

Our Town, Our Time...

CHATHAM-SAVANNAH
Citizen
Advocacy

Citizen Advocacy

thick
ice

this is our town

A valued citizen who is unpaid and independent of human services creates a relationship with a person who is at risk of social exclusion: the citizen advocate chooses one or several of many ways to understand, respond to and represent that person's interests as if they were the advocate's own, thus bringing the partner's gifts and concerns into the circles of ordinary community life.

passion &
persistence

this
is our
time

common
sense

compassion
& backbone

thin
ice

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Key Points

in Citizen Advocacy Relationships

Citizen Advocacy is rooted in a set of philosophical principles. This framework guides citizen advocates to take principled action over time.

- + Each person in a Citizen Advocacy relationship is there voluntarily.
- + The citizen advocate's loyalty is to the individual person. Each citizen advocate is independent of the Citizen Advocacy office, of human services and even of his or her advocacy partner's family. Spokespersonship and representation of the person's interests are encouraged.
- + Most Citizen Advocacy matches are established with the hope of developing a long-lasting, maybe life-long relationship. No other effort that we know of offers this as something to aspire to. It is a high calling.
- + Each citizen advocate looks for ways to bring the person's interests, gifts and needs to the larger community in ways that are dignified and enhancing to the person.

Why Invest

Common Sense, Passion and Persistence in Citizen Advocacy?

- + Many people who have developmental disabilities are socially devalued—that is, seen and treated as negatively different—and will need to be protected from conscious and unconscious prejudice and discrimination.
- + The images created about people with disabilities by the media, human service efforts and in literature often create and support negative stereotypes. These stereotypes affect our conscious or unconscious action, or our choice not to act. Personal relationships between people allow us to reconsider our stereotypes.
- + The most predictable outcome of current human service spending for people with disabilities is organized segregation. This has kept people apart and unknown to one another. Personal relationships between people help to overcome fear, myth and discomfort that comes from people not knowing one another.

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Why Invest

(continued)

- + Examples of abuse and neglect exist throughout human service systems. The presence of interested outsiders is one way to monitor and lessen this reality.
- + The best interests of an individual person may be different than the interests of the agency offering assistance, the person's family or the collective course of social change. Citizen advocates always focus on individual people and their personal interests.
- + Much of the care and response that has traditionally existed in community life is being driven out and replaced by professionalized services. Citizen Advocacy tips the scale back toward personal response and community responsibility.
- + Personal relationships are built on common interests. They depend on common bonds to sustain them. This challenges the illusion of difference.

- + Personal relationships can be the foundation for powerful protection and advocacy action over long periods of time.
- + People involved in voluntary, ongoing relationships sometimes find themselves in true solidarity with one another. This can create affection, protection, opportunity and community for the person who is devalued. It also can create a powerful learning opportunity for both people.
- + Becoming a citizen advocate builds character. A Citizen Advocacy office can be thought of as a secular character building organization.

Citizen Advocacy Roles

Citizen Advocacy offers many different ways to be involved

- + **SPOKESPERSON** – to help a person clarify and represent their own interests, or to speak for another person's interests when needed.
- + **FRIEND** – to begin an ongoing, sometimes lifelong relationship that may develop into a true friendship over time.
- + **ALLY** – to stand with a person during good times and bad times.
- + **MONITOR** – to monitor and hold human service organizations accountable for their actions or inaction.
- + **MENTOR** – to offer guidance and direction through personal example and advice.
- + **REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE** – to assume responsibility of a person's finances and to help the person with planning a monthly budget.

- + **ADOPTIVE PARENT** – to provide a forever family.
- + **LEGAL GUARDIAN** – to assume court-sanctioned responsibility for a person's major personal and/or financial decisions.
- + **OPPORTUNITY MAKER** – to help locate and arrange for a person to take advantage of new opportunities in our community in housing, in education, for leisure, for work, for neighborhood involvement and in civic clubs.
- + **RED TAPE CUTTER** – to help cut through policies and procedures that are sometimes overwhelming.
- + **CRISIS ADVOCATE** – to respond immediately, until a long-term advocate can be recruited, oriented and matched.
- + **ADVOCATE ASSOCIATE** – to offer expertise and influence to individual citizen advocates involved in advocating for their protégé. This includes, but is not limited to legal, financial, housing, vocational, medical, and educational expertise.



Tania Sammons and Heather Mullis met in October of 1999. Early on, there were a lot of hard and murky issues to consider together, and to act on. Today, it's the same, but different. If you have raised children, you know exactly what this means.

“Heather and I met before we were mothers. Now, we are both parents.”

Tania Sammons

Ms. Tania Sammons (left) and Ms. Heather Mullis (right) with their children in Savannah's historic Forsyth Park.



Solomon Amusan and Nakia Smalls

were introduced in January of 1998. Mr. Amusan is an attorney here in Savannah. He has offered legal protection to Mr. Smalls by becoming his legal guardian. This allows Mr. Amusan to influence choices and decisions regarding how Mr. Smalls lives his everyday life as well as big decisions that come along every so often in life. Both men are attracted to the kind of cars that cost more than they are worth. Can you relate?

“Handsome
Times 2.”

Solomon Amusan

Mr. Nakia Smalls (left) and Mr. Solomon Amusan (right) on the front steps of the home that Mr. Smalls shares with Ms. Marion Pelote.



Neel Foster and Loretta Washington met in 1986. In the years since, both women have seen their families grow, and parenting is often the topic of conversation.

“She prays for me when I don’t deserve it.”

Neel Foster



Ms. Neel Foster (left) and Mrs. Loretta Washington (right) cook together at Neel’s house on Wilmington Island.



Kim Abbott and Wayne Daughtry met in June of 1994. At the time, Mr. Daughtry lived a difficult life in a Southside nursing home. Mr. Abbott, his father, and several friends helped change that. Both men were members of the St. James Storytellers Group, which created allies and took action to help people who wanted to leave nursing homes.

“Wayne sort of introduced Mary and me to one another. It’s hard to explain, but he’s in the middle.”

Kim Abbott

Kim and Mary Abbott with three of their children, and Mr. Wayne Daughtry at Mr. Daughtry’s Southside Savannah apartment.



**Amy Hughes and
Brackie Hall**

met in November of 1997. Mr. Hall was tied down to a chair in a nursing home in Brunswick at the time. Helping Mr. Hall get back to Savannah to be near his mother has been an important part of Ms. Hughes' involvement. Protecting Mr. Hall from ineffective and sometimes unscrupulous human service professionals has been part of knowing Mr. Hall, too. When Mr. Hall's mom died, Ms. Hughes made sure he had a suit for the funeral and helped him move to the Atlanta area to be near his sister.

“Brackie is in my heart. Here, he and his mother welcome me into their home.”

Amy Hughes

Mr. Brackie Hall (left), Ms. Amy Hughes (center) and Mrs. Elizabeth Hall (right) in the Hall's family home in the Cuyler-Brownville community in Savannah, Georgia.



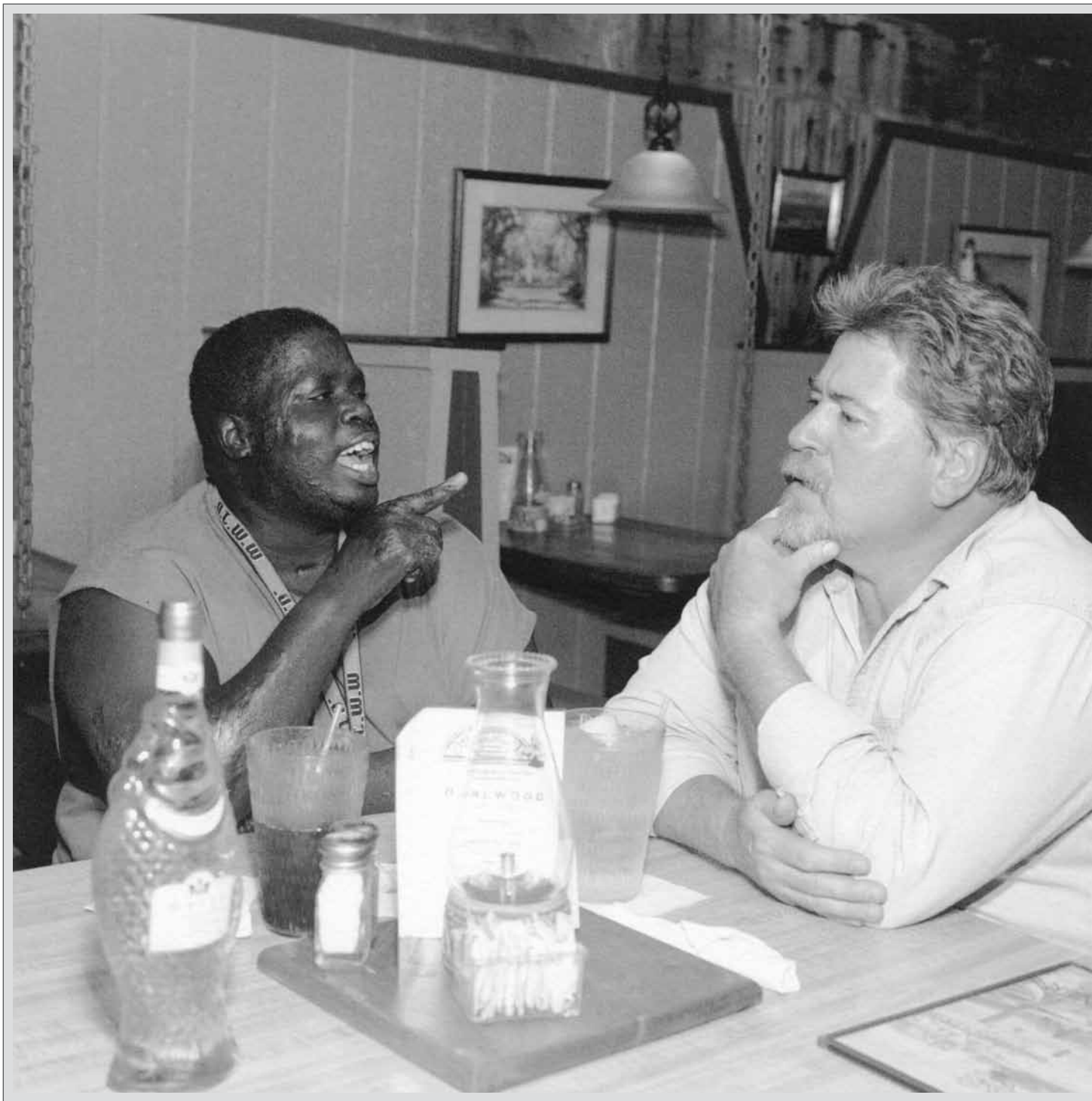
Mae Ola Mason and Tasha Rivers were introduced in July 1994. Mrs. Mason was invited to be a good neighbor, and to offer some of the hard-won wisdom she has gained to a younger woman who lives nearby.

“I see her beautiful smile and a heart that is graceful... Tasha and I will keep being friends for as long as we live. We’re equal partners. She never fails to tell me that she loves me and that’s nice for anyone to hear.”

Mae Ola Mason



Ms. Tasha Rivers (left) and Mrs. Mae Ola Mason (right) at Friendship Baptist Church in the Hudson Hill Community.



Chuck Jones and Jafari Grant first met over breakfast in the fall of 1996. The original hope was that the two men would become friends. But Mr. Grant's life changed for the worse, and Mr. Jones stepped into the role of spokesperson and ally.

"Jafari is someone who knows all about me and likes me anyway. He tells me the truth whether I like it or not and yet does not judge me. He is a good example for me to follow."

Chuck Jones



Mr. Jafari Grant (left) and Mr. Chuck Jones (right) at Dockside Seafood Restaurant on River Street.



Sheldon Tenenbaum and Gary Foss met in July of 1980.

Mr. Foss has allowed Mr. Tenenbaum to become his Representative Payee and to help him keep his business affairs in good order. He also makes sure that life is never dull for either of them. Mr. Tenenbaum's business and civic contacts and persistent spokespersonship have paved the way for public policy changes that make it easier for Mr. Foss to live in his own home, rather than in a facility.

“When Gary and I first met, Jessica was 3 years old; now she’s 28.”

Sheldon Tenenbaum

Mr. Gary Foss (left) Mr. Sheldon Tenenbaum (center) and Ms. Jessica Tenenbaum (right) on Broughton Street.



Mylene Dempsey and Brenda Gasper met in

May of 2005. Both are determined, resourceful, and independent of spirit. These are wonderful traits, most of the time. Do you know anyone like this? These women have a lot of fun together. Ms. Dempsey has helped Ms. Gasper continue to live in her own home, the home her mother and father left for her when they passed away several years ago. Ms. Gasper helps Ms. Dempsey get her mind off of the ninety to nothing schedule she keeps as a Customer Program Manager at Gulfstream Aerospace, and as a wife and mother.

“Thelma and
Louise...”

Mylene Dempsey



Ms. Brenda Gasper (left) and Ms. Mylene Dempsey (right) share dinner at Masoto of Japan in Savannah.



**Michelle Karner
and Jessica Feucht** were

introduced to one another in August of 2002. Ms. Karner spends her days as Art Director for *Savannah Magazine*. Ms. Feucht spends her days at her apartment and participating in her church, Overcoming by Faith, where she is part of the choir. Ms. Karner and Ms. Feucht stay in touch via email, phone and by hanging out together on weekends. Jane Townsend, a friend and co-worker of Ms. Karner's, has become an ally and friend as well.

“We make time to spend time together. We always have a good time.”

Michelle Karner



Ms. Jessica Feucht (left) and Ms. Michelle Karner (right) head out to the Oglethorpe Mall to shop and hang out. Both women live on the Waters Avenue bus route.



B.J. “Bubba” Lowenthal and Billy Glisson

were first introduced over dinner at the old Crystal Beer Parlor on Jefferson and Jones Streets in February 1989. Ironically, they have both wound up in the restaurant and food service business 20 years later. Mr. Lowenthal comes from a big and close knit Catholic family here in Savannah. Mr. Glisson’s family story would be the opposite. There are a lot of funny “Bubba and Billy” stories that have been spun out into the universe over the decades. This comes from a mixture of good-hearted hard-headedness and an appreciation for a man who sticks by his opinion. Both of these guys stick to their word. Not something that we should take for granted these days.

“We both had brown hair... When Billy and I first met 20 years ago, we lived at different ends of the park. We were both bachelors and both had brown hair. Those days are gone, but we are still right here.”

B.J. Lowenthal

Mr. B.J. “Bubba” Lowenthal (left) and Mr. Billy Glisson (right) catch up with each other at the fountain in Forsyth Park.

How do we bring people together?

- + We get to know a person with a developmental disability and learn about their hopes, dreams and interests.
- + We reach out to people we know who have connections, talents and skills that match up with who the person is and what their hopes are.
- + We give both people the opportunity to learn about one another and to decide if they would like to deepen that learning.
- + If the two people decide they would like to get to know one another and try to create change, we help them get started and we stay in touch to listen, share ideas and to offer encouragement.

- + We encourage citizen advocates to ask their friends and associates to help them in their advocacy efforts.
- + We are always available to the citizen advocate at their request. We do not step in for them, but we try to be there for them whenever they call.
- + We offer invitations to ongoing learning and celebration from time to time. These are invitations, not obligations.

Becoming a citizen advocate can bring these questions to life

- + What do we mean when we say that both people involved in a Citizen Advocacy relationship “bring gifts?”
- + What does “valued citizen” mean in the Citizen Advocacy definition? What do we mean when we speak of a person being “socially devalued” by the larger society?
- + What are the historical and current ways that individual people and groups of people are “devalued?”
- + As we look at our town, in this time, what patterns of devaluation can we see with regard to our personal habits, the civic and religious patterns of our community life and the public policies established by our government?
- + Identification, loyalty, independence, spokespersonship and longstanding relationship are words a Citizen Advocacy office uses often. How will they affect your Citizen Advocacy relationship?

Artist's Statement

Lyn Bonham, Photographer

People are important. They all have something different to offer. Sometimes, it is not obvious what they can contribute. Sometimes we turn away when they try to give. But now we must look with our hearts. We must take the time to understand. We must be open to the truth. The truth is about the gift and the best gift is the unexpected one. I have received unexpected gifts of truth while honoring these individuals through the art of photography. I have witnessed people giving themselves unselfishly to each other. They each offer their companions dignity, love and acceptance. A unique gift is shared in each relationship.

I also have a gift to bestow that is expressed through my art of photography. As I turn my camera to my subject I strive to give honor and dignity to the people I photograph. I look for the open face to give back to our world. I seek the honesty, strength and admiration given to each other, expressed through their eyes, through their gesture. As we honor these people through the endowment of portraits, let us remember the gifts of character and courage they offer so freely to each other and to us.

Lyn Bonham, Photographer
lynbonhamphotography.com

“You are looking for people who have compassion and backbone. Some people have lots of one, not as much of the other. Some people have both. Some people have neither. You are looking for people who have compassion and backbone.”

Mr. W.W. Law, civil rights leader, civic activist, historian, Savannahian

“Making one person’s life better, one person at a time, is a way to change the world.”

Amy Hughes, past citizen advocate and board member

“You’ve got to keep the ‘social’ in ‘social change.’”

Neel Foster, citizen advocate and past board member

“Over the long haul, allowing other people into our heart and soul, and sharing things that are closest to you, helps you to become a different person. It allows you to find the real person that you are.”

Linda Wittish, citizen advocate and past board member

“Social marginalization, social deprivation is one of the worst things I can think of subjecting someone to. I see one of the reasons why we do citizen advocacy as being to free people from that.”

Sean Brandon, citizen advocate and past board member