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**With Photo**

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## **COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED YOUTH ATTEND INAUGURATION**

### ***Journey to Washington Carries At-Risk Teenagers Much Further***

**Elizabeth, NJ** – Thirteen youths from **Community Access Unlimited** (CAU) journeyed beyond their dreams when they attended the presidential inauguration January 20. The at-risk teenagers traveled to Washington, D.C. to witness the inauguration of Barack Obama but left envisioning a brighter future for themselves, as well.

The 13 youths are members of CAU's Transitional Opportunity Program (TOP), which provides at-risk young adults aged 13-21 with housing and training, enabling them to enjoy a safe and stable living environment while working toward high school graduation or GED attainment and receiving training in life skills, employment and money management.

"It was a very different experience, and very special," said Nijmima Coleman, TOP director. "It gave them hope and inspiration because they never thought they would see an African American president. They feel the experience will motivate them to accomplish anything they set their minds to."

Marion Simmons was one of the members who made the trip. Simmons was politically active prior to the excursion, having voted in her first presidential election in November and served as a volunteer at a voting station in Elizabeth, yet she still felt deeply moved by the experience.

"I was inspired by Obama's speech," she said. "I felt like I was making a difference because I was there. His speech was amazing. Every word captured me."

The 13 youths and seven CAU staff members traveled to Washington by van the afternoon before the inauguration and stayed overnight in Maryland. They arrived in Washington the next morning at 4:30 a.m. and took in the morning events from the Lincoln Memorial before watching the inauguration huddled in a hotel lobby.

"It's something we can all pass on to generations to come, that we were there when the first African American was inaugurated," said Simmons.

### **About CAU**

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009, 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 3,500 individuals each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908.354.3040, online at [www.caunj.org](http://www.caunj.org) or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07207.

**Photo**  
**[TOP Washington Trip]**



Huddling in the early morning hours in Washington on January 20, members of Community Access Unlimited are warmed by the excitement of the inauguration.