational training and supported employment for small groups and individuals.

“At Amazon we celebrate the diversity of our workforce and are committed to providing a safe, accessible and inclusive workplace for all employees,” said Amazon Spokesperson Jenna Hilzenrath. “These associates hired through Community Access Unlimited are talented and bring various skills, experiences and diverse backgrounds – and we’re proud to help them accomplish their goals.”

Wilford Edwards completes a training session to start working at an Amazon fulfillment center in NJ.



TOP Celebrates Tradition of the National African American Read-In

Howard Wingard recalls that when he was in college, he was given a list of white American authors and their books to choose from for a term paper.

That didn't sit right with him, so he asked his professor if he could instead write about Richard Wright or James Baldwin. Why weren't they on the list of great American writers?

During his Black History Month, Wingard shared the memory during an event celebrating the National African American Read-In with members of the Transitional Opportunities Program (TOP) at CAU. Young people in TOP receive independent and transitional living support services that prepare them for a stable, self-reliant adulthood.

Over Zoom, the group discussed the contributions of African Americans to American art, science and culture. Wingard, assistant director of TOP, asked the group to try to connect with Black history, or their own ethnic or cultural identity, in a way that makes them feel enlightened and proud of who they are. He started off with a reading of "Thank you, Lord" by Maya Angelou.



"I thought it was very powerful," said member Leticia Ceaser, who said she is Black and Puerto Rican. "Sometimes folks don't take the initiative to recognize Black culture so I liked it a lot."

The African American Read-In has been a longstanding tradition at CAU. Established in 1990 by the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English, the Read-In aims to make literacy a significant part of Black History Month and has reached millions of participants around the world.

"We do want them to get interested in literature and the arts" Wingard said. "We want to get that side of them out to be a well-rounded person...It's important to let the members know about their culture to get them interested in it, and it's not just for kids who are African American. It helps them recognize and be proud of where they come from."

Member Rory Gras said she was also interested in the event and has been learning more about groundbreaking African Americans such as the first female self-made millionaire in the country, Madam C.J. Walker. The group also discussed the 2017 movie *Hidden Figures*, which highlights the brilliance of three African American women working for NASA in the 1960s. On Friday, NASA unveiled the renaming of the space agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C. to honor Mary Jackson, NASA's first female African American engineer and one of the inspirations for the book and movie.

"I think Black History Month is a very powerful thing for the black culture, it gives black people hope," Ceaser said. "I'm glad they fought to have a month and can appreciate where they came from."

Eligible youth can become a Community Access Unlimited TOP member by referral through different sources depending on the services needed. Referral sources include 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.

CAU invites you to the Ira Geller Walkathon!

Hop on a treadmill, go to a local park, or walk, run, or roll in your neighborhood to support services for people with disabilities and youth at risk in New Jersey!

The Community Access Unlimited virtual Ira Geller Walkathon runs the week of June 21-June 26. On June 26, runners living near Warinanco Park in Roselle are invited to run a 5K. Registration details are on the flyer at right and on our website.

Walker or runner tickets are \$30 and include a Walkathon t-shirt & race bib.

All proceeds will support CAU programs including housing, academics, employment training, day program and support services for people with disabilities and youth at risk.

Walkers and runners are encouraged to invite friends, family, and coworkers to join them virtually in the Walkathon from June 21-June 26. Run or walk a route of your choosing and share your success on social media using #CAUWalk2021. Make sure to submit your photos to sthana@caunj.org for a chance to win a prize! Prizes will be awarded for: most dollars raised, best team photo and most creative challenge.



Walkathon 2020

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

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

Day Habilitation-Learn life skills and study 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 services available. 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 - 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

ANNUAL IRA GELLER WALKATHON!

CAU provides services to people with disabilities and youth at risk in NJ to help them lead fulfilling lives as part of the community.

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

WHERE DOES MY DONATION GO?

Your donation makes a difference in our community! Your donation supports programs including housing, academics, employment training, day program and support services for people with disabilities and youth at risk.

Scan the QR code to donate today!

After scanning, follow the prompts & select donation amount based on sponsorship level below.



SPONSOR A WALKER

\$25



SPONSOR A HOME/TEAM

Receive a free t-shirt

\$50



CHAMPION SPONSOR

Become a champion sponsor and get promoted on our social media!

\$100+

People with Disabilities Continue Advocacy Fights During Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

New Jersey made a special recognition of March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month this year with a proclamation from Governor Phil Murphy. Advocates at CAU have continued their work through the pandemic and are reminding the community that people with disabilities continue to fight for accessibility and inclusion in our country.

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month was first recognized in 1987 by President Ronald Reagan, after the deinstitutionalization movement of the seventies and early eighties had laid the groundwork for social change necessary for people with developmental disabilities to reach their potential.

The New Jersey proclamation recognizes that approximately 133,000 children and adults in New Jersey have an intellectual or developmental disability, and gives credit to the resilience of these residents and caregivers through the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I think a lot of people are happy they’re getting vaccinated but they still can’t go back to work,” said CAU member Joyce Cargle, adding that some people either can’t find work or are waiting to return to their jobs. “I’m kind of frustrated too, because I can’t work at my cleaning job.”

Many people with disabilities in New Jersey also anxiously awaited a reopening of day programs in March, a process that started later in the spring due to state restrictions.

Cargle is a member of the New American Movement for People with Disabilities, a movement formed at CAU in 2012 and committed to social, political and economic transformation for the equity of all Americans.

NAMPD has continued to meet virtually during the pandemic, and members have spoken publicly on issues affecting people with disabilities.

Both Cargle and NAMPD co-founder Gary Rubin oppose a NJ bill that would allow cameras inside residential programs for people with disabilities if the people living at that program give their consent.

“We should refuse to live like that,” said Rubin, who has testified publicly against the bill.

NAMPD members meeting with Disability Rights NJ Executive Director Glen Orłowski.



NAMPD members have also given testimony to the NJ Senate Transportation Committee to address issues of reliability, capability and flexibility with public and specialized transportation.

“We should also have more accessibility at residential programs for people in wheelchairs,” Cargle said. “When you go to the doctor’s office and the door is small that’s not good. You should be able to roll up there. I think there should be more accessibility in restaurants, stores and schools.”

Walter Kalman, associate executive director of advocacy, communications and resource development at CAU, said that part of his work includes helping families understand and practice supported decision-making, so that people with disabilities can speak for themselves as much as possible, including on issues such as the “camera bill.”

“We need to be treated the way you want to be treated,” said Rubin. “Everybody who is different should be treated the same.”

Union County Board of Commissioners Chairman Alexander Mirabella acknowledged the work happening at CAU throughout the difficulties of the pandemic:

“The Governor’s proclamation recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic has created enormous new challenges for people with developmental disabilities, and for the community of family members, caregivers and advocates. Community Access Unlimited has been an invaluable partner in the efforts to ensure that developmentally disabled residents are able to connect with their community during the crisis, and on behalf of the Board I would like to thank them for their unstinting work.”



Members of NAMPD attend a meeting in 2019



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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.*

SAVE THE DATE!

JOIN COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED FOR OUR ANNUAL GOLF OUTING!

SEPT. 27, 2021	CEDAR HILL GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB 100 WALNUT ST. LIVINGSTON, NJ	8:00 AM
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FOR SPONSOR & PLAYER INFORMATION CONTACT:
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