

CAU in the News

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Community Access Unlimited Donated \$1,000 to Haitian Family *Suburban News*

Believing that people with disabilities not only are entitled to the rights, privileges and respect due any member of the community but also bear the responsibility of supporting others less fortunate than themselves, members of Community Access Unlimited (CAU) recently donated \$1,000 to a Roselle, New Jersey, family who lost several relatives in the earthquake that devastated Haiti. The money will be used to help members of the family on the island.

CAU is a non-profit human services agency that supports people with disabilities and at-risk youth. Members of the agency's self-advocacy group, Helping Hands, made the donation to fellow member David Dimanche, a 16-year-old whose family is of Haitian descent. Dimanche, a person with disabilities, lives with his parents and two sisters, who receive respite care through CAU's Community Support Program.

Helping Hands enables CAU members to further their rights and exercise their responsibilities as citizens through self-advocacy. Founded in 1984, Helping Hands is one of the oldest and most effective self-advocacy groups in New Jersey and provides members with a collective voice in local, state and national politics and discussions of social issues.

Members of Helping Hands also advocate for greater connection between people with disabilities and the community at large, and for community causes that reflect that connection, according to Sid Katz, president of the group.

"It is very important that we advocate for issues in the community because we live in the community," Katz said. "We work, we pay our taxes and it's important that people hear from us and get to know us. We want to be known in the community and we want to give back to the community. It's important that people connect with us and that we connect with them."

Community Access Unlimited is committed to helping people with disabilities live in the community and lead happy and rewarding lives, which includes giving back, according to Sid Blanchard, the agency's executive director. In the 31 years since its founding in 1979 CAU has enabled more than 7,000 people with disabilities and youth to live independently or semi-independently.

"There is a common misperception that people with disabilities require the support of the community to live and that the relationship is a one-way street," Blanchard said. "What many people don't see is that people with disabilities also support the community. They rent and own homes, hold productive jobs and contribute to the economy through taxes and consumerism."

"I've also found that people with disabilities have the biggest hearts, perhaps because they understand what it's like to be disadvantaged. The members of Helping Hands making this donation demonstrates that generosity and sense of community."