

community.justice.center | news

The Year(s) in Review

by Melissa A. Gertz, Esq.
Executive Director

The Community Justice Center is an innovative legal services non-profit based in Trenton, serving the low-income/homeless disabled, disabled veterans and their families, primarily within Central New Jersey. We opened our doors in March 2009, representing clients before both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Social Security Administration. Staff has worked extensively with those battling mental illness and other more “invisible” impairments, including traumatic brain injury (TBI), post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and spectrum disorders, and has been trained in trauma awareness, (il)literacy awareness/dyslexia, and other circumstances and conditions common to many of our clients.



The past two years have been chock full of exciting opportunities and milestones, many of which are detailed inside these pages. We welcomed our **650th client**, increased our visibility and voice throughout Central New Jersey, and thanks to the generous support of **BCB Community Bank of Monroe Township**, hosted **TAPPED 2016** in support of our services. We were especially humbled by some of our former clients having chosen to “pay it forward” and speak at the event!

Thanks to the continued support of **The Harbourtion Foundation**, we have been able to solidify our presence in Hunterdon and Middlesex Counties, while maintaining a high level of service in Mercer County. Amid great success in 2014-2015, we were again selected to receive funding from Hunterdon County for 2016-2017, under its *Human Services Community Programs*, and are hopeful to be awarded funding for the next cycle as well. We are thrilled to continue our relationship with the Hunterdon County Department of Human Services’ Division of Senior, Disabilities & Veterans Services. In Middlesex County, our collaborative effort with Elijah’s Promise remains strong – our achievements over the years have led to eligibility for the Middlesex County 2018 Freeholder Support Grant for the first time. We’re in the running for our program ***Making the Invisible Visible: Reclaiming Voices and Restoring Hope***, so keep your fingers crossed for us! Turn the page to discover more about our efforts in Middlesex County, along with the expansion of services into Somerset County.

In Fall 2017, we were again honored in and by our own backyard, as we were selected by the **I Am Trenton Community Foundation** to be part of its growing family of change agents in Trenton. Our grant will assist those most financially impoverished and struggling with “invisible” illnesses – many of whom have been driven underground and into silence or worse, suicide – by empowering them to reclaim their voice and restore the hope necessary to continue fighting for their own lives. I also had the privilege of speaking before the New Jersey Advisory Council on Traumatic Brain Injury, following the publication of my story *Racing the Sunset* in a special edition of **Chicken Soup for the Soul: Recovering from Traumatic Brain Injuries**. The book endeavors to connect civilian and military survivors, while simultaneously providing support for non-profits working in the field. It’s a win-win for everyone, especially for survivors like myself, who feel like their voices are being heard and validated, and that their invisible wounds are a bit less invisible now.

Of all the events and opportunities these past two years, most moving and impactful was **BASETRACK Live**. Sometimes our work takes its toll, and participation in events like these reinvigorates and recharges us. We were psyched that the traveling performance made a stop at William Patterson University in Fall 2016, and we had the opportunity to attend! BASETRACK Live is a powerful combination of live music, imagery, and post-deployment interviews, interwoven to expose the all too common struggles following deployment and reintegration, especially when coupled with newfound medical issues. Their own words could not describe them better: “BASETRACK Live is a multimedia documentary theatre piece about the life-altering impact of war on veterans and their families – a complicated and sensitive portrayal of how war affects us all. Two actors play AJ and Melissa Czubai, a real life young Marine and his wife. We follow their journey from his deployment to Afghanistan through his return home, while hearing and seeing the harrowing stories of others who served with him in Marine Corps Unit One-Eight.” Turn the page to learn more.

We hope as you read more in depth about our work throughout these pages 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!

We're Expanding into Somerset County!

by Rachel S. Marlowe, Esq.
Disability Rights Advocate



After completing both an internship and an externship with the Community Justice Center in conjunction with Widener Commonwealth Law School, I graduated in 2015, and somehow found my way back! In May 2017, I returned to the Community Justice Center, and now oversee outreach and program services in Middlesex, Morris, and Somerset Counties.

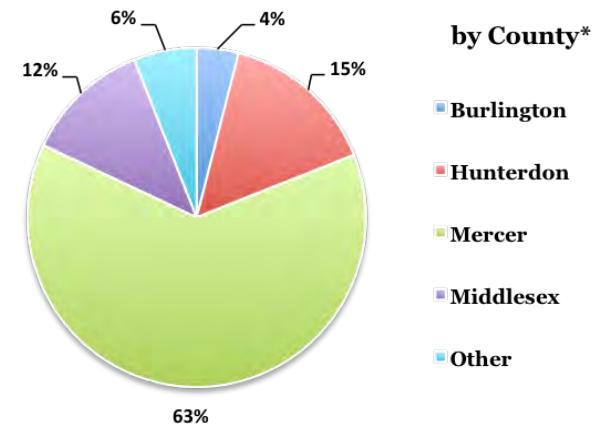
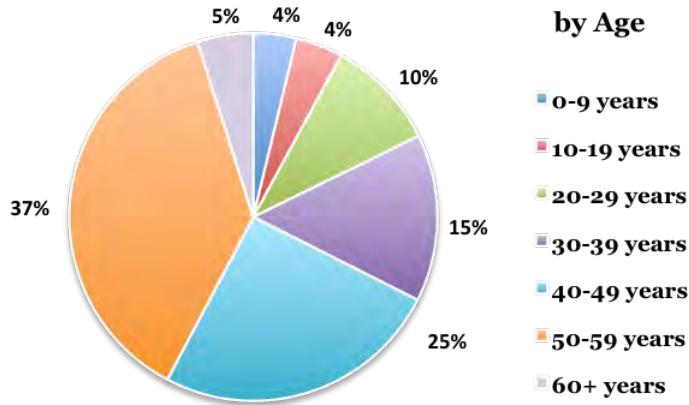
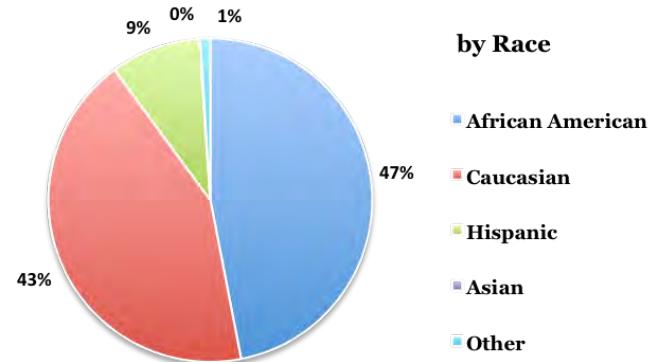
Since 2011, the Community Justice Center and Elijah's Promise, a multiservice resource center in New Brunswick, have had a fantastic ongoing collaboration. Our emphasis on empowering vulnerable populations complements the mission of Elijah's Promise: to Empower Lives, Invite Justice, and Alleviate Hunger. Thanks to their generosity, their facility serves as the hub for our presence in Middlesex County, allowing Community Justice Center staff and case managers from some of our partnering organizations, including Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care, to meet with prospective clients.

In Fall 2017, we expanded our services into Somerset County! Using a model proven successful for years in Hunterdon County, Somerset County's Department of Human Services, Office on Aging and Disability Services will now host office hours for Community Justice Center staff to meet with clients on site. By bringing services to their home county, we are opening doors for many Somerset County residents who lack transportation or ability to travel to Flemington (Hunterdon) or New Brunswick (Middlesex). I look forward to pursuing new opportunities for outreach throughout Somerset County and surrounding areas. If you think you may benefit from our services, or have a consumer who might, please contact us or complete the referral form found on our website, and we'll be in touch!

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

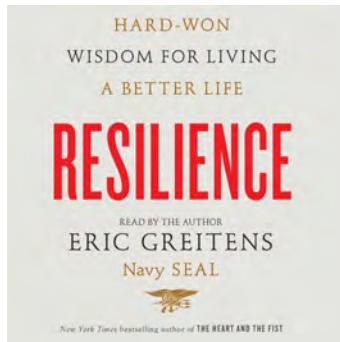
The Community Justice Center assists the low-income disabled (that is, 175% of the poverty level or below), with an emphasis on veterans, the homeless, and those struggling with "invisible" illnesses – in short, those who tend to fall through the cracks most frequently. In addition to full representation 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 2016 and 2017, demand for services remained consistently high. The Community Justice Center provided full representation to **265 clients**, during which time 86 cases were opened, and 123 were closed. Represented below is the demographic spectrum of the 265 clients for which it provided full-representation in both years.



* Other includes Atlantic, Camden, Essex, Hudson, Ocean, Somerset & Union Counties.

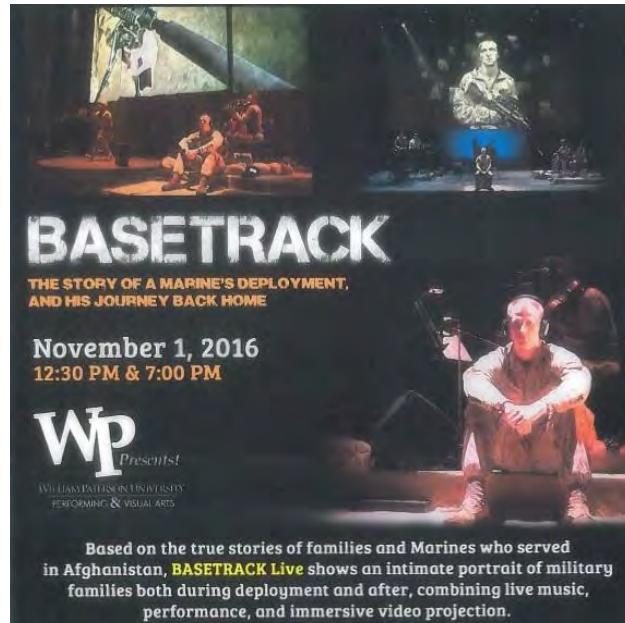
* Please note that roughly half of CJC's clients are homeless—they have been included in the county in which they receive emergency services.



*We loved this book so much
we couldn't help but recommend it!*

BASETRACK Live came to William Patterson University, and we were lucky enough to attend.

If you see it coming to your town, it's an opportunity not to be missed! Learn more at [https://engardearts.org/basetrack-live!](https://engardearts.org/basetrack-live/) →



Kenna's Korner: Start with a Smile

Well hello there! So glad you could join us. I'm Kenna, and this is my third time writing to ya'll. I joined the CJC Family in Summer 2013 after being rescued from a Really Bad Situation. I had been living in horrible conditions in a not-so-legal outdoor breeding kennel 1800 miles away. I was abused and neglected, and very sick. The owners didn't give me much food or water, so I was severely underweight. They never took me to the doggie doctor, so I had all sorts of health problems. In fact, they never took me anywhere, all I had was a tiny wire crate. But then some angels appeared on Christmas Eve 2012, and I got rescued! I had to spend four weeks in the doggie hospital. I was scared, but I fought hard to get better, just like so many of you. And boy am I glad I did! I learned about Grass and Sun and Bravery and Resiliency, and...oooh Popcorn! And when I met Ms. Melissa and heard her story, I knew I was just where I belonged.

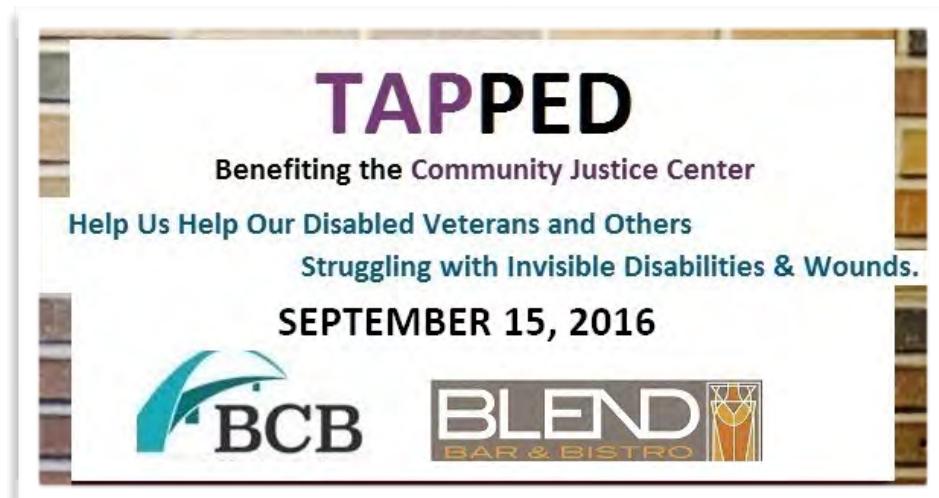
This CJC place is all about Resiliency! I see it every day when I hear clients' stories. Most days, I spend time making them feel comfortable and giving them Smiles. I also get to do Fun Things, like strut my stuff at the annual New Jersey Disability Pride Parade, or go to the annual Beach Bash!

Ooh, you don't know what the Beach Bash is?! It's great fun! This cool group of surfer dudes and dudettes – I think they call themselves Surfers Healing – comes to Belmar and helps my human friends with Spectrum Disorders or Different Brains experience the ocean and surfing! They close the whole beach, and the best part of course...Food everywhere!

Speaking of Food, it makes me sad to tell you that Ms. Carrie Ann left the CJC Family in December 2016, for something called Pennsylvania. Everyone who met her loved her, but I loved her most because we were Lunch Buddies and she always gave me some of her Food. Ms. Rachel must have really missed me, because she came back after being gone for...for...I don't know how long. So far I only get Smiles from her, but I'm trying really hard to be her Lunch Buddy too.

Oh, yeah, I almost forgot to tell you that I'm a Star. I got asked to be a model for Hush Puppies! 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! I've been all over their email blasts and website! I'm living proof that you can come from a Really Bad Situation and rise up to be a Star.

If you'd like a Smile of your own, stop by and say hello. Maybe we can play Fetch with Popcorn! It really is the only time playing fetch makes any sense... And if you'd like to give me a Smile from wherever you are, you can help the CJC Family by donating through all your Amazon purchases, just visit www.smile.amazon.com and choose us!





Cocktails & Conversation

...and a little bit of inspiration

And the Verdict Is In!

"All the Community Justice family made me feel very comfortable at all times. They took the time to explain what I didn't know and they fought for me when no one else would. They did a wonderful job keeping me abreast of all issues. Melissa got me a good settlement and I can't thank her and her staff enough." ~ T. S., Ewing, NJ

"I felt welcome and didn't feel looked down upon. I never could have done it without them."

~ E. O., Middlesex, NJ

"I am very satisfied with the services. The staff have always been fully respectful and compassionate. We need more programs like the Community Justice Center to help the disadvantaged and disabled."

~ M. M., Hamilton, NJ

"Rather than asking our Hunterdon County consumers to go to Trenton and meet with them, the staff of the Community Justice Center comes to Flemington and meets people who are seeking disability benefits at the County Division of Senior, Disabilities, and Veteran Services. This convenience has made all of the difference for Hunterdon County residents with disabilities, many of whom do not have reliable out-of-county transportation. People also appreciate meeting in the familiar comfort of our local office. Their staff also provides training for human service professionals who help people apply for disability benefits. They have done this in a large group training forum in Hunterdon County. We invited other Counties' professionals as well, reaching a large audience that benefitted from their excellent training."

~ Barbara Metzger, LSW,
Hunterdon County Disability Services Planner



*Accepting the 2017 Award from
the I Am Trenton Community Foundation*

"Outstanding, committed service. Great people to have in your corner, who won't stop until the case is complete, win or lose."

~ T. N., Trenton, NJ

"I'm so happy someone finally recommended CJC or I may still be sitting in limbo. I'm very happy. Everything ran smoothly and quickly. My day in court was as stress-free as possible. Melissa has been a Godsend."

~ N. W., Ewing, NJ

"Carrie Ann and Vic were friendly and very competent and worked very hard on my case."

~ P. V., Edison, NJ

"CJC staff have pulled me up when I was down. All the kindness and gentle care was so appreciated. Without them, I don't think I could have made it through. The Community Justice Center has changed my life tremendously."

~ C.H., Trenton, NJ

"Although there are no guarantees, one thing I'm sure of is that there is a feeling of relief associated with handing everything over to CJC...I'm sure you have improved a lot of lives by doing what you do and I'm grateful."

~ M. P., Hopewell, NJ

You can keep those donations coming by visiting our website at www.nj-communityjusticecenter.org or by choosing us when you shop on Amazon – simply visit www.smile.amazon.com.

Love what we do, and wish you could help in other ways?

We're looking for new Board Members!

If you're interested in joining the CJC Family, please email info@nj-cjc.org with the subject line

CJC Board Membership and tell us why!

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 **Blend Bar & Bistro** and **Melanie & John Clarke**, who graciously hosted our events, and to our new supporters, including **BCB Community Bank**, and an extra special thanks to some of our former clients who chose to pay it forward by speaking on our behalf. It's been an honor to continue to work with all involved, and receive your recognition and support!

Mighty Oak (\$5,000+)

Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc.
Joan & Jack Hall

Oak (\$1,000-\$4,999)

BCB Community Bank
of Monroe Township
Melanie & John Clarke
Joan & Alan Gertz
John & Louise Wellemeyer
Melinda Wilp

Sapling (\$500-\$999)

Carol Anderson & Stephen Lin
Anonymous
The Bank of Princeton
G. Whitney Snyder Charitable Fund
Ann & Lee Gladden
Linda & Bucky Hayes
Mark & Cynthia Larsen
Kathryn W. Poole & Howard H. Tomlinson
Robert Sansonetti,
in memory of Constance Sansonetti
Josh & Mariah Silva
Virginia & Jonathan Weiner

Seedling (\$250-\$499)

Christina & Christopher Dymek
Christina V. & William Harvey
Deborah Herrington & Doug Sawyer
Ellen & Ira Idelson
Bob & Lynn Johnston
Debra Owens & Herman Kummler
James Pope & Nancy Marks

Acorn (- \$249)

James & Mary Gay Abbott Young
Jane Brailove Rutkoff
Donald Cantlay
Maria & Joseph Depiano
Bob & Carol Foster
Patricia & Eric Gertz
Rachel Gray
Terrie Jenkins
Sandra Johns
Jon & Nathalie Kaledin

Anne Labate
Samuel W. Lambert, III
Emily Marlowe
Rachel Marlowe
Michael McKenna
Michelle McKenna
Thomas J. Morgan
of TJM Behavioral Health Services
Lisa Nickels
Monica & Carl Parsons
Lisa Phifer & Judy Gertz
Eileen Pittenger,
in memory of Madelyn Toth
Carrie Ann & Jason Ploppert
Anne Reeves
Llewellyn Ross
Michael & Eileen Stewart
Atakorn Tangtrakul
Michelle Templon
Carol Tosches
Paul Tractenberg
James & Susan Trowbridge
Nancy Vanorman

In-Kind

Applebee's
Basil Bandwagon
Best Buy
BJ's of Flemington
Blend Bar & Bistro
Patricia & Eric Gertz
Thomas Glover
Christina V. Harvey
The Home Depot
Shelton Jackson
C. Patterson McKenna
Moe's of Hamilton
Mohel Elliott Bauer & Gass
Lisa Nickels
Panera Bread
The Pennington Market
Jay & Amy Regan
Shoprite of Flemington
Top Gun Bartending
James Trowbridge
Adriaan van Stolk
Wegmans of Princeton

Speakers

David Dorse
Cheri Howell
Terrie Jenkins
James Morris, Jr.
Linda Rivera
Matt Sikorski
David Symons
India Tillman
Wilma Woodward

Foundational / Government

Essig Enright Family Foundation
The Harbourton Foundation
I Am Trenton Community Foundation
Hunterdon County Department of
Human Services
State of New Jersey, Division of
Family Development

Collaborating / Referring Agencies

Alliance Center for Independence
The Arc of Hunterdon County
Autism Family Services of New Jersey
Bancroft
Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton
Crisis Ministry of Princeton and Trenton
Easter Seals of Hunterdon County
Elijah's Promise
Family Promise of Hunterdon County
GI Go Fund
Hunterdon Behavioral Health
Hunterdon County Board of Social
Services
Hunterdon County Office of Disability
Services
Mercer County Board of Social Services
Middlesex County Board of Social Services
NAMI - Mercer
Oaks Integrated Care
The Rescue Mission of Trenton
Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care
Somerset County Office on Aging
and Disability Services
State of New Jersey, TBI Fund
Veteran's Haven North
Womanspace

"Giving back to the community has always been critically important to me. My desire to help aid and advocate for those who are mentally ill, intellectually or developmentally disabled, and those with spectrum disorders arose through having afflicted family members, as well as from volunteering with The Arc Mercer. Interning at the Community Justice Center has further increased my commitment to pursue law school, and eventually assist the community in a similar fashion."

~ Adriaan van Stolk, Rutgers University '08
2016 & 2017 Intern





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

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