

THE CITIZEN ADVOCATE

CHATHAM-SAVANNAH

Citizen Advocacy

Savannahians helping Savannahians
for more than 40 years...

Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy is a 45-years-old community-based non-profit organization that recruits, matches and offers support to over 100 local citizens in voluntary citizen advocacy relationships.

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SPRING
2023

Building Relationships by George Seaborough

March in Savannah has come to an end. The fountain at Forsyth Park was dyed green for St. Patrick's Day, parade floats were made, and we had our first big St. Patrick's Day Parade since Covid. New and old friends gathered around parade routes to celebrate the bonds of family, traditions, and friendships. While Savannah was geared up for one of the biggest days of the year, there were still people wishing they had the relationships to help them leave the nursing or group home to participate in the festivities. Through the lens of Citizen Advocacy, we have the ability to see how one-to-one relationships can lead to participation in community celebrations, membership, and overall protection.

We have also noticed a few simple truths: One being that **the world is crying out for more love**. Every day we are surrounded by more technology and loveless ideas, and more and more, there is research on how our society is the loneliest in history. This shift in societal design is reflected in quick fixes to complex ideas and the overwhelming sense of individualism. When it comes to people living with a disability, society tends to look for quick fixes and loveless ideas to solve a problem and not take a deeper dive into building a relationship with a person.

For almost nine years of working at Citizen Advocacy, I have noticed that good works have a purpose in our community. With that said, the action of quick fixes does not allow for the development of a relationship, and good relationships add opportunity and a layer of protection for people... especially for people who are isolated and devalued. Through relationships, advocates and proteges become committed to one another and develop loyalty to each other. That commitment and loyalty can motivate them to move forward together when things are hard, to commit to staying connected to one another, and to celebrate the good things in life.

“Some people think they are in community, but they are only in proximity. True community requires commitment and openness. It is a willingness to extend yourself to encounter and know the other.” –David Spangler.

A Few Stories from Advocates and Protégés Building Their Relationships

Commonality & Commitment

One of the things we encourage and honor in citizen advocacy is the idea of long-lasting relationships.

Sean Brandon is the Director of Parking Services for the City of Savannah and has been an advocate for 19 years. Sean is matched with Herman. Herman is big on sports and likes to laugh and meet new people. When Sean first met Herman, he helped him prepare for job interviews and worked on prep questions. Over the years, he has helped Herman think about the best place to live and how to add more people to his life.

Sean is thinking about how to make Herman's life and circle of friends bigger. The two guys have been to trivia night at a couple of places, plan to look for sports clubs Herman could join, and continue to experience Savannah together. Sean has let Herman know that he will help him go to new places, meet new people, and continue to think about ways that Herman can be connected and contribute to the community in Savannah.

Art & Imagination

Elizabeth is a regional sales manager and has been matched with Ashley for four months. Ashley likes to paint, laugh, and is a big fan of hip-hop music. Ashley also lives in a personal care home and attends a day program five days a week. Elizabeth has noticed that Ashley, as a 32-year-old young woman, is not being offered the same experiences in life as other people her age.



As Elizabeth has picked up on how much Ashley enjoys art, she had the idea to set her up with a high-

end drawing kit - a much different take on Ashley's love of art than the day program worker who was supplying her with coloring books designed for kids. Elizabeth also realized that no one had ever given Ashley a chance to use a paintbrush. She made arrangements for the two of them to attend Painting With A Twist so she could paint for the first time. Ashley enjoyed the new experience of painting and now proudly displays her painting in her room. The women celebrated Christmas together, visited Zumba classes, explored downtown Savannah, and created art together.

Citizen advocates use their imaginations to help people be seen in more dignified and enhancing ways and to explore more than what a life of services has to offer.

Mom-to-Mom

Advocate Gwen is a local real estate agent and is also a mother of a 4-year-old. When Gwen first met her protégé (Sam), Sam was pregnant. Gwen's goal was to help Sam be the best mom possible. The two women spent the year getting to know each other and figuring out the best way to stay connected. Recently Sam received an eviction notice and had to go to court. Gwen made sure that she was with her in the courtroom, helped her understand what was going on, and worked with her to put the eviction off as long as possible. Gwen also helped secure a new apartment, get essential documents for Sam's baby, and get a new job. Gwen and Sam are still building their relationship, and they are taking things one day at a time while having real mom-to-mom conversations.

Personal is Always More Powerful

Advocate Tammy Toler has known her protégé for less than a year. They see each other frequently. When she visits, she brings the things he needs – groceries, things to read, and clothes. She brought him a Christmas tree, presents, and food in December. Early in the relationship, she pushed for things to get done through “the system,” but she soon realized that the system was not interested in moving quickly enough for him. So, she makes sure that he has whatever he needs. We continue the work of Citizen Advocacy because we know that the consistency of a personal relationship is a more powerful response than looking to systems to get people what they need.



Welcoming Kathy

We would like to welcome Kathy Bohannon to Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy in the role of Administrative Coordinator. Kathy has lived in Savannah for more than five years and has worked in various administrative roles throughout her career.

“I am excited to be joining Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy and to be able to be a part of a long-standing and needed grassroots organization. This is my dream job as I know firsthand how important it is to help people who are segregated and isolated be a part of the community.”

- Kathy



Oysters on the Bluff: The Best One Yet!!

By George Seaborough

Smiles, hot sauce, pork rinds, and oysters set the scene at the Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy's Oysters on the Bluff event on February 5. Several people have called to say that this year's event was the best oyster roast to date. There were plenty of people, lots of oysters, hotdogs, chili, chicken fingers, sweets, and of course, beer and wine.



As I zig-zagged from the oyster-sucking table to the pavilion, I saw advocates, protégé, donors, elected officials, friends of the organization, and families enjoying themselves. The event gave us a glimpse of the phrase “everyone at the table.” I believe one of the reasons people may have felt that this was a great event is because there were former board members and advocates, new advocates and protégés, new and long-term volunteers, lots of children, and former and current staff of Citizen Advocacy present. Forty-five years of the community together in one place.

For 45 years, everyday citizens have been saying yes to the idea of Citizen Advocacy. Yes to the idea of being an advocate, a board member, a donor, a name-giver, and an ally to ensure that Citizen Advocacy remains strong in Chatham County. Throughout the years, advocates and protégés have demonstrated to the Savannah community that we all belong together and make Savannah a fantastic place.



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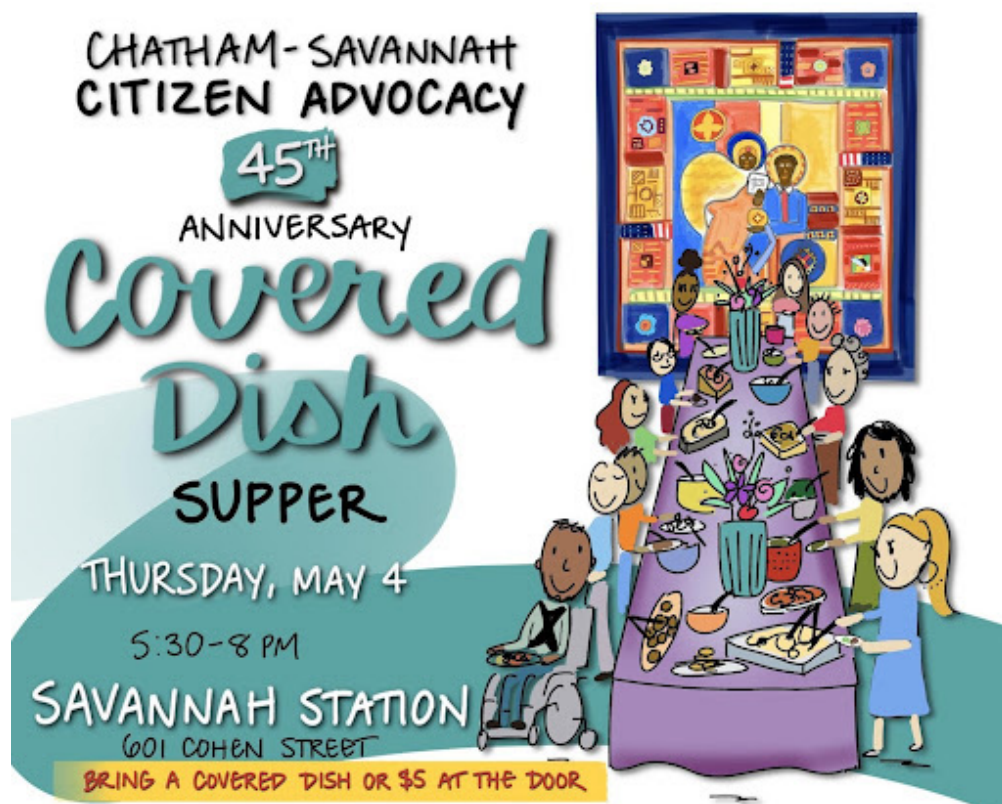
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Help us keep the "social" in "social change" and mark your calendar for our Annual Covered Dish Supper & Celebration.

Tuesday, May 4 • 5:30-8:00 p.m. • The Savannah Station, 601 Cohen Street

Appetizers, music, beer, and wine will be served on the patio from 5:30-6:00 p.m. From 6:30-8:00, experience the biggest and best covered dish supper and program in Chatham County.

**Bring a big covered dish to share or \$5 at the door –
(but a big covered dish is the way to go!)**



Please save the date and DON'T FORGET TO COOK BIG!!!!

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