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COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED HOSTS NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN READ-IN EVENT

Event promoted literacy as a significant part of Black History Month

Elizabeth, NJ – February 27, 2012 – The youth members and staff of Community Access Unlimited (CAU) hosted a Read-In Saturday, Feb. 25, as part of the 23rd National African American Read-In celebration designed to make literacy a significant part of Black History Month. The event also was attended by educators, representatives of other community organizations and the general public.

CAU provides support services to people with disabilities and at-risk youth that enable members to live independently within the community. As part of that effort CAU provides at-risk youth with life skills training, including literacy training. A large segment of CAU's youth members are African American.

"I thought the national Read-In effort was an ideal tool for us to celebrate Black History Month while also integrating our concentration on literacy as a life skill that our members need to continually strengthen themselves," said Wanda Watson, clinical director for CAU's Transitional Opportunities Program (TOP) for its youth members.

"We always want to instill that spirit of reading and literacy. We also want our members to broaden their horizons and what better way to do that than through the inspiring words of African American writers."

The National African American Read-In was started in 1990 by the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English and has since been endorsed by the International Reading Association. More than a million readers from the United States, West Indies and Africa have participated.

At CAU the first reading was offered by Howard Wingard, coordinator of supported housing in TOP, who read from the book "Voices of Slavery: 100 Authentic Slave Narratives."

"I didn't think I had a lot in common with the voices but the stories started to remind me of the stories my grandmother and grandaunt used to tell me," said Wingard, who grew up in Goshen, Mississippi. "They just didn't use the word slavery."

Lillian Brown of Roselle, representing the Zeta Phi Beta sorority, read about Michele Hoskins, who went from welfare to riches selling syrup.

"She wanted to better her life...and you can do things to better your lives, as well," Brown told the young people in the audience.

Many of those young people read, as well, either other authors or their own work. Osner Charles read a poem written by Wanda Watson, "Just the Way I Am," about accepting people as they are.

"I really enjoyed it," said CAU member Shayla McPleasant, who read to herself the poetry of Maya Angelou during the event. "When I was in high school we didn't learn a lot about black history. I felt like everyone connected."

CAU partnered with teachers from Elizabeth High School; local college sororities; Prevention Links, a nonprofit dedicated to fostering communities through education, collaboration and linkages to resources; and other groups for the event. Read-In hosts were selected for their interest, experience and knowledge in organizing groups, selecting appropriate reading materials and promoting literacy.



Osner Charles, a member of Community Access Unlimited (CAU), reads a poem written by Wanda Watson, CAU clinical director at the 23rd National African American Read-In celebration hosted by CAU to promote literacy during Black History Month.

About CAU

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating its 33rd anniversary in 2012, supports people with special needs in achieving real lives in the community. CAU provides support and gives a voice to adults and youth who traditionally have had little support and no voice in society. CAU helps people with housing, life skills, employment, money management, socialization and civic activities. CAU also supports opportunities for advocacy through training in assertiveness, decision-making and civil rights. CAU serves more than 5,000 individuals each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908.354.3040, online at www.caunj.org or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202.