

For Immediate Release

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Community Access Honors Gabourey Sidibe as Mental Health Advocate of the Year, Raises \$1.2M at Annual Good Neighbor Gala



*Gabourey Sidibe with Steve Coe, CEO of Community Access
Photo Credit: Sean Sime Photography*

(New York, NY, 5/4/18) – Community Access hosted its 44th Annual Good Neighbor Gala on Thursday, May 3, to support the expansion of opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services. The event was held at 583 Park Avenue in New York City, with more than four-hundred leaders of business and the community attending. Gala leadership included Emmy-winning actor and director John Turturro as honorary chair; Gala co-chairs were Dan Wurtzel, President of First Service Residential New York; David Segura, Chief Strategy Officer of Roomi; and Monadnock Construction, Inc.

This year, Community Access proudly honored Academy Award- and Golden Globe-nominated actor Gabourey Sidibe as the organization's Mental Health Advocate of the Year.

In her recent memoir, *This Is Just My Face: Try Not to Stare*, Gabourey very candidly discusses the mental health struggles she has faced and overcome throughout her life. Her warmth, humor, and resiliency shine through on every page and her message of radical self-love has given others the hope that they can recover, too.

Community Access believes that a big part of fighting mental health stigma starts with people sharing their own personal stories: opening a dialogue for conversation in one's family, in the community, and creating a path towards positive change in society.

"Thank you, Community Access for this award and recognition of how I just won't ever shut up about how important therapy and mental health is," said **Gabourey Sidibe**. "But more importantly, thank you for what you do for those who need your help and guidance to help themselves. It is really hard to get people to treat what we can't easily see. It's even harder to get people of color to treat what we can't see because of stigma, economic status and the generation who raised us, keeping secrets and emotions to themselves for survival. But you guys strive to turn that around and I can't think of anything more admirable than that."

"Advocacy is an essential part of our work. To build a more just New York, we need to change the way people think about – and talk about – mental health," said **Steve Coe, CEO of Community Access**. "Gabourey Sidibe understands this principle and has embraced the power of storytelling to change the way we think about mental health challenges. Through her art and her advocacy, she encourages us to see and celebrate each other's common humanity. And she urges us to fight for a world where all people have the chance to live free of fear, and with hope for a better future. That's why it's our pleasure to honor her as Mental Health Advocate of the Year."

Community Access was founded in 1974 as a proactive response to the mass release of patients from New York's psychiatric hospitals. Its founders sought to assist residents in obtaining housing, reconnecting with the community, and rebuilding social ties. These early efforts became the prototype for one of the nation's first supportive housing programs.

Community Access has since expanded beyond housing to also offer comprehensive support services, job training, counseling, education and advocacy programs to meet the needs of individuals who include people with histories of substance use and the formerly incarcerated. Its award-winning programs have been replicated across the globe.

Community Access is committed to affirmatively hiring individuals with lived experience to work at the agency and provide peer support to others in the community. The organization also trains and supports mental health consumers to engage in activities that help shape city, state, and national mental health policies that can lead to system-wide change.

About Community Access:

Community Access' mission is to expand opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services. We are built upon the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives.

www.communityaccess.org

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