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The Year(s) in Review

by Melissa A. Gertz, Esq.
Executive Director

As many of you know, the Community Justice Center is an innovative legal services non-profit based in Trenton, serving the low-income/homeless disabled, and returning disabled veterans and their families, primarily within Central New Jersey. We opened our doors to the public in March of 2009, able to represent low-income disabled veterans before both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Social Security Administration. The Community Justice Center is transforming lives—not merely by providing legal assistance, but by providing something far more priceless: hope.

Thanks to the foundational support of **The Bunbury Company**, **The Harbourton Foundation**, and the **Princeton Area Community Foundation**, along with the corporate support of **Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc.**, we have been able to greatly increase our services in Hunterdon and Middlesex Counties, while also able to maintain our services in Mercer County. In addition, we were selected to receive Hunterdon County funding for 2014-2015, under its *Human Service Community Programs*, to help sustain our work there. We are excited to continue our relationship with the Hunterdon County Department of Human Services' Division of Senior, Disabilities & Veterans Services, along with our partners in Middlesex County, including New Brunswick-based Elijah's Promise.



In Fall 2014, and again in Fall 2015, we were honored to be selected by the **I Am Trenton Community Foundation** to be part of its growing family. Their sentiment that “grassroots organizations and entrepreneurial individuals can be the key to great change” is mirrored in the evolution, mission, and work of the Community Justice Center. We are thrilled to be recognized in and by our own backyard.

The past two years have been chock full of exciting opportunities, many of which are detailed inside these pages. We welcomed our **500th client**, increased our visibility and voice throughout Central New Jersey, and were part of some very exciting events! We attended the **Abilities Expo**, the **New Jersey Disability Pride Parade**, and some phenomenal educational and networking conferences. Hearing and meeting David Grant, author of *The Social Profit Handbook – Measuring What Matters*, at the **Council of New Jersey Grantmaker's 2015 Conference** *Lifting All Boats: Leadership, Capacity, Impact*, was not only insightful but inspiring. Meanwhile, Disability Rights Advocate Carrie Ann Young, Esq. was attending an intensive course in trauma awareness – turn the page for her insights.

Perhaps most moving and impactful for all of our staff was **Team Never Quit's Patriot Tour**. Sometimes our work takes its toll, and participation in events like these reinvigorates and recharges us. We were psyched that TNQ made a stop at the War Memorial in Trenton and that we had the opportunity to attend! You don't know TNQ and their Patriot Tour? Their own words couldn't describe them better: *“Team Never Quit embodies the heart of a warrior, men and women in all walks of life who have faced incredible hardship but have chosen not only to survive, but to learn from the experience and make themselves and those around them stronger for it. Our commitment is to honor those who have fallen, stand with those who have survived, and share their stories that might inspire others to Never Quit...Let's bring together the best things in life...faith, family, service, sacrifice, community. Now inject those with heartfelt music and speakers as approachable as a best friend but also absolutely elite in lifestyle and character...”* Check them out at www.teamneverquit.com – you won't be let down.

Just a few weeks ago, I had the chance to meet and exchange books with ABC News Anchor, former 20/20 Host, and current host of ABC's “What Would You Do?” John Quiñones. A lifelong proponent of giving voice to the voiceless, it was an honor to hear him say we were heroes for the work that we do. We hope you agree as you read more in depth about our work throughout these pages, and that you find we are meeting our overarching mission of *Encouraging the Empowerment, Resiliency, and Rights of Those Struggling with Disabilities*, and that we are worthy of your continued support. Cheers!

Enhancing Trauma Awareness Enhances the Lives of Our Clients*

by Carrie Ann Young, Esq.
Disability Rights Advocate



Recently, I was presented with the opportunity to participate in a training program conducted by the Institute for Family Professionals entitled Enhancing Trauma Awareness. This was a six-session course aimed at teaching and exposing us to a variety of principles and concepts in the hopes of making public service professionals better equipped at handling the topics we face in our specific fields. This training program was impactful, life-altering and extremely useful; it is my wish that all public service professionals could experience this course!

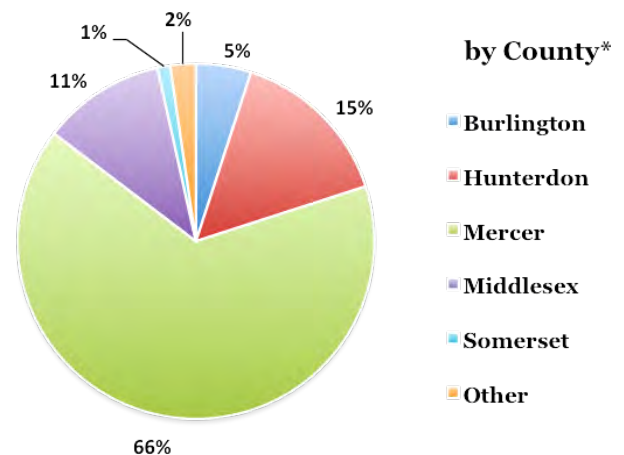
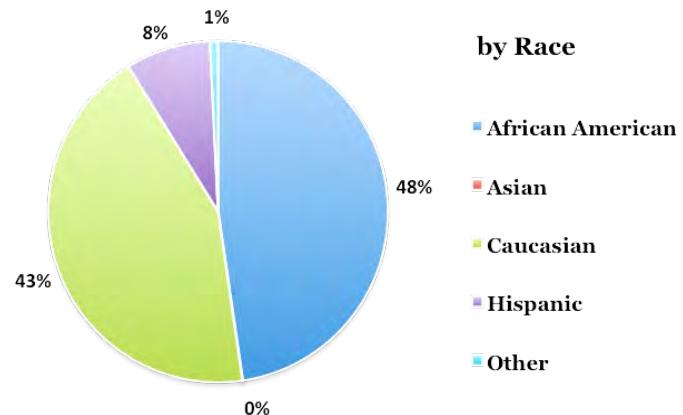
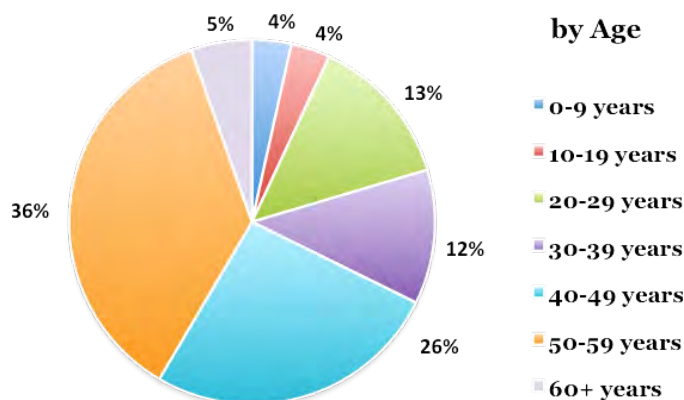
As we attempt to provide services to our ever-growing list of individuals, families, and communities, it is important to remember that these are people's *lives* we are discussing. Using the descriptions "trauma victims" or "trauma survivors" are not conducive to healing. "Trauma victim" indicates that above all the person is first and foremost a victim, not one who has had a horrific experience. On the other hand, "trauma survivor" seems to imply that the horrific experience is all over, and doesn't reflect that the person is still affected by the trauma. However, using the phrase, "trauma-impacted person" is a neutral way to describe someone who in some way has been impacted by trauma. This phrase keeps the focus on what *happened* to them instead of focusing on what's *wrong* with them. It's changing the question from "What's wrong with you?" to "What's been going on with you?"

Trauma can be acute (a single traumatic event that is limited in time i.e., serious accidents; community violence; natural disasters; sudden or violent loss of a loved one; or physical or sexual assault) or it can be chronic (the experience of multiple traumatic events i.e., a child who is exposed to domestic violence, is involved in a serious car accident, and then becomes a victim of community violence; or suffers from longstanding physical abuse, neglect, or is living in a war zone). The amount and level of trauma a person experiences and is exposed to affect the way a person reacts to a traumatic situation in the future. (continued on Page 3)

Any Way You Slice It, We're Reaching the Community

The Community Justice Center assists the low-income disabled (that is, 175% of the poverty level or below), with an emphasis on veterans and the homeless. In addition to full representation and brief service, the Community Justice Center provides training and information sessions upon request to area agencies, government units, and consumer-run support groups.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, demand for services remained consistently high. In 2014, the Community Justice Center provided full representation to 140 clients – 93 cases were opened, and 42 were closed. In the first 10 months of 2015, full representation was provided to 120 clients – 56 cases were opened, and 37 were closed. Represented below is the demographic spectrum of the **260 clients** for which it provided full-representation in both 2014 and the first 10 months of 2015.



* Please note that roughly half of CJC's clients are homeless—they have been included in the county in which they receive emergency services.

The brain stem is involved in the fight, flight or freeze reaction our bodies all experience in response to a signal of danger, and if the wiring in the brain stem has been compromised, the brain may become more sensitive, increasing its arousal, thus moving into the state of self-protection faster than a non-trauma-impacted brain. This in turn leads one to question why a client responds so dramatically (in a non-trauma-impacted view) to a simple, none-threatening change of environment. As it turns out, traumatized people view change differently than a non-trauma-impacted person. A non-trauma-impacted person often looks at change as a form of growing, a means of becoming a healthier, better version of himself; whereas, a trauma-impacted person views change as an indicator of danger. So, for example, does a child who cannot sit still in class have ADHD and problems with focusing, or has he or she been exposed to trauma at home and is therefore constantly feeling as though he or she needs to be hypervigilant and constantly checking for safety? When we feel afraid or fear for our safety, our thinking becomes overly simplistic and we are unable to deal with a variety of categories of thought. Time is a useful tool when working with someone constantly in alert mode – it takes one’s body *twenty uninterrupted minutes* to calm down and return to its normal state – so give the person his twenty minutes – you will both be grateful you did!

**The full text of this article, including footnotes, can be found on our website.*

We’re thrilled that our Executive Director has been selected to be published in the newest edition of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*! A book series generally focused on providing uplifting and inspiring messages, this edition, **Recovering from Traumatic Brain Injuries**, has a loftier goal, endeavoring to connect the civilian and military survivors, while simultaneously providing support for non-profits working in the field.

Racing the Sunset tells the story of Ms. Gertz’s rise from the tragedy of 2004. The book is available now, and publishers have graciously allowed us to sell the book at \$15, with \$10 of the proceeds to benefit its TBI services. Ms. Gertz is moved by the publisher’s generosity, saying that “It’s a win-win for everyone, especially survivors like myself, who feel like their voices are being heard and validated, and that their invisible wounds are a bit less invisible now.”



Kenna’s Korner

Well, howdy humans! Welcome back! My name is Kenna, and this is my second time writing to ya’ll. As some of you already know, I joined the CJC Family in the Summer of 2013 after being rescued myself from a Really Bad Situation. Let’s just say I was abused and neglected, and very sick. I was scared, but I had a good support system and I fought hard to get better, just like so many of you.

I’ve been paying it forward in so many ways. Most days, I spend time with clients and their families, making them feel comfortable. I especially like giving people Smiles. In case you were thinking of stopping by to say hello, or maybe to get a Smile of your own, you should know I’m very fond of popcorn. Oh that smell of popcorn...

Oh yeah, I almost forgot to tell you my Biggest News. I’m a Star. First, I had a cameo on a Comedy Central show called *Broad City* (Season 2, Episode 6). The Lawyers in the office say you can’t have a cameo until after you’re already famous, but I say I’ve been telling them I was a Star all along. It’s not my fault that they don’t listen to me.

And then, just to prove that I’m a Star, I got chosen to be the new model for Hush Puppies!! What, you don’t know what Hush Puppies are? No, not the Food. Though, given my excitement and love of Food I can see why you’d think that... It’s the shoe company! Soon, I’m gonna be all over their website, in their emails, and on their commercials.

See, I told ya’ll I was a Star. I’m living proof that you can come from a Really Bad Situation and rise up to be a Star.



Kenna welcoming Bart, a service dog

Please Join Jay & Amy Regan for an Evening with
 Melissa A. Gertz, Executive Director of the
 Community Justice Center,
 Cocktails, Hor D'oeuvres, & Chicken Soup!

Hear Melissa's story of founding GJC's legal services for
 injured veterans, as featured in Chicken Soup for the Soul:
 Recovering from Traumatic Brain Injuries
 Comments by Ret. NJ Supreme Court Justice
 Virginia A. Long

Tuesday, October 21, 2014





And the Verdict Is In!

“As I walked into the office, Melissa was very friendly. You feel warm, comfortable, and next thing you know, you start talking, and off you go. Melissa is positive. She sent me home happy. Every time I went home, all I could think about was what she said, and it made me confident. Once Melissa looks at your case, she will tell you if she can help you or not. I tell people on the street to come to her, because she can help them. She can really help the people.” ~ L. W., Trenton, NJ

“Melissa took great care and length to help me understand the system. She was an incredible friend to have during this whole process. She kept in touch with me and answered all of my questions, even when they did not seem to make any sense!”

~ A. H., Glen Gardner, NJ

"Carrie Ann has helped me in so many ways. I cannot thank her enough. I will be sending others to her because of her great work."

~ L.P., Trenton, NJ

"I would like to thank all staff members for all the support, help, professional advice, and listening ears that were rendered to me during my extreme distress, depression, and fear. I am still recovering, and you all helped me to reach this far. Thanks and may God bless you all." ~ V. S., Hamilton, NJ



*Melissa Gertz, Rachel Marlowe,
Carrie Ann Young*

"Special thanks and gratitude to Carrie Ann, whose legal expertise, combined with compassion and thoughtful understanding, are so greatly appreciated."

~ Caseworker, Lawrenceville, NJ

"I would like to thank the Center and Ms. Gertz for their effort on my behalf. The work was exceptional and outstanding in every respect. Kudos!" ~ A. H., Flemington, NJ

"I had made several attempts to get [help] due to my mental health to no avail. Upon coming to CJC, my road began to change. It has been 19 years living with my disease. Thanks to the CJC team for not judging or downplaying mental illness. Continue to strive and make changes to help others livings with a disability or disease - important not just to their families, but to the community." ~ K.P., Hamilton, NJ

“Interning at the Community Justice Center gave me the chance every day I was there, to return to clients the voice they may have had taken. I have been lucky this past summer to work alongside everyone at CJC as their intern, helping those in great need of Social Security and thus returning to them their voice that so often gets lost in the shuffle. Having the ability to speak - even if it is someone else speaking on your behalf - can make all the difference in the world.”

~ Rachel Marlowe, Widener School of Law - Harrisburg, '15
Summer 2014 / Spring 2014 Intern

“My summer with the Community Justice Center has been nothing short of amazing. I am forever grateful and appreciative for what you guys have done to help me grow, not only as an aspiring attorney but as an individual. The Patriot Tour was terrific to be a part of; hearing their stories and the message it sent will be something I never forget. It is truly amazing to see that law is a field where helping others is a true option. The Community Justice Center does this on a daily basis.”

~ Michael A. Camadeco, Delaware Law School, '17
Summer 2015 Intern



Thanking TNQ's Pete Scobell for his inspiring music – check out his band at www.petescobellband.com.



Getting Ready for Team Never Quit's Patriot Tour: Michael Camadeco, Thakoon Tangtrakul, Nebojsa Zlatanovic, Melissa Gertz, Carrie Ann Young



Meeting ABC News' John Quiñones!

Our Support

As always, thanks to each and every one of our donors for believing in the Community Justice Center and the vital role it plays in the health and well-being of Central New Jersey's low-income disabled and veterans. Special thanks to **Jay and Amy Regan**, who hosted our Fall 2014 Benefit, and to our new supporters!

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2014 Holiday Party at Weyerbacher Brewing Company



*Encouraging the
Empowerment, Resiliency, and Rights
of Those Struggling with Disabilities.*

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